

Famous Chefs & Fabulous Recipes

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LESSONS LEARNED AT ONE OF THE
OLDEST COOKING SCHOOLS IN AMERICA

Lisa Abraham
with Catherine St. John



RINGTAW BOOKS
AKRON, OHIO

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This book is dedicated to the chefs who have taught here,
the students and to Zona Spray, who started it all.

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Finally, thanks to my parents, Larry and Ruth White, who brought me up in a house that was built around the kitchen. Every meal was made with love, which fostered my love of cooking and gave me a place where I could discover myself.

Catherine St. John
Owner, Western Reserve School of Cooking

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Thank you, thank you, thank you all!

Lisa Abraham

Foreword

Only two hours remained before people would arrive for class. I hurriedly propped up a still-wet handmade sign against the back staircase at Hudson's Little Church on the Green. Thirty minutes earlier, before racing off that sunny September morning to teach the school's first class, I had suddenly realized that no one—except Hudsonites—would find 1 East Main Street. And who would think to walk to the back of the church and down the basement stairs without direction?

Looking for a solution, I spied a flimsy two by four-foot plywood board in my garage. It wasn't ideal, but at least the shape could accommodate four words. I grabbed a two-inch paint brush, cracked open a small can of black paint and scrawled the school's name, vertically, not horizontally, down the board. It looked like child's play.

Thirty-eight people came to class that morning, forty years ago. There have been many changes during those four decades: the most important was a move across the Green to the school's current location, 140 North Main Street. The new address brought instant visibility; though enlarging the teaching space demanded major structural overhauls. Since those earliest years, thousands of people have ventured through the school's doors. And each student and teacher have marked the school's history with a story. Put together, they could fill a book with behind-the-scenes fascination and intrigue. Not as gripping as *007*, but close.

From the beginning, the school's goal was to help people understand cooking, its logic and why things happen in the pot. Recipes were little more than examples of cooking techniques, with a bit of food chemistry thrown into the mix. Used together, they help cooks identify cause and effect—knowledge that spurs creativity and helps purge kitchens of costly mistakes.

The earliest classes were filled with home cooks. But when young chefs from Paris started arriving to teach, bringing exciting *nouvelle cuisine* dishes and revolutionary cooking tricks, the mix of students changed, as did the times. Consumers were now demanding increasingly sophisticated food and they were willing to spend hours in the kitchen. Boning a turkey, stuffing it and roasting it for Thanksgiving proved to be one of the school's most popular participation classes. Students flew in from Chicago to learn the technique. It was a green light for all things French, but it didn't last.

During the 1980s, while the United States dominated the art world, food writers cried for an American cuisine. But what was it? No one knew exactly. But it initiated a flurry of creativity among local chefs. They competed with

one another, improved their menus, honed dishes until they were art forms on a plate and searched for ever-changing, innovative ideas. Restaurant owners and chefs came to classes, hoping to soak up the creative juices, as foreign chefs practiced their skills with such perfect timing and fluidity that watching them perform was as good as the ballet.

Over the years, people behind the scenes kept the pulse of the school beating. Food editors from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *the Sun News* and *Akron Beacon Journal*, including food writers from Kent, Hudson and as far away as Canton and New Philadelphia, helped spread the word about classes. It didn't matter if a class was for beginning cooks, wait staff or chefs, as long as there was a story, food editors covered it.

The school has outlived many, if not all, of those earliest writers who watched over the little nascent school. But know this—the school exists today because of them. They gave us the courage to be adventurous, and they quietly guided food lovers to our doors, keeping us alive financially. Another huge thank you goes to the numerous Cookery and school employees; and posthumously, I fear, to more souls than I want to count. And of course, there were the students. Many came to improve the food shared at family tables.

Others became leaders in the commercial food world. Some became writers, wrote cookbooks or opened highly successful restaurants. A remarkable number returned to the school as teachers. And there are those who came and never left, building the business—both in front of the house and behind the stove.

