

Intermezzo party: DINNER FOR EIGHT



Chef, author, vintner and entrepreneur Michael Chiarello has made his career, in part, by rejecting the idea of the fussy dinner party. Visions of ironed linens, fine china and spending all day in the kitchen are just not part of Chiarello's approach to hosting.

"I always put together a menu with lots of things I can make in advance," says Chiarello, whose Food Network program, *Easy Entertaining with Michael Chiarello*, is based on this philosophy. "I want to be a guest at my own party, not be stuck slaving over a hot stove while my friends are having a great time without me!"

But hosting a multi-course dinner for more than a few guests can be intimidating. Many home cooks who've yet to develop a style or specific genre of cooking can be overwhelmed when deciding on what theme or flavor their overall menu should have.

"People are always trying to figure out what their cooking style is, and they try too hard when doing this. I often ask people to start with themselves—start with how you dress," suggests Chiarello. To make his point, he gives me a once-over and opines, "You're wearing nice boots—they look high-quality. And your jacket is very classic, not trendy even though you live

NapaStyle brand, a collection of cookware, dishes, gourmet food products and home furnishings that reveals this distinct point of view and his penchant for relaxed entertaining.

Hosting parties at his Napa home with family is something Chiarello does regularly. And though he is an acclaimed chef, everyone pitches in with various tasks, such as setting the table or slicing tomatoes—another tip for making life a little easier for the cook. Chiarello even cooked for his own wedding reception, and had everyone from the kids to the grandparents helping out. Though he doesn't recommend it for most ("Don't try this at home, kids!" he advises), he does emphasize that it's fine to ask guests to help out and to get them involved in the process. He finds that it results in a more relaxed and casual atmosphere.

One rule he is a stickler about, however, is that of "whoever plans the menu does the cooking. My wife, Eileen, will say to me, 'Hey, let's have a dozen friends over on Friday for dinner!' and I'll say, 'Great. I'm in the mood to cook.' Then she'll start writing the menu and I'll tell her, 'No, no no! You plan the menu, you cook. I plan the menu, I cook.' The point is that

# DINNER FOR EIGHT, Napa Style

BY CLARE KLEINEDLER



in Los Angeles where everyone is super trendy. Your jeans are nice, not too casual, but because they are jeans the look is not too formal. So I'd say that you are a very detailed person when setting the table; you want everything to look nice and pulled together, but you like your food to be casual and rustic. There's your cooking style right there."

Chiarello's own style of cooking is rustic Italian, which is inspired by his familial roots as well as his young adulthood in the Napa Valley. "Napa has really become America's Tuscany; it has the quality of light, sight and flavor of the Mediterranean that you can't get anywhere else in this country," says Chiarello. As in his cooking, these elements are also apparent in his

you want to cook dishes that you are comfortable making; you don't want to try to pull off someone else's vision."

Chiarello's own unique vision is always in motion; it's something that changes with every new inspiration. Though much of his food and style is distinctively rustic Italian, like his Pastina Timbale, he samples from a wide variety of cultures and cuisines. For the Seafood Gazpacho with Popcorn, he found inspiration in South America. "In Peru and Ecuador, they have a roasted corn that pops, and they use it often for a starch or garnish," he says. "The warm popcorn is a great topping for the cold gazpacho."

For more information about Michael Chiarello and his books, television programs, NapaStyle brand and recipes, please visit [www.napastyle.com](http://www.napastyle.com).

## SEAFOOD GAZPACHO WITH POPCORN

SERVES 6 TO 8

*The gazpacho is cold, the popcorn is warm. Simply add a handful to each bowl and mix it in for a flavor and texture pop.*

For soup base

- 3 cups tomato juice or tomato vegetable juice blend
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 bulb fennel, finely diced
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded and finely diced
- 1/2 small red onion, finely diced
- 2 medium stalks celery, finely diced
- Sea salt or gray salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

For seafood and finished dish

- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 8 ounces halibut fillet, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 to 3 tablespoons minced, seeded jalapeño
- 8 ounces medium shrimp, peeled, deveined, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 can (6 1/2 ounces) clam juice
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 pint tiny, ripe cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fennel fronds
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh Italian parsley leaves
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh basil leaves
- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

For popcorn

- 1/2 cup popping corn
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, if popping on stovetop
- Drizzle extra virgin olive oil
- Salt

1. In a large bowl combine all soup base ingredients and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours.



2. In a medium skillet over high heat, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil. Season halibut with salt and pepper. Add to pan and cook, without stirring, until browned on one side, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir halibut briefly and cook for 30 seconds longer. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside.

