

COOKING CONQUESTS

CHEF CAROL HASKIN

Haute cuisine considered finest in the world

Think of fine food, and undoubtedly the French come to mind. Haute cuisine enjoys the reputation of being considered the finest cuisine in the world. Literally meaning "high cooking," haute cuisine, with the rich sauces, fine ingredients and exquisite taste, typifies classic French cooking. Through the efforts of the great French chefs, haute cuisine first came to the attention of the rest of the world at the time of the French Revolution. Before 1789, chefs were employed by the richest families to prepare food similar to what was being served to the royal court. These chefs established a proving ground for the elaborate recipes that formed the basis of haute cuisine. The style at the time was elegant food served in many courses, often with rich sauces to accompany the many meats on the menu.

Restaurants grow
Although the food was unfamiliar to common citizens and beyond their reach, it emerged to popular consumption after the revolution. The fall of the aristocracy meant the great chefs were out of work, which resulted in the opening of numerous restaurants. Before the revolution, there were at least 100 restaurants in Paris, which increased to more than 500 after the social changes. Those who had never tasted a truffle now were able to visit the burgeoning restaurants to sample new delicacies, such as quenelles, tripe cervelle de chat, and foie gras. Restaurants became temples of haute cuisine.

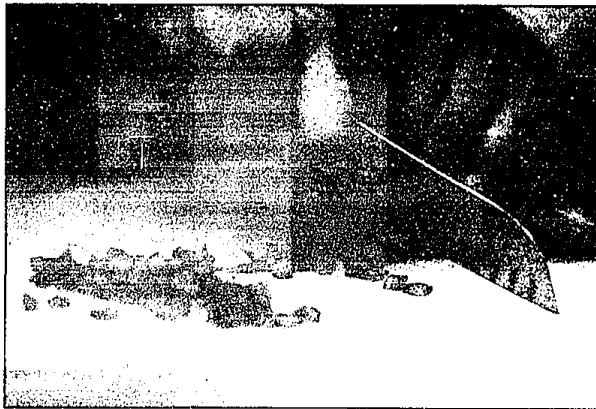
Today, the French influence remains prevalent in American restaurants. At an elegant restaurant, the "maitre d'" leads diners to their table. Back in the kitchen, the "saucier" whisks sauces. In the "garde manger" salads are prepared, while the "chef de cuisine" oversees the cooking operation. Guests are served "hors d'oeuvres" and presented with the soup "du jour." However, you don't have to dine in the finest restaurant to enjoy one of the easiest and most used French culinary techniques. The literal translation for "saute" in French is "to jump" (from the verb, sauter). When sauteing items, chefs frequently make the contents in the pan "jump" by shaking the pan. Sauteing is best defined as "cooking in a small amount of hot fat in a shallow sided pan usually over high heat."

Preparation is key
As with stir-fry, most of the work in sauteing is involved in the preparation stage. Once the ingredients are assembled, the cooking is done in a matter of minutes. These are the basic steps to a quick and delicious saute meal. First, sear your meat in a hot pan turning only once. When cooking in batches, remove the meat from the pan and place on a warm platter in a medium oven. Cover lightly with foil. After cooking all the meat, a flavorful liquid such as lemon juice, wine, liquor or stock is then added to the pan and brought to a boil. Stir with a whisk to incorporate any food particles and pan juices - this procedure is known as "de-glazing." Add any final ingredients and seasonings. Finally, add the meat to the saute pan to finish cooking a few minutes more.

When sauteing, chefs insist that the pans are "smoldering hot." A less than hot pan is a common and serious mistake. Once the pan is hot, add a small amount of fat. When the fat is hot (it will only take a few moments), add your favorite meat, vegetables or seafood and begin preparing your "Four Star" meal.
* See recipes inside Taste.
Chef Carol Haskin is the pastry and consulting chef at Big Rock Chop & Brew House in Birmingham. Chef Carol holds the distinction of being the first certified female executive chef in the State of Michigan.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:
Focus on Wine
Cooking for presidents



With lightning speed: Jamie Valvo of Farmington Hills spreads out chopped mushrooms to prepare his pate brix of mushroom in the culinary arts kitchen at Schoolcraft College to prepare for a regional Salon competition starting Friday in Kansas City. Salon 2000 team members also practice chopping red peppers and other vegetables following strict cutting guidelines.

THE WINNING SALON 2000 MENU

- A pate brix of mushroom - crisp roll of mushrooms on wilted greens, served with forest chips and a mushroom essence created by Jamie Valvo of Farmington Hills.
- Chilled salad of pickered Seviche-style, layered with a jicama red onion slaw, cucumbers with a cilantro-lime vinaigrette by Joel Vassallo of Canton.
- Ballotine of chicken, presented on black beluga lentils with braised sweet cabbage, wine merchant sauce and a sweet potato chip by John Griffiths of Farmington Hills.
- Medley of orange, orange bavarian, tangerine sorbet, blood orange sauce and a pistachio tulle from Sharon Martin of Northville.

STUDENTS Sharpen CULINARY skills

SALON CLASS PREPARES FOR COMPETITION

Story by KEN ABRAMCZYK • Photos by BRYAN MITCHELL



Focused: Evan Demers, front, and Sondra Baier, both of Northville, practice in the Schoolcraft kitchen.

