

Taste of the Town

HEIDI KNAPP RINELLA

Restaurant to usher in Chinese New Year

The Chinese New Year — specifically, the Year of the Rooster — is being celebrated at Chinois at the Forum Shops at Caesars, 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. South.

Festivities begin today with performances of the lion dance by the Shaolin School at 6, 7 and 8 p.m.

Special menu items created by Wolfgang Puck and Chinois chef Terence Fong will be available through Feb. 22. They include starters such as crispy seafood ravioli with lobster-uni sauce, and roasted curry-spiced kabocha squash soup, and entrees of sauteed abalone medallions Française with ponzu butter and fried Chinese long beans, or braised Asian short ribs with daikon and shiitake mushrooms. For reservations or more information, call 737-9700. ...

In true juxtaposition of cultures, Lent begins today as well. Quinta Belina, 8665 W. Flamingo Road, has introduced a special Lenten menu. Available beginning at 11 a.m. daily are entrees of Ensenada fish tacos, lobster tacos Acapulco-style, lobster enchiladas from Puerto Nuevo and shrimp enchiladas from Puerto Vallarta. Beginning at 5 p.m. each day, they're joined by entrees of shrimp Jalisco-style, cod Vizcaine-style and shrimp chile relleno. For more information, call 227-9191. ...

BV wines will be featured in a tasting and dinner scheduled for Thursday at Viaggio Italian Cuisine, 11261 S. Eastern Ave. in Henderson. The evening will begin with a tasting of eight wines from 6 to 7 p.m., followed by a four-course dinner with wine-pairing menu. It's \$79.99 and reservations are required by calling 492-6900. ...

Gustav Mauler's restaurants have announced their wine dinners for February.

A dinner featuring the wines of Turner Road is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at Sazio at The Orleans, 4500 W. Tropicana Ave. With an entree of sliced beef medallion with crispy onions and olive crushed potatoes, the four-course dinner is \$39, plus tax and tip. For reservations, call 948-9500.

And a dinner featuring Franciscan Oakville Estates is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 22 at Spiedini at JW Marriott, 221 N. Rampart Blvd. With an entree of Colorado lamb chop and rosemary roasted leg of lamb with celery root mashed potatoes and cipollini onions, the four-course dinner is \$58, plus tax and tip. For reservations, call 869-8500. ...

Uncle Angelo's Pizza Joint at Jerry's Nugget, 1821 Las Vegas Blvd. North, is now open for lunch. Its menu includes appetizers, soups, stromboli, chopped salads, calzones, pastas, entrees, desserts and, of course, pizza, with more than 30 toppings to choose from. Lunch hours are from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily, dinner 3 to 10 p.m. daily. Carry-out service also is available. ...

Jokers Wild Casino, 920 N. Boulder Highway in Henderson, has made some changes in its Wild Card Buffet, including the introduction of themed nights. Wednesday is International Night; Thursday is All-American Night; Friday is Seafood Night; Saturday is Steak Night; and Sunday is Champagne Dinner. The buffet is open from 4 to 9 p.m.

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HUNGRY BACHELORETTE



Gary Appelsies, from left, Ashok "Ash" Yadav and Chris Rogers work on their meals in the demonstration kitchen of the Creative Cooking School.

RALPH FOUNTAIN/REVIEW-JOURNAL

Who Says Men Can't Cook?

Gary Appelsies' meal delights judge's taste buds in R-J contest

By JOAN WHITELY

REVIEW-JOURNAL

Three male egos were on the chopping block. All survived, though only one was named winner of the Review-Journal's Hungry Bachelorette competition.

The trio are all single Las Vegas men who each agreed to cook up his best dinner for tasting and judging by a Las Vegas woman, also single.

The newspaper's Taste section whipped up the cooking event as a way to showcase the fact that men — specifically men who are not professional chefs or employed in commercial hospitality — can perform when given an apron, chef's knife and pile of uncooked ingredients.

The contest took place at the demonstration kitchen of the Creative Cooking School, 7385 W. Sahara Ave.

The timing is perfect, enabling us to announce contest results — and share bachelor-friendly recipes — in time for other single guys to duplicate the meals on Valentine's Day and potentially wow a date.

And the victor is, without further ado, Gary Appelsies, a 38-year-old graduate of Pace University who does

insurance and financial planning.

His winning menu consists of a salad of mixed greens with raspberry vinaigrette, salmon with mustard-wine sauce and tomatoes over wilted spinach with mashed potatoes, then a dessert of chocolate mousse.

