

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Chefs create superior food, wine matches

This year's Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza, celebrating Mardi Gras at Mac & Ray's was not only a food showcase, but a seminar on pairing food and wine.

Chefs from area restaurants teamed with wine purveyors to create some stellar food and wine matches. Troy's Men Jin Lau, the winner a few years ago, impressed the panel of judges that included us, and walked away with first prize again. Last year's winner, Café Cortina in Farmington Hills, came in a very close second.

Wino Picks
Picks of the week:
1997 St. Clement Arapeau, Napa Valley \$40 is a dynamic blend of cabernet, sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc comparing admirably with top chateau bottlings from Bordeaux.
1997 Stag's Leap Vineyard, Napa Valley \$25 is hands down the best syrah we've tasted from the 1997 vintage.
Red deals under \$10:
1999 Santa Rita 120 Sauvignon Blanc \$8
1999 Geyser Peak Sauvignon Blanc \$9
1998 Biering Shiraz (Australia) \$8

Food styles at these restaurants are among the trendiest. Mon Jin Lau specializes in Nu-Asean while Café Cortina may well be the most Italian of the area's Italian restaurants.

Mon Jin Lau

Marshall Chin, Mon Jin Lau's chef-owner, prepared a flavorful Chicken with Peanut Sauce on a Sesame Noodle Bed. Decanter Imports' Michael Kilano chose 1998 Chalone Vineyard Pinot Blanc as the "perfect" match.

"I focused on the weight of the wine and its flavors versus the dominant flavors in the dish," Kilano said. "The Chalone Pinot Blanc's 'weight' in its creaminess with some vanilla accents. It created an immediate harmony with the rich peanut sauce and brought all other elements together."

"The basic rule of white wines and white meats and red wines with red meats is still a good one. I started there, then knew a high acid wine such as a sauvignon blanc would not work with the peanut sauce. A chardonnay would have too much oak. The pinot blanc had the correct balance."

Tip one: Old rules are good basics to help focus on weight, a textural element creating balance between the food and wine.

Café Cortina

Owner Adrian Tonon paired Café Cortina's Tortelloni con Pomodoro Fresco with light herb cream sauce and the 1998 Allegrini Palazzone della

Please see WINE, D3



Memorable: Luctor International's Vincent Vodka bottle pictures an art gallery with some of Van Gogh's most famous paintings.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Salon team wins
- A vegetarian's cookbook

The International language

COOKING TOGETHER BRIDGES GAP BETWEEN CULTURES

BY NANCY DEUTSCH
SPECIAL WRITER

My mother-in-law searches for something in the cupboard.

"Namac?" I ask. She nods fervently. I pull down the pepper. She shakes her head. I have mixed up salt and pepper again. I hand her the salt.

"I thought salt was felfol," I explain.

She smiles, pours a healthy dash into the pot, and continues to cook. Then she offers me a taste.

Sedighah Najmadi and I have just communicated the best way we know how. Since we do not speak the same language (my mother-in-law is Iranian and speaks Farsi), and my husband and stepson are not around to interpret the entire six weeks of her visit, we have learned to communicate through a variety of means.

We use sign language, facial expressions, and pointing. We also use cooking.

Cooking together, or separately—as we hover around each other taking notes—has proven to be a wonderful way to get to know each other better.

Maman, as I call her, which is Persian for mother, knows that I want to learn to cook more Persian dishes. She is equally interested in learning more "North American" dishes.

For her birthday meal recently, she requested lasagna. I was glad to comply. But I have also introduced her to the odd dish of Malaysian or



STAFF PHOTOS BY PAUL BLANCHARD

Persian dishes: It's dinnertime with dishes of Baghali Pollo (Rice with Fava Beans and Dill), Khorosht-e Gheimeh (Stewed Beef or Lamb with Yellow Split Peas) and Khorosht-e Esfanaaj (Spinach Sauce).

Hungarian origin since I enjoy a variety of ethnic dishes. Thankfully, she will eat anything except pork.

There are a myriad of Persian dishes that rely on the same basic ingredients, but each has a small variation that totally changes the taste of the food.

Persian food is rich in fresh spices and vegetables. A Persian dish might include eggplant, basmati rice (a heavily scented rice common in Indian cooking), lent, lamb, fresh dill, and beans. The aroma as my mother-in-law cooks is enough to entice

the most reticent of appetites. My three-year-old daughter is a big fan.

