



## HOME ECONOMICS

A taste of Tuscany in your kitchen cupboard

Up a cypress-lined lane in what's arguably the most romantic spot in Tuscany, the Lo Franco family have been stirring up a quiet food revolution since 1978. Back then, organic and biodynamic farming weren't the buzzwords they are now. Also, rural residents were taking jobs in the nearby cities, leaving the fields unharvested. But just as farming traditions were being lost, so Piero Lo Franco and his sons began their role as new-age agriculturalists.

The Lo Francos' plot of land hadn't been farmed in living memory, so its soil was pesticide-free - their vision was to keep it this way. La Violla was among the first Italian farms to gain organic certification and is now a fine example of bio-dynamism.

They just couldn't be any greener, the Lo Francos. Sheep milked to make pecorino graze on organic grass under solar panels; the stones and pips of olives and grapes are spat straight on to the ground to make rich fertiliser; and they use a 14th-century granite flour mill, given to the family by local monks, just to ensure it stays in regular use.

Theirs is a magical, Willy Wonka-style factory of fine Italian food, the farm producing everything from olive oil, wine and cheese to pasta, bread, sauces and preserves. Everything they make you want to consume on the spot, but mail order will bring a touch of Tuscany to your kitchen. **LL** [la-violla.com](http://la-violla.com)

### WHERE TO FIND THE BEST CUP OF COFFEE

**ROME** Caffè Sant'Eustachio ([santeustachioilcaffè.it](http://santeustachioilcaffè.it)) is not in the most beautiful of spots, but pop in for a double espresso (caffè doppio) anyway - it's the best shot of the dark stuff in town.

**MILAN** The Caffè Marchesi is the insider's choice for a cappuccino paired with a freshly baked "cornetto" croissant topped with vanilla cream ([caffemarchesi.altervista.org](http://caffemarchesi.altervista.org)).

**TURIN** Al Bicerin ([bicerin.it](http://bicerin.it)) has only eight tables, so prop up the bar and watch the world go by with a "bicerin" - layers of espresso, hot chocolate and whole milk served in a small glass.

**VENICE** A coffee at the Florian ([caffeflorian.com](http://caffeflorian.com)) hasn't lost its charm. **LX**