

**All aboard!**

Bring back the Pullman rail car era with beautifully rectangular bread. **Page 2**

**Flavorful but easy**

Two quick-cooking chicken cutlet recipes that will save the day. **Page 4**



Chicago Tribune  
**GOOD EATING**

# Aged to perfection

Not wine or cheese, but rice! Year-old Italian grain has become darling of chefs

By PEGGY WOLFF

Special to Tribune Newspapers

After tasting a luscious rice frittata prepared by executive chef John Coletta of Quartino Ristorante in Chicago and viewing an episode of "In Search of Perfection," in which England's Fat Duck chef Heston Blumenthal went nuts over developing the perfect risotto, I went looking for that rice.

Called Acquerello (Italian for watercolor), it's an aged Italian carnaroli rice. That's right, aged, in a silo for a year, a length of time that rice farmer Piero Rondolino says gives the best results. (OK, a seven-year aged is slightly better, but it's hard to come by.)

The Acquerello headquarters in Livorno Ferraris, in Italy's Piedmont region, is hardly "the small farm" that his wife, Maria Nava Rondolino, humbly described to me during a trip to Chicago. Her iPad photos showed the green of the rice fields stretching to the horizon, a 17th-century estate with the original manor house, and long and ancient buildings that once were dormitories for the *mondine*, female rice weeders.

Today, those low buildings house an industrialized rice mill whose product inspires awe among chefs. Chef Thomas Keller calls for Acquerello in "The French Laundry Cookbook"; Gianni Vietina, the owner of Madeo in Los Angeles, says his customers love it; and executive chef Chris Marchino at Spiaggia in Chicago praises Acquerello as the best for risotto.

I went to talk with Coletta because I had tasted and loved a few of his Acquerello preparations.

Coletta walked into Quartino's wine room with three Italian rice varieties, spilled the grains onto small plates — arborio, vialone nano and carnaroli — and began.

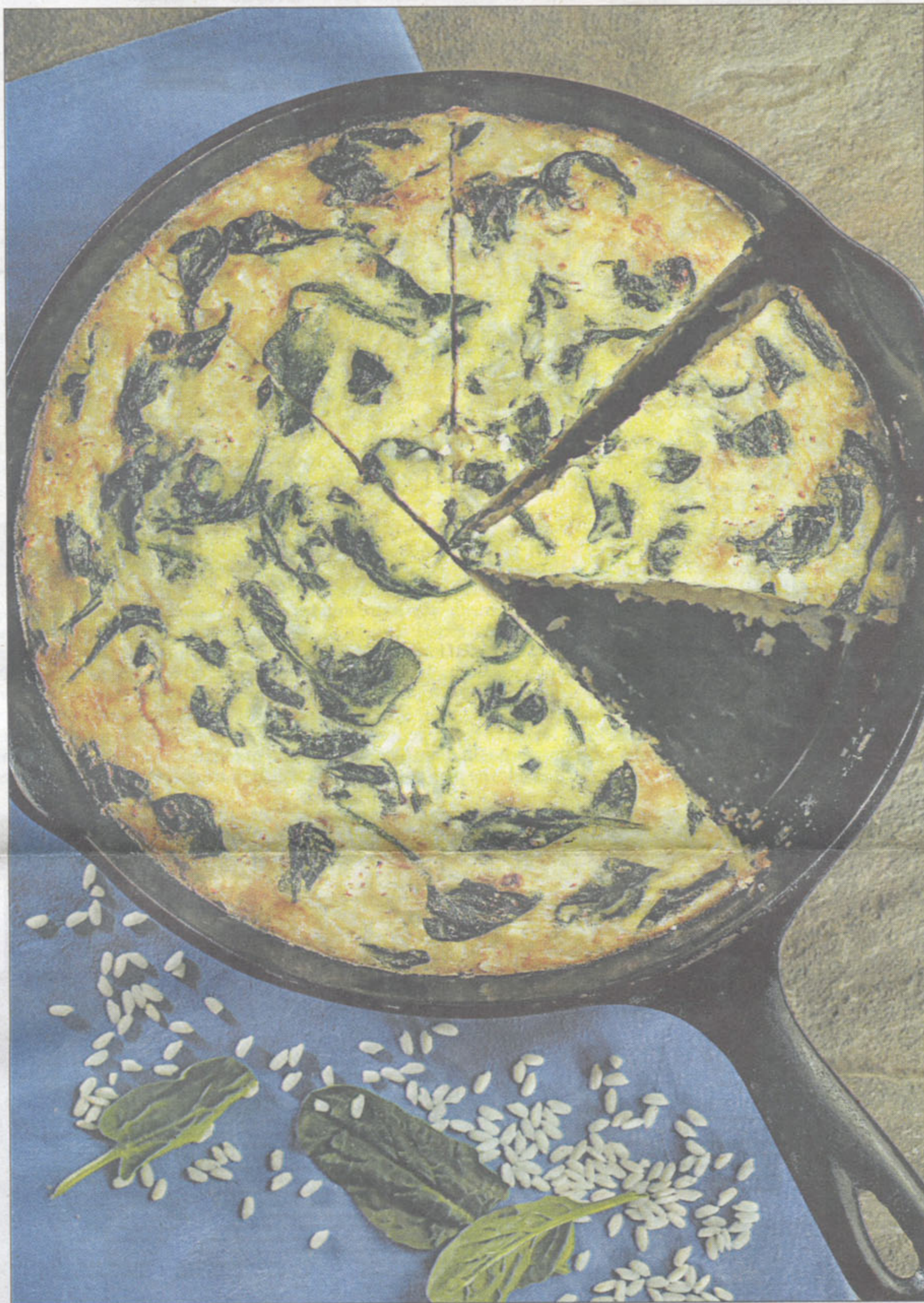
"When you carefully look at these, they all look the same. But look further; there are broken kernels." And misshapen, shrunken or in some way noticeably deformed — to him anyway. The Acquerello grains, he pointed out, didn't have a scratch.

