

welcome to

Thursdays

with
Mom &
Michael



You are invited



This book is a love letter to my mother, Elaine, the most talented and inspiring woman I have had the privilege to know and love. Throughout my life, my mom, my best friend, has impressed me with her artistic flair and her kind and caring nature. Our home has always been a magical place for our large family to gather and celebrate. In my eyes, she is the goddess of entertaining and her unique talent for blending a beautifully diverse crowd always gets rave reviews and keeps her guests coming back for more.

Although she loves throwing large events, my mother prefers small, intimate gatherings where people get a chance to really connect. In Aspen, she had this idea to host a weekly dinner party inviting ten new guests each week.

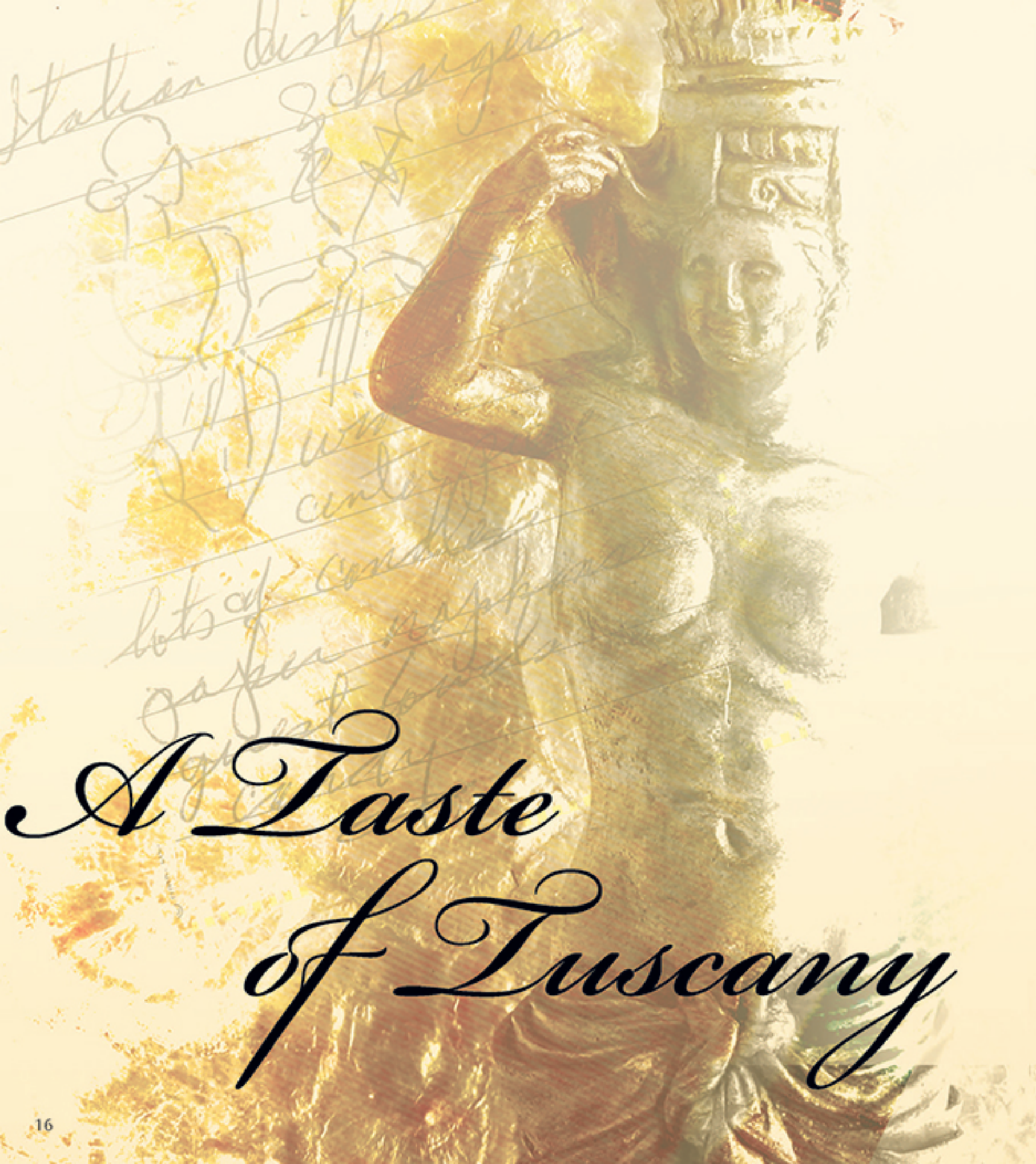
Some folks would know each other and others wouldn't because she loves mixing it up.

