

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD



RICK HALBERG

Build your menu with simply good ingredients

As we approach the next millennium with supersonic speed, something very interesting seems to be happening. The food we desire is not futuristic and new. More and more I am seeing people's tastes favor the food of their parents or grandparents.

I have written about "Slow Food," and taking time to recognize how meal time can be one of the most enjoyable and rewarding parts of one's life. I think it's catching on.

The current covers of *Bon Appetit* and *Food and Wine* magazine show "Back to Basics" and a very old world style meat dish of slow cooked and braised short ribs. These are the foods that comfort us through these speedy times.

Throughout the world, where people don't have the same accessibility to the variety of fruits, vegetables and other foods we have, they have always eaten this way. Travel across Europe or Asia and the cuisine is always about utilizing what is available. What separates good cooking from ordinary is the commitment to making a few ingredients stand out with honesty, integrity and love.

The Japanese practice of macrobiotic eating stresses to only eat what you can find fresh within a 500 mile radius in order to maintain a yin-yang balance.

Tropical fare

Recently I spent some time in a remote coastal village in Costa Rica. You might assume that Costa Rica is a land rich in fruits and vegetables. It isn't, the land is volcanic, mountainous and not really suitable for a lot of agriculture other than great coffee and pineapples.

At first look the small local restaurants had very limited, kind of drab offerings. But with the determination of the true food lover that I am, I was able to find a spot on the beach that served truly fine food. What struck me was the same thing that I've found in many of the best restaurants in Europe and the U.S. — the people who operated the restaurant were committed to obtaining the best local ingredients they could find. In Costa Rica, their choices weren't many — a few varieties of fish and seafood, some fresh herbs, tomatoes, tropical fruits and a locally made cheese. They did import some staples such as good olive oil, flour etc. The menu reflected this simplicity, and their execution was impeccable.

Imagine: Pounding surf fifty feet away, a tropical breeze swaying the palms above, big candles illuminating a few tables set out on a rough porch area. A huge wood fired grill behind a bar with a couple of stools.

The owner's wife, a beautiful Italian woman, comes to the table and brings some sliced, freshly baked and grilled bread slathered with olive oil and a good dose of fresh garlic, some chilled tomato juice and some sparkling water. She hands us a handwritten menu consisting of four or five items, all of them prepared on the open fire.

We order. Some time later, who knows how long, we are in the tropics, time means nothing, our food is brought to the table. The plates are huge cross sections of polished palm trunks. On each is a whole beautifully cooked fish, no sauce, just simply grilled, the crispy skin cracking under a drizzling of fresh sweet lemon, and sprinkled with lots of chopped fresh rosemary and olive oil. Accompanying the fish were a few slices of incredibly sweet and tangy tomatoes paired with the local cheese, that was kind of like a dry Jack cheese. That was it.

