

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 1996

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

I'm hungry for simple good old-fashioned food

Here I sit, eyeing new non-stick, non-skid, guaranteed flat bottom pans and spatulas, especially formulated for them. The pans cost a beggar's ransom. The utensils, if they were plastic, would be worth about 99 cents each but because they're "specially made for the cookware" the cost is around \$8. That's for each utensil! Remember when you could buy a complete set of cooking utensils for \$4.99?

It's not that I'm against progress, but as I sit here wondering how my momma existed without Silverstone, bread makers and Chef's Choice knife sharpeners. I'm wondering about the high price we've paid for convenience.

Of course, I would never choose to give up my refrigerator, dishwasher or self-cleaning oven. I couldn't fathom abandoning my food processor, microwave or the computer on which I write.

I was in a trendy new restaurant the other day and paid \$14.95 for eggs and bacon, a few home fries and muffin. That's the meal I used to get at our neighborhood Cunningham-Kinsel's lunch counter for 89 cents. Nowadays, the bacon is imported from pigs stuffed with truffles; the eggs are free range, antibiotic-challenged, from artificially inseminated Moroccan chickens. The muffins are made from a sourdough starter that dates back to Betsy Ross and the coffee hails from the highest southern exposed hills from an uncharted mountain somewhere in Ethiopia. When will enough be enough?

Memorable meals

I miss all those places I used to go to for a simple meal. Remember the giant ice cream cones from Emily's downtown? How about the club sandwich from Hudson's 10th floor dining room? Are there any "Clock" restaurants left? My neighborhood has become so chic there are no more blue plate special greasy spoons. The soda fountain has become a dress store and I long for a real hot fudge sundae from an attendant smiling at the end of a marble counter emitting tuna fish and egg salad sandwiches the way Sander's used to do it.

When I go to an unknown city, I have to ask where to eat. There is no more slipping down to a lunch counter for chicken salad, an iced tea and a piece of fluffy coconut layer cake.

There used to be trains with real dining cars, good soup, starched white linens, great coffee and equally good service. Going by car nowadays, one looks in vain for diners that used to serve fried green tomatoes and real french fries. Even the Howard Johnson's of old were better than the fast food we're now used to.

Great basics

I miss what used to be American staples — hash, french fries, mashed potatoes, hot beef sandwiches, lemon meringue pie and BLTs. Chefs nowadays must tinker with the basics to prove that they have earned their keep. Some things, like a good, gooey grilled cheese simply cannot be improved by innovation.

Give me hash browns off a griddle that were not rehydrated. Whatever happened to waffles with warm syrup?

Can anyone explain what happened to the grilled beef patty and cottage cheese plate? It's been replaced by low-fat this or that and comes with a \$5.95 price tag.

I want hot chocolate made with real milk and chocolate, not one made from a pre-sweetened mix.

I understand rising rents and labor costs, but for the record, I miss having a shoemaker on the corner and a butcher I can talk to and learn from.

Let's be careful to cherish the simple places that remain with us before they disappear. Long live club sandwiches with iceberg lettuce and homemade Russian dressing!

See Larry Jones' family-tested recipes inside. Chef Larry is a free-lance writer for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1888.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Wines from Columbia Crest in Washington State.
- Taste Buds column: Now is the time for Crock-Pot cookery.



Garlic

Small bulb gains big popularity

BY CORINNE ABATT • SPECIAL WRITER

Remember the line from an old song parody about feeding the baby garlic to find it in the dark?

Garlic took its share of lumps in the past, but now it's enjoying a popularity bordering on awe.

Enat Sida Mario's, with restaurants in Livonia and Rochester hills, is currently paying homage to it with a garlic festival that continues through Sunday, Jan. 21.

While such a celebration is new to the metro Detroit area, it's a tradition in New York's Little Italy, and Gilroy, Calif.

"There's been a lot of focus on garlic since people became aware of its medicinal benefits," said Ray Vance, vice president of Enat Sida Mario's. "And if you cook it right, it can do incredible things to food."

Saying this is a perfect time for a garlic festival, Vance continued, "In January we go into the blues, this gets you out to have some fun." In addition to the regular menu, diners are given a special garlic menu.

What mainstreamed garlic into the American diet is the discovery (or rediscovery) that it has more than meets the nose. Claims for its medicinal benefits run from lowering serum cholesterol triglycerides and blood pressure to being an anticoagulant, a germicide, a cancer reducer and a preventive for premature aging. In other words, many regard it as something akin to an edible wonderworker.

Ruth Woods, manager of Kitchen Glamour in Orchard Lake Mall, West Bloomfield, remembered her Russian-born grandfather as she commented on the garlic boom.

"He made garlic soup once a week in the winter — 'to stay healthy,' he said. We never went near him — the smell was overpowering." A smile crossed her face as she continued, "he told us we were being silly. Anyway, he lived to be 100 and died of old age, not disease, just old age."

Woods said she likes to cook with garlic as do many of her customers. "They can't get enough of it. But, what's interesting is they don't want to touch it."

