

# Setaro, when tubes are tubes

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Say yes to quality,  
not quantity



**M**any people think that the most famous production district of Italian pasta is in Gragnano (Naples), where the only PGI product for durum wheat dry pasta is produced. However, the most experienced in the sector know that in the past, and precisely at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was an even more fervent producing area which competed with the Gragnano area. In fact, if you have the patience and pleasure of watching a movie starring *Totò* and *Peppino* in 1962 (*Totò and Peppino divided in Berlin*), the taste of competition between these two districts emerges clearly with the unique taste of irony of these two actors: Totò: «What do you do, pasta?». Peppino: «Two tubes». Totò: «Ah, these are tubes». Peppino: «From Torre Annunziata». Totò: «I think it's





**They produce about 100 formats of long and short pasta**

from Gragnano. Gragnano, that's true, yes. So today we eat pasta». Peppino: «I eat pasta». Totò: «And I'm in».

Both are special anyway, especially when two hungry Italians are abroad, in rather complicated conditions. Let us read the excerpt of an article that appeared in the *Avanti!* newspaper on 27 April, 1904: "Torre Annunziata lives on the pasta industry. The grains arrive from Russia on steamers; three hundred port workers unload them; five hundred millers reduce them into semolina, in fourteen steam mills; eight hundred pasta makers transform semolina into pasta in fifty-four pasta factories; two hundred mechanics, stokers and carpenters operate and fix the machines; as many charcoal burners supply fuels



from the sea; three hundred men from the “caravan of the square” provide external services with handcart; one hundred carters take pasta to Naples; fifty porters of the railway “crew” load it onto the trains; fifty “lanzaiuoli”, on boats called “lanze”, take it by sea in small lots; and the above described port workers who supplied the raw material, i.e. the grain, now receive the return product and embark it on the large ships that will take it especially to America”.

### Golden times

You read it right: 54 pasta factories were active in Torre Annunziata, at the beginning of the last century. This can be found not only in the newspapers, but also in the only existing novel entirely dedicated to the world of pasta, and specifically to a family of pasta makers, the

family of Maria Natale Orsini, Francesca and Nunziata (Avagliano, 1996), semi-finalist at the *Strega Award* and from which Lina Wertmüller made a film starring Sofia Loren. In Torre Annunziata, the old remember the golden age of baker’s art, when the streets bustled with pasta factories and spaghettis drying on racks in the sun. Then came industrialization. Pasta began to be produced quickly and in large quantities. So, gradually, those valuable local pasta factories, which used to import Taganrog Russian wheat - with exceptional organoleptic and pasta-making properties, which disappeared with the Bolshevik revolution in 1918 along with cultivars that were never found or revitalized again - were unable to face the competition of technology

and huge capitals and one after the other, they all disappeared. But one.

### Quality is rewarding

Like a writer who refuses to adapt to new technologies and persists in producing great works using an old typewriter, Setaro pasta factory continues to produce about 100 formats of long and short pasta, applying the methods of the ancient pasta makers, since 1939, when the founder, Nunziato Setaro, took over a pasta factory in lava stone, including Braibanti brothers’s machines made in 1930 in Milan, which are still the irreplaceable plus of the company, making it unique.

The production reaches 24 quintals a day, far from the capacity of a large industrial pasta factory, and the drying time, in static cells,

the whole **Italian art** of pasta in one machinery



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varies from 72 to 120 hours. This does not only depend on the type of format, drawn in bronze, but also on the climatic conditions and the season, with a temperature that never exceeds 40 °C. In fact, if a north wind blows, the

## They apply the methods of the ancient pasta makers

environmental conditions for pasta drying are very different from the moments when a Sirocco wind blows.

Pasta Setaro is marketed throughout the Italian peninsula with exclusivity of area (which means that only one business in a village or city - be it a delicatessen or a gourmet shop - is entitled to sell the pasta factory products from Torre Annunziata). The

products are also exported to various countries, both in Europe and outside Europe and can also be found in the trendiest restaurants that pay attention to the real tradition of made-in-Italy pasta. No large-scale distribution. The last surviving pasta factory in the glorious district of Torre Annunziata - now run by Vincenzo, Giovanni and Nunziato Setaro, the third generation of pasta makers - places its products on the Italian and foreign markets (exports account for 50%) and is insensitive to changes in the pasta market trends.

### Zitoni on Sundays

Its formats - among which the 60-centimetre long *zitoni* stand out, which in the past, in Naples, were prepared on Sundays, especially with the ragout - can be tasted in trendy restaurants, such as the "San Domenico" in New York, the "Giorgio V" in Paris on the Champs Élysées, the "Don Alfonso 1890" in

Massa Lubrense (Naples). As well as "in the delicatessens and wine bars of Sydney, Melbourne, New York and Tokyo - underlines Vincenzo Setaro - customers can find our pasta and cook it to their liking while tasting the ancient flavours of Torre Annunziata". Like in the novel by Maria Natale Orsini, in whose plot, Nunziata, Francesca's adopted daughter, when asked by her mother to make a wish for a wedding gift, refuses "a golden roll... a set of diamonds... aunt Luigina's bracelets...", asking instead for "two devices to make maccheroni", the history of the pasta factory Setaro clearly shows that there is no gold that can repay the faith in the value of a family history and a tradition. And that, eventually, the undaunted resistance to temptations and anonymous winds is rewarding in all respects.

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