

taste buds
chef Larry Janes

Foodies can be inspiring

Frequently, I get the opportunity to meet foodies like yourself. Whether it be in line at the grocery store, at the recycling center or at the library, seldom does a day go by when someone doesn't come up to me and say, "Hey, aren't you...?"

When I meet people on the street, one of the most popular questions asked is, "Where do you get all the ideas to write about?" Well, in addition to reading just about every magazine I can get my hands on — not to mention cookbooks and press releases — believe it or not, I get quite a bit of material just from talking to folks like you.

I have a tendency to mingle things. One person might pass along an idea for a storyline. I file it somewhere in the back of my brain, and all of a sudden I meet someone else who kind of brings that idea back to life.

The writing process I use is similar to the combination of flavors derived from my recipe preparations. Different folks are like different flavors and, quite frequently, the flavors blend together in such a way I soon find myself with a totally new taste sensation.

Just as an artist combines colors to produce a painting, I think my job is even more interesting. Frequently when giving guest lectures, I comment that my culinary world has a platter for a palette and all the different foods are the colors, with my knives, forks, spoons and other sundry utensils my brushes. When I cook, the finished product is more like a painting, relying on the food to be my expression of colors, odors and flavors.

TASTE AND SMELL are irrevocably intertwined. Flavor is the quality of a substance that affects the sense of taste. The nature of its aroma, whether pleasant, overpowering or absent, will affect the way it tastes on a plate. For example, I frequently prepare a dish, when watching my caloric intake, using chicken, chicken broth, tarragon and lemon juice.

Anyone can saute a chicken breast in a little broth or, for more calories, a little butter. The plate presentation can be absent of any discernible aroma other than the chicken when it's sauteed with a little tarragon and then, just before serving, doused with a splash of lemon juice. The combination of tarragon and lemon juice affects the overall aroma of the chicken, making a basic, trundling piece of poultry almost bounce off the plate with smells of sweetness and tartness.

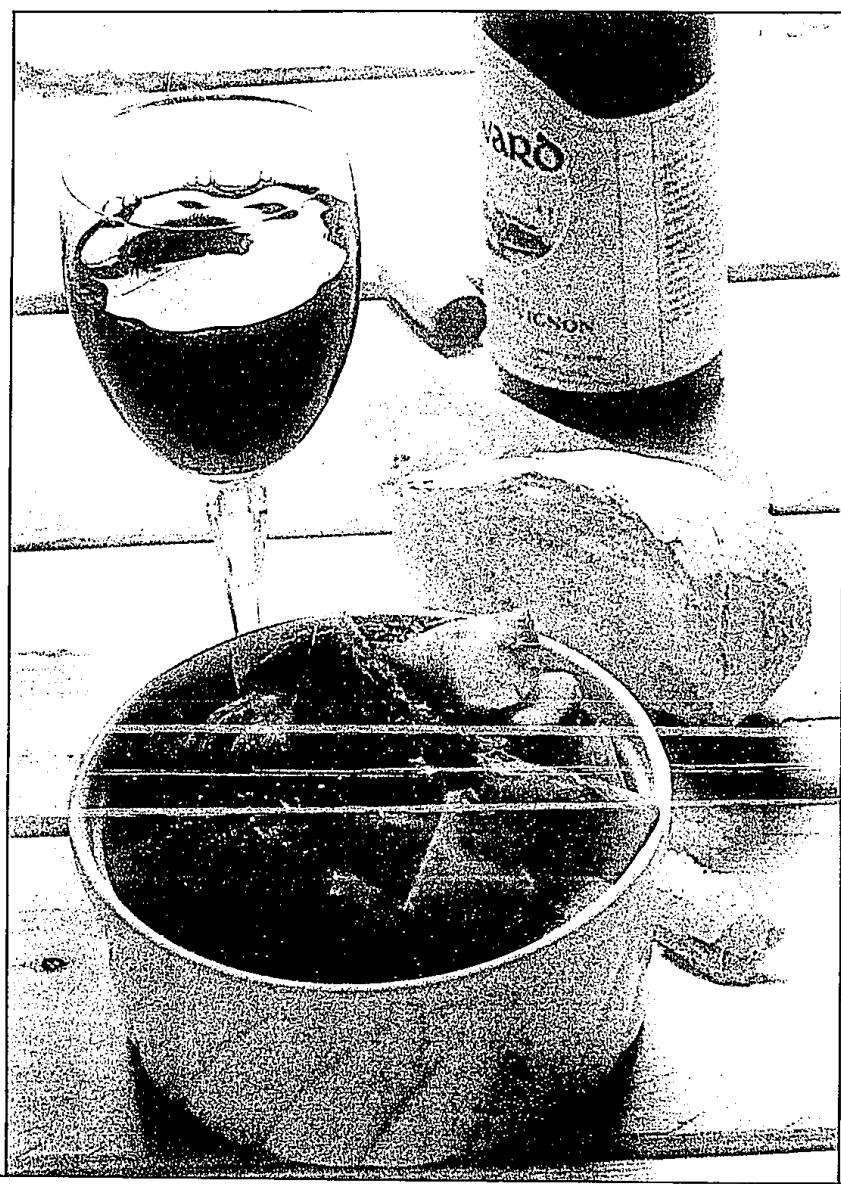
Flavors are broken down into two categories: primary and secondary. Primary flavors are those that are obvious, such as the flavors of the above-mentioned chicken and tarragon, or beef and red wine in a beef à la bourguignonne.

