

taste buds
chef Larry Janes



Spaghetti and sauce to sample

The history of pasta is almost as tangled as a bowl of vermicelli. Many authorities credit Marco Polo with bringing the noodle from China to Italy. I can handle that, but it was my friend Chef Boyardee who really discovered what a good, thick rich sauce did for those gossamer ribbons.

In most culinary circles, it is more important to be aware of how you twirl the spaghetti around your fork than from whence it came. (By the way, true Italians laugh when they see us use a spoon for fork twirling.) Practitioners of the noble art of pasta devouring claim it's all in the wrist.

In this country, our version of pasta has been drowned in a sea of tomato sauce. Only recently have we begun to appreciate the dazzling choice of sauces that accompany pasta abroad. One of the best ways to explore some of these lesser-known sauces and adornments is to give what the Romans call "una spaghettiata," a big spaghetti bash. If you know several people whose palates are prepared for a lusty adventure, invite them for an evening featuring perfectly cooked pasta with a sampler of sauces.

You probably know someone who runs in marathons. What better food for them to enjoy than something high in carbohydrates. A few of my fitness junkie friends have actually laid claim to eating a bowl of pasta for breakfast the day of the run for added "good carbs" (whatever they might be).

A CHIEF WHOSE home was in Florence, Italy, tried once to describe to me the proper way to test spaghetti for doneness. "It must be cooked 'al dente' or to a 'soft chewiness,' but the only way I can describe it is when you throw strands of pasta against the wall — and they stick. If they fall down, it isn't cooked. If they stick — bellissimo!"

Naturally, I thought that was his idea of a little joke. Can you imagine what his walls looked like? One evening, after preparing a platter of profound pericelli (small pierced pasta twice as thick as spaghetti but hollow like macaroni) and dousing a few liters of Chianti with friends, we tried it and it really did work.

Of course, it was a good three minutes of trying that my dog (Jack, the Wonderdog) truly enjoyed because he got to eat the stuff that was still a little too "al dente."

A word of advice, though. Don't cook the pasta until the very last moment, when all the sauces are ready and you're only a few minutes from announcing dinner. Always use a large potful of boiling water so the pasta has room to "move" through the pot. This alleviates sticking. Also, if making pasta from scratch, allow yourself plenty of space and lots of red wine.

A word about the cheese to sprinkle with: Forget the green plastic canister of that so-called "cheese" that has been in the fridge since last May. Try some fresh-grated parmesan. (Can be purchased already grated from the deli.) Well-aged parmesan has a faint golden color and an elusive flavor of nuts.

Romano is white, saltier and sturdier, but some prefer it to parmesan. My favorite, asiago, which originated in the provinces, is nuttier and more flavorful than parmesan or romano but very hard to find. Italians never serve cheese with a seafood sauce, but you can load on the cheese. If you like — I'll never tell. Bon appetit!

HOMEMADE PASTA
 (easily serves four)

2 cups flour
 1 tsp. salt
 2 whole eggs
 about 1 tsp. water

With hands, sift flour and salt together. Add eggs, mixing well with your fingers after each addition. If dough is still dry, add a little water or olive oil and knead into a small, smooth ball of dough. Wrap tightly and allow to rest for one hour. Roll out thin, cut into strips. Serve with sauce of your choice.

GARDEN SAUCE

1/2 cup parsley leaves, chopped
 2 medium onions, minced
 4 radishes, minced
 1 large leek, minced
 3 tsp. butter
 3 tsp. olive oil
 2 small scallion diced
 1 cup tomato sauce
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 6 slices prosciutto, minced
 2 carrots, minced



Peter Goatley and his wife, Suzanne, run the Palato Plesser in Bloomfield Hills. Their upscale customers need ready-to-go meals, to keep up with the demands of their accelerated lifestyles.

Gourmet carryouts are trendy

"It's definitely a yuppie market."

— Edward Postliff
 co-owner Edwards
 Caterers, Northville

Pre-packaged meals aren't new. Back in the Beaver Cleaver days, moms popped tinfoil-wrapped TV dinners in the oven to feed hungry youngsters.

But the TV dinner generation grew up. And it wanted something more.

So, gourmet carryout shops sprouted like sauteed mushrooms throughout Detroit's affluent suburbs.

These shops offer freshly prepared meats, vegetables and pastries to a clientele that is educated of palate and long on cash but short on time.

"It's definitely a yuppie market," Edward Postliff, co-owner of Edwards Caterers, Northville, said. "We sell to a lot of double-income couples. Ready-to-go meals are necessary to keep up with the demands of a fast-paced society, added Peter Goatley, owner of the Palato Plesser, Bloomfield Hills.

