



# THIS SEASON TRY DOING IT IN THE RAW!



**Albert Casciero**

Article photos courtesy Albert Casciero.

**U**ndoubtedly, this note will shock and outrage many readers while it will intrigue and entice many others as well. Why? Because it will disclose a practice in direct contrast with one of the well-established and wise tenets of mycophagy. It will describe the preparation of several species of mushrooms that are a delicacy... when eaten raw!

Yes, I do mean collected fresh and brought to the table to be eaten on the spot, without them having been even

near a fire or pickled!

When I was introduced to mycology, the first admonition I received was to cook mushrooms well and have them identified by an expert beforehand. I still believe in not eating anything unknown to me, but not in cooking, and especially not overcooking, everything that may be delicious and worthwhile eaten raw.

Living in a litigious society, I am well aware of all the legal disclaimers that appear on all mycological publications to financially protect authors, editors, and publishers, from lawsuits brought by grownups who like to blame others for their voluntary and foolish actions.

In respect and appreciation for FUNGI, the magazine and its editors and contributors, let me disclaim any of their reasonability for my words and deeds.

My predilection for raw or little cooked foods did not start with fungi. Since my younger years in New York City, I was introduced to raw clams and oysters in the bars that used to line midtown Broadway in those bygone days. On my first job at an upscale restaurant I learned about Steak Tartar. After that, the jump to sashimi and bloody rare hanger steaks, duck breasts, lamb chops, and saddle of venison was easy.

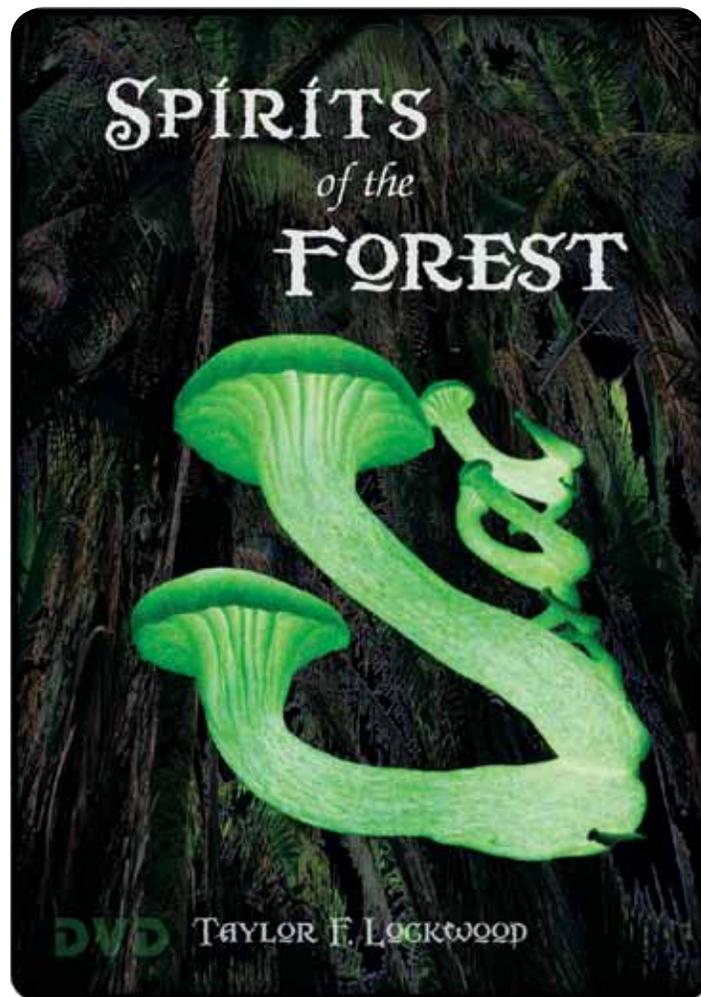
My first revealing experience occurred





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in northern Italy at a mushroom group meeting where I was urged by one of our hosts to bite a good chunk from a prime specimen of *Boletus edulis*. I still recall the aftertaste redolent of hazelnuts left in my mouth 30-40 minutes after eating it. That was my epiphany!

