

MONDAY, MARCH 4, 1996

## TASTE

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## TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

I've got a crush on  
flavorful cardamom

The tiny, dark, resinous seeds inside the pod of the cardamom plant have a complexity all their own. Crush one and you can smell its orange-rose scent. Taste one and you will notice a slightly sharp flavor of mint and lime with an undertone of camphor.

Because of its pungency, cardamom is a good match for other strong flavors. In Indian cooking, cardamom lends its characteristic warm perfume to curry and pilaf. Using it as a sweet spice, the Scandinavians put cardamom in their breads and buttery yeast dough. Bedouins create their famous Arabian coffee by infusing the drink with crushed cardamom pods.

Raised in tropical rain forest environments, the cardamom plant is a tuberous member of the ginger family. Since the plant takes up to four years to cultivate, and the pods must be hand-picked, cardamom, along with saffron and vanilla, is among the world's costliest spices.

## Buying tips

Instead of spending \$4-\$5 for a two ounce jar of cardamom at a local grocery store, I purchase cardamom pods in bulk from Raphael Spice in Detroit at the Eastern Market. For one dollar I can purchase more than enough cardamom for what my recipes call for.

The best cardamom money can buy is naturally grown cardamom. Most cardamom pods available to the general public have been bleached white strictly for aesthetic reasons. You might be lucky enough to find some green natural cardamom at Indian, Pakistani or specialty food markets.

Use cardamom judiciously because it can easily overpower food. A few of the tiny seeds inside the pod are plenty if you are going to pulverize them in a spice grinder or mash them into a powder using a mortar and pestle.

Fresh ground cardamom is frequently used as an ingredient in curry and in garam masala spice blends. Cardamom is outstanding when added to a beef, lamb or pork marinade and makes for an outstanding addition to homemade sausage.

Blend a little into sour cream or cream cheese and serve with bagels and lox. To impart a milder flavor, use the entire cardamom pod instead of the seeds. Add the whole pods to spicy stews, poached pears, and spice pickles. Cardamom is known for its hints of lemon and orange, so fresh grated lemon and orange rind can only compliment this spice. If you happen to own an ice cream machine, cardamom scented ice cream will certainly be appreciated solo or paired with a slice of fresh fruit pie.

I believe cooks should never purchase ground, powdered spices and herbs. They grow in spires (including cardamom) will lose a great deal of flavor once ground and allowed to stand. Therefore, whenever possible, I always recommend that you buy whole cardamom pods.

## Extracting seeds

To extract the cardamom seeds, break open the husk of the pod using the blunt end of a cleaver, a meat tenderizer or a flat wooden spoon. Once opened, you will notice three distinct sections of tiny dark seeds inside that are stuck together. Pick out the three sections of the seeds with a nut pick, skewer, or heavy toothpick. Break the sections apart with your fingers or use the back of a spoon to separate the seeds. You should be able to grind the seeds in a heavy bowl with the back of a spoon, but a mortar and pestle will work even better.

When using large amounts of cardamom seeds, I use a coffee grinder to pulverize the seeds. Before and after the grinder is used for spices, I grind a half slice of dry bread to clean the blades and to help rid the chopping chamber of spicy aromas.

Unfortunately, cardamom is one of those "exotic" spices that, to this day, momma wouldn't know what to do with even if she had it. I "discovered" cardamom in a soufflé about 20 years ago at the famed Drake Hotel in Chicago. I had always heard of the legendary food and service, and suffice to say, I was certainly impressed. If memory serves me correctly, the chef prepared a hazelnut soufflé scented with cardamom.

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:

- Celebrate National Nutrition Month.
- St. Patrick's Day recipes.

## Top chefs get ready for competition

Story by  
Keely Wygonik

Chef's choice: Chef David Iselti (left) of the Paint Creek Country Club, and a member of the 1996 Michigan Culinary Team and Chef Jeff Baldwin of Mac & Ray's present some of the dishes featured in "Mac & Ray's Olympiad Cookbook" at Norman's Eton Street Station in Birmingham.

