



COOK OF THE WEEK



Eye-catching food appeal



Randi Anglin/Staff Photographer

Tony Sansevero believes his recipes have to look and taste good. Among his creations are, from left, Chilled Champagne de Melon Soup, Chicken Marbella over Couscous, Conchiglie Shells With Mushrooms and Radicchio, and in the middle, Caesar Salad.

Food with a flair

Tony Sansevero is an artist at work and in the kitchen

By Jeanne Albanese
Staff Writer

The artist in Tony Sansevero can't help but creep into the kitchen when he's preparing a gourmet meal. To Sansevero, 31, merely serving food isn't enough. It has to be presented with flair.

That's why guests sip his cold champagne melon soup out of cantaloupe halves and spoon his ginger pumpkin soup out of a huge gutted pumpkin into smaller pumpkin bowls. It's also why the first time he met his in-laws over a four-course meal of international cuisine he created, he changed clothes for each course, donning a sombrero to serve the paella, an Italian look for his "killer" meatballs, and a chef's hat and apron for his American kebab appetizers, and so on.

In truth, Sansevero's art and cooking go hand in hand. While developing his artistic career, Sansevero, who now also illustrates children's books, waited tables for 10 years, working for about five years as a captain in one of Donald Trump's casinos. There, he watched

Chef's choice

Who: Tony Sansevero of Syracuse.
What cookbook do you use the most? "365 Ways to Cook Pasta," and "Vincent Price's Treasury of Great Recipes."
What kitchen tool or gadget do you rely on? "One knife that cuts garlic really well without chopping off my finger."
What spice or herb can you not live without? Garlic.
Where do you do your food shopping? Wegmans.
Favorite dish to feed a crowd? Chicken Marbella.
Favorite dish to feed the family? Stuffed Cornish game hens over couscous with dried fruit.

chefs create gourmet meals (that cost the diners thousands of dollars) and he learned a thing or two about presentation.

He also worked in the restaurant at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where the menu changed with each exhibit.

Sansevero, who moved from Boston to Syracuse about a year ago, started cooking as a young bachelor, as a means to survive.



Eventually, cooking itself developed into an art.

While living in Boston, Sansevero and his wife, Maria Julia, a dentist, regularly held dinner parties for groups of 20 friends. Often, they'd host theme nights: Clint Eastwood movies with Mexican food and margaritas, or French movies and French food.

Each year, he hosts a birthday party for his two dogs, Tasha and Frodo, both Labrador mixes. The dogs eat meat-loaf birthday cake, and the guests get Chicken Marbella, a mix of prunes, garlic, capers, brown sugar and red wine vin-

egar, one of Sansevero's favorite creations.

"Now it's a passion," he says. "And no one can go into my kitchen when I cook. I have my set ways of doing things, and it's not always the cleanest way."

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If you know a cook who really stands out or would like to nominate yourself, write to: "Cook of the Week," CBY, Syracuse Newspapers, P.O. Box 4915, Syracuse 13221. Please be sure to include a name, address and daytime telephone number.

Conchiglie Shells with Mushrooms and Radicchio from Tony Sansevero

6 tablespoons unsalted butter
6 ounces shiitake mushrooms, wiped clean, stemmed and cut into 1/4-inch slices
Salt to taste
1 pound medium-sized dried conchiglie (pasta shells)
2 1/2 cups heavy cream

1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
1/2 cup shredded Bel Paese cheese
1/2 cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
2 heads (about 1 pound) radicchio, halved, cored and shredded
6 fresh sage leaves, shredded

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Generously butter small individual baking dishes. In a medium saucepan, melt 4 tablespoons butter over medium heat. Add mushrooms and saute for 5 minutes or until tender. Add salt to taste. Remove from heat and set aside.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. At boiling, add a bit of salt. Cook pasta for about 10 minutes or until *al dente*. Drain well. In a large bowl, combine cream, the three cheeses, mushrooms and radicchio. Add the drained pasta and toss to combine. Add sage leaves and salt to taste.

Transfer the pasta into prepared dishes and dot with remaining 2 tablespoons of butter. Bake 30 minutes or until bubbling and golden brown on top. Serve immediately in small casserole dishes. Makes a great side dish.

Champagne de Melon Soup from Tony Sansevero

5 cups coarsely chopped fresh cantaloupe or honeydew melon
1 tablespoon fresh grated ginger

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
3 cups dry champagne
1-2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
fresh mint leaves

Puree melon and ginger in a blender. Force puree through a strainer, pressing solids through with a spoon. Stir in lemon juice. Just before serving, stir in champagne and just enough sugar to emphasize the melon's flavor without over-sweetening. Refrigerate from 2 to 12 hours, but not more than 12 hours. Garnish with mint

Chicken Marbella from Tony Sansevero

5 pounds chicken quarters
1 head of garlic, peeled and finely pureed
1/4 cup dried oregano
salt and pepper to taste
1/2 cup red wine vinegar
1/2 cup olive oil
1 cup pitted prunes

1/2 cup pitted Spanish green olives
1/2 cup capers with a bit of juice
6 bay leaves
1 cup brown sugar
1 cup white wine
1/4 cup Italian parsley, finely chopped

In a large bowl, combine chicken quarters, garlic, oregano, pepper, salt, vinegar, olive oil, prunes, olives, capers and juice and bay leaves. Cover marinade and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Arrange chicken in a single layer in one or two large shallow baking pans and spoon marinade over evenly. Sprinkle chicken with brown sugar and pour wine around it. Bake for 50 minutes to one hour, basting frequently with juices. Chicken is done when juices run clear yellow, not pink, when pricked. Garnish with parsley.

Pesto Couscous from Tony Sansevero

2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
1/3 cup pine nuts
1-2 large garlic cloves, chopped
1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup olive oil
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 package of couscous
Chicken broth

Finely chop basil, pine nuts, garlic and salt in a food processor. With processor running, add olive oil slowly and steadily until mixture is thoroughly blended. Transfer to bowl; fold in Parmesan cheese. Make couscous according to package instructions. (Package will instruct how much water or chicken broth to use.) Use broth instead of hot water. Mix both in a bowl and serve. It can be served as a hot side dish or chilled as a summer salad.