



A Single Woman's Guide to Food and Drink/by *Aimee Lee Ball*

DUELING BROWNIES

It was one of those quietly spectacular evenings, when one part of the conversation flows seamlessly into the next and even the taxi driver knew not to intrude. It was our second or seventh or something date—the ballet, Italian food, an extravagant bottle of wine—and we were sitting around my fireplace having one of those talks that would be excruciatingly tedious to anyone else, but is a requisite part of the getting-to-know-you dance that men and women perform. The subject of chocolate came up. (This is not as great a non sequitur as you might think because, to my mind, sex and chocolate are as natural a twosome as skiing and hot buttered rum.) I happened to mention that I make the best brownies in the world.

He said, no, *he* made the best brownies in the world.

I said, I was sure he was a very fine person, he had a cute moustache and a formidable backhand, but in the interest of accuracy, I must insist that I make the best brownies in the world.

He said that at age 14 he had been given his Aunt Ruby's prize brownie recipe in an envelope with a wax seal, had committed the contents to memory and burned the paper over the flame of a gas stove while whispering an incantation of "Nothin' says lovin' like something from the oven." Furthermore, he declared, his brownies had a sugar-cookie crust beneath a layer of nutted fudge, and the sensation of the two textures together was something like the feel of a hard worked-out body hitting soft sheets.

I said that I had arrived at *my* brownie recipe after tasting the ones in a fancy New York store that cost two dollars apiece. There is something deeply etched on my Judeo-Christian ethic, which is connected to my heart by my purse-strings, that balks at paying two bucks for a mouthful of chocolate, and I decided to duplicate the little gems myself. Two pounds of butter, ten pounds of chocolate and several dozen eggs later, I achieved perfection—a mousseline interior within a crackling chocolate shell, which was something like walking on a field of crusted snow and then rolling in the fluffy stuff underneath.

The mood in the room was changing visibly. He stood, removed his tie, took my hand. I supposed we were reconciling our



differences. Instead, he led me to the kitchen. Dueling Brownies. Fortunately, I have the sort of home that may run out of toilet paper but never vanilla extract. And three hours later, we conceded a draw. Our brownies were worlds apart, yet equally excellent—choosing between them would have been like choosing between emeralds and rubies, between Beethoven and Bach, between Redford and Newman. Choosing

between them would also have required the services of an impartial witness, and where are you going to hire one of those at 2:00 in the morning?

It would seem only fair, after this tale, to offer both brownie recipes and let you choose for yourself. But life, as your mother probably warned, is seldom fair. I'm the writer—you get my recipe. (There are *some* privileges of the press.) And another thing: You can learn a lot about a person over a pan of melting chocolate—about nasty qualities like pigheadedness and pride (I'm speaking about him, of course, not me), about strange habits like cooking with as few clothes on as possible (OK, OK, that's me) and about a capacity for romance, like licking the spatula clean together.

A word of warning: My basic philosophy is that if you are eating a piece of chocolate cake, and it should fall on your foot, your foot should break. We are talking *intense* chocolate. But I also believe in large quantities of good things and small quantities of bad things. So while this recipe has unconscionable amounts of butter, sugar and chocolate, a small portion will satisfy more than a big vat of something from a box. This is the one advantage sex has over chocolate: Sex is not fattening. ■

Aimee Lee Ball lives, writes and cooks in New York.

INTENSELY CHOCOLATE BROWNIES

4 oz. unsweetened chocolate
3 heaping T. cocoa powder
1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter
3 T. raspberry syrup
1 tsp. vanilla extract
4 eggs
1/4 tsp. salt
2 cups sugar
1 cup sifted flour

1. Melt chocolate, cocoa and butter in small heavy saucepan over low heat. Off heat, stir in raspberry and vanilla flavorings.
2. In electric mixer, beat eggs with salt till foamy. Gradually add sugar and beat for 10 minutes, until very thick and pale yellow in color.
3. Stir chocolate mixture into batter with spatula, just till mixed. Stir in sifted flour, just

till mixed. Pour into buttered 7 1/2-by-11 inch pan and bake in preheated oven at 375° for 25 minutes.

4. Watch carefully during last 10 minutes of baking. If edges start to burn, cover loosely with sheet of aluminum foil. Let cool completely before cutting.

P.S. In place of the raspberry, you may substitute another fruit syrup, or a heaping tablespoon of crushed espresso coffee powder. I like my brownies pure and unadulterated, but you may add 1 cup chopped nuts, raisins or chocolate morsels. P.P.S. As soon as the brownies come out of the oven, I shove them, still in the pan, into the freezer on a trivet for about 15 minutes. This is called the fudgification process and, for some reason I can't explain, it ensures the right consistency.



