



MUSEO DEL **Culatello di Zibello**

AUDIOGUIDE

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Pathway A - Museum of Culatello and Masalén

0 –INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Antica Corte Pallavicina, the patrician residence which has stood on the banks of the river Po since the XIII century and which today houses the Museum of Culatello. The route through the museum is divided into 8 sections which tell the story of the territory of the Parma lowlands, the pig, St Anthony protector of animals, the Spigaroli family and the figure of the ‘norcino’ or butcher, the ancient feast of cruelty, Culatello and the other local salumi from this area. The Museum visit ends at the Hosteria del Maiale and Culatello where you will be able to both taste and buy our typical products.

We are in the Parma lowlands, the flatlands between the river Po and the Via Emilia, an area forever associated with the production of Culatello. The cold, foggy winters and the sunny, torrid summers allow for the slow ageing of flavours and aromas which make this King of salumi, the Culatello so unmistakable.

Massimo Spigarolo:

“He we are in the Antica Corte Pallavicino. The Palace was restored by Galeazzo Pallavicino at the end of the XV century on the remains of an ancient fortress. Its first function was as a customs post to safeguard the flourishing river traffic, and in the XVIII century was transformed into a farm. My great grandfather, Carlo, arrived at the Antica Corte as a lessee and from then on devoted himself to farming and pig breeding in order to produce salumi. Later, the Court was abandoned and went rapidly downhill until our family bought the ruin in 1990 and after years of restoration, the ancient cellars where the Pallavicino family had aged their culatello, have returned to their original vocation and are again full of maturing culatelli.”

The Hostaria of Maile and Culatello, the Michelin starred restaurant and the 11 comfortable rooms of the Relais are ready to host the most demanding client and those who are interested in

familiarizing themselves with this corner of a gastronomical paradise. In these ancient rooms we have arranged the *Museum of Culatello and Masalén*.

TO REACH THE MUSEUM KINDLY CROSS THE COURTYARD AND GO DOWN THE SECOND FLIGHT OF STAIRS ON THE LEFT

1 . THE MUSEUM

The *Museum of Culatello and Masalén*, which has been organized in the evocative surroundings of the Antica Corte Pallavicina, was a vision brought to fruition by the Spigaroli family. The Museum rooms will let us get to know all the protagonists of the history of Culatello. The pathway through the museum has been curated by the historian Giancarlo Gonizzi, the lay-out designed by Lorenzo Lottici and graphics are by Giulio Belletti. The museum visit lasts about one hour and ends in the *Hosteria del Maiale e del Culatello* with a tasting of local cold cuts.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PIG

The Museum visit begins with a curious panel which shows how overall average weight of the pig has increased since the 1500's. Such weight increase, due to greater availability of food, is documented in archived papers

ONCE YOU HAVE TURNED THE CORNER, THE VISIT CONTINUES UNDER THE PORTICOED WALKWAY WHERE WE WILL MEET THE FIRST PROTAGONIST OF OUR HISTORY: THE LAND

3. THE LOWLANDS – THE LAND OF CULATELLO

The lowlands consists of that area of the plain of the Po river which lies to the north of Parma and extends from the river Po to the Via Emilia, bordered to the east by the Enza river and to the west by the Ongina and full of woods and fields under cultivation. Here respect for tradition is visible in the rich artistic, cultural, historical and gastronomical legacy which has evolved over time.

The historical families which governed this land in former times, the Rossi, the Sanvitale, the Meli Lupi and the Pallavicino, all built castles and sumptuous palaces filled with works of art and popular faith has left significant traces in the small parish churches and oratories. This is the land where, thanks to the particular geographical and climate conditions, the centuries old tradition of the Culatello maturing has taken place. The production area includes the municipalities of Busseto, Polesine Parmense, Zibello, Soragna, Roccabianca, San Secondo, Sissa and Colorno.

4. THE GREAT RIVER

The river Po has always been a major artery of transport, not only of goods and commercial traffic but also of people and an exchange of ideas and experience. The effect has been that this border area has become a melting pot of excellence

5. The Forests in the Plain

This land is strongly characterized by rivers and woods, these days woods of poplar trees but once upon a time of oak. It is precisely the presence of forested land with their food resources which encouraged the breeding of free ranging droves of pigs.

