This stunning book is a celebration of generations of Sicilians in the food culture of Italy. It takes you through the seasons of Italy using their olive oil and family recipes that have been in the family for centuries. The author, Natalia Ravida inherited a love of food and olive oil from the legacy of her Sicilian ancestors. The family farm at La Gurra has been in the family since 1770. The estate lies in an area still devoted to farming and is dominated by a 16th century farmhouse overlooking the Mediterranean sea. This book is her favorite dishes, accompanied by beautiful photography. The book packaging features a gorgeous cloth cover.

My Personal Review:
I have never owned a more beautiful and sensible cookbook. The inviting book cover itself is encased in a silk-like fabric and showcases the vibrant colors of the frescos that grace the 17th century villa where the author's family still lives. Each recipe comes to life in the stunning photography on every other page and each photo offers a glimmer of life in the unspoiled, rugged and proud land that is Sicily. Every friend or family member that sees my book wants it.

The recipes are not in any way "typical" of what one expects with Italian cuisine. This is primarily because Sicily is a land that has been occupied by nearly every Mediterranean culture and it is reflected in their diverse cuisine. For example, their recipes rarely include garlic but instead mix the flavors of Greece, Norway, Germany, and Armenia.

This cookbook includes a fantastic Pizza Rustica in which wine is added to the crust. I have made the amazing Arancini (with saffron), Sfincione (Pizza with onions, tomatoes and anchovies that is to die for and I'm not an anchovy person), Lamb (I'm not a lamb person either but this recipe made me a convert), and Baked Dextex (using Branzino instead) to truly rave reviews.

This is the perfect cookbook for a down economy. The recipes are inexpensive to make, not complicated and the ingredients are simple. Well, there is that Ragu recipe that strongly recommends the Pigs Trotter,
Pigs Tail and Pork Belly, which makes sense considering it's a family recipe they've been making exactly the same way for generations! Plus, I had the pleasure of tasting this remarkable dish while attending their cooking class in Sicily and it was the most amazingly intense and flavorful meat I've ever had! We even stuffed some of the leftover meat inside the Arancini for the next day's lunch, making an unforgettable meal I still pine for!

Many of these recipes derive from peasant dishes that offer all the comfort of a roaring fireplace during a snowstorm and provide truly gourmet flavors without the effort typically required to achieve such results.

The book provides both metric and U.S. unit measurements. My tip: Get yourself a scale that measures both. But I've become a huge fan of metric measurements as a result because all I need to do is put a bowl on my scale, zero out its weight, and then pile on the ingredients—500g of flour, add 250g of water for a total of 750g, 40g of yeast for a total of 790g, etc. I don't have to use measuring cups and spoons. Just keep dumping the ingredients in the bowl and watch it add up on the scale. So satisfyingly simple. And fast. And efficient.

Then, if you want a truly magical cooking experience, after you buy the book sign up for the author's cooking class in Sicily (ravida@ravida.it)! It is an extraordinary and delightfully unique educational experience, with classes held at her family's 17th century villa in Menfi near their family olive vineyard. There they produce outstanding Sicilian oil that is estate bottled and made from Cerasuola, Biancolilla and Nocellara olives. Her charming mother glides around their rustic kitchen effortlessly and proficiently, having made these recipes 100s of times over her lifetime, while Natalia's father runs the vineyard and regaled us with fascinating stories of their family history, Italian ceramics, and the olive oil business. It was an experience I hope to repeat just to spend time with these lovely people once again.

But in the meantime, there is this delicious cookbook to revel in and go back to time and again.

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Seasons of Sicily: Recipes from the South of Italy by Natalia Ravida
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