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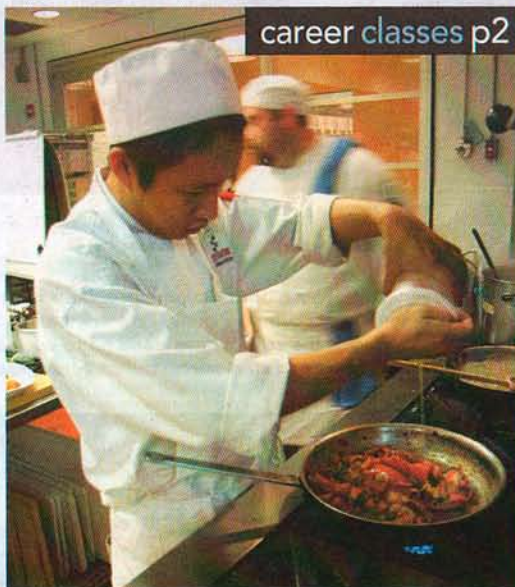
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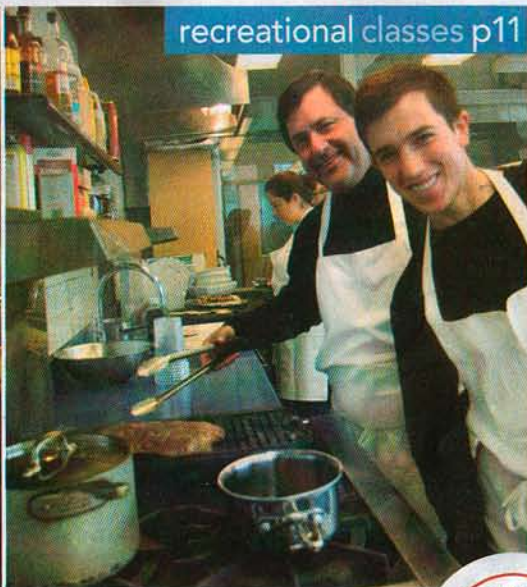
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Newsletter and Schedule of Courses

the main course

The Institute of Culinary Education



Time to Braise

Other than hot chocolate, braises are probably the most satisfying dish to enjoy in winter. Requiring little supervision once the pot is in the oven, braises make for rich, complex preparations that only await a bed of mashed potatoes, polenta, or even rice or pasta, to soak up their flavorful sauces.

Braises, unlike stews, are only partially covered in liquid, and feature larger pieces of meats. Because it is a long and slow cooking process, braising works best with tough cuts of meats that contain a large amount of connective tissue. While braising, these tissues break and release collagen, which naturally thickens the sauce as it turns into gelatin.

With the moist-heat method characteristic of braising, the flavor transfer between the meat and the liquid is constant, creating the complexity one comes to expect of braised dishes. Shanks, short ribs, shoulders, butt, and other primal and subprimal cuts of meats, as well as older poultry are perfect for braising. Vegetables like leeks, endives, onions, and root vegetables lend themselves well to white braise—made with white vegetable stock or chicken stock—ICE Chef-Instructor Ted Siegel explains. Classic dishes include Osso Bucco alla Milanese and Coq au Vin.

While most liquids are suited to braising, Siegel says he favors *(continued on page 8)*

Interview with Chef Johnny Iuzzini

Johnny Iuzzini, the executive pastry chef of Jean Georges and Nougatine, earned his stellar reputation with desserts that are always creative, superbly executed, and, most importantly, delicious. He joined Jean Georges, which boasts four New York Times stars and three Michelin stars—the highest rating for each—in May 2002, coming from Restaurant Daniel, where he was the first American executive pastry chef. His résumé also includes working with acclaimed pastry chef François Payard. Iuzzini won the James Beard Award for Outstanding Pastry Chef in 2006, after also having been nominated in 2003. In 2007, Forbes named him one of the ten most influential chefs working in America today, while

Pastry Art & Design twice chose him as one of the Top 10 Pastry Chefs in America and New York voted him Best New Pastry Chef in 2002. He can be found online at www.johnnyiuzzini.com, and will release his first cookbook, *Dessert 4 Play*, in fall 2008. The Main Course met him at Jean Georges in November.



