

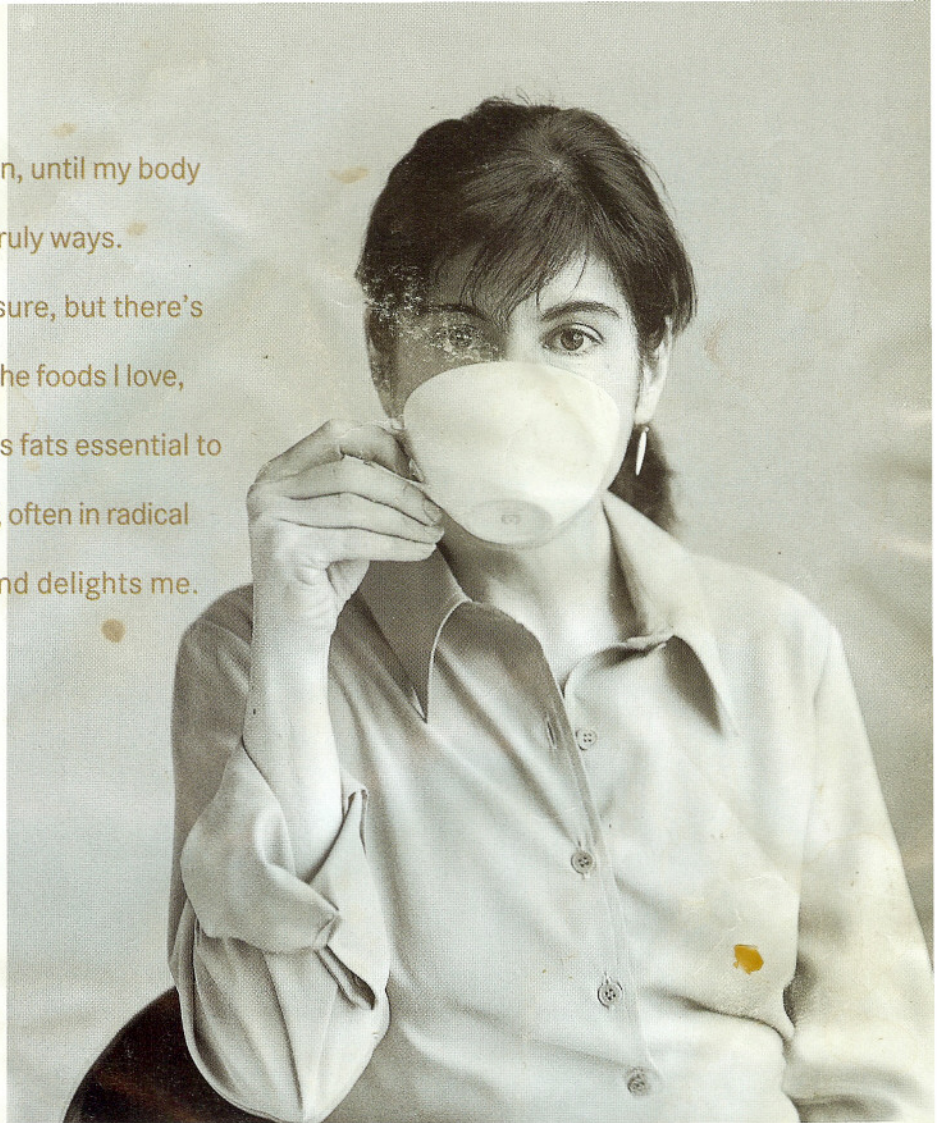
For years I ate and cooked with abandon, until my body rebelled and forced me to revise my unruly ways. Now I cook to balance health and pleasure, but there's no denial or counting fat grams. I make the foods I love, using sugar, cheese and all the delicious fats essential to good cooking. But I use them judiciously, often in radical ways, to produce food that sustains and delights me.

Baked Pasta with Wild Mushroom Ragù

6 SERVINGS

The earthy ragù exploits the meatiness of wild mushrooms (which even in their cultivated form have an intense, woody flavor) and is so rich that it obviates the need for fat other than a little cheese.