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THE BREAKFAST CLUB

I remember eating once with a man who was sort of inhaling his hamburger, oblivious to taste or texture or, it seemed, pleasure, and when I called him on it, he nodded agreement. "I wish there were a pill I could take," he said, "so I wouldn't get hungry, and I wouldn't get sick, but I wouldn't have to bother to eat." When I regained my powers of speech, what I said to him was this: "The reason you and I will never be truly close is that you eat to live, and I live to eat."

This is not strictly true—I do have other reasons to live—but the real physical pleasures of good food are so compelling to me that I seldom eat to feed hunger but rather to satisfy appetite. Except breakfast. I wake up hungry. I realize there is a whole lot of the rest of the world that can handle nothing more ambitious than creamed coffee before noon, but I am deeply in sync with the original notion of "breaking the fast" of the previous night's sleep, and some mornings it is practically the only thing that propels me from bed.

Mornings are times of familiar and comforting rituals—a known and trusted smell in the shower, a particular radio DJ, the 7:52 to the city—and we are creatures of habit in the kitchen, too. But catching the 7:52 or the crosstown bus or the southbound expressway lends a sense of expediency, if not urgency, to breakfast. On working days we are likely to dump several things in the blender that have no business knowing each other—things like bananas and raw eggs and buttermilk—masquerading as a "protein shake." One woman I know has three fast breakfasts in her repertoire: the five-minute special (apple slices spread with chunky peanut butter), the three-minute special (last night's leftover salad stirred into a container of yogurt) and the one-minute special (a frozen waffle, eaten out of hand straight from the freezer, which her 3-year-old calls "cold toast").

A business trip really ought to be a respite from the routine of breakfast, offering possibilities of scrapple in Philadelphia, grits in Atlanta and guava juice barely two hours old in Santa Fe. But few of us are as adventurous at 8:00 AM as we are at 8:00 PM. I don't order breakfast in bed in hotels because room service is likely to deliver bagels barely grazed by the toaster or blueberry muffins with 2½ blueberries per muf-



fin, all accompanied by cold coffee. Instead, I go to the coffee shop—my hair still unmoussed, my lips still unglossed. It is not a pretty sight. If there's a chance I'll see someone I know, I ask for a dark corner and wear a hat. (Before breakfast, the only person I want talking to me is Jane Pauley.) But the coffee will be hot, and you can put a lot of jam on the muffin to make up for its lack of blueberryiness.

All of us are so peculiar about our breakfast habits and rhythms that it is probably just as well we can indulge them in the privacy of our own homes, but get yourself invited away for the weekend, and you are sure to be exposed. I remember being one

of a big group at the country house of a woman who prides herself on the bounty of her table and whose kitchen always smells so fragrant and homey that you want to walk in and sit in her lap. But at breakfast, you are on your own. She has no interest in being a short-order cook for a crowd of people who want their eggs done a different way, and so, on arising, a guest is handed a skillet and pointed toward the stove.

On the weekend that I'm remembering, the garden outside the kitchen window was beginning to hint of crocus, the sun was bright gold, and everyone agreed that spring was springing. It was the last thing everyone agreed on. As each guest made eggs and toast and then came to join the breakfast club, I have never seen such looks of surprise and disgust.

"Your yolks are raw."

"How can you eat an egg without salt?"

"How can you eat an egg with catsup?"

"Two eggs died for that breakfast, and you're not even going to give them the decency of a once-over-lightly?"

Such impassioned speeches on the one true American way to cook an egg—I have seen people less fussy and intractable about politics, religion, money and sex. The next morning I got up half an hour early and made these muffins for the group. No one, but no one, could argue about them—except about how many to eat. ■

Aimee Lee Ball lives, writes and cooks in New York.

BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

Yield: 8 to 12 muffins

¼ lb. (1 stick) butter, room temperature

1 cup sugar

2 eggs

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup whole-wheat flour

1 T. baking powder

½ cup milk

2 cups blueberries

Sugar to sprinkle on muffin tops

1. Preheat oven to 375°.

2. In mixer or large bowl, cream butter

and sugar. Add eggs one at a time, beating well. Add vanilla extract.

3. Mix flours and baking powder. Add to bowl alternately with milk, just until mixed.

4. Fold blueberries into batter. Spoon into well-buttered muffin pan.

5. Bake 15 minutes, then sprinkle tops of muffins with sugar; rotate pan and bake 15 minutes longer.

6. Cool 20 to 30 minutes before removing from pan (otherwise the blueberries will act like glue). If you gotta have 'em hot, expect some to crumble.

Note: These freeze perfectly.