That may be one reason for the popularity of utensils such as the garlic peeler, the self-cleaning garlic press, the garlic grater, garlic slicer, garlic baker, ceramic garlic keeper, and a pint-size garlic cellar. Woods said the two hottest sellers are the terra cotta garlic baker and peeler. On the same shelf are four cookbooks devoted exclusively to garlic.

Rub your hands with salt or lemon juice to get rid of the smell on your hands after preparing garlic recommends Lois Thieleke of Birmingham, a home economist for the Michigan State University Extension — Oakland County. Her answer for garlic breath is to chew a sprig of parsley. She mentioned that the longer garlic is cooked, the milder it becomes and conversely the smaller the pieces you cut, the more pungent the flavor.

That's why timid cooks who haven't used garlic may choose to start out with a gentle, but elegant use of garlic. Rub the bowl with a peeled clove of garlic before making a tossed salad or insert slivers of garlic into a beef or pork roast before cooking. For a nice faint touch, rub a peeled clove on a warm platter before dishing up chicken or fish. • See recipes inside.

Buying and storing garlic

Fresh garlic is available year-round. Most of what we buy at the store is grown in California, although red garlic as well as white is grown and shipped from Mexico.

"Pick plump, firm, crisp heads," said Lois Thieleke, a home economist for the Michigan State University Extension — Oakland County. "Buy the heads loose, not in a package, so you can see they are free of soft spots."

Store garlic in a dark, cool, well-ventilated spot. Keep it out of the refrigerator.

Refrigeration makes garlic sprout. "Toss it, if you discover soft spots, green sprouts or yellowing," said Thieleke.

Garlic can be hung (not by the kitchen window), stored in a basket or in one of several types of ceramic or metal garlic keepers available in many stores.

Don't peel garlic until ready to use.

Garlic can be frozen indefinitely. "But," Thieleke warned, "store it in a freezer bag or container, otherwise your ice cream will taste like garlic."

Chef shares memorable moments, recipes

Nick Stellino invites readers into his kitchen, and shares unforgettable memories in "Cucina Amore," Easy-to-prepare Italian Recipes, (Doubleday, \$24.95).

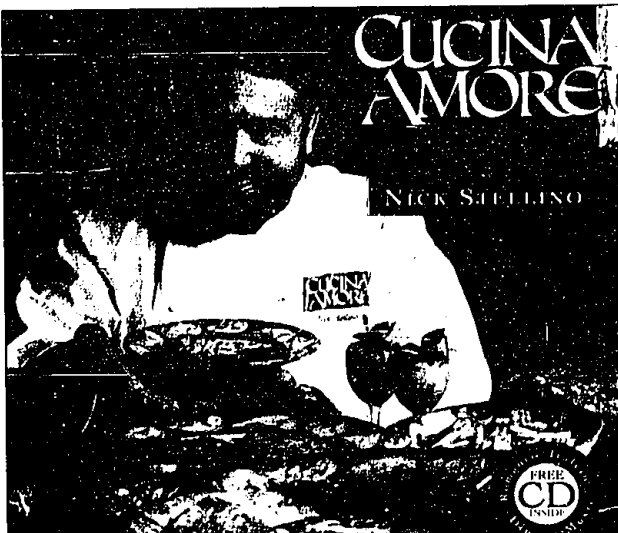
"Cucina Amore" is more than just a title," said Stellino. "Kitchen and love are irrevocably linked in my mind. Whether it was Mamma's strawberry dessert or the neighbor who lived upstairs in our apartment building who made me pasta with clam sauce, food was always prepared and eaten in a way that joined family and friends in unforgettable moments."

In "Cucina Amore" Stellino showcases traditional family recipes he enjoyed as a child in Palermo, Italy. "This is a dream come true for me," he said. "I call it the Renaissance of Italian cooking, because it's my chance to share the authentic family cooking that I think is one of the most powerful charms in the world."

Reading Stellino's book is like looking at someone's cherished family album. In addition to easy-to-prepare recipes, made with readily available ingredients, are black and white snapshots of family members, and little vignettes about them. Every recipe has a story behind it.

"Cucina Amore" also contains a CD of charming Italian dinner music to inspire the cook's creativity and enhance the diner's pleasure. Among the more familiar songs on the CD are "That's Amore" by Dean Martin, and Perry Como's "Anema E Core."

Stellino, 38, came to America to attend college and stayed on to work for seven years as a stockbroker with a Wall Street Corp. In 1981, he realized he would never be happy until he followed his heart, so he pursued his dream to work in a restaurant.



In the fall of 1982, while working as head chef at La Terraza, Stellino was "discovered" by an agency talent scout and eventually selected as the TV spokesman for Ragu Tomato Sauces. From that came nationwide exposure and recognition, and eventually a contract with West 178 Enterprises and KCTS/Seattle for a series on public television named "Cucina Amore." The program

airs locally 2:30 p.m. Saturdays on WTWS Detroit Channel 56

"This is a dream come true for me," said Stellino. "It's my chance to tell people what Italian food means to me, to show them the recipes that were the basis for many unforgettable moments in my life."

• See recipes inside.