

taste buds

chef Larry
JanesCuddle
with bowl
of soup

If there was ever a time for the so-called winter doldrums to set in, this week would be it.

Here we are, right smack dab in the middle of winter. It's dark before you get home from work and it isn't light till way after you get there. The Christmas tree was removed long ago and, again, we live of the recently rearranged living room furniture. Other than something called Super Bowl Weekend, we have little to look forward to until Valentine's Day. This is the time of year I like to cuddle. I cuddle with my down comforter, I cuddle with a 329-page novel, I cuddle with Kibbles, my cat. But there's something about cuddling with an oversized earthenware bowl of steaming homemade soup while wrapped in down, lounging on my La-Z-Boy with Kibbles on my lap and a book at my side.

I look out the window and see the cold and snow. My hands feel the warmth from the bowl. My senses are awakened by the steam that is inhaled, yielding pungent odors, sweet smells and a sensuous warming that is felt down to the cockles of one's heart.

Textures abound, combining gossamer limp onions with turtle beans exploding with flavor. The broth can be thin and as lanky as a well-gnawed rib bone bespeckled with droplets of glistening natural juices or thick and hearty, just waiting for someone to try to make a spoon stand on end.

YOU CAN ADORN crocks, bowls and tureens with a multitude of toppings ranging from flaky puff pastry to just a swirl of sour cream. A splash of brandy or a sprinkling of fresh grated cheese can turn a steaming bowl into a culinary work of art.

Yes, there are some pay-backs. You can bribe butchers to save you desirable bones that hopefully wouldn't have been picked clean by a voracious, inexperienced butcher. You can brown the bones, boil the bones, strain the bones, defat the bones, flavor the bones, and end up with a product that tastes like someone dropped one bouillon cube in a gallon of water. Or you can cheat a little like I do.

Cheating isn't really the term that truly expresses my need for a simmering soup on a cold, dark, dreary winter's day. When I want to eat, I want to eat.

Spending eight hours making homemade stock is neither fun nor heartwarming. Long ago, in a land far away, there was a culinary wizard who devised a product called institutional soup base. Some of the better brands even have beef, chicken and ham as a first ingredient while some of the lesser varieties rely on salt, MSG and a multitude of other flavor enhancers to do the job.

This miraculous product that saves time and energy and produces a classic homemade French onion soup complete with puff pastry top in less than 10 minutes can be bought only at wholesale food distributors. Contrary to popular belief, you won't have to buy a case, and many distributors have a walk-in cash and carry office just for folks like you and me.

THE BEST that money can buy is dubbed soup base, with other brands like Leone's Pride, LeGout, Custom and Majors running behind the leader but never really being able to catch up flavorwise. Not only does this miracle product make great soup, it also does wonders for gravies and sauces and keeps just about forever in the refrigerator. Flavors available include the naturals such as beef, chicken, pork and ham, but a little research might dig up the likes of a vegetarian base, a lobster base that makes a heavenly bisque and a clam base that will have a chowder on the stove every Friday.



STEPHEN CARTRELL/staff photographer

Many home cooks added new tools to their kitchen over the holidays. Cooking and baking should be even easier and more fun with additional "helpers." Shown above are fish poacher, croissant cutter, chef's knife and crock with kitchen utensils, accented by an antique cookbook.

New gizmos for the kitchen

By Geri Rinachler,
special writer

OK, NOW THAT the holidays are over, it's time to reorganize the kitchen and make room for all your new gadgets and gizmos. But before making any rash decisions about which tools stay and which get packed away for the next garage sale, let's consult a few professionals who know all about your future in the kitchen.

Espresso machines, electric hand mixers and chef's knives were all big sellers during the 1990 holiday season, but at the top of the list was an electronic bread making machine. Priced between \$230 and \$350, depending upon the size and brand, this small, counter-top kitchen appliance mixes, kneads, raises and then bakes one loaf of bread any time you do the ingredients and program it to do so.

Most of these machines bake one round or one rectangular loaf, depending on the make and model you choose. It won't work for braided coffee cakes, baguettes, or rolls, so don't discard your electric mixer with a dough hook attachment just yet.

Are you as baffled as I am as to why, during recessionary times, folks are plunking down \$200 to \$300 for a machine which only bakes specific styles of bread? Toula Patialis, owner of Kitchen Glamor kitchenware stores, said, "Now that the average family has a dual income and both people working, they want kitchen conveniences and they want the best."

PATLIS ADDED that high-quality chef's knives and paring knives, especially the high carbon stainless steel, by Wusthof, Trident and Gerber have sold well.

Richard Christensen has been an associate at Bridge Kitchenware in New York City for the past 19 years. He agrees that top-quality kitchen knives are hot items. He said home cooking is now "the thing to do. Our customers realize that high-quality items are long lasting and really make a difference when you use them. In New York, more and more people are cooking at home again, not just because of the high cost of restaurant dining but because you get less quality for your dollar (dining out)."

