

VEGETARIAN TRADITIONS



FAVORITE RECIPES
FROM MY YEARS AT THE LEGENDARY
INN SEASON CAFE

GEORGE VUTETAKIS

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INN SEASON

All ye guests and friends, who enter here,
WELCOME
You have come to Inn Season Café attracted and inspired
By appetite's hopes,
Or perhaps the memory of past satisfactions.
In any event, you have a taste for an enriched future,
As well as a delicious present.
Please come in.
Your place is prepared – or soon shall be – and
We shall honor your presence with service.

* * * *

In the beginning there is the kitchen, active
With its versatile tools of cooking,
Which are not the pots and ladles alone, but as well
The bounty of nature:
the piquant herbs and spices of all the world,
the succulent vegetables and fruits of our America
the hearty grains and beans from everywhere they grow,
And elements of the sea.
Matched and blended in recipes with ancient roots...
And with creative branching:
Behold our daily specials! (There's a new one every day)

* * * *

The menu you shall study is a catalog,
That sears and wards off ennui with its varieties
Across a range of cultures.
In season always is their purity, as their daily freshness is.
So, select freely, partake of your rightful share, and
Let tension's fetters be released....
If dormant, may good humor be awakened
In this mellow atmosphere.
If not dormant, then let it flourish,
So that, in departure, your spirits rejoice in rejuvenation,
Empowered by the deepest satisfaction
Of the appetites you bring.

Spyros Vutetakis
1990

To my parents and son,
Spyros, Marjorie and Spyros



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Preface

Over several decades, Inn Season Café in Royal Oak, Michigan, made an impact on thousands of vegetarians and non-vegetarians with healthy and flavorful cuisine. Regular customers could eat good food every day without the side effects from too much fat, sugar or refined foods—a claim few restaurants can make.

We took pride in preparing food that was not only sustainable, but also sustained the health of the customer. Time-honored techniques were used, running a parallel course with the slow food movement, drawing out the best flavors and nutrients each food had to offer. We were part of a green movement that embraced fresh, local and organic products. Our mission was to create extraordinary cuisine with the purest ingredients possible. The impact on the community was very positive and mutually rewarding.

In *Vegetarian Traditions*, I share recipes which were favorite dishes served during my tenure at Inn Season Café. Along with the recipes are bits of food history, stories from my adventures in India and anecdotes from my Greek-American upbringing, where my love for cooking developed. The farmers who contributed so much to our success are also a vital part of this story.

I started writing this book soon after passing the torch of Inn Season Café in 2002. A lot has happened between then and now. My wife, Sara Hill, and I delved into historic restoration and home renovation which had been a hobby when we ran the restaurant. The kitchens became the center and lifeblood of the homes. In addition, I have periodically taught classes where the craft of cooking was very personal between cook and clientele. My website and blog features everything that we've been working on from home projects in Michigan and San Diego to recipes and podcasts--thevegetarianguy.com.

Today, the Inn Season Café is as busy as ever. The organic food industry is booming and more products are able to be incorporated into the daily menu. Chef Thomas Lasher is in his element focused on local organic foods, with a new guard of up-and-coming cooks under his wing. I am proud to have been a part of the Inn Season Café family and look forward to continuing our work together promoting the food that everyone should eat.

Welcome to our culinary world!

George Vutetakis
thevegetarianguy.com

From The Staff Of The Inn Season Café

In *Vegetarian Traditions* one learns the dynamic story of Inn Season Café's first two decades, how it started, the community's involvement, and of course, all about the delicious and healthy food. Pioneering creative vegetarian cuisine, while upholding our internal standards of quality and presentation, is still our core mission. Due to this, Inn Season Café is on the verge of its third decade and is as popular as ever.

Inn Season Café is committed to serving fresh food from farm to table, real food for real people. Sourcing local food sustains our synergistic relationship with the immediate community. We treat Michigan farmers as our close allies and we have tirelessly supported local farmers and their markets over the last three decades.

