

Rolling With It

By Renée S. Suen

LEANDRO BALDASSARRE STARTED HIS ARTISANAL PASTA BUSINESS, Famiglia Baldassarre, in a Toronto basement in 2010 with nothing but a table, a cutting board and a hand-crank pasta machine. Having just returned to the city after a stint working at three-Michelin-starred Del Pescatore in Italy, he continued to grow his word-of-mouth business and in 2017 upgraded to a bigger space on Geary Avenue, complete with a no-frills lineup-inducing pasta counter.

Central to Baldassarre's small-scale operation is a trusty pasta sheeter. "My grandmother in Montreal used a broomstick—that was her style; my grandmother in Sarnia used an Imperia sheeter," he says. "Even if you do have the skills to use a rolling pin, it doesn't add any quality that you can't get with a sheeter. And it just takes longer."

Using a sheeter, Baldassarre adds, doesn't negate any of the artistry that goes into pasta making. It just makes the process more efficient. Such mechanization can be traced to the 1700s with the invention of the pasta extruder. While pasta dates back to ancient China and Italy, it became a mainstream staple during the Industrial Revolution. Mechanized presses enabled mass production, making pasta easy to store, transport and export. This innovation made pasta accessible and simple to incorporate into quick meals.

To Baldassarre, all sheeters operate on the same principle: It's two adjustable rollers that flatten the dough with each pass until it's uniform and at the desired thickness. "Manual tabletop models may start at under \$200, while electric versions are significantly [more]," he notes. "It's really up to you how big you want it and how much you want to invest in it."

He recommends manual sheeters—namely the Imperia or Marcato Atlas—for home cooks. According to the pro, the small, Italian-made stainless-steel sheeters are all similar, varying only in size and power. For those with a KitchenAid stand mixer, the brand's Pasta Roller attachment is another solid pick.

For his restaurant, Baldassarre went with an electric Imperia for one main reason. "Because brands like Imperia have been around for a long time and it's what I grew up with," he says. "[But] if I weren't running a business, I wouldn't buy an electric one. The reason is there's more failure points in an electric machine—electronics always fail; motors always burn out. If it's something you're going to use intermittently, manual is the way to go."

Baldassarre explains that unlike domestic extruders, which "don't have the pressure necessary for high-quality pasta," a sheeter delivers consistency, which is "crucial for achieving the right texture and thickness." He encourages home cooks to find one with a wider sheet width: "It gives you more options." The versatile tool also "makes almost every type of pasta" (that's not extruded) from hand-cut noodles, like tagliatelle, papardelle, maltagliati, tagliolini and lasagna sheets, to filled pasta. And, he says, with proper care—avoid greasy doughs and practice regular maintenance—"it will last forever." ●

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Pasta tools to add to your kitchen counter.



The Classic Hand-Crank
iPasta T. 2/6.5 mm Classic, \$180,
Imperia (nellacutlery.ca)



The Elevated Finisher
Pasty & Pasta Wheel Cutter Fluted, \$14.99,
Ateco (gourmetwarehouse.ca)



The Add-On Tool
3-Piece Pasta Roller & Cutter Set,
\$229.99, KitchenAid (kitchenaid.ca)



The No-Frills Cutter
Good Grips Pizza Wheel, \$13.99,
OXO (kitchenstuffplus.com)



The Alternative With More Attachments
Atlas 150 Aluminium Pasta Maker, \$147.95,
Marcato (crateandbarrel.ca)



High-quality chromium-plated steel for lasting performance.

Adjustable rollers let you roll pasta sheets to the desired thickness.

Pasta-cutting attachments. Most machines include the popular tagliatelle (2 mm) and fettuccine (6.5 mm) pasta styles.

A worktop clamp and a base with feet to secure the appliance for use.