How many desserts do you have on the menu at any given time? In Jean Georges itself, there's four tastings. Each tasting comprises four different desserts. So a table of four potentially has 16 different desserts on the table at one time. And then Nougatine has a completely separate menu of another seven desserts. Plus room service, which is another menu. And small banquets. *(continued on page 34)*

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Interview with Chef Johnny Iuzzini

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How often do they change?

We change the menu as often as we can. It's very seasonally based. I'll do a cherry tasting, and I can only do it as long as I have cherries at the market, or strawberries, or whatever else. Sometimes it takes me a little bit longer to change, because I don't repeat from year to year. I refuse to bring back that I've already done. Maybe a component here and there, but I will never bring back a dessert that I've done already. I just feel like it stifles you, you don't grow, you don't evolve. And at my age, I shouldn't have signatures. I don't believe in that.

What process do you follow, to create all these new desserts?

First I'll start and pick the theme. So if it's apple, I'll make a list of all the things I can think of. I'll just write down ideas. I just kept going and going. Then I'll start thinking about it: 'Okay, I like this,' or, 'I like this component,' and I'll just start building it from there in my head. I'll come up with eight or ten desserts. Then I'll make them. Then I'll say, 'Okay. Well, I don't like this. I like this.' And I'll break it all down into four. From the best of all those, I'll create the four desserts for the tasting. That's how I think. I don't go home and I wake up in the middle of the night and write down ideas. I have to really focus. I definitely have a line in my life that I always promise myself when I leave. I leave. But when I'm here I'm focused on the food. I don't have any cookbooks here. I have my archives from when I worked at Daniel or Jean Georges or Payard, all the stuff that I've already worked with. I keep an archive of all the tastings I've done since I've been here.

Those tasting sheets are what your staff works with?

Yes. I'm very organized. Each page has a photo and the recipes. On the back is the complete technique. That's what we use in the kitchen, and this is what [my upcoming] book is based on. It's a book of 15 tastings. Each tasting is four desserts, so it's 60 desserts.

Do you use savory ingredients in your desserts?

Always, yes. And there is salt in everything we do. In fact, one of my favorite ingredients for sure is salt, for balance, as a flavor enhancer, to help open up the palate. You wouldn't necessarily know or taste the salt. But you would taste it if I gave it to you afterwards without it.

What keeps you challenged?

This place. The fact that there's only three three-Michelin star restaurants in the city. We're one of five four-star restaurants. Where am I to go? What's better than where I already am? I'm motivated because all eyes are on us. Everybody wants to knock us off from where we are. So the challenge is to be better every day. I want people to see that we're continually evolving, we're not resting on our laurels. I want them to know that we still work hard and we still care about where we are and what we do. I feel very fortunate to be able to work here, because Jean Georges gives me the creative freedom that I have. He actually gives me free range. The only thing that doesn't change is the chocolate cake. Nothing else. I always love to get as much as I can out of Jean Georges. He's traveled the world. He has so much experience. I really learned so much just being here and seeing the way they approach making new dishes in the kitchen, and I think I've adapted a lot of that style in my desserts.

How did you first find yourself in a kitchen?

I started in a kitchen when I was 15 years old, as a dishwasher. We didn't have money, so it wasn't like I got allowances or anything. But I've always loved girls, and loved going out, and whatever else. My motivation was having money in my pocket to be able to go out on dates. I didn't expect anybody to give it to me. I worked for it. So I got a job at a country club. I washed dishes every day after school. The chef liked me, so he let me peel carrots eventually, and use the deli slicer. He left to go to another restaurant, and I rode my bike every day after school there. It was just me and him, so I started to learn how to cook a little bit. At the time, I was enrolled in a voc-tech program in a high school. You'd spend half the day in your regular classes and then you'd spend half the day at a trade school for high school students. I went into the culinary

program. I ended up going to competition, and I took second place in New York City. I went to state finals, and I blew that because I was too busy running around and being stupid.

From there, how did you become a pastry chef?