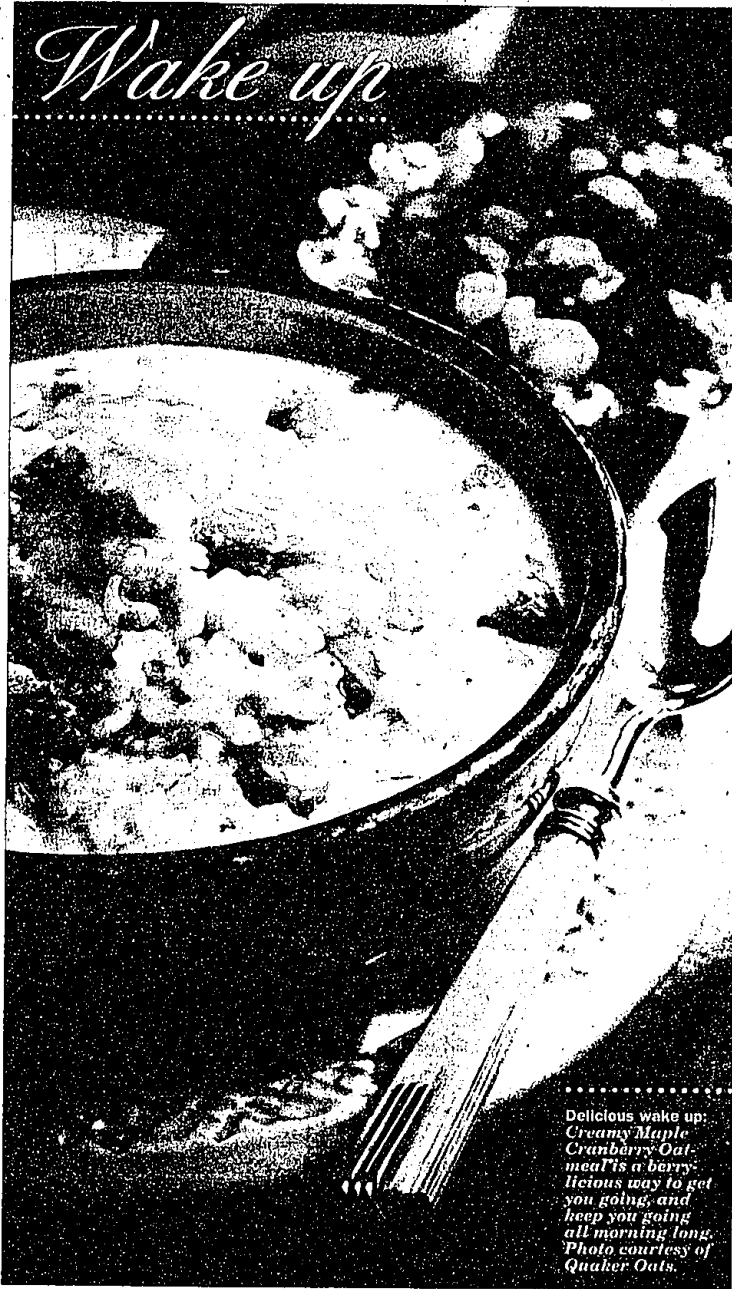
Our dessert choice was easy, there was but one offering, a tart of fresh oranges in a buttery rich crust. It was

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LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

■ Recipe to Share



Delicious wake up: Creamy Maple Cranberry Oatmeal is a berry-licious way to get you going, and keep you going all morning long. Photo courtesy of Quaker Oats.

RISE AND SHINE WITH A BOWL OF ENERGY

BY KEELY WYONIK
STAFF WRITER

Breakfast is the fuel that starts our day and just as important as brushing your teeth. Yet it's the most frequently skipped meal in America.

"We may have children who would rather watch TV than eat breakfast," said Joanne Hughes, principal at Kennedy Elementary School in Livonia.

"In my opinion, when children don't eat breakfast they have less energy, lack of concentration and the ability to solve problems," said Hughes. "They're unable to learn at their appropriate level and could possibly be irritable."

Nutrition research backs Hughes up. According to studies cited in the October 1995 issue of *The Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, students who missed breakfast demonstrated poorer performance in immediate recall. Data also suggested that the brain's functioning is sensitive to short-term variances in nutrition, possibly affecting the information retrieval speed, and accuracy as well as the memory of children who miss breakfast.

A Tufts University study showed continuous low nutrition-

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Eye-Openers

Here are some breakfast suggestions from "Eating Thin for Life: Food Secrets & Recipes from People Who Have Lost Weight & Kept It Off," by Anne M. Fletcher, a registered dietitian. (A Checkers Book Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997, \$14).

- Reduced-fat bran muffin (2 ounces).
- 1/2 cup grapes, 6 ounces orange juice.
- Yogurt "Sundae": Layer in a brandy snifter: 1/4 cup fresh blueberries, 1/2 sliced peach, 1/4 cup sliced strawberries, 4 ounces raspberry (nonfat yogurt); repeat; top with 3 tablespoons reduced-fat granola.
- 1/2 cup cooked oatmeal (made with skim milk) mixed with 1/2 cup nonfat sugar-free vanilla pudding. Toast with 1 teaspoon reduced-fat peanut butter and 1 teaspoon honey.
- Breakfast Shake: 6 ounces strawberry (nonfat) yogurt, 1 medium banana, 1 tablespoon wheat germ, 1/2 cup skim milk, 1/4 cup orange juice. Blend all ingredients in a blender until smooth.
- Veggie Scramble: Microwave or steam 1 cup mixed vegetables (chopped broccoli, onion, green pepper, mushrooms); scramble with 1 whole egg, 1 egg white, 1/4 cup skim milk and 1 slice (3/4 ounce) crumbled low-fat cheese in a nonstick skillet; 6 ounces orange juice.

