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La Contessa of the Hen House

By Susie Iventosch



Elizabeth Kirkpatrick in front of her cute little Hen House boutique in Lafayette Photos Susie Iventosch

a 12-hour photo shoot where La Contessa served up a lunch of Prosciutto and Figs, Bread and Cheese, and Caprese Salad.

"They were beautiful, humble people," Kirkpatrick said. "It was so enjoyable to spend the day with them."

Kirkpatrick is most definitely at home in the kitchen, the family gathering place where she finds joy in cooking ... but this was not always the case. Because her grandmother, Dorothy B. Rankin, was the food and wine editor for the Oakland Tribune, and her mother collected cookbooks, Kirkpatrick had an appreciation for fine food, but did not really learn to cook until Giampiero shared his passion for food and cooking with her.

"He first taught me to make a sauce with garlic and oil," she said. "Now, some of our favorite recipes are tuna pasta with capers, parsley, tomatoes and lemon (recipe below) and salmon lasagna with bechamel sauce."

Kirkpatrick said she learned to cook as a means of survival, because Giampiero, being a native Italian, loves to eat and enjoys the typical Italian meal beginning with a pasta dish, followed by the entree, fresh fruits and vegetables, salad and perhaps dessert. Meals at the Kirkpatrick's house are never of the "dine and dash" sort, but rather an event topping off each day.

Kirkpatrick's finely honed skills in the kitchen are not lost on her sons, Kristopher, 24, and Nicholas, 22. She was delighted when Nicholas called to request that she write down her recipes for him.

"It doesn't have to be by Christmas," he said. "But by my next birthday would be great!"

And though we won't get the entire collection her sons will receive, we can all find several of La Contessa's recipes published in *Where Women Cook* and *The Romantic Prairie Cookbook*, including Gurguglione (literally "bubbling up") pasta, Anchovy-stuffed zucchini blossoms, Savory grilled lamb chops with rosemary, Prosciutto with fresh figs, Grilled Tartine with eggs and peppers, and Tomato mozzarella salad.

Buon appetito!

To purchase a copy of *The Romantic Prairie Cookbook* or to meet La Contessa in person, please visit the Hen House at 20 Lafayette Circle in Lafayette.

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Following your favorite blog can lead to some very exciting adventures, as Elizabeth Kirkpatrick, owner of Lafayette's vintage Hen House, recently discovered. Kirkpatrick answered a request on food editor and author Fifi O'Neill's blog and as a result is now featured in O'Neill's just released *The Romantic Prairie Cookbook* as well as *Where Women Cook* magazine.

O'Neill was searching for homes that had a romantic country appeal for her magazine and Kirkpatrick decided to submit pictures of her own home as an option. After living near Florence, Italy for several years early in their marriage, she and her husband, Giampiero, wanted to infuse their Orinda home with the same Italian charm and style they enjoyed in the Italian countryside. One of their first projects was to create an Italian farmhouse kitchen.

"I informed Fifi that my house has lots of color, which may not be her thing, since romantic decor usually involves lots of white," Kirkpatrick (also fondly known as La Contessa) said.

It took six months to send out the reconnaissance team to take preliminary photos for review, and nearly a year later O'Neill and photographer Mark Lohman arrived for



*Elizabeth Kirkpatrick -
La Contessa*

Nearly 6,000 miles separate San Francisco and Florence, but distance doesn't thwart Elizabeth Kirkpatrick's desire to infuse her Northern California home with the warmth, charm, and flavors of Italy. La Contessa, as she's affectionately called, strives to make mealtime a celebration of family, friends, and the bounty of the season. Her home and vintage shop, Hen House, reflect La Contessa's flare for design and her desire to bring the pleasure of a banquet to each meal.

Elizabeth Kirkpatrick of Orinda featured in Where Women Cook Magazine

Gurguglione

By Susie Iventosch

(Makes 6 Servings)

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 small yellow onion, chopped
- 2 Asian eggplants, cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 3 zucchini, sliced into 1/4-inch rounds
- 3 yellow or red bell peppers, seeded, de-veined and cut into long, narrow strips
- 10 ounces plum tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

In a pot over low heat, warm olive oil. Add garlic and onion, and saute until translucent, about 5 minutes.

Add eggplants, zucchini and peppers, and saute for about 3 minutes, stirring frequently.

Add tomatoes and season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and cook on low heat until flavors are blended, about 40 minutes. If necessary, add a little water to keep vegetables moist.

Spoon into a serving dish and serve while warm.

Tuna Pasta with capers, tomatoes, parsley and lemon

By Susie Iventosch



Elizabeth Kirkpatrick's Tuna, Caper & Olive Pasta

(Serves 4)

INGREDIENTS

1 can chunk light tuna, packed in oil (12-ounce can is fine)
1/2 cup sliced olives
1/4 cup capers
1/2 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
Juice of one lemon
1 14-ounce can crushed tomatoes OR 1 to 2 cups diced garden-fresh tomatoes
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 16-ounce box penne pasta

DIRECTIONS

Drain tuna and put in a bowl with olives, capers, lemon juice and tomatoes. Pour olive oil over the mixture until it covers the top of the tomatoes. Sprinkle the parsley over mixture and mix all of the ingredients together. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit all day on the counter, not in direct sunlight, but not in the refrigerator. Stir occasionally throughout the day.

Make pasta according to directions on box. Drain and pour sauce on top. Serve immediately, while pasta is hot.

Susie's notes: I used sliced green Greek olives and fresh tomatoes. Also, we used tuna packed in water, which worked fine. And finally, although it is excellent with the canned tuna, I think this dish would also be delicious with grilled fresh Ahi in place of the canned tuna.

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