

taste buds chef Larry Janes



Classic sauces return to favor after lean years

A person can eat just so much grilled tuna with a splash of fresh lemon.

Ditto for the much-overpublicized "chef's salad" that has grown to such humungous proportions that it takes two cups of salad dressing to eat.

It's about time we said au revoir to nouvelle cuisine and brought back the classic, great sauces of yesteryear. White sauces thickened with egg yolk, bechamel laced with creme fraiche and the ever-classic veloute laden with artery-hardening butter.

Call Weight Watchers if you're looking for a fat-free tomato sauce. Read on if you want to indulge in a rich, supple fantasy that will surely have you visiting Vic Tanny's.

Great, classic sauces like those mentioned above have lasted a long time, and with good reason. These sauces are the foundation of French home cooking, and they lend themselves to almost infinite variations.

TECHNIQUES REQUIRED for making perfect sauces composed of butter, milk and flour are not difficult but do require care and proper timing. The butter should be melted over a medium-low heat in a heavy-bottomed saucepan (avoid both cast iron and aluminum, which can discolor the sauces). Then the flour is added and whisked in quickly to produce a smooth roux.

After cooking this combination for 3-5 minutes over low heat to eliminate the raw taste of the flour, the pan is removed from the fire. The roux should remain a pale color. Have the liquid you are adding close by at room temperature (milk or stock).

Add the liquid, all at once, whisking quickly. This quick whisking is the secret for achieving a smooth, lump-free sauce. After returning the pan to low heat, keep whisking without fail until the sauce is thickened. Simmer for about one hour until a pale ivory color, sitthen body and velvety texture is achieved.

At this stage, the sauce can be sieved to remove any minuscule lumps, but yours truly thinks that's just a few too many dishes to wash, and if the sauce was made carefully the first time, sieving should not be necessary.

At this point, the sauce can be frozen. If serving immediately, add herbs, and just before serving, swirl in a few tablespoons of pure butter to achieve a glossy glow. Do not reheat after adding butter as this will cause the sauce to break down.

IF THE SAUCE is not to be used immediately, pour in a thin layer of cream or top with a piece of waxed paper to prevent forming a "crust." Do not cover with a saucepan lid as this will create condensation, which will cause the sauce to thin and separate. If reheating does become necessary, place the saucepan in a warm-water bath and stir gently, being sure that no additional water enters the sauce.

I've found the best way to "keep" sauces, especially when entertaining and stove space is at a premium, is to store the freshly made warm sauces in a clean thermos rinsed in hot water. The thermos will keep the sauce at serving temperature without cooling for at least two-three hours. Then all you have to do is pour the sauce into a gleaming saucepan and let everyone think you spent all day over a hot stove. Never underestimate the value of true technique.

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Ramadan's fast ends at sundown

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Dr. Bashar and Hoda Succar deftly worked side by side in their Bloomfield Hills kitchen, he putting the final touches on a yogurt sauce and she turning the kibbee loaf onto a silver platter.

Hoda's brother, Bashar Arbat, who had just arrived from Saudi Arabia for an extended visit, poured nourishing apricot nectar into crystal goblets.

A nephew, Arfan "Ali" Sheweiky of Livonia, prepared Syrian, or pita bread.

A trio of Succar daughters dressed in their best — Rania, 9, Sena, 8, and Deema, 5 — watched wide-eyed in anxious anticipation. The "prince," Eric Fahed, 1, slept in his upstairs crib.

The sun set. Darkness ascended. Finally, the exact moment arrived.

It was time to break the Ramadan fast observed by Moslems the world over as one of five pillars in the Islamic faith.

The Succar family and their guests gathered at the lavishly set table, preparing to break the fast together and partake of delicacies prepared in the manner of their Syrian heritage.

"RAMADAN IS our holiest period. It is the time you feel closest to God. I feel very close to Him," said Hoda, adding final touches to a meal of kibbee, lentil soup, fattoush, fatted makdous, fried cauliflower and beans.

The fast, set by the lunar calendar, lasts 29 or 30 days each year. It is the holiest month in the Islamic year, a time when Moslems believe God gave the first portion of their holy book, the Koran, to Mohammed.

During Ramadan, adult Moslems in good health are required to refrain from eating or drinking, smoking or sexual relations during daylight hours. This year, the fast began Sunday, April 17, and ends in exactly one week, Monday, May 16.

Children fast by choice. This year, Rania fasted one day for the first time, a feat the family proudly mentions.

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Syrian recipes are passed along

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Syrian food is as much an art form as it is a culinary endeavor. "We decorate our food," said Hoda Succar, artfully arranging finely sliced wedges of lemon and tomato over fried cauliflower and simmered green beans and sprinkling minced parsley and diced dill over eggplant and yogurt.

Syrian recipes are also history, rich oral tradition passed from one generation to the next.

Hoda and husband, Dr. Bashar Succar, fashion recipes in the manner of mother and grandmother before them, relying on taste to measure ingredients and habit born from years of experience, to produce succulent offerings.

Because the origins of the recipes spring from yesterday, only fresh ingredients are used, except in rare instances when a modern can of tomato paste replaces the hours required to produce a thick sauce from simmered fresh tomatoes.

During the month of Ramadan, the traditional month of fasting observed by Moslems the world over, special dishes are prepared for friends and family who gather together at the close of day during this special religious period.

