



HONEST WEIGHT FOOD CO-OP

AUGUST SALES & SPECIALS

Zephyr

By: Gustav Ericson

Photos By: Tom McGregor



nel- really, all the *contorni*- are sublime. And, you know, the breeze wafting off the river...where else indeed?

But you can make marvelous fennel right up here. You might have to wash the roasting pan, but you'll be able to have some luke warm leftovers the next day and you will not have spent \$12.U.S. and you can mop up your plate with your ciabatta without chagrin. *(When fennel bulbs are in season, look for tight little heads with deep green fronds and no browning petals. Remove the fronds and hollow stems, eighth the bulbs, and blanch or steam for eight or nine minutes. Shock them in ice water. Let drain well, pressing them a bit to remove excess water, then remove to a substantial, buttered baking sheet with a rim. Pour in a cup of vegetable or chicken stock, drizzle with olive oil or melted butter, sprinkle with coarse salt, and roast at 400 degrees, jiggling the baking sheet occasionally, until the fennel have absorbed the liquids and are caramelized. You can scatter a healthy amount of Grana Padano over them and return them briefly to the oven that you should have raised to 450 degrees. I don't do the cheese thing-yikes- because I love the subtleties of fennel so much that I think it best nudely brown).*

The produce department has rocked- to coin a phrase- this summer. Even the apricots have been wonderful, after so many bleak years of apricots mealy and mediocre. Because company was coming, I bought a lot of apricots recently, knowing their penchants (and mine). A dozen halved apricots- poached in a little vanilla and sugar, their juices exuding and making a simple enrobing sauce- is the best of summer in a bowl. But then, to lavish them over some of that amazing vanilla Lā-Loo's ice cream over in grocery? That's adequate revenge. (You know, "living well..." etc). (That small production goat milk ice cream is a knock out for sure. I made sundaes for our selfless inventory people last winter with the black mission fig version and some melted, cognac-laced ganache, and everyone went home elated- if slightly jacked

This year's Fancy Food Show was not exactly packed with revelations, or even sensations, but it sure did make one appreciate some of the old standards, and moreover, some of the local provender that continues to improve every year. We did try some excellent new Tuscan pecorini- new at least to these shores and taste buds, and Monsieur Mahjoub has introduced some sauces and dried spices that are fantastic. Head spinning, to tell the truth. We had a good time with our pal Fabio, who took us around the Italian aisles and offered us excellent tastes of organic olives, and their oil, as well as organic- and decidedly not ponderous- whole-wheat pasta. We found a new robiola and some excellent Spanish tunas. Food-driven Manhattan in early summer is all swagger and steam, not a little enervating, so we were very happy to get an early table at Esca, where the fish sparkles even as the wine, and the braised fen-

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up). Ponder the many contributions of Persia to the culinary world the next time you nibble or poach an apricot. The company and I had *the* midsummer breakfast one sultry morning: good toasted pumpernickel (I have to give Manhattan credit for *that*), juicy blackberries and apricots and swathes of Painted Goat plain- but wonderfully so- chèvre. Burnt umber and purple and amber and alabaster- as well as the myriad greens of the damp lawn and saturated woods to the north. The next morning, the same, but because the company is discerning (mostly) and the blackberries were used the night before, I opened a jar of M. Mahjoub's mulberry preserves. Revenge doesn't get better, particularly at seven in the morning.

The blackberries had been relished with dessert, a nice Zabaglione, which is simple and simply luscious with all summer's bounty except for, probably, tomatoes. (*Learn, if you would, to keep a bottle of good dry Marsala in the house, if not for your chicken breasts and crimini, then certainly if you want an impressive and easy-to-execute dessert. We have a wonderful selection of good, golden-yolked country eggs now [thank you, Mr. Runquist] which, whisked with a few tablespoons of organic sugar and a half cup of Marsala, are all that's needed for a velvety Zabaglione. Remember to bring your double-boiler water to the boil, and then lower it to just a simmering whisper as you set your pan of yolks, sugar, and Marsala over it. Whisk perpetually with your sturdy whip until the mixture has at least quadrupled in volume, then take it off the heat and continue to whisk, more leisurely, until cool. I then fold in a half pint of heavy cream that has been whipped just until it mounts luxuriously- about the same consistency as your egg foam. [Remember the culinary rule of "Like into Like" whether it refers to temperature or to texture]. Watch the colors as you fold- the yellow yolk foam lightening in hue and sweetness as you introduce the stark white cream*). This lightened Zabaglione can be spooned lavishly into goblets and allowed to chill before adding whatever fruit (except tomatoes) you have found that day. I used up the blackberries that night, but the apricots or August's blueberries are just as good, as were the strawberries earlier this summer. You can serve this concoction dolloped over sponge cake or Savoirdi (the crispier, drier

