

Escapes



PHOTOS BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST



The chef at Robert Morris Inn in Oxford, Md., has introduced a full menu of cooking classes, complete with wine pairings and a Miele demonstration kitchen.

Chef Henry Miller prepares dishes for his December class, Cocktail Party Appetizers, at Two if by Sea on Tilghman Island. He holds classes once a month.

Food a bit bland? Needs more Eastern Shore.

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

The first thing you need to know about cooking classes on Maryland's Eastern Shore and at the Delaware beaches is that you can leave your Old Bay seasoning at home. In search of classes to spice up my cooking repertoire this winter, I've found plenty of offerings that are anything but bland — even sans the little yellow can.

Last month, I took a Sunday class at Two if by Sea, a cafe on Tilghman Island, about 60 miles past the Bay Bridge. Chef Henry Miller offers monthly classes, and the December theme was cocktail party appetizers. Miller, who spent seven years at Williams-Sonoma before he bought the restaurant, walked around and uncorked bottles of wine — it was BYOB for those who like adult beverages with their cooking instruction.

There were a dozen students in the class, many of them members of a local book club (although they were hard-pressed to tell me the last book they'd read). The woman next to me, who wore dangly earrings, said that Miller had once had participants help prep the ingredients rather than simply observe. "But we like watching demonstrations better," she confided. "We like to talk and drink." The conversation flowed from island gossip (someone's kid got into trouble for packing a crab and crab-eating tools in his school lunch) to mousse — and it took me a minute to realize that it was the hair variety, not the chocolate kind.

Miller knocked out eight appetizers — including Brandied Apricot Brie, Three Mushroom Ratatouille and Lobster Avocado Cocktail. None of the recipes were complicated enough to be intimidating, and many were prepared in a food processor — perfect for those of us without fancy high-end appliances, and perfect for this working fishing town. Watching Miller zip through recipes with everything pre-chopped and pre-measured into plastic foam cups, I was reminded of an essential cooking lesson — the importance of mise en place, or having your ingredients ready to go before you start cooking.

When Miller finished, everyone applauded, and we dug into his creations for a little feast. I asked Miller whether he teaches a crab cake class, and he hesitated. "Everyone here has their own crab cake and coleslaw recipes," he said, implying that it might be a hard sell for the

locals.

I did find one Eastern Shore chef who's considering a crab cake class. Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Executive Chef Tony Breeze said that visitors to the area want to learn how to make really good crab cakes and that he has often demonstrated his recipe to individual guests upon request. He uses a base of mayonnaise, Dijon mustard, freshly chopped parsley, a touch of panko (Japanese bread crumbs) and fresh Choptank River crab from J.M. Clayton Seafood.

And Old Bay? "I'm not a huge fan of it," he said. "But we do put a little Old Bay in there. On the Eastern Shore, it's kind of expected."

Whether you're looking for a demonstration or a competition, there's no shortage of cooking-related events on the Eastern Shore and at the Delaware beaches this winter. Below are a few of our favorites.

Two if by Sea

Monthly classes held 4-6 p.m. Sundays.

Jan. 15, Chinese New Year; Feb. 19, Mardi Gras; March 18, Garden Party; April 15, Cooking With Eggs. \$20.

5776 Tilghman Island Rd., Tilghman, Md.; 410-886-2447, www.twoifbysecafe.com.

Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina

For the past eight years, Executive Chef Breeze has been hosting and judging Family Iron Chef, a competition to make a winning pasta dish. Breeze judges groups of four on teamwork, organizational skills, sanitation, waste and creativity. (He finds engineers to be some of the most creative in the kitchen — e.g., cleverly using serrated spoons for tasks such as grating parmesan cheese.) Teams cook for 45 minutes and then present Breeze and spectators with a verbal description of their dish — extra creativity points for skits and poems. The top team wins a \$100 gift certificate to the resort.

Family Iron Chef will be held at 2 p.m. Jan. 14, Feb. 18, March 31 and April 7; \$30 per four-person team. Sign-up is first-come, first-served on the day of each

competition. Cooking demonstrations held Thursday, Friday and Saturday at the resort's grill and seafood restaurants.

