

In this Issue

- Lessons from a Photo Shoot
- News from Clients and Students
- Resources You Can Use
- Just for Fun: Opting out of the Macho Food Movement
- Upcoming Classes and Appearances

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Lessons from a Photo Shoot

As you have read in previous newsletters, I'm working on a cookbook called *Grilled Pizza and Piadina*, with my collaborator, chef Craig Priebe. Last month we undertook an extensive photography session in New York with our photographer (Charles Schiller, <http://www.charlesschiller.com>), food stylist Susan Vajaranant (<http://www.foodonset.com>), a prop stylist, two book editors, and an art director. I'm saying "we," but, being the writer and recipe tester rather than the chef, I had no reason to be there. Craig flew in from Chicago. I think he made 50 grilled pizza crusts in one morning, on the patio of the art director's apartment.

I had no idea how much coordination it takes to do a photo shoot until Craig forwarded this email from our editor. Here's part of her notes to prepare for 10 days of shooting and 85 photos:

- Nichole (editor) will send the Fresh Direct (grocer) link and all of our contact information.
- Craig (co-author/chef) and Susan (food stylist) will send Nichole the shopping list for Fresh Direct by Friday, August 31 (as Monday is a holiday). Nichole to place the order on Tuesday for Wednesday delivery to the studio. Michelle (assistant), please check that this is okay with Charlie.
- Craig to supply DK (publisher) and Susan with a list of which tools he will bring with him ASAP so we can supply the prop stylist.
- Susan to supply DK a list of which tools/pans she will bring to shoot ASAP so we can supply the prop stylist.
- Craig and Susan to supply us with a shot list by Tuesday, September 4th, including: which pizzas should be shot outdoors; which should be shot sliced; which should be what shape; what pizza or piadina should be shot on a cutting board vs. the grill vs. a cookie sheet vs. a plate; and finally, the order of shots to be most efficient.
- Susan will supply Craig with a shopping list for Wednesday, September 5th, and addresses of where to go. Craig may also need to pick up chef's whites on Wednesday, and can shop for any equipment.
- Michelle will contact Charlie about whether Craig can use a kitchen on Wednesday afternoon to make the dough. Also to follow up on the outdoor space for shooting.

- Craig, what do you need to transfer the dough from the studio to Dirk's (art director) kitchen Thursday morning? A large cooler? And how should we transfer the finished crusts back to the studio without them breaking? A large crate with towels?
- Craig to roll out and grill the crusts Thursday morning at Dirk's.
- Craig and Susan to finish prepping all sauces and toppings Thursday at the studio.
- Reprep on Monday. Perhaps shoot equipment and step-by-steps that day while reprep is happening?
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Last week, our editor sent Craig and me a partial stack of spreads that look like the finished book, but printed on lighter paper on a laser printer. It's a modern "blueline," a term used long ago when dinosaurs like me were editing magazines and newspapers. Before the final printing, we reviewed a draft, printed in blue ink, for typos. My book editor has entered one or two handwritten edits such as "Is that lemon peel on the pizza? Please add to the ingredients list." Almost every recipe has a big photo on the facing page, and the photos are gorgeous: full of color and dramatically styled to make you hungry immediately.

After examining the photos, I learned firsthand what I had heard some cookbook authors complain about when I interviewed them for my book, *Will Write for Food*: sometimes the photo doesn't exactly match the recipe.

Typically, when Craig creates a pizza, he uses many layers of flavor and texture: He grills the crust, applies an herbed olive oil, then cheese, toppings, and a finish of a drizzled sauce or a salad. The result invariably elicits groans of "Oh my God," from the recipient.

The photo shoot was a struggle between showcasing the beautiful fruits, vegetables and meats that provide so much color and texture, and accurately representing the recipe. So there are sauces below the toppings rather than drizzled over all, or fruit removed from the sauce that sits naked on its own, or there's no garnish when garnish is called for, or a different garnish, or there are whole leaves of herbs instead of chopped leaves, or Red Bliss potatoes instead of a sliced Russet, etc.

The Emilian, for example, calls for cantaloupe chutney, prosciutto and walnuts, definitely a multiple "Oh my God" winner. The photo shows cantaloupe chunks, prosciutto and walnuts, no chutney in sight. The resulting pizza is gorgeous, but it is not exactly the same. When Craig and I reviewed the spread, he said it's a great recipe, and he's not going to change it because the photo is a tiny bit different. He's right. Maybe we're the only ones who will notice the difference (and all of you now).

What he and I think doesn't matter much anyway, at this point. The photos will stay the way they are because, as I said, they're gorgeous and 95 to 100% accurate. More importantly, this result required lots of time, money and effort from talented, hard-working professionals. Craig and the photographer already flew to New York; Craig and the stylist already found, prepped, cooked and

styled the food; and the prop stylist plated it on colorful tableware. There's no going back.