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MEMORABLE MEALS

The summer that I was 27 and feeling independent, I went on vacation by myself and wandered through Italy looking for Signore Right. One night in a tiny town on Lake Como, I walked a mile on a country road and came to a *trattoria*—six tables and a message over the threshold signaling a full house. A boy at the door, no more than 12, finally acceded to my urgent appeal that I was “*una sola persona*,” conferred with the proprietor (his mother) and admitted me, setting up a makeshift place at the rough wood carving table that held the hunk of ham, still on the bone, waiting to be sliced into prosciutto. I was brought a loaf of crusty bread and some tomatoes with an earthenware pitcher of green-gold olive oil and then a platter of grilled prawns and *cicala*—the Mediterranean cousins of shrimp and lobster—just plucked from the lake. Dinner cost about six dollars. I left the boy—my waiter—a 1,000 lire tip (about a dollar at that time, a serious sum to a small Italian boy), and he kissed my hand. I walked home singing. It was a memorable meal.

The memorability of a meal is sometimes a function of the food or the circumstances or the company or some permutation thereof. One of the great meals of my life took place in Paris, where a group of total strangers had somehow formed in the lobby of a Left Bank hotel. It was quite an international hodgepodge of people—an English couple, three Japanese businessmen, a German actress, a Frenchman—none of whom spoke anyone else's language. We ate and drank on both sides of the Seine into the still of the night, and I remember walking down the street at dawn eating a wedge of Cantal cheese and bread still warm from the oven of the local *boulangier*, who was making his first batch of the day. At one point, the Frenchman, who had drunk quite a lot of red wine, turned to me and said, “*Avant l'aube, vous aurez des yeux bleus*,” which means roughly, “Before the night is over, you will have blue eyes.” My eyes are irrevocably brown. It was a memorable meal.

I don't mean to say that my memorable meals have all been European. Once I found myself in Ketchum, Idaho—ghosts of Papa Hemingway in every crevice of the town—and a man who had just been ice fishing in the frozen Snake River grilled



fresh-caught salmon in foil packages and served dinner on the cabin floor. I remember a beach party on the shores of Long Island where there was chicken salad (poached chunks of chicken in a simple sauce of sour cream and Dijon mustard), new potatoes boiled in their red jackets and tossed with butter and fresh dill and chunks of a chocolate cake that a friend of mine calls Mississippi Mud. There was sand in everything, but it was a memorable meal.

Sometimes nostalgia overtakes accuracy

in memory, and my fondness for a remembered meal has more to do with the quality of the experience than with the food. When I was about 10, I was allowed to take the train all by myself to my father's office in downtown Philadelphia on school vacations and special Saturdays. My father would meet me at the Reading Terminal, and we would walk through City Hall courtyard, past the statue of “Billy” Penn, to his office, where I would sharpen his pencils and play with his paper clips and where I was permitted—oh, joy of joys—to type a letter or two. At noon we would go to Horn and Hardart for lunch, where a red-haired waitress named Ruth always served me the same thing: the vegetable plate with real mashed potatoes, Harvard beets and glazed carrots, and for dessert, the deep-dish apple pie with warm vanilla sauce. It seems now that was an unusual meal for a child to love, but I think I was taken with all the bright colors on the plate. On the way home, we'd always stop at the famous food stalls of the Reading Terminal market to have a Bassett's ice-cream cone—Irish coffee was our favorite—and we'd always bring sticky cinnamon buns home to my mother. Those were memorable meals.

These months, I can create memorable meals almost any night from the sheer bounty and freshness of summer produce.

PESTO: Capture Summer in the Freezer

The original pesto is a pungent, basil-based puree intended to sauce hot pasta. But you can create variations on the theme by using a mix of other fresh summer herbs. And don't stop at spaghetti. Slip it under the skin of a chicken before roasting; add to cold summer soups, dips or dressings.

Makes 1 cup.

2 cups fresh basil leaves (see note)

1/2 cup olive oil

2 T. pine nuts or walnuts

2 cloves garlic, peeled

2/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Salt to taste

3 T. softened butter

1. Put basil, olive oil, nuts, garlic and salt in blender and blend till smooth, scraping sides with a rubber spatula.

2. By hand, beat in the grated cheese.

3. If you are making the sauce for pasta, stir in 3 T. softened butter and 1 or 2 T. of the hot water the pasta is cooked in. If you are making the sauce for the freezer, prepare as above but do not add garlic or cheese to the blended basil mixture. The pesto will taste fresher if you add these ingredients after defrosting.

Note: If you experiment with different herbs in pesto, mix stronger herbs like dill with milder ones like parsley or spinach. For example, instead of the basil, use a mixture of 1 cup fresh dill and 1 cup fresh parsley or try mixing 1/2 cup each scallions and dill with 1 cup fresh mint leaves.

The operative word in that sentence is freshness. On an old episode of M*A*S*H the soldiers were talking about the things at home they missed most, and Colonel Potter told them about fresh corn—I mean, *fresh* corn. He would take a portable hot plate out into the cornfield and set on it a pan of water to boil. And when the water was simmering, he would bend a cornstalk over the pot and hold an ear of corn in the water and then eat it, still on the stalk.