David Smith, manager of Williams-Sonoma in Troy, agrees electric hand mixers and

electronic bread-making machines are "in" but he also saw requests for hand-cranked egg beaters and elongated fish poachers.

Well, what does 1991 hold for cooking enthusiasts? Use of copper zabaione (Italian egg custard) pots and manual pasta machines is on the rise, as Italian cookery is still very popular. Christensen predicts sales increases in 1991 of the electric hand mixer and top-quality knives, along with stainless steel mandolines, a hand-operated tool that slices, juliennes or waffle cuts vegetables and fruits. The mandoline came to fame during the cuisine-nouvelle era of the late '70s and early '80s.

The "back-to-basics" philosophy in kitchenware has been obvious in the cookbook market as well. Last year Julia Child's "The Way To Cook" and "The New Basics" by Julie Rosso and Sheila Lukins each sold more than one million copies. And just as the 1990 holiday rush began, Fred Bridge and Jean F. Tibbets added some balance to the list with "The Well-Tooled Kitchen" (William Morrow and Co., \$24.95, 1990).

FOR MORE THAN 55 years, Fred Bridge has supplied cooks, from the professional

chef to the weekend cuisinier. Shelves and counters of his New York store on E. 52nd Street are packed warehouse-fashion with every conceivable kitchen gadget, pot, knife, slicers and mold.

"The Well-Tooled Kitchen" is described as a guide to more than 500 kitchenware items. With more than 250 photographs, it really is an encyclopedia of utensils. Bridge and co-author Tibbets devote the first 30 pages of the book to the history and uses of knives. They thoroughly answer all questions about the best materials and design of knives for chopping, slicing, boning, fluting, filleting and decorating food.

Not sure how or why to use a butcher's (or a multicut) steel, or even what it is? Bridge and Tibbets explain that the steel, a tapered cylinder, is used to straighten a knife blade's cutting edge and give it a keener finish.

So before going out to buy a new truffle slicer, grapefruit knife or brioche mold to your pantry shelf, consult the source: "The Well-Tooled Kitchen."

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These pleasing cakes appeal to sweet tooth

By Arlene Funko,
staff writer

Walter Stevanovich of Livonia knows a thing or two about pleasing customers who love sweets.

"Seventy-five percent of people buy the product by its looks," said Stevanovich, owner of Thomas Wedding Cakes. "The taste brings the customer back."

A native of Yugoslavia, Stevanovich is a baker by trade. While he has done all kinds of baking over the years, "My personal interest is cakes," he said.

Stevanovich, who specializes in fancy, special-occasion cakes and sumptuous cheesecakes, knows that elaborate decorations cannot take the place of flavor.

"I use good ingredients," he said. "It's all important — the ingredients, the baking and the decoration."

Name recognition is important, too. Stevanovich, who owns the Garden City Bake Shoppe on Ford Road,

purchased the venerable Thomas Wedding Cakes slightly more than a year ago.

"It's always better when you keep the same name," he said.

For 37 years the distinctive white brick Thomas store occupied the northwest corner of Middlebelt and Five Mile roads in Livonia. Now the shop is located a few blocks east, on Five Mile Road.

STEVANOVICH HAS adapted the wedding cake recipes used by original owner Roy Thomas, who established his business in the 1920s in northwest Detroit.

The most popular wedding cake flavor is yellow-and-chocolate marble, he said. Other flavors include white, chocolate, cherry nut and carrot.

The cheesecake recipes — which include plain, chocolate, lemon and black forest — came from Ruby McCord, previous owner of Thomas Wedding Cakes.

There have been at least three

generations of Stevanovich bakers. Walter Stevanovich learned to bake from his father, a bakery owner, after the family emigrated from Yugoslavia to Canada in the early 1950s.

Walter, who studied culinary arts in Montreal, later came to Detroit and worked at Oakwood Bakery. He also was a part-owner of Burt's Bakery in Dearborn for several years.



Lemon-filled cheesecake is one of the special cakes at Thomas Wedding Cakes in Livonia.

His wife Dobrinka bakes and ices cakes. Son Dan, who lives in Canton, operates the Garden City shop. Eventually Stevanovich hopes to open a string of cake shops throughout Michigan.

"There are more and more occasions," Stevanovich said. "For everything, they celebrate with a cake."

Celebrating a retirement? How about a fancy cake with a frosting

vignette of a guy lounging in a hammock? There are heart-shaped Valentine's Day cakes and cakes with a telephone motif for Sweet Sixteen birthday parties.

OF COURSE, the Thomas reputation was built on its wedding cakes, towering confections decorated with

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