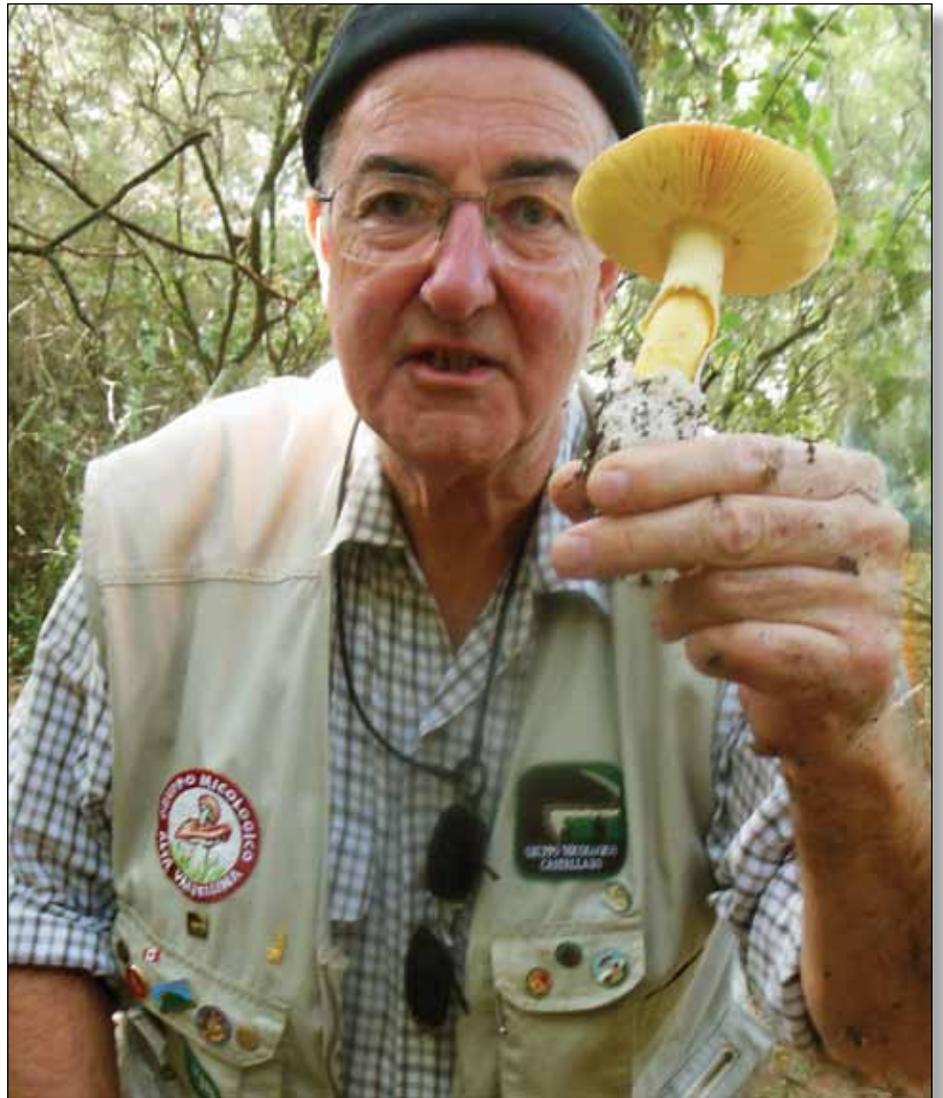
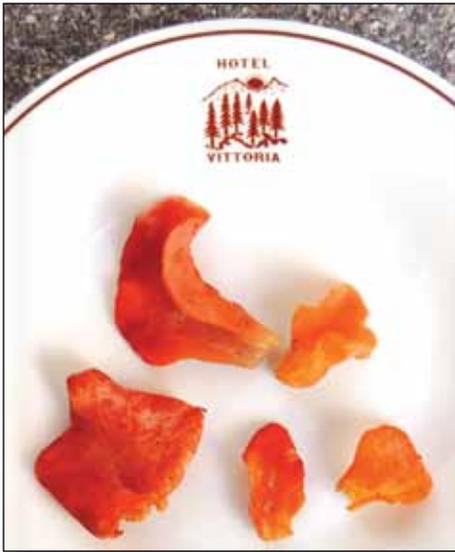
There are just a few mushrooms that I eat raw with great delight to my palate. My list is short<sup>1</sup> and includes rather well known species:

- Albatrellus pes-caprae*
- Amanita caesarea* and *A. jacksonii*
- Boletus edulis*, *B. aereus*, *B. pinophilus*, and *B. reticulatus*
- Cantharellus cibarius* and *C. cinnabarinum*
- Coprinus comatus*
- Fistulina hepatica*
- Guepinia helvelloides*
- Macrolepiota procera*
- Tremella mesenterica*
- Tuber magnatum pico* and *T. melanosporum*

All specimens should be very fresh and young, and they also should be naturally clean; maybe in need of minor brushing, but not in need of washing. They also should be consumed in moderation, not in excess.

My choice of oils are the extra virgin, light golden ones of delicate taste and aroma, such as those from Andalucía, Liguria

<sup>1</sup> There is a species that I omitted from the list because of the possible misidentification with a highly poisonous, maybe deadly, lookalike. It is the *Amanita ovoidea* which I have eaten several times raw and cooked. The *A. ovoidea* is completely white while its lookalike, *Amanita proxima*, has rusty, brownish-orange colorings in the volva and stipe.



or Provence. Imagination in the choice of ingredients paired with their excellent quality, along with a light handling, are prerequisites to capture and enhance the subtle flavors and nuances of each species.

*Amanita caesarea* is one of my favorite fungi, of delicate taste and texture, subtle in flavor and gracious in color. Their caps should be cut across in thin slices. My preferred method is to peel a large garlic clove, cut it in half longwise, and use the cut surface to rub a china plate. The slices of amanitas should be set as a single layer on the plate to absorb the garlic's oil and fragrance and salted lightly with fine sea salt—better yet, French Fleur de Sel. A sprinkle of mild

pepper is left to discretion. Then, they should be drizzled with oil and let rest for a little while before consuming. The American "Caesar" (*A. jacksonii*), which I find in the East, is not as fleshy and solid as the European *A. caesarea*. In my experience, it is much more slender and smaller, and it does not have the intensity of flavor and delicacy of the true caesarea, but it is an acceptable morsel.<sup>2</sup>

The above preparation is basically the same for *Coprinus* and the *Macrolepiota*.<sup>3</sup> However, other than the very young, almost egg-like small *Coprinus*, I would peel the caps of older ones and would trim any darkened edges of older specimens in their very early

2 *Amanitas* are avoided by most people because the poisonous and deadly members of the species. I normally consume *Amanita rubescens* cooked since it is easily found in the East. See "Amanita rubescens paté" in *FUNGI*, 2011, 4(3): 64-65.

3 The loose ring of *M. procera* is nice to chew by itself for it has a taste reminiscent of hazelnuts/almonds.

announcement of deliquescence. The flesh of *Coprinus*, when very young, is almost “creamy.” The firmer flesh and more robust taste of the *Macrolepiota* can stand well up to a very light sprinkle of lemon juice drops.

*Albatrellus pres-caprae* is even denser and the flesh is firm and flavorful. Veal or beef *carpaccio* is a great pair in my opinion. Adding tender leaves of arugula (rocket salad) would replicate the original *carpaccio* dish with a fungal additive. I have also eaten it with horse meat *carpaccio* which is sweeter and more delicate than beef and it makes a delectable appetizer. Another less common ingredient is also a good pair: *lardo* (fatback cured with herbs) very thinly sliced. Toss in a sprinkle of toasted and cracked pine nuts for added flavor complexity, if you wish.