"I would have to say the most unique thing about my cooking is that I am an observant Jew and all of my creations are strictly kosher," Appelsies wrote in his application to compete. He is one of 10 brave males to apply.

The second cooking contestant is Chris Rogers, 38, who is a video editor and a bouncer at the Shadow Bar at Caesars Palace. "I'll talk about what simple things guys can do to impress the girl," he wrote. "Menu will consist of food that is both tasty and healthy, low-fat for the gym-conscious woman and man."

The third contestant is Ashok "Ash" Yadav, 45, a senior computer programmer for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police

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The winning meal includes salmon with mustard-wine sauce and tomatoes over wilted spinach with mashed potatoes, front, mixed greens with raspberry vinaigrette, left, and chocolate mousse.

SALMON WITH MUSTARD-WINE SAUCE AND TOMATOES

- 2 salmon fillets
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup butter
- 1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 tomatoes, diced

Season salmon with salt and pepper. Heat olive oil and butter in sauté pan. Pan-sear salmon in oil and butter till cooked, about 5 minutes per side. Remove salmon from pan and set aside.

Combine mustard and wine in sauté pan on low heat and whisk together until incorporated and sauce thickens slightly. Add tomatoes till warmed.

Put a fillet on each plate. Pour wine sauce and tomatoes over salmon. Serve with wilted spinach and mashed potatoes. Makes 2 servings.

— Recipe by Gary Appelsies



Food judge and bachelorette Krista Smith sips a glass of wine while she awaits the tasting.

Chef offers two restaurants with different comfort zones

Employees work at the raw bar at r.bar.cafe at Mandalay Place, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. South.

JOHN LOCHER
 REVIEW-JOURNAL



Chef Rick Moonen brings his New York seafood restaurant concept, r.bar.cafe, to Mandalay Place, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. South.

Moonen actually has opened two restaurants in one 1,600-square-foot space, with the downstairs casual dining r.bar.cafe and the fine dining rm seafood restaurant upstairs.

Designed by San Francisco architect Cass Calder Smith of CCS-Architecture, r.bar.cafe features an outdoor dining area, a bar and lounge area, Raw Bar and dining room with mahogany wood tables. There's also a separate private dining area blocked off from the rest of the cafe by large

Appetizers

KEN WHITE

curtains. At the junction between the Mandalay Bay casino and Mandalay Place shopping area, the cafe serves the same menu throughout the day.

Moonen, executive chef of New York City's restaurant rm, received three stars from the New York Times and four stars from the 2005 Mobil Travel Guide. He has moved to Las Vegas to oversee the new restaurants at Mandalay Place.

Two separate kitchens and staffs prepare food for the

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► BACHELORETTE: Contestants kept a tight schedule and worked to impress the judge

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Department. He began cooking as a single college student in the States and started with what he had eaten first: the cuisine of his native India. Then he branched out into other food genres.

"While I was married, I did most of the cooking," Yadav wrote. Now that he is single again, he likes to involve his three sons in the kitchen.

The Hungry Bachelorette competition was an informal fusion of several TV show concepts.

Like "Iron Chef," our contestants competed against a clock. But the time allotment was generous, as we didn't want any fingers accidentally amputated by a food processor. Unlike "Iron Chef," our contestants had no secret ingredient to contend with. Each bachelor designed his own meal.

Like "Date Plate," a cooking-combined-with-dating show, our contestants were each given a \$50 budget to prepare a romantic three-course meal for the female judge. Unlike "Date Plate," our cooks knew nothing of the judge's personality or food preferences. Nor did our judge select the winning meal in order to win a date with its cook.

She rated each course for looks and flavor. She also awarded points for the balance of menu and nice personal touches.

Appelsies' salad "looked beautiful, like a piece of art," raved the judge, Krista Smith, 27, a human resources assistant at Community Bank of Nevada. "The raspberry dressing looked fantastic against the mixed greens."

For the entree, she noted, "the crust on the salmon was perfect." While the dessert was good, something hot might have worked better, she said.

Appelsies received 45 points out of a maximum 50. Just like the guys, Smith had to compete by written application for her berth as judge.

"When I travel, I pack a previously researched list of restaurants that I would like to try," Smith wrote. "There is no latest best seller on my nightstand, no diary, no motivational books. I have an ever-present stack of cooking magazines and cookbooks for bedtime reading."

