

by Ron_James

THE CHEF

Nancy Silverton changed the way millions of Americans think about bread. Anyone raised on Wonder Bread found a first taste of her La Brea Bakery artisan bread to be a mind-blowing culinary experience. That commercial breakthrough made Silverton a superstar - and a very rich one at that.

NANCY SILVERTON - Nancy Silverton received the 1990 James Beard Best Pastry Chef of the Year award. She and her husband operate the highly successful La Brea Bakery near Los Angeles. CNS Photo.
ITALIAN SAUSAGE - Nancy Silverton's Italian sausage with giant white beans, radicchio and roasted onions uses simple ingredients to get layers of wonderful tastes and textures. CNS Photo. Like many famous chefs, Silverton began her journey at college where she cooked in her dormitory kitchen at Californian State University, Sonoma. After a brief apprenticeship at a Northern California restaurant, she attended London's Cordon Bleu. Back in her Los Angeles hometown, she took an assistant pastry chef position at Michael's in Santa Monica.

Silverton's career took off when she met Wolfgang Puck, who hired her to be the dessert chef at his new Spago restaurant. There she honed her skills and met her future husband, chef Mark Peel. When the couple decided to open their own restaurant and bakery, Silverton turned to her father, and partner Manfred Krankl, for help finding investors to fund the purchase of an art deco building built by Charlie Chaplin in 1929. Their Campanile restaurant opened 1989, but the bakery was put on hold until they had the product they wanted.

Despite her experience at Spago, Silverton had little experience making bread. For months she worked tirelessly day and night, making hundreds of loafs using different yeasts and handling techniques until she developed the perfect sourdough bread. Finally, six months later, La Brea Bakery opened its doors. When word spread that this little bakery was turning out bread like they have in Paris, people lined up at the door and the bakery sold out in a few hours.

The bakery and restaurant prospered. By 1997, La Brea bakery filled a 68,000-square-foot facility that produced 80,000 loaves daily for markets and restaurants around the country. In 2001, the partners sold the

bakery to Irish-owned IAWS for more than \$60 million.

Silverton has countless honors, including the 1990 James Beard Best Pastry Chef of the Year. She is now partnering with chef Mario Batali in Pizzeria Mozza and Osteria Mozza in Los Angeles. The author of several best-selling cookbooks, she has just finished "A Twist of the Wrist" (Knopf, \$29.95).

THE DISH

Silverton's latest cookbook illustrates how to use preprocessed foods to create quick, healthy and delicious meals. Her Italian Sausage With Giant White Beans, Radicchio and Roasted Onions is a great example of how to combine a simple meat dish with off-the-shelf items to get layers of wonderful tastes and textures.

Silverton's recipe calls for jarred onions. Make sure you do not buy cocktail onion packed in vinegar or you'll have a very different dish from the one she proposes. You can substitute cannelloni beans for the giant white beans.

THE WINE

Look for a wine that will hold up to the spicy Italian sausage but not overpower the more subtle flavors of the beans, onions and radicchio. A medium-bodied red would be best - a good merlot or a medium-bodied pinot noir would both be good choices. A nice Bethel Heights 2005 Pinot Noir Eola Hills Cuvee 2005 (\$25) is a great match for this dish. It is a creamy, smooth red with lots of black cherry flavors and nicely balanced acidity.

Bethel Heights' 50-acre vineyard is located in Oregon's Willamette Valley in the Eola Hills region. It

specializes in prize-winning pinot noir, but also produces great chardonnay, pinot gris and pinot blancs as well.

ITALIAN SAUSAGE WITH GIANT WHITE BEANS, RADICCHIO AND ROASTED ONIONS

1/4 cup olive oil, plus extra as needed

4 sweet or spicy Italian pork sausages (preferably flavored with fennel; about 3/4 pound)

16 large whole radicchio leaves

16 small jarred onions, quartered (about 1 cup)

2 large garlic cloves, grated or minced

Kosher salt

2 (15-ounce) cans giant white beans, rinsed and drained (about 3 cups)

1 cup vegetable or chicken broth

1 heaping tablespoon finely chopped fresh oregano leaves

High-quality olive oil, for drizzling

Yields 4 servings.

Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat for 2 to 3 minutes, until almost smoking (you will begin to smell the oil at that point). Add sausages and cook, turning often for even browning, about 10 minutes, until golden all over but not cooked through. Move sausages to side of skillet to continue to cook while you sear radicchio.

Put a couple of radicchio leaves in skillet in single layer and cook about 45 seconds on each side, until seared and wilted slightly. Remove leaves to plate and cook remaining leaves in the same way, adding more oil to pan if it's dry. While you sear radicchio leaves, continue to cook and turn sausages for 10 more minutes, until cooked through, and transfer to plate when done.

Add a bit more olive oil if necessary to coat skillet. Add onions, garlic and a pinch of kosher salt, and saute about 1 1/2 minutes, until onions are soft and garlic is soft and fragrant, stirring constantly so garlic doesn't brown.

Reduce heat to medium, add beans and broth, and simmer until liquid is reduced by 1/2, about 5 minutes. Stir

in oregano and season with kosher salt.

Arrange 4 radicchio leaves in clover pattern on each of 4 plates. Spoon beans over radicchio, dividing evenly, and drizzle with sauce left in skillet.

Cut sausages in 1/2 at an angle and place 2 pieces of each sausage side by side on each plate. Drizzle sausage and beans with high-quality olive oil.

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Food and Wine: Pinot noir tops easy sausage and bean dish by Ron_James