Chanterelles can be a colorful and tasty addition to a salad of mild greens. The golden chanterelles should be thinly sliced while the red ones can be left whole to better appreciate their peppery taste.

*Tremella mesenterica*, “witches butter,” and *Guepinia helvelloides*, “apricot jelly,” have distinctive, attractive colors and variety of texture, not necessarily intense or distinct flavors. The tremella can be tossed on top of lettuce or other

cold salads to add a bright yellow accent and a chewy texture to a bite. *Guepinia* has been my latest discovery of an unsuspected edible. During my recent foray in the mountains of Lombardy, our guide was an old timer who related to me after finding a few specimens that he learned to eat them during the war when food was scarce. Many of the mycologists in the group were quite



surprised when I brought them to the table to try. Lightly seasoned, not to overwhelm its faint taste, it has a nice crispiness to the tooth and its beautiful bright color adds a touch of the unusual. A drop of oil and dash of soy sauce, or smidgen of salt, will enhance these pretty morsels.

When it comes to the *Boletus (porcini)* group, they can provide more variety of choices, accept added ingredients, and

a bit more aggressive and imaginative handling. Very thin shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano can be added to compliment the nutty notes of their flesh. Grated or matchstick-size slivers of raw young parsnips, or even celery root, can be tossed with them. *Boletus* could be served on top of very young bibb lettuce, dainty mâche leaves, strips of endive or the tender whitish-pale yellow leaves from the heart of Romaine lettuce. If the specimens are robust in flesh and flavor, I may also sparsely add bits of very finely chopped garlic and parsley.

*Fistulina* has sufficient acidity; therefore lemon juice should not be added. Authentic *Aceto Balsamico de Modena* should be sparingly added to the oil, or droplets of it sprinkled on the slices. Its dense, unctuous, and mildly sweet undertones will enhance the fleshy slices

of the fungus.

We have now reached the top echelon of the fungal pantheon reserved for the truffles. I chose to pair them with two other top members of the edible kingdom, namely oysters and veal. For the first time, I am using fire, not to cook but to enhance the flavor and aroma of *Tuber melanosporum*, the popular black Perigord truffle. For them, I have selected oysters in their half shells that shall be



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placed on an oven-proof pan. Heavy cream should be whipped only to non-running consistency, not hard whipped, and very slightly salted, perhaps even with a sparse dusting of finely ground white pepper. Each oyster should be covered with a scant spoon of the cream and the pan placed high in a very hot oven for about two-three minutes. The task here is to warm up the cream without cooking the oysters; but heat them enough to compel the thin slices of truffle to be placed on top of the oyster—once removed from the oven—to release their aroma and enhance the taste so distinctive of these “black diamonds.”

Lastly, finely ground or paper-thin sliced, fresh raw veal is the chosen pair for the precious *Tuber magnatum*, the white truffle. Olive oil and salt are added to the veal, either mixing it if ground<sup>4</sup> or sprinkling it on, if carpaccio-like sliced. Then, the white truffle is shaved on top of the servings as thick as you can afford it!

Some general suggestions may help guide and narrow the selection of wines to compliment the variety of species and preparations. The Caesar mushroom, given its rank and subtle taste, should be paired with Champagne. A well rounded and full-bodied Chardonnay should be selected for the shaggy mane and the Macrolepiota. Chianti, Bordeaux, or Rioja should be reserved for the boletes and beef polypore, while a Barolo belongs with the white truffle/veal combination and Burgundy or Bordeaux whites would nicely harmonize with the oysters and white truffle.

Taste the subtle, exotic, gustatory quality of raw and wild fungi at your own risk and peril. If you dare, you will be rewarded with an exclusive experience granted to deserving few!

Enjoy without overindulging! 🍄

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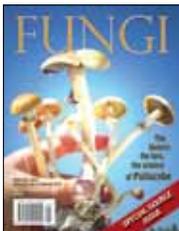
4 As with a Steak Tartare, raw egg yolks smooth the texture.



An uncommon edible, the “goat’s foot,” *Albatrellus pes-caprae*.



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