

My 2017 Finds for Your 2018 Resolutions

Susan Says, Mommom Muses

Question: Please recommend an Italian restaurant in Philadelphia. I would like to take my parents to dinner at an elegant but reasonably priced Italian establishment, preferably in South Philly.
- Soliciting Suggestions for South Philly

Susan: My favorite Italian restaurant in Philly is the one I would recommend — Tre Scalini, a BYOB, at 1915 E. Passyunk Avenue. Chef Franca DiRenzo has helmed the kitchen for over 20 years. Her Abbruzzese fare features a variety of veal dishes as well as her celebrated saffron potato gnocchi. The setting is elegant with white tablecloths and intimate enough to allow for easy conversation. For more leisurely dining (the nearby meters are two-hour), consider using the valet service stations along Passyunk.

Mommom: Why not make a “nice” sauce for your parents at home? Just start with a mix of beef, pork, and veal, some hot Italian sausage, and some rolled beef for a brasciole...

To celebrate the New Year, I share some food and drink items that I incorporated into my repertoire in 2017. Perhaps you will consider trying one or two or all five — for health reasons or simply for taste — as you reflect on your hopes and plans for the year ahead.

Kimchi

This Korean side dish made from fermented Napa cabbage has significant health benefits. Kimchi not only promotes a strong heart and aids the digestive and immune systems, but it is also quite tasty. My favorite is Mother-in-Law’s, an artisanal product sold at Janssen’s Market and online. Lauryn Chun, founder of the company, uses the recipe from her mother-in-law’s restaurant, which opened eighteen years ago in Garden Grove, California. Vincent and I enjoy the chile sauce in the red House Napa Cabbage Kimchi when looking for a kimchi with a kick. The milder white version sans pepper is described as “crisp, delicate, and effervescent like a glass of Champagne.” Now, tell me when you have had cabbage that tastes like a glass of bubbly?

Capon

This fowl outshines the turkey for a festive holiday meal. Look up the definition of capon and you will learn that it is a gelded rooster. What the online dictionary will not tell you is that this bird is much more flavorful than turkey or chicken. I also find it much juicier than any other bird. Check out D’Artagan online for a seven to twelve pound capon that is free-range with no hormones or growth stimulants. In the new year, celebrate the holidays like the French and Italians with a capon. This is no paltry poultry.

Cynar

This Italian liqueur made of thirteen herbs and plants has become as cherished as its sister bitter, Campari, in our household. Artichokes rank as a key ingredient and help give it its deep brown hue. I enjoy Cynar as an aperitif with seltzer water and, on occasion, substitute it for Campari in a Negroni. Please don’t be bitter, Campari.

Enoki

These mushrooms come in clusters of thin, white stalks with tiny caps. You can simply sauté them in butter, extra virgin olive oil and garlic for a side dish, or incorporate them into an Asian soup. Consider substituting them for noodles in chicken stock with bok choy and shrimp (or chicken or tofu). Add a splash of sesame oil, freshly squeezed lime juice and a few slices of jalapeño to each bowl before serving. Think of it as a trompe l’oeil — udon or fungus?



Chipotle Morita Flakes

These flakes are milder than crushed red pepper and possess a sweet, chocolaty flavor. Vincent and I first purchased them in a cooking store in Portland, Maine, called Skordo. While you will not appreciate their smoky aroma online, you can order them along with other interesting spices at www.skordo.com. Sprinkle on tacos or a baked potato for some sweet heat. These flakes are so popular that we keep them in one of the containers in our masala dabba. Don’t flake out — please try this spice. 🌶️



Susan E. Poppiti is a mathematics teacher and director of the legal shadowing program at Padua Academy High School and managing member and cooking instructor for La Cucina di Poppiti, LLC and can be reached at spoppiti@hotmail.com. Other recipes and cooking tips are available on Susan’s food blog at www.cucinadipoppiti.com.