From my seat, looking back over the years, the school offered a fascinating kaleidoscope of ever-changing experiences, opportunities and connections. Only a few weeks ago, I met two young opera singers in Sarasota, Florida. One was a twenty-four-year-old apprentice, on his way up the grueling singing ladder. He grew up in Hudson, lived catty-corner to the high school. The other was Hak Soo Kim, performing as the principal tenor in Sarasota's opera production, *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*). Alone and fresh from Korea in the 1990s, Kim had attended Hudson's Western Reserve Academy, where he had discovered that his voice might be more than choir quality, and the food in Hudson made him homesick for rice and kimchee. "Oh, yeah... that cooking school... my mom went there," and, "Yes... oh yes... I remember that place," they reminisced, smiles widening. I felt like a mom who hadn't been forgotten.

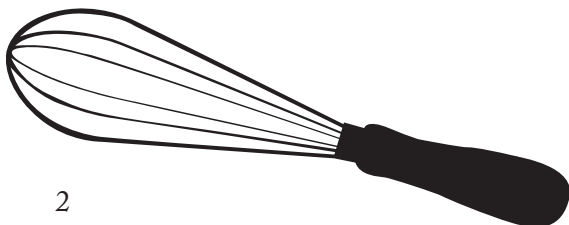
Zona Spray Starks

Famous Chefs & Fabulous Recipes

The Recipes

Zona Spray

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Chapter 1

The History of the Zona Spray / Western Reserve School of Cooking

Enter the unassuming doorway of 140 North Main Street in Hudson, Ohio, and step into the storefront jammed with pots and pans. Walk past the stacks of books, the wall of aprons and whisks, into the back room, where you will come to rest on hallowed ground.

In this tiny kitchen, with its rows of chairs squeezed tightly together, the food world's royalty have come to share their knowledge and teach their craft. Their images, collected over forty years, festoon the back wall and gaze upon the new generation of students who come to the Western Reserve School of Cooking. It is one of the oldest continuously-operating cooking schools in the country. The lessons taught here can be quantified—there are files, records and course books of class schedules. But the lessons learned here are immeasurable.

This unpretentious culinary artery has provided lifeblood to chefs, restaurants and home cooks throughout the globe, all from this tiny enclave south of Cleveland. Thousands of recipes, hundreds of chefs and thousands of students have passed through the doors over the past forty years.

French chefs Jacques Pepin and Madeleine Kamman, baking elite Nick Malgieri and Alice Medrich, crafters of California cuisine John Ash and Hugh Carpenter, and members of the newest generation of television's celebrity chefs, Alton Brown and Michael Symon, all have taught in this small kitchen, with its well-worn equipment hanging in plain sight.

The list of chefs is large and lofty, and seems to be missing only Julia Child. School founder Zona Spray still keeps the letters—apologies from Child for not being able to accept the invitations to teach at the school—tucked inside a drawer in her home outside of Sarasota, Florida. One can imagine Spray's determination in trying to schedule Child as a guest, particularly considering that Spray counted Child among her friends; the pair would get together every time Child came though Cleveland. Child's hectic schedule never permitted anything more. "It wasn't for lack of trying," Spray recalled.

It was that same kind of determination that Spray summoned to open the school some forty years ago. In 1971, Spray realized that she could rent space in Hudson's Little Church on the Green for the cooking classes that she had been hosting in the basement of her home in Twin Lakes, just outside of Kent,

Ohio. The rent was reasonable, just \$5 an hour, and Spray found that students who wanted to learn how to cook were everywhere.

“It was pretty incredible,” Spray recalls of her early days. The church had a kitchen in its basement and Spray used that space for her classes. Right away she had more than thirty people sign up, paying \$20 each for her to teach them how to cook. “I discovered they were so ripe for learning,” Spray says of her early clientele.

For two years, she stayed in the church basement, her students mostly housewives and sometimes their children. The classes were hands-on and extremely technique-oriented—Spray has never been about teaching recipes. While the thousands in the school’s collection would suggest the contrary, they do bear witness to the students’ desire to take something tangible home for practice after their classes were over. For Spray it was never about the recipe, but always about teaching her students how to cook.