Well, I don't live near a cornfield. But where I live, in the brick and concrete pastures of Manhattan, there is a farmer's market set up in a city park, and the green-growers of the surrounding countryside truck in their wares to a greedy and grateful urban audience. I go there every week and meander through the stalls, admiring the piles of squash and eggplant, the ruby-red tomatoes, the bushels of peaches and cantaloupes, the beans of every color. I buy armfuls of basil, red-tipped lettuces and as many zucchini as I can carry. To me, the food of summer is green, and I am content to be practically vegetarian. And I make enough pesto to freeze for memorable meals all winter long. ■

Aimee Lee Ball lives, writes and cooks in New York.

Pesto Pleasures to Enjoy All Year

COLD SUMMER VEGETABLE SOUP

Serves 4 to 6

This soup can be made year-round with any firm, fresh vegetable, such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, peeled eggplant or potato. It's also good hot.

1 cup minced onion
1 clove garlic, minced
1½ pounds zucchini, sliced
5 cups chicken broth
2 T. pesto or fresh herbs
Sour cream and chives for garnish

1. In a Dutch oven, sauté onion and garlic in oil until soft.
2. Add zucchini and broth and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer 15 minutes until vegetable is tender.
3. In a food processor or blender, puree soup in batches until smooth.
4. Chill soup for 4 to 24 hours in a non-metallic bowl.
5. Stir in pesto or herbs and serve topped with sour cream and chives.

CHICKEN, PESTO AND PASTA SALAD

Serves 6 to 8

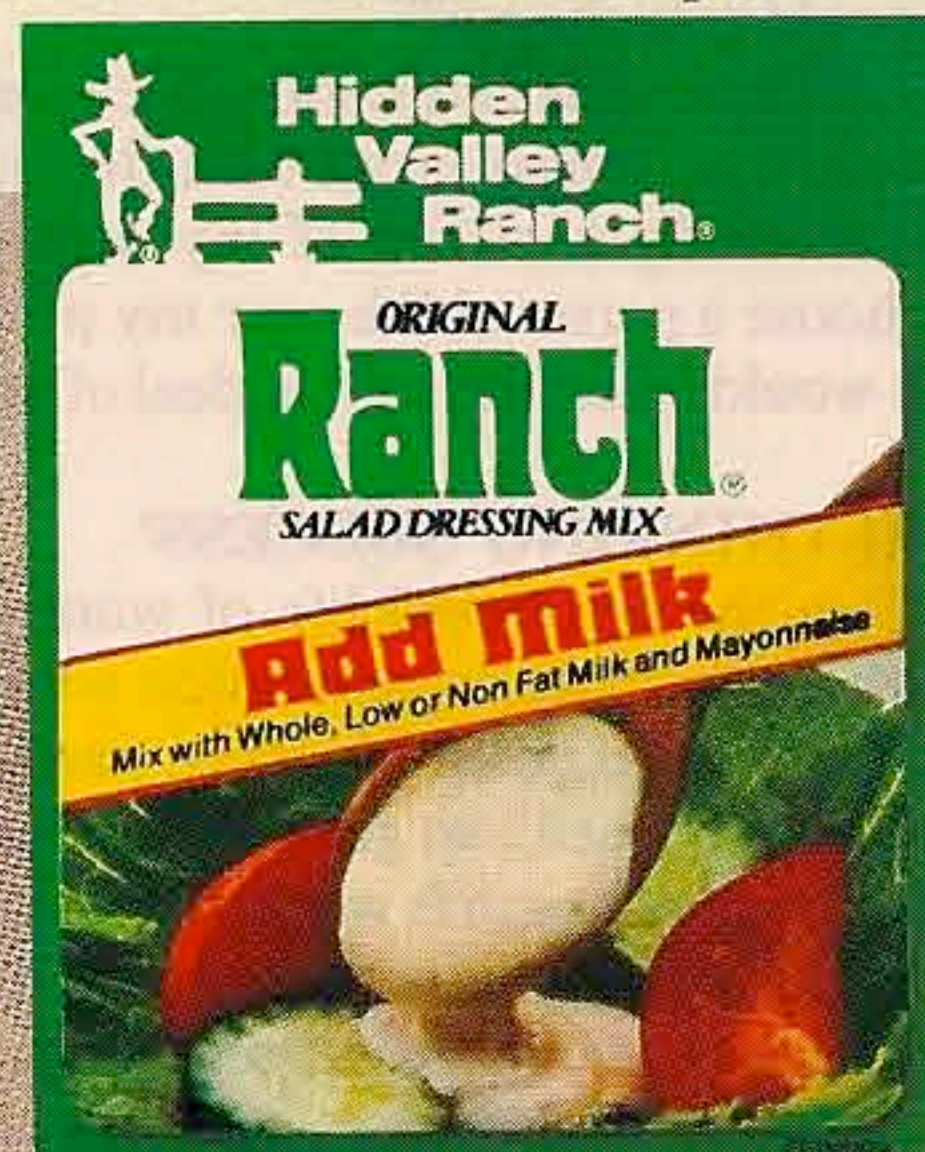
1 pound rotelle, ziti or penne pasta
2 to 3 cups cooked chicken, cut in chunks
2 cups green beans, blanched
1 pint cherry tomatoes or 2 cups red pepper strips
1½ cups mayonnaise
½ cup pesto
1 T. lemon juice
Salt and pepper
1 cup toasted walnuts or pine nuts
Fresh basil leaves (optional)

