

## Happenings

# Beyond Big Mac: Culinary confidence

THERE'S A TIME to move beyond the culinary limits of Big Mac and Hamburger Helper. But after encouraging your tastebuds at various ethnic restaurants in the Chicago area, what then?

Like most Americans, I was raised on a steady diet of meat and potatoes, all cooked in the same basic manner—unexciting. It wasn't until I opened the doors to a variety of food palaces here and in San Francisco that I began to enjoy food, even look forward to it! But eating out puts a cramp on the budget.

So confronted with bankruptcy or more meat and potatoes, I took up ethnic cooking and soon discovered that all knowledge does not come from a cookbook. I decided it 'twas time for a cooking class.

ENTER DAVID NOVICK, 29, who has a culinary mission: teaching cooking confidence. Novick, a graduate of the University of Chicago's MBA program, has held a very unusual and fun cooking school for the past 19 months in the kitchen of his Hyde Park home.

Novick shuns the traditional structured approach to culinary instruction. He teaches an informal, relaxed course, sans starched white hats and utilitarian

stainless steel counters. Instead, the setting is an olive and red-colored kitchen with newly-sanded maple floors.

And the price is right in these inflationary days: \$35 for five lessons, food included.

Novick believes that good cooking "is not an archaic art achieved at the feet of a master." Rather, he lets the students do the stirring and chopping to attain the confidence he believes important to success in the kitchen.

"If they understand it, they can do it," he says of his desire for students to comprehend the process behind recipes, "so they can duplicate them at home." That process, he says, is merely a matter of technique, another point fundamental to his instruction.

NOVICK'S THEORIES WORK, if my experiences as a somewhat timid, tho very interested, student of Near Eastern cuisine are any guide. I finished the course, not as a chef supreme, but as a confident practitioner of the kitchen arts.

The cuisines Novick teaches are as varied as his interests: Mandarin, Near Eastern, French, a bit of Japanese, and soon, Italian Beyond Spaghetti. Novick once managed the Court House Res-



Student Howard Finberg, left,



# Mac: Confidence

ess steel counters. Instead, the  
g is an olive and red-colored  
n with newly-sanded maple floors.  
the price is right in these infla-  
y days: \$35 for five lessons, food  
ed.

ick believes that good cooking "is  
an archaic art achieved at the feet  
master." Rather, he lets the stu-  
do the stirring and chopping to  
the confidence he believes im-  
t to success in the kitchen.

they understand it, they can do  
e says of his desire for students to  
reprehend the process behind recipes,  
they can duplicate them at home."  
process, he says, is merely a mat-  
technique, another point funda-  
al to his instruction.

VICK'S THEORIES WORK, if my  
iences as a somewhat timid, tho  
interested, student of Near East-  
uisine are any guide. I finished the  
e, not as a chef supreme, but as a  
ent practitioner of the kitchen

cuisines Novick teaches are as  
as his interests: Mandarin, Near  
n, French, a bit of Japanese, and  
Italian Beyond Spaghetti. Novick  
managed the Court House Res-



Tribune photo by Ovie Carter

Student Howard Finberg, left, and instructor David Novick.

restaurant in Hyde Park before returning to college.

Good eating, he maintains, doesn't have to be expensive. He recommends Chinese cooking for singles as a tantalizing way to minimize the expense of cooking for one.

One point shouldn't be overlooked about Novick's classes: they're fun. He is enjoyable to watch as he dashes about the kitchen in the manner of a hyperactive Julia Child. He takes command before a 50-year-old, eight-burner restaurant stove, moving from one bubbling pot to another, tasting this and that. He never really seems to measure ingredients, but he's always careful and particular about taste.

What's more important is the manner in which he teaches his students. His ease in the kitchen can't help but rub off and make you relaxed and, a better cook.

STUDENTS, ABOUT four to six in each class, assemble along a 20-foot long marble-topped table that serves as an all-purpose cutting board as well as a workbench. Walls and counters of the huge kitchen are crowded with thrift-shop finds such as 30-year-old mixers that still work, heavy-duty woks, antique cleavers; and assorted other kitchen work tools, out of date but still useful.

Pots and bowls are everywhere, and by the end of a lesson, the tiny sink is usually jammed with cookware. Spices and herb containers are stacked high on one wall. The refrigerator bulges with food.

It is within this organized confusion that learning occurs. For each two-hour session, about three recipes are discussed, created, and hopefully eaten with gusto — in most cases. Students

range from budding food freaks [like myself] to interested beginners. In fact, Novick enjoys teaching tyros: "It's more of a challenge, and it's more fun for me."

He and his wife, Ann, a constant critic in the kitchen and an English professor at the University of Illinois, travel around the country looking for new food and recipes. On one trip to New Orleans, they drove home with 40 pounds of Creole tomatoes, 30 pounds of green peppers, 20 pounds of eggplant, and assorted bags of coffee and spices. There are also frequent field trips to New York for cheeses and Italian specialities.

IN MY NEAR Eastern class we tried cooking egg-lemon sauces and kuftes; folded filo dough, kneaded pita bread, and delved into the secrets of creating halvah for dessert. Thruout the five weeks Novick tries to parallel class techniques with other, more familiar cuisines.

At the conclusion of my lessons, each class member prepared part of a meal and brought a friend for dinner. The main course was leg of goat. Yes, goat, a staple in the Near East, but a curious, undeveloped taste in Chicago. [The rest of the meal was received with somewhat more enthusiasm than the goat.]

Novick's most popular class is Mandarin cookery. He would like to teach a South American class, but hasn't yet found enough students.

What's "quarter-pounder" in Spanish?

Classes are held on weekends and weekday evenings for two to two and a half hours. Cost is \$35 for five lessons. Novick has a French course starting Saturday, March 23; a Chinese course the next day. For information, 924-2180.

Howard Finberg