

Sunday, March 25, 2001

CULINARY ADVENTURES



BRUCE KONOWALOW

*A morel dilemma:
Go with a pro
to identify them*

Michigan and morels are heavenly words for those of us who salivate, knowing that the long-awaited harvest will begin soon.

This edible fungi, prized by mycologists (mushroom hunters) and foodies alike, is one of the primary pleasures of early spring.

In and around Boyne City, Mich., tight-lipped mushroom hunters traipse off to their secret spots in the woods, searching for this elusive and (when purchased in a store) costly culinary delight.

Nothing guaranteed

There are no guarantees where morels will grow consistently, but they seem to prefer undisturbed forest floors and areas that house large oak, elm and ash trees. Apple orchards, black cherry trees and areas subjected to forest fires can create the preferred environment, if the rainfall and the temperature are just right. It is this uncertainty that makes it incredibly difficult to cultivate these mushrooms commercially.

In the Midwest, there is believed to be three varieties of morel – the yellow morel, the black morel, and the half-free morel.

The prized black morel is usually found in the last two weeks of April and the first two weeks in May. Every Mother's Day weekend, Boyne City hosts the National Mushroom Hunting Championship. Contestants have 90 minutes to scour the woods and turn in the largest cache of morels.

By the end of May, they cannot be found.

In the Midwest, there is believed to be three varieties of morel – the yellow morel, the black morel, and the half-free morel. Black morels can be as small as 1/2-inch high to over 2 inches tall. Some consider the yellow morel the best tasting; they are sometimes referred to as gray morels. The half-free morel is very tasty, but more fragile than the others are. The half-free is sometimes confused with another spring mushroom called the verpa, which is somewhat poisonous. The basic rule of thumb in mushroom hunting is "if in doubt, throw it out."

Watch what you eat

A good rule to follow for morels is "Do not swallow if the cavity is not swallowed." If you slice a morel open, you will find there is no flesh in the inside, just the occasional insect or worm.

Both false and real morels contain a chemical that causes a violent reaction with alcohol. True morels may contain trace amounts; false morels contain larger doses. With that in mind, it is probably best to go out with somebody that has experience and knowledge before you take any unnecessary risks. Downing a couple of cold ones during your hot pursuit is probably a bad idea, if you intend on eating large quantities of your catch.

If you are not the outdoors type they can be purchased either in the fresh or dried state. It is not uncommon to pay more than \$20 a pound for fresh morels, depending on the available supply. Dried morels are more readily available, however they may be as much as \$90 a pound.

Both fresh and dry morels should be washed, as they can be sandy. Fresh morels often contain worms or insects. The morels' earthy flavor makes them the tastiest of all mushrooms.

Bruce Konowalow is the director of the Culinary Arts Department at Schoolcraft College and a Taste columnist. Konowalow is a former director of the New York Restaurant School in New York City.

See related recipe inside Taste.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Easter eggs
- 2 Unique

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FAMIE ON SURVIVING FAMIE



Chef's next project is promoting new cookbook

Famie's Adventures in Cooking

Published by Sleeping Bear Press
Availability: Borders Books & Music and other area bookstores, \$29.95

Breakdown: First three chapters showcase 33 of Famie's favorite recipes for dishes he served in metropolitan Detroit at Chez Raphael, Les Auteurs and Orange Grill; subsequent sections take on regional cuisine for such areas as Vietnam

By NICOLE STAFFORD
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Detroit Chef Keith Famie lost 27 pounds as a *Survivor* II cast member. "From 170 to 143," he says, speaking on his cell phone on route to the Towne Center in Southfield. "There's the saying I lost my baby fat. I refer to it as losing chef fat. Unfortunately, my chef appetite has kicked back in."

Famie's hunger for media attention, well, just keeps kicking.

He has returned from the Australian Outback, but is still alive on the No. 1 CBS reality television show, which concludes May 3. Back home in West Bloomfield, Famie has a cookbook – and, hey, who knows what else fame, and maybe fortune, will bring – to tout.

Just last Wednesday, for example, Famie



Book circuit: Chef Keith Famie also has been doing book signings to promote *Famie's Adventures in Dining* (\$29.95 Sleeping Bear Press). At Borders Books & Music in downtown Birmingham, he signs one for Catherine Harris of Pleasant Ridge.

was spotted doing lunch at Mei Ling, a vegetarian Chinese restaurant in West Bloomfield. Along for the tofu, was Famie's *Survivor* comrade Michael Skupin of White Lake Township and two mystery men, one of whom was feverishly pitching clothing lines and speaking engagements to the two *Survivors*. Suffice to say cell phones were in abundance.

In any case, retreat into anonymity simply is not on the plate for this chef. Soggy rice is no fail for Famie.

And while he's open to new opportunities, he plans to continue taping his local cooking show for WDIV Channel 4.

"I would, no question, like to see an opportunity to do something in the national arena, but I'm not going to pick up and go to Hollywood. This is where I live and this is where my children live."

To promote the cookbook, *Famie's Adventures in Dining* (\$29.95 Sleeping Bear Press), a launch party, complete with celebrity appearances, is slated April 6 at The Marriott at Centerpoint hotel in Pontiac to benefit the Rainbow Connection.

Famie will help cook for the event's strolling dinner. And an auction which includes a chance to win dinner cooked by Famie, with Skupin as maitre d'. When the moment is ripe, another *Survivor* cast member, Marilyn Hershey, will join the event's entertainment and sing.

"Now, they're friends of mine," says Famie of the cast member appearances, which may include a few surprise ones.