For current menus, news and further information, please visit us at www.theinnseasoncafé.com.



Introduction

In 1981 Inn Season Café, a natural foods restaurant, opened in Royal Oak, Michigan—the culmination of a longtime dream for founders John Armstrong and Maggie O’Meara. It was my great fortune to be hired as their head chef. Together we created an award-winning menu and concept. I purchased the restaurant from them five years later and expanded the philosophy and dedication of presenting flavorful, healthy and extraordinary cuisine.

Through the years, as other natural food restaurants came and went, Inn Season Café grew into a local icon attracting people from all over Michigan—and beyond. From the beginning, the café won awards from regional publications and was recognized by many of the national “where-to-eat vegetarian” books. We showcased our talents in many charity events, including the Stepping Out Aids Walk, Taste of Royal Oak and The Empty Bowls Project. I also presented cooking demonstrations on local news stations, PBS and cable shows.

Community involvement was integrated into our way of doing business and we contributed with great pride. The bulletin board in the café promoted events and businesses and we featured local artists on the walls of the café. Customers began to demand our secrets, so we started a series of very popular cooking classes.

Quickly, Inn Season Café became *the* place to dine and our 50 seats would fill up soon after opening the doors—long lines were the norm. Our catering and take-out business boomed. We even had one devoted chocoholic who would call about once a month demanding that a Chocolate Cheeseless Cake be FedExed to Florida.

Many of our regular customers came in every day, sharing their stories of why they chose to be more conscious of their diets and before long we learned many of their special needs and restrictions. Some even had a button on our computer indicating their tailored orders. The ticket would come into the kitchen as “Karen’s Salad” or “Bev’s Tofu.” Because our cuisine was flavorful as well as healthy, they felt comfortable bringing in their carnivorous friends. In fact, most of our customers were non-vegetarian.

Restaurants are notorious for high staff turnover—not ours. Once someone joined the Inn Season Café family, they felt good about what we were doing and wanted to stay. Many people made their mark at Inn Season Café, often for years on end. Thomas Lasher, now chef and co-owner, is embarking on his third decade.

After nearly twenty years of being chef/owner, I decided it was time to focus on writing, teaching and other artistic endeavors. In the summer of 2002, I sold the café to longtime-friend Nick Raftis. He and Thomas continue to provide our valued customers and treasured employees with the same standards and philosophies the café had always held. Today, the restaurant is as popular as ever and continues to win accolades from the community. In this book, I focus on the philosophy of Inn Season Café as well as my own motivating forces.



My Culinary Odyssey

Setting the Stage

The unmistakable aroma of cinnamon-laced *pastitsio*, fennel-infused stuffed grape leaves and my favorite honey almond cookies, *amigdalota*, alerted all my senses as I stood in the kitchen corner watching *Yia Yia*, my Greek grandmother, prepare the regular family feast. When I was a boy, it was a very special treat to spend time with her. She would pretend not to see as I swiped a *spanikopita* two off a tray and it wasn't until years later I realized it was purposely left on the edge of the counter just within reach of small fingers. She cooked each of us our favorite dishes, such as her prize almond *skordalia* for my father and vegetarian grape leaves for me.

Yia Yia's family home was on a striking promontory in Western Crete, formerly an estate of a Venetian duke. The men farmed and fought a revolution while she developed her cooking skills. She left for America at the tender age of seventeen and brought with her the flavors of the Mediterranean sunshine and the incredible cuisine of the Cretan island. Sometimes, my mother would admirably try to replicate her recipes, but *Yia Yia* had a magical touch which made the taste and smell of her food unique. She introduced me to a world of food and culinary passion that embedded extraordinary flavors in my memory.

Those early experiences in *Yia Yia's* kitchen awakened in me a curiosity for foods from many ethnic traditions—like a “culinary coming of age.” I absorbed everything within my grasp—a recipe from one cook, an idea from another. However, the most significant culinary experiences began when I was seventeen, during one of my many journeys to India.

