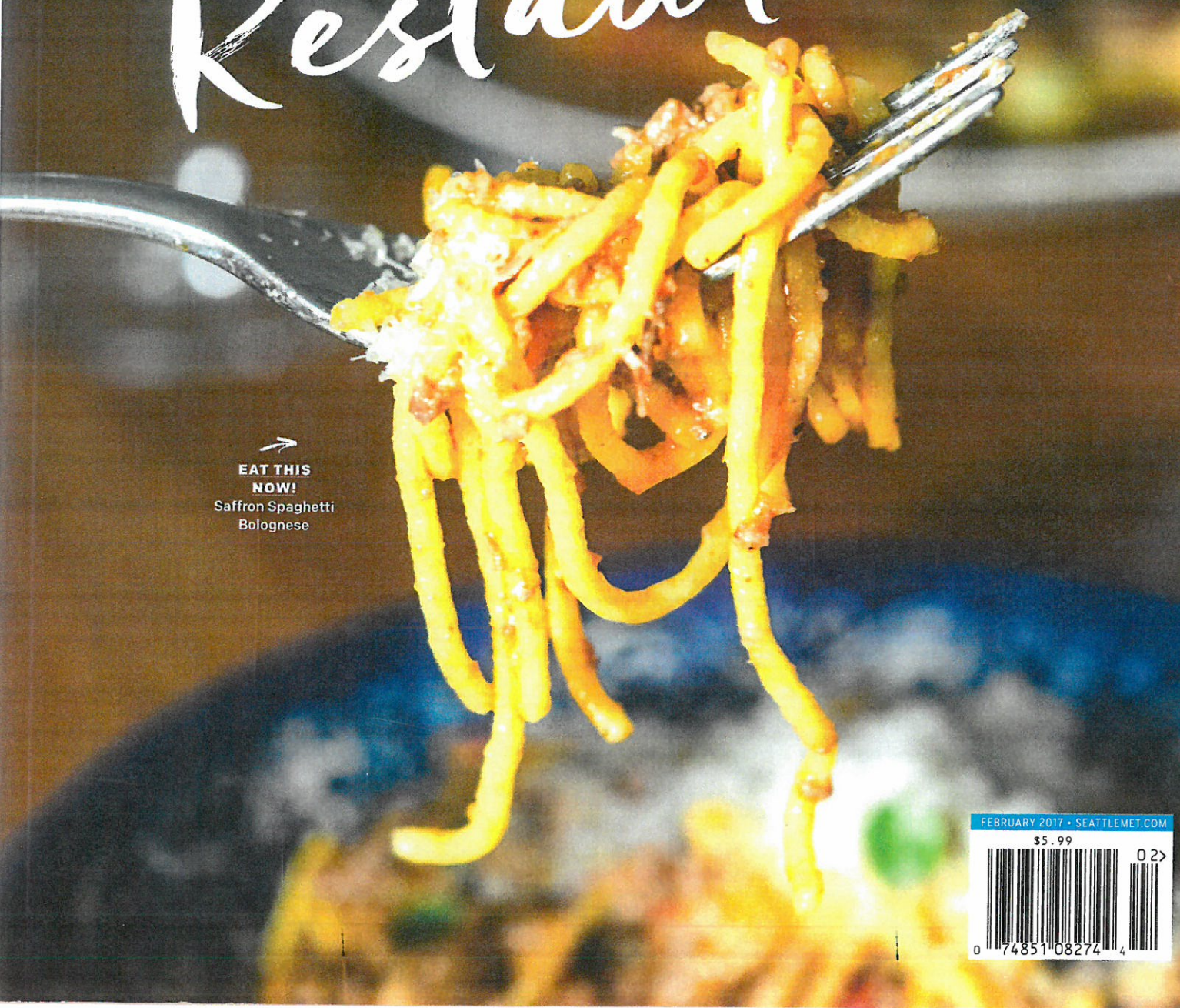


75

Ways to Make a Positive
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Seattle Met