*And that is when she met Michael Rueggeberg, the most sought after private chef in town. Thursdays were the only night Michael had available and that is how **Thursdays with Mom & Michael** became the hottest ticket in a very hot town!*



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A Taste of Tuscany

*T*uscany is one of my very favorite places. The countryside and the people are warm and relaxed. The first year I took my family to Italy was special because it was where I celebrated the end of my cancer treatments. It was a magical time of sailing to Sardinia and Portofino, viewing masterpieces in Venice, Rome and Florence, then visiting medieval castles and wine tasting throughout Tuscany and Chianti. To this day, those colors, smells, and sounds restore my spirit and rejuvenate my soul. For me, there is nowhere as life-affirming as Italy, so I've chosen to open this soirée season with a Taste of Tuscany, to share the spirit of that special time and place with the people that I love, right here in my own family dining room.

-Elaine



setting the table

My mother's world of tabletop is an organic process of mixing and matching, like an artist painting a masterpiece. Her table is her canvas and the end result is always a delightful surprise. Starting with the dishes and tablecloth as her base, she adds on from there. Hunting for the perfect artistic details might entail heading to downtown Aspen where she is sure to find the greatest entertaining accessories. For Tuscany, it was the rustic plates and chargers that she used as the cornerstone of her earthy settings. She picked up amazing Italian vases that put a twist on the usual centerpiece idea, and she filled them with ivy to reflect the vineyards and olive trees of the region.

For this theme, the color palette was crucial to re-creating the romance and passion of those La Dolce Vida nights. Warm terracotta and earth tones reminded her of the faded patinas from the churches while dozens of glowing candles on the table sparked that Italian spirit.

Breaking the rules



My mother's design philosophy is **MORE is MORE**. She has never been one to follow the rules, and is not part of the less-is-more school of thought. Patterns, prints, and colors are her playground, and she has a reputation for creating a visual feast for the eyes with decor that someone else might not normally think to put together. To create a Tuscan tone, she juxtaposed pattern on pattern with paisley print napkins on top of festive Italian pottery and served burgundy colored Chianti in colorfully painted glass decanters normally used for flowers. Her philosophy is about following your own instincts and not being afraid to play and take risks. If you get excited and have fun creating your tablescape, your guests will enjoy it too!



planning the menu

Michael and my mother have been throwing parties together for so long there is an unspoken communication between them, and an abiding mutual respect. She never tells Michael what to cook, and he never tells her how to set a tabletop.

As soon as the theme is set, Michael begins researching the region so that he can present the purest and most authentic dishes possible. He learns that there is really no such thing as Italian cuisine as we generally think of it. Each area or province in Italy has its own unique and proud specialties. For instance, Roman cuisine uses a lot of sheeps' milk Pecorino cheese, and Piemonte and Lombardia grow their own unique varieties of rice, which are used to make their internationally renowned risottos. The north of Italy is the home of polenta. Emilia-Romagna is known for lasagna and tortellini. Naples is proud of their pizza, mozzarella, and pastries, and Tuscan cooking features white beans, meat, and unsalted bread. No matter where you go in Italy, every Italian table strives to present the very best of each season. Here's the very special Tuscan menu that Michael planned.

The best kitchens in Tuscany use only the freshest, seasonal produce. My menu for A Taste of Tuscany is planned while I am out shopping, so that I can see first-hand what is available. Finding fresher than fresh anything can be tricky in a town like Aspen, where everything must be flown or trucked in!

Michael



Menu

Appetizers

Blue Cheese Gougère

Vol au Vent

Country Bread with Three Kinds of Spreads

Main

French Onion Soup with Gruyère Garlic Bread

Filet of Sole with White Bean Purée and Provençal Artichokes

Spinach and Bacon Quiche with Organic Mesclun Herb Salad in a Hazelnut Vinaigrette

Roasted Chicken with Braised Vegetables and New Potatoes

Dessert

Sour Cherry Clafouti

Special Drink of the Night

Kir Royal

Spinach and Bacon Quiche with Organic Mesclun Herb Salad in a Hazelnut Vinaigrette

Spinach and Bacon Filling

serves 6-8

- 1, 9-inch pie form
- 6 ounces thick cut bacon, cut into narrow strips (or "lardons")
- 2 large eggs
- 2 large egg yolks
- 2 cups fresh spinach leaves, chopped
- 1¼ cups heavy whipping cream
- Pinch freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 cup grated Gruyère cheese

In a medium skillet, cook the bacon until crisp and the fat is rendered, about 5 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Discard the fat or reserve for another use. Arrange the bacon evenly over the bottom of the baked crust; layer the spinach over it. In a large bowl, beat the eggs, yolks, and whipping cream. Add the remaining ingredients and whisk to combine. Pour into the prepared crust and bake until the custard is golden, puffed, and slightly wiggly in the center, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool on a wire rack for 15 minutes before serving. Serve with organic mesclun salad.