In India, I discovered my niche was in the kitchen and food became a language in which I could express myself freely. I also learned it is an important instrument for achieving balance in a Yogic life and affects people on physical, emotional and spiritual levels. According to Yogis, food does not belong to us by right, it is a gift from the land and higher powers. Food is part of our synchronistic and reciprocal relationship with the cosmos. When Brahmins cook, they do so selflessly, refraining from tasting the food until all have been served. Their focus is to please those for whom they are cooking. My training by Brahmins in temples, combined with family culture, allowed me to merge Mediterranean passion for life with the pursuit of nirvana. A synergy of uncommon experiences shaped my culinary career.

After eight years managing many kitchens, running a restaurant in Manhattan and cooking for hundreds, often thousands in India and America, I found myself in Royal Oak at Inn Season Café.

Inn Season Café Begins

Detroit's Eastside, November, 1980. Catering season was in full swing and I had just put stuffed

artichokes in the oven when the doorbell rang. It was Arvid, the health food store owner from across the street, announcing that there were some people in the store he thought I should meet. This was my first encounter with John Armstrong, Maggie O'Meara and Norman Turner.

They described their idea for a vegetarian restaurant in Royal Oak with barn wood walls, antique tables and a menu inspired by the food of Greektown, Mexican Village and other places of Detroit's culinary heritage. Their vision was reminiscent of places I had seen many times before in the 1970s and sounded like a good fit for Royal Oak. However, due to my other commitments, I couldn't join the team. I wished the earthy-looking threesome the best of luck and went back to my cooking.

Detroit's Eastside, January, 1981. The catering business was down to a trickle and I was looking for other things. Out of the blue, I received a phone call from Maggie asking when I wanted to start. The next day we met at the café. As I entered, Maggie's father was working on the leaded glass front door and others were nailing up the barn wood and installing kitchen equipment. On the wall, a mural was beginning to take shape full of carrot people, broccoli trees, mushroom gnomes and mystically shaped clouds.

It turned out to be a meeting of destiny and with two weeks to go before opening, I took the job as head chef. My first day on the job I was asked for a good recipe for spaghetti sauce and within the next few days Maggie and I put together recipes to create an entire menu. Some of her recipes remain on the menu today as Inn Season classics. The details came together and we opened to a full house on February 24, 1981. For months, each day was busier than the one before, and it was obvious to us that we had filled a void in Metro Detroit.

After a year and a half at Inn Season Café, I accepted a position as chef and manager at a friend's place in Montreal. Quebec was a marvelous combination of Old World culture and modern community, as exemplified in neighborhood restaurants that embraced rich traditions. Inspired by my experiences, I returned to Inn Season Café in 1984 as head chef, ready to take the restaurant to the next level.

“Quality of food is synonymous with quality of life”

That was the unspoken motto of Inn Season Café during my tenure as chef/proprietor which began after I purchased the restaurant in 1985. Everything from ingredients to cooking methods to ambiance was tailored for the customer's optimum health and utmost enjoyment.

The restaurant was a comforting place where guests could depend on a flavorful, yet surprising healthy dining experience. Regular patrons became active participants in the Inn Season revolution and created a contagious enthusiasm that resonated throughout the community. Twenty percent of our clientele were visiting us for the first time on any given day. Many vegetarians came from all over the country, making Inn Season Café a mandatory stop in the Detroit area.

Since the beginning of Detroit's 300 year history, immigrants have infused the area with their treasured cuisines. James Beard, legendary chef and food writer, noted that Detroit was one of the great food cities of the U.S. because of its multitude of ethnic cuisines. The original Inn Season Café menu contained our versions of dishes served in Detroit's Greektown, Mexican Village, Polish

Hamtramck and Middle Eastern Dearborn. Over the years we would add themed dinners, as well as individual dishes, reflecting Detroit's diversity. My passion for history taught me the importance of creating community through maintaining culinary traditions. I would occasionally invite people from different nationalities into the kitchen to teach us their vegetarian recipes.

