

Celebrating 150 Years of Thanksgiving Holidays

By Roger Weatherburn Baker, *Southeast Chargé de Presse Provincial Honoraire*



This year, more than ninety million Americans are expected to travel across this great nation to be with family and friends to celebrate Thanksgiving, first proclaimed a national holiday by Abraham Lincoln in 1863.

To mark the 150th anniversary of that proclamation, we asked three *Chaîne* experts to help create a memorable celebration and to share their thoughts, ideas, and recipes with us as they developed it. We listened as they discussed every step, from cocktails and canapés to dessert and *digestives*.

We learned that although the menu's centerpiece is expected to be a traditional turkey, it and the other components of the meal offer plenty of opportunity for creativity, originality, and artful presentation.

We heard about innovative ingredients that take full advantage of the fall season's bounty. We learned about floating potatoes, secrets of carving, and all about flipping the bird. We heard about great wines for adults and fun drinks for children. We even had a lesson in how to create a stunning seasonal tablescape.

All Naples Bailliage confrères, our experts were:

- ❖ **Bailli Sandi Moran**, who presides over one of the largest and most successful baillages in the country and has a formidable reputation as a brilliant hostess.
- ❖ **Chef Rôtisseur Sebastian Mazzotta**, a Gulf Coast culinary sensation who has created dining extravaganzas for such corporate clients as Cartier and Saks Fifth Avenue.



PHOTOS BY MILA BRIDGER PHOTOGRAPHY



1

◆ **Professionnel de la Table Margaret Short**, an event planner who orchestrates events ranging from private dinners and parties to large-scale, high-profile galas. Local, regional, and national media, including the *New York Times*, have covered her assignments.

What follows are tips, advice, old family recipes, and new twists on old themes. Certainly there are enough creative ideas to inspire even the most seasoned host or hostess.

The group's discussion started with the culinary centerpiece. Must it be a turkey? What were other possibilities?

Bailli Moran is a fifth-generation Floridian whose family arrived in the state in the 1830s. She briefly considered creating a traditional Southern dinner from that period, staying faithful to her roots.

Yet, she wasn't sure what an 1830s version of a Thanksgiving dinner might look like. "You could do a goose, duck, or venison," Chef Mazzotta suggested, "but I think a turkey is what everyone expects today, and we should keep to that, but with a few innovative twists.

"For example, everyone has cranberries with their turkey. I do port wine and caramelized shallots instead.... You still get the sweet and tart combination on top of your turkey; it's just a different way of getting there.

"It's easy to do. Take a quart of port wine, add a whole bunch of sliced shallots, put it on a low heat for about ninety minutes, add a little brown sugar toward the end, and you're done. It's ready to serve."

"I don't stuff the bird," Bailli Moran pointed out.

"That's good," Chef Mazzotta agreed. "It's a big no-no. You're dealing with a huge temperature issue. The breast gets very dried out. It's so much better left open."

"I don't stuff the bird with dressing," she clarified, "because the dressing, which is uncooked, is too densely packed inside the bird to cook properly. However, I do stuff the cavity with carrots, onions, celery, and thyme before I cook it. It adds flavor from the inside out.

"I also brine the bird," she added. "I think this is the most important thing to do. It just makes such a difference."

Her brine is two parts salt to one part sugar. She lets the bird brine for six to eight hours. Then she dries it and puts it in the refrigerator uncovered overnight before cooking the next day.

Chef Mazzotta agreed that brining is an essential step. He also offered a tip. "I have an Escoffier book that I first read in culinary school and learned a trick from it. Once the water's boiled, you turn it off and let it settle down. Then you drop a peeled Idaho potato into the brine container. If it hovers in the center, the brine is the perfect mixture. If it sinks, it needs more salt and sugar. If it floats, you need to add more water."

(Previous page)
 Chef Rôtisseur Sebastian Mazzotta, Bailli Sandi Moran and Professionnel de la Table Margaret Short.

(This page)
 1 Chef Rôtisseur Sebastian Mazzotta and Bailli Sandi Moran.

2 Pumpkin, cranberry and gooseberry martinis.



2



3 Beet salad.



4 Professionnel de la Table Margaret Short.



“What [brining] does,” Bailli Moran offered, “is make the meat very moist. The sugar helps the skin become browner and crispier. No one used to eat the skin in my family. Now they all fight over it, it’s so crispy!”

Chef Mazzotta nodded. “I cut off the breast as one joint and slice it into thinner servings horizontally. That way, everyone gets some of the crisp skin.”

When the turkey is ready to cook, he starts by “blast[ing] it at 500 degrees for a half hour. I spin it halfway through, take it out of the oven and let it relax for about twenty minutes, then turn the oven down to 220 degrees and finish it off for another four or five hours depending on size.”

Bailli Moran had a different approach. “I start with my turkey upside down to crisp the bottom. Then, halfway through the cooking, I flip the bird to cook the top, which leaves it well cooked all over.”

They both create a basic stuffing using breakfast sausage and fresh herbs.