Knowing how to follow a recipe and knowing how to cook are two entirely different things. It can be likened to the old adage, give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day; teach a man to fish and he’ll eat for a lifetime. In Spray’s case, if you gave a housewife a recipe for fish, she could make one dish, but if you taught her how to sauté, she could fix endless meals. Spray knew that basic cooking techniques—how to braise, how to sauté, how to chop, how to make a pan sauce—needed no recipe, yet provided the foundation for cooking nearly everything. Techniques give body to the creative soul of the chef and skills open up the portal through which the culinary muse can dance.

“Even during my great-grandmother’s time, cooking was technique-oriented and cooking by ratio. That’s been around for a long time. Even the Eskimos cook by ratio and have for centuries.” Spray would know—in 1939 she was born in an Eskimo village in Shungnak, Alaska, high above the Arctic Circle. Her parents, Delmer and Teresa Boyer, were teachers employed by the federal government to educate native Eskimos, years before Alaska became a state. When World War II began, Alaska became too dangerous a place to remain, due to its proximity to Russia and Japan. The family returned to their Oregon home in 1944, where Spray had her schooling and later graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in sociology. It was there she met her future husband, Lee Spray, who was studying for a career as a university professor. They married and stayed in Oregon while he earned his doctorate degree.

Lee Spray’s first job was in Louisiana. Zona, just twenty-four-years old, became acquainted with her neighbor, Katie Buelle, at the time a well-known Creole cook. “She and I cooked night and day for about two years,” Spray recalled. “We worked on her books and did a number of things.” During the same time period, Spray gave birth to her son, Eric.

After Spray’s two-year immersion in Creole cooking, her husband took a teaching job at the University of Chicago and the young family moved north,

where daughter, Deirdre, was born. Spray's interest in cooking, piqued by her days with Buelle, led her to enroll in the Antoinette Pope Cooking School. The classes were demonstrations, and Spray attended faithfully, sitting among the rows of watching students. She graduated from the program, but Spray's desire for cooking knowledge still wasn't satisfied. She wanted more and she wanted to do something more than watch.

Spray obtained an apprenticeship at the Dumas Père l'Ecole de la Cuisine Française in Chicago, operated by renowned master chef John Snowden. Snowden was unusual at the time, an African-American, he was not French, but was French-trained from the time he was a young boy. He had won several gold medals at the Culinary Olympics and Spray was impressed by his credentials. Moreover, his classroom consisted of twelve stoves. The training required students to cook, every day, all day and Spray was anxious for the opportunity to do more than watch. Snowden could be cruel and barked at his students for the slightest mistakes, not afraid to humiliate them in front of the others when things went wrong. As a woman, Spray was already considered handicapped. In the 1960s, restaurant kitchens were still the domain of men, and Spray's diminutive size—just 5'2", about 100 pounds—didn't give her any advantages. But she was eager for more information; she wanted to know why things worked the way they did and Snowden was a master of kitchen chemistry. "He was very chemically-oriented and very technically-oriented. This was 30 years before a lot of books on technique ever started coming out. He was a real technician," she said. Later, Spray would enroll in college chemistry courses to continue to satisfy her curiosity about why things happened the way they did.

Her training with Snowden was difficult, but Spray kept her focus, despite the environment, and even recalls the time fondly. "That's really where I consider I got my training," she said. It is also where Spray began to nurse the idea that one day she too would teach cooking.

A third move was in the offing for the Spray family, this time to Toronto, Ontario, Canada, where Lee Spray took a job at York University. It was here that Spray began to teach for the first time, giving lessons out of her home and later teaching at the local YWCA, where she also taught classes in art history. In 1970, a fourth and more permanent move soon followed, as Lee Spray accepted a teaching post at Kent State University and the family moved to Ohio. By this time, Spray's children were in school and she knew that she could devote more time to a career. The family settled in a home in Twin Lakes, outside of Kent, and Spray once again began teaching cooking classes from her home kitchen. Soon after, she discovered Hudson's Little Church on the Green.