We served fish at the Café for a number of years, all the while going to great lengths to separate it from pure vegetarian products. We offered it to attract customers who otherwise might never have come. The media began running stories of polluted waters and the depletion of the fish population. Even the fish farm industry was suspect, with relatively few farms attending to bacterial issues. Fish became the weak link in the Inn Season food chain. When we finally flushed it from the menu, we were able to focus our energies completely on the vegetarian fare, bringing us to new levels in service, flavor and vitality. Ironically, business boomed as a result of this change. Removing fish was also a big relief because of the issues relating to the classic struggle of ethics between man and animal.

Bonding with the Community

By taking Inn Season Café on the road, we supported many community events. For nine years, we were the primary food provider for the annual Stepping Out Aids Walk, serving our corn bread and chili to about 2,000 people. The Taste of Royal Oak was a local restaurant association event at which nearly 4,000 people could experience our Tuscan pizza.

The primary community interface for more than 20 years was through the Royal Oak Farmers Market. Every week during the growing season we would roll flatbed carts loaded with hundreds of pounds of produce through the market. Inn Season Café also sponsored an organic growers' booth that initiated a permanent presence for organic farmers at the market. Shopping at the market was a social event where I would meet patrons, farmers and community leaders. Often, some of the farmers would deliver their surplus to the back door of the restaurant after the market closed. Truckloads of corn, all kinds of squash, beets, tomatoes, zucchini, etc. would be channeled through the kitchen with extra going to customers, employees and local soup kitchens.

Outreach programs were also very successful. A small restaurant can only work with so many charitable programs and still make an impact, so we chose the "Empty Bowls Project." It was a grassroots-level template created to bring families, students, local artists and restaurants together to organize funds for feeding the poor. The students or local artists made the ceramic bowls and the families or restaurants supplied the soup to fill the bowls. The program has since been embraced nationwide, and we had the good fortune to be involved almost from the inception of the Empty Bowls Project in Southeast Michigan. The largest event we participated in was the National Service Learning Conference of 1996 in Detroit. Working with a local Royal Oak high school environmental club, we cooked 100 gallons of soup with the students assisting. We served 1000 people at the conference with bowls made at a number of local schools. A few years later the founders of Empty Bowls, John Hartom and Lisa Blackburn, honored my efforts as one of "the heroes of the Empty Bowls movement."

Passing the Torch

Exponential growth is one of the indicators of a popular restaurant. We experienced it for many years

thus enabling us to blaze new trails in vegetarian cuisine, while we rode out the ups and downs of the economy. After almost two decades as chef/owner of Inn Season Café, I wanted to spend more time teaching and writing. Fortunately, our former sous chef Thomas Lasher stepped in as chef, ensuring the continuation of Inn Season Café's commitment to quality and fine cuisine.

Developing this cuisine has not been a matter of arbitrary decisions or whimsical taste. It is but a part of a culinary revolution embraced by those who wish to find the relevance in food through both good health and meaningful connections. This book, a labor of love, is an offering to all who wish to participate in this revolution.



How to Cook like a Chef at Home

A Day in the Life of Inn Season

Amidst the morning hum of cars careening around corners, dogs barking and deliveries being made, would arrive at the restaurant to begin a new day. Lights, fans and ovens were turned on like stage lights in a theater. As always, the first business was to re-sanitize all the cooking surfaces. Next would start the bread and write the Cook's List for the day's production. This was a quiet time when would proceed in an almost ritual motion meditating on what to create, which often would be 20 to 30 preparations. We had a full menu that required making bases in a rotation of every two to three days.