With the players introduced, let's shift back to the Creative Cooking School kitchen, which grew warm with stovetops blazing, ovens baking and bachelors sweating under the pressure of a deadline.

The men arrived at 5:30 p.m.



CHICKEN IN CREAM SAUCE

1 full chicken breast, skinned, washed, cut in chunks
Salt and black pepper, to taste
2 teaspoons dried thyme
1-inch piece of ginger, peeled and coarsely chopped
3-4 garlic cloves, peeled
1/4 cup water
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 small onion, peeled and chopped
1 medium tomato, peeled and finely chopped
2 tablespoons plain yogurt
4-5 tablespoons of heavy cream

Sprinkle salt, pepper and thyme on chicken pieces. Mix well and set aside.

Put ginger and garlic in a blender and half the water. Blend until a smooth paste is formed. Add more water as necessary.

Heat oil in a pan. When hot, put in chicken pieces and brown. Remove chicken to a plate.

Put chopped onion in same pan and fry until light brown. Add ginger-garlic paste. Fry until all water is evaporated. Add chopped tomato. Turn heat to low. Mash tomato while it is cooking.

Add yogurt to pan, a little at a time. Incorporate into sauce before adding more.

Add chicken pieces and their juices. Turn heat to low and cover, cooking for a few minutes. Add heavy cream and mix. Heat sauce until it reduces to desired consistency. Serve over fried rice. Makes 2 servings.

— Recipe by Ashok Yadav

Then the bachelors unpacked grocery bags and commenced peeling, chopping, mixing and boiling.

All knew the schedule. At 6:30 p.m., the "mystery" judge, Smith, would arrive. Showtime would be 7 p.m., when each bachelor had to be ready to present his meal to Smith.

Sinsay — waiting on the sidelines to intervene in any emergency — commented on the scene when the cooking had been under way about 15 minutes.

Speaking in a quiet, respectful undertone, like a commentator at a professional golf tournament, his first observation: "Just the way they (the three bachelors) move, they're really comfortable in the kitchen. ... Their movements are very precise."

He noted that Rogers was grouping all his raw materials by food course. "I'm impressed with Chris," Sinsay said. "That's called *mise en place*," which means putting everything — utensil or ingredient — in place as a prelude to cooking.

Not long after, though, Rogers gave a loud groan. He had detected a problem: "Uh-oh, the poppy seeds. I can't believe I forgot them."

The omission was significant. Rogers' entree was a casserole he calls poppy seed chicken. He checked his vehicle to make sure the poppy-seed container hadn't rolled out of the shopping bag en route. He checked the Creative Cooking spice cabinet, too, but alas the school was out.

There was nothing for him to do but forge ahead without the namesake ingredient.

Rogers' chicken was complemented by a side of white-grape Jell-O made with sparkling water instead of regular water. A green lettuce mix was combined with a sprinkle of trail mix — yes, M&M candies included. Baby carrots had to be cooked with brown sugar and honey. Dessert would be assorted fresh berries soaked overnight in milk served atop store-bought pound cake with a dollop of ice cream and Hershey's chocolate syrup.

Meanwhile contestant Yadav was giving his knife skills a workout. He had brought along his favorite small chef's knife from home. Better to work with a familiar blade, he reasoned. He used it to mince ginger, cilantro leaves, garlic cloves, onion and whole tomatoes. He also chopped raw chicken breasts into bite-size chunks.

His menu? Chicken in a cream sauce reminiscent of Indian cuisine, but toned-down spicewise for a Western palate. It was accompanied by fried basmati rice with cumin and green peas. He also served a green salad with cherry tomatoes and sliced radishes topped by his



POPPY SEED CHICKEN

5 or 6 chicken breasts
Cooking oil spray or olive oil
Freshly ground pepper, to taste
1 can Campbell's Healthy Request cream of chicken soup
1 can Campbell's Healthy Request cream of mushroom soup
1 container of light sour cream, 8 ounces
2 tablespoons poppy seeds
4 ounces light butter
1 1/2 sleeves Ritz crackers

Cut chicken into small strips. Lightly coat skillet with oil spray or olive oil. Lightly dust chicken strips with pepper. Heat oil.

Place strips in skillet and cook until brown on outside and no pink inside. Stir regularly to ensure even cooking.

While chicken is browning, mix together in large bowl the two soups, sour cream and poppy seeds.