Spray was able to easily attract many chefs to come and teach with her, as it was the era before the birth of the celebrity chef. Chefs who wanted to sell books outside of New York and make names for themselves nationally had to travel. The two years she spent in the church basement solidified her own repu-

tation as the source for cooking lessons in Northeast Ohio. But Spray knew that if she wanted to grow, her school needed a permanent location. She found The Cookery, a cookware and gift shop owned by the chef at Hudson's prestigious Western Reserve Academy and his wife. Spray purchased the business in 1973, converted the back room to a kitchen and the Zona Spray Cooking School found its official home. Spray taught cooking, sold cookware and began building a stable of regular teachers, some of who remain at the school to this day.

Kathy Lehr began taking classes from Spray in 1977. A grade-school teacher at the time, Lehr wanted to study bread-making, but eventually worked her way through Spray's professional series of classes and earned a chef's certificate. These classes are typically taken by students who want to work as chefs, not home cooks looking to learn how to prepare new dishes. Over the years, Lehr formed a longtime friendship with Spray, whom she affectionately refers to as "Zoner," and began to teach at the school as well. "She gave me, more than anything, a really wonderful basis for how I teach today," Lehr said. After years of devotion to her craft of bread-making, Lehr is now regarded as a national expert and teaches throughout the country. Spray remains one of her favorite instructors. "When she taught, she had the history and the knowledge that goes with the lesson, the whole history, the stories—I think that's what I loved so much about learning from her," Lehr said.

Food Network Iron Chef Michael Symon of Cleveland, also remembers Spray's passion for food and knowledge. "She knew everything about food and was a little bit of a history book about food," he said. He remembers the school as being ahead of its time in the American culinary landscape. "Now there are cooking schools all over the place. There was nothing really like it at the time and it preceded—by a lot—the kind of food movement that has happened."

It was perhaps Spray's degree in sociology that made her such a keen observer of how the world, in particular the food world, was evolving. Blessed with the ability to pick a winner and spot trends early, she had Chicago chef Rick Bayless and his wife Deann as guest teachers in the early 1990s, just as Bayless was beginning to burst onto the culinary scene.

In the late 1970s, Spray noticed another trend—one that struck directly at her business. In a time when Americans were beginning to travel abroad more frequently, Spray noticed that American women were heading to France to study at the Ecole de Cuisine LaVarenne in Burgundy. After two weeks they would return home and start their own cooking schools. Spray was incredulous. What could these women possibly learn in two weeks that would qualify them to teach others? "How can you possibly open a cooking school and know nothing?" Spray wondered.

She set out for France to find out. The move would have a lasting impact on Spray's school and help establish it among the international cooking set. LaVarenne was run by the internationally-acclaimed cooking teacher Anne Willan. A native of England, Willan had graduated from Le Cordon Bleu in

London, and had worked as a chef at the Palace of Versailles before moving to the United States in 1973. She worked as an editor at *Gourmet* magazine and later as the food editor of the now-defunct *Washington Star*, before moving back to Burgundy, where she opened LaVarenne in 1975. Spray arrived at LaVarenne in the summer of 1978, and during her first visit, ended up teaching. The wife of one of the instructors had delivered a baby prematurely and the child did not survive. Since the instructor was unable to teach, an administrator at the school asked Spray if she would co-teach the sessions with him. Spray learned little new about cooking techniques during her time in France, but was blown away by the ingredients she encountered. At the time, the United States was still a culture steeped in iceberg lettuce. No one was eating or even cooking with the variety of greens Spray experienced. “The cheeses, the butters, no one had ever even heard of at the time,” she said. “I certainly learned a lot about food.” She returned for a six-week stint in 1979, and worked as a chef’s assistant.

During her time at LaVarenne, Spray forged friendships with Willan and many of the chefs who taught there. In the evenings, Spray tested recipes with chefs like Ireland’s John Desmond and Steve Raichlen, who was steeped in French training long before he became America’s barbecue guru. Spray issued an open invitation for the chefs to visit her school, and in the summers when teams from LaVarenne would travel to the U.S., Hudson, Ohio, became a regular stop between the New York and Chicago scenes.