“I also add cornbread croutons,” Bailli Moran said. “I make the cornbread the night before and cut it into one-inch squares, which I then toast. The key is to start early so you’re not killing yourself on Thanksgiving Day.”

Other accompaniments discussed were a sweet potato casserole; a mash of caramelized onion, potatoes, sour cream, and butter; and a rutabaga-turnip mash. “A beet salad adds a nice seasonal color to the table,” Chef Mazzotta added.

Grand Echanson Bruce Nichols, who advises the Morans pro-

fessionally on their stunning wine collection, was called upon for his expertise. Surprisingly, he didn’t recommend a Pinot from her cellar to pair with the turkey but rather Araujo Estate Eisele Vineyard Syrah 2007.

“It’s not about trying to perfectly pair a wine to the turkey,” he explained. “It’s more about finding a match that meets the richness of the gravy, the many herbs, and the diversity of all of the side dishes without overpowering the food with a lot of oaks or tannins. Syrah fits that bill perfectly, and if there’s a better New World Syrah producer than Araujo, I haven’t found it yet.”

The team had several creative suggestions for drinks before the meal. Bailli Moran remarked, “We usually start with champagne. As a matter of fact, we start sipping champagne while we’re still preparing the meal. That’s how I get everyone to help!” Her choice? Duval-Leroy Paris, a rare-edition bottle designed by Leroy Neiman. The bubbly inside is described by Grand Echanson Nichols as a “masterpiece.”

Chef Mazzotta suggested pumpkin, pomegranate, or gooseberry martinis with brown sugar and cinnamon around the rim, served with hors d’oeuvres that showcase the season’s colors, such as Bay scallops and osetra caviar dressed with pumpkin purée.

Professionnel de la Table Short suggested Shirley Temples or cranberry juice and sparkling water for the kids.

“Coordinated color is very important,” she noted. “Obviously in this case, we used the colors of fall and tried to apply them wherever we could in the tablescape as well as everything else we could from



cocktails to dessert. A great idea to keep children busy is to have them select a few leaves that can be used as place settings and then have them draw names and faces on them.”

Once everyone’s in the festive spirit and the meal begins, all agreed that clam chowder for the first course is a must, although butternut squash bisque was a close second, paired with Morlet la Proportion Dorée 2006, a blend of three white Bordeaux varietals.

“Its richness marries well with the creaminess of the chowder,” Grand Echanson Nichols noted, “while the minerality of the sauvignon blanc complements the salinity of the clams. A touch of citrus keeps it alive.”

For breads, the team suggested pumpkin, squash, or banana-walnut creations served with brown sugar and garlic butter.

What about dessert? “The family is usually so stuffed with turkey,” Bailli Moran joked, “that they’re not really interested in dessert!” However, Château d’Yquem 1997 would be her unequivocal dessert wine selection.

Grand Echanson Nichols concurred. “It stands alone as the single greatest dessert wine in the world. Period!”

Chef Mazzotta created a pumpkin-white chocolate bread pudding for our shoot, served with caramelized coffee sauce and candied pecans. Yet, he also had other possibilities in mind, including rhubarb-Riesling tart, grape-nut custard pie, and pumpkin crème brûlée.

“For the kids,” Professionnel de la Table Short offered, “pumpkin ice cream served in miniature pumpkins would be fun.”

“At the end of the meal,” Chef Mazzotta concluded, “cranberry-orange brandy would go down well, but in my house, it’s time for a good cognac, a game, and a nap.” ☒

Editor’s Note: We are very grateful to Naples Bailli Sandi Moran for her support of and contributions to this story. Not only did she coordinate and fund our cover shoot but she graciously opened her home to a cadre of professionals and shared her expertise during every phase of production.



5 & 6 Chef Rôtisseur Sebastian Mazzotta.

7 Pumpkin-white chocolate bread pudding with caramelized coffee sauce and candied pecans.

EVERYONE KNOWS CHEF JOE



- 1** Co-Owner Nancy Peterson, Mora Peterson, First Lady Michelle Obama and Co-Owner/Chef Rôtisseur Joe Peterson.
- 2** Co-Owner/Chef Rôtisseur Joe Peterson and Co-Owner Nancy Peterson.
- 3** Co-Owner/Chef Rôtisseur Joe Peterson.

By Eileen Regen, *New Hampshire Vice Chargée de Presse*

Grand-scale galas, casual dinners, and community events set life's pace for Chef Rôtisseur Joseph Peterson, co-owner of the Village House restaurant and Chef Joe's Catering in Franconia, New Hampshire. Chef Joe's reputation for excellence has earned him praise from the likes of *Bon Appétit* and *Gourmet* magazines. In 2012, his career reached a new zenith when he was invited to cater a campaign luncheon for First Lady Michelle Obama.