1. Cook pasta, drain and place under cold, running water to chill. Drain.
2. In a large bowl, combine pasta with chicken, beans and tomatoes.
3. Blend mayonnaise with pesto and lemon juice; fold into pasta mixture. Taste salad, adding salt and pepper and more mayonnaise and pesto if needed. Cover; chill 30 minutes.
4. Garnish with nuts and basil.

Spudderly delicious.

HIDDEN VALLEY RANCH NOUVELLE POTATO SALAD

2 lbs. new potatoes, cooked until tender, cut up
 ½ lb. fresh green beans, steamed, cut
 1 carrot, shredded
 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
 1 cup prepared Hidden Valley Ranch salad dressing — Original Ranch® Milk or Buttermilk Recipe.
 Gently combine.
 Serves 6.





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THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

I've always loved cooking, even when I had no place to cook. In college I fought over the one TV in the dorm when I wanted to watch Julia Child rather than the more popular "Laugh-In," and I read cookbooks in bed the way other people read novels. I was living vicariously—it is difficult to make *coq au vin* with an immersion coil—but the reading and watching seemed to help me face the swill in the cafeteria. When I moved to my first apartment, the kitchen was on one wall of my one room, with an oven that knew one temperature and a refrigerator that reached to my knees. If I attempted anything more ambitious than toast, I had to put up an ironing board for a countertop.

Finally I got a place with a real kitchen. But the woman who had lived there before me was a painter who'd grown old and eccentric in this apartment. There was a table set up in the bedroom with her oils and brushes, a table in the living room with her bourbon and absinthe, and the kitchen had grown a crust. I don't think she had cooked so much as an English muffin in 20 years. Paint was hanging from the ceiling like stalactites, and the refrigerator contained jars of baby applesauce and several sweaters.

Some of my friends took one look at the place and ran screaming into the night. But I saw the high-beamed ceilings and the French doors and the sun pouring in the southern windows, and I knew it could be wonderful. The civilized thing to do in such a situation is to hire a contractor who will in turn supervise the army of painters, plumbers, electricians and carpenters. But lacking the funds, I sat down in the gutted space with two design-minded friends, and several hours later, we had a blueprint for a budget-minded renovation: open shelving, quarry tiles on the floor, a mile of counter space and a pantry where there had been a "maid's bathroom"—an anachronism from the turn of the century, when the building was built.

Most of the workmen I hired began by calling me Mrs. Ball and asking what my husband thought. Once the reins of power were established, we got along fine: They would tell me how much something cost; then they would pick me up off the kitchen floor where I had fainted, and I'd write a check. That was my main function, writing



checks, plus a kind of choreography that is required to keep everyone from bumping heads and chainsaws: The ceramics man can't tile the backsplash until the plumber installs the sink, which he can't do until the carpenter builds the cabinet, which he can't do until the scraper scrapes the floor, which he can't do until the painter paints the walls. And nobody can do anything until the wall between the kitchen and dining room gets knocked down, which I did not have permission to do.

In desperation one day, I asked my painter (who was still scraping off the stalactites), "Is there any way that wall could fall down by itself?" He gave me a quizzical look, but the next morning he called and reported cheerfully, "Half the wall fell down yesterday. The other half is going to fall down today."

I had a few private victories. In defiance of a high-priced electrician and his notions of female helplessness, I learned to install a dimmer switch and rewire a range hood with four dollars worth of materials from Mrs. Sisskind's hardware store. And in answer to a plumber who never answered my phone calls, I called a big supply house, highly praised by my friend Bill, to ask for a referral. When the deed was done, Bill burst out laughing. "What you did," he chortled, "was to call the head of the largest plumbing-supply firm in the country to get a sink installed. That's like calling the president of Paramount Pictures and asking, 'Seen any good movies lately?'"

All of the workmen knew I had a goal in mind: Thanksgiving dinner made in my new kitchen. In my family, holidays had always been celebrated at a not-very-well-loved relative's (where we feared food poisoning) or at my mother's (much loved but weary after her 800th turkey) or at some other married woman's home. This was to be the year when, single or not, I established my credentials to roast and bake the traditional feast. It was a close call: I peeled butternut squash to the sound of a power drill punching in drawer pulls, and the turkey was delivered before the stove. We came perilously close to take-out Chinese for Thanksgiving that year.

