

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1997

TASTE

B

MASTER CHEF



MILOS CIHELKA

Shop carefully for freshest fish

With modern transportation methods it is possible in many U.S. cities to purchase, for example, fresh Norwegian farm-raised salmon one day after its been harvested. In most metropolitan areas, freshwater fish is also readily available. However, when it comes to saltwater fish, the availability of really fresh fish is often a problem.

A number of years ago we had "day boats," which left docks in the evening, fished all night, and returned with their catch in the morning. That was really fresh fish. Today, because of the depletion of fish stocks, day boat fishermen can't catch enough fish to economically survive. Therefore, we rely on larger fishing boats that may stay on the water fishing for as long as three weeks. Ice is shoveled over each day's catch and the sheer weight of it and the time the fish stays on board take their toll.

On the North Atlantic shores, these fish are sold at auctions. There may be three price groups for the same species off the same boat, depending on its age and condition. Buyers from fish wholesalers (such as M.F. Foley in Boston) that sell to high quality stores, restaurants and clubs, will pay a price premium for fish caught the last two days of fishing, which is called "the top catch." This very fresh fish seldom shows up in the average supermarket because of the price difference.

What do we look for if we want to buy really fresh fish? First, observe how they keep the fish in the store. The fish cabinet should be clean and orderly. Whole fish should be buried in ice, not just laid on top. Fillets should be displayed in a manner ensuring their temperature at a constant 32 degrees F. Use your nose. If there is an unpleasant, fishy odor, then the product being sold is of poor quality.

Whole fish have clear, bulging eyes, the gills are bright red or pink, the color of the skin is bright, and the scales are firmly attached. Cuts of large fish should have a bright color, fillets have a natural shine, no blood bruises, and the edges are not frayed. Above all, fish should have a sweet sea or cucumber-like smell. If you are not allowed to smell the fish in the store, do so as soon as possible after the purchase. Any foul odor, a hint of ammonia or yeast, and you better take it back.

Fish fillets

Be careful when buying skinned fish fillets. The origin and correct species of the fish are also important. The skin provides a clue. Quite often skinned fillets are sold as something else, always more expensive. Skinned "Florida Red" snapper is seldom that. More likely it is a cheaper cousin from South America.

Whole fish and steaks are also commonly advertised as of different origin: "Native" swordfish could be Chilean and of much lesser quality. "Norwegian" salmon may also be Chilean or Canadian, even Pacific. So called "Bay Scallops" are often called "calico," very inferior to the taste of the real bays.

Poaching fish

Many people believe that food has to be browned to taste good. It is not necessarily so. Poached fish gives us not only a very moist, flavorful product, but it also eliminates the fishy smell in the house, is healthier, easily digestible and makes cleaning up a snap.

What is poaching? It means cooking a product submerged in liquid at temperatures between 165 and 180 degrees F. Higher temperatures result in boiling, which is OK for potatoes, but causes fish, and poultry, to become dry and crumbly.

Fatty and firm flesh are especially well suited for poaching. Use a meat thermometer to monitor the water temperature. Add your favorite herbs and spices, or a splash of vinegar. The fish may be portioned into steaks or fillets.

To check for doneness in a steak: push a fork into the spine bone; when the fish is done, the bone will pull out easily.