The rest of the crew would file in: a pantry cook, a short order cook and a dishwasher. The cook would proceed to set up the lines, heating food prepared the day before while surveying every detail of their station. The pace stepped up as one item after another would be crossed off the Cook's List as they were completed, transferred and set up to serve. The dishwasher focused on washing the pans and, on slower days, would help shuck corn, pod peas and peel carrots. Most of the time, production would whirl with choreographic symmetry, disturbed only by the occasional malfunction of equipment or untimely deliveries. It would take months of training for a person to adequately fill any of the positions in the kitchen. Trainees would work as assistants until they became proficient. This added bodies to a space already cramped for maximum efficiency, causing people to misstep in their "dance" and squash a toe or two, thus slowing everyone down. Fortunately, dangerous mistakes with hot, slippery and sharp surfaces were rare.

At any given time, there were at least 22 to 30 employees with 10 to 12 full-timers. With those numbers, it was rare that one or two people were not having problems. Also, many factors could affect production and dinner menus. Often, we had to change creative plans midstream. The two months of chaos so in a year where everything ran like clockwork kept us going the rest of the time. When it ran smoothly, it was exhilarating.

When we opened the doors for lunch, the customers had no idea what it took to get there. While lunch was served, recipe production would continue through the day, with short order often sharing space on the stove as I prepared the evening specials. Often, lunch was busy and I would become the second short order cook or assistant to the pantry cook. Since everything was served without microwaves and ovens, I assisted to keep ticket times within a 10-minute period. Life at the helm could be hectic with special customer needs, phone calls and questions. Seeing the customers enjoying their meals from behind the swinging doors was enough to get me through almost anything. I thrived on the challenge of providing an extraordinary dining experience. By the time the dinner menu was presented, the "curtain" would go up and the entire restaurant would be in dinner service mode. We cranked for lunch, but dinner was the "show."

Preparation

Cleaning the kitchen to get it ready for cooking is the first step in prepping. All counters should be wiped down (in restaurants a mild bleach solution or hospital grade quaternary sanitizer is used), pans rinsed and cutting boards laid out. Washing one's hands frequently, wearing clean clothes and cleaning anything that has potential for food contact are basic to every kitchen. One of the cooking principles from India is that everything should be washed, not only as an insurance against bacteria but also as a cleansing ritual. In ancient Greece, visitors to shrines like Delphi, as well as all temple workers, washed their mouths, hands and feet before entering as a symbol of respect for the sanctity of the environment. The kitchen is an altar for our communion with the earth. It is the place where the almost mystical transformation of raw ingredients to palatable, healthy food takes place. Good, clean habits are essential when attending to the details of a preparation and are also considerate of our relationship with those we feed. Wash all ingredients before placing them on a clean counter. If something must wait because it is too tender (mushrooms) or will be affected by moisture (grains), place them in a clean bowl on the counter to create a separation.

Organization and Planning

Organization is the key to successful multitasking. Chefs set up their kitchens to be efficient. At In Season Café, the short order area was set up with every possible ingredient, utensil, and garnish available within arms reach. Clear surfaces are also one of the most important parts of setting up a kitchen. Having an uncluttered space to set pans, dishes, etc. is paramount to organizing and cooking dinner. Do the stove and the workspace have enough light? Will you have to walk across the kitchen with hot pans, or can a place be set up to keep them near the cooking area? A little forethought goes a long way.

Ease of use should be the guiding principle when organizing kitchen equipment. First, give priority to frequently used pans and utensils. Second, make sure everything is easy to access. There's nothing like a needed pan in the back of a cupboard to discourage a cook from making a dish. Organize the utensil drawer and have separate compartments for spatulas, spoons, tongs, etc. Avoid throwing everything randomly in drawers, particularly knives which should not be stored with other utensils. Although the necessary pans and utensils may be set out for use, often a backup set is needed and you must know exactly where to find it.

Well-prepared meals reflect a well-prepared cook. By removing distractions, one can focus on the essence of the recipes. Cooking then becomes fluid and natural. Memory is another factor for successful cooking. Again, by removing obstacles ahead of time and anticipating cooking needs, the cook can consciously register each activity and not wonder whether salt had been added.