Best Italian Restaurants



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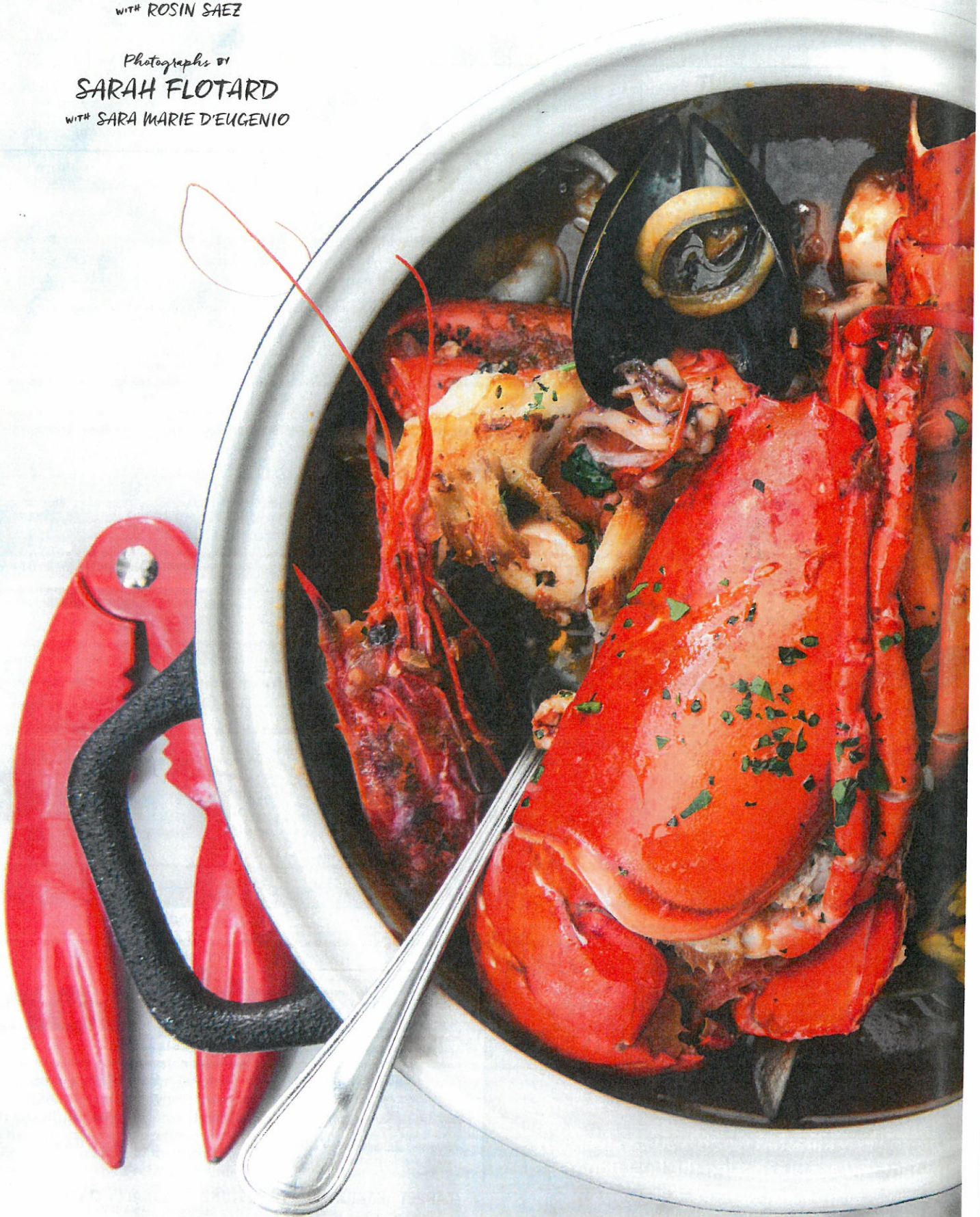
BY ALLECIA VERMILLION


WITH ROSIN SAEZ

Photographs BY

SARAH FLOTARD

WITH SARA MARIE D'EUGENIO






Seafood soup at
Cinque Terre.

Seattle's Best
ITALIAN
FOOD

It's about way
more than pasta.



SIMPLE. SEASONAL. GROWN CLOSE BY.



Italian cooking ethos has an awful lot in common with how we do things in the Northwest. For the past century in America, emigres have added their own red-sauced spin. We know it all as Italian food—and from the simplest of handcrafted pasta to chicken parm and garlic knots (and, yes, pizza), Seattle can't get enough.

The New Wave of Italian Restaurants



(Top) Dueminuti grows its own herbs in the corner of the open kitchen. (Opposite page) The restaurant's campanelle with braised hen, citrus, and pistachio.

