



taste buds  
chef Larry James

## It's easy to build a house

The holidays just wouldn't be complete at the James Gang home without the construction of at least one gingerbread house.

Mention house construction to most culinary creators and their eyes make a quick roll, and immediately you hear phrases like, "I can't assemble an appetizer tray and you want me to make a house — out of gingerbread, yet?"

Contrary to popular belief, it's easier than you think. As a matter of fact, way back when I used to own and operate a gourmet shop and cooking school, the gingerbread-house-making classes were always the first to fill up and those involved never minded the actual construction of the house but were more taken back with how they should decorate it.

Do I want a snowy, frosting-covered roof? Or should I shingle it with fruit-striped gum? Should the sides be dotted with M&Ms or just judiciously adorned with red licorice and candy cane moldings?

To create a gingerbread house, the builder must first start with a basic recipe for a good gingerbread. Not the soft, pliable gingerbread but one filled smooth and thin so that after baking it will lend a crisp rigidity to the construction. After the gingerbread dough is made and refrigerated, you will need a basic pattern for the house.

**GINGERBREAD HOUSES** come in all shapes and sizes. Some small, some luxurious. For the beginner, I recommend the construction of a small, compact bungalow. You can freelance — draw a pattern, hoping for exact measurements on the sides, back and top — or you can do what I do: Find an old deck of cards. Using the cards for two sides, front and back, lay them out and trace the pattern on the rolled-out gingerbread dough before baking. You can make cut-outs for a door and windows if desired or you can add them on during construction with sticks of gum, candied fruit slices or whatever.

After the baking and well-deserved cooling off, all the basic gingerbread home designer needs now is a little "royal" icing and some imagination. Royal icing is a pliable icing made of powdered egg whites and powdered sugar. It's soft and pliable when made fresh but upon drying turns into a rigid, hard substance that resembles white cement.

Assemble the house on a small piece of Styrofoam or cardboard. Allow it to "dry" and then begin creating a design with candies, gum, fruit, mints or anything edible. You can decorate the "ground" with snowmen made from the icing after hardening and make a walkway dotted with raisins or nuts.

Now if all of this seems a little mind boggling, and you want to give it the old college try with a minimum of fuss, you can use graham crackers for the house construction. Sheets of graham crackers can be carefully cut with sharp scissors and again, using the royal icing, assembled in no time with a minimum of bother.

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## Winner Dinners wanted

Columnist Betsy Brethen wants your recipes for her Winner Dinner column.

She says, "As we move further into the month of December and closer to the coldest months of the year, I am looking for recipes for the following dinners and hope that you will take the time to send them in: dinners using left-over turkey, seafood dinners, hearty soups and casseroles and tasty chili."

See her column on Page 3 for more information.



## Spicing up the holidays

By Marty Fiegly  
special writer

**M**MMMM. Do you remember the wonderfully delicious aroma of gingerbread being baked around this time of year? Perhaps this will inspire you to experiment with some other ways to enjoy ginger.

One of the most important spices used in holiday cooking, ginger has a long history and has traveled far and wide to provide flavor for many foods. In ancient times, the spice was used to preserve meats. Records indicate that builders of the pyramids ate unleavened sweet ginger cakes.

There are more than 1,000 species in the botanical Zingiberaceae family. Some have beautiful foliage, some so not. Many have rich volatile oils that are used in condiments, dyes, perfumes and medicines. The species grown for culinary use is *Zingiber officinale* — true ginger.

This spice originated in India and tropical Asia. Its roots were first used by the Chinese and Indians as early as 1800 B.C. Arab traders took it to the Mediterranean regions, and the Greeks (who imported it from the Orient) introduced ginger to the Romans. They used it as a seasoning, much as we use black pepper today.

**THE ROMANS** then carried it to Great Britain, where, in the 13th century, English royalty regarded it so highly it was worth its weight in gold. Although, ginger was grown in Jamaica and exported back to Spain as early as 1524.

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## La Rotisserie food matches elegant decor

**Special Feature:** Holiday visitors to La Rotisserie should check out the huge gingerbread house in the lobby. The Hyatt Regency's executive chef, Domenick Bufone, and his staff, designed "the world's largest Gingerbread Chalet." It's 22 feet tall and roomy enough for Santa — who will be there through Saturday, Dec. 23, from noon to 2 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. weekdays and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekends.

The Dearborn Hyatt Regency's premier restaurant, La Rotisserie, is "putting on the Ritz." Not only has it undergone a complete transformation, but it is serving premier dishes that rival those served by its neighbor, the Ritz-Carlton.

Although the Hyatt's management denies that the \$450,000 renovation to La Rotisserie had anything to do with the opening of the Ritz, the restaurant was looking pretty tired and dated at the time its prestigious neighbor settled in.

But that's yesterday's news. Today La Rotisserie has a stunning new decor that architects from Catalo Associates describe as a contemporary interpretation of the old grand ballrooms.



Indeed it is elegant, from the 400-square-foot marble dance floor to the two 8 1/2-foot dome-shaped chandeliers and the etched glass panels by Blair Reed that separate seating areas. The room also has beveled glass mirrors with marble insets and black carpeting with a beautiful feather-like border.

**THROUGHOUT** THE two-tiered room is artwork, which was commissioned for the restaurant and is set

off by special lighting. All this style and ambience could easily overshadow the food were it not for the talents of the energetic, 25-year-old chef, Paul Grosz, a native of Warren who trained under the noted Jean Banchet at Le Francois in Wheeling, Ill.

Not only is the food exquisite, but the restaurant offers a "classic dining experience" in which customers can select an appetizer, soup or salad, entree and dessert for \$25 per person. It is all part of Hyatt General Manager Klaus Peters' desire to make elegant dining affordable.

It certainly meets our approval on both counts. Our meals would have cost \$20 more if purchased a la carte.

Grosz's "American-French collaboration with a Midwestern accent" menu features many game dishes, light and intensely flavored sauces, an extensive use of mushrooms, salads that use five-eight different lettuces, and an obvious emphasis on quality. Each entree is meticulously arranged on the plate and is wheeled to the table on carts by the formally dressed wait staff.

Because he is fond of hunting and

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JIM JACOFFEL/Staff photographer

Paul Grosz, chef at the Hyatt Regency Dearborn's La Rotisserie restaurant, shows off some of the specialties: double appetizer with vanilla sauce (center); passion fruit mousse cake (from left), chocolate creme caramel with raspberry puree, strawberry-lingonberry flan, and dark chocolate.