



Meat sauce, not a tomato sauce

The Ragù Myth

The word ragù simply means a meat sauce, but its definition changes with the landscape. While every Italian region has its own version, the Ragù alla Bolognese is undoubtedly the most famous, and the most misunderstood.

What is served as "Bolognese" in Northern Europe or the US often bears little resemblance to what we cook here in Bologna. The most common surprise for my guests? A traditional ragù is not a red sauce. In a true Bolognese kitchen, we don't use tomato sauce or purée. We use a small amount of tomato concentrate primarily for depth and a vibrant, bronzed color. The result is a sauce that is fundamentally about the meat, slow caramelization and the quality of the stock in which it simmers. It is rich, thick, and brown, not a pool of liquid tomato.

Pairing

The texture of the sauce dictates the pasta it belongs with. This is why you will never find a traditional ragù served with spaghetti in a Bolognese home. The smooth, rounded surface of spaghetti allows the meat to slide off and settle at the bottom of the bowl. We pair it with Tagliatelle. The rough, porous surface of the handmade egg pasta acts like a canvas; the meat and the fats cling to the wide ribbons, ensuring that every bite is a perfect balance of pasta and sauce.

Essence

When you strip away the excess tomato, you taste the complexity of the beef, the sweetness of the pork, carrots and onions, and the richness of the slow-cooked fats. It is a lesson in restraint, showing that the most famous sauce in the world isn't about adding more ingredients, but about giving a few quality ingredients enough time to transform.