AS WE GO INTO THE END ROOM ON THE LEFT WE MEET THE SECOND PROTAGONIST OF OUR STORY: THE PIG

6. THE PIG

The pig can be found in almost every continent from the British Isles to Morocco, from Japan to New Guinea, The wild boar is the ancestor of the modern varieties of swine, and has been domesticated by man since pre-history. Pig breeding in the Parma area is documented already during the bronze age, between the XVII and XII centuries before Christ in the 'Terramare' settlements and gave rise to a culture which was consolidated thanks to the Celts, the Etruscans and the Romans all of whom colonized this land.

The pig has always been significant in terms of food as well as economically and commercially, and this is still relevant today. The pig has also played an important role in popular mythology and folklore.

7. OAK TREES

The oak tree, sacred tree above all others for its majesty and force, was linked to the cult of the divine in Celtic culture. It has always been of vital importance in feeding pigs as the acorns were plentiful from the vast oak forests covering the Po river valley and provided the essential food to fatten the pig before the winter cold.

8. THE BLACK PIG

The original pig from the Parma provincial area was the Parmigiana Black of the Spanish strain. They were similar to wild pigs and were quite small in weight. They provided excellent meat and lard for preparing the local salumi products. Towards the end of the XIX century for economic reasons they were cross bred with English pig breeds which grew faster and thus rapidly replaced the black pig. Only a few survivors of the black pig breed survived in the high Apennines. They were only re-introduced at the end of the XX century and are now protected by the Consortium for safeguarding the quality of the Nero di Parma - Parma Black which was set up in 2006. Today the black pig has returned as a true protagonist of the production of excellent salumi from the Parma lowlands, and, in particular of Culatello, which has characteristics both unique and rare.

9. THE SYMBOL

Since ancient history the pig has been considered a symbol of fertility and abundance. The fact that money boxes are very often shaped like piglets and have to be broken once they are full of savings is an example of this traditionally held belief. Many other household objects in daily use are pig shaped to underline the familiarity and importance of this symbol.

10. PIG POSTCARDS

Pigs have frequently figured in European postcards from the second half of the XIX century to mid way through the XX century as they were traditionally used in northern Europe to exchange New Year's good wishes. The panel shows a selection of postcards from the extensive – more than a thousand - collection of Massimo Spigaroli. The entire collection can be accessed through the touch screen on the wall. The material has been subdivided into themes to facilitate consultation.

11. THE PIG'S IMAGE

Over the course of the centuries the symbolic meanings of the image of the pig have multiplied. Men have always bred pigs and in many cases the pig has become almost one of the family. The collection that you can see here underlines this aspect and takes us from satire, to illustration, from the cinema to publicity and even on stamps.

THE TOUR CONTINUES IN THE NEXT SMALL ROOM WHERE WE MEET THE THIRD PROTAGONIST OF OUR HISTORY: ST. ANTHONY ABBOT, PROTECTOR OF PIGS AND ALL DOMESTIC ANIMALS

12. ST. ANTHONY OF THE “GUSEN”

There is a deep and significant link between St. Anthony Abbot and the pig. Originally the pig, pictured at the feet of the Saint, symbolized the temptations of the devil. However, the importance given to the animal in popular agricultural culture has modified the iconographic significance, from enemy to protected being, assigning to St. Anthony the role of protector of all domestic animals, but, above all, the pig.

13. ST. ANTHONY ABBOT AND THE PIG

St. Anthony is always represented with a small pig at his feet as can be seen in the statue, the votive tile, the metal plaque used during the liturgy and the devotional images on display in this section. On the 17th January, the Saint's day of St Anthony, agricultural peasants were in the habit of clearing out the barns and byres and paying special attention to their animals. Pig butchering was suspended for the day out of respect for the Saint.

14. ST. ANTHONY OF THE “GUSEN”

The image shows us the figure of St Anthony from the polyptych painted by Benedetto Bembo in 1462 and currently on display at the Sforzesco Castle in Milan, but which used to be in the chapel of Torrechiara Castle. The animal which you can see at the feet of the Saint is a typical black pig from our territory represented with a light band of colour around its midriff, unlike the Sieneese Banded pig which has a black band on a pinkish coat.

15. ST ANTHONY'S PIGS

In the middle ages the friars of St Anthony bred pigs which were recognizable because of the little bell they wore around their necks. They were authorized to wander the streets where they ate household refuse. The fat from these pigs was used to make an ointment for the treatment of *Herpes Zoster*, commonly known as ‘ St. Anthony's Fire’ or shingles.

