

taste buds

chef Larry
JanesSausage
making
is a first

I did something last weekend I had never done before.

Remember the first loaf of bread you ever created? Maybe it was that perfect pie.

Last weekend, along with a fellow foodie toting pork shoulder and curing salts, we created homemade sausage.

Not just any sausage, mind you, but homemade brats and about 10 pounds of a spicy New Orleans favorite dubbed Andouille.

THERE CAN'T be very many folks out there who are into sausage making.

When my foodie friend visited the butcher's supply for some hog casings and requested enough casings for about 15 pounds of sausage, she said that the counterperson almost laughed aloud while screaming at the top of his lungs, "The smallest package of casings sold will make about 1,000 pounds!"

"No problem," my friend retorted. "Casings keep forever when smothered in kosher salt."

"You'd keep forever if covered in kosher salt, too," I responded.

SO WITH A powerful KitchenAid mixer sporting a brand-new food grinder option and sausage horns in hand, we rimmed pork shoulder, ground fresh spices, rinsed hog casings and stuffed sausage to our heart's content.

Fortunately, we had a little help.

A few weeks back, Bruce Aidells, one of the authors of "Hot Links and Country Flavors: Sausages in American Regional Cooking," visited Zingerman's Deli in Ann Arbor.

He so impressed us with his knowledge that we just had to get the book.

Anyone remotely contemplating homemade sausage should check out this tome, stuffed with regional delights such as Michigan Dutch farmer's sausage, Southwestern chorizo and authentic Southern Boudin, not to mention new American cuisine sausages like pheasant and wild mushroom, duck sausage and venison sausage.

THE GRINDING of the spices mortared into a paste, the rinsing of the elongated and twisted casings, the grinding of the meat and fat and finally, the stuffing, proved to be almost instinctive. You knew when the spice mixture was just right by its smell. You could tell by the feel of the sausage if it was stuffed too loose or tight.

There was a "colonial" feeling as we sat around the table trimming the pork shoulder.

The gentle mixing of the meat, fat and spices so as not to "melt" the mixture reminded me of kneading bread, knowing just when to stop.

AFTER THE physical labor was finished, we found ourselves almost fighting for the chance to stoke the smoker with an assortment of alderwood, mesquite, hickory and apple wood that was soaked to aromatic perfection.

The brats, fortunately for us, smoked to perfection in under two hours, just waiting to be plucked with tongs and tossed with some freshly sautéed red and green peppers and Vidalia onions and sautéed baby red skins.

The Andouille summoned a smoking that would last at least 12 hours.

WHEN THE sausage had finally passed the 14-hour mark and I wouldn't stand it any longer, it was removed from the smoker, only to fill my kitchen with faint aromas of a "smokehouse." Need I say more?

If you are remotely interested in the fine art of sausage making, you must get this book.

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At
home
in *Olga's
kitchen*By Janice Brunson
special writer

ASIDE FROM providing mere substance, food has played an unusually important role in the life of Olga Lolton of Olga's Kitchen fame.

It has been the means by which she has passed along Greek tradition to her children and their children. It has also provided a meaningful reason for being during a particularly difficult period of life, enriching Lolton in the process.

Twenty-one years ago last month, Lolton founded the first Olga's in a sliver of a shop in what was then the Continental Market in Birmingham. It was an instant success, frequented by businessmen and students who quickly adopted the small eatery as their hangout.

Today, Olga's is a chain of 55 restaurants in 11 states, employing some 4,000 people. Two years ago, the chain became a franchise, with new locations opening at breathtaking pace. Among the many locations, there are Olga's in Westland, Livonia, West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Township and Birmingham. Rochester Hills is slated next.

At openings of each new restaurant, "I stand there in my little place with tears in my eyes. Oh, Daddy, if only you could see me now," the diminutive Lolton said, during a recent interview in her striking Mediterranean-style home in Birmingham, designed by architect husband John.

HER FATHER'S DEATH 26 years ago and continuing dreams of him afterwards inspired Lolton to spend a year with her children in his homeland of Greece. It was there she discovered souvlaki, later to become the mainstay of her restaurant.

Although reared in a Greek home of immigrant parents, enjoying traditional cuisine prepared by her mother and passed along to Lolton, she had never before tasted souvlaki until the year's sojourn to Greece.

"This is when I saw the sandwich. The kids loved them. I wondered if this could go over in America. The kids got very excited. They thought the idea was great."

After much persistence, Lolton finally purchased a spit on which to broil lamb and beef, carefully packing and carrying the prized possession back to the United States at the end of the year's visit.

But her husband opposed the idea of a restaurant and so, for four years, the spit sat unused in the

basement of their home.

Meanwhile, Lolton prepared souvlaki for family and friends, spending endless hours refining the ever-important bread recipe into a softer finished product more befitting to the American palate. Acting on inspiration, she added a sauce of seasoned yogurt to the pocket of bread, filling it with sizzling slices of meat garnished with chopped onion and tomato.

THE CREATION, a mouth-watering original that has since become well known as a gyros or hero sandwich, was virtually unknown at the time. Diners raved over the finished product, feeding Lolton's confidence that she had indeed stumbled upon a gastronomic wonder.

A visit to the local doctor for a case of depression provided the final impetus. "There's nothing wrong with you. Go out and get a job," Lolton said the doctor told her. She then revealed her idea. The doctor, a Persian by birth, grew excited. "Souvlaki. I grew up on it. I love it," he said.

