

THEY’RE SERVING SUSHI ON TV

We all get the cookery programmes we deserve. But while here in Italy we might be happy with presenter Antonella Clerici’s recipes or some pots and pans fakery on pay-TV, in Japan cookery shows have become a mass mania. Just turn on the TV: on one channel a group of mountain-climbing gourmets will be scaling the heights in search of the perfect mushroom, while on another a few local celebrities will be cooking their favourite meals, and on another channel again the members of some boy-band will be offering their dishes to no less a worthy than prime minister Junichiro Koizumi himself. **TV cooks everywhere, and at all hours of the day; to such an extent that, according to a recent survey, programmes on guzzling have broken all records for taking up airtime, occupying as much as 35-40% of schedules.**

While the first such programme, “Iron Chef”, broadcast a few years ago, had to entertain a very refined audience with masterpieces of venerable culinary art, today’s new shows are slanted at the mass of ordinary housewives and propose dishes whose ingredients are more or less “poor”. And herein lies the key to their success. For while food may well be a veritable obsession for the Japanese, it is just as much so for their wallets. Only in Japan does a slice of Kobe beef cost \$400, and an apple cost you up to \$15, or a tiny slab of chocolate \$5. **Only Japan dedicates such maniacal attention to gastronomic souvenirs; have a look at the supermarkets in stations and airports. And only in Japan are**

gourmets ready and willing to wait for weeks, and sometimes months, to get a reservation at their favourite restaurant. Such as the *Bettola da Ochiai* in Tokyo which, despite its rather unpromising Italian name (literally, *bettola* means “greasy spoon”), is a luxury must-be-there venue owned by chef Tsutomu Ochiai who has, of course, achieved superstar status on his own TV show.

As 43-year old architect Kumi Hino told the “Washington Post”, **“The fact is that, apart from the food itself, we Japanese especially love all the ritual that takes place before we eat it, such as the quest for the right ingredients.** I can spend hours at the market, just looking around or sampling new flavours”. At which point he might well exclaim “Oishiii!” which means “delicious!” in Japanese.

And of course it is not just a matter of taste; that’s something we Westerners, fond of those tiny masterpieces of sushi freshness, already know about. What we all also want is something to feast our eyes on. “If the presentation of a dish leaves a little to be desired, then the public won’t bite”, explains Motonobu Nakamura, director of TV programme *Which Dish?* where the meals prepared have to be so irresistible that the viewers at home can smell them. But to feed this obsession, you also need more than a pinch of mystery, and in Japan there are certain cookery secrets that are never revealed. Viewers, for example, have never learned just where the path up to the perfect mushroom discovered by our mountaineering gourmets is.

CATWALK VS. EAST-WALK

The paradoxes of fashion. On the one hand, according to a recent survey, Gucci and Armani are still the most sought-after griffes in forty-two countries around the world; while on the other, however, an ill wind of competition is blowing round the “Made in Italy” brand, with strong arm tactics and skirmishes in the textile industry, and opponents rattling their regulatory sabres. But the “enemy” in the East is sharpening a weapon that this time has nothing to do with red tape, laws and import-export regulations: the free circulation of creative works. For the talent of new designers is being increasingly exported. From Chinese trailblazers Vera Wang and Anna Sui, who first emigrated to the US and today are as much in demand from Milan to New York as Prada is, to second-generation designers such as Vivienne Tam, Wu Haiyan and Zang Toi who have dusted off seven-thousand-year-old sartorial styles and traditions and reinterpreted them from a metropolitan slant.

And now **alongside the Celestial Empire, Russia is also making a bid to capture the sceptre of Western elegance. There are now over 150 Russian fashion houses, most working in prêt-à-porter, with 5 major networks** controlling 70% of sales in the sector in the principal cities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, for a turnover estimated at hundreds of millions of euros. **This breed of Croesus from the East not only throw their money away on the usual European brands, they have also discovered a national pride in being trendy which in just a few years has become the driving force behind a new business, managed, as it**



were, from home. Post-Soviet prêt-à-porter is in fact quite recent. It was only in 1993 that Valentin Yudashkin launched his "pick it up and wear it" range, earning him membership of the Paris Haute Couture Syndicate and an exhibition of his designs at the Louvre Costume Museum, the California Fashion Museum and Moscow's State History Museum. Since then he has become the official designer for the Russian Olympic team and for Aeroflot uniforms the world over. Rather like our own Giorgio Armani, who designed the uniforms for Alitalia. Before Yudashkin, the king of high fashion design had been Vyacheslav (Slava) Zaytsev. Slav by name and origin, the Moscow designer had gone into the business with mixed success. Under the regime he had represented the fashion of Soviet totalitarianism, and in the 1960s the Western press dubbed him the "Red Dior". The baton has been now passed to emerging talent: to 27-year old Alena Akhmadullina from St. Petersburg, from the same city as President Putin; to Nina Donis, the first Russian brand to tread the catwalks at London Fashion Week,

and listed by "i-D magazine" as one of the top 150 designers in the world. There are in fact two people behind the brand: Nina Neretina and Donis Pupis. The similarity with Dolce & Gabbana is quick to come to mind.

VIAGRA FOR ME TOO

It was 1989 when Dr. Peter Ellis discovered a revolutionary formula to combat erectile dysfunction. Its active ingredient was sildenafil citrate and has met with the kind of success that not even the researchers at Pfizer had imagined. **Today, one packet of Viagra® is sold every six seconds, but eight years after it was first sold in the West's chemists and pharmacies, there are some countries where the little blue pill's success story is only starting.** Like India, for example, where only last December Pfizer Inc. launched its best-seller in thirty cities to treat the 90 million Indian men who suffer from erectile problems. The number of potential customers is huge and given the country's billion-strong population, India will be the pharmaceutical industry's Eldorado. "We think we'll be covering 10-

15% of the market in the next two years", explained the senior director of Pfizer's local products division during the presentation in New Delhi, "and we forecast a turnover of between 750 million and a billion rupees".

The blue miracle will cost patients between 464 rupees for the 50 mg tablet, and 594 rupees for the 100 mg tablet, in line with list prices in other Asian countries. (It costs \$12 in the US.) The prices are more or less "capped" in an attempt to mitigate losses to the black market. In the last five years there have been at least fifteen altered versions of sildenafil citrate, illegally sold at 22 rupees a tablet. The measure is geared to blocking **the boom in fake pharmaceuticals, which in the east is a parallel business that has been reported a number of times to the WHO.** In 2005, 781 altered labels were found in 67 countries worldwide, 40% more than in 2004, the equivalent of a slice of the market that goes from 6% to 10%, but which in Asian can reach peaks of 20-30%. In the list of top ten countries most at risk from counterfeiting, we find Russia, followed by China, South Korea, and India. And it is in India, surprise, surprise, that Viagra is the most frequently imitated medication, the very same famous blue pile from the West that has improved the sex lives of 27 million men. In a country whose financial potential, the potential of one of the financial powerhouses of the future, is only beginning to unfold.