

by Ron_James

THE TEACHER

Giuliano Hazan was nervous as he waited for the envelope to be opened at the 2007 International Association of Culinary Professionals Awards dinner, the culinary world's version of the Academy Awards. Hazan was a contender for one of the industry's most sought-after awards: cooking teacher of the year. He held his breath as the master of ceremonies revealed the winner.

GIULIANO HAZAN - Giuliano Hazan was named the cooking teacher of the year in 2007 by the International Association of Culinary Professionals. Along with his wife, Lael, he runs a weeklong cooking school in Verona, Italy, and he is the author of three cookbooks. CNS Photos.

AROMATIC SALMON - Giuliano Hazan's Aromatic Salmon In A Pouch calls for the fish to be slow cooked in an aluminum-foil pouch. This method melds the flavors of the parsley, tomatoes, garlic and oregano in Hazan's recipe. CNS Photo. "For his effectiveness in communicating an exceptional knowledge of culinary studies and techniques, the winner is Giuliano Hazan!"

Backstage afterward, Hazan called the person responsible for his success - his mother, Marcella Hazan, one of the greatest Italian cooking teachers and cookbook authors in America.

"My mother was thrilled," said Hazan. "Of course I developed my passion for Italian cooking from my parents. I grew up in a household where good food was valued greatly. But I didn't know I would follow in my mother's footsteps until I went to college to study acting in New York in the 1960s. I started cooking because I was hungry - because the cafeteria food was such a shockingly different experience than my palette was used to."

"I began to enjoy the cooking as much as acting," Hazan continues. "But I consider my acting education time well spent. A good cooking teacher must be a good performer. You have to know how to cook, but you also need to keep your students engaged."

Hazan now teaches at cooking schools across America and is a frequent guest on NBC's Today Show. Along with his wife, Lael, he runs a weeklong cooking school in Verona, Italy, which was recently featured in Gourmet magazine. He is the author of three cookbooks; the latest is "How to Cook Italian" (Scribner, \$35). He also loves to cook with his three daughters in their Florida home. Perhaps some day one of them will be the next great Italian cooking guru - cooking talent obviously runs in the family.

THE DISH

Hazan's salmon recipe has the fish being slow cooked in an aluminum-foil pouch. It's a modern twist on a very old method of cooking. Pouch cooking goes back before recorded history, to a time when our ancestors wrapped their catch in a large leaf or husk and put it in or near the fire to cook. The pouch kept the food inside from burning and held in moistness and flavor.

Fish are perfect for pouch cooking. This method intensifies the inherent flavors of the fish and melds the flavors of the parsley, tomatoes, garlic and oregano in Hazan's recipe. It's still important to get the very best salmon available. Try to buy wild salmon, either fresh or fresh frozen, for the best results.

THE WINE

This delicate dish is layered with spices, herbs and tomatoes. It calls for a wine that will not overpower the fish, hold up to the other flavors and balance nicely with the acidity of tomatoes. The 2006 Russian River Valley J Pinot Gris (\$20) is a wonderful match for this dish. It is crisp with excellent acidity and flavors of tropical fruits like pineapple and mango.

The J varietal is a bit mellower than some pinot gris because a percentage of the wine is aged in oak. This gives it a bit of honeysuckle and spice overtones, which complement the sweetness of the salmon. J Vineyards

& Winery was founded in the Russian River area of Sonoma in 1986 by Judy Jordan. Although the winery specializes in sparkling wine, it makes outstanding still wines, including pinot gris, pinot noir and chardonnay.

AROMATIC SALMON IN A POUCH

2 teaspoons roughly chopped oregano

2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic

3 tablespoons finely chopped flatleaf parsley (divided use)

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

2 pounds skinless salmon fillet

Extra-wide, heavy-duty aluminum foil

2 tablespoons dry white wine

3/4 pounds (about 1 cup) fresh ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded and cut into 1/2-inch dice

Yields 4 to 6 servings,

Preheat oven to 400 F on convection heat setting, or 425 F on regular bake setting.

Mix together oregano, garlic, 2 tablespoons of parsley and the oil. Season mixture to taste with salt and pepper.

Butterfly salmon fillet by slicing horizontally along its thicker side so fillet opens like a book. Spread garlic mixture on inside and outside of salmon.

Tear 1 sheet of aluminum foil large enough to wrap around fish completely.

Place fish in center of foil. Add white wine. Spread diced tomato over fish and sprinkle remaining parsley on top. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Seal foil making sure not to leave any openings. There should be enough room around fish for steam to circulate while it cooks. Place pouch on cookie sheet and put in oven. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, depending on thickness of fish (see note). When fish is done, remove from oven and gently open foil, taking care not to spill juices. Lift foil off of cookie sheet and slide contents into serving dish. Serve at once.

Note: If you are unsure whether fish is cooked, it's perfectly OK to partially open pouch and check with fork to see if it flakes.

- From "How to Cook Italian."

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: Pouch salmon and pinot gris take center stage by Ron_James