

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

I'm hungry for simple good old-fashioned food

Here I sit, eying new non-stick, non-skid, guaranteed flat bottom pans and spatulas especially formulated for them. The pans cost a bugger'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 99 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 halls 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 eternally slimming pot at the end of a marble counter emitting tuna fish and egg salad sandwiches the way Sander's used to do.

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 Janes' 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) 983-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mailbox number 1886.

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 cooking.



Small bulb gains big popularity

BY CORINNE ABATT • SPECIAL WRITER

Remember the line from an old song paro-
dy about feeding the
babby garlic to find it in
the dark?

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

East Side Mario's, with restau-
rants 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 East
Side 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
blabs, this gets you out to have some fun." In addition to the reg-
ular menu, diners are given a
special garlic menu.

What mainstreamed garlic into
the American diet is the discov-
ery (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 anticon-
gestant, a germicide, a cancer reduc-
er and a preventive for premature
aging. In other words, many
regard it as something akin to an
elusive wonderworker.

Ruth Woods, manager of
Kitchen Glimmer in Orchard Lake
Mall, West Bloomfield, remem-
bered her Russian-born grandfa-
ther na 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 over-
powering." 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 inter-
esting 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-cloning
garlic press, garlic grater, garlic
slicer, garlic barker, ceramic garlic
keeper, and a pint-size garlic
collar. 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 econo-
mist for the Michigan State Univer-
sity 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
haven't used garlic may choose to
start out with a gentle, but cle-
ver use of garlic. Rub the bowl
with a peeled clove of garlic
before mashing a tossed salad or
inset 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."

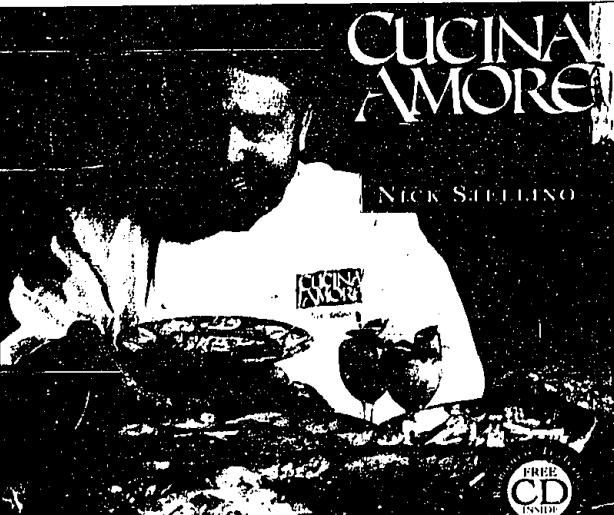
Reading Stellino's book is like looking at someone's cherished family album. In addition to easy-to-prepare recipes, it's filled with readily available ingredients, are black and white snapshots of family members, and little vignettes about them. Every recipe has a story behind it.

"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 "Amore, E Cosa."

Stellino, 38, came to America to attend college and started to work for seven years as a stockbroker with a Wall Street Corp. In 1991, he realized he would never be happy until he followed his heart, so he pursued his dream to work in a restaurant.

His first job was dishwasher. The lessons he learned from his family of cooks helped him rise from dishwasher to prep cook, to salad maker, to au pair, all the way to executive chef. During the next few years he worked with many of the country's most successful Italian chefs.

A series of professional internships followed where he learned the art of cooking at some of the top Italian restaurants in Los Angeles: Sports Club, Cafe Largo, Rosita's, Farfalla, and La Terrazza.



In the fall of 1992, while working as head chef at La Terrazza, Stellino was "discovered" by an agency talent scout and eventually selected as the TV spokesman for Regal Tomato Sauces. From that came nationwide exposure and recognition, and eventually a contract with West 175 Enterprises and KCTS/Seattle for a series on public television named "Cucina Amore." The program

airs locally 2:30 p.m. Saturdays on WTVS Detroit Channel 66.

"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.