

DRINKING & DINING

2



1

PERFECT WELCOME — Turin GLOWING TERMS

The kitchen is very much the focal point of cookbook author Mimi Thorisson's family home in northern Italy. Gathering together the best ingredients that Piedmont has to offer, she enjoys preparing warming, market-fresh meals — with an expertly mixed apéritif or two, of course.

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Mimi Thorisson swiftly crosses the hall of Turin's Antica Tettoia dell'Orologio market, heads towards a butcher whose display is stacked with various regional sausages and orders two *salsicce di Bra* for the hearty pasta dish that she has in mind for lunch. "These are made exclusively in Piedmont," she says, pausing to remember the rest of her list. "What else? Oh, yes, leeks – they're so underrated." We leave the main hall through a back exit and dart into a covered farmers' market to snap up eight stalks of the vegetable (as well as a savoy cabbage) from Floricoltura Granziera, a wholesaler based in Carignano.

A CNN staffer-turned-self-taught cook, Thorisson says that she feels as though she has been conquering this market, bit by bit, since she moved to Turin seven years ago. She now knows her favourite stallholders by name and always shops intuitively, following recommendations and snapping up the season's specialities. Today she has several heavy bags, so she calls a taxi to help transport her haul. "When I shop, I often return with more ingredients than I planned," she says as we climb into the taxi, which takes us to her home on Corso Vittorio Emanuele II.

Once there, we load the bags into an antique Stigler lift. It whirs up to her 400 sq m flat on the third floor of the stately, late-19th-century building; she bought the apartment last year with her husband, Oddur, an Icelandic photographer and art director. "We lived in the French Médoc countryside for 10 years, a place that really inspired me in my work," says Thorisson, taking off her grey-brown blazer coat by Carla Saibene to reveal a dress by Loretta Caponi from Florence. "But when the children grew up, the question of a good school arose and we decided to move back to a city."

The family first set up camp in Turin when Thorisson was working on a cookbook and her love of the city endured. "As the former capital, Turin has a rich history but Piedmont is also unique from a culinary point of view," she says as she unpacks the groceries and spreads them out on the kitchen table, where chestnuts, sage, onions, lemons and two packets of tagliatelle are

waiting to be used. Today's lunch is a family moment but that doesn't stop her from mixing a quick apéritif for *Konfekt*, shaking sage syrup with vodka and lime juice to create a cocktail in a few simple steps.

The centrepiece of the new kitchen is a large Bertazzoni gas cooker. The hay-green built-in cupboards and the chimney-like extractor hood were made by Tuscan interior designers Homewood. "We wanted the kitchen to look as authentic as possible, as though it had always been here," she says.

Thorisson ties on a white cotton apron and begins to chop some onions, carrots and celery sticks, which she sautés in a casserole dish, adding olive oil and a little sage. Then she throws in a finely chopped potato. The

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family's terrier puppy, Henri, is curled up at her feet on the terrazzo floor.

"I grilled the chestnuts and then froze them," says Thorisson, explaining how she uses them to put together a warming chestnut cream soup. "But you can also opt for boiled chestnuts, which you can buy ready-made," she says, adding about 500g of chestnuts to the vegetables in the casserole and setting aside a few to garnish the soup, which is then puréed in the blender until creamy.

The daughter of a Chinese father – a plastic surgeon – and a French nurse, Thorisson grew up in Hong Kong. "My dad loved good food and I was his sparring partner in trying out new dishes and testing restaurants," says Thorisson, as she cuts the leeks for the pasta, sautéing the small rings and putting a tray of chopped hazelnuts in the oven to roast. She squeezes small pieces of the *salsiccia di Bra* into hot oil in a separate pan and cooks them until they turn golden brown. Meanwhile, a large pot of boiling water simmers on the side for the tagliatelle.

"Every summer, we spent two or three months with my grandmother and my aunt in the south of France," says Thorisson. "They were both passionate about cooking and became my role models."

After studying finance in London, she returned to Hong Kong to work for CNN Financial News. "I was a keen cook at the time but I never thought that it would become a job," she says. As a business developer, she produced lifestyle content until she met Oddur in a Paris nightclub in 2005. She had one child from her first marriage, while Oddur already had two; together they wanted to have more and decided to move to the countryside for their growing family.

The time in the country proved to be very fruitful – I had always loved cooking and wanted to continue providing my friends with recipes," says Thorisson. "So I started my blog, *Manger*, which was picked up by [US television personality and businesswoman] Martha Stewart. From there, everything just took off." She produced four cookery books, including *A Kitchen in France* and *French Country Cooking*, together with her husband.

Today she regularly organises culinary workshops in Venice, Naples, Hong Kong as well as Turin. At home, however, she enjoys inviting over friends for long, cosy meals. "If I'm preparing for a festive evening with friends, I like to start early in the day, slowly stirring sauces while the flat fills with the scent of butter and herbs," says Thorisson. "I always envision a meal in three gentle acts: an apéritif with something crisp and salty, a generous main course and a dessert that feels like a little celebration." She takes the tray of roasted hazelnuts out of the oven and their aroma floods the room. "I love it when guests wander into the kitchen, glass in hand, to taste a sauce or steal a spoonful of cream – that's the most joyful part of entertaining."

Food is part of the conversation in the kitchen and at the table. The author, whose latest cookbook, *A Kitchen in Italy*, was published in early November, often gives tips and secrets as she cooks, making recipes part of the evening.

Thorisson begins peeling three cooking apples and beats some ricotta with two



Previous page
1. Mimi Thorisson at the table with two of her children

This spread
1. Thorisson washes leeks in the kitchen of her Turin home

eggs, flour, almond flour, sugar, salt and baking powder in a large bowl. "This apple ricotta cake is also from my new book," she says over her shoulder as she adds milk to the mixture until the batter has a soft consistency.

When she cooks with her children, the author admits, it's never about achieving perfection. Instead, what's important are their small hands rolling dough and the laughter that finds its way into the soup. Three of her eight children are here today. "Each of them has their favourites: Audrey loves roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, Lucian loves *tajarin* with ragu sauce and Gaia would die for the leek and hazelnut *Bra* sausage pasta – she will be especially happy today," she says. "Unless I am travelling, we sit together every night, even if the meal is simple. The table is where we share the stories of our day. The kids eat basically everything: they will always love even the humblest vegetable if it's dressed with enough care." With that, the children rush into the kitchen and hug their mother. Oddur – who is Viking-tall, with short grey hair – joins them and sets the table in the dining room. Meanwhile, Audrey, aged 11, lights some candles.

The family takes a seat on Gio Ponti chairs that Oddur recently bought from antique dealer Michelangelo Limongelli. Thorisson serves the soup, garnishes it with olive oil and roasted chestnuts, while Gaia, aged 14, slices the bread. A quiet descends as they slurp generous spoonfuls, before the table breaks into chatter about decorating the Christmas tree together.

A tall Nordmann fir was delivered today and is waiting for the children to dress it. Before that, the rest of Thorisson's winter feast awaits them and they tuck into their next course over excited talk of presents and winter tales. —— **K**



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1. Ready for setting the table
2. The Thorisson family sit down to eat
3. Fresh produce from Turin's Antica Tettoia dell'Orologio market
4. Hand-stitched napkins
5. Pouring apéritifs
6. In the shaker
7. Apple ricotta cake



4



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