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Pinci with Tomato Sauce

Serves 6

This rustic pasta is always handmade, and it is traditionally almost the thickness of a pencil. The density of the noodle and the bite in its texture qualify pinci for the dumpling category. The exact length and thickness of pinci will vary, depending on village traditions or a family's preference. In some parts of Tuscany, the "n" is dropped and the pasta is called *pici*. In Umbria, a similar pasta is called *stringozzi*, and in Lazio, it is called *umbricelli*. What I really love about this dumpling is its weight and chew. Pinci have an old-world feel that is unmistakably Italian.

255 g / 1-1/2 cups semolina flour, plus more for dusting
285 g / 1-3/4 cups + 2 Tbsp all-purpose flour
2 tsp salt
255 g / 1 cup + 1 Tbsp warm water, plus more as needed
Sauce of your choice (see Tomato Sauce below)

In a large bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook attachment, combine the semolina flour, all-purpose flour, and salt at medium speed. Add the water and stir with a wooden spoon or mix on medium speed until a cohesive but not sticky dough forms, 1 to 2 minutes. Add more water, 1 Tbsp at a time, and knead with your hands or on medium speed until the dough is smooth and soft without being sticky or dry, about 8 minutes more. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and let rest at room temperature for 1 hour.

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and dust with semolina flour. With a rolling pin, roll the dough on an unfloured work surface into a flat sheet 1/8 in (4 mm) thick, and then cut into 1/8-in- (4-mm) wide strips. With your hands, roll one strip back and forth on the work surface into a fat spaghetti-like strand. Put the pinci on the prepared baking sheets and shape the remaining dough. Make sure that the pinci don't touch or they will stick together.

(To store, refrigerate on the baking sheets, covered with plastic wrap, for up to 2 days, or freeze on the baking sheets and transfer to an airtight container. Use within 1 month. Do not thaw before cooking.)

Bring a large pot filled with generously salted water to a simmer over medium-high heat. Add the pinci and simmer until they float to the surface, 1 to 3 minutes. Simmer until slightly al dente, 1 to 2 minutes more. Remove immediately with tongs and finish with your choice of sauce. Serve right away.

SAUCE PAIRINGS: Traditionally, pinci are paired with heartier sauces such as Tomato Sauce; Liver, Pancetta, and Porcini Ragù; Rabbit Ragù; Lamb Ragù; or Beef Ragù.

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Tomato Sauce

Makes 3 cups (720 ml)

From region to region in Italy and household to household, the style and recipe for tomato-based sauces will vary. Some sauces are thick and textural, and other sauces are thin and silky. This sauce combines elements of many techniques I have learned. It is a basic sauce that pairs well with many pastas and dumplings. The addition of butter in this version was inspired by a specific recipe from Marcella Hazan – the butter softens the acid in the tomatoes and adds a lactic sweetness.

2 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
4 large garlic cloves, halved
1/2 large yellow onion, sliced
Leaves from 1 sprig fresh rosemary
1 bay leaf
1/2 tsp red pepper flakes
6 cups (1.2 kg) canned whole peeled tomatoes, pureed and strained
1/2 cup (115 g) unsalted butter, cut into small cubes, plus more for serving
Kosher salt
Dumplings of your choice, just cooked
Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano Cheese for serving

In a medium pot, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add the garlic, onion, rosemary, bay leaf, and red pepper flakes and cook until the onion is translucent, about 10 minutes. If the onion begins to brown, lower the heat. Add the tomatoes and butter and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the sauce is slightly thick and soft but not pasty, about 45 minutes. The butter should emulsify into the sauce. Season with salt. Set a fine-mesh strainer over a large bowl and pour the sauce into the strainer. Discard the solids in the strainer.

(To store, transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 2 days, or freeze for up to 1 month. To thaw, place in the refrigerator overnight or until fully thawed.)

To finish dumplings with sauce, for each serving, warm about 1/2 cup (120 ml) of the tomato sauce in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add 1-1/2 tsp to 1 Tbsp butter per serving, depending on how naughty you feel, and gently simmer until the bubbles get large and the sauce is not watery along the edges of the pan. The sauce should be thick and silky, not dry or pasty. Add the cooked dumplings and simmer for 1 minute to let the dumplings absorb the flavor to the sauce. Spoon into serving bowls and top with grated Parmigiano-Reggiano. Serve right away.