I grew up in the Catskills. I graduated high school at 17, and I was working at this restaurant there. The florist at that restaurant was also the florist at River Café in Brooklyn. At the time, River Café was still a very big deal, in the early '90s. She brought me in to meet the chef, and right after I graduated high school, he hired me. At 17 years old, I was working at River Café. But I have a problem killing things. My mother was a wildlife rehabilitator, so I grew up with all sorts of wild animals with broken legs, feeding them back to health and then re-releasing them to the wilderness. So I have a hard time—I love to eat, but I can't butcher a baby cow. I can't do it. So I was working at River Café and the pastry chef there at the time was Eric Gouteyron. He'd be making the famous chocolate bridges and all this stuff. The only thing I knew about chocolate were Hershey's Kisses and Hershey bars. I was still so ignorant, from the mountains of New York. I worked for free every night for him after I finished my shift as garde-manger, until finally he said, 'Okay. You come work for me,' and I switched to pastry. I'd already been accepted at the Culinary Institute of America in the culinary program, so right before I started, I switched to pastry, and I went to the pastry program instead. This was pretty early on. It was a pilot program. Half the time they didn't even know where our classrooms were going to be. My graduating class at CIA [in 1994] was three. My 18th birthday was my first day at CIA. I graduated at 19. And that's when I started with Daniel Boulud.

At Daniel?

At the original Daniel. My CIA externship was with Lincoln Carson, who had worked for François [Payard] at Le Bernardin. That was my connection into Daniel, into François. I spent the next four years or so with François. Three at Daniel and then a year opening Payard as sous chef. But then I knew I wanted to go and travel. I hadn't traveled yet. I was only 22 or 23 years old. I was just tired. I was working in the clubs at the same time.

Why's that?

Because I didn't make any money when I was cooking. I was lucky enough to have that to fall back on. That allowed me to pursue my dream of being a pastry chef. I knew a lot of people. I was always out at night. Clubs just started paying me to show up to these parties, paying me to promote, paying me to bring more people in. They would fly me to Vegas. They'd fly me to Miami to host parties. I'd end up making \$1,300 in two nights to party. But it got to a point where Daniel was in trouble, so I was helping there, and I was working at Payard, I was working eight hours in each restaurant every day, then going and working the clubs at night. I was fried. I burned out after a year and a half, and I knew I had to get away from everything. I was at a crossroads in my life. I was the only American in pastry for a while. They were telling me, 'You're stupid. You're American. Blah-blah.' I'm getting my teeth kicked in every day at the restaurant. I'm making no money. I love what it is, but it's such a hard environment to be in, especially being young and American in an all-French environment. So I decided to leave. Daniel found out I was leaving, and he told me, 'Well, I heard you're going around the world. How're you going to pay for it?' I said, 'Credit cards.' He said, 'I'll make you a deal. I'll give you \$10,000, no interest. The deal is, you go do your trip. When you want to come back, you help me open up Café Boulud, you help me open up Daniel [in its new location] as sous chef.' So I said, 'Okay,' and I took the \$10,000.

Where did you go?

I went from New York to Hong Kong, Australia, Bangkok, Moscow, Prague, Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Holland. About seven or eight months around the world, backpacking by myself. It helped with trying to find myself, trying to find out who I really am. Am I this club person? Am I this personality that I've created? Or am I a pastry chef? I just found myself kind of rotating myself back into kitchens, working for free anywhere I could go, eating at every little pastry shop I could find, and really figuring out that's who I am, that's what I love. Then one thing led to another. I ended up in Nice.



Jean Georges and Nougatine Executive Pastry Chef Johnny Iuzzini with pastry cooks Michal Shelkowitz and Geoffrey Koo, both ICE alumni.

where François is from. I worked for his father for a while in their pastry shop. I worked at another pastry shop called Pâtisserie Chèreau in Nice, which was amazing. Then I ended up in Paris working for Pierre Hermé. I spent about a month or two working at Ladurée. He let me work every station and really opened up his kitchen to me. It changed my life. I came back to Daniel, opened up Café Boulud as pastry sous chef under Rémy Fünfrock, and then opened up the new Daniel as pastry sous chef under Thomas Haas. When Thomas left, there was a window where they tried to bring someone else in. It didn't work out. Then Daniel gave me the pastry chef position. I was 26 years old, in January 2001.

Was that pretty unusual?

Yes, because I was American. I was his first American pastry chef. And also because I was so young.

You were pretty young when you came to Jean Georges as executive pastry chef too, right?

Yes. I came here at 27, about to turn 28, I think. Now I'm old, ready to retire.

You've always worked in really challenging environments. What is the advantage of making such a choice?

