

APPETITE FOR LIFE

# Stirring words

**Anthea Gerrie** meets a food guru who is teaching us a more measured approach to eating



Catherine Gazzoli



**B**USTLING AROUND her rustic white, brick-walled kitchen looking for a choice of teas to accompany the banana bread she has baked me, Catherine Gazzoli seems every inch the *balabusta*.

"This loaf is full of good stuff, and you're taking the rest home with you," insists the New Yorker whose eat-in kitchen is the epitome of warmth and hospitality.

But, hospitality apart, illusion is at work. The rustic kitchen is in the heart of Covent Garden and while she makes a mean cake, Gazzoli is no *balabusta*, but a supercharged career woman for whom there are never enough hours in the day.

"I have so many initiatives to get across to promote a better way of eating," explains the chief executive of Slow Food UK, an offshoot of the Italian movement which has swept through more than 150 countries, including Israel, but is yet to find household recognition in the UK.

Slow Food stands for buying good-quality, sustainable fresh food whose producers have been rewarded fairly, cooking it care-

fully and making time to take pleasure in what's on your plate. Slow Food UK is already educating children in these principles and encouraging bubbes to pass down their family recipes, trying to instill in their busy children and grandchildren the importance of eating well together.

From her own experience, the Jewish community already knows what Slow Food is all about, says Gazzoli, who arrived in Britain two years ago to spread the message.

"I saw it in all the dishes my Jewish grandmother made and took care to pass on — like cholent, to which she added stuffed chicken neck and French toast made with challah.

"There's a great emphasis in Jewish families in eating together — food is used at all the key moments of life, from the wedding feast to the shiva.

Nanny kept the traditions going with her favourite dishes from Russia, while all the time she was under pressure from her Italian mother-in-law to learn Italian dishes too.

"It's no surprise krepalach is one of my favourites — it's a mix of both sides of my heritage!"

Gazzoli, who was born in Geneva and raised in New York, first

explored her inner *balabusta* with a spell at the Skirball, Los Angeles' entre of Jewish culture, while studying for her degree.

"That's where I learned that even in the face of challenging events, food was the absolute glue in Jewish life. It's something I totally relate to, because I have been baking and cooking as a sign of love for years.

"But in the wider community, it horrifies me to see that kitchens are now being built without ovens and that many children make no connection between a cow and the beef or cheese on their plate."

Knowing she needed to be as close as possible to Slow Food's London HQ, Gazzoli decided a fourth-floor walk-up was worth it to have a flat with a proper kitchen. She puts good food on her table from the minute she sits down with the editors she urges to publicise the efforts of Slow Food and the philanthropists she hopes will fund her initiatives.

"Like Slow Food Baby, for which we have just signed a partnership with the Natural Childbirth Trust. I would so like funds to be able to tailor this for the Jewish

community, getting the message across in nurseries that good eating should start in the cradle and for the Taste Adventure we bring to schools.

"How great to be able to include gefilte fish and challah on the chart and show Jewish children how foods they encounter regularly and which have a cultural significance for them start life."

The life-long initiatives to eat better continue with Slow Food on Campus, which has arrived at more than a dozen British universities whose students want decent grub in their cafeterias, as well as Slow Food Wisdom, exhorting us to share good food traditions with the next generation.

Although her own *bubbe* would probably fret that the 33-year-old has been too busy gadding about to settle down, she would surely be proud of the fact that her globe-trotting granddaughter can still find time to bake a cake and serve it up with love — even amid the noise and bustle of Covent Garden.

[www.slowfood.org.uk](http://www.slowfood.org.uk)