The Rondolino family studied the carnaroli grain and determined what they would have to do to produce a rice that had a firm kernel and wasn't broken, and when cooked wasn't a cake-y mass.

After the rice ages in a temperature-controlled silo, sugars present in the starch increase, making the rice sweeter, while at the same time lipids in the rice release fatty acids, as Piero and Maria Nava Rondolino's son Rinaldo described in Blumenthal's book "Further Adventures in Search of Perfection." The rice grains harden, which means they take longer to absorb the final cooking liquid.

To avoid damage in the milling, the Rondolinos use a patented process of gently tumbling the grains with a propeller, or a helix, grinding rice on rice.

The germ (the embryo) and the bran (the grain's outer skin) are separated. Other producers discard the germ, but the Rondolinos save it, reheat it and slowly re-coat the white rice with layers of its own germ. It's white rice with the nutrients of brown rice. Finally, a laser scan on a moving belt sorts out the imperfect



MICHAEL TERCHA/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTOS; CORRINE KOZLAK/FOOD STYLING

A frittata made with aged carnaroli rice, spinach and cheese. The rice produces a surprisingly light texture.

## Inside

Aged rice makes a fine pudding, plus buying information. **Page 5**

grains.

It gets better: Acquerello carnaroli doesn't overcook easily, nor will you be standing at the stove stirring and adding liquid. This is stir-free risotto. Put the water in and walk away. The simmering, bubbling water creates enough agitation to help the rice release starch. As it oozes out of the rice and into the liquid around it, it's the starch — and not what you add to the pot — that will give your risotto its creaminess and an amazing al dente texture.

Try it in your favorite risotto recipe or with the frittata or rice pudding from Coletta. Buon appetito!



Acquerello ages its carnaroli rice for a year at its site in Livorno Ferraris, a village in the northern Italian region of Piedmont.

## Rice frittata with spinach and Parmesan

**Prep:** 20 minutes  
**Rest:** 30 minutes  
**Cook:** 40 minutes  
**Makes:** 8-10 servings

Adapted from John Coletta, executive chef and managing partner of Quartino Ristorante, Chicago.

2 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> cups cold water  
8.8 ounces (250 grams) Acquerello carnaroli rice  
3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> tablespoons butter  
2 teaspoons kosher or sea salt  
10 to 12 cups spinach leaves, torn  
3 to 4 tablespoons olive oil  
10 eggs, beaten  
1 cup freshly grated Parmesan (Parmigiano Reggiano)  
Freshly ground black pepper

**1** Put the water, rice, butter and salt in a large stainless steel pot. Heat on medium-high until it starts bubbling, about 5 minutes. Turn to medium; do not cover. Let it simmer without stirring until the rice has absorbed the water, about 20 minutes. Transfer cooked rice to a baking dish; cool.

**2** Sauté spinach leaves in a skillet in 1 tablespoon olive oil. Transfer to a bowl and squeeze out excess liquid; chop. Cool.

**3** In a large stainless mixing bowl add the eggs, spinach, Parmesan and a few grinds of pepper. Whisk together; add the cooked rice. Let it rest, 30 minutes.

**4** Heat the oven to 375 degrees. Coat a 12-inch oven-safe, nonstick skillet with 2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil.

**5** Pour the rice mixture into the skillet; bake until the frittata is puffy, has a golden color around the edge and is firm to the touch, 15-25 minutes. Remove from oven; let rest for 2 minutes before sliding frittata onto a serving platter. (You also can serve directly from the skillet if the frittata won't slide out easily.) Serve warm or at room temperature.

