

## Pesto al Emilio; The Story, the Journey, the Recipe

### *Emilio Iodice*

A few words of wisdom before we begin our adventure:

*What I've enjoyed most, though, is meeting people who have a real interest in food and sharing ideas with them. Good food is a global thing and I find that there is always something new and amazing to learn - I love it!* Jamie Oliver

*Food is our common ground, a universal experience.* J. Beard

*I always knew that food and wine were vital, with my mother being Italian and a good cook.* Robert Mondavi

*If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him... the people who give you their food give you their heart.* Cesar Chavez

*A crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet partaken in anxiety.* Aesop



*There is no sincerer love than the love of food.* George Bernard Shaw



*Tradition leads to what you know. Creation is an adventure. It is a slippery slope. Look what happened when God made Adam.* Emilio Iodice

### **PESTO AL EMILIO: The Story, the Journey, the recipe**

#### ***Emilio Iodice***

I recall the first time.

It was magic.

It was life changing.

There was a feeling in the room. The setting was old but new. Color was everywhere. The sensation was marvelous.

The texture, the shape, the look, took my breath away.

I had known it before but not this way.

Yes, it was the first time I tasted pasta with pesto.

Basil was common but not like this. It was exotic. I felt strange twisting my fork.

This was for gods. I was from the Bronx.

I did not deserve this. My mouth felt different. It was filled with flavors. I could not distinguish the herbs from the oil or the pasta. It was a creation. Only those who lived in heaven had this.

I nearly fainted.

It was my first time.

Since then, I have had it again and again. Each was different.

It depends. The amount of basil, whether or not you add pine nuts or cheese or the type of olive oil, leads you somewhere else.

I say “somewhere” because pesto is a trip not a destination.

How you shape the voyage is about you. It is a chance at starting without ending.

Tradition is in the heart of Italy. Things need to be done as they were done. This is to keep change in chains. New is not a word. It is a concept. Novelties are risky.

Tradition leads to what you know.

Creation is an adventure.

It is a slippery slope.

Look what happened when God made Adam.

The Romans were adventurers. They took cheese and basil and olive oil and crushed it with a marble mortar and wooden *pestle*. They spread it on bread. It was good.

This lasted sixteen centuries.

Then the Ligurians around Genoa cracked the Roman rule and added crushed garlic, grated *Pecorino* and *Parmigiano*, pine nuts and olive oil and called it *pesto* since it was made with a mortar and pestle.

They put it on pasta and the world almost stopped turning.

Genoese seafarers took pesto along to avoid sailor's scourge – scurvy. Did the Genoese explorer, Christopher Columbus have pesto on- board when he sailed to the New World?

Pesto is wonderful. It is admired, respected.

Italians touch the formula with trepidation.

Tinkering is taboo.

So *pesto* is the same in Genoa as Palermo.

Chefs in Rome prepare it like Rimini or Ravello. The result is perfect.

It has been this way for four hundred years.

No one can surpass the sublime except a Michelangelo, Rafael, or Caravaggio.

If they believed art was perfect we would not have *La Pietà*.

Pesto with basil, pine nuts, olive oil, garlic and cheese was for Giotto.

I loved it but I wanted more.

So, like an artist, I began to experiment with colors, shapes, flavors, textures.

It took time.

Experimentation is heart rending.

Cracking tradition is a violation.

Yet, once I surpassed my sense of guilt, I was free to make pesto my way.

I asked why? Why only basil? Why only pine nuts? Why only pecorino?

The chefs said because our great, great, grandfathers did it this way.  
“If you do it your way it is not the same,” they exclaimed.  
I swallowed hard. I took the risk.  
I did it my way.

They tasted it. They loved it. They said it was new but not the same.  
They admitted it was better, but not the same.

*Bingo! I had succeeded.*  
I leaped from the candle to the incandescent light.  
My pesto illuminated in a way not expected by the experts.  
The horse and carriage were nice.  
The four on the floor was better.  
It was a new trip, a new adventure, a new pesto.  
Even so the final challenge was before me.

It was like scaling Everest. How could I make it to the top?  
I convinced the best and the brightest but had not reached the zenith. I could not  
introduce it to the world until I planted my flag on the highest peak.  
The last great test was to begin.

It took time. Finally, I found the courage. I served it to the expert of the experts.

She was rarely impressed.  
She never played favorites.  
She was cold.  
She was objective. She cooked her way. She ate her way.  
Exotic was for swashbucklers. Tradition was paramount.

Pesto was pesto. Before I prepared it, I explained why I embarked on this journey.  
She understood. I cooked it before her eyes.

Her look was severe. She did not trust change.  
My heart pounded. I was stressed.  
I served her. I watched as she carefully tasted the first forkful.  
I waited for the smile. It was not there.

She took a second forkful. She thought. It was the third. Yes, the third taste made the  
difference.  
“This is good. It is very good. It is better than mine. My son is a chef,” she  
exclaimed!

I got a hug and a kiss.  
Mamma liked my pesto.

I hope you do.

Saluti  
Emilio

## PESTO AL EMILIO



**Objective:** Create a special sauce that includes some non-traditional ingredients that has all the qualities of typical pesto plus additional flavors that, once combined, produces a dish that is delicate and light yet filled with fragrances that enhance and accompany the flavor of the basil and the pasta.

(Lighter cheeses with the same flavors can be added to reduce calories and cholesterol).

### Ingredients for four servings:





**Two abundant handfuls of fresh, large and small basil leaves**  
**Two abundant handfuls of Italian parsley**  
**One large handful of arugula (*Eruca sativa*)**  
**Two tablespoons of nuts (cashews, almonds, walnuts and or pine nuts)**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup of butter**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup of brie**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup of Swiss cheese**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup of *parmigiano***  
**One vegetable (vegetarian) bouillon cube**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup of extra virgin olive oil**  
**Two pound of Italian *fettuccini* (500 gr)**



**Preparation:**

**Dissolve the bouillon cube in a cup of warm water.**

**Add all the ingredients into a blender including the water with the bullion. Mix until creamy.**

**Cook the pasta until it is “almost” *al dente*.**

**Remove approximately ½ cup of the water that the pasta was cooked in. Drain the pasta and put in a large skillet.**

**Add the sauce and the cup of pasta water and mix.**

**Heat over a low flame for two minutes.**

**Serve immediately.**

**More grated *Parmigiano* and *Pecorino* cheese and sauce can be added to each plate.**

**Sprinkle a small amount of olive oil over each plate and serve**

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