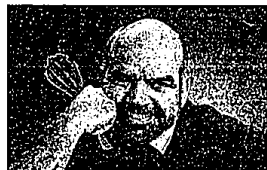


MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1992

# TASTE

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## TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JAMES

## Bring out the flavor of pasta with cheese

When Italian food is mentioned, the first to come to mind is pasta. The second? Cheese. Not just any old cheese or heaven forbid, something out of a shaker can. Something nutty, something sharp. Something to bring out the flavor of the pasta.

Ah, but what is good pasta without the customary grating of a fresh block of Parmesan, Asiago or Pecorino Romano cheese. A simple dusting. A complex outburst of taste.

Of course, too much of the so called "simple dusting" of cheese can undo all the good. No sense dwelling on the salt content, cholesterol and fat contents of these cheeses. Why spoil such a delectable experience? Let's face it, you don't want to mask the flavor of the pasta, but simply improve upon it.

If you haven't already guessed, good, aged cheese is as important as a fine grade of pasta. You wouldn't make a cake from scratch and top it off with canned icing? Why even consider doing the same with shaker-can Parmesan cheese and a plate of steaming pasta?

### Imported cheese

Unfortunately, imported grating cheese like Asiago, Parmesan and Romano aren't readily available in most markets and must be searched-out, usually in small local Italian groceries or gourmet-type food shops.

Every now and then, I stumble on one of these super "supermarkets" that have a dell with imported cheeses, but true Italian cooks look for the seals present on all imported cheese indicating its type and origin. Ask nicely for labels and the block. There are many varieties of grating cheese, both imported and domestic. The flavor difference always stands out.

Take Asiago, for instance. Asiago cheese is golden, nutty, and in my opinion, has more flavor than Parmesan and Romano. When I want to toss a simple pasta not covered with a flavorful sauce, I choose Asiago because it complements the pasta rather than covers it. Asiago can be purchased two ways, Stravecchio (very old) and Vecchio (old).

Of course, the best is the very old variety but in some markets, I've seen this priced as high as \$9.00 per pound. Look around and you should be able to find it in the \$5 per pound price range. Don't think you have to purchase a pound. Four ounces will grate one cup of cheese. Be careful, once you try this flavorful and nutty variety, you'll be hooked.

### Perfect Parmesan

When it comes to Parmesan, the best variety available is called Parmigiano Reggiano, made the same way as it was in the 10th century. This is a finely textured, golden hard and is very hard and aged to perfection. If you want the best, this is it. There is no other in comparison. Other dependable brands include Polenghi, Salbani and Locatelli but purists seek out the Parmigiano Reggiano.

Contrary to popular belief, imported Parmesan should have a light sweet flavor and be slightly nutty, and have almost no trace of bitterness. You'll pay even more for imported Parmesan than you will Asiago so shop around and check out the market dell areas for the best prices and trendy little Italian markets like Alamo's in Dearborn for availabilities.

Romano is a hard white cheese that is somewhat salty in flavor, and has a tendency to be very sharp. Pecorino Romano is the best Romano available and when you see it called for in a recipe, I suggest using half Romano and half Parmesan or Asiago for an improved, less sharp flavor. Remember, you want to complement, not overpower simple pasta.

### Great graters

Enough said about cheese, now a simple word on cheese graters. Every kitchen has (or should have) the standard hand grater with four sides and available at local houseware stores for about \$4. However, if you really want to get the best, search out the Mouli hand grater.

Now you're cooking Italian. Food processors such as the Cuisinart and mini-grinders can handle small chunks of cheese, but because these grating varieties are best aged more than three years (and some for up to 10 years) they are extremely hard. Trying to cut them up into small chunks for grating in a food processor is senseless. (I think this is the first hard word I've ever said about my Cuisinart).

When it comes to storing grating cheese, keep them tightly wrapped as they can impart flavors to other foods and vice versa. I've found that the freezer works best for long storage. (Just allow the cheese to come to room temperature after grating and before serving).

See Larry James family-tested recipes inside. To leave a message for Chef Larry, dial 953-2047, then mailbox number 1886.



Splendid table: Lynne Rossetto Kasper presents a dish from her newly published cookbook "The Splendid Table," which explores northern Italian cuisine.

BY LARRY JAMES  
SPECIAL WRITER

You have probably heard the old adage "they broke the mold when you were born." This doesn't hold true after spending a few hours with Lynne Rossetto Kasper, author of "The Splendid Table." (Copyright 1992, William Morrow Publishers, \$30, hard-cover).

Kasper recently visited Kitchen Glamour in West Bloomfield, and prepared several recipes from her book.

Undoubtedly, you have heard me speak many a time of my Wyandotte upbringing and Kasper bears a very close resemblance to Mrs. Kopernick, a neighbor on Sycamore Street who shares Kasper's joy of cooking.

Mrs. Kopernick's claim to fame didn't come from writing the definitive cookbook of recipes from the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy like Kasper's, but her baked goods were the first to be snapped up at St. Joe's bake sales. Her zest of food, and it's many offerings were evident when, at Halloween, neighborhood goblins and pirates were treated to homemade popcorn balls. As her old Detroit Times carrier, I was treated to homemade fudge and cookies all tucked neatly among shards of tin foil in an Armstrong's shirt box.