Once chicken is fully cooked, take a square baking dish (8 inches by 8 inches) and place in it a layer of chicken strips followed by a layer of soup mix, alternating until all chicken and soup mix used.

In medium sauce pan, melt butter. Crumble one sleeve of Ritz crackers (about 40 crackers). Try to keep in large chunks, don't crush to powder. Add crumbles to butter. Stir until coated.

Lightly spoon buttered cracker crumbs on top of baking dish. Bake in 350-degree oven for 35 minutes.

Garnish with poppy seeds and remaining half-sleeve of crackers, crumbled, if desired. Serve over rice with a glass of pinot grigio. Makes more than 2 servings.

— Recipe by Chris Rogers

for a brief tour of the facility by Anthony Sinsay, an instructor chef at the school. "This is a professional kitchen, so I have to say this. Please wash your hands"

before preparing any food, he said. "Let's wash our hands (again) in front of the girl, so she sees" us, contestant Rogers quipped.



RALPH FOUNTAIN/REVIEW-JOURNAL

Krista Smith begins tasting as Chris Rogers, clad in his serving outfit of black apron and black bow tie, watches.

favorite prepared salad dressing: Trader Joe's brand cilantro.

The men were all chugging along in their preparations when Smith arrived. Her presence injected a new wave of excitement.

Appelsies immediately popped open a wine bottle and offered her a glass. (He chose a chardonnay for his salmon that night, but believes any "good-quality, dry white wine" could work.)

Yadav offered a glass of Gewürztraminer.

Rogers stepped forward to present a bouquet of fresh flowers.

"I feel so special," Smith said, and she hadn't even tasted any food yet.

Appelsies' meal placed highest, but she had words of encouragement for all contenders.

Yadav's Indian-inspired meal she pronounced "well-balanced, with the flavors complementing one other." His chicken with sauce was "very flavorful, yet simple."

Rogers' meal she relished, too. "It reminded me of a home-cooked meal," she

wrote. Apropos, as Rogers had earlier confided to his competitors that the recipe came from his mom, and was one of his favorites.

Rogers lost points for balance in his menu. "Although each dish was tasty and well thought out, I think that the only thing that tied (them) together was that they were healthy."

On the other hand, she rated him highest in the "nice touches/personality" category. "He certainly took this contest seriously and preplanned a lot of nice touches," she wrote.

What nice touches? Well they're touches that take guts to emulate.

When it came time to serve, Rogers shed his shirt, donning in its place a black bow tie as well as a black apron that showed off the sculpting of his torso.

Then when dessert was over, he sealed it with one of what he has dubbed Chris's Chocolate Kisses.

Its formula is audacious: Guy tells girl to close her eyes. Guy daubs chocolate syrup on his lips. Guy plants a you-know-what on surprised date's lips. Stage curtain drops.

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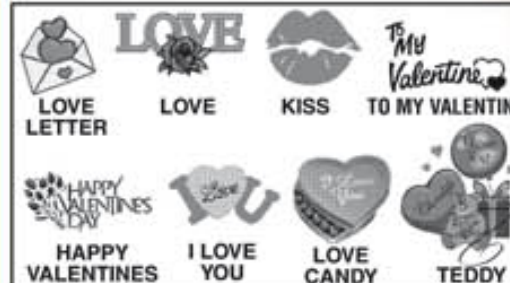
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▶ APPETIZERS: Desserts include homemade pies, such as apple and Key lime

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1E

restaurants, both featuring separate menus. "The cafe menu is good old American seafood," says Moonen, who personally selected the beers to pair with the seafood dishes. "It's more comfort food."

The 250-seat r.bar.cafe is open for lunch and dinner starting at 11 a.m. until 11 p.m., Sundays through Thursdays, and until midnight Fridays and Saturdays. The bar-lounge area is open until 2 a.m. daily.

The upstairs fine dining restaurant rm, which seats 85 and contains a lounge and two private dining rooms, is open daily from 5:30 to 11 p.m., for tasting menus and à la carte dining (632-9300).

Following are items from the r.bar.cafe menu. **Starters:** Raw Bar featuring oysters on the half shell (\$15 for a choice of six



The new r.bar.cafe serves the "Plateau," featuring oysters, littleneck clams, mussels, gulf shrimp and Maine lobster.

from such varieties as Hood Canal, Kumamoto, Hama Hama, Blue Points, Moonstone and Beau Soleil); oyster shooters (\$5 each); Pacific white shrimp (\$15); littleneck clams (\$12); one-pound Maine lobster (\$39); Dungeness crab (\$18); and seafood antipasto

(\$12). From the Biscuit Bar, warm seafood veloutes on cream biscuits with a choice of toppings including blue crab (\$16); rock shrimp (\$14) and Maine lobster (\$18).