GO THROUGH THE DOOR INTO THE NEXT ROOM WHERE YOU WILL FINALLY MEET THE SPIGAROLI FAMILY: AGRICULTURALISTS AND PORK BUTCHERS

16. THE SPIGAROLIS, AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

The surname itself indicates a trace of former agricultural aptitudes, and at the end of the XIX century the Spigaroli family were share croppers on the property of Maestro Giuseppe Verdi and also practiced the art of pig butchering. Chef Massimo's great grandfather, Carlo Spigaroli, was a *Masalén* and during the winter he moved around from farm to farm to prepare salumi.

17. THE SPIGAROLI AND THE RIVER PO

Having transferred to Polesine next to the antica Corte in 1905, the family cultivated the land and tended to the fields which had remained isolated on the banks of the Po following changes in the course of the river. To cut down on the chore of crossing the river in 1913 a ferry was set up which was soon used by the general population to cross the river with carts and goods. To satisfy the people waiting on line to take the ferry, the women of the house took up position on opposite banks of the river and supplied travellers with home-made bread, cold cuts (salumi) and wine.

18. THE SPIGAROLI RESTORATEURS

The second World War destroyed years of work in one fell swoop. Activity picked up again after the war with the establishment of the Lido di Polesine on the Parma bank of the great river. Here people could eat and dance. Later the restaurant Al Cavallino Bianco was opened and in 1990 the Antica Corte was acquired and has now been totally restored.

19. THE NORCINO, PORK BUTCHER

The norcino, Masalén in local dialect, was in charge of butchering the pig and preparing the cuts of meat for various types of salumi. He was a figure of great importance in the rural world and had acquired his expertise through working as an apprentice with an experienced pork butcher who had passed on his knowledge and skills.

The arrival of the Norcino was an ancient rite, almost a collective feast which saw the preparation of the salumi which guaranteed the survival of the community. The Spigaroli family were Norcini for generations and here you can see the bicycle kitted out for work which was used to move from one farm to another. Here too are some tools of the trade on display.

PLEASE LEAVE THE ROOM AND WALK ALONG THE SMALL CORRIDOR WHICH LEADS OUTSIDE AND CONSIDER THE HISTORY OF THE ANTICA CORTE PALLAVICINA.....

20. THE ANTICA CORTE PALLAVICINA

Built in the XV century on the remains of a Pallavicino fortress, the “Palace of the Two Towers”, as it was called became a country residence and farm. By mid way through the XIX century it was used as a barracks for the Duchy border guards and, ever more under threat from the changing Po river, in 1897 the Pallavicino family sold the property. It was bought in 1904 by the businessman from Busseto, Giuseppe Muggia, who used it as a logistic base for the river port and for steam powered trams. The entire property was ceded in 1941 to Zemiro Usberti and returned to being a farm. However, neglect continued and the continuing floods of the Po resulted in a state of decay and deterioration which induced the last owners to sell up. In January 1991 the Spigaroli family bought the property which has been lovingly restored to its original splendor. Today the property houses the Relais, the Restaurant, the Hosteria and the Culatello Museum.

OUTSIDE WE FACE THE SECTION DEDICATED TO THE ANCIENT ‘FESTA CRUDELE’ OF PIG CULTURE WHERE WE COME ACROSS A NEW ENTRY TO OUR STORY: THE NORCINO OR PIG BUTCHER AT WORK

21. THE ANCIENT FESTA CRUDELE – CRUEL FEAST

The figure of the pork butcher (Norcino) , he who brings fundamental knowledge for the treatment and conservation of meat and thus the survival of the families of agricultural workers, has been a fundamental figure throughout the centuries from ancient Rome to modern times. His image can be seen at work in Roman low reliefs, in Medieval sculptures and mosaics, in Renaissance miniatures and gives us a complete picture of the phases of his work from butchering to the production of salumi. His work is described in the evocative verses of Pomponio Torelli, Count of Montechiarugulo in the 1500’s. For the curious among you on your right can be found a small vocabulary of Parmesan terms linked to the pig in dialect.

CONTINUE TO THE LEFT AND GO DOWN THE LANE

22. AT WORK IN THE THRESHING AREA

From the thick fog which flowed around everything during the rigid Po valley winters, some images emerge of agricultural workers cooking ‘cicciolata’ (a tasty cold cut made from the less noble parts of the pig) round the fire. To the side you can see some of the pieces of equipment used by the pig butchers like a small stove, the copper cooking pot and a fork.