In the early 1980s, Cleveland chef Parker Bosley began taking classes from Spray. He recalls the era as a heady time in culinary circles. The region was just beginning to wake up to food and all of its possibilities and Spray was leading the way. “She was pre-Williams-Sonoma. Zona’s was where you could find a great knife or a copper pot,” he said.

Bosley met French chef Michel Pasquet at Spray’s school in 1983, and arranged an apprenticeship with him at his Paris restaurant; he also studied at LaVarenne. In the early 1980s, he regularly taught classes for Spray, before opening his namesake Cleveland restaurant, Parker’s New American Bistro, in 1986. Bosley became Cleveland’s first and most vocal proponent of the sustainable foods movement, a role he continues today. A farm boy from rural northern Trumbull County, Ohio, Bosley was ahead of his time in his quest for sourcing local produce and meats for his restaurant, which closed upon his retirement in 2006. Bosley’s voice may never have emerged if not for Spray and the opportunities he had at her school.

Over the years, Spray’s school grew, as did her business acumen. Bosley recalls that Spray always had an eye on the bottom line. Her interest in succeeding financially was an asset to her professionally, because she was always willing to take a chance on something new. “She was receptive to many kinds of food and teaching and to all kinds of people. She always got the cookbook authors and those people who were the hot names to come to do a class,” he said.

Filling the seats in a class and keeping the business viable was always a concern for Spray, who, after divorcing in 1986, supported herself with the school. She had purchased the building in 1979 and at one time, was operating the school, The Cookery, a deli and carry-out, a sit-down restaurant and a catering business, all out of the first floor.

Spray routinely hosted the visiting chefs at her home, and while some saw the move as a way for her to save on hotel bills, most of the chefs fondly recalled the experience. Returning to Spray's home after their evening classes, Spray would uncork wine and cook a late supper for her guest. Cookbook author Giuliano Hazan said Spray's school was always one of his favorite places to teach, in part because of his late-night dinners and conversations with Spray. She also made an effort to be a good ambassador for the Cleveland area, often taking visiting chefs to see the current exhibit at the Cleveland Museum of Art or the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. New York-based pastry chef Nick Malgieri, a frequent teacher at the school, felt Spray's hospitality made the experience enjoyable. "Zona considered the people who came to the school her friends, and that's why people would come back," he said.

Spray was also notorious for watching the budget. Nancy Neal, who has worked at the school in various capacities since 1992, when Spray hired her as a dishwasher, said Spray's frugality was legendary. "You didn't waste a thing," Neal said. Bones went into the stock pot and dried bread became breadcrumbs. But Neal said what she learned from Spray about being organized and not wasting food stayed with her and helped her to feed her family of four children on a lot less than what her friends were spending. Like many of the people who worked for Spray, there was an intimidation factor, at least at first. "Most people were quite in awe of her, but I guess I was a little afraid of her," Neal said.

Catherine St. John, who trained at the Tante Marie Cooking School in San Francisco, recalls the time in 1994 she approached Spray about the possibility of teaching at her school. A mother with a young daughter, St. John had relocated to Ohio, her husband's home state, a few years earlier and knew of Spray's reputation. St. John said Spray had a larger-than-life presence, not only because of her immense cooking knowledge, but because of how she conveyed it and how she conducted herself. Plenty of people were intimidated by Spray, but everyone respected her, she said. St. John felt her training in classical French techniques gave her a foundation similar to Spray's and the two got along well. Spray remembers St. John as one of the hardest workers she ever hired, one who came with excellent references.

