

**Claudia Roden:** *The Food of Italy*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1989: 218 pp, colour photographs, index, £16.95.

Originally a newspaper series, *The Food of Italy* is now out in book form; a great convenience for Roden fans. Her food-related travels in Italy are recounted in her usual lively and personal style. She has set her own rules (and breaks them too), putting in what she likes, leaving out what she doesn't, and occasionally changing her mind. She considered leaving out Neapolitan rice cake with meatball filling, on the ground 'that it was too much trouble, . . . but then it fed so many people and it was so appreciated that it stayed in'. She explains that the selection of recipes reflects what is popular in Italy today, and really traditional; but leaving out dishes which might upset squeamish readers, such as frogs. Yet, lo and behold, page 43 has an attractively simple recipe for frogs cooked in wine.

The book is divided into chapters on the various regions of Italy, each one beginning with a happy jumble of history, which foods are of particular importance, and anything else she feels like telling us. Those bits make a delightful read before perusing the recipes, which in turn make one feel like going into the kitchen and importing those Italian flavors and smells into the home.

Don't worry that you'll be spending hours in the preparation of all these treats. Bruschetta can be in your mouth in about 3 minutes, once you have your olive oil, country bread, tomato and garlic to hand.

J.M.D.

**Anna Del Conte:** *Secrets from an Italian Kitchen*: Bantam Press, 1989: 339 pp, line illustrations, index, £14.95.

This is a book that drives you to the kitchen itching to savour its delights — the Pork fillet with elderberries, almonds and balsamic vinegar (*Filetto di masala alla Cavalcanti*), the Rocket and potato soup (*Minestra di rucola e patate*), the Bundles of monkfish and grilled peppers (*Fagottini di peperoni e coda di rospo*). Anna Del Conte has an infectious and accessible style and combines plenty of information and entertainment in her introductions to the recipes.

She starts from the premise that the Italian meal consists of two courses — the first and the main — both equally important. The chapters are then organised by ingredient; Pasta, Fish, Cheese, Fruit, Vinegar, Olive Oil, Edible Weeds. This makes for slight confusion as to where you'll find a particular recipe. The chapter on Rice and risottos is particularly pleasing, as is the one on fruits. But I would love to have known more about wild mushrooms, for which there are only three recipes.

K.C.