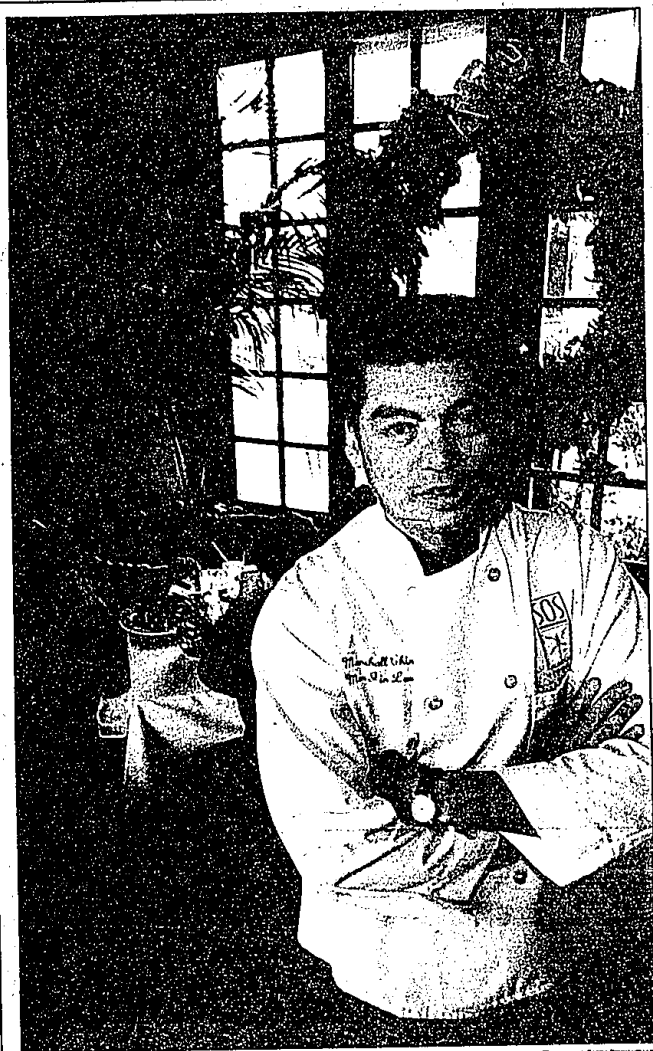
To check for doneness in a fillet: slide a wide spatula half way under the fish, then lift the center of it up. Look inside the flesh - when done, the flesh is opaque (not translucent). Remove the fish and the crack will seal again.

Chef Milos Cihelka is a Certified Master Chef and Bloomfield Hills resident. Formerly executive chef of the Golden Mushroom, Cihelka enjoys sharing his knowledge of cooking with others.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Focus on Wine
- Celebrate National Nutrition Month



Competition winner: Mon Jin Lau's chef/proprietor Marshall Chin won first place in the Michigan Culinary Food and Wine Extravaganza.

Prize-winners

- First place - Chef Marshall Chin, Mon Jin Lau, 1515 E. Maple, Troy (810) 689-2332
- Second place - Chef Tim Ginzsky, Opus One, 565 E. Larned, Detroit (313) 961-7766
- Third place - Chef Ron Hofer, Luglis Downtown, 104 Macomb, Mt. Clemens (810) 468-7200

Local chefs go to toque to toque to pair food and wine

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Area foodies are learning that the place to be on Mardi Gras is the Annual Michigan Culinary Food and Wine Extravaganza at Mac and Ray's harborfront restaurant on Lake St. Clair's Anchor Bay. The event is a benefit for the Michigan Culinary Team and Scholarship Fund.

The Michigan Culinary Team competes in the World Culinary Salon (culinary equivalent of the Olympics) every four years. Team Michigan 1996 brought home seven medals including one gold.

This year, 25 of metro Detroit's top restaurants and chefs were invited to go to toque to toque. Each created a table display, designed a recipe and matched it with a wine available through one of the area's wine purveyors who also participated. Preparations were of Olympic stature! We, along with a few other area food writers, judged the restaurants and assigned a maximum of 20 points in each of five categories: overall table presentation and display; visual presentation of food; food composition and quality; quality of wine selection; and food pairing/compatibility with wine. Competition was stiff. Only one point out of a possible 100 separated first and second place. Less than a point differentiated third place from second.