GO THROUGH THE FIRST DOOR TO THE LEFT TO FINALLY REACH THE LARGE ROOM WHERE WE CAN SEE THE CULATELLO, THE REAL STAR OF OUR HISTORY.

23. PORK MEAT

Pork meat has always been particularly appreciated and used since ancient times. The tradition of preparing salumi and cooking pork meat was not lost in the Middle Ages and indeed was even more important during the period of the barbarian invasions between the V and XI centuries AD.

During the low Middle Ages the various guilds and corporations of workers involved in the preparation and sale of salumi emerged and the figure of the Norcini became ever more significant. The panels illustrate the principal cuts of pork meat and the salumi derived from them with their

specific nutritional characteristics. For Culatello the upper part of the muscle in the pig haunch is used..

24. SALT

Since man's first appearance on earth he has tried to make food last longer in order to get round nature's insistence on seasons and the typical dearth of food during the winter season. He has developed ingenious means of doing this by means of trial and error. Next to sun drying and smoking the extraordinary role of salt in the conservation and preservation of meat and many other foods was established. Because of its importance, salt has been used since ancient times in health care matters and also as a significant element for exchange and barter. Think of the origin of the word "salary".....

The presence of springs and salt water wells in the hills of Salsomaggiore and Rivalta was a vital factor in the development of the art of salumi making: by boiling the water it was possible to extract a salt rich in

oligominerals like iodine and bromide above all, which were powerful antiseptic agents. Because of this less salt was necessary to preserve and conserve the salumi and was most certainly easier and cheaper than using salt brought in from Cervia near the Po river delta. The panel shows some rare documents linked to the salt wells of Salsomaggiore and the Pallavicino family who administered them for many centuries.

25. PEPPER

At a time when the preservation of food was quite hit and miss and generally depended on climate, it was vital to use spices in order to "cover" unpleasant odours and flavours. In this way the use of spices and, above all, pepper was already known in ancient times as can be evinced from the numerous recipes of the Roman cook Apicio which called for pepper. Originally from India, it had to cross oceans and deserts to reach Europe and was thus very expensive. A precious ingredient in ancient times it became a status symbol on a par with architecture and fine clothes. Pepper was monopolized by the Venetian Republic until the discovery of the Americas moved the route to the Atlantic.

Still today pepper is essential to confer shades of spice notes to the perfume of Culatello.

26. THE SALUMI OF THE PARMA LOW LANDS

Amongst the salumi produced in the Parma lowlands the following are presented with a brief description: il fiochetto, la mariola, il prete, la spalla and salami.

The characteristically pear shaped fiochetto is obtained from the anterior muscle of the haunch once the Culatello has been cut away. A particular cut of shoulder can also be obtained.

La Mariola is a short, plump salame with a rounded shape which has a lengthy ageing process after which it can be eaten sliced or else cooked. It is obtained from the cheeks, snout, tongue and shin of the pig.

Il Prete, so-called because of the curious shape similar to a Priest's headwear, is obtained from the shin of the pig which is de-boned and then filled with trimmed, salted and lightly spiced pork trimmings.

The salami are produced following ancient recipes and use minced pork meat. The names and flavours change according to the ageing period and the type of gut used for packing the product.

The salame gentile is made with straight gut, the crespone and cresponecchio with the large intestine while the strolghino made exclusively from Culatello trimmings, uses a narrow gut.

27. THE LOWLAND SALAMI AND GIUSEPPE VERDI

Shoulder of ham, eaten either aged or cooked, is the forward part of the pig shoulder and is packed into a bladder. Some documents testify that this is the earliest type of salume produced in the low lands and has been produced since the XII century.

It was particularly appreciated by Giuseppe Verdi who used to send it to his friends together with wise instructions for its preparation and cooking times.

Giuseppe Verdi was one of the most important people in these parts as he was born in Roncole di Busseto in 1813 and was destined to become one of the most important Italian composers of the XIX century. A wealthy landowner who appreciated fine food he has left many letters with suggestions and recipes for the Shoulder of Ham San Secondo Style.

28. CULATELLO

“ I am a greedy connoisseur of Parma Culatello” this is how Gabriele D’Annunzio, writer and poet from Pesaro, described himself in a letter dated 30th June 1931 sent to his friend Renato Brozzi, the sculptor from Traversetolo.

