The award-winning chef of two of New York’s most celebrated restaurants presents his fresh, vibrant approach to Italian cooking with recipes that reveal the secrets behind his most acclaimed dishes.

Scott Conant, chef-owner of L’Impero and Alto restaurants in Manhattan, has been thrilling diners and impressing critics since L’Impero opened in 2003. Now he translates his inspired combination of the best of New American cooking with the best of Italian cuisine into more than 130 sophisticated but easy-to-follow recipes. Here are the dishes that have garnered national attention and unanimous praise, including melt-in-your-mouth beef short ribs, the creamiest polenta, intoxicatingly fragrant roast chicken, and a deceptively simple Spaghetti with Fresh Tomato Sauce that transforms an everyday meal into something sublime.

Because Scott understands that home cooks don’t often have as much time to spend in the kitchen as they’d like, his New Italian Cooking includes many dishes that suit hectic weekday schedules—meaning they can easily be made in 45 minutes or less—such as Seared and Slow-Roasted Sirloin of Beef or Grilled Shrimp with Mint, Orange, and Fennel Couscous. When he slows things down for the weekend, it’s with luxurious braises and roasts that require more time but not necessarily more effort, including Oven-Braised Lamb Shanks with Red Wine Vinegar and a sumptuous, long-simmering Bolognese Sauce.

Featuring 30 captivating color photos, new insights on Italian ingredients, and friendly yet meticulous instructions, Scott Conant’s New Italian
Cooking is a book to turn to again and again for the best of contemporary Italian cuisine.

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My Personal Review:
'Scott Conant's New Italian Cooking' by, you guessed it, Scott Conant (chef-owner of L’Impero in New York City) and cooking writer for hire, Joanne McAllister Smart impresses me as being the kind of book I was really expecting from Terrance Brennan’s ‘Artisanal Cooking’. While it is not quite as cerebral as Paul Bertolli’s ‘Cooking by Hand’, it is definitely more thoughtful than some other leading neuvo Italian cookbooks such as those from Rose Gray and Ruth Rodgers of London's River Café or their irrepressible protégé, Jamie Oliver. While Oliver and River Café offer lots of smart but easy recipes, Conant gives us somewhat more involved recipes dealing much less with pasta and more with some of Italy's more exotic ingredients such as bottarga (dried, pressed fish roe) and guanciale (cured pig's jowls). And Senor Conant is totally unapologetic about using these hard to get ingredients. While my hero Mario Batali will often specify this ingredient and say you can substitute pancetta, Conant insists that the real guanciale have a flavor that simply cannot be reproduced by protein from some other part of the pig.

Conant's sense of 'new Italian' cooking is also different from Mario, who, with his love of ramps and other local ingredients, sees himself as adapting the Italian concentration on local ingredients with those ingredients which are local to the farms around the New York metropolitan area. Conant relies on purely Italian ingredients with an emphasis on Italian techniques such as carpaccio that may not be familiar to most American fans of Italian cuisine.

Conant is also very big on pairing dishes with wine and being almost totally ignorant of wines, I will take it for granted that Senor Conant knows what he is talking about in this area and, if wine is your thing with Italian food, this book is doubly valuable to you.

Conant's culinary center of gravity seems to be the northern coasts of Italy, with much more risotto, polenta, and gnocchi dishes than dishes with dried pasta. He also does a lot with seafood.

Many of the recipes in this book are relatively easy. But, on average, they are not as easy as Rodgers, Gray, and Oliver. Many recipes also seem to be not too far removed from the professional kitchen, as there are a lot of instructions for prepping up to a point and bringing to table readiness at the last minute. This restaurant orientation also gives us several very interesting pantry preparations. One, in particular, is a ginger flavored oil
which almost seems like a throwback to the Medieval European lust for oriental spices including ginger and the now-rare galangal.

The book is also filled with very nice insights about Italian cuisine and food in general. I found his comment on salmon very interesting when he said that he rarely serves salmon as a main course, as it is easy to become bored with the tastes from a big chunk of this fish. I never thought of this before, but it is really true that grilled or poached salmon can get old in the mouth really fast, although I have a hard time imagining becoming bored with lox.

The chapters are quite conventional, with one each for:

Small Tastes
Salads and Soups
Pasta and Gnocchi
Risotto
Main Courses
Vegetables and Side Dishes
Sweets and Cheeses

There are several comments which go to the heart of cooking technique, such as his recommendation to quickly pan-sear beef and other meat, followed by a slow roasting to bring it up to serving temperature through and through. This means the book has, for me, the most important quality in a restaurant cookbook. It gives valuable clues on cooking common ingredients which help you deliver good, hot food to the table.

The one thing I find totally puzzling about this book is how poorly it is designed, especially compared to some other recent publications by Broadway Books. While Sara Moulton's new cookbook by Broadway is a model of typographical clarity, almost worthy of something from Alfred A. Knopf, this Conant volume is done in stark black and white with a really light, uninteresting font and ascetic gray borders around the headnotes. Some of these borders are in slightly more interesting colors, but I get the impression they gave Broadway's artistic staff the day off when they designed this book. The cover and the few color photographs are nice, but there are none for the important section on how to make fresh pasta. You can read this and go visit one of Marcella Hazan's excellent illustrated tutorials on how to do this. This artistic economy is surprising in light of the conventionally high list price of $35, compared to Ms. Moulton's nicely modest $29.50 list price.

This is an excellent supplement and alternative to one of the recent encyclopedic Italian cookbooks from Batali and Michele Scicolone. It may put off the casual cook, but it is pure gold for the serious foodie.

Highly recommended.