As a check and balance, the ingredient layout should match the order of use. Small dishes can hold individual herbs and spices. Measure out liquids and place any refrigerated items out, but not for more than half an hour before cooking. The idea is to lay out everything needed in an organized fashion so that all of your attention may be focused on cooking--this way two to three dishes may be prepared in the time of one.

Mind-set

Panache is something we all desire when cooking; it is style and flair combined with creative expression. The successful chef must focus on the execution of a plan which includes fine-tuning and finishing each dish with verve. Keep this in mind when setting up your cooking program, plan ahead, get inspired by recipes, study them and absorb the mental imagery of the flavors that the cook intended. Use your own experiences with each recipe as a guide, whether they come from eating stories you have heard, the Food Network, films or literature.

It is thought that the mood of the diner can impact the nourishing qualities of a meal. The ancient Sufis had a saying, “Eating food in stress is eating poison.” The mind-set of the cook can also affect the meal. Many Brahmins in India will only eat meals they personally prepare so as not to take on the karma of others. Another example can be found in the film “Like Water for Chocolate” when the main character transfers her grief as she cries into the cake batter she is preparing. Later, when the wedding party consumes the cake, they all fall ill.

Slow versus Fast Cooking

Many dishes are best when prepared slowly. An entire culinary society has evolved around this called “The Slow Food Movement.” Savory flavors in cooking are developed through ‘fast’ cooking methods, including grilling, sautéing, broiling and frying. Examples of ‘slow’ cooking are roasting, simmering and baking. The main differences between the two are the degree to which the preparation must be tended to and watched. The slow techniques allow time for the flavors to develop. Fast and slow food can work harmoniously when trying to make a meal quickly. Often, I combine slow cooking with fast and one of the best ways to do this is by using the oven. Once the concept of speed cooking is understood, it’s fairly simple to determine what method is best for achieving optimum results.

Clean-up

Incredible cooking can make incredible messes. A veritable quagmire of pots, pans, utensils, trash and littered countertops. The clutter seems to expand exponentially as a cook speeds up—just ask my wife! The key to keeping the kitchen functional is to include cleaning as part of the cooking regime. At every stage, take the extra minute or so to wipe the counter or wash a pan. It is helpful to begin soaking some of the pans and utensils as the cooking proceeds. Also, deglazing a hot pan will help keep the pan from drying and becoming crusty. Parchment paper can be used to cover trays when baking which facilitates cleanup to a great degree. Clean-up can also become a social activity with everyone helping.

Presentation

Visual presentation is a significant aspect of the meal. First impressions are indicators of what’s to come. Even when cooking for two, taking the time to set up a beautiful plate reflects an appreciation for aesthetics and tradition, thus creating a less stressful and healthier meal. Keeping it simple is always best. Too many dishes on one plate can confuse, distract and clutter the taste buds. Everything should be edible and have a purpose, such as a raspberry sauce used to decorate a plate that a chocolate cake sits on. Garnishes may be as simple as a bit of parsley on an Italian dish to help clean the palate or cilantro on an Indian dish to complete the fresh flavor.

Cooking Methodology

Ancient cultures perceived that the elements of earth, water, fire and air combined in different forms to create basic structures for everything in this world. A fascinating aspect of this perception is that they often believed the fire was already in the wood. One only had to spark it in order for the flames to manifest. Our creativity is just below the surface, waiting to ignite. Discovering the “cuisine within” is something many of us dream about while we aspire for greater heights in cooking.

Cooks find motivation from many sources including mentors, other cooks, books and magazines. Going to a farmers market, walking through a field of produce or tending to a garden have always been sources of inspiration for me. Experiencing firsthand the food and culture of other lands has provided the foundation of my cuisine.

Another way I gain inspiration is through the stories about recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation, family member to family member. I have enjoyed sharing these tales through my cooking classes and writing. They speak of a recipe’s origin, home, land, cultivation and preparation.