MASSIMO SPIGAROLI

“ A sentiment of true fraternal friendship united the sculptor and my grandfather and the Culatelli which Brozzi sent to D’Annunzio came from the cellars of the Antica Corte Pallavicina. Giuseppe Verdi loved Culatello as well and in 1862 after the fortunate first performance of “Forza del Destino” in St. Petersburg he celebrated with a Culatello prepared by my greatgrandfather Carlo.”

The panel shows other famous people who praised or cited Culatello in their work: Riccardo Bacchelli, Cesare Zavattini, Gianni Brera and Peppino Cantarelli. Legend has it that Culatello was a precious wedding gift at the noble marriage between Andrea dei Conti Rossi and Giovanna dei Conti Sanvitale in 1332. It was also a gift sent by the Marquis Pallavicino to the Sforza family of the Duchy of Milan. Unfortunately no documentation has been found to support the legend, though the red and silver colours from the Coat of Arms of the Pallavicino family have been used in the identifying label of the Consortium for safeguarding the Culatello from Zibello. The first documented citation is from 1735 in a list of fixed prices issued by the Duchy of Parma. In literature, the King of Salumi appears for the first time in the XIX century in a local poem in dialect by Giuseppe Maria Cellegari where the poet imagines it being served in Paradise.

29. PRODUCTION

Culatello is a type of salumi with a typical pear shape, tied up in a kind of string bag knotted in a particular way. It obtained recognition in 1996 as a DOP product (denominazione di origine protteta), which acts to safeguard and guarantee the genuine nature of the Culatello, its integrity and traceability.

Culatello is also known as the King of Salumi , a title motivated by its importance in the Italian gastronomic tradition and for its unmistakable flavour, the difficulty of its preparation and for the absolute quality of the product.

The pictures show the main phases of the preparation of Culatello, obtained from the upper muscle of the back haunch of the pig.

MASSIMO SPIGAROLI:

“Once the meat has been cut, the bone and the rind are removed. The cut of meat is salted and bound spirally with string. After a few days rest in a cool room, the Culatello is massaged with salt, pepper, garlic and white wine. It is then left to rest in a refrigerated cell until the massage mixture has been absorbed.

At this point the muscle is wrapped in either the bladder or stomach of the pig. And is left in underground cellars to mature for at least 18 months. Thanks to the micro-climate of the lowlands, to the natural damp and vicinity to the Po river the Culatello loses liquid and reduces its volume until it reaches a weight of between 3 and 5 kg. The outside of the Culatello is covered with naturally incurring noble moulds which preserve the product and convey an intense and characteristic perfume as well as a unique and unrepeatable flavour.”

The picture low down on the left shows Chef Spiagaroli proudly showing the cellars full of maturing Culatelli. As your visit continues you too will see this marvellous sight.

30. TASTING

It is necessary to undertake a precise series of preparatory actions before you can actually taste a delicious slice of Culatello. First of all, the string around it must be removed and the whole piece carefully brushed down. Then the salume is wrapped in a cloth soaked in either white wine or a light sparkling red wine like Fortana. Then peel back the skin and trim the visible fat covering. Finally the Culatello is revealed and can be either sliced by hand in order to optimize the taste or by machine.

MASSIMO SPIGAROLI

“Sliced Culatello has an intense, uniform ruby red colour with clear white veining. While on the palate it is delicate and sweet the back taste can change according to ageing. Indications for a perfect tasting are to combine with a low alcohol sparkling wine like the red Fortana or else, if the Culatello has been aged for longer, a white, still Malvasia from the Parma Hills. For a more sophisticated combination, the ideal would be a sparkling Classic Method or a Brut Rosé Champagne”

31. THE SALUMI OF PARMA

Having presented the salumi of the Parma lowlands, below are described the products of the hills and the territory of Parma.

Prosciutto di Parma, which is now known all over the world, is mentioned for the first time in the Statutes of the *Beccai* (butchers) of 1339 using the word *baffa* (possibly from the German verb ‘to dry: *backen*’). Commercial success took off in the XIX century and in 1963 the Consortium of Prosciutto di Parma was set up and the product was registered as DOP in 1996. The Museum of Prosciutto di Parma is in Langhirano.

Cicciolata is obtained by lengthy boiling of the meaty and cartilaginous trimmings from the preparation of other salumi.

Ciccioli are from the lean and fatty trimmings, which are boiled and filtered to remove all the liquid fat.

