

JOYCE GOLDSTEIN *California Local*

Pam Mazzola keeps focus on the food

If I say her name, the odds are that most of you will not recognize it. Yet, Pam Mazzola is one of the longest- and hardest-working chefs in San Francisco.

Pam helped to run the show behind the scenes for many years. She was co-chef with Nancy Oakes for 28 years, starting at L'Avenue in 1988, then at Boulevard in 1993. Now she's the chef at the almost 3-year-old Prospect, although her name rarely, if ever, appears in columns and blogs.

Like many women chefs, Pam finds work and family sustaining, satisfying and totally time-consuming. She has been on her feet for more than 70 hours a week for years, at the same time raising three children — one a recent college grad, one a high school grad and one still at home, with the support of an understanding husband of 26 years who knows how much her work means to her.

With the dual responsibilities at work and home, she does not have time for hanging out with other chefs and making

issue and is not unique to the restaurant kitchen. In the new movie "Somm," women sommeliers get barely two minutes of screen time even though there are innumerable women sommeliers and 19 Masters. The film focuses only on aspiring male sommeliers and past Master Sommeliers.

Most women chefs are not adept at swagger, nor are they attracted to aggressive dog-eat-dog TV game show competitions. They will participate if it means getting coverage for their restaurants, but generally are reluctant self-promoters.

While they are not adept at "leaning in" for press attention, most who are active in restaurant kitchens willingly "lean in" when it comes to taking on work and extra responsibility.

Drawn to California

Pam was enticed into cooking school in Colorado during her senior year of college, and then worked in a few restaurants there. But she heard about the exciting changes happening in California in the early 1980s and



Craig Lee / Special to The Chronicle; styling by Sarah Fritsche

Wild King Salmon With Warm Pea & Potato Salad & Vinaigrette

Serves 6

This recipe is adapted from Pam Mazzola, chef/partner of Prospect in San Francisco. Freshly dug new potatoes — available at farmers' markets — are a summertime bonus. The skins of these potatoes are paper-thin and can almost be rubbed off.

20 snow peas

20 snap peas

Kosher salt, to taste

5 baby leeks, white parts only; or 1 bunch green onions, white and light green parts only

½ pound freshly shelled English peas, about 1½ pounds in the shell

¾ pound new potatoes such as small yellowfin or red potatoes, or marble potatoes

2 tablespoons creme fraiche

1 teaspoon Champagne vinegar

2 tablespoons very thinly sliced fresh mint

Ground black pepper, to taste

2 tablespoons olive oil + more as needed

6 5-ounce skinless wild king salmon fillets or fish of choice

½ cup small diced bacon

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

Instructions: Remove stems and strings from the snow peas and snap peas; lightly blanch the peas in boiling salted water, drain well and set aside. Cut the leeks or green onions into ¼-inch rounds and lightly blanch, drain well and set aside. Lightly blanch the En-

glish peas, too, unless they are very young and tender.

Wash the potatoes and cut in half. Place in a medium size pot with water to cover and season with salt. Bring to a simmer and cook until tender, about 10-15 minutes; drain.

In a medium bowl, combine the creme fraiche and vinegar; stir to combine. Add the English peas, mint and warm potatoes and stir to combine; season with salt and pepper to taste; cover to keep warm.

For the fish: Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet — preferably nonstick — over high heat. Season the salmon fillets with salt and pepper.

When the oil is very hot and shimmering, place the fillets, presentation side down, in the pan and give a quick shake to keep fillets from sticking to pan. Saute about 3 minutes, until golden brown. Turn the fish over and cook an additional 3-5 minutes.

Remove pan from the heat and let the fish rest in the pan for 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the

vinaigrette.

For the vinaigrette: Add 1 tablespoon olive oil to a medium skillet over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until crisp. Drain off half the oil and reduce the heat to low. Add the snow peas, snap peas and baby leeks or green onions, then stir in the olive oil and sherry vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

To serve: Place a spoonful of the warm potato salad in the middle of each plate. Top with a piece of salmon and spoon the warm pea and leek vinaigrette over the top.

Per serving: 550 calories, 36 g protein, 22 g carbohydrate, 35 g fat (8 g saturated), 104 mg cholesterol, 234 mg sodium, 5 g fiber.

Wine pairing: A mouth-filling Viognier such as the 2010 Summerwood Paso Robles Viognier (\$25; 15.3%) has plenty of weight to support the vinaigrette and rich salmon.

the social scene. And, she's way too busy to tweet or post on Facebook her every activity or culinary thought.

Some of this is the generational divide. Many young chefs and cooks tweet and post all the time, while the more mature chefs, both male and female, who have been in the business for a long while, focus mainly on their work and consequently get little or no real coverage unless they are opening a new place or hiring a publicist to promote events. The squeaky wheel still gets the grease.

But gender remains an

moved here to be part of the food revolution.

Her first job was in garde manger at the Fairmont Hotel. She recalls enduring the kind of crude harassment that lone women in commercial kitchens were subjected to at that time. She then moved to the tiny Cafe Mozart, where she cooked nouvelle-inspired French cuisine and eventually became chef de cuisine.

After three years, she left Cafe Mozart and took 14 months off to have her first daughter. During that time, she kept in touch with Gaines Dobbins, a cook she had met

while running Cafe Mozart who subsequently went to work with Nancy Oakes.

One night Pam and her husband went to L'Avenue for dinner. After visiting Gaines in the kitchen, she met Nancy, who called her a few days later. Pam was itching to get back into a restaurant kitchen, and went in for her interview with the baby in the stroller. Nancy didn't bat an eye and offered her the opportunity to work three days a week. Pam has been working with Nancy ever since.

Gaines also went on to

work with Nancy for many years. Staff longevity in the Boulevard kitchen is impressive.

Dedication to craft

Pam loves tracking down new ingredients from the best purveyors. She enjoys the challenge of creating new recipes and writing a balanced menu. Tasting food with the staff, reading, and dining in other restaurants are all part of her education.

She describes Prospect as a modern California restaurant, with a seasonal, market-driven menu. She's working on stream-

lining the number of ingredients on the plate to avoid what she calls "the forest" — the overabundance of greenery and flashy garnishes that have sprouted up over the years. After spending all that time sourcing great ingredients, she wants to highlight them rather than bury them in excessive complexity.

Now that her children are grown, she says she feels as if she is starting over as a new chef. Her greatest pleasure at work comes in training her young staff, teaching them the craft of cooking and guiding them along

their career paths to becoming chefs.

Pam is still not in it for fame and glory but for the true joy of cooking, still vibrant after all these years.

Prospect, 300 Spear St. (at Folsom Street), San Francisco; (415) 247-7770. www.prospectsf.com. Dinner nightly; brunch Sunday.

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