During the 1990s, Carole Ferguson, an Akron native, worked for AT&T in nearby Boston Township. One of the closest places for lunch was downtown Hudson and Ferguson remembers that more often than not, she would end up eating at Zona Spray's. Ferguson felt drawn to the school and the cooking environment. Her dream was to win the lottery so that she could make Spray

an offer she couldn't refuse. Ferguson never won the lottery, but an opportunity for early retirement did come her way. In 1996, AT&T offered workers a chance to retire early. Ferguson fit the requirements and left the company. She began making lists of what she wanted to do in retirement and "go to cooking school" was at the top, so Ferguson enrolled at Zona Spray. She finished the three levels of professional courses and at her class graduation dinner, she and Spray discussed her future plans. Ferguson recalls how Spray said to her, "Perhaps you'd like to buy my cooking school," and from that point on, it became Ferguson's goal. "I had been in love with the place forever," Ferguson said.

Ferguson hired an accountant and a lawyer, obtained a small business loan, invested most of her retirement savings and on April 12, 1997, Ferguson became the school's new owner. The move was a surprise to some, but Spray had been teaching for twenty-six years at that point and longed for more free time to travel.

"I had taken it as far as I could. I didn't want to franchise and I didn't want to keep doing the same thing," Spray said. Spray stayed around for a period of transition, but after her 1998 remarriage to Grant Starks, the pair eventually retired to Florida.

The school's identity had been so wrapped up in Spray that it was hard for some to imagine the school without her. Ferguson set out to blaze her own trail with the school, which began with the very bold move of changing the name to the Western Reserve School of Cooking. Ferguson said she felt the school needed a new identity, with Spray no longer involved, and felt using Western Reserve in the name truly reflected Hudson's role as one of the earliest cities in the Connecticut Western Reserve. Moreover, she was tired of customers coming into the shop and asking her "What's a Zona Spray?" Ferguson established a website for the school and got involved with the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP), an organization that encompasses chefs, cooking school owners and food writers. Through the IACP network, she made contact with up-and-coming young chefs and found they were still willing to come to Hudson, even without Spray's presence. In the Ferguson years, Pam Anderson, John Ash and Colette Peters all came to the school for the first time. By 2002, Ferguson had even begun teaching classes. Unfortunately, while she had a passion for the school, Ferguson did not possess the business acumen that had kept Spray going for so long. In 2004, when she was on the verge of losing the school, her accountant, Ed Schiciano of Twinsburg, who had helped to broker her purchase from Spray, stepped in and bought the store.

Despite losing most of her retirement savings, Ferguson is not bitter about what she lost or what she put into the business. "I never regretted it. I loved every day of it. The cooking school is really the jewel of Main Street," she says, "I've had a really good life and the best part was the cooking school. Going to cooking school was a dream come true, much less owning the school. It was the best seven years of my life."

For his part, Schiciano admits he stepped in for sentimental reasons. He had worked for Ferguson, and Spray before her, and didn't want to see the school close. An avid cook, he was aware of the school's history and felt it could be saved with time and care. He put Nancy Neal in charge of running the day-to-day operations and while he wasn't making money, the school was breaking even and surviving. Schiciano describes himself as a "caretaker owner." He watched the books, paid down the debt and basically stayed out of the way, hoping that one day someone would step forward to purchase it.

By 2007, Schiciano had grown weary of his role of caretaker. He was on the verge of closing the school when one day in the spring, St. John and her husband, Carl, stopped by his office. St. John remembers his first words to her were, "What took you so long?" Purchasing the school was something that St. John had been considering for ten years, from the time Spray originally sold it, but the timing hadn't seemed right. Like Schiciano, St. John didn't want to see the school close and felt she could find a way to make it profitable again. St. John has a dual approach; she shares Ferguson's enthusiasm for attracting big-name chefs to teach, but also embodies Spray's practicality. She's not afraid to make changes and cut costs when needed to keep the school on strong financial footing.

Like Spray, St. John is in the classroom every week, teaching fundamental cooking techniques. But unlike Spray, her students have expanded far beyond the Hudson housewife set. St. John's classes have a wide mix of men and women, from middle-aged laid-off workers looking for a fresh start, to young students who have found her professional certificate program a less expensive way into the job market than one of the larger, out-of-state cooking schools.