- 1 cup boiling water
- ½ cup dried porcini (½ ounce)
- 2 sun-dried tomato halves
(not oil packed)
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 2 thyme sprigs
- 1 pound fresh wild mushrooms,
such as shiitake, cremini or
oyster, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 1 can (28 ounces) Italian peeled
tomatoes, chopped, with their
juices
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 1 pound penne
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-
Reggiano cheese (1½ ounces)
- 5 ounces ricotta salata cheese,
thinly sliced or coarsely grated



1. In a heatproof bowl, pour the boiling water over the dried porcini and tomatoes. Cover and let steep until softened, at least 15 minutes.
2. In a medium saucepan, combine the onions, garlic and 1½ teaspoons of the olive oil. Cover and cook over moderate heat until the onions begin to wilt, about 5 minutes. Uncover and sauté until the onions are just beginning to brown, about 2 minutes.
3. Scoop the dried mushrooms and tomatoes into a strainer, reserving the soaking liquid. Rinse under cool water to remove any grit; squeeze dry. Chop coarsely and set aside.
4. Carefully spoon about ¾ cup of the

- clear soaking liquid into the saucepan, leaving behind any grit. Add the red wine and thyme and boil for 1 minute. Add the fresh mushrooms and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the canned tomatoes and their juices, the dried mushrooms and tomatoes, the sugar and the salt. Cover partially and simmer until the mushrooms are tender and the ragù is thick, about 15 minutes. Season generously with pepper.
5. Preheat the oven to 375°. Brush a shallow 2-quart casserole with the remaining ½ teaspoon of oil. Cook the penne in a large pot of boiling salted water, stirring, until barely al dente, about 5 minutes (it will finish cooking

ABOVE: Sally Schneider. *The dish*, OPPOSITE: pasta with mushroom ragù. *The idea*: use full-flavored cheeses, such as Parmigiano-Reggiano or ricotta salata—a little goes a long way.



later.) Drain the pasta and return it to the pot. Add the mushroom ragù and ½ cup of the Parmigiano-Reggiano and toss. Season with pepper. Pour half of the pasta into the prepared casserole, top with the ricotta salata and add the remaining pasta. Sprinkle the remaining ¼ cup of Parmigiano over the top. Bake the pasta for about 20 minutes, or until heated through and the top is lightly crisp. Serve at once.

MAKE AHEAD The pasta can be assembled and refrigerated overnight. Bring the pasta to room temperature before baking.

ONE SERVING Calories 472 kcal, Total Fat 10.1 gm, Saturated Fat 5.3 gm

WINE The fruit in the 1993 Riserva Chianti Classico from Monsanto il Poggio complements the mushrooms, and the cheese in the dish tones down the wine's tannin. Another fine option: the 1988 Ruffino Riserva Ducale Gold Label.

Artichokes with Crispy Garlic and Sage

4 FIRST-COURSE OR SIDE-DISH SERVINGS

Braising artichoke hearts in a little water and a small amount of oil infused with garlic and sage produces maximum flavor with minimum fat. The crisped sage and caramelized garlic used to make the oil are used again as a garnish.

- 1 lemon, cut in half
- 4 large globe artichokes
- 10 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 4 teaspoons fruity extra-virgin olive oil
- 15 sage leaves
- ½ cup water
- ½ teaspoon salt

Freshly ground pepper

1. Squeeze the lemon into a medium bowl and fill most of the way with cold water; as you trim the artichokes, add the hearts to this bath to keep them from turning brown. Trim ½ inch from the artichoke stems. Pull off all the green outer leaves until you reach the pale yellow leaves.

2. With a sharp knife, halve the artichokes crosswise; discard the leafy tops. With a paring knife, peel off any tough or fibrous outer skin. Quarter the artichoke bottoms lengthwise. Cut out and discard the furry chokes. Slice each artichoke quarter in half again.

3. In a large nonstick skillet, combine the garlic and olive oil. Cover and cook over low heat, stirring frequently, until the garlic is barely golden, about 5 minutes. Uncover and cook until the garlic is crisp, about 1 minute; transfer the garlic to a bowl. Add the sage leaves to the skillet and cook, turning once, until the leaves are darkened, crisp and fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the sage leaves to the garlic.

4. Drain the artichokes and add them to the skillet along with the water and salt; toss to coat with the oil in the pan. Cover and cook over moderate heat until the water has evaporated and the artichokes are tender, about 12 minutes.

5. Uncover the pan and increase the heat to moderately high. Cook to evaporate any liquid in the pan, then sauté the artichokes until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Season with pepper and transfer to a platter. Serve hot or at room temperature, with the garlic and sage scattered over the top.

ONE SERVING Calories 130 kcal, Total Fat 5 gm, Saturated Fat .8 gm

The dish, ABOVE: liver pâté. The idea: chestnut puree provides a rich, creamy texture without fat.

The dish, OPPOSITE: garlic and sage artichokes. The idea: use infused oil to heighten flavor.