3. Add remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil to pan. When oil is hot, add garlic and cook, stirring, until light brown. Add jalapeño and sauté for 15 seconds. Add shrimp and season with salt and pepper. Sauté until barely done, about 1 1/2 minutes. Add clam juice and wine. Bring mixture to a boil and cook 30 seconds. Remove shrimp from pan and set aside.

4. Continue cooking until liquid is reduced by half, about 10 minutes. Return halibut and shrimp to pan and stir to coat with liquid. Remove pan from heat and allow to cool.

5. About 30 minutes before serving, pop corn in an air popper. If you don't have an air popper, pop on stovetop. Heat oil in a large pot with a lid over medium-high heat. Add popcorn, cover, and shake pot until all corn is popped. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt, and set aside.

6. When ready to serve, stir tomatoes, fennel fronds, parsley, basil and vinegar into chilled tomato juice and vegetables. Spoon into bowls and top with cooled seafood. Garnish with a handful of popcorn.

## FENNEL-ROASTED VEGETABLES

SERVES 8

For fennel spice rub

- 1 cup fennel seeds
- 3 tablespoons coriander seeds
- 2 tablespoons white peppercorns
- 3 tablespoons kosher salt

For vegetables

- 3/4 pound Yukon gold potatoes, unpeeled, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 large carrots, peeled and cut on diagonal into 1/2-inch-thick slices
- 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 pound red onions, each halved lengthwise and cut into wedges
- 1 fennel bulb, halved lengthwise and cut into 1/2-inch wedges
- 3/4 pound asparagus, tough ends trimmed, cut on diagonal into 1 1/2-inch lengths
- 2 zucchini, ends trimmed, halved lengthwise, and cut on diagonal into 1/2-inch-thick slices

1. Put fennel seeds, coriander seeds and peppercorns in a heavy pan over medium heat. Watch carefully, tossing frequently so seeds toast evenly. When light brown and



fragrant, pour seeds onto a plate to cool. They must be cool before grinding. When cool, pour seeds into a blender and add salt. Blend to a fine powder, shaking blender occasionally. Reserve 1½ tablespoons for veggies and store remainder in a tightly sealed container, or freeze.

- Preheat oven to 425°F.
- Place potatoes in a large pot of cold, well-salted water. Bring to a boil, adjusting heat to maintain a gentle simmer, and cook until potatoes are almost tender, about 7 minutes. Add carrots and simmer 1 minute longer. Drain.
- Heat a very large ovenproof skillet over high heat. Add 4 tablespoons of olive oil. When oil is hot, add potatoes and carrots. Cook 1 minute, then add onions and cook, turning occasionally with tongs, until vegetables are nicely browned, about 10 minutes. Reduce heat if needed to keep veggies

from burning.

- Add fennel, asparagus, zucchini, spices and salt to taste. Toss well to distribute seasonings. Drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon oil and toss again. Transfer skillet to oven and roast until vegetables are deeply caramelized, 20 to 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve immediately.

## PASTINA TIMBALE

SERVES 8

*The pasta mixture can be made the day before, put into molds, covered and refrigerated. Pastina is a tiny round pasta.*

For pasta

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 pound spicy Italian sausage links,

- cut into bite-size pieces
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 cup fresh breadcrumbs
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup coarsely chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1 pound pastina

For sauce

- 3 pounds canned diced tomatoes, drained
- 2 jalapeños
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup minced onion
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh oregano leaves
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

For assembly

- 1 tablespoon butter

- Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Butter 8 (12-ounce) ramekins or 1 large soufflé mold or baking mold and set aside.
- Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a medium skillet and sauté sausage until browned.
- Meanwhile, combine 2 tablespoons oil and minced garlic in a medium skillet over medium heat. Cook until garlic is light brown, about 2 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Add breadcrumbs to skillet with garlic and stir every minute for 3 to 5 minutes until crumbs are lightly toasted. Season with salt and pepper. Add ¼ cup of parsley and ¼ cup of



Parmigiano-Reggiano. Cook for 30 seconds.

5. Divide breadcrumb mixture into prepared ramekins or bowl and press with your fingers to evenly distribute it along bottom and up sides of ramekins or bowl. Set aside.

6. Preheat oven to 400°F.

7. Make sauce. In a large bowl, toss tomatoes and whole jalapeños with 1 tablespoon of olive oil; season with salt and pepper to taste. Place tomato mixture on a baking sheet and roast 15 or 20 minutes or until slightly browned. Remove from heat and finely chop tomatoes. Transfer tomato pulp and any juices to a bowl. Chop jalapeños and taste to determine their heat. Set aside.

8. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat until hot. Add onion, season with salt, and sauté until softened. Add garlic and oregano and stir. Add jalapeños and simmer for another minute, only adding as much as you want for spice. Add vinegar, tomatoes and their juice and bring to a boil over high heat. Lower heat to medium and simmer for 10 minutes.

9. While sauce is simmering, cook pastina in boiling salted water until not quite al dente, about 9 minutes. Drain.

10. When ready to assemble, cut sausages in half lengthwise, then cut crosswise 1/4 inch thick, creating half-moons. Stir sausages into sauce and then stir in drained pastina. Add remaining 1/4 cup parsley, 1/2 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano, and butter, if using. Season with salt and pepper and stir to combine. Taste and adjust seasoning. Transfer to prepared ramekins (1 1/4 cup per ramekin) or large bowl. Allow to cool for 10 minutes, invert, and serve.

## POTATOES DA DELFINA

SERVES 8

*Outside of Florence is a famous restaurant called Da Delfina, which is renowned for serving locally foraged herbs and wild game. That's where Chiarello first had potatoes prepared this way, boiled with good salt, then cooled slightly and smashed between the cook's palms to break the skin. Finally the "smashed" potatoes are browned in olive oil until they are crusty outside and creamy within.*

3 pounds creamer potatoes (Yukon gold

preferred, about 32)  
 4 tablespoons gray salt  
 Peanut oil, for frying  
 Salt  
 Freshly ground black pepper  
 1/2 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
 4 teaspoons lemon zest  
 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil  
 1/2 cup chopped garlic

1. Place potatoes in a large pot with generously salted water to cover. Bring to a boil and cook until a knife slips in easily, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain. When cool enough to handle, hold 1 potato between your hands as if you were clapping and press gently. You want to smash potato to about a half-inch thickness while keeping it in one piece. Skin will split, but potato should not fall apart. Repeat with remaining potatoes. You can prepare potatoes to this point several hours ahead.

2. Pour a 1/2 inch of peanut oil in a large skillet and heat over moderately high heat. When oil begins to smoke, carefully add smashed potatoes and cook on both sides until crisp and well-browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain. Season with salt and pepper.

3. Combine parsley and lemon zest in a serving bowl. Set aside.

4. Heat olive oil in a small skillet over moderately high heat. Add garlic and sauté until lightly browned. With a slotted spoon, transfer garlic to bowl with parsley-lemon mixture, add potatoes and toss gently. Serve immediately. Save leftover garlic oil and use it to dress a salad or vegetables the following day.

## SPIRAL ROLLED FILET WITH PESTO

SERVES 8

*Use your favorite premade pesto or make your own. Ask your butcher to "spiral cut" or "jelly roll cut" the filet for you to create a flat, rectangular piece of meat.*

4 pounds center cut filet of beef, spiral cut  
 Sea salt or gray salt  
 Freshly ground black pepper  
 1 cup basil pesto  
 Extra virgin olive oil, to drizzle

## Equipment

16 long wooden skewers, soaked in water

1. With heel of your hand, pound meat and flatten to a thickness of about 1/2-inch. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Spread pesto over meat, leaving a 1-inch border on one long side. Roll meat towards border.

2. Cut roll in half. Then cut each half into 4 slices. Lay 2 slices of meat side-by-side. Run a skewer through one side of both pieces. Run a second skewer through opposite side of pieces. Repeat with remaining meat. Drizzle with oil.

3. Preheat grill or a grill pan. Grill over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes per side. Let rest for a few minutes before serving.

## STRAWBERRIES PAZZO

SERVES 8

*For an elegant presentation, place a single Italian-style biscotti finger upright in a martini glass. Spoon marinated berries into glass and top with gelato. As an alternative, substitute sweet summer plums for the strawberries. Also try crumbling ginger snaps for the base and Devonshire cream for the topping! Plums need not be completely ripe; in fact, plums that are slightly crisp work the best.*

12 tablespoons balsamic vinegar  
 1 cup superfine sugar  
 Grey salt  
 Freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
 4 cups strawberries, hulled and quartered  
 12 Italian-style biscotti, about 6 inches long  
 8 ounces mascarpone cheese or vanilla gelato

1. Combine vinegar, sugar, salt and black pepper. Mix well to incorporate. Let stand for 15 minutes. When ready, stir again to incorporate all sugar then pour over sliced strawberries and gently toss until berries are fully coated.

2. Gently crush biscotti into 4 serving bowls. Spoon strawberries on top. Stir mascarpone cheese to a smooth consistency then top each serving with a dollop of mascarpone (or gelato, if using). Finish with any remaining syrup and serve immediately.