

taste buds

chef Larry Janes



## Fresh pasta better than boxed kind

You don't have to be Italian to love pasta. With the onslaught of fresh pastas and pre-packaged "homemade pastas," today's diner doesn't have to settle for the plain old boxed stuff anymore.

If you have yet to visit a fresh pasta shop or store that features homemade pasta, be prepared to face a magnitude of decisions ranging from how thin (or thick) you prefer your pasta to choosing flavors such as tomato, spinach, basil and even chocolate for the ultimate in desserts.

Flavor sensations don't come cheap. Expect to pay anywhere from \$1.59 to more than \$3 per pound. (That's about double what you can buy in a box.)

Of course, there is no comparing the flavor of boxed pasta to fresh. Even basic egg pasta, made from flour, eggs, salt and water, tastes like something Mamma Leone would dish up the little Leones (all 13 of them) on Wednesday — and it wasn't out of a box. Pasta made at home — by hand or with the help of pasta machines — is a revelation in delicate flavor and texture.

**FINE PASTA** can be made by hand with no more elaborate equipment than a bowl and a rolling pin. However, a noodle pin and noodle board are helpers worth having if you want to use the time-honored basic method.

Noodle pins are long, and shaped from a single piece of wood. Having no handles, you "palm" the pin, rolling from the center out to the edges. No nonsense equipment here.

Noodle boards are the same as pastry boards and are crafted from hardwood with a turned-down front edge and a turned-up back edge that prevents the board from creeping away as you roll. These boards cost upwards of \$30 but are well worth it to the serious pastry and pasta maker.

**HAND-CRANKED PASTA** machines are prevalent nowadays because a small investment of less than \$40 can allow you to prepare spaghetti noodles, fettuccini noodles, lasagna noodles and raviolis.

Some of the better machines, like the Altea, Atlas and Imperia, come with optional attachments (some \$20 each) that can make just about anything from angelhair pasta to cappelletti. Look for a chrome-plated, heavy metal machine with a "C" clamp for locking onto tabletop surfaces.

If you would like electricity to take over the rolling and cutting of the dough, be prepared to shell out some \$100-plus for a machine that, if not looked after carefully, can overheat and make tough noodles. Cuisinart has a pasta attachment, as does Kitchen Aide and Simac.

All are pretty much equal in comparison, but who needs another plug-in contraption when the basics are so easy and the fun is truly derived from the cranking and cutting? Let's face it, you'd have to eat a heck of a lot of pasta to get your money's worth.

When it comes to cooking homemade pasta, a large pot is indispensable for allowing the pasta to "swim" in plenty of boiling water. Without the added water, your pasta will be starchy and gooey and will stick together.

A teaspoon of salt added to the water will flavor it, but did you know that salted water boils faster? Yep, it's heavier and will boil faster, but let's not overdo it.

WHEN IT comes to pasta gadgetry, there's only one true, tested device that has earned its way into my kitchen: my pasta fork. It looks like a large, long-handled wooden spoon with tiny (about one-inch) picks protruding from the base.

This nifty little 99-cent can't-do-without is just what the doctor ordered for picking up portion-controlled servings of the homemade pasta. A definite plus in any spaghetti lover's domain.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Chef Kevin Gawronski created these pasta dishes including beef ro-tini with cauliflower and mushrooms, with sour cream and chives sauce (left), carrot shell salad with honey sweet basil dressing (center), and rainbow angel hair with breast of chicken and sweet red

pepper sauce. Gawronski, who teaches culinary arts at Schoolcraft College, also conducts classes in pasta making for the public at other locations. In addition, he operates his own wholesale and retail pasta shops called Cucina Di Pasta.

# PASTA

## Flavors go along with trend to lightness

By Mary Rodrigue  
special writer

Looking for pasta with pizzazz? Push aside the macaroni salad and spaghetti with meat sauce and picture this: carrot sea shells, beet ro-tini, lemon pepper fettuccini, a rosemary pasta for lamb, cholesterol-free pasta for HeartSmart dieters.

"We're getting into a lot more of the unique flavors. We're like the Baskin and Robbins of pasta," said Kevin Gawronski, who conducts pasta workshops when he's not teaching classes in the culinary arts program at Schoolcraft College in Livonia.

"We're moving away from the red meat sauce to get more in line with the main course."

Chef Gawronski recommends lemon pepper fettuccini to accompany seafood, wild mushroom pasta alongside game dishes. Cranberry, artichoke and pumpkin have served as the base for other pasta creations.

**GAWRONSKI, 37**, of West Bloomfield is in tune with the latest pasta trends because it's his business.

He owns Cucina Di Pasta (Italian for "pasta kitchen") outlets in Novi and West Bloomfield. The Novi location is a wholesale producer of pasta for commercial use in restaurants and stores. Chez Raphael, Charley's and the Merchant of Vino are customers.

The West Bloomfield shop is a restaurant-housed, the Boardwalk shopping center on Orchard Lake Road north of Fourteen Mile Road.

