

diversions

Thursday, April 11, 2002 • Page 5



Classes Weave Together Cooking, Art

Everybody eats. Whether you slave over a hot stove and let your dinner simmer to perfection or just swing by the Top of Lenoir or the McDonald's drive-through, cooking plays a fundamental role in your dining experiences.

It's no surprise, then, that more people are seeking out cooking lessons to make their own dining more enjoyable, to acquire an essential life skill or even to flex a little of their creative muscle.

Anne Everitt, a pastry baker at Weaver Street Market, teaches a series of five two-hour cooking classes in the kitchen of Panzanella, a new-wave Italian restaurant in Carr Mill Mall. Everitt said that because of the rising demand for her classes among college students, she is considering teaching an additional series of classes to fit their schedules.

The classes focus on basic cooking techniques, beginning with knife skills and leading into creative root vegetable cooking and soup-making.

Geared toward beginners, the series aims to leave them with skills they can apply to new situations. "If you don't know anything about cooking, you can take the class," Everitt said. "I find a lot of people in need of some basic cooking skills."

She cited as an example the class on knife skills, in which students learn fundamental concepts like cutting vegetables into same-sized pieces so that they will cook evenly.

Everitt emphasized the importance of her students leaving the class not only understanding how to work through specific recipes but also knowing how to use basic skills like slicing and dicing to tackle new things.

"I try to teach people how to work without a recipe and to not be afraid to find a recipe and attack it," she said.

According to Rebecca Lawson, a local jazz dance teacher who just finished the series, Everitt was successful in this aim.

"The class was helpful in giving me more confidence about how to cook without a recipe and how to play with food," she said.

To make sure all her students achieve this goal, Everitt said she lets them do a great deal of cooking and learn skills through experimentation. "I do very little demonstration,"

she said. "The class is very hands-on."

Working in a group environment is an added perk because it allows students to learn from one another as they venture into uncharted territory with new recipes. "The students get to work with a lot of people and see each others' techniques," Everitt said.

While teaching a cooking class serves a practical purpose, Everitt said, she is conscious of the importance of incorporating aesthetics into her culinary endeavors.

"I consider myself more of a creative person than an artist, by any means," she said. "But it's important to the taste buds to have something that looks good and tastes good."

Likewise looking at cooking from an artistic angle, the Carrboro ArtsCenter is offering cooking classes in cooperation with local restaurants. The classes, covering Italian cuisine, bread-baking and vegetarian cooking, incorporate aesthetic appeal into skills and recipes.

"We consider cuisine to be a fine art," said Mary Ruth, the coordinator of the classes. "There's a lot of creativity that goes into putting ingredients together to make food."

Dilip Barman, who teaches the class on vegetarian cooking, emphasized the importance of making food pleasing to the eye.

"I think that food is far more than what you put into your mouth," he said.

"There's a philosophy to it."

Centered around the philosophy of vegetarian cuisine, Barman said, his class gives students the opportunity to work with a wide variety of foods. For artistic flair, he teaches them how to use color to enhance the food's aesthetic appeal.

"Using purple or blue potatoes will add a whole new experience to what you eat," he said.

He also emphasized encouraging his students to learn new things by violating recipes and experimenting.

"If (the recipe) calls for an onion, try using a shallot, for example," he said.

Barman said that culinary art begins with recognizing cooking as a necessity and that his talent for working well with food originated in its routine presence in his life rather than a need for a creative outlet.

"It's a matter of centering around food," he said. "It's the highest priority in life."

He said the importance of food in everyday life goes hand in hand with the idea of cooking as a basic life skill.

Many of his students have minimal experience but simply want to improve their skills in order to eat out less.

Rebecca Sowder, a freshman environmental science major at UNC, is enrolled in Barman's class and said it has already benefited her. "I've already tried cooking for my family and friends and I think I've learned a lot," she said.

She added that she had some cooking experience when she signed up for the class but that she has learned a lot of new things about presentation.

"Dilip really emphasizes colorful dishes, and at the end of the meal we put everything on the plate in a proper way to make it aesthetically pleasing."

For some people it's a necessity; for others, it's an art form. But with so much room for experimentation in such a practical skill, learning to cook is bound to add a little flavor to life.

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DTH/JESSICA NEWFIELD

Anne Everitt (left) demonstrates one of her soup-making techniques in front of her class in Panzanella's kitchen. She is considering creating a series of classes to better fit college students' schedules.

Pleasuring the Palate

Add Some Flair to Your Food

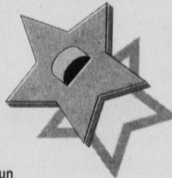
For most college students, the extent of dorm room culinary capabilities is Ramen, Easy Mac and the elusive (and forbidden) George Foreman grill. But you can't live like this for long, and a meal for a special someone can't always consist of different microwavable pastas and a hamburger patty off the iMac-colored Foreman. But even if you do make that delectable meal, garnish can turn it from Chef Boyardee to Chef Your-Name-Here. Here is a how-to for some simple garnishes and accent ideas.

Shaped Accents

All you need for this is anything that could be cut with cookie cutters. They are a universal tool too often overlooked by the Food Network.

Ideas:

1. Cut bell peppers, apple slices or anything large enough to get a cookie cutter onto, then make them into shapes and use as garnish.
2. Cookie-cut lunch meat, cheese and sliced bread into fun little sandwiches for the kiddies.
3. Slice potatoes, cut with cookie cutters and bake with some spices for tasty, shaped fries.