Flaky Butter Crust

- 9-inch tart or pie crust
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 7 tablespoons unsalted butter, chilled and cut into pieces
- 1 to 2 tablespoons ice water, or more as needed

To make the dough in a food processor, combine the flour, salt, and butter and process until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs, about 10 seconds. With the machine running, add the ice water through the feed tube and pulse quickly 5 or 6 times, or until the dough comes together and starts to pull away from the sides of the container. Knead the dough into a ball, flatten it into a disk, and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour. On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough to an 11-inch circle. Fit into a 9-inch pie form with a removable bottom and trim the edges. (Alternatively, a 9-inch pie pan can be used.) Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line the pastry with parchment paper and fill with pie weights or dried beans. Bake until the crust is set, 12 to 14 minutes. Remove the paper and weights and bake until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool on a wire rack.

Organic Mesclun Herb Salad in a Hazelnut Vinaigrette

- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 teaspoons dark brown sugar, optional
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic
- Salt and fresh black pepper to taste
- 1 teaspoon, fresh chives, cut ½-inch long
- 1 teaspoon fresh tarragon leaves, picked
- 1 teaspoon fresh flat leaf parsley, picked
- 1 teaspoon fresh chervil, picked
- ¾ cup hazelnut oil
- 3 cups mesclun salad mix, for accompaniment

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk the vinegar with the mustard, sugar, garlic, salt, and pepper until sugar and salt dissolves. Then slowly whisk in the oil until emulsified, whisking constantly, adjust the seasonings. Toss a few tablespoons of the vinaigrette with the salad herb mix and serve immediately. If not using dressing right away, cover and refrigerate, whisking or shaking again before use.





Roasted Chicken with Braised Vegetables and New Potatoes

Roasted Chicken

serves 6

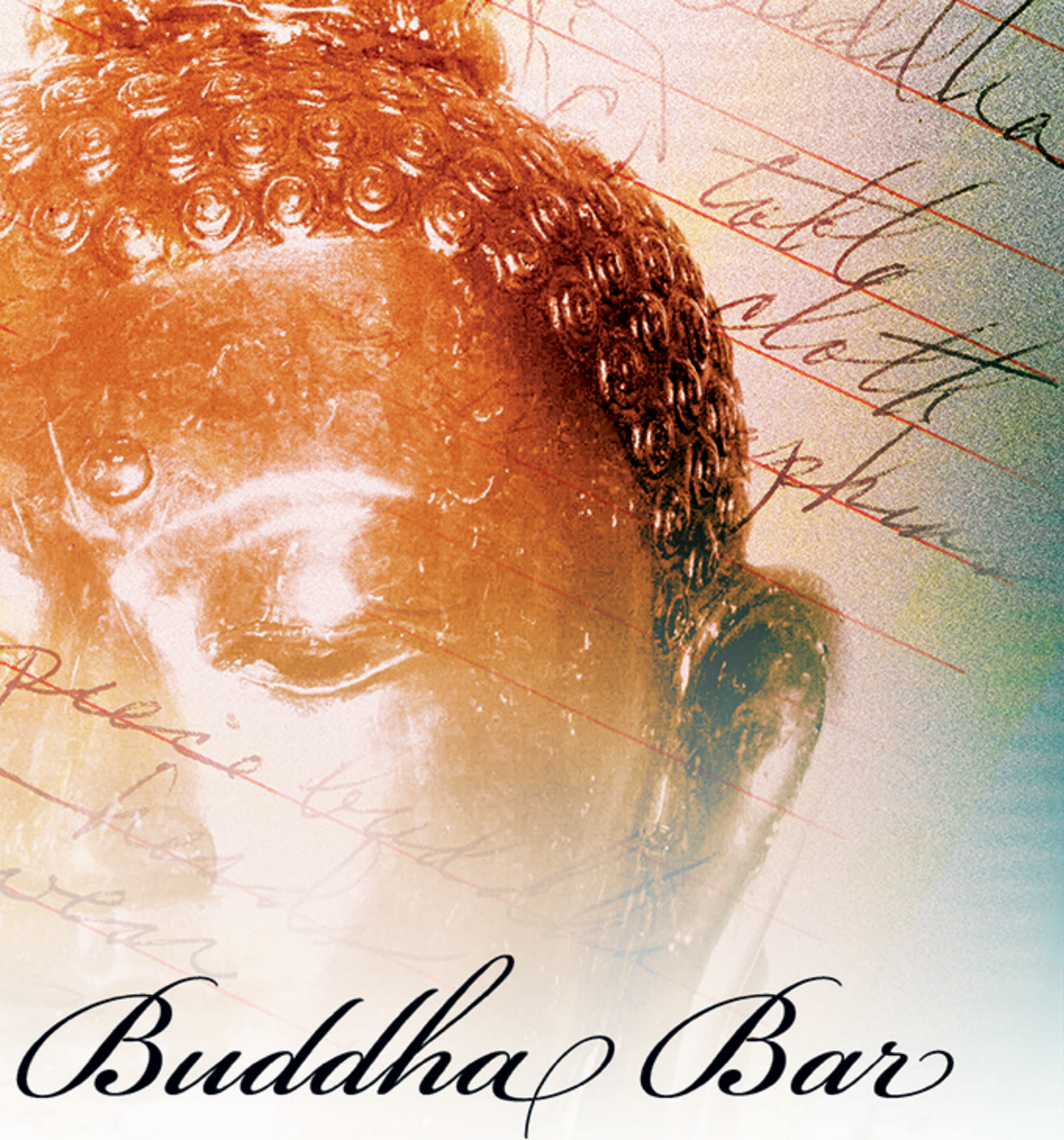
- 2 three-pound free range whole chickens
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 fresh oranges, washed, cut in half

