

RISOTTO WITH RADICCHIO AND PANCETTA

by Christopher Lee

There are several types of rice for risotto, commonly known as arborio rice, which is grown mostly in northwest Italy. The large-grained Carnaroli is considered the most refined and most prestigious; Baldo is for more general use, including in salads and timballo but also for risotto; and the smaller-grained Vialone Nano is utilized widely in the Veneto for soups and loose risotti. I suggest Carnaroli here, for its elegance and firm texture. Choose a gently spiced pancetta, as strong spices will tilt the flavor of the risotto in their own direction. For a simple chicken stock, I buy a pound and a half of wings, backs, and necks and simmer them for an hour in water with a small piece of bay leaf and nothing else, or maybe an onion or shallot skin if one is lying about. Be sure to skim the stock as it comes to a simmer. The risotto pairs wonderfully with the light-bodied Gardoni Bardolino, slightly chilled.

2 ounces pancetta, chopped	2 ounces dry white wine or vermouth
1 ounce olive oil	
4 ounces unsalted butter	3 cups homemade chicken stock, held on lowest heat on stove
½ small yellow onion, peeled, finely chopped	Sea salt
1½ cups Red Verona radicchio, core removed, thinly sliced	⅛ teaspoon nutmeg, grated
½ pound arborio rice, Carnaroli or Vialone Nano	4 ounces Grana Padano or Parmigiano, finely grated
2 tablespoons Italian tomato paste	¼ teaspoon black pepper, freshly milled

Sauté pancetta in oil and 2 ounces butter over low heat for 1 minute, stirring. Add onion and radicchio and sauté for 2 minutes, stirring, until radicchio wilts. Reduce heat, add rice and tomato paste, and cook gently, stirring, for 1 minute. Deglaze with white wine and cook until dry. Ladle hot stock—about three 8-ounce ladles full—onto rice to cover by ¼ inch. Add salt and keep at robust simmer, scraping bottom of pan and stirring gently with a wooden spoon to help rice release its starch. Cook, stirring often but not constantly, until liquid drops below surface of rice, then add more stock in scant cups to again cover by ¼ inch. Continue process until rice is tender and cooked through but retains a tiny bit of firmness. Rice should be emulsified and creamy. Remove from heat and taste for salt; adjust if needed. Off heat, stir in rest of butter, nutmeg, and 1 ounce Grana Padano. Spoon onto warm plates in wide hillocks. Grind fresh black pepper on top and sprinkle with remaining Grana Padano. Serves 4–6

Christopher Lee is a former head chef of Chez Panisse and Eccolo restaurants in Berkeley and co-founder of Pop-Up General Store in Oakland. Visit his website: oldfashionedbutcher.com.