Mrs. Kopernick was undoubtedly Kasper's precursor. An early teacher, Alamo's Italian grocery in Dearborn, the Oaza Bakery and Ko-

## Author dishes up SPLENDID CUISINE



Lynne Rossetto Kasper, author of the newly published cookbook, "The Splendid Table," explores the rich culinary heritage of northern Italy. Discover this region which is the home of real Parmesan-Reggiano cheese and Balsamic vinegar.

walski's, she would arrive home carrying two of those French expanding string bags filled to the gills with ethnic goodies after the 30 minute bus ride on the Schaefer express.

Mrs. Kopernick passed away about 10 years ago but there's little doubt her spirit lives on in the likes of Lynne Rossetto Kasper.

A Brooklyn native with roots in the Emilia-Romagna area of Northern Italy, (before arriving in New York) Kasper's culinary tome of recipes from the region explore the rich heritage from one of the best known food areas in the world.

Dubbed "The heartland of Northern Italian Food," this region is the home of real Parmesan-Reggiano cheese, Balsamic vinegar and the famed Prosciutto di Parma ham.

Kasper's roots are from the region, and after spending five years

there researching and learning from the locals, she compiled her book of recipes and basic information.

The book, and I hasten not to call it a cookbook because of the pages of stories about the region, is a compendium of recipes and cooking tips featuring the best of what any Italian would require to enjoy his or her last meal.

"Ask any Italian where to take only one meal in Italy, and, after recommending his mother's house, he will more than likely send you to Emilia-Romagna," writes Kasper.

Unlike most cookbooks, in addition to sharing the recipes of her homeland, Kasper incorporates stories from the region. For example, a short three paragraph story on the history of pasta claims that "it (the pasta) may have been born of crusts of bread discarded after Medieval

banquets... Once the bread was soaked with meat juices, they were thrown away to be gathered by peasants who waited eagerly for leftovers."

The book dissects nearly all forms of Italian pasta including colorful stories of Strozziappeti or "priest stranglers" thickly cut and hand twisted pasta and Sarganelli which are cut, placed on combs and rolled around quilled pens, the theory being that pasta not rolled smooth and instead is "rough" holds the sauce better.

The recipes also include tips on "working ahead," wine and menu suggestions and the seldom seen "cook's notes" that end the recipe with those secret little tricks of the trade that separate a cook from a food preparer.

If learning more about the regional cooking of northern Italy intrigues you then Kasper's book should be a do-rigger addition to your kitchen library. Even if you don't choose to spend the time cooking, the short stories about the birth of prosciutto, balsamic vinegar and are worth the price alone.

Mrs. Kopernick would have loved living next door to Lynne Rossetto Kasper and you will love Kasper's book.

See recipes inside.

## Dust off the cookie sheets, it's time to roll



Christmas cookies: Make Oatmeal Gingerbread Cookies to hang on the tree. Children love to decorate these holiday treats.

BY KEELY WYGONIK  
STAFF WRITER

Dust off the rolling pin, grease the cookie sheets, and find the cookie cutters — the holiday baking season has begun.

Seasons greetings — "Bah humbug" some people say, but if you like to cook, this is one of the best times of the year. If you're searching for ideas, one place to look is the newly published "An Edible Christmas: A Treasury of Recipes for the Holiday Season" by Irena Chalmers, (William Morrow & Co., \$23 hard-cover).

Beautifully illustrated with color photos, and easy-to-read type, this is a book any cook on holiday shopping list would treasure. It's also a good gift to buy yourself.

There are recipes for "Gifts in Jars" including Five-Alarm Salsa, jams and chutneys, crock of simmering potpourri spices, flavored vinegars, oils and vodkas.

Of course, there are cookie recipes — Apple and Nut Pockets, Cranberry-Orange Crunchies, Cinnamon Crisps, and Puff Angels to name a few. There are candy recipes, fun kitchen projects for the whole family like salt-dough Christmas ornaments, and party menus.

From the "Little Kitchen Collection," are two new cookbooks that make perfect stocking stuffers or holiday hostess gifts — "The Chocolate Cookbook" by Patricia Leaudino and "The Christmas Cookbook" by Marilyn Bright, (HarperCollins Publishers, hard-cover, \$7). These little books, 3 1/2 inches by 5 1/4 inches, are filled with delicious ideas. Illustrated throughout with four-color pictures,

"The Christmas Cookbook" includes 20 recipes to help celebrate the holidays in style with old-world tradition.

There are recipes from all over the world including Roast Goose with Apple Stuffing, Plum Pudding and Oyster Stew, and some lesser-known treats like Caramel Potatoes, Cranberry Chutney, and Homemade Marzipan.

Chocolate lovers are sure to enjoy "The Chocolate Cookbook." Surprise chocoholics in your family with one of the 20 wonderful treats including Black and White Terrine, Chocolate Cookies, Chocolate Fudge Pie, and White Chocolate Ice Cream.

The Quaker Oats Company offers these pointers for making cookies with children.

When selecting a recipe, take into consideration your child's age and skill level. A preschooler will have a short attention span, but can enjoy simple "hands on" tasks such as breaking eggs into a bowl, mixing the dough with a spoon and decorating.

A school-age children, on the other hand, will be able to assist with measuring, rolling and cutting, and more elaborate decorating.

Let your kids take part in the planning. Ask your child to help choose the cookies you will bake. If there are too many for a single baking session, put it to a vote.

Let kids help package cookies for gifts. Use crayons, felt tip pens, stickers or stars to decorate plain white paper plates. Arrange cookies on plate; wrap with clear plastic wrap or colored cellophane. See recipes inside.