So who cares if the photo shows a whole sage leaf instead of chopped sage? I do. Have you ever eaten a whole, raw sage leaf? Not a good thing. Craig, the chef and artist, says I'm too literal, that a full sage leaf on an individual pizza is a creative statement. My compromise was to change the step to: "Garnish with whole or chopped sage leaves."

Perhaps this situation is a minor example of why readers complain that the photos don't match the recipes, or the dish they cooked doesn't look the way it did in the recipe. I'm sticking with being too literal. It's a fault of mine, but sometimes it comes in handy.

Got an opinion or a good story on this subject? Shoot me an email at dj@diannej.com.

Best,
Dianne

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News from clients and students

Valerie Rogers, Faith Kramer and **Nani Steele** are conducting research for veteran cookbook author Molly O'Neill's next book, *One Big Table*. The three of them are learning how to approach a subject they know nothing about, and investigate it until they drill down to a core person and recipe.

Molly says she's been working on her book for 10 years. The cookbook is a portrait of the nation, dish by dish, with 750 recipes. A former chef and staff writer for *New York Newsday* and the *New York Times*, Molly has twice been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Alison Anton, a nutritional chef, wrote a feature story about fish for *Alternative Medicine Magazine*.

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Resources You Can Use

How does the new generation of American women cook? Betty Crocker unveils a new **study** of 1500 women aged 20-40, and the conclusion is: they're not cooking the way their mothers did. To find out whether that's good or bad, go to <http://toledoblade.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071007/ART06/71006029/-1/ART>

Wondering how many **food blogs** are out there? An author and photographer in Evanston, IL, keeps track. You'll find an A-Z directory, followed by specialty

blogs organized by beverage, food blog meta-sites, food forums, podcasts, industry, and more. See <http://www.kiplog.com/food/foodlinks.htm> <<http://www.kiplog.com/food/foodlinks.htm>> .

Even if you've been to **Mediabistro**, <http://www.mediabistro.com/> <<http://www.mediabistro.com/>>, a useful website for freelance writers, you probably don't know that when Laurel Touby started the company 10 years ago, it was just a way for editors, writers, television producers and graphic designers to meet at after-work mixers. I went to a few of the parties in San Francisco at a rented art gallery with adjoining bar. In New York, she held an after-work launch party for *Will Write for Food* when my book came out in 2005.

Later Laurel turned the cocktail parties into an on-line community that actually makes money with subscriptions, job postings and writing seminars, attracting investor financing. Her website grew to 600,000 hits last year. This past summer, she sold her company to Jupitermedia Corporation, for \$23 million!

Publishers Weekly interviews cookbook editors on what works and what doesn't: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6476666.html>

Looking for an agent for your book? Now you don't have to ask a friend of a friend of a friend if you can get the name of her agent. Just go to <http://www.agentquery.com/>. I did a search on "cookbooks" and found a list of 141 agents. Unfortunately, I could only view them two at a time. I found lots of other resources on this site for writers, including conferences and how to submit a book idea.

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Just for fun

Are we in the Macho Food Writing movement? See Slate.com: <http://www.slate.com/id/2174218/fr/flyout>.

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Upcoming Classes and Appearances

October 20, 2007

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Food Writing for Food Lovers

The Writing Salon, <http://www.writingsalons.com/classes/index.php?p=31>

Berkeley, CA

\$85 members/\$95 non-members

Come to this 1-day session on writing for newspapers and magazines, starting a

food blog, writing recipes and writing a cookbook.

October 27, 2007

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Writing Nonfiction Books - Here's How to Do It

The Writing Salon, <http://www.writingsalons.com/classes/index.php?p=159>

San Francisco, CA

\$85 members/\$95 non-members

You have an idea for a book, but haven't taken it any further because you're not sure what comes next. Come to this class to find out. I'll cover both traditional publishing and self-publishing. A large part of our time will be spent developing your book idea.

November 8, 2007

5:15 - 6:45 p.m.

Iraqi Jews from Shanghai: how their identity is linked to food memories

Culinary Historians of Northern California

Judas Magnes Museum, <http://www.magnes.org/> <<http://www.magnes.org/>>

Berkeley, CA

Free

A talk, slide show, and reading about how food creates identity, based on my family of immigrants.

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Please forward this email to anyone you think might be interested. To change your email address or unsubscribe, please email me: dj@diannej.com

I will not rent, trade or sell my email list to anyone for any reason.

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Author of *Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Restaurant Reviews, Articles, Memoir, Fiction, and More* (Marlowe & Co./Avalon)