If you were serving pickered as a chilled salad, you might place a cracker on the dish as a garnish, or set it nearby to be consumed with the fish.

Joel Vassallo of Canton, a culinary arts student at Schoolcraft College, gives a lot of thought to such matters. Garnishes aren't afterthoughts, they should complement the dish.

A sesame cracker, baked in a spiral shape, is substituted for a buttercrisp cracker as a garnish for a chilled pickered salad he created. The sesame cracker was placed on top of the pickered, like a skyscraper jutting out against a city skyline.

Changing the garnish adds an incredibly dramatic dimension to the dish. Instead of rolling the cracker dough flat, I used a pasta attachment to make it thin, cut into long strips, then wrapped it around a wood dowel and cooked it," explained Vassallo.

Chief Kevin Gawronski, director of culinary arts, Vassallo, and his salon team members from Schoolcraft College in Livonia, hope judges in the two-day regional cooking competition in Kansas City starting Friday, March 31, notice their attention to detail.

"Last year we lost by five-hundredths of a point to the eventual national champs," Gawronski said. The team from Kansas won the regional competition and advanced to the nationals.

But it isn't just garnishes they're concerned about; students have slaved for weeks, making competition dishes, over and over again, tweaking them with herbs, spices and juices.

Vassallo first wanted salmon in his recipe. Then he wanted rainbow trout. After practicing, he soon decided on pickered for its leanness. His chilled salad of seviche-style pickered is layered with jicama red onion slaw, cucumbers and a cilantro-lime vinaigrette.

"The acids from the lime juice and the white wine cook it," said Vassallo, explaining the term "seviche." The pickered with jicama and red onion slaw is something nice, light and refreshing. The high acid content opens up the taste buds for the next dish. "Something like that stands out."

Team competes
The team, which includes Vassallo, Jamie Valvo, John Griffiths and Sharon Martin, won a Salon competition to represent the state

between Macomb and Oakland community colleges. Jean-Paul LePage serves as an alternate, in case one of the others is unable to participate.

That's not all. They and four other students or recent graduates - Sondra Baier, DaJuan Sandifer, Evan Demers and Tracy Bahlmann - will travel to Singapore April 8 for an international individual salon competition, then to Bangkok for a cooking class.

Gawronski believes Schoolcraft is the only community college from the United States going to Singapore, a competition that features 25 to 36 countries. The trip will cost \$26,000 - most of it being paid for with money from fund-raisers.

The salon class prepares students for competition. Gawronski said, "Skill development is encouraged, and they work under a severe timetable. They create and design their own dishes."

Students learn about the seasonality of foods, taste associations and food groupings, Gawronski said.

The 11 salon students are divided into two teams for the class. The team that "wins" in the instructors' eyes competes as a team, while the others compete individually.

Please see SHARPEN, D2



Practice makes perfect: Sharon Martin of Northville, front, mixes for a cake for her medley of orange dessert, while Joel Vassallo prepares pickered for his chilled salad.

Book satisfies hunger for 'Wholesome, Vegetarian Cooking'

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
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Lenore Baum has practiced and preached natural foods cooking for more than 25 years. First in Phoenix, and for the past nine years at her cooking school in Farmington Hills.

Baum's first cookbook is "Lenore's Natural Cuisine, Your Essential Guide to Wholesome, Vegetarian Cooking," (Culinary Publications, \$21). The cookbook, set to hit bookstores in April, highlights many of those cooking lessons.

"What motivated me to write this book," said Baum, "was that I had not yet discovered a down-to-earth, practical cookbook that would guide people toward a healthier diet." Baum designed a user-friendly cookbook that provides simple step-by-step instructions,

and more than 260 cook's tips to help you get good results and save time.

She promotes a healthy diet, particularly the vegan (pronounced VEE-gan) diet, which excludes all animal products such as meat, cheese, eggs, milk and honey.

"People become interested in a vegetarian diet for a variety of reasons ranging from compassion for animals to religion to world hunger issues," Baum writes. "But the most recent trend in eating this way has to do with health. Research has linked lower rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes and obesity with a vegetarian diet."

So what's a shopper to do? Instead of drinking milk from cattle (most of



which consume pesticides and receive growth hormones), Baum recommends dark leafy greens such as collards, kale, broccoli and bok choy for as a source of daily calcium.

The book walks the reader through menu planning, last-minute meals and eating out healthfully, explaining what to order, why and how to eat well.

Baum said many of the more than 100 recipes were fine-tuned in her cooking classes. The recipes contain less than 15 percent fat and are made without refined sugar or dairy products. "The recipes are tasty, nourishing and satisfying, not bland, boring or complex," Baum said.

Baum loves soups, like her hearty

bean soup and pressure-cooker pea soup with a medley whole wheat bread. Her creamy cauliflower and chickpea soup is high in beta carotene. The cauliflower is pureed, and the chickpeas add a creamy heartiness, Baum said.

She came up with spaghetti with gingered broccoli while visiting a friend and using ingredients found in the refrigerator. Now that recipe is one of her favorites.

The book calls for unusual ingredients that will require trips to specialty and natural food stores for items such as shoyu and tempeh. Shoyu is the Japanese name for naturally fermented soy sauce. Made from soybeans, roasted wheat and salt, it is fermented in wooden kegs for at least 18 months. Tempeh is a fermented soybean prod-