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## Food

Wednesday, June 16, 2004

### Blogs With Flavor

#### Cooks can create and commiserate on the Web

By Sara Kate Gillingham-Ryan  
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Just as cookbooks were once considered recreational reading for food lovers, Web sites called food blogs are now used by increasing numbers of us for culinary dreaming, recipes and not-so-occasional soul searching. I know this because I've succumbed to the lure and now spend hours each week writing my own blog and reading others.

Like online diaries, blogs (short for Web logs) are Web sites with regular updates and links to other stories and resources on the Web. There are blogs on every topic imaginable, and food blogs are among the trendy. In them are recipes, food gossip, the history of specific cuisines or ingredients, restaurant reviews, photos of real meals made by real people for their real families, and food-related musings of regular folks who love to eat. These musings are sometimes brilliant and sometimes boring. Yet they are the essential ingredients of a blog. It's up to the author, or blogger, to concoct an appealing combination of ingredi-

ents to make his or her site so delicious that readers keep coming back for seconds.

There are thousands of blogs on the Web. Log on to <http://indianfoodrocks.blogspot.com>. Maybe you like reading the food section of different newspapers but don't have time to take in them all. Check out <http://www.thefoodsection.com>.

Food blogs provide current information in a way that cookbooks and even newspapers cannot. When an entry is posted on a blog, it appears immediately. Books have a delay of

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months, if not years. Magazines usually prepare their issues at least four to six months in advance. Newspapers can take as much as a month or two to publish an article. But a blog you read this afternoon can be as fresh as a home-cooked meal. And it may provide information about what's for sale in your local farmers' market that day, along with relevant recipes. Or it may profile a restaurant opening tonight in your city.

I was skeptical when I first learned about blogs from my brother-in-law, who has worked in digital media for years. Between reading the food sections of my favorite newspapers each week and keeping up with the fast pace at which cookbooks are published these days, I had no time for more information.

Then he showed me the Julie/Julia Project (<http://blogs.salon.com/0001399>). It's a blog in which a woman named Julie Powell chronicles her 365-day project cooking everything in Julia Child's classic *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. I was hooked. It wasn't long until my own idea was born. I was preparing to start an 11-week intensive culinary program at New York City's French Culinary Institute. Why not blog my way through culinary school? And so I did.

Once I had my idea to write about culinary school, my husband helped get me started last Christmas. He gave me a card with a sketch of a stove, an addition symbol, then the words "sarakate.net," then an equal sign and the word "inspiration." He showed me my new Web domain ([www.sarakate.net](http://www.sarakate.net)) and taught me to use Typepad, one of several blog publication services. We haven't gotten around to ordering a new stove yet, but the blog has been an invaluable tool for me.

The technology is simple. You just need to follow a few simple instructions.

There are a several publication services. Typepad ([www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)), Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) and Salon.com ([www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com)) are a few of the big ones. For \$5 to \$15 a month, Typepad allows users to set up sites that are easily updated as much as the user chooses, and to post links and photographs in their own design.

You don't have to have your own domain name like I do. Having one allows me to build it into a larger and more comprehensive site, though. Typepad will give you an address on its server, such as [yourblog.typepad.com](http://yourblog.typepad.com). I chose Typepad because I liked the available design options and I found their interface easy to navigate. Blogger is a free service, but it has more limited features. Salon.com looks similar to Typepad and offers software and service free for a 30-



Smooth: Melted chocolate gives Michelle's Boozy Mousse a pleasing texture (AP Photo).

day trial. After that it costs \$39.95 a year.

Within 20 minutes, I was designing my site, and within an hour I had my first comment posted by a total stranger. I was thrilled.

Typepad notes newly created blogs on their site so it's easy for outsiders to keep tabs on what kinds of blogs are being created. On the first day, someone saw my blog, checked it out and sent good wishes to me through my "email me" link. This is a major component of many blogs: public commentary. Bloggers are very supportive of their fellow bloggers and, for the most part, there is no sense of competition. In fact, many blogs have links to other blogs they like. This is one of the best ways to increase traffic. I recently received a wonderful series of questions from a reader who had read my post detailing the night we studied egg whites at school. I replied, at length, about how to separate the yolk from the white, how to fish out a stray shell and how to deal with the chalaza (the stringy white piece attached to the yolk). I felt like I was doing a real community service.