Pull out the two pockets of fat from inside the body cavity and reserve 2 tablespoons for the chicken glaze. Cut off the wing tips and neck and coarsely chop. Preheat the oven 350° F. Cut the herb butter into 3-inch pieces. Gently work your hands between the skin and flesh of the chicken, works well with slightly oiled hands. Slide the herb butter sheets under the skin and then massage the chicken with your hands so that the butter softens and moves over the chicken flesh. Season inside and outside with salt and black pepper. Add the thyme, rosemary, garlic, and orange into the cavity. Truss the chickens and place in a roasting pan. Roast, basting often, for about 1 hour, until the skin is crispy and golden brown. To make sure the chicken is cooked, the juices should run clearly when the thigh is pierced. Transfer the chicken to a wired roasting rack and rest for at least 10 minutes. Before serving, remove the herbs, garlic, and oranges, skim off the fat from the juices and add the juices to the chicken glaze.

Chicken Glaze

- 2 tablespoons chicken fat (reserved from chicken)
- 2 small garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 shallots, peeled, chopped
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 2-3 cups chicken stock

Coarsely chop the chicken fat and place in a small saucepan, heat over medium heat until it melts. Add the wing tips and neck, cook until browned. Pour off excess fat and stir in the shallot, garlic, thyme, and rosemary and pour in the chicken stock to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and reduce until syrupy. Strain and set aside.



Buddha Bar

My Buddha Bar was inspired by the fabulous Buddha Bar in Paris, whose three-story tall Buddha statue represents the union of all cultures and nations that value peace and harmony and breaking bread together. It's very spiritual to me, so I decided to introduce my own version of Buddha-chic, using rich colors, lush textures, exotic spices, and these great Buddha candles, which I fell in love with. It was an evening of good karma through the sharing of delicious food, treasured friendships, and the appreciation of peace.

-Elaine






EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT
NAPKIN RINGS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK –

buddha-licious napkin rings

Love is in the details, and adding napkin rings is like throwing a kiss to your guests. When my mother told Amen of Amen Wardy that she was looking for a Buddha vibe, he showed her these fat, happy Buddha napkin rings. Amen explains, “A napkin without a napkin ring is like a woman going out without jewelry.” Buddha with his big belly is a symbol of prosperity in Chinese culture, so if you rub the Buddha belly you are assured good fortune.





BUDDHA-LICIOUS FOOD FOR THOUGHT —

*Life
is a party
and
you
are the host!*



Midnight in Morocco

Marvin and I took a trip to Morocco that was a once in a lifetime experience. After watching camel races and the sun sink below the horizon on the desert landscape, we were royally wined and dined. I had never been inside such a magnificent tent or sat on such priceless Persian rugs. Midnight at the oasis made such a lasting impression on me that I wanted the final party of the season to reflect this special memory. Although we did not have camels or sand, it was still a magical Arabian night.

-Elaine



Walking through a bazaar in Tangier, Morocco during my work as a chef on a cruise liner, I was amazed by the variety of food and fragrances that greeted me around each corner. The unique combinations of European and Arab influences combined with rich and exotic spices like cinnamon, cumin, coriander, saffron, paprika, and ginger inspire my culinary imagination. This experience is what I wanted to bring to my Moroccan menu.

Michael



*to Rent
or not
to Rent —*
THAT IS
THE QUESTION

Occasionally, you invent a party theme and in order to pull it off you might need to rent a few fabulous items to give you the ultimate exotic experience. This is what my mother did for her Moroccan party. By adding exotic drapery, tufted stools, glass lanterns, and tenting the ceiling with luscious fabrics, she was able to re-create an Arabian night in her living room.





THANK YOU
for
Sharing

THURSDAYS
WITH MOM
& MICHAEL

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