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BROOKLYN

[Traditional Italian Baking on the Rise in Park Slope](#)

[Comment](#) | December 20, 2013 | By [Ariel Lauren Wilson](#)

Not unlike many others who have lived in France, I had a serious *boulangerie* habit. I bought multiple baguettes per week like any good francophile, and frequently indulged in the breakfast *croissant*, *pain au chocolat*, and *frangipane*-filled *croissant aux amandes*. I grew comfortably familiar with the offerings at the storefront across from my apartment until the holidays arrived; out came slews of *buches de Noël*, *galette des rois* and a cake with an obviously-not-French name: *panettone*.

I had only tried *panettone* once before I visited [Albero dei Gelati](#) in Park Slope last week. It was at a French friend's holiday/board game party. I wasn't feeling it that night, so when it came time to play the French equivalent of Trivial Pursuit, I sat out a turn and drifted towards a table full of desserts. *Panettone* was there, but instead of being one of those glowing loafs that I eyed in every bakery window, it was encased in cellophane and a red cardboard box. Curious (and also assuming) as to why it hadn't been opened, I did the honors and helped myself to a sliver. It was flakey, dry and generic from what I can remember, perhaps like many other plastic-wrapped desserts. Its appearance on the dessert table was obviously inspired out of tradition rather than craving.

I've had many firsts since I moved from France to New York, including what I consider to be my first real *panettone*. Monia and Alessandro, the owners of [Albero dei Gelati](#), invited me to their store on 5th Ave in Brooklyn last week to try their variation of the holiday loaf. They're celebrating their fifth month in New York after having moved from a village near Milan (the birthplace of *panettone*) nearly five months ago. For good reason, their *albero* has received much praise for their savory and seasonal gelato menu that changes daily. Depending on the time of year, one can expect flavors like blue cheese, toasted chestnut and olive oil since, according to Monia, "anything can be made into gelato."

While the idea of licorice gelato is certainly tempting (and hip), what moves the [Albero de Gelati](#) beyond any trends is their commitment to classic Italian technique. They are strong followers of the Italian-born Slow Food philosophy that honors "good, clean and fair" ingredients as much as it works to preserve traditional cooking methods. The way

this philosophy translates is that Monia and Alessandro purchase the majority of their ingredients from not only “local” farms, but also ones that they’ve visited. A member of a long line of gelato makers, Monia and her family preserve their tried and true recipes for every product that they serve. Except for some Italian wines and a handful of other ingredients, they make everything in house from the best products around.

The *panettone* is no exception. The entire process takes three days, so I only watched the incorporation of the butter, flour, sugar, eggs, raisins, candied fruit, salt, honey and vanilla beans into the mother yeast that had already risen for twelve hours. With the garnishes kneaded in, the loaf still had six hours left to rise before being baked and eventually hung upside down overnight to ensure a light texture. It’s ready to eat once gravity has done it’s job.

It didn’t matter that my first *panettone* experience had been unremarkable; anyone can taste that Albero dei Gelati’s loaf is genuinely special. The darkened exterior gives way to a golden interior that’s marbled with small bits of candied orange and moist raisins. It’s sweetly fragrant, whether it’s at room temperature or toasted, and is especially satisfying when drizzled with a whipped marsala wine custard or paired with one of their seasonal *gelati*.

Nothing gold can stay, though; *panettone* is only served during Christmas and New Year’s according to tradition. To not miss out like I did in France, I made sure to place an order for my own homemade *panettone* from Monia and Alessandro. It will certainly outshine any other holiday dessert.