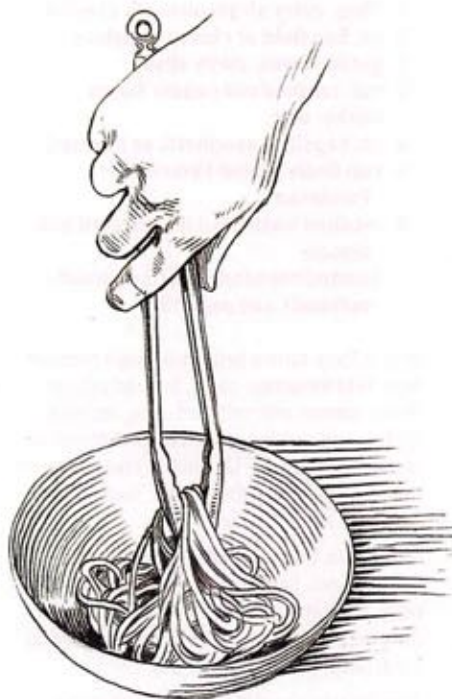




# 9

IT SHOULD  
LOOK  
AS GOOD AS IT  
TASTES



Like a wineglass, a **well-designed pasta bowl** not only makes for beautiful presentation but also serves a purpose. A broad bowl with high sides keeps food warm (especially if you heat the bowl in an oven first), and a white one makes the colors in the sauce pop. We like Crate & Barrel's Bistro Large Bowl (\$7; [crateandbarrel.com](http://crateandbarrel.com)). Use your trusty tongs for plating. "It should look like a bird's nest," says **Thomas McNaughton**, executive chef at San Francisco's Flour + Water. To get the look, twirl the pasta, lift it out of the pan, lower it into the bowl, then re-twirl.

## SPAGHETTI ALLE VONGOLE SERVES 2

The briny juices from the clams help to flavor this brothy sauce—the fresher the clams, the better the dish. Clams' salinity varies depending on their variety and provenance, so in this case, be sure to salt the pasta cooking water lightly.

- Kosher salt**
- 6 oz. spaghetti**
- 4 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided**
- 1 garlic clove, thinly sliced**
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes**
- ¼ cup white wine**
- 2 lb. cockles, Manila clams, or little-necks, scrubbed**
- 2 Tbsp. roughly chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**

Bring 3 quarts water to a boil in a 5-qt. pot. Season lightly with salt; add pasta and cook, stirring occasionally, until about 2 minutes before tender. Drain, reserving ¼ cup pasta cooking water.

Meanwhile, heat 3 Tbsp. oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and cook, swirling pan often, until just golden. Add red pepper flakes and continue cooking 15 more seconds. Add wine, then clams; increase heat to high. Cover skillet and cook until clams open and release their juices, 3–6 minutes, depending on size of clams. As clams open, use tongs to transfer them to a bowl.

Add ¼ cup of the reserved pasta water to skillet; bring to a boil. Add pasta to pan. Cook over high heat, tossing constantly, until pasta is al dente and has soaked up some of the sauce from the pan. Add clams and any juices from bowl to pan, along with parsley, and toss to combine. (Add more pasta water if sauce seems dry.) Transfer pasta to warm bowls and drizzle with remaining oil.

## COOK THE COVER



### PASTA AL POMODORO SERVES 4

Heat ¼ cup **extra-virgin olive oil** in a 12" skillet over medium-low heat. Add **1 minced medium onion** and cook, stirring, until soft, about 12 minutes. Add **4 minced garlic cloves** and cook, stirring, for 2–4 minutes. Add a **pinch of crushed**

**red pepper flakes**; cook for 1 minute more. Increase heat to medium, add **one 28-oz. can peeled tomatoes, puréed in a food processor**, and season lightly with **kosher salt**; cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce thickens slightly and the flavors meld, about 20 minutes. Remove pan from heat, stir in **3 large fresh basil**

**sprigs**, and set aside. Meanwhile, bring **3 quarts water** to a boil in a 5-qt. pot. Season with **salt**; add **12 oz. bucatini or spaghetti** and cook, stirring occasionally, until about 2 minutes before tender. Drain pasta, reserving ½ cup **pasta cooking water**.

Discard basil and heat skillet over high heat. Stir in reserved

pasta water to loosen sauce; bring to a boil. Add pasta and cook, stirring, until sauce coats pasta and pasta is al dente, about 2 minutes. Remove pan from heat; add **2 Tbsp. cubed unsalted butter** and ¼ cup **finely grated Parmesan or Pecorino**; toss until cheese melts. Transfer to warm bowls; serve with more cheese, if desired.

## PASTA WITH SUN GOLD TOMATOES

SERVES 2

New York City's Italian impresario **Mario Batali** likes to use Sun Gold tomatoes—a sweet, slightly tannic variety of cherry tomato—to make this dish. Any good cherry or grape tomatoes, or a chopped large tomato, will work, too. Be sure to cook the tomatoes down until they've released all of their juices.



- 4 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 8 oz. Sun Gold or cherry tomatoes
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ¼ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt
- 6 oz. capellini, spaghetti, or bucatini
- ¼ cup finely grated Pecorino or Parmesan
- 8 medium fresh basil leaves, torn into pieces
- Toasted breadcrumbs (for garnish; optional), see page 157

Heat 3 Tbsp. oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add tomatoes, garlic, and red pepper flakes, season with salt, and cook, covered slightly and swirling pan often, until tomatoes blister and burst, 10–12 minutes. Press down on tomatoes to release their juices. Remove pan from heat and set aside.

Meanwhile, bring 3 quarts water to a boil in a 5-qt. pot. Season with salt; add pasta and cook, stirring occasionally, until about 2 minutes before tender. Drain pasta, reserving 1 cup pasta cooking water.

Transfer pasta to skillet with tomatoes; set over high heat. Add ½ cup pasta water. Cook, stirring and tossing often, until sauce thickens and begins to coat the pasta, about 1 minute. Stir in remaining oil, cheese, and half the basil and toss until sauce coats pasta and pasta is al dente. (Add more pasta water if sauce seems dry.) Add remaining basil, season with salt, and serve with breadcrumbs, if desired.



# CHEESE IS NOT JUST A GARNISH

# 8

Whether you know it or not, restaurants **enrich pasta sauces with cheese** even before grating it tableside. When a little bit is added to the sauce, it melts and becomes a binder, a stealth ingredient that lends texture and flavor. Here are three simple steps to getting the most out of it:

**Skip pre-grated cheese.** It's more expensive and it doesn't taste as good.

**Grate it finely** so it'll melt easily into the sauce. You're making pasta, not a quesadilla.

**Think beyond Parmesan.** Frank Falcinelli and Frank Castronovo, of New York City's Frankies Spuntino, use Pecorino, a sheep's-milk cheese with a tangy bite. "It has a stronger flavor," Castronovo says, "so we use less of it in the food."

# 7

# EVERYTHING'S BETTER WITH BUTTER

The other secret to rich, silky sauces is extra fat—and yes, all the restaurants use it. "I finish the pasta with a little bit of olive oil, butter, or both," says **Andrew Carmellini** of New York City's

Locanda Verde. "In Italian it's called *mantecare*, which means 'to make creamy.'" He adds cold butter to the pasta and sauce in the pan, off the heat, to give it an unctuous texture.