

What's Cooking with Jane Citron

BY MARY S. GILBERT

Jane Citron's kitchen has all the requisite equipment that you would expect of someone whose life revolves around cooking — to wit, a Sub Zero refrigerator, a Cuisinart, a microwave oven, a Viking range with six gas burners and two ovens, two ancillary ovens, extensive cabinetry, a marble and butcher block-topped center island, an array of All Clad pots, and canisters segregating wooden spoons and wire whisks.

It is the ideal setting for preparing home-cooked meals, which, logically, makes it the equally ideal setting for teaching cooking classes.

Citron, the food writer for Pittsburgh magazine, began holding cooking classes in her Squirrel Hill home in 1978 as an extension of her "natural love and feeling for food and cooking."

Citron's inherent affection for food really came to fruition when she and her husband, Carl, lived in San Francisco during the early years of their marriage.

"I was exposed to a level of cooking and wine not available in Pittsburgh," she recalled. "I continued that interest back here, preparing meals, although nothing elaborate, for company. Then I started to travel to places like Morocco and Europe, and that became an influence as I tried to make what I saw there. I taught cooking classes at Mom's Day Out, at the Jewish YMHA and the Pittsburgh Council for International Visitors, where I worked with foreign wives who didn't understand American cooking."

Citron found perhaps the ultimate illumination when she studied in France with Madeline Kamman, a James Beard Foundation award winner. She also credits Jacques Pepin with having a tremendous impact on her profession.

In her classes, Citron sees her role as both a teacher and a source of inspiration and entertainment for amateur cooks. The homey intimacy of Citron's kitchen is a comfortable, non-intimidating environment in which to learn.

"My cooking class is a marketplace format to exchange information and to motivate you," she said. "I succeed if I can stimulate you to go into your kitchen, if you think that looks fun. People should go to a cooking class if they want to go in their kitchen, cook, and succeed. They should see new ingredients. They should know what truffles, morels, and celery root are, and then make their own judgment."

Her desire to instill a sense of pleasure and confidence was evident during a recent class, where, with the assistance of friends Melanie Affinito and Jody Clark Walter, she prepared a special occasion menu of celery and celery root bisque, roast rack of lamb with pistachio, sun dried tomato, and goat cheese crumb crust, wild rice and mushroom tim-



The president enjoys one of Jane's cherry and raspberry pies.

bale, and Alsatian apple tart for a dozen appreciative and attentive students.

While she demonstrated a mix of old and new techniques, she freely encouraged dialogue, eagerly dispensed advice, and even sought ideas from her class (Anyone know how to remove red wine stains from carpet?).

Her comments ranged from the practical to the philosophical: More is not better. Use fresh, quality ingredients. Keep brown sugar in the refrigerator to keep it from hardening. Let your taste be your guide. Always season every part of the dish; if you wait to season when everything is in the pot, all you season is the liquid and it gets very salty. When you entertain, do as much ahead as you can. The best sauce begins with a reduction of a good stock, which deepens the flavor. When baking you have to pay attention to the recipe; a soup gives you more flexibility to add a little of this and that.

Citron plans her classes to capitalize on current trends while providing fundamental techniques and a refined style of cooking which students can duplicate at home. She uses olive oil, and downplays butter and cream. Recent offerings have included the flavors and ingredients of Provence, innovative concepts from French-American chef Georges Vongerichten, a comprehensive look at pasta, and elegant tastes from Vienna and Budapest.

"My most popular classes have a format," she noted. "People like the idea of a complete menu. I modify recipes a lot and make up some. If I use someone else's recipe, I fully acknowledge it. I base others on a technique then add to it. For instance with rack of lamb, you essentially cook it the same way, but I enhance it with spices and toppings and vary the sauce or wines."

Travel continues to bring an added dimension to Citron's cooking classes. She returns with ideas, recipes and ingredients — "I have more olive oil than Penn Mac," she laughed. "I drag it home."

She also introduces people to the joys of cooking and cuisine beyond the confines of her kitchen. Once a year she leads small groups of food and wine aficionados on gastronomic excursions to, primarily, the Napa Valley, Italy and France, locations where she has spent ample time and has well-placed contacts. Janice Rosenberg of Omega World Travel handles the travel arrangements.

"I try to provide experiences that people would be unable to do on their own. We do some cooking

classes and demonstrations, dine at wineries, go into restaurant kitchens, tour facilities not open to the public, and attend food and wine festivals," she said.

Besides catering to the home cook in her classes, Citron also has cooked for the famous. She baked a cherry and raspberry pie for President Clinton when he attended an event at her friend's house in Washington, D.C. She baked the pie at home, boxed it and carried it on the plane, securing an upgrade to first class. Citron's friend told the president that Citron had baked him a pie. He took a bite, and soon the chairman of the Democratic National Committee was indulging in the pie as well.

The person she would still like to cook for is Stephen Spielberg.

"He is such a credit. He's done so much for humanity. But I'd be tongue-tied," she said.

Hard to believe that Jane Citron, with her infectious zeal for spreading the gospel of good food, would ever be at a loss for something to say. For more information, Jane can be reached at 621-0311. **SA**

On the side with Jane Citron

Need to plan a special occasion meal? Consider Jane Citron's favorite menu for spring: Appetizer — Smoked salmon bavarois (recipe follows) Main course — Grilled quail breast wrapped in pancetta with a pan reduction sauce. Side dishes — Wild rice timbale, Asparagus with truffle oil, used sparingly, and chives. Salad — California greens with warm goat cheese. Dessert — Profiteroles with caramel sauce

Bavarois of Smoked Salmon with Tomato Coulis (from Restaurant Chiberta/Paris)

12 2-oz. ramekins
3/4 lb. smoked salmon, thinly sliced
1 tsp. catsup
2 tbs. lemon juice
pinch of cayenne pepper
dash of Worcestershire sauce
1/4 c. snipped fresh chives
1 c. heavy cream
1 oz. salmon roe (optional)

Line bottom and sides of 12 2-oz. ramekins with half of the salmon. Process remaining salmon (you should have about 6 oz.) in food processor until smooth. Blend in catsup, lemon juice, cayenne and Worcestershire. Whip cream until soft mounds form, then combine with salmon paste. (Lighten paste by beating a small amount of cream, then folding in the rest with chives and optional salmon roe.) Spoon into prepared molds, smoothing tops with metal spatula. Chill 2-3 hours or overnight. Sauce 2 lbs. ripe tomatoes, quartered 1 tbs. tomato paste (optional) dash Worcestershire sauce dash sugar few sprigs of fresh mint salt and freshly ground pepper crème fraiche (optional) Cook tomatoes 10 minutes to soften, then pass through food mill. If tomatoes are watery, stir in tomato paste. Add few sprigs of mint. Season with Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper. Simmer briskly until thickened, stirring occasionally. Time required: 15-25 minutes. Remove mint, re-season and refrigerate until cold. (A purist might consider re-straining finished sauce.) To serve: Invert molds onto plates. Surround with sauce. If desired, garnish with additional mint and crème fraiche. **SA**