

Garrubbo on Italy’s table rules, how to break them

Posted on November 9, 2026 by Alina Trabattoni, Sabina Castelfranco

ROME — Edwin Garrubbo, the Rome-based Italian American food writer and culinary tour leader, signs his third book, the Garrubbo Handbook, at the Sacripante Art Gallery on November 11. Pocket sized and covering all 20 regions, it follows Sunday Pasta (2014) and the Garrubbo Guide (2020), which earned a starred review. Garrubbo spoke to Italy Now about Italian food rules and how to break them, among other things.

Q. You trained as a lawyer. What happened?

Once a lawyer, always a lawyer. When my father died young, about 20 years ago, I asked what was important in my life, and concluded that law wasn’t. My passion was food, centered on my family and what I thought was lacking in America.

Q. Where is your family from?

Three quarters of me is Sicilian, half from Agira, a small town in Enna, and a quarter from Messina. One grandfather came from Avellino, in Campania.

Q. A visitor sits down in a Roman trattoria at half past 12. What is the first mistake?

You can’t really make mistakes. But people think restaurants stay open from noon until midnight. They close at 2.30 or 3 and reopen at 7.30 or 8. Americans are first in, but it doesn’t get going until the Italians arrive, generally an hour later.

Q. What do your tour guests ask most?

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/edwin-garrubbo-italy-table-rules/

Everyone asks the cappuccino question. Italians don't really drink cappuccino after breakfast, because milk is considered a breakfast food. As my grandfather used to say, why are you eating more food after your food? But if you like it, get it.

Q. Which table rule would you happily break?

I agree with the cappuccino rule, but Italians bend it with a macchiato, a little espresso with a dollop of milk. You can't put cheese on *spaghetti alle vongole* (spaghetti with clams). But go down the coast to Naples, Ischia, or the Amalfi Coast and you find *cozze con pecorino*, mussels with pecorino cheese.

Q. So rules are there to be broken?

Picasso was classically trained. Once he really knew how to paint a portrait, he decided to make disfigured faces. That is how it works in Italy. Every chef learns the rules first, then learns how they can be broken in ways that work.

Q. Which region do visitors overlook?

I spent a week or so in Calabria and Basilicata this summer, and it was like going to a different country. These regions remain different cuisines within the patchwork that is Italian food.

Q. You are in an *enoteca* (a wine shop) holding a bottle. Where do your eyes go first?

The region, then the grape, then the maker. But most *enoteche* don't want to sell Chianti after Chianti, and every small batch bottle varies. Go in with an open mind. A Verdicchio from Le Marche might taste very different from the next one.

In Rome, Garrubbo also hosts a Sunday Pasta lunch at Elephant on November 15 and visits Soho House Rome on November 20, then Madison, New Jersey, on December 6 and Soho House New York on December 13.

Photo credits: Edwin Garrubbo

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/edwin-garrubbo-italy-table-rules/

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/edwin-garrubbo-italy-table-rules/