Cacio e Pepe

Quick · Serves 4

Ken's note: TBD

Roman for "cheese and pepper." Pasta, Pecorino Romano, lots of black pepper, and starchy pasta water, nothing else. The sauce is creamy without any cream, but it's finicky: keep the pan off the heat when the cheese goes in.

Ingredients

- 1 lb spaghetti, tonnarelli, or bucatini
- 1 Tbsp whole black peppercorns, coarsely cracked (or 2 tsp coarsely ground)
- 2 cups (about 6 oz) finely grated Pecorino Romano, plus more to serve
- 1 Tbsp olive oil or butter (optional)
- Kosher salt

Method

1. Grate the cheese as finely as you can and put it in a bowl. Bring 3 quarts of water to a boil and salt it lightly (Pecorino is salty). The smaller pot makes the water starchier. Cook the pasta 1–2 minutes short of done.
2. While it cooks, toast the pepper in a large dry skillet over medium heat 1 minute, until fragrant. Stir 1½ cups of the cooking water into the cheese a spoonful at a time to make a thick, smooth paste.
3. When the pasta is nearly done, ladle ½ cup of cooking water into the pepper. Transfer the pasta to the skillet with tongs, and cook over low heat, tossing, 1 minute. Remove from the heat, let it cool 30 seconds, and add the cheese paste, tossing hard, adding more pasta water a splash at a time, until creamy and glossy. Serve right away with more Pecorino and pepper. Taste before salting.
4. If the cheese clumps, the pan was too hot. Add a splash of warm water and keep tossing off the heat.