With renewed determination, Olga's Kitchen was born within the month. Son Bill, then a student at Lawrence Institute of Technology, became a willing partner. Five years later the two were catering a party in Bloomfield Hills when two guests, properly impressed by the tasty fare, approached her about selling the business. Two weeks later, the deal was consummated over a meal of pancakes.

Lolton, the colorful founder of Olga's Kitchens, was retained as an ambassador of goodwill, a position she finds "very nice. They are very respectful of me and I'm very proud of what they are doing." Each week she is scheduled to visit various restaurants.

Last week, a 5-year-old caught Lolton and other patrons in a Detroit-area Olga's off guard when he asked to shake the hand of the woman who created such a tasty sandwich. "That's a true story," she said, simultaneously crossing herself in Catholic fashion.

GIVEN TO LAUGHING, she delights in the story and countless others, all evolving around her food. "Little things like that happen all the time."

The secret bread recipe, still known to only two people in addition to Lolton, is prepared fresh daily at corporate headquarters in Troy. Frozen bread balls are shipped daily to each "kitchen," along with Olga's famous spinach pie.

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Olga Lolton (above) in her Birmingham Kitchen makes traditional Greek dishes. (Left) some of her specialties are Cushtari, Pastirio (clockwise from left), Individual Stuffed Eggplant, Eggplant Casserole and Spinach Pie. STEPHEN CAMPBELL staff photographer

Spotlight is on you, along with 4-star food, at the Bijou



A night at the Bijou is a night of stardom.

Guests are greeted and pampered in a style befitting this Southfield restaurant's Hollywood theme and in a manner that is unique today in establishments run by longtime restaurateurs like the Bijou's Swiss-born owner Walter Maeder.

Our evening there was full of pleasant surprises, from maitre d' Robert Kimoto's quiet attentiveness to the subdued showmanship with which entrees are prepared table-side to the parking attendant's impeccable timing. It was like being swept into a toned-down Hollywood production.

Maeder's restaurant is a bit of a classic — and so is its menu. It is influenced by Maeder's European roots and experiences. Trendy sundried tomatoes are out. Top billing at the Bijou goes to dishes like Dover sole, rack of lamb and filet mignon served with classic sauces, butter with almonds, peanut and bernalise respectively.

It's also a place where guests can spend a tidy sum without much effort. Entrees are served with a vegetable, in our case green beans with tomatoes. Soups, salads and other vegetables are a la carte. And you can spend between \$3.50 and \$65 on appetizers alone, with selections like

an ounce of Beluga caviar (\$65), terrine of goose liver with truffles (\$25), a popular smoked salmon (\$12.50), or a simply wonderful serving of crab toast (\$3.50). The four wedges of toast are stuffed with a delicious crab-mayo mixture and served with a sweet and sour sauce. Very good.

ON TO THE SOUPS, where choices include french onion, a soup of the day and the restaurant's extraordinary lobster bisque. The choice is simple — the thick, creamy and delicately seasoned lobster bisque is fantastic. It is sweetened with a touch of coconut milk and is equally good with or without the sherry that accompanies it. The soup is quite filling, but is a "must try" and is worth every penny of its \$6 charge.

On salads, the Bijou again deserves a rave. Kimoto's excellent captain's salad features a delicious combination of celery, mushrooms and artichoke hearts all sliced diagonally to soak up the delicious creamy dressing with a faint taste of mustard. Bibb lettuce with seafood oriental dressing is also quite popular. Salads are tossed alongside your table in a huge metal bowl that is the envy of any home chef.

The showmanship continues as the waiter prepares main entrees table-side as well, from slicing the Chateaubriand to arranging shrimp artfully on the oversized plates. With a deft hand, maitre d' Kimoto deboned our Dover sole as gracefully and expertly as we've ever seen it done.

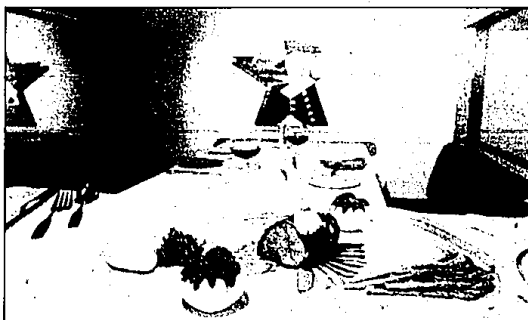
The Indonesian-style roast rack of lamb (\$25) is truly worthy of the praise it receives. Marinated in spices which include a slight touch of curry, cooked medium rare and served with a peanut sauce that truly complements the meat, this entree is delicious and memorable.

BIJOU ★★★★★
30855 Southfield Road just south of 13 Mile Road

Southfield
644-5522

Hours: Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Monday-Friday, Dinner 6-11 p.m. Monday-Saturday, Closed Sunday. Reservations accepted.

Prices: Lunch: \$6.50-\$13; Dinner: entrees \$19-29 with salads \$3.50-\$8 and soups \$3.75-\$6. All major credit cards.



Chateaubriand for Two. Bouquetiere is a favorite at the Bijou in Southfield. JERRY TOLKOVSKY staff photographer

Value: Food and service make it worth the expense.

RATING GUIDE

★ Average (lots of places with similar quality)
★★ Good
★★★ Very good
★★★★ Excellent
★★★★★ Consistently superb — a rare honor