"OUR LIFESTYLES are so accelerated compared to those of our parents that it's really a different world," Goatley said.

Eland TV dinners hold little appeal for today's upscale consumers, he added.

"America is in a food craze,"

By Wayne Peal
 staff writer

Goatley said, "Food has become stylish. There's tremendous interest in how meals are prepared and presented, but most people don't have the time to do it themselves."

Postliff, who once had a Birmingham shop and still sells to Birmingham-area clients, said demands change with the suburbs.

"In Plymouth and Northville, people are more conservative. They like to prepare at least part of the meal themselves. Here, we sell a lot of appetizers," he said. "In Birmingham, they're more likely to make the whole meal a carryout."

Pasta salads, chicken salads and gourmet hot meals, especially featuring fish or fowl, are staples at most gourmet carryout shops. So are pastries.

Yvonne's To Go, the area's first gourmet carryout chain, prides itself on its chicken pies, a company spokeswoman said.

Others entered the field earlier — Goatley and his wife, Suzanne, have been in business for six years — but the gourmet-to-go era took hold in mid-1984, with the opening of the first Yvonne's To Go in Southfield.

Yvonne's outlets, inside Farmer Jack supermarkets, offer gourmet foods in a mass-market setting.

"WE TELL people they can have a TV dinner for \$3, or for a dollar or so more, they can have a gourmet meal that's freshly prepared," spokeswoman Pat Wesley said.

Though stores have since been added in Livonia, Farmington, Dearborn Heights, Grosse Pointe and Warren, the Southfield store remains the company's largest. All outlets, except Farmington, have their own bakeries. Though founded by Detroit restaurateur Yvonne Gill, the outlets are now a branch of Farmer Jack. Gill is no longer associated with the shops.

Services vary among the smaller gourmet carryout stores.

As its name suggests, Postliff's is heavily into catering. Goatley's store stresses "healthy cuisine."

"We specialize in low-salt, low-cholesterol meals," he said.

Young urban professionals aren't the only ones tapping the gourmet carryout market these days. Empty nest parents are also getting into the act. Postliff said older couples also make up a substantial part of his business.

Yvonne's To Go, a pioneering gourmet outlet chain is specifically targeting older, non-yuppie customers, while trying to hold on to its upscale base.

"I think it started out as a yuppie market but we're trying to broaden the appeal," Wesley said.

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Mike Hall, executive chef at the Guest Quarters Atrium Cafe, prepares a dish in the hotel kitchen. His 12-hour workdays leave him little time to spare.

Action! Atrium chef thrives on long hours

By Sevil Omer
 special writer

Mike Hall, 30, doesn't have very much time for conversation.

Amidst the stainless steel carts holding rows of fresh breads, the white-coated master sculpts a 400-pound block of ice into a lavishly crafted swan, later to become the centerpiece for the afternoon buffet.

Trays of fresh melons need stuffing, vegetables need to be marinated and the chronic ringing of the phone needs to be answered.

Hall, executive chef of Guest Quarters Atrium Cafe in Troy, says his work — often consuming 12 hours a day — is strenuous, but he thrives on the challenge.

"You have to do what it takes," he says, taking a second to wipe his brow. "You have to take pride in the work you do and go that extra mile."

"I'm perfectly happy at being a

"You have to take pride in the work you do and go that extra mile."

— Mike Hall

chef. It takes dedication, long hours and commitment."

A Waterford native, Hall earned his chef's degree at Schoolcraft College's Culinary Arts School in Livonia. His talents have graced the kitchens of Truffles in West Bloomfield and Jacques in Bingham Farms. Since March, Hall has brought the world of fine dining to the tables of the Atrium Cafe.

Hall's award-winning culinary talents have taken him to plush resorts like Lake Tahoe's Harrah Hotel Casino and the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia.

HE WON A BRONZE medal in the 1986 Great Lakes Hotel and Restaurant Show, but for now Hall said he is pleased to be back home.

He clears his way through the aisles of dessert trays to finish placing an order for fresh produce. With the luncheon rush almost winding down, Hall has to revive himself and his staff for the dinner crowd that will soon pack the dining room.

"Each chef is unique, he says, and a good one can "take his trade anywhere."

The key to a chef effectively exercising his talents, though, is in being able to adjust to the kitchen he's working in. "You have to apply situations to certain restrictions," he says. It's dealing with limitations (of food costs and kitchen sizes), that turns a good chef into a good manager, he believes.

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