Book signings, media interviews, publicity propositions all tied to *Survivor*. Isn't it a bit irritating to a chef coming out with his first cookbook?

"It's only natural," says Famie. Besides, it benefits his charity, The Rainbow Connection, his book and the publisher, Sleeping Bear Press. "There's no question that the book now has a newer and broader audience," says Famie.

Book party adventure

What: Book release party for *Famie's Adventures in Dining* featuring strolling dinner prepared by Chef Keith Famie and the Marriott Parkway Grill's Chef Jerry Nottage, entertainment by Stewart Frank and drawing for two round-trip airline tickets to Sydney, Australia

Appearances: Chef Keith Famie and his *Survivor* television show comrades Michael Skupin and Marilyn Hershey
When: 6:30 p.m. Friday, April 6
Where: Marriott at Centerpoint, 3600 Centerpoint Parkway in Pontiac
Tickets: \$75 per person or \$125 per couple to benefit the Rainbow Connection, call (248) 338-7760

Back story

In fact, Famie's book was to be released in October after a contract with Sleeping Bear was signed the month before. Just weeks before the scheduled launch, Famie called the publisher and explained he had to leave town on business.

"We were stunned," recalls Beth Flintoft, publicist at Sleeping Bear. "We were like we can't really release a cookbook without the chef, so we called the printer and said 'don't print.'"

The following January, Flintoft was on business in Paris and in search of an American newspaper. "I walked by and saw there's an English newspaper I can read," it was *USA Today*, which had done a front page story about the new *Survivor* cast.

Later, Famie called Sleeping Bear's president, Brian Lewis, to apologize and explain that he wasn't able to reveal he was headed to Australia to tape *Survivor*.

Given the circumstances, Sleeping Bear decided to re-shoot the book's cover, placing Famie, rather than one of his culinary creations, on the front. The book's original title, *Famie's Adventures in Dining*, worked perfectly.

Q & A la Famie

"Do you know where the Towne Center is?" inquires Famie, breaking out of interview mode, still talking via cell phone. "It's made up of a couple of buildings, OK," he says, "So, I'm in the right place. Go ahead. Next question."

"What's the first food he ate after *Survivor*?" "I can't tell you that," he says. "I ate like a barbarian," he does say, emphasizing the word "barbarian."

"I can tell you I had a lunch meeting in Detroit soon after I got back. And I had two servings of bread pudding."

What about food cravings?

Please see FAMIE, D2

Going costal with wines from Mendocino

California touts its "costal" wine regions. North of San Francisco, costal, in the minds of many, means the larger Napa Valley and Sonoma County appellations. What about Mendocino County? It's the northernmost of California's costal wine-growing regions and not that well known.

Recognized for its ruggedly beautiful land, the Mendocino area attracted pioneers such as the Pomo and Yuki Indians 5,000 years ago and back-to-the-land settlers in the last 30 years. Home to 30 wineries today, Mendocino County extends the youthful promise of bountiful opportunity that is both the myth and reality of the West.

Mendocino wineries range in size from small, hand-operated family cellars to large, high-tech facilities. The vineyards are equally varied with old, head-pruned varieties to those with modern trellis systems. A pioneering spirit is all pervasive and sensed in the wines of the area.

The years following California's 1850s Gold Rush witnessed the first planting of

wine grape varieties. Immigrant farmers who failed as prospectors, turned to agriculture as a way of life in their new homeland. They knew to choose flat land for food crops and rugged hillsides for grapes. Prohibition killed early wine industry promise.

The 1960s wine boom inspired the revival and replanting of wine grapes. Through the 1970s and especially the 1980s, winemaking expanded due principally to the efforts of Parducci Wine Cellars and Fetzer Vineyards. Their success inspired others to come to the region, especially since the cost of vineyard acreage is more reasonable than in Napa or Sonoma.

Today's focus

Attention in the region has turned to a refined focus on particular grape varieties and achieving distinctive wine styles that are different from other costal growing areas.

Since chardonnay remains the number one consumer wine choice, even with the enthusiasm for red wines, we thought it would be interesting to learn whether Mendocino chardonnays had a defined thread, a distinction not common in chardonnay from other California wine regions.

A tasting revealed that the best Mendocino chardonnays showcased flavorful pineapple and tropical fruit, but came across leaner and more French Chablis-like, creating a good harmony with foods, especially seafood.

In this category, the 1998 Handley Estate \$16, 1999 Bonterra Vineyards \$15 and 1999 Greenwood Ridge Vineyards, Mendocino Ridge, DuPratt Vineyard \$24 scored highest. Handley is the most Chablis-like while Bonterra and Greenwood Ridge sport a touch more oak, but not overdone.

The 1999 Husc La Ribera Vineyards \$18 had nice pineapple and tropical fruit

Wine Picks
■ Pick of the pack: 1999 Morgan Pinot Noir, Monterey \$22. Lovely wine and a very good value.
■ Zinfections: 1997 Mazocco Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley \$16 and 1998 Gutierrez-Burgette Morse Vineyard Zinfandel \$18.
■ Tired of too much oak in California chardonnays? Wines from the Chablis area of northern Burgundy in France offer some of the purest chardonnay flavors without oak. It's hard to beat these from Domaine Roger Seguinot: 1995 AOC Chablis \$18 has richer mouthfeel than most AOC Chablis; 1998 Vieilles Vignes (64-year-old vines) \$17 is richer and more generous than the AOC; 1999 Fourchaume \$20 is deliciously fruity with citrus, lime, apple and some typical mineral notes.

Please see WINE, D2

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