lady fingers) and remind me next spring to give you my highly-tweaked Melissa Clark Strawberry Moscato Dessert that I made so much when the strawberries were in season (though strawberries as good as this year's only need to be dragged through a bowl of mascarpone or maybe that Cognac-y ganache to make you go *aha!* Or forego any and all accompaniment). *Il Zabaglione* is great in the dead of winter, too, with canned stone fruit and a scattering of toasted almonds. You can put your lightly poached pears or plums into an oven-proof baking dish, cover them with Zabaglione and then run the affair under the broiler for a wonderful fruit *gratin*, too.

Before the berries came on, it was all about asparagus, and we ate it nearly every night in one manifestation or another, often paired with cheese. Exceptional produce merits exceptional cheeses, eh? I made that asparagus *sformata* that I wrote about a few years back, and several pasta dishes pairing asparagus with arugula, olive oil and lemon, or fat shrimp or scallops, sneaking on some taboo Parmigiana. (*Mostly I just chose fat spears and roasted them at 425 degrees with a generous amount of sliced shallots and olive oil and gray, or sea, or gray sea, salt. Roast until they just start to sag when you lift them up with your trusty tongs. [It's sad to think how much asparagus flavor we've washed away over the years by boiling or steaming, but now I know better, and you probably already did]. They roast up so well, concentrating their peculiar sweetness as their dark lavender tips turn slightly to gold. This you definitely must make at home, maybe alone, so you can eat the whole pound, and then mop up the baking sheet with a baguette heel, in private. You might nibble shards of Reggiano or (in my case), Moliterno along with this, or squeeze half a lemon over it]*).

I like an asparagus omelette like I like Matisse or Sarah Vaughn, which is to say, muchly. This spring, with such good asparagus and gruyère available, I turned back the clock and made a couple of those souffléed omelettes popularized by Julia Child and beloved by any Francophile. *These are easily accomplished by separating your eggs, beating your yolks in one bowl over simmering water alla Zabaglione until thickened (or mounted); then beating your whites in a pristine and non reactive bowl (of unlined copper if you*

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have one) with a different whip, then folding the two elements into one another, again remembering that important tenet of like unto like. Season judiciously with salt and pepper and perhaps a little tarragon or nutmeg, then make an omelette in sizzling unsalted butter. Start over high heat, then, once the egg mixture has hit the pan, jerk the pan around until the eggs are distributed evenly, then lower the heat and cover until it has set and puffed up arrogantly. Strew with shredded gruyère or (in my case) Montasio, then arrange your roasted asparagus, or wilted spinach, or sun dried tomatoes, or braised leeks, or whatever you fancy, on top. Cook briefly to melt the cheese, and then carefully fold your green and gold masterpiece onto a good- and heated- plate. You will impress your peeps and will have learned a lot about the behavior of eggs. If you use six eggs two of you can eat like royalty for about eight bucks. Funny that I can turn out omelettes like this- that look like “Gourmet” centerfolds- as certain people used to say- but cannot poach an egg to save my life.

After the asparagus came the garlic scapes, and I now see the reason for all the clamor. They are an elegant accompaniment to any roast or fish, or roasted fish, and would be nice in an omelette like the one above. What a fun element to add to your plate (but not to a bowl of Zabaglione)- a long curvaceous green tendril with a mere hint of garlic and a nice substantive texture. I built my preferred pasta sauce, *La Puttanesca*, around sautéed scapes about a ten times early this summer and served them over good old spaghetti, albeit *Rustichella d’Abruzzo* good old spaghetti. It’s good clean fun to sit with a bowl of spaghetti- and a friend- and admire, then slurp, the occasional long green strand (*lo spago*) intertwined with the white strands (*gli spaghetti*). Doing without *Puttanesca* sauce, to me, would be like doing without apricots, arugula or Vivaldi: you could, and you *may have*, at one time, but prithe, why continue? It was fortuitous to give *La Puttanesca* a little tweak with those scapes. Try it next year, and remember about the visual impact of *gli spaghetti*.

Newer imperatives, at least for this writer, are the aforementioned chèvres from the Painted Goat Farm out there in Garratsville. Tom and Morgana recently visited the gracious Painted Goat folks, Elissa and Javier, and were treated royally.