Cooking is a form of expression and a wonderful avenue for creative talent. For me, planning the meal, stirring the pots and presenting the food is a form of meditation and a vehicle for communication. After many years of cooking short order and quantity preparation, I still find emotional comfort and solitude in the heat of the moment, with pans blazing and food flying as I juggle a multitude of tasks. I regard myself as an instrument directed by pulses of intuition, as the energy flows from the earth and into the food. This “sweet spot” is a place of peace and love without boundaries, a creative nerve center that helps to define goodness in life and food.

Experience and practice have helped this awareness develop, but it was present even in the beginning of my culinary endeavors. During those formative years, an insatiable quest for understanding food helped open my mind to creative possibilities. Each preparation learned was a step in a new direction and every technique added to a repertoire of skills from which I found great comfort. As my skills increased, so did my knowledge of how specific foods interacted with the body, traditions and history. The cultural context of each recipe was critical to translating the preparation as it was meant to be. Almost more important than a recipe, this understanding enhanced the passion of my cooking.

The methodology of cooking is broad. Over the years, I discovered adhering to traditional cooking methods, while respecting climatic and seasonal factors, enhanced my cooking ability. The following time-tested methods were used at Inn Season Café:

Stir Fry

Stir-frying has been a key part of the recent North American evolution toward fresh food. It is a

ancient method, used for millennia in Asian cuisine, and is closely related to sautéing. The difference is that traditional stir frying uses a wok at a very high heat, thus searing the food and sealing the flavorful juices inside. The food is served immediately, a la minute, not allowing the moisture inside to soften the exterior. Each morsel retains individual taste and texture while being flavored by the spices, oils and seasoning sauces. Stir-frying is an ideal way to prepare food quickly, maintaining freshness with optimal health benefits. A good well-seasoned wok allows for minimal use of fat while getting the stir-fry benefit. Stir fries were one of the favorite dishes at Inn Season Café. We use minimal oils, frequently no oil at all, to produce authentic flavors and textures.

Steam

When Inn Season Café opened in 1981, it was almost unheard of for a restaurant to offer steamed vegetables. Steaming is a cooking method that spans across many cultures: rice in Asia, *dim sum* in China, *idli* in South India, *dhokla* in Gujarat and cous cous in Morocco, just to name a few. Steamed foods are usually served with condiments, often acidic in nature, to balance the flavor and digestibility. Steaming is an excellent way to retain optimum nutrients in vegetables, the preferred method for cooking many grains and is invaluable for re-hydrating foods as seen in the widespread use of steamers in restaurants.

Sauté

A sauté pan, or frying pan, is a basic tool of European-style cooking. A small amount of oil is usually used in sautéing and with a well-seasoned steel or cast-iron pan the fat may be reduced to minimum quantities. The key to a good sauté is the right heat (usually medium to medium-high), the correct cut of the food and the frequency of stirring. The right sauté techniques result in savory flavors and maximum nutrient retention. At Inn Season Café we used the sauté pan to cook many items, including Shiitake Mushroom Sauté and sautéed tofu.

Roast

Roasting is another ancient method of cooking, utilizing clay vessels, clay brick ovens, hot rocks in the earth and food in various wrappings over an open fire. In the restaurant, we found limited possibilities for roasting using a minimum of fat and achieving maximum flavor while retaining the nutritive juices. Often, we would roast dishes normally prepared on the stove top, giving us the ability to cook many things at once, such as Roasted Vegetable Ratatouille, Michigan Pot Pie, and Beggar's Banquet.

Braise

Braised food is first browned, covered and then cooked on the stove top, or baked with a stock and natural juices from the food. Traditionally, the food was cooked in a wide, tightly-covered pan with coals above and below. The key is the right amount of liquid and the length of simmer to ensure that the preparation retains most nutrients because the sauce is consumed with the food. Inn Season Café used this method extensively, especially in the winter.

Bake

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