I always felt I'd rather make less money. This is the thing that I don't think students understand. Students come out, they're looking for a title, they're looking for money. Experience is almost going to come last. It's so wrong. I made every compromise I had to make to work for the best, whether it was making no money or I was working the longest possible hours because it was shift pay. It was crazy. When I went to Daniel, I didn't even know how much I made until I got my first paycheck. I'm serious. It didn't matter. I knew I would make it happen with whatever they gave me, because it was that important for me to be there. Because I knew I wouldn't learn as much anywhere else. I think what students need to understand is, if you want to become one of the best, you've got to put your head down, keep your mouth shut, and just put yourself in a position where you're just going to absorb and absorb and absorb and absorb. The day you stop learning somewhere is the day you should move onto the next, and not before. My staff here gets that. I am nothing without my team.

What motivated you to write a cookbook?

I think it marks a point of my career. If anything, that's pretty cool. I think I have something to show people. Not necessarily a recipe, but the way I approach food, the way I put things together. It's interesting. I didn't want to make a pretentious book. We actually had to break it down and simplify it. I think we found a nice balance. There's so much involved in what we do, but so much of it is just a way of thinking. So luckily that's strong enough that we were able to simplify. There are still some techniques in there that maybe the home cook can't do right away, but there are sources to find everything you need. I wanted to create something that interested people and that they could use in their home, but also I wanted to teach. I think a book should be educational. I think there should be something in a book that you don't know about. That's the point.

What about your website? What prompted you to launch one?

At the time, [Jean Georges'] website really didn't give any detail about who was here,

what was going on. I've always been a self-motivator, a self-promoter. At Jean Georges, we don't have a PR person. Anything you see of me in the news, it's me getting it, me going after it. I do demos. I do TV. Everything I do is me going out to get it. It's not that I want to be a celebrity chef—I don't. But I want to have options in my future. The more people who know my name and know the quality of my work, the better off I'll be in whatever endeavor I want to do. It's just logical. It's not about seeing my name in lights. It's about the day I want to do something, people thinking, 'All right. Well, I know who that is. I know what that stands for. That means master quality.' That'll be my brand. I want my brand to stand for quality.

Do you consider yourself a celebrity chef?

No. I think that Rocco [DiSpirito] and Marcus [Samuelsson] and those guys have that, and Jean Georges. It's nice to be known. It's nice to be respected. But do I need to be called a celebrity chef? I'd rather be infamous than famous.

Pastry chefs have become such stars. Why is that, do you think?

I don't know. I think the world goes through cycles of what's cool. Hopefully it's something that matters now. It took years and years for celebrity chefs to happen, right? So it's just a matter of time until they realize that a restaurant doesn't function on one side of the kitchen. It takes two sides of the kitchen. It's only the generation above me that really became known, like François and Jacques Torres. Even in that, some of them got some TV time and press time, but a lot of them were already past that. I think definitely there is a life expectancy for a pastry chef versus a chef.

How so?

Think about who are, quote-unquote, the 'top pastry chefs' in New York now. Restaurant pastry chefs, what's the average age? We're all between 30 and 35. I don't think there's a pastry chef on the top of that list that's over 35 years old. They decided to do a business. They go into ownership or whatever. I think our age, between 30 and 35, is the point where you figure out your next step as a pastry chef. Because the last thing I want to do is grow old in someone's basement. You max out as far as salary. I won't make more money than I already make here anywhere else. Any other move for me to a restaurant is a lateral or a step down. So what do I do?

What do you do?

Open a bar. It's eventually going to happen. There's no timeline on right now. That's my goal, and Jean Georges knows about it. My next goal is to develop a high-end bar concept with the world's greatest bar snacks with my partner Dave Arnold. That's for sure. Dave's been a huge asset for me as a pastry chef, just as far as I can say, 'Dave, help me with this.' Dave is great at doing research. We're both very creative, very hyper people, and I think it's going to be a great, great thing. The idea is to roll it out, to do a bunch around the country. It's exciting to me, because I'll get to work my way up again, to re-earn the respect of people again.

Isn't that scary?

Yes. Right now I'm in the best of the best. For me to someday leave here, it's scary. It's not like I'm leaving any time soon.

For more with Johnny Iuzzini, go to www.iceculinary.com/news.

—Anne E. McBride