100 Heron Blvd. at Route 50, Cambridge, Md.; 410-901-1234, chesapeakebay.hyatt.com.

Robert Morris Inn

When Mark Salter and Ian Fleming — formerly the executive chef and general manager, respectively, of the Inn at Perry Cabin in St. Michaels — bought the Robert Morris Inn in Oxford, Md., 18 months ago, the locals knew that fine dining was on its way. And sure enough, Salter has introduced an entire menu of cooking events for this winter, including demonstrations, a Saturday "dinner theater" with a four-course food and wine menu, and wine dinners with winemakers. He has a beautiful Miele demonstration kitchen in the main dining room, a clever setup that allows him to instruct as he prepares each dinner course while everyone else relaxes with food and wine. The setting is just as attractive outside: The 300-year-old inn sits on the Tred Avon River. The ferry is closed for the winter, but the water views are calming no matter the season.

Cooking demonstration series 10 a.m. to noon: Feb. 4, Italy; Feb. 18, Comfort Food; March 17, Signature Dishes; April 28, Afternoon Tea; \$64 for class, lunch and wine. Saturday Dinner Theater with Mark Salter on Feb. 25, March 31, April 21, \$140. Inn rates for two, including breakfast, \$120 to \$198 through March. Call for winter discounts.

314 N. Morris St., Oxford, Md.; 410-226-5111, www.robertmorrisonn.com.

Bartlett Pear Inn and Pear Restaurant

You've sharpened your knife skills, refined your risotto and bettered your baking. Now you're down to the nitty-gritty: You want a sauce that turns on your taste buds. Easton's Bartlett Pear, owned by Jordan and Alice Lloyd, offers a Chef's Saucy Package that includes a private 30- to 45-minute demonstration with Chef Jordan, who has worked at the Four Seasons Washington, Michel Richard's Citronelle, La Goulue in Miami and Per Se in New York. He also schedules private cooking lessons at the historic inn, which include lunch and wine.

The Chef's Saucy Package includes two

nights, a private demonstration on re-creating a favorite sauce — his or yours — breakfast and a 10 percent discount on dinner; \$425 for two.

28 S. Harrison St., Easton, Md., 410-770-3300, www.bartlettpearinn.com.

Smith Island cake demonstration

It's hard to say which would be the bigger Eastern Shore adventure: learning to make a Smith Island cake — which has up to a dozen layers — or making your way to the island itself, which is accessible only by boat. If you and your friends do survive a trip there, make it through the class and return safely to the mainland, an exquisite layered cake will be your reward. Maryland's only inhabited island in the Chesapeake Bay, Smith Island is home to Mary Ada Marshall, who offers traditional Smith Island cake baking classes to small groups in her home. And if you've never had the good fortune to taste one of these treats, just know this: More layers of cake and frosting is a good thing.

Classes for groups of five or more are \$20 per person, by appointment. Passenger ferries make the 45-minute trip to Smith Island twice daily (12:30 p.m. and 5 p.m.) from the city dock in Crisfield, Md. Call during winter months to confirm schedules.

Mary Ada Marshall, Tylerton, Md.; 410-425-2023, www.visitsmithisland.com/togo.html.

Nage Rehoboth Beach

It may be in Rehoboth Beach, Del., but Nage is a far cry from boardwalk fare. Known for its Foodie Fridays, Meatless Mondays and appetizers such as Blue Corn Johnny Cakes and Maple Roasted Pecans, the restaurant offers two-hour monthly cooking demonstrations that include tastings and a recipe booklet. The restaurant also has monthly beer dinners hosted by local breweries, including Dogfish Head and Evolution.

Jan. 21, Healthy and Flavorful Cooking; Feb. 18, Hearty Winter Soups and Stews; March 24, Hands-On Sushi Rolling; April 21, Nage Classics. \$50, sushi class \$75.

19730 Coastal Hwy., Rehoboth Beach, Del., 302-226-2037, www.nagerestaurant.com/rehoboth_beach.

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Jordan Lloyd, formerly of Citronelle and now chef at Bartlett Pear Inn in Easton, Md., offers private demonstrations on re-creating a favorite sauce.

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