**Nutrition information per serving (10 servings):** 283 calories, 15 g fat, 6 g saturated fat, 204 mg cholesterol, 24 g carbohydrates, 12 g protein, 627 mg sodium, 1 g fiber



## FROM THE COVER

## Rice pudding with dried fruit compote

Prep: 1 hour, 30 minutes Cook: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Stand: 30 minutes Makes: 8 to 10 servings

Adapted from John Coletta, executive chef and managing partner of Quartino Ristorante, Chicago. The syrupy sweetness of the compote, with hints of red barbera wine, is a perfect companion to the creamy risotto pudding. This recipe takes a lot of prep work. You cook the compote and the rice; then make a custard with the egg yolks, incorporating mascarpone. Whipped egg whites are then incorporated, before the whole is folded into the cooked and cooled rice. But you can make the fruit compote the day before and refrigerate it.

## Fruit compote:

- 3/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon water
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 cups fruity red wine, such as barbera
- 3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
- 2/3 cup each: dark raisins, golden raisins, dried cherries
- 3 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon honey

## Rice pudding:

- 2 quarts water
- 8.8 ounces (250 grams) Acquerello carnaroli rice
- 1/2 cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons whole allspice
- 1 stick of cinnamon
- 4 star anise, whole
- 2 teaspoons Juniper berries, whole
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 egg yolks (save one of the whites)
- 1/2 tablespoon white wine
- 6 1/2 ounces mascarpone cheese
- 1 teaspoon vinegar
- Pinch of Kosher salt
- 1/2 cup scant confectioner's sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla

**1** For the compote, pour the water and sugar into a large, heavy-bottomed stainless steel pot. Simmer over medium heat until a light brown caramel forms and coats the back of a spoon, about 20 minutes.

**2** Add red wine and red wine vinegar; simmer, 5 minutes. Add the dried fruits; simmer until soft and plump, 20 minutes. Add honey; simmer 2 minutes. Cool; refrigerate until needed. Makes about 1 quart. (You will have compote leftover; enjoy with yogurt or over granola or oatmeal.)

**3** For the rice pudding, add the water, rice and 1/2 cup sugar to a large, heavy-bottomed stainless steel or copper pot.

**4** Make a spice sachet: Cut a 10-inch square of triple-layered cheesecloth; place the allspice, cinnamon, star anise, juniper berries and bay leaf into the center. Bring the corners together; tie the sachet with kitchen string. Put the sachet in the pot; cover. Cook on medium-high, 10 minutes. Turn heat to low. Simmer, covered and without stirring, until rice is cooked through and tender, 25-30 minutes. Discard the sachet; strain the rice. Spread rice on a rimmed baking sheet to cool at room temperature.

**5** In a stand mixer with a balloon whisk, mix the egg yolks, remaining 3 tablespoons sugar and white wine on low, 1 minute. Turn the speed to high; blend until you get a thick cream, about 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a metal bowl.

**6** Heat a small saucepan of water over medium heat; rest the bowl with the egg yolk mixture on top; whisk by hand until creamy, 5 minutes. Make an ice bath in another bowl. Place the bowl with the egg mixture on top of the ice bath; continue whisking until it becomes cool.

**7** In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle, whip the mascarpone cheese on low until creamy and soft, about 30 seconds. Add the whipped mascarpone to the egg yolk mixture in the metal bowl that is resting on top of the ice bath.

**8** Using a paper towel, rub the interior of a small bowl with the vinegar. Add the reserved egg white and a pinch of salt. With an egg beater, beat on low for a minute, then on high until firm peaks form. Fold beaten egg white into the mascarpone mixture with a spatula. Continue to keep the bowl over an ice bath.



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**9** Fill the bottom of a skillet with ice cubes and crushed ice. In a large stainless bowl set over the ice bath, add the cooled rice from the rimmed baking sheet; stir in the powdered sugar and vanilla. Then add the creamy beaten egg yolk mixture with the mascarpone and beaten egg white (from steps 7 and 8). With a spatula, gently fold the mixture into the rice; let it rest 30 minutes; chill until ready to serve.

**10** To serve, fill individual serving cups or glasses three-quarters full with risotto pudding. Top each with a heaping tablespoon of fruit compote.

**Nutrition information per serving (10 servings):** 312 calories, 10 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 60 mg cholesterol, 53 g carbohydrates, 4 g protein, 39 mg sodium, 1 g fiber

## Where to buy it

Look for Acquerello carnaroli rice at these stores and online. Eight ounces will feed 6 people.

- Eataly, sells many sizes (\$12.80 for a 17.6-ounce tin)
- Other Italian specialty stores
- Sunset Foods (\$9.99 for 17.6-ounce tin)
- Many Mariano's stores
- Almagourmet.com
- Italydepot.com
- Gourmet-Food.com