



Photograph by George Sakkestad

Carol Firenze, the author of 'The Passionate Olive: 101 Things to Do with Olive Oil,' fittingly lives in the Olive Zone of Los Gatos. The parking zones are named after various fruits and nuts.

## Olive Me

By Lisa Toth

Carol Firenze is so passionate about olive oil she even lives in the Olive Zone in Los Gatos. [More](#)



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## Cover Story



Photograph by George Sakkestad

Carol Firenze dabs a bit of olive oil on a cotton swab to remove her makeup. She claims olive oil is the ultimate beauty secret for rejuvenating dry skin and smoothing out wrinkles and can even be used as a facial mask. She recommends using extra virgin olive oil for eye make-up removal because it's pure, moisturizing and non-irritating.

## Olive Me: Carol Firenze is passionate about olive oil

By Lisa Toth

Instead of bringing a plate of cookies, a bunch of flowers or a bottle of wine as a gift to a dinner party, Carol Firenze has a new and trendy alternative. Try bringing along a bottle of olive oil along with a copy of her latest book, *The Passionate Olive: 101 Things to Do with Olive Oil*.

Carol Firenze Anglin wrote this humorous and novelty coffee table book under her Italian maiden name, Carol Firenze, even though most people know her as Carol Anglin. *Firenze* translated directly is Florence, the capital of Tuscany, which is known for its fruity and robust olive oils.

Firenze grew up in Saratoga and attended Saratoga Grammar School. She graduated in 1961 from Los Gatos High School and lives in Los Gatos with a view of her alma mater right in her backyard.

"I also live in the olive district of Los Gatos," Firenze says, referring to the olive parking zone. "Isn't that funny? I actually noticed it one day."

The parking zones in town are named after various fruits and nuts, but Firenze happens to live in a zone fitting of her passion for olive oil. The energetic 61-year-old energetic author has a book signing—in addition to many others throughout the Bay Area—on April 30 at 4 p.m. at Borders of Los Gatos. The book signing will also include an olive oil tasting featuring the products of Olivas de Oro.

Frank and Marti Menacho are the owners of estate-grown Olivas de Oro products. Their 160-acre estate is situated in the Sierra Nevada foothills, but they live in Los Gatos and sell their products every Sunday at the Los Gatos farmers market.

Firenze's 86-year-old mother, Gigi, and late Italian grandmothers used olive oil in many recipes as Firenze was growing up. While they obviously rubbed off on her because she loves making foccacia and homemade frittatas drizzled in olive oil, Firenze's book doesn't focus on the culinary uses of olive oil.

"I've always loved olive oil, but about 20 years ago a group of my girlfriends and I were in Kuleto's restaurant in San Francisco sitting around talking, and there were little bottles of olive oil and bread on the table," she says.

The phenomenon has caught on because today many restaurants serve bread for dipping in olive oil and vinegar as an appetizer. From that outing in San Francisco, the Extra Virgin Olive Oil Club was born. The group of six women started laughing about their new name and began meeting at each others' homes or eating out with a focus on olive oil through the food and conversation.

At the time, Firenze pledged to write a book someday about olive oil, but not just about its cooking uses. After about 20 years of gathering research, three years of actually writing the book and a long publishing process, it's in print as of March 29. Ballantine Books, a division of Random House Inc., is the publisher.

Within the book's text, Firenze focuses on the non-traditional and useful uses of olive oil such as killing lice, removing eye makeup or fixing a squeaky door hinge.

"I take my makeup off with it because it doesn't hurt my skin," she says. "I polish furniture with it. I like it for a massage. I don't have a dog right now, but it's very good for their paws [and] noses and for them to ingest."

The book is also interspersed with family recipes and fascinating

historical references to olive oil, as well as Firenze's side comments that leave readers chuckling to themselves.

"Everyone who knows me knows I love olive oil," Firenze says. "I like high-intensity olive oil."

Firenze grew up in a close-knit Italian family, and her grandparents were from Liguria, Italy. She earned a bachelor's degree in history and master's in public administration from San José State University. Her doctorate in education is from University of San Francisco, with a focus in cultural and communicative understanding.