Sometimes things turn out even better than you planned. "Our Sous Chef Ron Hokanson has a computer at home, and we were going to do a small in-house cookbook with recipes for some of our most-requested dishes," explained Jeff Baldwin, Executive Chef at Mac & Ray's harborfront restaurant in Harrison Township, and former corporate chef for Norman's Restaurant, which includes Norman's Eton Street Station in Birmingham. Then Norm LePage suggested we include recipes by chefs of Michigan's Culinary Team, and donate a portion of the proceeds to help them raise money to compete in the World Culinary Salon in Berlin this September.

Baldwin, who grew up in Orchard Lake, spent about six months testing and refining recipes. "I tried to pick recipes that are easy to do," he said. "I've done cooking classes before, and included tips in the book because people always ask for them." The illustrated spiral-bound cookbook, with four color pages of finished dishes, contains pictures of team members, and recipes for everything from appetizers, soups, salads, stews & sides, meat and poultry to pastry & desserts. Interesting anecdotes and information boxes are sprinkled throughout making it an enjoyable read.

"Mac & Ray's Olympiad Cookbook" sells for \$14.95, and is just one of the fundraisers for Michigan's Culinary Team, which still needs to raise \$30,000 to \$20,000 to pay expenses to the World Culinary Salon. The competition is to chefs what the Olympics are to athletes. It was started in 1900 in Frankfurt, Germany, and is held every four years. Chefs from over 20 nations compete.

On Feb. 20, Mac & Ray's hosted the Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza to celebrate Mardi Gras, and help the team. Guests sampled food and wine pairings prepared by local restaurants, and met current and former team members. Copies of "Mac & Ray's Olympiad Cookbook," written and designed by Ron Hokanson, recipes and concept by Jeff Baldwin, were available for purchase. "It was a fabulous event, and well attended," said LePage who explained the idea began when Roger Petri, director of operations at Mac & Ray's, and Judy Dunn,

president of Decanter Imports, were looking for a way to unite several area restaurants for an exceptional evening of food and wine. With the input from Baldwin and LePage, the group contacted Joseph Beato, Team Michigan manager and proprietor of Il Centro in Detroit, and Reid Ashton, president of the Golden Mushroom. "We intend to make it an annual event with proceeds to benefit the team, and provide culinary scholarships," said LePage. "We're excited, and hope the team will bring back lots of medals."

Participating in the World Culinary Salon requires a lot of commitment. "The team was formed about eight months ago," said Beato who participated in the 1998 competition. "We invited chefs who are members of the Michigan Chef de Cuisine Association to try out in April. We told them that we'd like to see chefs who had won at least

one gold medal in American Culinary Federation competition. We interviewed them to make sure they could stand a lot of pressure and heat, and picked the people we thought would make the best team."

Michigan Culinary Team 1996 consists of Randy Smith, Chef de Cuisine, Country Club of Jackson; Randy Emert (team captain) Sous Chef, Pike Street; Doug Ganhs, Sous Chef, Grosse Pointe Yacht Club; and David Iselti, Executive Chef, Paint Creek Country Club. Chef Mario Etomard of the Palace Grille, who was captain of the 1992 team, is helping Beato manage and coach.

There's a lot of pressure. Team members work full-time, practice, and help with fund-raising efforts.

"This spring I want them to concentrate on practicing," said Beato. "We ask different chefs in the area

to judge. They pick apart every dish, and show our chefs what they could improve upon. The judges in Berlin are looking for new, fresh ideas. Our judges, which include Certified Master Chefs who have competed before, are a driving force to help team members become the chef they never thought they were."

While their focus is on winning gold medals, the real prize is learning.

"They get to see what the best chefs in the world are doing, and bring ideas home to share them. That's why it's important to go," explained Beato. "When you go there you absorb a world a talent. We're blessed to have so much talent. I am quite happy with the team, and the progress they are making. I'm looking for good things."

• See recipes inside.

## "Mac &amp; Ray's Olympiad Cookbook"

Is available for purchase at:

■ Golden Mushroom, 18100 W. 10 Mile Road (at Southfield), Southfield, (810) 559-4230.

■ Il Centro, 670 Lothrop, Detroit, (313) 872-5110.

■ Mac & Ray's harborfront restaurant, 30675 North River Road, Harrison Township, (810) 453-9620.