The course offerings have changed, too, to reflect the times. Most classes are now participation classes, not lectures, and the course book is filled with classes more relevant to this generation—barbecuing, pressure cooking and even couples classes. As a way of developing a new revenue stream, St. John has developed programs for corporate team-building exercises and cooking retreats. It's rare that a French chef comes to town these days. It's not that St. John would dismiss the idea, but she knows that American cuisine has come into its own over the past twenty years and it is reflected in her clientele's course selections. John Ash, Hugh Carpenter and other leaders of the California cuisine movement will fill her classroom, along with younger members of America's culinary guard—chefs like Molly Stevens and Wendy Kromer, who are leading the way into America's food future. Spray sees the sale to St. John as an excellent move and said while she could have never predicted in 1994 that St. John would one day be the school's owner, she is not surprised by it either. "She has very much blossomed there," Spray said.

Even with the perspective of forty years, Spray doesn't necessarily share the sense of awe that others have when gazing upon the images of the chefs who

hang over the kitchen. The famous ones who chopped, braised, baked, sautéed and gave thousands of lessons on food, they are colleagues and friends to her. She never set out to create anything grand. The chefs she played host to were there, in part, to satisfy her own selfish desire to learn more, as much as they were for her students and her business. “I was just doing what I had a passion for,” Spray said. “I was drawn to the cooking. I love food. I love to eat.”



Zona Spray

Zona Spray has spent most of her lifetime teaching other people how to cook. When asked which recipes, of the thousands in her collection, she wanted to share, she offered a small collection of classic, unpretentious foods—a simple soup, roasted chicken, mashed potatoes and parsnips. Yet contained within each recipe are the skills that Spray has worked so tirelessly to teach her students over the years: chopping, roasting, braising and building layers of flavors, using the freshest ingredients and right equipment for the job. These recipes are her lessons.

Soup Bonne Femme (Soup of the Good Woman)

As the story goes, this soup was made on laundry day, when women hauled water to the laundry tubs, heated it, scrubbed the clothes, hauled more water, rinsed the clothes and hung them out to dry. Exhausted, but with dinner yet to prepare, women could quickly make this soup and serve it with an excellent crusty country bread for a satisfying supper.

1 teaspoon butter or oil	milk, cream or sour cream, as desired
1 small onion, sliced	salt and pepper, to taste
1 clove garlic, bruised (optional)	nutmeg, to taste
1 medium potato, sliced	cayenne, to taste
water or light chicken stock (enough to barely cover potatoes)	chives or other fresh herb for garnish

In a saucepan, add butter, onion and garlic and cook gently, until translucent, but not colored. Add potato, season, barely cover with water or stock and cook until tender.

Purée soup finely for a smooth-textured first course or leave small chunks in soup for a more rustic texture. Add stock or milk and thin to soup consistency. Season to taste with salt, pepper, nutmeg and cayenne.

Garnish with a fresh herb and a little sour cream, if desired. Serve with crusty bread.

Makes 2 servings.

Tilapia with Tomatoes and Basil

Only one skillet is needed in this braised dish and like all fish, you can have dinner on the table within minutes. If basil isn't available, use fresh parsley.

1 tablespoon olive oil	1 tablespoon chopped chives
1/3 cup diced onion	2 sorrel leaves, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced	salt and pepper, to taste
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes	1 1/4 pounds Tilapia fillets (3 fillets)
1/8 teaspoon salt	5 to 10 torn basil leaves
1 (whole) 3-inch diameter tomato or 2 plum tomatoes, diced with seeds	grated zest of 1 lime
15 basil leaves, torn into 1/2-inch pieces	juice of half a lime

In a 10 or 12-inch skillet (large enough to hold all 3 fillets), add olive oil. In separate areas of the oil, add onion, garlic, pepper flakes and salt. Heat on medium-low until garlic begins to turn golden.

Distribute diced tomato, basil, chives and sorrel over pan contents and season with salt and pepper. Lay fillets on top in a single layer.

Sprinkle salt and freshly ground pepper over fish. Toss 5 to 10 torn basil leaves over fish. Cover, braise gently on medium-low heat, simmering until fish is white and tender when pierced with a metal skewer.