I have a photograph from that dinner. The kitchen looked great, despite a few rough edges, while I looked like I needed a rest cure. Part of the cure, as I remember, involved a midnight raid on the kitchen for leftovers of my favorite cranberry-ginger conserve, spooned on vanilla ice cream. I make the cranberries every year. But this year, I'll be thankful to look at the faces of my loving family and friends sitting around somebody *else's* table. ■

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CRANBERRY-GINGER CONSERVE

Makes about a quart

- 1 cup white wine
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 bag (12 oz.) fresh or frozen cranberries, rinsed
- Grated rind of 1 large lemon
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup preserved ginger in syrup, finely chopped, with 2 to 3 T. of the syrup

1. Mix wine, water and sugar in stainless steel or enamel saucepan; bring to a boil.
2. Add cranberries, cover and simmer about 5 minutes, until berries pop. Add lemon rind, raisins and ginger in syrup, and simmer 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Remove mixture from heat, let cool and refrigerate.



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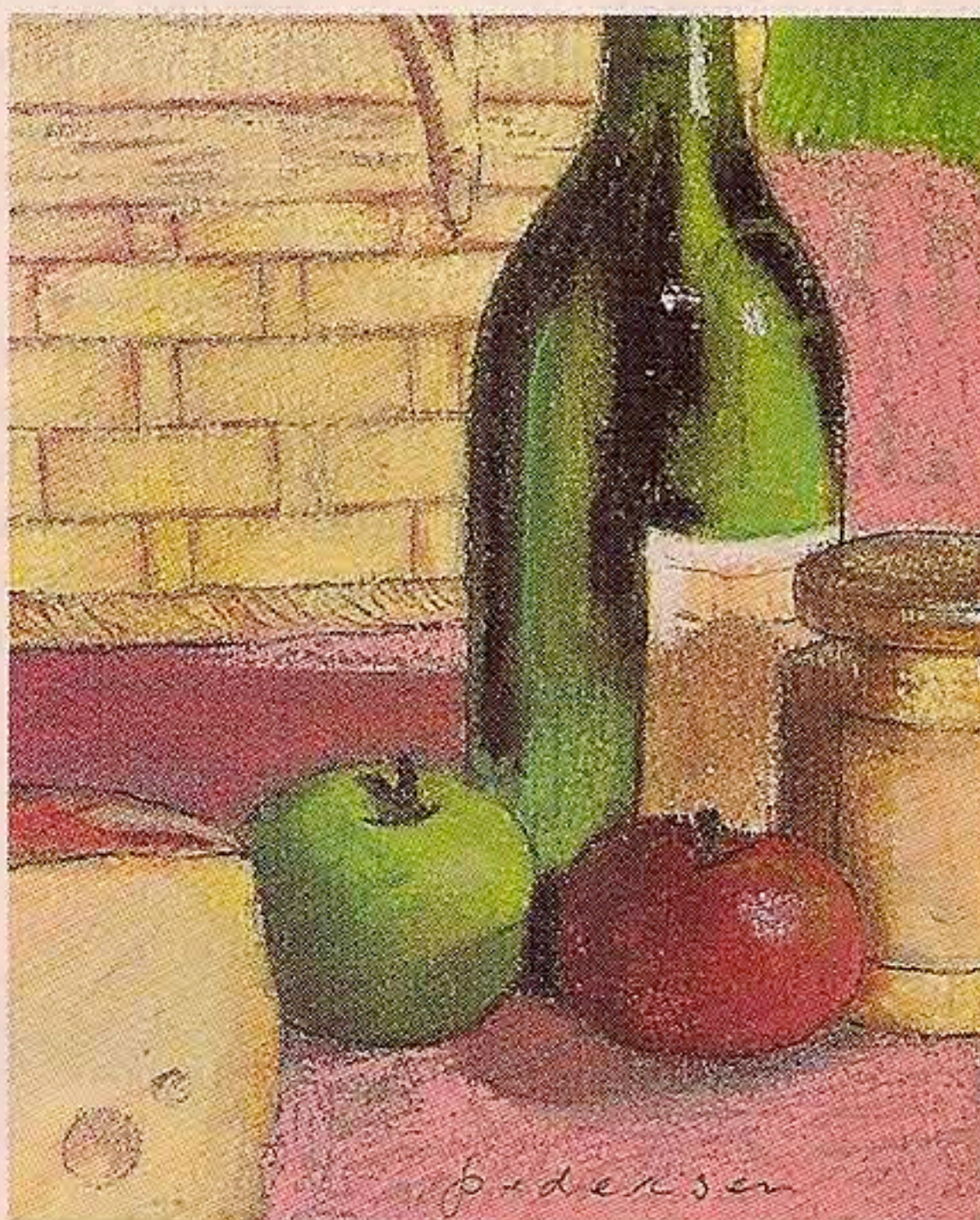
IN THE PICNIC SPIRIT

I know you're reading this by the pool, but as I write, the wind-chill factor is 12 degrees above zero, and I am considering burning the furniture if I run out of firewood. But I am about to have a picnic. Three friends are en route: One is bringing prosciutto bread; another has Syrian olives and string cheese; the third has promised the best pâté this side of the Left Bank; and I am supplying a gooey carrot cake—all of which we are going to eat on my living-room floor, with an old steamer trunk as a tabletop. I actually have a perfectly serviceable table, but I love a picnic.