Secret ingredients belong in the realm of secondary flavors. The light splash of Tabasco that ends up in the fondue just before serving helps to highlight the flavor of the wine and cheese used in the dish. Ditto for a splash of lemon juice that gets enveloped in my special bean soup to help pronounce the bean flavor.

AND JUST LIKE the world is filled with uninteresting and nasty people, the wrong combination of ingredients sometimes will seal the fate of the obvious. Let's face it, you wouldn't use a mint jelly on a peanut butter sandwich now, would you?

So short of getting a doctor's degree in chemistry, now does someone like you and me know when to add just the right seasoning to top off a spectacular dish? This is where my library of cookbooks, magazines, articles and press releases comes to view. I've always said never to follow a recipe verbatim, but when comparing similar recipes, I always look for the interesting little addition that will help make my dish stand out from the others.

Pot simmers with winter stew



What warms up a winter more easily than a simple meal of hearty stew, accompanied by crusty bread and red wine?

It takes time but no fuss

By Larry Janes
special writer

STIEW: TO SIMMER slowly, combining meat, vegetables and potatoes in a hearty, one-dish combination. Also, no fuss.

Mention stew for dinner and the first sentence tells all. But to some cooks, preparing a pot of stew turns into more of a fuss rather than the slow, effortless combination that a stew should evolve from.

Folks may confuse stewing with pot roasting and braising, claiming that a stew is more of a serving style than a cooking method. Good cooks worth their weight in salt, however, know that a stew can be a compelling combination of meat, vegetables and potatoes that literally melts in one's mouth.

Pot roasting utilizes a tight-fitting lid and very little liquid which is, in turn, cooked by steam.

Braising is cooking in stock or wine, used with all cuts of meat, that first involves searing the meat to force the juices into the interior of the meat. This changes the color and flavor of the resulting sauce. Then, by the addition of a liquid, the meat continues to cook, resulting in a more juicy and tender product.

Stewing, on the other hand, develops the flavor of the meat through a slow cooking process. It relies on the natural juices to intermingle with herbs, vegetables and potatoes for a melt-in-your mouth delicacy unrivaled in flavor and aroma.

WHEN MOMMA made stew, she first retrieved the old cast-iron dutch oven from the fruit cellar and scrubbed it well, while waiting for Dad to return from the local A&P with just the right amount of stewing beef cut precisely to her directives. After trimming the meat herself, she would rummage for a medium grocery sack. After adding the trimmed stewing beef, Momma would generously sprinkle on a handful of flour and toss the bag for a minute or so, making sure each piece was covered with just the right amount of flour.