**GAWRONSKI'S RESEARCH** of pasta consumption has revealed that Americans are eating more of the

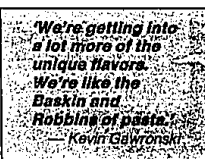
stuff, although still lagging far behind Italians, who eat an average 60 pounds a year per person.

"In our research we found that 20 years ago the average person consumed six pounds of pasta a year. Now it's up to 15 pounds a year. Our market research gave us an indication that the trend shouldn't peak until 1995.

"It's healthy food. Carbohydrates are a mainstay in people's diets. Starches are usually on the dull side — potatoes and rice. With pasta you can create a flavorful side dish. A sauce isn't necessary. You don't have to mask it. Pasta stands on its own."

Gawronski just finished a pasta lecture series at Bonnie's Patisserie in Southfield and a health-care lecture series for the University of Michigan. In addition to cholesterol-free pasta, he creates no salt/no oil sauces.

"WE HAVE such a health-conscious market today," he said. "We use all fresh vegetable purees. Pasta



you see in the market is made with vegetable powder, which gives it a duller color and less nutrition."

Pasta can be dressed with fresh-cut vegetables or pesto sauce, Gawronski said. Since pesto is made of basil, pine nuts, oil and garlic, those looking for a low-calorie alternative might choose chickpea pesto, which does away with the oil and nuts, he said.

Pasta has great appeal — "for the health-conscious, athletes like it for the energy boost, it's gourmet and it's economical. It's an alternative to

starches. And one of the cheapest meals you can put out."

Here Gawronski offers recipes for health-conscious consumers.

**CHOLESTEROL-FREE FETTUCINI**

- 2 cups semolina flour
- 2 egg whites
- 2 teaspoons olive oil

Mix flour, egg whites and oil together by hand or on a mixer with paddle attachment until it forms a ball. If mixture is too dry, add a little water to moisten. Chill dough, allowing it to rest 20 to 30 minutes.

If using hand-cranked pasta machine, follow machine directions as to how to press and cut pasta.

By hand, slice pasta ball into one-fourth-inch slices and flatten with a rolling pin. On a floured board, roll out as thin as possible. Roll up the roll of dough loosely, jelly-roll fashion, and then cut into one-

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## Shoppers, diners enjoy newly cranked noodles

By Mary Rodrigue  
special writer

There's no question pasta is the main attraction at Cucina Di Pasta. A worker stationed in a front display window operates a commercial pasta machine, called an extruder,

that cranks out 50 pounds of noodles per hour. Diners can watch as the fresh pasta is hung on steel racks.

Then there are the front display counters where pasta in every shape, color and size is stored and sold. Herbs hang from the ceiling; flavored, bottled vinegar in bright col-

ors is placed on high shelves around the restaurant, and large cone-shaped containers store — what else? — more pasta.

The shop has been open for business since last July.

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## Choconolic takes honors for her 'Kahlua Bad Boys'

By Ethel Simmons  
staff writer

Jo Rosen of West Bloomfield came up with a brownie recipe that tasters at the Observer & Eccentric judged to be the best of the many entries submitted in the newspaper's recent contest.

Rosen, whose letter described herself as an "artist and chocoholic," provided her recipe for Choco-Chip Kahlua Bad Boys. She wrote, "Dear Brownie Tasters. I paint at home nearly every day. I exist on chocolate treats to motivate my watercolors. These 'Bad Boys' make for creative watercolors."

When reached by telephone, however, to congratulate her and ask her to make a batch of the brownies so

she could be photographed snacking on them while she works, she said, "Is it all right if I give them to the photographer? I'm on Weight Watchers."

Rosen is the mother of two children, a daughter, 7, and son, 4. "We're all chocolate lovers in our family," she said.

Second favorite recipe of the tasters doesn't look like a traditional brownie because it contains white chocolate. Rebec K. Hauser of Canton submitted her recipe for White Chocolate Almond Apricot Brownies.

Her 19, attends Schoolcraft College in Livonia, where she is a first-year student in culinary arts. She has been in several food competitions and has won two gold medals, three silver and two bronze.

**FOR THE BROWNIE** competition, she and her mother tried to think of something different. "I've been working with white chocolate a lot," Hauser said. After creating the recipe, she made a batch, which she took to the office and tried out on co-workers.

Six recipes from among the contest entries were selected as finalists by the Taste crew. Chef Larry Janes, Taste Beds columnist, made up each of the recipes for sampling by O&E staffers.

Of these recipes, two more pulled a lot of votes. They are Nana's Brownies from Cindy Olley of Rochester Hills, and Mint-Flavored

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DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Jo Rosen of West Bloomfield is a self-confessed chocoholic. Her whole family loves chocolate, she says. An artist, she likes to nibble on brownies while she paints watercolors. Tasters at the Observer & Eccentric picked her recipe as the best in the recent brownie contest.