He described the experience of cooking for Mrs. Obama and 130 guests at the home of Stonyfield Farm Owners Meg and Gary Hirshberg as "fun, new, and nerve-wracking." Though initially concerned about how having to clear four levels of security might delay preparation and service, he needn't have worried. He soon discovered that both the human and canine security teams were quite professional. The dogs sniffed the food politely but did not attempt to eat it. Following lunch, Mrs. Obama expressed great appreciation for the event and the meal.

A Chaîne member since 2004, Chef Joe has had many mentors over the years. As a member of the American Culinary Federation's apprenticeship program, he trained under acclaimed chefs at the Balsams Grand Resort and the Wayside Inn. "I felt lucky to fall in with some really good guys," he remarked.

After stints at restaurants in Massachusetts and Florida, he returned to New Hampshire, becoming head chef at the Horse and Hound Inn. Later, as executive chef at the Sunset Hill House, he oversaw several excellent Chaîne events.

Chef Joe favors locally sourced ingredients such as root vegetables, Concord grape vinegar, and wild-caught fish. At his restaurant, which offers both formal and casual fare, he smokes his own meats and fish. He also makes it his business to welcome patrons personally, whether they are local residents or visitors to the area.

Chef Joe's wife, Co-Owner Nancy Peterson, is the dynamic force behind all of the site work, purchasing, publicity, and event design. Their daughter, Mora, helps out in the family business; according to her father, she has the "design gene." Chef Joe's future plans include consulting work for new hotels across the country.

"It is fun to cook for people with a passion for food," he said. He believes that people come to restaurants for two main reasons: to recall memories of times happily spent with friends and family and to experience and learn about new foods and techniques. We couldn't agree more. ☒



By Marie Addario, *Far West Chargée de Presse Provinciale Honoraire*

It's been rare and valuable, plentiful and cheap. It's been elevated to a status symbol encased in gold and reduced to public enemy number-one ahead of fats, sugars, and alcohol. It's built empires and brought down governments. Few histories of any condiment are as impressive as that of humble, commonplace, everyday salt.

Like every other living creature on this planet, we need salt to survive. We use it in our cooking and boil, evaporate, and mine it as we have done for centuries.

It has preserved meat from meager hunting sorties through long Ice Age winters in Europe and preserved fish in ancient China.

The Chinese are thought to have been the first to discover the process of preserving with salt, curing their fish with it, while the ancient Egyptians may have been the first to use it to cure meat.

Salt runs through our human history, religion, and politics like the mighty Tigris-Euphrates once coursed through the lands of the Bible. Salt has caused the rise of great civilizations in Africa, China, India, and the Middle East.

Salt is said to have inspired Rome's first step toward becoming an empire. The site of Ostia, Rome's first colony, was chosen because of its salt marshes. The famous Via Salaria, or Salt Road, was built to carry salt

to the city. Roman soldiers were paid in salt. Great cities, like Salzburg (Salt Town) in Austria, have risen around its lucrative trade.

People have fought over it, rebelled over it, and undertaken at least one marathon march to protest it. Mahatma Gandhi walked two hundred miles to protest Britain's salt tax, an epic event that galvanized many during India's quest for independence.

Even our lexicon leaves a salt trail. Salad, salami, sauce, sausage, saucer, soused, salary, salsa, and Salisbury are all derived from the root word salt.

Salt has been given status at our tables in elaborate gilded, silver, glass, pewter, and enamel vessels. The Romans used the term

salinum to describe a small container for salt, but the Greeks are credited with the term “saltcellar.”

During the Middle Ages, saltcellars became high fashion. Symbols of prosperity and status, they were made usually of gold and depicted ocean motifs.

The Renaissance and baroque periods saw large ornate salt vessels. The salt in them was referred to as “standing salt” because it wasn’t passed around. In the Elizabethan era, the term “trencher salt” came into being, and by the seventeenth century, tiny spoons appeared.

Large salt vessels were gradually replaced by small individual ones. The Victorian era saw the invention of saltshakers, which, once the problem of salt clumping with anti-caking agents was solved, soon became the norm.

Today, there is a world of salt from which to choose. Thomas Keller, owner-chef of a family of restaurants that includes the world-famous French Laundry in Yountville, California, and Per Se in Manhattan, said, “Salt is the new olive oil.”

To underscore the importance of salt in our daily lives, let me leave you with a few last thoughts. You could take what you’ve read with a grain of salt. If you salted away the wisdom I’ve imparted, I’ve done my job. On the other hand, if you think I’m not worth my salt, please don’t rub salt in the wound. I’ll just quietly go back to the salt mines. ☒



JEAN GUIBERT (ACTIVE 1613 - C. 1623)
SALTCELLAR: VIRTUES AND LIBERAL ARTS WITH
RELIGION AND JUSTICE, EARLY 17TH CENTURY
ENAMEL ON COPPER
4 13/16 IN. (12.3 CM)
THE FRICK COLLECTION, NEW YORK
PHOTO: MICHAEL BODYCOMB

BACKGROUND: DETAIL



Sign on salt road from Bad Reichenhall in Bavaria to Lake Constance in Teisendorf.