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Arista di Maiale

There's an apocryphal story that Florentine Arista di Maiale was served at a church council meeting in Firenze in 1430 to "smooth out some differences between the Roman and Greek Churches". When the Greek bishops were served the Tuscans most famous pork roast, they were heard to murmur "Arista! Arista!" which in Greek means "This is really terrific!" so Arista it has been ever since.

3 tbsps unsalted butter, at room temperature plus 1 tbsp olive oil
good sprig of fresh de-leaved or 1-2 tsp Squisito air dried rosemary
1 dtsp Squisito smoked fennel seeds
Squisito Trapani sea salt and fresh ground black pepper
4 medium garlic cloves (about 1/2 ounce total, 15g), peeled
1 pork loin roast (about 6lb/2.75 kg), centre cut, bones split for slicing
2 large fennel bulbs (about 2 1/4 pounds total, 1.3 kg), trimmed of stalks, cut into eighths
60 ml water
240 ml dry Tuscan white wine like Vernaccia di San Gimignano
fresh rosemary to garnish

Place a rack in the centre of the oven and preheat the oven to 400°F/200°C. Pop a tablespoon butter and the olive oil in a roasting pan and place in the oven to melt the butter. Put the rosemary, fennel seeds, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon pepper in the work bowl of a food processor with the metal blade in place. Drop the garlic through the feed tube with the motor running and process until the garlic is finely chopped, about 10 seconds. Cut 1/2 inch deep slits in the pork loin at random and fill with the herb-garlic mixture. Season the meat with salt and pepper. Put the pork loin in the prepared roasting pan and cook in the preheated oven until the meat registers an internal temperature of 170°F/73°C rested (allow for a rise in core temp of 5°C when resting). Roast 75-90 mins.

Meanwhile, process the fennel bulb pieces in 2 batches until finely chopped, about 8 pulses for each batch if using a food processor. Simmer the chopped fennel in water, covered, until tender, about 30 minutes. Drain the fennel thoroughly and process with the remaining 2 tablespoons butter until smooth, about 1 minute, scraping down the work bowl as necessary. Return the purée to the saucepan, season with salt and pepper, cover and set aside. When the pork is done, transfer it to a cutting board and cover loosely with aluminium foil to keep warm. Discard the fat from the roasting pan, leaving only the juices. Place the pan over high heat and deglaze it with white wine. Boil for 2 minutes, then strain the juices and discard the solids. Reheat the fennel purée over low heat. Slice the pork through the split bones. Serve with the pan juices and the fennel purée. Garnish with fresh rosemary. Makes 8 servings (about 10 ounces each, 280g).

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