

# The New York Times

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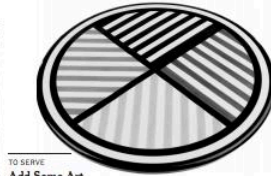
## Front Burner

FLORENCE FABRICANT

TO BAKE

### Cake Academy Finds a New Home

► The closing this year of the New York Cake Academy, the venerable baking supply house and cooking school, has a very happy ending. Lisa Mansour, her right, and Jenny Kashanian, near right, the daughters of the founder, Jean Mansour, center, have moved the establishment into a larger space just a block away. The new store has a cafe in the front, where dessert confections made in-house are served, something that was never possible in the smaller shop. The glassed-in cooking school can handle twice as many students and now has ovens, so baking, not just confectionery, can be taught. And in the rear are racks upon racks filled with every baking and decorating implement imaginable: The New York Cake Academy, 118 West 22nd Street, 212-675-2253, [nycakeacademy.com](http://nycakeacademy.com) for classes, [nycake.com](http://nycake.com) for cooking supplies.



TO SERVE

### Add Some Art To an Opulent Dinner

► A line of dinnerware designed by the artist Sol LeWitt and made to his specifications in Deruta, Italy, is a stunning addition to the Whitney Museum store. Serving pieces include this flat, 12-inch sharply patterned plate, for hors d'oeuvres, cheese and desserts like tarts and cakes. It's worthy of display when not in use. There are other designs for plates, bowls and even sets: Sol LeWitt Tableware, serving pieces, \$190 to \$290; dinner settings for 8 (24 pieces), \$1,825, Whitney Museum

TO TREAT

### Your Ghosts and Goblins Can Make These Treats

► You supply the chocolate, and the children (under adult supervision) can use the mold in this new holiday kit to make edible little ghosts, bats, cats, pumpkins and so forth for Halloween. The kit, from a company that specializes in cooking gear for children, comes with recipes for different flavors of chocolate: Chocolate Making Set, \$13.50, [handdendesigns.com](http://handdendesigns.com).

TO DISCOVER

### For Relaxing Times, Japanese Gin and Vodka

► When it comes to Japanese spirits, one thinks of whiskey and soju, not gin and vodka. But now those "white spirits," notably gin, have seeped into the American market. Recently, Suntory — the Japanese distiller that has been in business near Kyoto since 1899 — started shipping its newest gin and vodkas to the United States. The vodka, which is fairly neutral but traced with sweetness, is distilled from rice. The gin, which is floral and citrusy, is flavored with six Japanese botanicals, including yuzu peel and sencha tea. Though the herbs and spices



typically used for gin, like juniper and coriander, are also added, they are subtle; the gin is not the London dry style: Haku Vodka, \$24.99, and Raku Gin, \$29.99 for 750 milliliters, [warehousewinesandspirits.com](http://warehousewinesandspirits.com).

### Culinary Tales From the Hudson Valley

► Richard Erickson, a chef, and his wife, Mary Anne Erickson — the owners of Blue Mountain Bistro-to-Go, a prepared-food shop in Kingston, N.Y. — have published a cookbook. Despite the



title, "Feel Good Food," the book is not plugged into the ubiquitous "wellness" trend. It's simply a solid collection of reliable recipes closely tied to the Hudson Valley agricultural of farms — also reflects and is from M. moved in stock, N.Y. Blue Mountain snow close dishes like mushroom spiced lent are sencha Middle E. both ever slims." ► From the Mountain and Erick Erickson, \$29.95.

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## A Visionary Reimagines Dishes

Amy Brandwein has tackled classics and restaurant culture.

By MELISSA CLARK

WASHINGTON — Amy Brandwein is a chef who has visions, and one of the tastiest involves eggplant.

Contemplating the *penne alla Norma* that was already on her menu at *Centrolina*, she imagined her favorite part of the dish — the rag of golden chunks of fried eggplant coated in marinara sauce — piled high in the center of the plate. On top, she saw a mound of soft white cheese, a mix of ricotta and milky burrata that would slowly melt over the eggplant into a creamy puddle.

"I thought, how the *penne*," she said. "Let's make the eggplant its own dish: *pasta alla Norma* — minus the pasta."

The idea didn't seem that radical to her, but when she replaced the *penne* dish with eggplant *Norma*, it was an instant hit. It was something her customers had never seen, and they loved it.

