

CONTINENTAL COOKING: COOKING WITH JULIA (SO TO SPEAK)

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There's no one better to give you a little "taste" of France than Elinor Griffith on one of her Griffith Gourmet tours.

"Pinch me," said Brenda, a Florida doctor who loves to cook. "I can't believe I'm actually here stirring things up in Julia Child's kitchen."

This past October marked the seventh year that Griffith organized a small group – six people in all, including a woman from Chappaqua and a mother and daughter from near Washington D.C. – to join her to cook in the South of France. They were in the quiet rolling hills above Cannes, away from all the glitz of that film-festival town, actually staying at – and cooking in – the former home of "The French Chef."

"Soon we gathered at the stove to braise veal for our lunch, and put a flourless chocolate cake into the oven," Griffith told me. "Around us, the yellow kitchen walls were covered with pegboards showcasing much of Julia's batterie de cuisine, or the whisks and pots and pans necessary to make a gourmet meal. This charming kitchen was the very place where the beloved cook had written, along with her then next-door neighbor Simone Beck, much of 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Volume 2.' And in some ways, our treasured experience was much like cooking in the Smithsonian, where Julia's Boston kitchen is now on display, one of the museum's most popular exhibits."

Recently Griffith organized an exclusive cooking school run by Chef Kathie Alex. During free time in the afternoons, Griffith served as a guide and took the group to special places such as the Ephrussi de Rothschild Villa & Gardens near Nice, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Musée Picasso in Antibes and to the artsy medieval village of St. Paul de Vence.

For Griffith, these trips are all about connecting with one's passions. She was an editor at Reader's Digest, then headquartered in Chappaqua, and always dreamed of more time to travel to France, Italy and elsewhere, eating superb food, surrounded by fascinating people. Now she can share her passions with small groups of people across WAG country and around the world.

For a lucky few, Griffith has a few spots remaining for the Sept. 7-12 Griffith Gourmet's culinary trip to Julia Child's kitchen. In spring 2015, you can enjoy these culinary adventures – "An Insider's Taste of Paris" or "Viva Italia – the Don Alfonso 1890," at the Relais & Châteaux property with a Michelin-starred kitchen on the Amalfi Coast.

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