Citrus Twist

A simple way to garnish just about anything is with a citrus twist. Whether it's an entree, dessert or fancy appetizer, a couple of twists add character and color.

Steps:

1. Thinly slice an orange, lime or lemon.
2. Make a cut from the rind three-quarters of the way to the opposing rind.
3. Take the slice on either side of the cut and twist in opposite directions.
4. Repeat as desired.

Strawberry Fans

Easy way to make a fruit plate, fruity alcoholic concoction, dinner plate or just about anything a little prettier.

Steps:

1. Find a decent sized strawberry — not a huge misshapen one or a little runt.
2. Slice 3 to 4 slits from the tapered end of the berry to close to the leaves.
3. Carefully pull and extend the folds, making them fan out.
4. Put wherever you want.



Smoked Salmon Rosebud

Don't get scared yet. This garnish is easy and can be used to dress up a variety of dishes, but it is used by caterer Matt Trexler from Salisbury to dress up salmon dip.

Steps:

1. Grab a bacon-looking strip of smoked salmon, and after laying it flat, begin rolling tightly.
2. Pull lightly from middle of roll to shape into a more bud-like shape.
3. Grab non-poisonous leaves (if it's a rose leaf, even better) to place rosebud onto.
4. Place leaves and rosebud around food or on top for a fancy touch.

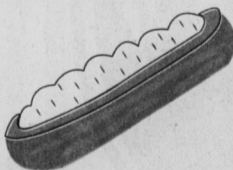


Cucumber Canoe

Ever look at a veggie tray and think it just looks boring? The cucumber canoe will be sure to be the focal point of party discussion as it is edible and purposeful.

Steps:

1. Find a huge cucumber.
2. Slice off a section of the cucumber lengthways, making a flat surface for it to sit on.
3. Slice a long C-shaped cut into the other side of the cucumber, making a eye shape, and remove the section. Be careful to not cut through the bottom of the cucumber.
4. Set cucumber on flat side and fill the middle of the cucumber with ranch dressing or whatever veggie dip you choose.



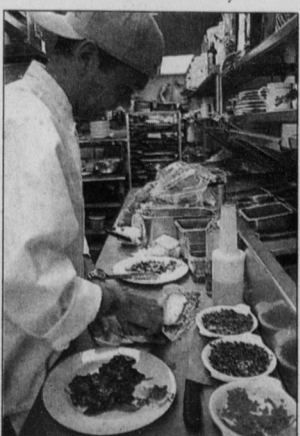
CONTENT BY KRISTEN WILLIAMS
DESIGN BY BETH GALLOWAY AND GARY BARRIER

Restaurants lining Franklin Street strike a balance of maintaining taste standards and taking creative liberties.

Many people tend to think that only two ingredients — tasty food and sanitary utensils — are required for a restaurant to garner a well-known reputation.

But behind all the shiny silverware and fanciful entrees, a whole other world of culinary creativity exists to make restaurants visually and aesthetically appealing to customers.

BY JENISE HUDSON
Staff Writer



DTH/KATE MELLNIK

Chris Adams, a chef at Aurora, prepares the baked trout special.

Carolina Crossroads' chef Brian Stapleton said chefs play the largest role in restaurants' day-to-day attempts to establish consumer appeal. "Chefs are the focal point of a restaurant from a marketing point of view," Stapleton said. "From most guests' perspective, the success of a restaurant is equated with its chef."

A graduate of the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, Stapleton's background, like many chefs, includes professional training. But John Tate, a pastry chef at Il Palio, said it isn't always necessary that chefs go to culinary school in order for them to do their jobs well.

In fact, Tate said he landed his job at Il Palio by coincidence.

"I became friends with a guy that used to be the sous chef, and one day he asked me if I wanted a job," Tate said. "Then one day the old pastry chef asked if I'd be willing to take over. It's been a big learning experience."

Tate said a large part of his learning has come from watching other chefs in action.

He said one instance in particular taught him what not to prepare for the restaurant.

"One time this guy did this bright green cream sauce for Saint Patrick's Day that looked like it came from the Caribbean," Tate said.

While Stapleton and Tate woo their guests with lavish entrees, chefs Dave Allworth of Four Eleven West and Patrick Cowden of Michael Jordan's Restaurant-23 said they prefer a more relaxed approach.

"We're a casual, fun place," said Allworth. "(Four Eleven West) is a friendly neighborhood restaurant, and we do pretty good business."

Allworth said he makes an effort to use local produce in his dishes to bring the restaurant's neighborly feel full circle. "I try my best to get local produce because it adds to the friendly nature (of Four Eleven West)," he said.

In catering to the elegant yet subtle atmosphere of Michael Jordan's 23-Restaurant, Cowden, who is the general manager, said he likes to keep the presentation of his dishes relatively simple. "Sometimes people build dishes a mile high, and while that kind of looks cool, the reality is that people come to eat the dish," Cowden said.

But Cowden said his knack for practicality in presentation doesn't keep him from creating dishes that are complex and visually appealing. "I would describe my presentation style as artistic and somewhat color-coordinated," he said.

Aurora's sous-chef Scott Dunlap said it is simple attention to presentation details that help to make food visually appealing. "I think presentation is very important," Dunlap said. "If food is presented in a beautiful way, then people are going to be looking forward to enjoying it."

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHAEL JORDAN'S RESTAURANT-23

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