Wonderful cheeses are even better when thoughtful, creative folks are producing them. Their whole repertoire brings a smile, a nod and- most always- a purchase. Elissa and Javier’s creamy chèvre with figs and rosemary, or garlic and chives (successful, I might add) and the ephemeral fresh local strawberry version are all best sellers. My favorite is their pignoli “pesto” chèvre, decidedly Greek in its origins and flavors, decidedly glorious in its aesthetic- white and gold and deeper gold. There’s a hint of mint and a mere nuance of garlic along with the crunch of the pignoli and the subtle, tongue-enrobing tang of the cheese. Elissa folds this into hot pasta with spinach, lacinata kale, or sun dried tomatoes. I did it with the very last of the garlic scapes and some additional mint and coarsely chopped flat leaf parsley. (*When you are making pasta, remember to keep your coarse salt, pepper mill, and a measuring cup next to the stove. A measuring cup with a lip is best. Always dip out a cup of your pasta-cooking water just before you go to drain your orechiette or linguini [your little ears or your little tongues, i.e.] Use enough of your starchy water to thin your sauce slightly, then briefly cook the three elements together until the sauce thickens and enrobes your little ars or tongues*). Elissa also uses her pignoli chèvre on flat bread pizza and to stuff squash blossoms. I know that I’ll be using it on roasted squash and/or caramelized onion pizza this fall, probably sprinkling it with rosemary needles and drizzling it with just a bit more EVOO. Elissa’s aged chèvres are also delectable, and I made several marinated chèvre logs this past spring for special events. I marinated them in the lemon “confit” that “Saveur” magazine covered recently. (*That is merely a couple lemons cut thinly and warmed up in a generous cup of olive oil, with a good amount of coriander and fennel seeds. You simmer this briefly, and then allow it to cool. You pour it over your chèvre logs or buttons and refrigerate for a good while. If you actually submerge the cheese, you are duplicating an ancient, and yummy, means of preserving the cheese. If they are not submerged, simply turn them over twice a day until you serve them*). These look great on a bed of arugula (then again, what does not?) and make for a good summer supper with some cherry tomatoes (quickly blistered in olive oil in your iron

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frying pan and scattered with oregano, if you like), some marinated Gaeta or Niçoises olives, and good pita or a coarse *boule*. I add crushed red pepper to my marinade, and you could use some whole black peppercorns. (*Do remember to toast your coriander and fennel in a dry frying pan prior to roughing them up in your mortar and pestle, which I prefer, in this instance, to the finer grind you achieve with a spice grinder*). Elissa et Cie. are also busy perfecting their "Esperanza" - a version of what we know as *crotins*, aged little cylinders with downy rinds that they *affinage* in France until they are flinty, powerful and even challenging. Elissa's are extra special because they have the crumbly texture perfect on salads and because they are not overly saline- nor terribly "goaty". And- "*Esperanza*"-what a grand name for a young producer of artisanal cheeses. These are perfect for submerging in the lemon and oil bath cited above. Elissa sautés, or even grills, her *Esperanzas* whole and raves about the result. I trust her wholeheartedly.

I trust her feta, too. I have never tasted a *bettah*, ahem, feta. Again, it's not salty, so the milk flavors shine through in each chalk- white bite. (*I made a quick Greek salad recently with only Kirby cucumbers, chopped nonchalantly, the goat feta, dried oregano, Kalamatas, a splash of that "Ta Mylelia" olive oil from the*

isle of Lesbos, and a strewing of chopped mint leaves. Let such a salad sit a bit to marry the flavors, but not long enough to get soggy). If you have not tried that "Ta Mylelia", do yourself a favor. It's verdant and olivaceous but not too grassy, and each bottle contains a few olives and a little olive branch. It's the perfect gift for the Graecophile in your life. Perhaps they'll make you a salad.

It is always nice to get away and look for the new and esoteric, and New York has arguably maintained its status as food-nut capitol of the planet. It's also pretty gratifying to get home and count ones blessings: apricots, pristine chèvres, golden-yolked eggs, Romano beans, homemade pistachio baklava, haunting fig ice cream, a sumptuous bittersweet chocolate tarte. We fortunately have all those things and more, right up here at *Il Co-op*, under one roof.

Stop by the cheese department for a taste of those illustrious Painted Goat chèvres, We will be offering a sale on M. Mahjoub's condiments this August.