Soups and salads: Rick's clam chowder, red or white

smoked trout with horseradish cream and tart apple salad (\$10); old-fashioned chicken soup (\$8); RM seafood salad (\$15); hearts of romaine Caesars salad (\$8; \$16 with shrimp); chopped salad with cucumbers, red onion, olives and feta (\$11); roasted Bosc pears, microgreens, toasted walnuts and Maytag blue cheese (\$11); and sugar beet, Belgian endive and watercress salad with hazelnuts (\$12).

Entrees: Small plates: Fried oysters with spicy remoulade (\$12); Cajun popcorn, aka fried rock shrimp (\$12); salt and pepper calamari with sweet chili dipping sauce (\$12); jumbo lump crabcake with chipotle mayonnaise (\$15); house-cured wild salmon, shaved fennel and creme fraiche (\$13); fruitwood

smoked trout with horseradish cream and tart apple salad (\$10).

From the wood grill, prepared with extra virgin olive oil, sea salt and lemon: Yellowfin tuna steak (\$27); organic chicken (\$19); filet mignon (\$29); garlic prawns (\$23); pork chops (\$22); Pacific white bass (\$22); mahi mahi (\$22); Hawaiian ono (\$24); and lamb chop (\$29).

Big plates: Crusted tuna with red pepper sauce and ratatouille (\$28); Rick's seafood gumbo (\$24); shellfish fra diavolo, lobster, shrimp, scallops and mussels (\$24); Asian-style whole fried fish and fingerling potato salad and tomato ginger vinaigrette (\$26); Pacific white bass with chive mash potatoes and truffle vinaigrette (\$24); one-pound Maine lobster,

steamed, grilled or broiled, with mashed potatoes and herb butter (\$49); grilled branzino with artichoke and fennel ragout (\$26); linguine with white clam sauce (\$20); and baked tortellini mushrooms, tomatoes and olives (\$19).

Extras: Macaroni and cheese casserole (\$8); cucumber salad (\$5); tartar mashed potatoes (\$6); salt-roasted fingerlings (\$6); garlic bok choy (\$6); and rice pilaf (\$5).

Desserts: Homemade pies, including apple, Key lime and chocolate pudding (\$8 by the slice, \$11 a la mode).

Appetizers is a weekly informational column about new developments on the Las Vegas dining scene. Items should not be considered reviews or recommendations and none is a paid advertisement.

▶ TASTE: Reader seeks Louisiana-style boudin

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1E

Wednesday through Saturday and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday ...

Marie Callender's is having its semiannual pie sale this month at its numerous valley locations, with all 30 pies priced at \$5.99 each through Feb. 28 ...

Readers helping readers: For Steve Brady, who is looking for Manhattan clam chowder, Al Maestri e-mailed to recommend the Oyster Bar at Sunset Station, 1301 W. Sunset Road in Henderson. He said it has "fantastic New England clam chowder," too.

Mike Eckman suggested the

Oyster Bar at Palace Station, 2411 W. Sahara Ave., or Texas Station, 2101 Texas Star Lane, adding that he prefers the former.

Sharron Hibler wrote to say Big Al's Oyster Bar at The Orleans "serves a delicious one."

And Diane Kemish, manager of Buzio's at the Rio, 3700 W. Flamingo Road, e-mailed to say her restaurant serves Manhattan clam chowder and is open from 5 to 11 p.m. daily ...

Reader requests: Jay Beach is on the lookout for fresh, locally made Louisiana-style boudin ...

Joanne Garson is looking for filé, used in gumbo ...

And Helen Danzilo, a winter resident from Brooklyn, N.Y., e-mailed: "Can anyone out there tell me where to buy a four- to six-cup, nonelectric, old-fashioned or new-fashioned coffee percolator? I will drive up to 59 miles from Sun City Summerlin to buy it."

Readers? Submit information to Heidi Knapp Rinella, Review-Journal, P.O. Box 70, Las Vegas, NV 89125-0070. You also can send faxes to 383-4676 or e-mail her at hrinella@reviewjournal.com. Include your first and last names, and if e-mailing, put "Taste of the Town" in the subject line.

Heidi Rinella
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