Florida restaurants showcase wine in grand fashion



A lot of you go to Florida's Gulf Coast! Your voice mail inquiries about wine events and best restaurants with good wine lists have been numerous. In short,

here are the best.

The restaurant with the world's largest wine list, over 7,000 selections and 500,000 bottles, is Bern's Steak House in Tampa, Fla. Founder Bern Laxer has been dubbed a "nut." But for nearly half a century, Bern's has been considered one of the most famous destination restaurants in the world. Adorned with expensive but somewhat garish antiques, Tiffany lamps, red wallpaper and French vineyard murals, this multi-room, 320-seat establishment packs in foodies, wine connoisseurs and wine geeks.

The latter pour over the gargantuan wine list, larger than the New York City Yellow Pages, wired to the table. Those not ready to tour vineyards of the world in text, and who would also like to order in a reasonable amount of

Wine Picks

- Picks of the pack: 1994 Conn Creek Anthology \$37; 1994 Clos du Bois Maristone \$25; and Beringer Howell Mountain Merlot \$45.
- Merlot has become synonymous with a request for red wine. Some wines parade as that variety. Some make the grade. Top 1995 Clos du Bois Merlot, Alexander Valley \$20 and 1995 Dry Creek Vineyard Merlot \$19.
- Cabernet Sauvignon pairs best with meat, so think Spring, get the BBQ going and select from: 1995 Clos du Bois Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley \$18; and 1994 Conn Creek Cabernet Sauvignon, Limited Release \$20.
- Pinot Noir has a wide range category, but 1995 Marlene Torres Pinot Noir \$23 is no pretender. It has lots of flavor and good structure.
- Best Import buys at \$10 and under: 1996 Fortini Cabernet Sauvignon \$8; 1995 Richmond Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve \$7; Chateau de La Tour, Bordeaux \$9; Chateau Les Moutelles, Cotes de Bourg \$10; 1995 Fortifica, Chile \$10; 1996 Borgolte Chianti \$8; 1995 Castello di Gabbiano Chianti \$9; and Villa Pinot Borgolte \$10.

time, get wine tips from the superbly trained, wine knowledgeable wait captains.

This is a place to order beef and an equally beefy, big red wine. Only U.S. Prime, aged an additional four to 10

weeks in the kitchen's controlled temperature and humidity meat locker, is served. Six basic cuts are available in any thickness, broiled to eight levels of doneness.

Reserve an alcove in the upstairs Harry Vaughn Room after dinner. Surrounded by highly polished redwood slats, that had former lives as wine fermenters, you encounter the meal-jacketed multi-page dessert menu. Any choice may be accompanied by around 400 different dessert wines or spirits served by the glass.

It's not stodgy here, but rather high-tech with a computerized jukebox, offering every style of music. At the push of a button, you can make a personal request of the live piano player at the Steinway in another room. High-mount TV monitors allow you to personally select a show, as if you weren't already starring in one!

While many escape winter in February, April's weather in Florida is more predictable, sunny and warm, while it's often still shiver city around here. Florida's best wine event is the annual Florida Winefest & Auction in Sarasota. Festivities this year are April 23-26 at The Resort at Longboat Key Club. It



Sampling: Participants sample the best wine and food matches at the Florida Winefest and Auction in Sarasota.

is one of the best ways to get to know the area's best chefs, restaurants and wine lists.

This is four days of feasting on the Epicurean delights prepared by the best area chefs and accompanied by liquid fruits of the vine. More than 90 wineries have signed up to "pour it on" this year.

On Thursday, April 23, winemaker

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