

QUICK & HEALTHY

An Italian caprese salad given an Asian twist.



THE ITALIAN JOB

RECREATE THE TASTES OF AN ITALIAN MEAL
IN YOUR KITCHEN.

BY LONG LI YANN RECIPES FROM OSCAR PASINATO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RORY DANIEL

Tucked away in a corner of Tanjong Pagar is the cosy and no-frills Italian restaurant, Buko Nero (loosely translated as “black hole” in Italian). It seats only 20 diners at any one time, and customers – eager to savour the innovative fare dished up by Italian chef Oscar Pasinato – have been known to make reservations a month in advance.

“Our aim was to recreate a homely, living room atmosphere in our restaurant,” says Oscar, who runs the eatery with his Singaporean wife, Tracy. He may have worked in kitchens from London, Paris and New York to Japan and Thailand, but the Venice-born chef cites his wife and his mother as his sources of inspiration. “I believe in keeping things very simple, with minimal fuss. I cook mainly classical Italian dishes that I learnt from my mother,” he says. He imbues them with Asian influences as an ode to his wife’s heritage.

If the wait to dine at Buko Nero daunts you, here are four recipes from the chef himself that you can recreate at home tonight.



Chef Oscar Pasinato with “inspiration” and wife, Tracy.

ASIAN CAPRESE SALAD (SERVES 1)

The classical Italian caprese salad is made with mozzarella cheese, tomato and basil. Here, Chef Pasinato gives it an Asian twist by replacing the mozzarella cheese with local silken tofu.

You’ll need:

- 1 piece fresh round silken tofu
- 1 piece Japanese tomato, blanched in hot water and peeled
- 2 fresh Japanese basil leaves
(Both the tomato and basil leaves are available at Japanese speciality supermarkets; otherwise, replace with the conventional variety)
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Balsamic vinegar (optional)

- Slice the tofu into three thick slices and pan-fry in a hot pan with a dash of olive oil. Add salt and pepper to taste. Do the same with the peeled Japanese tomato.
- Arrange on a plate. Top off with the fresh Japanese basil leaves and some extra virgin olive oil. Add a splash of balsamic vinegar if you like.



A watermelon slice anchors this salad.

WATERMELON, CITRUS AND SPINACH SALAD (SERVES 1)

You'll need:

- 1 slice red watermelon (cut into a square)
- 10g peeled fresh pomelo
- 3 pieces fresh orange segments
- 2 pieces grapefruit segments
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 20g fresh baby spinach, washed
(can be replaced with any other green salad)
- Salt and pepper to taste

- Place the watermelon slice on the serving plate. Arrange the grapefruit, pomelo and orange segments on top of the watermelon.
- Top it off with the baby spinach leaves. Sprinkle some salt and pepper.
- For the dressing, mix balsamic vinegar and olive oil, then gently pour the dressing over and around the salad.

FRESH GUAVA AND MINT SALAD WITH STRAWBERRY SORBET

(SERVES 1)

You'll need:

- 1 piece guava, peeled and julienned
(Can be replaced with pineapple or pomelo)
- 1 small bunch fresh mint
- 200g fresh strawberry, cut into small pieces
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 250ml lemon juice

- Prepare the sorbet base by boiling the lemon juice with sugar and strawberry pieces. Let it cool before blending.
- Strain the blended sorbet base, pass it into a sorbet machine*, and store it in the freezer.
- Toss the guava in mint leaves and lemon zest, and serve it in a bowl with a scoop of strawberry sorbet.

* If you don't have a sorbet maker, you can replace the sorbet with a granita. Prepare the same base, pour it into a shallow tray, and place in the freezer. Take it out and whisk with a fork every 20 minutes to break up the ice crystals as the mixture freezes. Aim for a slushy texture.

A fruity salad, topped with strawberry sorbet.



WHOLEWHEAT PASTA WITH SPICY CRAB MEAT AND PRAWN SAUCE (SERVES 1)

You'll need:

1 whole garlic
1 teaspoon chopped red chili
1 teaspoon chopped spring onion
1 tablespoon crab meat
2 pieces prawns, shelled
80g wholewheat pasta
A dash of extra virgin olive oil
50ml dry white wine
Salt and pepper to taste

- Roast the garlic with the chopped chilli in a pan with some olive oil. Add the prawns and crab meat.
- Add the white wine and wait till it evaporates. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- Boil the pasta in salted water for two minutes.
- Toss it with the crab meat and prawn sauce. Add a dash of extra virgin olive oil and chopped spring onion. Serve.



Wholewheat pasta on a seafood theme (with a hint of white wine).