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What Jamie did next

Exclusive interview in our 64-page Food & Drink special

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Matthew Hoffman brings back the flavour of Sicily from Anna Tasca Lanza's school

On the day after my return to London, having attended Anna Tasca Lanza's five-day course on her family's wine estate in Sicily, I got an early opportunity to put my new skills to the test. I had to make a quick dinner for a visiting friend, so I repeated the menu from one of my nights there: pasta with grated pecorino, seasoned whole artichokes roasted in charcoal embers, grilled thin sausages, raw fennel, and cannoli for dessert. Simple, and much appreciated.

The school is in the family-run 1,500-acre Regaleali wine estate in the foothills of the Madonie Mountains. My fellow students (eight American women) and I arrived separately on a Monday, and by 6pm were gathered in the kitchen to watch Anna bake a large cut of swordfish, which she first stuffs with her own mixture of local herbs, mint and garlic. It is served with a purée of wild mushrooms, potatoes boiled with mint, and a whole ricotta baked for eight hours.

This meal is a signature tune of what will follow for the next four days: local ingredients, many from the farm on which we're staying, used in a loving fashion while we watch, take notes and, of course, devour the results. There is some hands-on participation. My favourite activity was making the *arancine* – deep-



Matthew Hoffman gets hand-on experience making *arancine*

fried rice balls, filled, in this case, with lamb ragu. The technique is to cup one hand, line it with freshly made risotto, add the filling and then complete the ball, patting it into shape.

There are trips to the winery and dairy (where we watch the shepherds making ricotta and pecorino from their goats' milk), and an expedition to the town of Polizzi Generosa, to sightsee, buy pottery and lunch with the locals.

One evening we take a 10-minute walk to Anna's sister's hilltop home, through vineyards, past foxes, mockingbirds, doves and an owl. It's followed by a meal of pasta and fagioli soup, a steak tartare and two of the Regaleali winery's Tasca d'Almerita wines. Strawberry blancmange and almond brittle and Pantelleria desert wine concluded the feast. Good food leads to good conversation.

Carciofi alla brace (artichokes on the coals)

A perfect barbecue idea. Trim away the thorns and tips of the leaves from some artichokes. Take one, spread the leaves apart with your thumbs and push a mixture of garlic, salt, pepper and dried oregano down between the leaves. Just before cooking, pour olive oil into the centre. After you have finished grilling the other dishes, and the coals have burned down, set the artichokes directly on to the cinders and give them a quarter turn from time to time so that they cook evenly. They are ready when they are completely charred. To eat, discard the outer leaves and bite off the flesh from the bottom of the remaining leaves. Anna Tasca Lanza cooking classes at the Regaleali-Tasca d'Almerita Winery, Vallelunga, Sicily, 00 39 091 450727, www.absoluteitalia.com. From €130 for one day with lunch, to €2,250 for a five-day course including meals and accommodation