Ms. Brandwein, 48, has had visions before. Contemplating the glowing, slick cafes with adjacent groceries that she had seen in Rome, she could envision her own sleek, hip place in the center of Washington. At its heart would be an open kitchen serving rustic, seasonal Italian cuisine, and on the side, a market selling the same high-quality local produce, seafood and imported condiments she would cook with.

That idea didn't seem radical to her, either, but when she went to banks for financing, they repeatedly rejected her proposal.

It had nothing to do with her ideas or track record. Ms. Brandwein, who grew up in Arlington, Va., had the ideal résumé for the project, having been the opening chef at three other highly successful Italian restaurants, including *Alba Osteria* here and *Casa Nonna* in New York. But a big, ambitious restaurant in Washington owned by a female chef? The bankers, she said, could not imagine that.

"To them, I was doing something different — a woman opening a restaurant without any male partners," she recalled as she shook a pan full of sweet, sliced tomatoes over the fierce blue flames of her stove at *Centrolina*. "They wanted to see a hundred other successful businesses in the same model, but there weren't a lot of comparable places to point to."

"Comparable" in the banker's parlance, meant owned by a woman.

The pan hissed and sizzled as Ms. Brandwein poured tomatoes into the steaming onions, setting the pot to simmer into a heady sauce. Then she got to work on the eggplant, expertly slicing it into fat, even cubes, a bit larger than she would for a pasta topping. The girls of the kitchen maintain their texture, she said, so they get crunch on the outside without turning to mush within. She deep-fries the chunks in her ever-ready fryer at the restaurant; at home, a broiler gets the job done.

It took her four grueling years to gather the funding for *Centrolina*, cobbled together



The chef Amy Brandwein at *Centrolina*, which has been a hit since she opened it.

### EGGPLANT RAGÙ WITH CAPERS AND BURRATA

ADAPTED FROM AMY BRANDWEIN, *CENTROLINA*, WASHINGTON, D.C.  
TIME: 1 HOUR  
YIELD: 2 TO 4 DININGS

- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, finely grated or minced
- (14-ounce) can whole plum tomatoes in puree
- 1/2 cup basil leaves
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon red-pepper flakes
- 2 large eggplants (about 2 1/2 pounds total)
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- Vegetable or canola oil, for frying
- 1/2 cup burrata (4 ounces), roughly torn
- 1/2 cup sheep's milk ricotta
- Roughly chopped capers, for serving (optional)

1. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook until onions start to brown, 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low and continue to cook until lightly caramelized, another 10 to 15 minutes. Add garlic and cook 1 more minute.

2. Use your hands to break up the tomatoes in

the can, squishing them into the skillet. Pour in the tomato juices. Fill tomato can halfway with water and stir that water into the skillet. Add half the basil leaves, season with salt and black pepper to taste, and red-pepper flakes, then simmer vigorously until tomatoes break down and sauce has thickened, 15 to 20 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, heat the broiler, and place the rack 4 inches from the heat source.

4. Cube 1 1/2 of the eggplants into 1 1/4-inch cubes (about 7 cups). Set remaining half an eggplant for garnish. Arrange cubed eggplant in an even layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Toss eggplant thoroughly with remaining 4 tablespoons oil, then season to taste with salt.

5. Broil eggplant until browned on one side, 5 to 6 minutes. Flip the pieces and broil until browned and tender, 6 to 8 minutes. If your eggplant starts to burn, move the baking sheet to a lower rack.

6. To make the garnish of eggplant slices, slice remaining eggplant lengthwise into long, 1/8- to 1/4-inch-thick slices. Place flour on a plate, and generously coat both sides of each eggplant slice.

7. In a large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat 1 inch of oil to 350 degrees. Fry eggplant, in batches, until golden, about 1 to 2



minutes, flipping the slices halfway through. Transfer to a separate paper towel-lined plate and sprinkle with salt.

8. In a medium bowl, fold together burrata and ricotta.

9. To serve, gently stir broiled eggplant into tomato sauce until evenly coated. Serve or let 2 to 3 minutes until the eggplant is warmed through. Transfer to serving bowls, and spoon burrata mixture on top. Garnish with remaining basil leaves, crisp eggplant slices and the capers if you like.