Now my week revolves around my blog. Monday is class. Tuesday I post. Wednesday, class again. Thursday I post. Friday and Saturday I cook at least one dish that I have learned in class. Sunday I recover, and Monday it starts again. It is an absolute thrill to write something and see it instantly published.

Blogging my way through culinary school has also been a wonderful way to review what I've learned.

Some blogs have very short posts that often are links to other sites or news stories with short introductions. Sites of original content, such as mine, tend to be wordier.

A good blog is updated regularly, shows commitment to quality in grammar and graphics, can be easily navigated and, of course, provides useful information. A bad blog may contain random information that is not held together by a common thread, it may be sloppy or visually unappealing.

In September, Forbes magazine selected their five favorite blogs in various categories. Their favorite food blog was the Julie/Julia Project, followed by four others, including Cooking with Amy (cookingwithamy.blogspot.com), by a San Francisco-based food lover, and lapingourmand.com, in which a French Canadian amateur chef writes in both French and English.

The April issue of Gourmet magazine listed their five favorite food blogs, (which they called "flogs," for foodie

blogs). Among them was "The Radical Chef" (cooking.houseonahill.net), in which a woman in the Philippines posts photos of her family dinners with recipes, some history of Filipino cuisine and flashbacks to when she was learning to cook with her grandparents. Another Gourmet pick was Bourrez Votre Visage (bourrezvisage.com), the work of two friends, Matt Kantor and Martin Rundle, who cover food news, restaurant reviews and occasional tales from the Culinary Institute of America, where Kantor is a student.

There are too many food blogs to track down; more are being created as you are reading this story. It's no surprise that Forbes and Gourmet selected different blogs as their favorites.

But if you're interesting in sampling a few, there are several ways to sort through them. You can browse through food blogs in general, by using sites like Blogdex.com and Kinja.com, but searching through [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) is still one of the best ways to find sites that match your interests. A search for "blog" and any other term of interest ("enchiladas," "vegetarian," "thanksgiving," "organic") will reap multiple hits for blogs that have at the very least, mentions of these topics.

Kinja will set up a digest of your favorite blogs for free so you can see a daily summary of your favorite blogs without having to log onto each of them separately. Even so, the large number of blogs can make it difficult to keep up.

As my culinary school journey comes to an end, I'm now thinking about what my next blog project will be. If you log on to [Sarakate.net](http://Sarakate.net) in the coming months, you will find out. One thing is for sure, I'm committed to writing about food that is joyful, delicious and healthy. Perhaps in this second go-around I might even begin to follow the unwritten rule of keeping posts brief. But with a love this great for food, it's hard to imagine cutting back.

## Schvitz Fish Stew

(Recipe from <http://www.sarakate.net>. This stew recipe is based upon Deborah Madison's Tomato, Fennel and Potato Stew with Saffron.

This is the stew that my good friend and cooking comrade, Amy, made the night I burned my hands in a fire. (The recipe comments are hers.) We had friends out for the weekend for what was supposed to be a sweat lodge (or schvitz). Instead, we accidentally started a small brush fire. Once the firemen left, Amy saved the day with her delicious stew

1 1/2 pounds red or yellowpotatoes

2 fennel bulbs

2 cups whole canned tomatoes with juice  
or 1 pound ripe tomatoes peeled and  
seeded

Salt

3 to 4 tablespoons olive oil

1 large leek, white part only, finely diced

1 large yellow onion, diced

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1 teaspoon herbes de Provence

2 to 3 pinches of saffron threads

2 2-inch long wide strips orange zest

2 bay leaves

1 cup dry white wine

12 pitted black olives, oil cured, Nicoise,  
Gaeta, whatever you prefer

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1 pound cod fillets

Rouille (recipe below) or garlic  
mayonnaise

1. Peel the potatoes and slice them  
lengthwise into sixths or eighths and then  
in half again across. Trim fennel and cut  
into wedges 1/4- to 1/2-inch thick,  
leaving some core so pieces stay intact.  
Cut the tomatoes into large neat pieces.