Uncover; grate lime zest over fish. Squeeze fresh lime juice over all. Adjust salt and pepper if needed.

Serve over rice, with a green vegetable. (Broccoli and chard are good because of the textural contrast.)

Makes 3 servings.

Note: Sorrel is a lemony-flavored herb. Leaves are 3 to 5 inches long. It grows like a weed in the garden and is wonderful in many dishes. If you don't have it, add some lemon zest or a squeeze of lemon just before serving the dish. Though this dish has lime in it, the combination of lemon and lime is excellent.

Slow Roast Chicken and Vegetables

For years I've preached the merits of breaking down proteins with low heat. But until I had to be out of the house for two hours, with friends waiting for dinner upon my return, I hadn't tested the theory with a whole chicken. It was delicious and juicy; try it.

1 whole fryer chicken, liver reserved	3 large carrots, cut into 2 by ½-inch strips
handful of fresh thyme (about 16 sprigs)	8 large garlic cloves, unpeeled
salt	3 tablespoons olive oil
3 medium-size potatoes (such as Yukon Gold), washed and quartered lengthwise	salt and pepper
1 large onion, cut lengthwise into 10 pieces	

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Remove giblets and vent fat from chicken. Sprinkle salt inside cavity. Put liver and fresh thyme inside. Tie a string around legs and tail. Place, breast up, in a 9 by 13-inch heavy au gratin pan.

Arrange vegetables around chicken, or mound in one end of pan. Drizzle all with olive oil. Toss vegetables in oil. Smear oil over chicken (use your hands; it's efficient) and rub ¼ teaspoon salt over skin. Sprinkle vegetables with salt and pepper. Pop pan with chicken and vegetables into oven and immediately turn heat to 250 degrees and leave alone for two hours.

After two hours, chicken should be done; thigh meat will feel soft to the touch. If vegetables are not quite tender, or you want chicken to be beautifully browned, raise heat to 400 degrees. Toss vegetables in juices; spoon some juices over chicken. Return to oven for about 10 minutes, until chicken is browned and vegetables are tender.

Remove chicken from oven; rest five minutes so juices distribute throughout the meat. Warm plates in oven while you're carving the bird and pouring dinner wine. Cut chicken into four pieces: breasts with wing attached and drumsticks with thigh attached. Arrange chicken and vegetables on plates. Sprinkle with salt and freshly ground pepper. Degrease juices and spoon over meat.

Makes 4 servings.

Note: Free-range chickens are preferred. If you don't have one large heavy pan, then use two smaller ones. Parsnips are excellent roasted with this mélange of winter vegetables; or substitute parsnips for the potatoes.

Parsnip and Potato Purée with Truffle Oil

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Many people have been deprived of enjoying parsnips, a sweet root vegetable that blends beautifully with other root vegetables. Mashing parsnips with potatoes enhances the flavor of both vegetables.
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3 medium potatoes (a starchy variety), peeled and chunked	4 tablespoons butter, or to taste salt, pepper, nutmeg, to taste
2 parsnips, peeled and chunked	1 tablespoon truffle oil
water to cover	2 tablespoons minced chives
½ cup hot whipping cream (optional)	

Put potatoes, parsnips and enough water to barely cover in saucepan. Boil; simmer until tender when pierced with a skewer.

Drain potatoes; reserve cooking water. Return saucepan to heat and shake pan until potatoes look dry and a little powdery.

Mash potatoes and parsnips while adding hot cream; use some of the hot cooking water to thin out as desired. Enrich with butter.

Add salt, pepper and freshly ground nutmeg to taste. (You should not taste nutmeg, but know if it is missing.) Add truffle oil and chives.

Mashed potatoes are best served immediately, but if you must make them ahead, set aside at room temperature with lid slightly askew. Reheat when needed.

Makes 6 servings.

Note: Add or subtract cream and butter to your taste. For the lightest purée, the liquid should be hot and butter should be room temperature. Use saved drained hot potato water in lieu of cream, if desired.