The dutch oven was lightly brushed with fat and heated till the fat rippled. Adding the stew meat in three intervals, she would immediately lower the temperature and brown the meat chunks.

After a few minutes of gentle prodding with a pair of tongs (she seldom stirred randomly), an equal amount of water and dry red wine were added, in addition to a bay leaf, some peppercorns and a melange of herbs and spices. The heavy top to the dutch oven was put in place and, with just a glimmer of gas flame, the concoction was left virtually untouched for what seemed like days on end, although in honesty proved to be just a trio of hours.

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Follow your nose to cinnamon-bun shop



Mark Tanaki, owner of Cinnacraz at Wonderland in Livonia, adds the finishing touch to cinnamon buns.

By Arlene Funke
special writer

The heavenly aroma of cinnamon grabbed me as I followed the pack of morning mall walkers.

A tray of fresh-baked cinnamon rolls had just come from the oven at a shop called Cinnacraz, in the Eaton Centre food emporium at Wonderland Mall in Livonia.

The rolls, resting in full view of shoppers, were gigantic. Just-applied cream cheese frosting dribbled down the sides of the still-warm buns. I got in line. Calorie counting would have to wait for another day.

"The product, cinnamon rolls, just doesn't sell itself," said Mark Tanaki, owner of the Plymouth-based Cinnacraz chain. "It's the atmosphere and quality. You can come to the store and watch them bake. It's fresh-baked. It's the aroma."

Took the words right out of my mouth. A sweet, delicious comfort food.

Sitting in Eaton Centre was Annette Patalon, who brought Emily and Norman Nawrocki to the mall for a morning treat. The three, Westland residents, split a giant Cinnacraz cinnamon roll with their cups of coffee.

"EVERY TIME I walk, I've wanted to try it," said Patalon, popping a bite of sweet roll into her mouth. "It's fresh and real tasty."

Norman Nawrocki, said he enjoyed the coffee. His wife Emily, raved about the sweet roll's cream cheese frosting. "I wouldn't make a habit of it, because of the calories," she said.

The Tanakis opened the first Cinnacraz, at Briarwood Mall in Ann Arbor, in 1987. Other outlets are in Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi and at Sheldon and Ann Arbor roads in Plymouth, where their corporate offices and commissary are located.

Owned by Plymouth resident Tanaki and his wife, Susan, the chain is one of several local businesses specializing in the sale of giant cinnamon buns baked on the premises. The name is a contraction of "cinnamon craze," recognizing the trend which Mark Tanaki, a former electrical engineer, spotted on the West Coast three years ago while employed by Boeing Aircraft.

Mom's Cinnamon Rolls, in Laurel Park Place Mall in Livonia, and T.J. Cinnamon's, with locations in Farmington, Royal Oak and Pontiac, also sell sticky buns and specialty breads along with the big cinnamon rolls.

SIGHT, SIZE and smell bring in

customers, according to Ken Thiemann, an assistant at Mom's, which opened in mid-November. "We fill the shopping mall with the aroma of cinnamon," said Thiemann, a Livonia resident. "Basically, it's impulse buying. The rolls are humongous. They catch everyone's eyes."

Prices hover around \$1.50 each, with a reduction when purchasing six or more rolls. At around eight ounces, these aren't wimpy sweet buns. They're thick and yeasty, laced with cinnamon and brown sugar and slathered with rich frosting.

Tanaki said plain, unfrosted buns are available. But most people choose the feed variety. Each one has around 500 calories.

People who can't handle such a hefty caloric wallop may opt to buy what Cinnacraz calls "cinnabits," the smaller pieces yielding half the calories of the full-size roll, according to Tanaki. "You can still get a treat but there's not tied in all those calories," he said.

Serious walkers are much more likely to buy one of several muffin varieties, rather than a cinnamon roll, he pointed out.

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