ALTHOUGH THEY are fast, female cooks may taste test their food "with the tip of their tongue if their husband is fussy," Hoda said.

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DUANE BURESON/staff photographer

"Welcome. Be my guest." The Arabic writing above, which says "Iafad-dalu," warmly receives visitors into the Arab home. Dr. Bashar and Hoda Succar break the Ramadan fast with family and friends at a meal the couple prepared.



Bowls of fried cauliflower (clockwise from upper left), seasoned green beans and dates signal dusk and the end to the day's fast. Apricot nectar is above center.

Middle East spices fill air at the market

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Ingredients for Middle Eastern cuisine are available at a number of area markets that sell specialty items. Walk into one of these markets and the air is alive with the pungent aroma of spices spilling over from bins much like those in the souqs of Damascus, Jeddah, Beirut or Amman.

The aromas of tart cardamom used in Arabic coffee, coriander, cumin and cinnamon used to season vegetables, and rare saffron used in rice blended with sap of the mastic tree.

Other bins reveal a variety of beans, including the favorite for breakfast, the fava bean, and black beans used in soups. Bulgur, dried pastas and other grains are also available.

No Middle Eastern market is complete without sweets like delicate baklava, dripping with syrup, and burma, shredded dough with pistachio nuts.

- International Market, 15375 Inkster, Livonia
- Majestic Market, 25377 Lahser, Southfield
- Oasis Import Mart, 4270 N. Woodward, Birmingham
- Yaldeo's Imports, 8000 W. Seven Mile Road, Detroit.

Chefs battle it out, with their dueling videos

By Larry Janes
special writer

It wasn't really my idea. I mean, spending Saturday night (into the wee hours, I might add) at home in front of the TV/VCR with 11 different cooking videos? Give me a break.

By the time the 11th video ran, I was saturated with Diet Coke and had eaten enough Orville Redenbacher to fill a stock pot. With each tape running about 55 minutes, not including all the fast-forwarding over the boring segments, I now have the expertise to make a whod-mill out of a carrot, debone a chicken, bake and decorate a cake, use a food processor and feel comfortable enough to consider Wolfgang Puck, Julia Child, a Japanese sushi chef and Keith Farnie close personal friends.

I can personally recite on which fingers Keith Farnie wears his rings, Julia Child's favorite outfit (she wore the same one on eight different tapes) and tell you in detail how many times the Wilton Cake Lady says, "Ah-um" during the course of one video (33 times).

About five years ago, cooking videos seemed gimmicky, at best, when introduced to cookbook buyers.

On one hand, they provided the cook (or non-cook) with a means of visual instruction that could be given in the home, much the way cooking lessons are given in the classroom. The big difference: cooking videos can be repeated until thoroughly understood.

ON THE OTHER hand, the idea that cooks would take a TV set and a VCR into the kitchen for simplified demonstration appeared to be a luxury reserved for the elite. All of a sudden, technology made kitchen-sized televisions standard equipment and a simultaneous reduction in the cost of a VCR made it affordable enough so one can have an extra around or compact enough so that schlepping it to the kitchen is not a major hassle.

Now, next to the under-the-cabinet coffemaker, electric can opener, Cuisinart, microwave, pasta machine, toaster, grill, waffle iron, answering machine and computer, sits the TV/VCR. My kitchen looks like a shelf display at Ollie Fretter's.

Ever for those who watch the cooking demonstrations in their living rooms or dens, take notes, then return to the kitchen to try what they have learned, the cooking video quickly became a practical approach to learning how to cook. A



lesson could be viewed for a one-time fee, often at lesser prices than an actual class, then repeated over and over again for free.

Even with the minor cost of video rentals, cookbook publishers are becoming more and more aware of the creeping video cookbook market.

SPEAKING OF rentals, it is highly recommended that you rent a video before plunging down your hard-earned bucks. Reviewing the different videos, I found there were many that proved to be a waste of time, effort and money.

Video rentals are available now at most up-scale kitchen shops and, of course, at the video rental stores. Knowing my city library offered video rentals, a quick check found a slew of cooking videos available for \$1 per night, and there were some that were "Closed Captioned" for the hearing-impaired. The older the video, the more I noticed an instructional style. However, some of the newer videos include a mixture of instruction, technique and entertainment.

If you're looking for straight information — that proved a little cut and dried — there are videos available focusing on a specific topic (wine, chocolate).

There's even a video available through Kraft titled "Cooking with Kids," which will help you displace the fear you might feel when little Billy grabs the serrated bread knife and corners the family pet: white yelling, "Hot dogs, anyone?" Here's a video primer of a few of the selections currently available just about anywhere. This is not a review of the tape but simply an overview to help you in your selections. Of course, any feedback from you would be greatly appreciated. Jot me a note in care of this paper.

JULIA CHILD: THE WAY TO COOK . . . poultry, vegetables, fish, eggs, meats, soups, salads, first courses and desserts

If you buy them all, make sure you bring your cookbook. Great basic information and superb camera shots showing techniques and "how to." Julia is Julia, not stuffy but flirty, down to earth with just a glint of humor. How could you not like her?

JACQUES PEPIN: SECRETS OF A MASTER CHEF

Definitely the video for someone Please turn to Page 3