Gola (throat), so-called because the lard is taken from the throat of the swine. It is very thinly sliced and served on warm bread.

Lard is obtained from from the fatty layer below the rind on the back of the pig. It is minced and used to prepare soups and vegetables or else sliced and served on bread or toasted polenta.

Coppa is from the muscle layer covering the neck and first thoracic vertebra. The ageing process lasts from 60-90 days in damp conditions.

Lombino is obtained by salting and spicing the loin of pork before placing it in a sausage skin. This particular cold cut is only now being more widely diffused following the cultural re-evaluation of pork meat.

Pancetta, bacon, is the fatty pork belly from the side of a heavy pig. It is matured from 2 to 10 months and served thinly sliced.

Salame from Felino is produced in the small town of the same name and is obtained from the minced noble pork trimmings. The mince is salted and spiced with pepper, garlic and white wine and then packed into straight pig gut. In 2013 it was granted IGP status (Indicazione Geografica Protetta). The Museum dedicated to this product is in the Castle of Felino.

32. GUARESCHI IN THE CELLAR

At the far end of the large room there is a picture of Giovannino Guareschi, the famous journalist and creator of Don Camillo and Peppone, concentrating on selecting a Culatello in the cellar. Yet

another example of the consideration given to this noble salame by writers and famous people from the past. Cross the room reserved to His Majesty the Culatello and admire to the back on the right a glimpse of the ancient cellars of the Pallavicino with the Culatelli hanging up to mature.

33. AGEING

To the left is a small room where you can see hanging all the cold cuts obtained from a whole pig: 2 Pork Cheeks (guanciali), 2 Pancette (bacon), 2 Coppe, 2 Spalle (shoulder), 2 Culatelli, 2 Fiochetti, 2 Preti, 1 Mariola and 15 salami. The panel shows the text of "The Pig's Last Will and Testament" specifying where he leaves the various parts of his body.

THE TOUR CONTINUES BY GOING OUT OF THE DOOR AND UP A FEW STEPS TO REACH THE FIRST ROOM ON THE RIGHT

34. ALONG THE RIVER

Here can be seen pictures as well as original instruments and pieces of equipment from the early XX century illustrating life along the river, from managing the river banks to navigating the Po.

GO THROUGH THE DOOR ON THE LEFT AND ENTER THE HOSTERIA DEL MAIALE AND CULATELLO WHERE IT IS POSSIBLE TO TASTE OUR SALUMI AND THE EXTRAORDINARY PRODUCTS OF THIS TERRITORY

AFTER A FORTIFYING SNACK, FOR THOSE WHO SO WISH, IT IS POSSIBLE TO CONTINUE THE VISIT ALONG THE RIVER BANK TO SEE A DROVE OF PIGS IN THEIR NATURAL STATE AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE GREAT RIVER. THE SIGNPOSTED WALK IS IN THE OPEN AIR AND LASTS ABOUT 30 MINUTES.

PATHWAY B – the historical rooms of the "Palace of the two Towers"

WELCOME TO THE ANTICA CORTE PALLAVICINA, RESIDENCE OF THE NOBLE PALLAVICINO FAMILY FROM THE XIII TO XIX CENTURY

TO VISIT THE ROOMS ON THE NOBLE FLOOR, CROSS THE COURTYARD TO THE DOOR ON THE RIGHT

ROOM 1

The visit begins here in the first room, once the warm kitchen and now welcoming entrance to the magical atmosphere of history and charm which envelopes this residence.

The first Palazzo was built by Uberto Pallavicino "The Great" in the middle of the XIII century to check river traffic and the commerce of salt. It was subsequently abandoned for about 200 years but the beginning of the 1500's saw great changes as the former fortress was re-adapted by the Marquis Galeazzo into a comfortable court to be used by his secret mistress, the courtesan Bianca.

The restoration work undertaken was lengthy and meticulous: the ancient defensive walls were opened and given wide windows. The Palazzo was raised and the ground floor given vaulted ceilings and fireplaces in every room. The kitchen was established in this room during the first

decades of the 1500's as it was more protected from the Po river floods than the previous kitchen in the basement. The Renaissance style decorative frieze above the great fireplace dates back to that time but has been largely lost.

The roasting spit in the fireplace functions using a pulley mechanism as designed by Leonardo da Vinci.

High up to the left used to be the cook's quarters. The statue of the pig in the centre of the room however is modern and of great sentimental significance to Chef Massimo because it was a gift from Gualtiero Marchesi, the great Maestro who changed the face of Italian cuisine.