Her book blends her love for education and teaching with her interest in history. She has lived in Saudi Arabia, London and Brazil. She explains in a timeline in her book that olive cultivation first appeared in Syria in 6000 B.C., and olive oil was one of the first traded commercial products.

After working as a history teacher in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara, Firenze moved on to serve in school administration. She now works as an international independent management consultant, educating top executives in educational leadership, organizational change and team training and effectiveness.

"I went from teaching kids to teaching executives, and now I'm teaching people about olive oil," she says.

Firenze hopes readers take away three main messages after reading her book. First, she says olive oil connects everything; second, olive oil isn't just for cooking; and lastly, she suggests always reading labels on olive oil bottles before purchasing them.

Olive oil, according to her book, can be used to prevent candle wax from sticking, can safeguard frying pans, rejuvenate plants and make them glisten, preserve wooden cooking utensils, polish hardwood floors, shine a dog's coat, unstick a zipper and alleviate stretch marks during pregnancy. It can help to treat a hangover, ease the pain of arthritis, strengthen fingernails, soften hands and can even be used for shaving. Firenze's list of 101 ways to use olive oil continues to grow now that her book is out. She says people have been emailing her uses she never knew.

Firenze isn't the first to discover the amazing uses of olive oil. Cleopatra may have used olive oil to beautify her nails, and olive oil is said to be the ultimate beauty secret in the Mediterranean.

"It's useful for beauty because it's a natural product," Firenze says. "It has the closest chemical composition to the natural moisture in our skin."

Actress Jane Seymour attributes the shine and radiance of her hair to olive oil treatments. Classic film actress Sophia Loren takes two tablespoons of olive oil every morning, and so does Firenze. Famous baseball players like Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams soaked their bats in olive oil to give them more spring.

Olive oil is also good for digestion because it serves as a laxative. Firenze says it's good to use topically because it has moisturizing and hydrating properties. In the chapter on pregnancy and baby care, Firenze suggests the cure for cradle cap, or bad dandruff, is olive oil.

There's also an intriguing chapter Firenze says might interest male readers. It's about the sensual uses of olive oil. Historians have documented the sexual practices of early Greeks and Romans who used olive oil for lubricant and pleasure-enhancing methods.

Another chapter highlights olive oil's uses in rituals, religion and folk magic. Catholics like the late Pope John Paul II are anointed with olive oil during the sacrament of the sick and dying. Priests are ordained with it, babies are baptized with it and youth and adults are confirmed with it. In the Jewish faith, the whole miracle of Hanukkah is based on olive oil.

"I want readers to know that there's a magical, mystical, legendary history to olive oil," Firenze says. "To me, it's a gift from the gods or God, whatever anyone believes."

Firenze travels to Italy at least once a year and frequents Italy's olive oil museums. She has also taken an olive oil harvest tour in Tuscany. Her house reflects her obsession. It's filled with collections of different types of olive oils, a replica of an amphora used to transport olive oil during the Roman Empire, dishes and kitchenware decorated in olives, and furniture shining from the polish of olive oil. She even enjoys dressing in olive-colored attire.

Firenze suggests that not any old bottle of olive oil should be purchased off the shelf at a local grocery store. Consumers should look for certified California or European seals on bottles that guarantee they are extra virgin olive oils.

"Olives start oxidizing the moment they are picked," she says. "They should be processed within 24 hours. Without a seal, they are not certified."

Extra virgin means the olive oil is without defects, virgin oil has some slight defects and regular olive oil is much more acidic.

"In the United States, we don't have a law yet that states that if you put extra virgin on a bottle that it's actually extra virgin," she says.

Bottles of olive oil turn rancid about 60 to 90 days after they are opened.

"But with all the uses in my book, your olive oil won't last that long," Firenze adds.

Firenze is a board member of the California Olive Oil Council and a professional member of the American Institute of Wine and Food and the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade. She has an olive oil

consultant certificate from the Italian Culinary Institute in New York and is a member of many olive oil of the month clubs.

Carol Firenze certainly knows her olive oil—so well, in fact, that her tips also come with a word of warning: Don't forget to exercise, because there are 120 calories per tablespoon.

*Carol Firenze's book, 'The Passionate Olive: 101 Things to Do with Olive Oil,' can be purchased at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Borders, as well as at [www.thepassionateolive.com](http://www.thepassionateolive.com).*

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