When Maman visits every year or two, we spend most of our time together in the kitchen. I will ask Maman how to pronounce something or how long it needs to cook. Maman understands more English than I do Farsi, so many of my questions are answered one way or another. We laugh as we try to come to a mutual understanding.

We are also each other's biggest fans. If I cook, I am sure she will tell me it is delicious. I am equally complimentary. After all, we all know food tastes better when someone else has done the work!

My mother-in-law always arrives from Iran with special items difficult to find here, such as Sumac (a spice used frequently in Persian dishes), fresh dates, and a tart dried red berry I still don't know the name of, used in rice dishes (there are some things even my husband can't translate). When she returns to Iran, she

leaves behind enough to last me a long while as I try to replicate her cooking.

But cooking is not just a way to find a common footing. Cooking for each other has also become a way for us to express our affection.

When I returned from a few days away, my mother-in-law presented me with my favorite dessert from her repertoire: a cake made of dates. When she seems tired, I prepare dinner before she has the chance. On the day she arrived in the States, I had prepared an elaborate Persian dish. I have no doubt it did not taste like anything a Persian woman has ever made. That didn't matter.

It is the effort we make for each other that is important.

Maman and I are very different. We follow different religions, politics and lifestyles. Our basic difference is language. Thanks to cooking, we are able to communicate in a way that is fun, easy and invariably delicious.

Nancy Deutsch is a Canton resident. Share your stories about the language of cooking, and recipes with Ken Abramczyk, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or e-mail kabramczyk@ec.homecomm.net. See recipes inside.



Time to eat: Sedighah dishes up some dinner while Nancy watches.

RECIPES TO SHARE

Sauerkraut ribs, Southern-style soup add twist to old favorites

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK

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It must be what Jeanne Lamb does with the sauerkraut that livens up her country-style spare ribs.

Lamb made her ribs and sauerkraut dish for her children and it is one they still enjoy today when they visit her in her Canton home.

"I prepare this dish when I want a quick meal," Lamb said. "It's easy to make. They really like the sauerkraut, and the honey really gives it a sweeter taste."

The sauerkraut is rinsed with tap water, then given a taste of honey and a spoonful of brown sugar. After an hour of baking with the ribs, the end result is a great accompaniment and a great meal.

Lamb said she purchases her ribs at Eastern Market of Canton or Mike's Market in Livonia. She recommends serving apple sauce, baked or mashed potatoes or a salad with her dish.

Another reader wrote us about her chicken butternut squash soup, what she described as a delicious Southern-style soup.

"My family enjoys this new recipe from the Libby family of Memphis," wrote Rita Kollin of Rochester Hills. "It is a traditional Henukka dish for the Libby family and now with ours."

"This soup is great for a cold night with latkes or garlic bread."

SAUERKRAUT WITH COUNTRY-STYLE RIBS

- 3 to 4 pounds country-style spare ribs
- 1 32-ounce jar sauerkraut
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1/2 cup raw or brown sugar
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 bottle of ketchup (or 7 ounces)

Broil ribs until browned (or brown in pan on top of stove) to cook off excess fat. Rinse sauerkraut thoroughly. Combine with honey, sugar, onion and ketchup.

Place in roaster and top with spare ribs. Season meat with additional ketchup or barbecue sauce. Cover. Bake in moderate oven (350°F) for one hour or until meat is tender.

CHICKEN AND BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

- 1 (4-pound) chicken, cut up
- 8 cups water
- 3 cubes Knorr bouillon
- 4 tomatoes, cut up
- 2 cups butternut squash, peeled and cut, 1/2-inch pieces

- 2 cups frozen corn
- 3 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 3 cups frozen sliced okra (optional)

Place chicken, water and bouillon in a heavy pot. Bring to a boil, skimming surface. Add all remaining ingredients. Reduce heat, simmer until chicken is cooked through or about 40 minutes. When chicken is cooked, cut into bite-sized pieces. Return to soup, simmer 10 more minutes. Yield: 10 servings.

Everyone knows the best recipes are the ones you share. Send us your favorite original recipe, and if it is chosen to be featured in the Recipe to Share on the third Sunday of the month in Taste, we'll send you a cookbook.

Send recipes for consideration in Recipe to Share to Ken Abramczyk, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (734) 691-7279, or e-mail kabramczyk@ec.homecomm.net.

Please include a daytime phone number and the best time to call, so we can contact you about your recipe. Try to be as specific with recipe details such as can and package sizes.