2. Bring pot of water to boil, salt  
liberally, add potatoes and boil 5  
minutes. Remove potatoes (put them in  
the same bowl as fennel and tomatoes)  
and keep the cooking water.

3. While potatoes cook, warm olive oil in  
a wide pan. Add the leek, onion, garlic,  
herbes de Provence, some salt, saffron,  
orange zest and bay leaves. Cook slowly  
over medium heat until onions begin to  
soften, about 7 minutes. Then add the  
wine and let reduce by half. Add  
tomatoes, potatoes, fennel, olives and  
half of the parsley. Pour in enough potato  
water to cover, bring to a boil, lower  
heat and cook for 35 minutes.

4. Rinse and cut the codfish fillets into  
approximately 2-inch chunks, add to the  
stew after 20 minutes.

5. Garnish with remaining parsley and  
serve with a bowl of Rouille (recipe  
follows) or garlic mayonnaise.

## **Rouille**

3 to 5 cloves garlic

1/2 teaspoon course salt

1 to 2 teaspoon ground red chili or a little cayennepepper to taste

1 egg yolk

1 cup olive oil

Pound garlic in a mortar with salt until it's broken down into a smooth paste. (It can be chopped and mashed with back of wooden spoon in small bowl, or worked over with a flexible paring knife against a cutting board. Salt helps break it down.) Then work in the ground red chili or cayenne to taste and the egg yolk. Gradually add the olive oil -drop by drop at first, then in a small stream. If it ever stops turning into a thick creamy sauce and separates, chill in fridge, then try mixing around again, or start with a new egg yolk. If it gets too thick, add a little hot water.

## Michelle's Boozy Mousse

Recipe from [www.sarakate.net](http://www.sarakate.net). This is the mousse I remember eating on special occasions. The recipe comes from my mother's childhood friend, Michelle, who's also my godmother. She suggests just throwing all the ingredients in the blender together. I think melting the chocolate first lends a nice smooth texture.

6 ounces good-qualitysemi-sweet dark chocolate

3 tablespoons freshly brewed strong coffee

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1 to 3 tablespoons dark rum or cognac

1 tablespoon sugar or maple syrup

3/4 cup milk or 1/2 cup milk and 1/4 cup whipping cream

Lightly sweetened whipped cream for garnish, optional

Whole coffee beans forgarnish, optional

1. Set a metal bowl over a pot of simmering water, making sure bottom of bowl does not touch water. Break chocolate into pieces and melt in bowl, stirring occasionally. When melted, stir in coffee.

2. Meanwhile, in a blender or food processor, combine eggs, rum or cognac, sugar or maple syrup and milk or milk and whipping cream. While blender is running, pour in chocolate and coffee mixture and run until well combined. Fill 3/4 of small ceramic sake cups (about 2 ounces each) or 6-ounce ramekins or wine glasses and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Before serving, garnish with

whipped cream and coffee beans, if desired.

Makes 5 large or 10 small servings.

## Ten-Minute Sesame Noodles

Recipe from <http://cookingwithamy.blogspot.com> .

This recipe uses a Thai spice blend, available from such places as My Spicer ( [www.myspicer.com](http://www.myspicer.com) ) or Penzeys Spices ( [www.penzeys.com](http://www.penzeys.com) ), and some supermarkets.

This dish is fast, easy, healthy, uses relatively few ingredients and is great hot or cold.

It's a useful thing to have in your repertoire to serve at home, for picnics, potlucks, whatever. Feel free to vary the amounts and customize it.

To make this a main dish, add such ingredients as mushrooms, broccoli, snow peas, stir-fried beef.

8ounces noodles (such as angel hair pasta or flat Thai or Chinese rice sticknoodles)

1 to 2 teaspoons Thai Spice Blend

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1 tablespoons peanut butter

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon rice vinegar

1 teaspoon Chinese chiligarlic sauce, or more to taste

1 carrot, peeled and chopped

1 scallion shredded

Prepare the noodles according to package directions. Mix together Thai Spice Blend, sesame oil, peanut butter, soy sauce, rice vinegar and garlic sauce. Whisk to blend, then add carrot and scallion. When noodles are cooked, drain and toss with the sauce while hot.

Makes 4 side-dish servings.

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