CONTINUING TO THE LEFT ENTER THE SECOND ROOM

ROOM 2

On the vaulted ceiling can be seen paintings from the 1600's showing scenes of hunting and fishing and episodes in the lives of agricultural workers. Such activities like working in the fields or producing salumi were dictated by the changing seasons. The chimney piece was originally on the outer wall of the room.

The two towers, which have given their name to the Palazzo, are linked by a loggia with two orders of arches built on circular columns. Above us, originally, there was a large reception room with a wooden caisson ceiling. This was changed in the XVII century to allow for the passage of the chimney flues from the ground floor fireplaces, which had been moved into the inside, within the new dividing walls.

CONTINUE THROUGH TO THE CENTRAL ROOM, THE ROOM OF THE COATS OF ARMS

ROOM 3

On the south side of the room, facing towards the village of Polesine, can be seen the great fireplace and painted on the chimney breast is the coat of arms of the Pallavicino family with an eagle holding a shield in silver and red. To the east towards the courtyard, on your left, can be seen the armorial bearings of the Ducal families to which the feudal possession of Polesine owed allegiance. In the centre is the coat of arms of the Farnese family, Dukes of Parma from 1545 to 1731. To the left the coat of arms of the Visconti, Dukes of Milan and to the right, that of the Sforza family who succeeded them.

All around can be seen the coats of arms of those members of the Pallavicino family who succeeded each other as feudal governors of Polesine, together with the insignia of their respective wives. Next to the door can be seen the parchment illustrating the various coat of arms to facilitate recognition of the noble houses.

In 1790 the fate of the Palazzo was in the hands of Antonio Maria Pallavicino who leased the building to the State as a barracks for the Dragoon border guards. In this way the palazzo became once more a fortified edifice and holes were inserted into the walls to allow for firearms to be used. In the 1830's, the Po river became ever more invasive causing flooding in the cellars which led the foundations to buckle. To avoid total collapse the building was lowered by one floor.

ROOM 4

GO THROUGH TO THE NEXT ROOM

We are in the Room of Olympus, the final room open to visitors in the Palazzo, and here we can admire the renaissance decorations showing the divinities of Greek mythology. These frescoes take us back to the decorative cycle of the 1500's.

The vicissitudes of the Palazzo continue. In 1897 the Pallavicino family sold the Palazzo to Alberto Galeotti, Mayor of Soragna who wanted to use it as a nursery school for the village. The plan was abandoned as the regular floods of the Po, unprotected by the river banks, submerged the whole area.

In 1904 the Palazzo and its land were bought by Giuseppe Muggia of Jewish origin who owned the steam driven trams between Parma and Busseto and Zibello as well as a company of river transport.

In 1905 the Spigaroli family rented part of the Palazzo living there in precarious conditions because of the constant flooding. One of the floods swept away one of the two courts of the complex.

In 1942 the racial laws forced Giuseppe Muggia to sell the Palazzo to his friend Zemiro Usberti, a rich land owner from Pieveottoville, who had already bought land around the estate. Muggia was captured by the Germans in Venice and taken to a concentration camp from which he did not return. The Spigaroli family as well were forced to abandon the Palazzo during the war.

Once the war was over, the former residence went back to being a farm and was occupied by deer hunters, woodsmen and fishermen who survived thanks to the river, but the decay and degradation continued until the Usberti family decided to sell up.

In 1991 the Spigaroli family returned, but this time as owners. The two brothers, Massimo and Luciano, bought the Palazzo in order to render homage to the three generations of the family who had survived on the estate. Twenty years of lengthy and meticulous restoration have restored its lost dignity to the former patrician residence which is today the Antica Corte Pallavicina.

The Restaurant is situated in the northern wing of the Corte and only two years after opening was granted the much sought after Michelin Star in 2011.

The Hosteria del Maiale e del Culatello opened in 2015 completing Chef Massimo's culinary offer of products strongly linked to local territory and in the main from the Spigaroli estate farm.

2015 also saw an expansion of the Relais: the original 6 rooms, 2 of which are magnificent suites, were joined by 5 more rooms.

The cellars of the Corte where once upon a time the Pallavicini family aged their own salumi, have returned to their original function and safeguard the Culatelli as well as hosting evocative events and dinners.

All of this is the Antica Corte Pallavicina.....where you can breathe in history and fascination as well as the culture of good food !