First place and trophy winner was Troy's Mon Jin Lau where chef/proprietor Marshall Chin designed Thai Chicken with Peanut Sauce and Rice Noodles to harmonize with the 1995 Etude Pinot Blanc. Chin credits Nov's Decanter Imports vice president Michael Kilano for "nailing the match." Kilano favors two regular menu items at Mon Jin Lau: an appetizer of Thai Chicken on Bamboo with Peanut Sauce and Sizzling Thai Chicken with Peanut Sauce, an entree. When his wine company was paired with Mon Jin Lau for the competition and Chin said he wanted to do a Thai chicken recipe, Kilano sensed a harmony with

See TOQUE, 2B

MAIN-DISH MIRACLE

Entertain uncertainty with quick turkey dish

BY MURIEL G. WAGNER
REGISTERED DIETITIAN

February and March can be fickle. You never know when an ice or snow storm is in the works. During this uncertain time, it's always better to expect the unexpected. Dinner's no problem when it's built around ingredients that can be conveniently kept in the freezer and pantry.

Turkey Breast Scallopini with artichokes and mushrooms is an elegant response to the question - "What's for Dinner?" It's not budget busting, accommodates your new healthful eating program, is fancy enough to serve company, and tastes wonderful. And, if you're veal is in fat, but did you know that turkey is lower in cholesterol than veal?

Artichoke hearts packed in water add an elegant low calorie touch. They come already cut in quarters, but if you can't find them, it takes no time to cut them up. I like to cook the mushrooms in the microwave until they release their water. I discard the water. Since it takes only about 3 to 4 minutes, you can do this while the turkey is browning. Canned, whole mushrooms can be substituted, but they lack the flavor of fresh. Italian seasoning is an herb blend found in the spice section of your local market.

I use an expensive, but drinkable white

wine rather than cooking wine in this recipe because it's more palate-pleasing and lower in sodium. Some cooking wines have added salt.

If wine is not a usual part of your cooking repertoire, double the chicken broth. Frying the turkey breast pasta, mixed with some flat leaf parsley, chopped fresh, seeded plum tomatoes, and sliced ripe olives makes an interesting side dish. If this isn't available, rice can be substituted. I like to cook my rice in chicken broth for added flavor.

This whole meal, including making a green salad, should take less than 25 minutes to prepare, even for inexperienced cooks.

Turkey Breast Scallopini is one of Myra Petoczky's favorite dishes. "It's a pleasure to eat something that tasty and know that it's also healthy," said Petoczky who lives in West Bloomfield. "Everyone loves it. No one realizes that it is so low in fat and calories."

Muriel G. Wagner is a registered dietitian and nutritional therapist with an office in Southfield. She publishes "Eating Younger," a quarterly newsletter filled with recipes and nutrition tips. To subscribe to "Eating Younger," send a check or money order for \$13.50 to Eating Younger, P.O. Box 63021, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069. Look for Muriel's column on the last Sunday of the month in Taste.

TURKEY BREAST SCALLOPINI

- 1 pound Turkey Breast Tenderloins, cut into four portions
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons Italian seasoning
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 clove (or more) garlic, chopped
- 1 can (13.7 ounce) artichoke hearts, quartered and drained
- 1/2 pound fresh mushrooms
- 1/2 cup low sodium chicken broth
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 fresh lemon, quartered

Pound the tenderloins with a mallet or cleaver until 1/3-inch thickness. Combine flour and Italian seasoning in a plastic bag. Shake the tenderloins in the closed bag until well coated with the flour mixture.

Heat olive oil in a nonstick skillet on low heat. Add chopped garlic. Cook over low heat until garlic is softened. Do not brown. Add turkey and brown on both sides until the center is no longer pink.

Remove turkey, but do not discard pan juices or browned bits. Cook mushrooms covered on high for 3-4 minutes in the microwave until they release their juices. Drain. Add to skillet with artichokes, wine and broth. Heat for 10 minutes until liquid becomes syrupy. This will not thicken. Return turkey to pan and reheat to serving temperature.

Remove to plate and squeeze the juice of the quartered lemon over each piece. Serves four.

Nutrition values per 4 ounce serving: Calories = 205; Fat = 4.4g; Saturated fat = 0.5g; Sodium = 262 mg; Cholesterol = 60mg; Diabetic exchanges: 3 lean meat, 2 vegetable.