FAST. CASUAL. PHENOMENAL

Dueminuti

"Healthy pasta" sounds like the saddest trombone of all fast-casual concepts. But this Capitol Hill newcomer from two Tuscany natives delivers legitimately superb pasta—and with fewer carbs too. Pick your shape from the day's offerings, which may include spaghetti, rigatoni, or big spirals of campanelle, then select a sauce like Sicilian pesto made with mint and almonds or braised hen with pistachios and citrus zest. Nuclear scientist-turned-chef Filippo Fiori extrudes pasta made from a legion of flours: quinoa, rice, rye, corn, and bean among them, the combination of which adds more fiber, more protein, and more satisfying bite. dueminuti.com

A LEGEND REPLICATED

Carmine's Bellevue

Servers in white jackets brandish platters of veal scaloppine and

apportion shared plates, then lavish it all with showers of parmesan, just like they do at Il Terrazzo Carmine, Pioneer Square's power dining powerhouse. This new location, from the sons of late restaurateur Carmine Smeraldo (see page 82), faces Bellevue's Downtown Park, its vast interior softened with timbered beams and chandeliers. The menu—rigatoni bolognese, hefty steaks and chops—rings familiar, but there's plenty of nuance in these time-tested dishes, like a delicate pesto coating fat prawns atop fettuccine or a peppery snap to the cioppino. carminesbellevue.com

PERFECTIONIST PASTA

Raccolto

Brian Clevenger still preps pasta the way he learned at San Francisco's esteemed Delfina—housemade noodles cook briefly in simmering water, but mostly in the saute pan with the sauce, and a few ladles of pasta water for good measure. The difference is subtle, but there's an

almost creamy dimension to the strozzapreti in a ragù of pork shank, an extra richness to the spaghetti that crackles with anchovy and chili flakes. Like its sibling, Vendemmia, Clevenger's new restaurant in West Seattle is all about pasta, fish, and vegetables—with more pasta and more tables. Some dishes, like hamachi crudo or a salad of dungeness crab and snap peas feel more Northwest than Italian. Then again, isn't using the best of what's nearby and in season the most Italian approach of all? Something to ponder over the panna cotta with apple and caramel. raccoltoseattle.com

ATMOSPHERE FOR DAYS

San Fermo

There's an Italian miracle happening on Ballard Ave: Two conjoined old houses, the city's oldest intact residences in fact, are reborn as a stylishly atmospheric warren of dining rooms, serving memorable pastas (the spaghetti bolognese...ye gods), a perfectly dressed caesar, an osso bucco whose rich sauce, topped with a gremolata of orange and sage, could be served in a bowl on its own. The food packs all the hearty pomp of an old-school Italian American restaurant, reimagined through the prism of Northwest seasons. Add to that the attentively informal service—and have we mentioned the space? sanfermo-seattle.com

Seattle's Best
ITALIAN
FOOD.



Seattle's Best ITALIAN FOOD



Fettuccine con
gamberi al
limone at
Cinque Terre.

ALL THE SANDWICHES

Pellegrini Italian Market

Italian delis—purveyors of pastas, cured meat by the pound, sandwiches—are an old-school East Coast fixture, relatively rare this far west. So big ups to the family behind La Rustica for creating this white-tiled haven in the heart of the Junction, its shelves stuffed with wine bottles, its deli cases full of antipasti, fresh pasta and sauces, and all manner of Italian cookies. The hot menu revolves around sandwiches, from the enormous portofolios (pizza dough layered with toppings, then folded up and baked) to subs made with bread that's somehow both ethereal and up to the challenge of the red sauce and superlative lamb meatballs. 4521 California Ave SW, West Seattle, 206-257-5764

COMPETENT PIZZA BY ACTUAL ITALIANS

Pizzeria 88

Capitol Hill's mellow new house of Neapolitan-style pizzas is the latest from the family behind Mondello (and original owners of Queen Margherita and La Vita e Bella) and the latest in a string of Italian restaurants to call this Broadway address home: Now it's full of actual Italians. Your best bet is a seat at the marble-topped bar and a pizza roughly the size of a dinner plate, with a pillowy crust and a paper-thin center barely supporting ample combos like broccolini, slivers of sweet onion, and crumbles of fenneled sausage or lamb with mushrooms, arugula, and goat cheese. pizzeriaottantotto.com

LASAGNA ON WHEELS

Mangia Me

Serving fresh pasta on a food truck? That's bold. Especially when it's spaghetti black with squid ink and flecked with parsley, chili flakes, and bits of just-fishy-enough sardine, plus capers and generous hunks of garlic bobbing throughout. You'd be glad to receive something this good in a restaurant; it's bananas to have it thrust into your hands on a rainy sidewalk. This all-Italian food truck is the brainchild of Alex Kong, who grew up in the kitchen of his parents'



Italian restaurant, Perche No, and makes all his own pasta. Ravioli stuffed with lamb and a five-layer bechamelfest of lasagna, both colored and flavored with a bit of parsley, sell out first. mangiamefood.com

