



The Grill Sergeant

Chef extraordinaire Mario Batali RC'82, author of the new book *Italian Grill*, waxes eloquent on lounging meat, grilled octopus, and wayward vegetables.

Rutgers Magazine: *America, you write, is "a wild world of grill experts." Is there a big difference between Italian and American grilling?*

Mario Batali: Italians are Zen master minimalists, preferring to leave the flavor as close to its original as possible. Americans like to kick it up with zippy spices and complex sauces. I love both. American barbecue is our greatest cultural achievement after rock 'n' roll.

RM: *How did you develop your chops for grilling chops?*

MB: Practice. Practice. Practice.

RM: *What is a common mistake that amateurs make?*

MB: Moving things too often after putting them on the grill. Let the grill do its work, and let the meat lounge.

RM: *Most weekend warriors overcook meat. How do you avoid it?*

MB: The professional chef uses intuition; the Zen master uses a meat thermometer. Guess which direction I go in? I like beef and lamb, medium-rare (about 125 degrees inside); pork, medium (140 degrees); and fish, just cooked through (except for salmon and tuna, which I like medium-rare: 120 degrees).

RM: *And what's the trick to grilling vegetables?*

MB: Not dropping them through the grates. I use a grill box or skewers and make sure vegetables are cooked through so I can get the char on them for maximum flavor.

RM: *What meat or fish do you recommend?*

MB: I love octopus, for which there are two recipes in the book. Prepared properly, it is exquisite grilled.

RM: *Do you have a favorite recipe in the book?*

MB: I love the spit-roasted duck, and the focaccia recipes are really fun and easy to do. Buy the dough from your local pizzeria.

RM: *What favorite white and red wines would you recommend for grilled food?*

MB: My faves are Tocai by Bastianich, made in Friuli, in northeastern Italy, and Perazzi by La Mozza, made in Maremma in southwestern Tuscany.

— Bill Glavin

Italian Grill (Ecco Press, an imprint of HarperCollins) is available at bookstores and amazon.com.