



# The Singing Chef

PUTTING ON A SHOW AT ROBLAR WINERY'S COOKING SCHOOL

**S**inging for your supper was given a new meaning when Andy LoRusso took over the kitchen at the Roblar Winery Cooking School for a balmy summer's evening of culinary inspiration. The two dozen strangers who signed up for a class with "The Singing Chef" discovered that sharing a brilliant meal in

a glorious setting and joining their voices in song was the perfect recipe for a memorable evening in wine country.

"Music brings the energy up. It opens the lungs and opens the heart," says LoRusso. He learned this growing up in a large Italian family in New Jersey, where he also learned to cook from his Sicilian grandmother, who, he

Singing Chef Andy LoRusso (top right) warms up in Roblar Winery's kitchen herb garden before his Italian cooking class. Top left: Salads await serving. The four-course meal included his Bellini's Pasta Norma (bottom).

remembers, “cooked for everybody and never ate sitting down.” He had his first record deal at 22. After pursuing a music career and capitalizing on his love of entertaining (he once had an exercise program called “polkaerobics”), it all came together when he combined his passion for music and food. The best-selling author of *Sing and Cook Italian* has taken his Singing Chef show to special events, parties, festivals, and TV shows around the world. Recently he found time for a rare event on his home turf.

Since opening in 2006, Roblar Cooking School has offered weekly classes in cuisines from around the world, including French, Brazilian, Moroccan, Ethiopian, Asian, and of course, Italian. When LoRusso arrived at



LoRusso prepares a pasta sauce from locally sourced ingredients.

Roblar to demonstrate a dinner of classic Italian dishes, he found a talented, efficient staff under the watchful eye of Hospitality Director Beta Silva, and a group of eager “students” ready to be entertained, enlightened, and fed. In turn, they found a chef who relishes adding humor and high spirits to fine food and wine.

The men and women of the class filed in and took their seats around a large island in the winery’s kitchen, specially designed not only for the brunches and lunches the winery serves but also to accommodate the popular classes that inevitably turn into a party. Everyone was handed an apron, a folder with recipes and song lyrics, and the first tasting of a series of the winery’s best-selling wines.

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### *Prosciutto-Wrapped Mozzarella With Balsamic Glaze*

Fresh Mozzarella  
Arugula  
Prosciutto-sliced thin  
Balsamic-reduced to syrupy consistency

#### *Method*

Lay a slice of prosciutto on work surface, then stack arugula, and mozzarella on top. Roll prosciutto and arugula around mozzarella. Use decorative pick, place on a platter, and drizzle with balsamic glaze.

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## EPICUREAN

Resplendent in his red chef's jacket, LoRusso began to prepare an appetizer of bruschetta with Gorgonzola, roasted red peppers, kalamata olives, and garlic for the students to nibble on with the wine tasting. He made it look effortless, but in fact a dinner that has to be "taught" while being prepared takes tremendous preplanning. It all began, he says, when Roblar sent him a half a dozen bottles of their wine for him to pair with his dishes. He then worked with them to seek out and procure the finest ingredients on the Central Coast for his feast.

Using a bit of personal history, not a little shtick, a zest for jokes, and

"May you live to be a hundred and may you look and feel as good as you do now."

excellent culinary tips, he mesmerized his students with his energy, charm, and enthusiasm. While preparing his simple, savory Bellini's Pasta Norma, he had everyone say his or her name and use one word to describe their own cooking. ("Garlic," "sea salt," "pecorino rounds.") Demonstrating the honey sherry vinegar dressing for a salad of sweet fennel and oranges, he led the students in singing "Happy Birthday" (to himself) and soon had them toasting to birthdays, to miracles, and to the 2007 Roblar Merlot, declaring, "I absolutely love this wine!" adding, "May you live to be a hundred and may you look and

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**WITH CABERNET SAUCE**  
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In the barrel room of the winery, students enjoy a feast paired with Roblar vintages.

feel as good as you do now.”

Within minutes of their first Italian song, the group had become a credible chorus, and all had huge grins on their faces. “I have a party every time I work,” LoRusso assured them before admonishing, “Put on music when you cook! Create a mood!”

The four-course dinner was served on one long, beautifully set table in the winery’s barrel room. After the salad and pasta dishes came an entrée of grilled local swordfish with a toasted almond basil pesto, followed by sample plates of Italian plum torta, Sicilian ricotta cheesecake, and vanilla gelato, served with espresso. LoRusso walked around directing and singing the classics (“La Donna e Mobile,” “Santa Lucia”), discovering to his delight that the acoustics were marvelous, “like being in a little opera hall.” It was both hokey and elegant—and utterly fun. At the end of the evening two dozen strangers had become friends. They exchanged contact information and agreed to meet again at the next class.

LoRusso received a standing ovation.

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