RIVIERA IN THE REGRADE

Cinque Terre

Unlike the timeworn cliffside villages of Liguria, this rambling space is sleek and modern, a Westlake Ave newcomer from the folks behind Barolo not even a block away. The lengthy menu is a lens into the five historic fishing villages along Italy's Riviera: tender cuttlefish with braised greens, legs of charred octopus atop silky mashed potatoes, silver-skinned anchovy fillets laid over ricotta and crusty bread, a raw

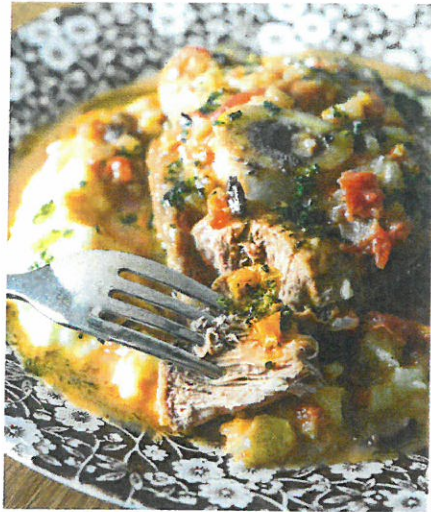
oyster bar for the bivalve obsessed. Pastas are housemade, naturally, and there's a 32-ounce tomahawk bistecca for the carnivores. The pizzas that hail from the stone oven are mostly classic, but one unlikely (and surprisingly enjoyable) option channels New England clam chowder with diced potatoes, calamari, and a spicy garlic cream sauce. cinqueterreseattle.com

RED SAUCE REGULARS

Radici

Rudy LaValle's latest restaurant in Pioneer Square bears testament to his Calabrian roots with a menu featuring a delicately layered eggplant parmesan, penne puttanesca, and white beans with pancetta and rapini. But it's the deep, flavorful red sauce, which he remembers always

percolating on his mother's stove when he was growing up, that was the big draw at his former restaurant, Rialto; now it draws old regulars and pregame Sounders fans alike to this mellow, white-tiled space. The sauce is a perennial favorite with spaghetti and meatballs, also sold by the jar for at-home saucing. radiciseattle.com



DRINK WINE. BUY GROCERIES

Little Lago

At Cafe Lago's new spin-off Italian market in Portage Bay, the deli case bursts with meat, cheese, and soon owner Carla Leonardi's pasta, while shelves offer groceries both aspirational (fancy pasta) and functional (chips, carrots, toothpaste). Meanwhile, at the long butcher block counter, a gleaming espresso machine does its thing by day, couples perch on tall stools near the open kitchen to drink wine and await their pizza or rotisserie chicken by night. Families vie for the handful of larger tables by the window. Little Lago definitely isn't a restaurant, but the neighborhood can't get enough of the food. littlelago.com



STRAIGHT-UP LOVELY

Ernest Loves Agnes

The atmospheric surroundings remain the same, but the 19th Ave hangout has shifted focus. It's still Italian (after all, Hemingway's ill-fated love affair on the Italian front inspired the name), though now less about meaty pasta dishes and pizza by the slice. Flavors are more broadly Mediterranean and more interesting by a mile: housemade cavatelli gets texture and punch from both merguez and octopus, tagliatelle with egg and bacon balances richness with a peppery bite. The menu is indisputably for grown-ups (cured sardines, pizza topped with porchetta and broccolini) but even the chicken parm on the kids' menu is on point. ernestlovesagnes.com

IF A RESTAURANT WERE SWEATPANTS

Aglio e Olio

It's one of the most aesthetically challenged dining rooms in town, and yet this former Pizza Hut in a

Madison Valley strip mall has become a hangout, thanks to homey stylings of chef Tricia Harte, who dispatches plates of rustic porchetta with no-nonsense sauteed vegetables, pillowy pizzas baked in cast iron, and delicate polenta crepes stuffed with braised lamb leg and swathed in a creamy sauce of goat cheese and just enough mint. Harte partnered with veteran Pioneer Square restaurateur Luigi DeNunzio but serves her own favorites from Italy and the East Coast. Add in the genial front-of-house guy, house-made pastas (that every so often need salt), and Harte's habit of chatting with customers from her kitchen: It's like dinner at your Italian grandma's house—just not in that cliché, Olive Garden—commercial way. aeorestaurant.com

San Fermo's osso buco, saffron spaghetti bolognese, and atmospheric dining room.



Lemoncocco: Roma in a Can

In summertime, the tiny espresso stands on Rome's sidewalks and piazzas sell lemoncocco grattacacca—an icy tonic of Sicilian lemons and coconut juice. It's essentially an Italian summer romance in beverage form, and now Seattle's Jones Soda Company sells its own sunny version.