The standard picnic conjures up an image of a blanket on the grass and an ant army fighting over the chicken legs, but with a bit of improvisation, a picnic spirit can be accomplished in almost any climate at nearly any time of year. Sand and surf or apple orchard are nice, but I have dined well and happily on the Massachusetts Turnpike, on the front steps of a city brownstone and in the semi-private room of a friend in traction.

I once went to a picnic where we sat on wicker lawn chairs at round tables set with plates that looked like ceramic lettuce leaves, and where the hostess floated around in the kind of white, gauzy dress I imagine for Isak Dinesen. It was lovely, but I wasn't too happy—at a picnic, you shouldn't have to worry about which fork to use. Besides, I'm sure it's scientific fact—who would dispute it?—that finger food tastes best. A dish of ice cream is not nearly as satisfying as a cone.

There is also the indisputable fact that food tastes better alfresco—I don't know why—with one exception. I'm not a terrific sailor (I'm much too fond of my equilibrium), but when a friend acquired a new boat and invited me for a picnic cruise, I could hardly refuse. I arrived looking, he claims, like Eleanor Roosevelt, with a big straw bonnet and crepe-soled shoes, but I had brought along my famous Chinese chicken wings, so I was forgiven for not being too adorable. We might as well have eaten my hat and shoes, because everything tasted like I'd used too much salt. It wasn't my fault, that's just the way food tastes on the ocean. Plus, with all the bobbing and weaving, it is hard to identify anything so familiar as hunger. I prefer my picnics on solid ground.



I have eaten cold poached salmon with watercress mousseline sauce on the banks of the Charles River with Arthur Fiedler in the background, and I have had deviled eggs with ballpark mustard in hotter-than-hell Texas with Willie Nelson—both meals tasted good. And once, in a miracle of a place called Petaloudes, in Greece, I made a picnic entirely out of walnuts and a paper bagful of fresh apricots sold by a vendor at the mouth of a trail leading to "Butterfly

Valley" (a cool green glade opening into a field of literally millions of uncocooned butterflies). In fact, I rarely let an opportunity to be out of doors in fine, fair weather pass without a picnic, and I tend to get petulant if others don't concur—I'm that attracted to the idea of communing with nature and a flock of friends.

It helps to have everyone in a party mood, but it isn't absolutely necessary: Once I was working with a group of people making a television commercial in a secluded part of Griffith Park, in the hills above Los Angeles. We were reasonably grateful for the green respite from freeways and smog, and since it was noon and the sun was high and we would be stranded for a few hours' work, I assumed *someone* would have thought to bring along cold chicken and white wine. Someone did not. I seemed to be the only one who thought of this as an occasion to eat—the others were content to work. (Fools.) I was so mad at the oversight that I hid the car keys to prevent our return to the office, until I was threatened with violent repercussions, but I exacted a promise from them to stop for Kentucky Fried and chocolate shakes, which we ate in the car, in silence, on Melrose Boulevard.

It tasted delicious. ■

SINO-ITALIAN CHICKEN WINGS

In recent culinary history the spirit of adventure has yielded some travesties, such as rare duck with avocado and vanilla sauce, and some triumphs... one of them being the pairing of Chinese and Italian flavor principles. The chicken wings here are a perfectly delicious example of what happens when soy sauce and ginger meet garlic and Parmesan, and they make for classy picnic eating.

Serves 4 (recipe can be doubled)

24 chicken wings
1 cup soy sauce
½ cup dry sherry
1 T. brown sugar
1 T. minced garlic
1 T. minced fresh ginger or ½ tsp. ground
1½ cups flour

¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
6 T. vegetable oil

1. Halve wings between two main joints. Cut off and discard tips.
2. In a large bowl blend soy sauce, sherry, sugar, garlic and ginger. Add wings and toss to coat with marinade. Cover and refrigerate 2 to 24 hours.
3. Blend flour and cheese on a large plate 30 minutes before baking. Drain wings and roll one at a time in flour mixture.
4. Heat oven to 425°. Divide the oil between two shallow baking sheets, rotating pans so that they are evenly coated with oil. Arrange wings in a single layer in pans, so that they are not touching.
5. Bake 15 minutes. Turn wings and bake 15 minutes longer. Serve hot, or cool on racks to room temperature before serving.