■ Norman's Eton Street Station, 245 S. Eton (at Maple), Birmingham, (810) 647-7774.

■ Pike Street, 18 W. Pike (two blocks east of Woodward), Pontiac, (810) 334-7878.

■ Kitchen Glamour stores

■ Novi, Novi Town Center, (off I-96, Novi exit), (810) 380-8600.

■ Redford, 26770 Grand River, (313) 537-1300.

■ Rochester, Great Lakes Mall (Hollister & Livernois), (810) 652-0402.

■ West Bloomfield, Orchard Mall (Maple & Orchard Lake Road), (810) 655-4468.

## Knockout presentations pair food, wine



If anyone doubted the interest of area residents in matching wine and food, this thought was dispelled when over 1,100 enthusiasts

crowded the Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza at Mac & Ray's restaurant in Harrison Township to celebrate Mardi Gras.

A team of wine and food writers that included as judged the restaurant competition based on 100 points divided among five categories: overall table presentation and display, visual presentation of food, food composition and quality, quality of wine selection and food pairing with wine. Chefs from 20 restaurants went all out to create eye-catching, flavorful dishes and local wine purveyors achieved many stellar wine and food matches. The knockout combination was created by Brian Polcyn, chef/owner

of Five Lakes Grill in Milford. His Seared Sea Scallop with Smoked Salmon, Carrot and Leek Salad was, in our opinion, in perfect harmony with 1989 Pommery Vintage Brut Champagne (\$40). We gave it 20 out of 20 points in the food pairing with wine category.

"I was pleased when Vintage Wine Company chose to pair Pommery Champagne with a dish I would create," Polcyn said. "I know Pommery Champagne well; it's one of my personal favorites and I have visited the cellars in France. The recipe is an original creation and it had its first presentation at the Food & Wine Extravaganza."

Polcyn dubbed Champagne Pommery as "a classic champagne" with "unbeatable creaminess." He says he viewed salmon as a classic match with champagne and then balanced the wine's creaminess with natural seafood sweetness of Georges Bank unseasoned sea scallops obtained fresh from Foley's Seafood in Boston.

"It's important to use unseasoned scallops because they have less moisture and more meat," Polcyn

explained. "Scallops and salmon were the balancing act, but a perfect wine and food match also needs a recognizable contrast and I achieved that by creating a sharpness with chive oil and leeks."

Chef Derin Moore from Pike Street Restaurant in Pontiac captured the second best winning combination of Spicy Lamb Sausage with Mediterranean Couscous Salad and Currried Sundried Tomato Vinaigrette paired with 1993 Atlas Peak Sangiovese (\$16). It's interesting to note that Moore was assistant when Polcyn was the executive chef at Pike Street. When Moore learned about his ranking in the competition he jokingly said, "I guess I'm still the student, but I'll never complain about coming in second to Brian."

Moore, who created his recipe especially for the wine and food event, said he picked up flavor clues when he tasted the wine and immediately thought of spice and a full spectrum of Mediterranean flavors. "All the flavors of the couscous ingredients blend together and they

## WINE SELECTIONS

■ Bannister Wines are at long last available in Michigan, but in very limited quantity. Mary Bannister has quickly preferred to sell for her small case production. The 1993 Russian Five Valley Chardonnay, Allen Vineyard (\$19.95) is stunning with a blend of aromas and flavors. The subtle toasty notes in the finish are intriguing. The 1993 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel from Bradford Mountain Vineyard (\$16) will please all lovers with its lively blackberry and berry flavors enhanced with a black peppered finish in the finish.

■ We seldom get excited when a winery announces it is producing a new chardonnay, but this time was different. Shaler Vineyard's 1994 Red Shoulder Ranch Chardonnay (\$23) is a wine that grabs your attention. It is Shaler's first ever single-vineyard designated chardonnay named for the red shouldered hawk which patrol the vineyard in the Carneros region. Hawks play a significant role in the winery's ridding practices and control gnats which can destroy a vineyard. The wine is multi-layered, rich and extracted.

need a heady wine with bold flavors as a complement," Moore explained. "The broad range of compatible flavors holds up to a big wine like the Atlas Peak Sangiovese."

To leave a message on the Heald's voice mail - dial (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1884. See recipes inside.