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The power of presentation: Domestic chef Annabel Cohen

Every dinner party deserves an ornate tablescape.

Annabel Cohen's has a spring motif. Vases filled with pastel tulips and gerbera daisies; green leaf-shaped plates; and strategically placed bunches of green grapes, limes and green apples. Square leather samples from **Eagle Ottawa**, an automotive leather supplier, lie beneath place settings.

Cohen changes her tablescapes to suit her mood or fulfill a creative idea. Mixing and matching interesting items can work wonders.

"Food is my life. ... I love the process, the expression, the chemistry and composition," she explained. The self-proclaimed lousy sleeper said that it's not unusual for her to wake up in the middle of the night and start cooking. "I call it my golf."

A Sunday brunch at her artful 1950s Bloomfield Hills home proved that she takes her "golf" pretty seriously. The menu included spinach triangles, fresh blueberry, raspberry and boysenberry parfaits garnished with yogurt and granola, steak and wild mushroom and chèvre scramble. Flan was for dessert. Upbeat and energetic, Cohen finds no entertaining task is too much. "I didn't do anything for this until this morning," she said, "including going shopping for food. I like everything fresh."

Cohen is able to juggle her job as a marketing manager, raising her 18-year-old daughter, Raquel, and entertaining often because she keeps a

Nathan Skid/Crain's Detroit Business



Name: Annabel Cohen
Age: 46
Title: Marketing manager.
Company: Eagle Ottawa L.L.C.
Specialty: Blending ethnic flavors into dishes.
Favorite cooking gadget: Panini griller. "I always say toast is the best thing since sliced bread, and the panini griller makes perfect toast."

Steak and wild mushroom and chèvre scramble

Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients
Steak

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
 4 3-ounce slices filet mignon
 Kosher salt and pepper to taste

clean, well-organized house — and she takes a lot of shortcuts, including buying pre-washed greens, roasted chickens, soups in a box that can be enhanced with homemade flavors, and loaves of high-quality bread.

The avid traveler recently vacationed in Japan. This month, she's going to India. It's fair to say that friends can count on a dinner party upon her return. "I am inspired by different foods when I travel," she said. Incorporating ethnic flavors into dishes comes natural to Cohen. Her parents were from Brazil, and her grandparents were from Turkey and Poland.

Lucky for guests, she doesn't like leftovers, so everyone goes home with a Chinese cardboard container of food.

"The secret to my success is that I am not a snob. I just cook what I like, and I cook like everyone's grandmother used to, assuming granny was a great cook — a little bit of this and a little bit of that," she said. "I usually make up my own recipes. That's what happens when you find 12 extra kiwis in the fridge.

Roasted salmon with kiwi salsa, anyone?"

— *Marti Benedetti*

Flan

Time: 1 hour

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 can (about 14 ounces) sweetened condensed milk
- 1 3/4 cups milk
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons water

Preheat oven to 325°F. Fill a pan (with sides) with 1 inch of water (the pan must be large enough to accommodate 8 small glass or ceramic ramekins that hold about 4–6 ounces each). Place the pan in the heated oven while you continue the recipe.

Arrange 8 ramekins on a flat surface.

Syrup

Sautéed wild mushrooms

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chopped spanish onions
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 8 ounces fresh sliced mushrooms, such as morels, baby portabella and shiitake
- 1/2 cup champagne or white wine
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste

Eggs

- 10 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons half-and-half
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 ounces crumbled chèvre, or another soft goat cheese
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste

Mushrooms

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When oil starts to get hot, add the onions and garlic, and sauté for three minutes. Add the mushrooms, and sauté for three more minutes. Add the champagne or white wine and deglaze, scraping up any small bit (remove from flame if using a gas range). Season to taste with salt and pepper. Keep warm until ready to use.

Steak

Heat oil in a medium skillet until very hot. Add the filet mignon and pan fry quickly on both sides until medium-rare (cooking time will vary by cut size). Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Eggs

Whisk together the eggs and half-and-half in a medium bowl. Heat butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat until it starts to brown. Add the eggs all at once. Cook until the edges of the eggs are beginning to set. Begin stirring the eggs to scramble. Add half the chèvre and season lightly with salt and pepper. Continue cooking, stirring frequently, until the eggs are cooked, but not dry.

Serve

Eggs, dotted with remaining chèvre, with the sautéed mushrooms and the filet mignon on the side and some toast.

Yield: 4 servings

Heat sugar in a small saucepan over medium–high heat. When the sugar begins to melt, stir constantly until it's a deep amber color. Quickly pour the syrup into each ramekin. Set aside.

Custard

In a bowl, beat eggs with a fork. Add the condensed milk and milk and stir well. In another small bowl, dissolve the cornstarch in the water (with a spoon or using your finger to stir), pour this into the custard and whisk well.

Divide the custard among the ramekins.

Place the ramekins in the water–filled baking pan. Bake flan in water bath for about 40 minutes, until set in center when the ramekins are jiggled. Remove from oven and allow the flans to cool or chill overnight.

Serve

Run a sharp knife around the edges of the ramekins to loosen. Place a dessert plate on top of a ramekin, flip upside down and shake a little, until you feel the flan fall. Gently remove the flan from the ramekin and pour on any remaining syrup. Repeat with all the ramekins.

Yield: 8 individual flans. For one large flan, use a glass pie dish or small ring pan and cook for 1 hour at 350°F.