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A COOK'S FANTASY COMES TRUE

Every time I have taken an especially wonderful-smelling something from my stove, the person eating it has had the same response: "You ought to sell this." I would imagine that all people who like to cook for their friends are, from time to time, urged to go professional: to open a café, cater parties or sell their special chocolate cakes at a little neighborhood place. I've always suspected that I would hate doing anything of the kind—cooking in quantity for people I don't know always sounded like a hideous idea; but recently I had an opportunity to prove myself right or wrong. A French restaurant near where I live offered a chance to spend one night in a "working kitchen" watching the staff prepare the evening's meals. The irony of paying \$300 (after six months on the waiting list) for the privilege of cooking other people's dinners did not escape me. But I thought of it as an expensive finishing school, a chance to pick up enough tips from the pros to expand my repertoire at home. Besides, I was there on full scholarship.

The kitchen at this sort of restaurant is something like the parlor of a beloved dowager madam—four sous-chefs (two men, two women) all working to please a master chef; but the atmosphere is surprisingly relaxed and congenial. Everyone has such specific skills and responsibilities and has performed them so many times that feeding vast numbers of hungry, well-paying customers has become a habit. Before we began I was given a white chef's jacket, white pants and a white apron, all of which I managed to keep spotlessly clean during the course of the evening, which gives you an idea of how much work I did. Mostly I watched—and smelled: For a person who loves food, this is the grown-up equivalent of being a kid in a candy store. I also lost three pounds during the course of the evening, despite tasting every butter-basted and cream-enriched thing in sight, which gives you an idea of the amount of heat generated by ten burners, three ovens, a row of food-warming lights, a salamander grill and a constant mist of hot water for dishwashing.

I have occasionally and lovingly prepared a complex sauce from scratch. A sous-chef here prepares 30 every day—artichoke sauce for the lobster, horseradish sauce for the veal, olive sauce for the duck



and so on—each one the color of a semiprecious stone. I have—once—made my own ice cream, in a contraption that practically required a trip to the salt mines and that I gave to the Salvation Army after one use. The chef here makes all his own ice creams and palate-cleansing sorbets, each one a sharp reminder of the lime or kiwi that gave it birth. Of course the variety of fresh produce and the exquisitely stocked pantries encourage happy invention: There are tiny wild strawberries, big as thumbtacks, flown over from France. There are half a dozen kinds of mustards and vinegars made from fruits I've never heard of. And, always and everywhere, there is an assortment of equipment to answer every conceivable need. The chefs feel so strongly about knives that they bring their own from home. (The consensus: The German Wüsthof Trident brand is best.)

With one of these knives, I learned how to bone a whole chicken so that it looked like a pale, round cantaloupe. (The process makes a sheath of the skin, and the chicken, thus boned, can be stuffed, tied in cheesecloth, roasted and sliced.) I learned, after first watching in horror, how to test the internal temperature of a fish terrine by inserting a metal skewer into the loaf, then running that skewer under my lower lip till it feels just right—hot but not too hot. I also learned how to burn the croutons that go with a saffrony bouillabaisse. (Yes, even the pros burn an occasional crouton.)

In a professional kitchen it is wonderfully liberating to sift and stir and chop, certain that someone else will be cleaning up

after you. That much can't be duplicated at home—not in my home, anyway, and probably not in yours. But one thing that can be successfully transplanted to anybody's kitchen is the degree of organization I saw at work. Those 30 sauces I mentioned are all prepared ahead, poured into tall earthenware crocks and kept warm in a *bain-marie* over a low flame. The fresh herbs that come at a price from points east and west are treated like green gold: individually wrapped in plastic bags and then put in one big bag in the herb department of the refrigerator, which would correspond to the crisper at home. But no matter how many preheater dinners need to be dished up before curtain time, everything is accomplished at a measured and unrushed gait—an approach worth remembering at home when the hollandaise curdles and the guests are at the door.

I contributed, as I've said, very little to the care and feeding of the restaurant's clientele that night. But every time a salad I had dressed or a dish I had sauced went through the swinging doors out to the dining room, I wanted to follow it and hear the oohs and aahs of the eaters. I confirmed my suspicion that I don't like feeding anonymous strangers. To me, food may not be love, but cooking is. It's free, but you gotta earn it. ■

SWEET BUTTER SALAD SAUCE WITH CAPERS

This lovely dressing, made with melted butter in place of oil, would be good over any mixture of salad greens.

- 1 egg yolk**
- 1 T. wine vinegar**
- 1 tsp. Dijon-style mustard**
- 5 ounces clarified unsalted butter**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**
- 1 T. each chopped capers and cornichons, optional**

Whisk together egg yolk and vinegar. Add mustard. Whisk in melted butter. Add salt and freshly ground pepper to taste. Mix in optional capers and cornichons.