

♥ love stories ♥
meet the producer

From Italy, with love...

Venice is the most romantic city
in the world – and it's where Co-op
spinach and ricotta tortelloni is
made with real passion, as
Rosie Mullender found out



Stefano Zardetto, food technologist ▶



'Italy has so many fantastic ingredients – beautiful ricotta, tomatoes, spinach, lemons and mozzarella – and we use them to make our fresh filled pasta here in Venice, including Co-op spinach and ricotta tortelloni.'

Pasta supremo Stefano Zardetto



If you ever want proof that laughter is contagious, meet Stefano Zardetto. A food technologist, he works for award-winning food producers Voltan in Venice, Italy, where he makes fresh pasta for Co-op.

As Stefano talks animatedly in Italian to Giovanni, son of company founder Leandro Voltan, about the history of the family's pasta business, I can't understand a word.

But still, I can't help laughing along. Stefano's passion would make anyone smile (see for yourself by watching him in action on the Co-op Food YouTube channel).

'Italy has so many fantastic ingredients – beautiful ricotta, tomatoes, spinach, lemons and mozzarella,' Stefano tells me in English, grinning. 'And we use them to make our fresh filled pasta here in Venice, including Co-op spinach and ricotta tortelloni.'

'If the raw materials are good,' Giovanni adds, 'the finished product is good too.' At least, that's what's translated to me...

Passion for pasta

As well as tortelloni, Stefano helps develop Co-op pasta and gnocchi, fresh Italian sauces, including tomato and mascarpone (the UK's favourite flavour), and Co-op Irresistible hand-finished filled tortelli.

Stefano has worked here among the beautiful canals and palazzos of Venice for

more than 20 years. But when it comes to pasta, the Voltan family's history goes back even further. Leandro Voltan opened his first artisan pasta shop back in 1937 in Mestre, Venice, where he learnt to make tortelli by hand.

He could make an impressive 1kg in a single hour – and it's this expertise that's been passed down to make Co-op fresh filled pasta so delicious.

Giovanni, who was born the same year that his father's shop opened, has also passed on the passion for pasta that's in his blood. 'Although now I'm a full-time grandad,' he smiles.

Great ingredients

Today, the company is run by Giovanni's three sons and grandson – a fourth-generation pasta maker. The relationship between Stefano, Giovanni and the Voltan brothers has been key to their success, as over the past 21 years they've formed a strong bond. It's helped them make their pasta the very best.

Traditional Italian techniques are combined with fresh approaches across Voltan's four production sites, and each of the company's 300 enthusiastic staff pours their love into making 400,000 servings of pasta and sauce every single day. ➤

Co-op pasta is developed in the kitchens at Voltan's headquarters in Venice using fantastic fresh ingredients

♥ love stories ♥

meet the producer



The beautiful setting and Italy's reputation for fresh produce inspire Stefano in his work creating tasty pasta



PASTA PASSION

Co-op is the first UK supermarket to sell own brand

handmade pasta and fresh sauces from Italy

Co-op is the first UK supermarket to sell handmade pasta and fresh sauces from Italy under its own brand, which, Stefano tells me, is pretty special.

'Co-op has charged us with coming up with innovations that are unique to them,' Stefano explains to me. 'We came up with a way of making handmade tortelli in a factory setting just for Co-op. They're really pushing the boundaries on authenticity and quality.'

And it shows in the taste. Co-op Irresistible hand-finished buffalo ricotta and Sicilian lemon tortelli are absolutely delicious, the garlic oil they come with making them sing, and perfectly complementing the creamy cheese. In fact, my only worry is how to stop eating them.

Made with love

The spinach and ricotta tortelloni made here in Venice are just as well-loved. As Stefano shows me around the factory, he checks the pasta when it trundles by on a conveyer belt, and shows me how cutting-edge technology ensures the labels are just so on all Co-op packaging.

The pasta – made simply from durum wheat, flour, free range egg and water – is filled with ingredients including nutmeg and tasty ricotta, that are mixed together in

the kitchens. 'We have to make sure every piece is perfect,' Stefano says.

After our factory tour, he asks chef Andrea Mognato to whip us up some of his lovely pasta for lunch. Plump spinach and ricotta tortelloni sit in a delicate and fresh tomato and mascarpone sauce. Each plate around the table is quickly emptied.

Everyone looks very happy – especially, as always, Stefano. 'In the beginning I used to criticise him, because he was always making me spend lots of money to buy new equipment,' Giovanni laughs.

'He always had to have the latest technology. But although he was young, I knew he had the skills to take us forward, and it's what's brought us to this success. With him, I've found a fourth son. He's the same age as them, and a very nice man.'

Everyone in the room wells up a little bit (OK, a lot). And as I watch Stefano and Giovanni laughing together, I can't help but agree wholeheartedly. Stefano Zardetto was born to make pasta – and is a very nice man indeed...



CO-OP WINE BUYER BEN SAYS:

Co-op spinach and ricotta tortelloni needs a good quality Italian white wine to bring out the flavours. Co-op Irresistible Fiano is refreshing, honeyed and the perfect match