

by Ron James

THE CHEF, AUTHOR AND ENTREPRENEUR

Sara Foster's intense dislike of commuting changed her life.

It was 1981 and the Tennessee native had just graduated from the New York Restaurant School. She worked four jobs, getting up at four in the morning to make salads and pates at the SoHo Charcuterie in New York and working late into the night for a Big Apple catering company. But she and her new husband Peter had moved to the Connecticut countryside, and the daily commute to the city was killing her.

Foster was looking for work nearer to home when a friend told her about a local caterer who needed a chef. The women who owned the company asked Foster to make lunch as part of the interview. The lunch proved tasty and within a week Foster was working for Martha Stewart.

Foster loved the hands-on training she received from Stewart as they worked on meals, menus and several of Stewart's famous cookbooks. As her culinary skills grew, Foster felt the tug of entrepreneurship.

In 1985, Foster started her own catering business in Greenwich, Conn. Five years later, she decided to return to her southern roots to pursue a lifelong dream of opening a gourmet food market-cafe in Durham, N.C.

SARA FOSTER - After graduating from the New York Restaurant School, Sara Foster opened Foster's Market in Durham, N.C. She has written three best-selling cookbooks and has been featured on national television and dozens of publications. CNS Photo.

CHICKEN SALAD - Sara Foster's green curry-ginger chicken salad is a bit spicy, she admits, but the heat from the curry is mellowed out by the pineapple. CNS Photo.

"I really didn't know what to expect," Foster said. "I never had worked in retail. One of our first sandwiches

was a fresh mozzarella sandwich. The locals said, 'what was this?' It was a learning curve for me and my customers."

Obviously, Foster's customers learned to like what she served. The business thrived, and in 1998 Foster opened her second location in Chapel Hill, N.C., where she featured seasonal prepared foods, specialty items and fine wines. Foster's Market serves more than 2,000 customers each day and has expanded into a private-label line of specialty foods.

Foster is nationally respected for her warm, relaxed approach to food and cooking. She has been featured on television and dozens of publications including, of course, Martha Stewart Living Magazine. She also has written three best-selling cookbooks, including "The Foster's Market Cookbook: Favorite Recipes for Morning, Noon, and Night" (Random House, \$35) and the just released, "Casual Cooking: Simple Fresh Recipes for the Way We Eat Today" (Clarkson Potter, \$35).

THE DISH

"I love this dish," said Foster, when asked about her Green Curry-Ginger Chicken Salad. "It's great for graduation parties, weddings, Mother's Day or any special event. It's a bit spicy, but the heat from the curry is mellowed out with the pineapple."

"Green curry paste is a spicy Thai ingredient that comes in small cans or jars," Foster explains in her cooking notes. "You can find it at Asian and specialty food stores. This salad is best when the chicken has absorbed some of the dressing, so make it a few hours in advance if you have time."

THE WINE

A dish being served at an elegant outdoor spring or summer brunch calls for an equally elegant sparkling wine. We've selected a wonderful Robert Hunter 1999 Brut de Noirs (\$35) to go with the curried chicken salad. The layered texture and flavors of the dish match very nicely with the texture of the bubbles and delicate flavors of the wine, a blend of 60 percent pinot noir and 40 percent chardonnay.

The Robert Hunter Winery is in Sonoma County, Calif. The winery gardens double as the tasting room and are among the nicest in wine country. They are open to the public with an appointment. The winery's sparkling wines have been honored for years as among the best in the industry. The wine's two grape varieties provide a special crispness and stone fruit flavors rarely found in single varietal sparkling wines.

GREEN CURRY-GINGER CHICKEN SALAD

1 cup mayonnaise

3 tablespoons grated peeled fresh ginger (from a 3-inch piece)

1 tablespoon Thai green curry paste

Juice of 2 limes

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon ground coriander

4 cups shredded, cooked chicken

1/2 cup golden raisins

1/2 cup shredded coconut

1/2 cup slivered or sliced almonds

1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

6 scallions, minced, white and green parts

2 celery stalks, chopped

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 cup coarsely chopped fresh pineapple

Yields 4 to 6 servings

In small bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, ginger, curry paste, lime juice, cumin, and coriander.

In large bowl, combine chicken, raisins, coconut, almonds, cilantro, scallions, and celery. Add about 3/4 of the curried mayonnaise and season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss to coat chicken. Add more mayonnaise, if desired. Serve or refrigerate in an airtight container until ready to serve or for up to 1 day. Just before serving, add pineapple and stir gently to combine.

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Ron James welcomes comments and suggestions. E-mail him at ronjames@perfectpairings.us. Listen to his "Gourmet Club" radio show and see archives of previous columns at www.perfectpairings.us.

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Food and Wine: Robert Hunter bubbly adds sparkle to curry chicken salad by Ron James