



Olive oil and balsamic a growing trend in European restaurants

Chunks of homemade ciabatta to dip in extra virgin olive oil with a swirl of balsamic continues to replace the bread and butter appetizer traditionally served in high-end European restaurants.

Even 10,000 meters above Europe, Emirates airline includes a little bottle of olive oil and balsamic as part of their prestigious three-course business class meals served during flights from Dubai to New York City—illustrating the literal heights this delicious combination can reach.

Originating in Italy, balsamic vinegar is made from freshly crushed grape juice with all the skins, seeds and stems. It might come as a surprise to discover that this tasty olive oil-balsamic combo didn't originate in the trattorias and fine restaurants across Italy and the Mediterranean. While the history of the mix is disputed, there is one strong argument that claims it began in a Little Italy restaurant in San Francisco during the 1990s and spread from there.

Fans of Francis Ford Coppola will recall Don Altobello, played by the late Eli Wallach, extolling the delights of extra virgin olive oil and bread, while sitting under the hot Sicilian sun. This is a common practice in different regions across Italy, while balsamic is drizzled over bruschetta, but combining the two in the way we know is unusual.

Despite a lack of consensus regarding its origins, many would readily agree that it is a delicious way to start a meal or simply enjoy as a healthy snack. Spoon the Boat, a prestigious restaurant in the Hungarian capital of Budapest, told the TAICHI project that they serve extra virgin olive oil and balsamic in a small dish with homemade ciabatta for each guest after taking their order.

"We do that from the middle of May until the middle of September during our terrace season. During the autumn, we serve homemade butter with the same ciabatta. We have three reasons: homemade butter melts quickly during the summertime; the combination prepares the stomach for a nice dinner; and it also tastes so good," explained one of the city's best avant-garde restaurants.

Others include it in their vegetarian platter, which can also include roasted garlic, sun-dried tomatoes, olives, mozzarella and tapenades made from black olives or roasted peppers. While not a recognized part of the Mediterranean diet, the presence of Italian extra virgin olive oil guarantees the highest possible level of oleic acid, a nutritious monounsaturated fatty acid.

Over the past year, studies have found that the regular consumption of extra virgin olive oil, as part of the Mediterranean diet, can lower heart disease risks, prevent the development of intestinal tumors, reduce blood clot formation in obese adults, deter overeating and improve the endurance of athletes after just four days.

The international TAICHI project is spreading information about the health benefits of using extra virgin olive oil for cooking to Mainland China and Taiwan.

Co-funded by the EU and promoted by the two main consortia of Italian olive growers, Italia Olivicola and UNAPOL, the TAICHI project offers consumers all the information they need to understand olive oil through its website, various social media platforms and OurOliveOil APP – available in the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

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