

# FOOD & DINING

## Chef

from page 4

and that was always the terror because it dies; ice cream just melts," Zebrowski said.

The solution was to use liquid nitrogen (think *Terminator 2*) to keep the ice cream cold for the amount of time required to photograph it. "You drop it on your feet or something like that, that ice cream would be so hard if you dropped it on the floor it would shatter," Zebrowski said. "We had to be really careful, you could really get burned. You just didn't touch it...it was really hairy."

Zebrowski's experience styling cookies was less dangerous, but equally tedious. "I wrote a gold standard for what a cookie at a photo shoot should look like," she said.

Her standards dictated that the amount of chocolate chips in the photographed cookie should be representative of the number of chips in the bag and visible on the outside of the cookie. "You could never put one just straight up and down," insists Zebrowski. "They had to be like one turned upside down, about three of them turned sideways and such."

In order to accomplish this for a shoot, Zebrowski would use a specific size ice cream scoop to get the right size and shape, cooking them until they were firm enough to have chocolate chips placed on top. After selecting the perfect cookie, she would then brush the chocolate chips with Simple Green in order to give them a shine that lasted for hours. "You might have to do 200 cookies—it's pretty arduous stuff," Zebrowski said.

On a shoot where she prepared a turkey, Zebrowski cooked the bird for about 45 minutes, put it in her trunk and drove to the set in Orange County. She created a paint of sorts, with ingredients including Kitchen Bouquet and bitters which she brushed onto the skin in layers until it was the right color. Because the coloring would not easily stick to greasy turkey skin, she also added detergent. After that, she took out a blow torch she bought from a hardware store and applied its flame to the skin to finish the job.

Although the turkey started smelling before it was finished being photographed, Zebrowski said eggs can last up to a week if they are properly styled. She would cook the whites in a half inch of oil at a low temperature, ladling oil on top with a spoon and carefully forming the shape. "And then when it's almost firm, you take the yolk and drop it on and you kind of hold it until it gets solidified in the right spot and then you pour a little oil on that," Zebrowski said. "It's really tedious making those things."

### Chemistry of Cooking

Baking is more difficult than cooking over a stove, Zebrowski said, because of the chemistry involved. Changing one ingredient can cause other ingredients to react with each other in unintended ways. "If you make a muffin and then you decide you want it to be a lemon muffin, if you put acid in there, then that completely changes the pH level," Zebrowski said. "So then baking powder usually isn't enough because there's only a little bit of soda in it to counteract the acidity, so you have to use either all baking soda, or baking powder plus baking soda and you have to get that proportion just right."

Nestle wanted its recipes to include Nestle products, using as much of each package as possible. Zebrowski remembered when she was asked to develop a cheesecake recipe

using an entire can of evaporated milk and canned pumpkin. "I said you can't do that...I said cheesecakes don't have moisture; they don't put milk in it," Zebrowski said. She ended up making 13 different variations of cheesecakes but without being able to use the entire can. "I said I'm done, it can't be done."

It was another test kitchen chef who ended up taking the cake. "She said, 'Let me see what I can do,' so she put together a cheesecake with pumpkin and evaporated milk and it worked the first time," Zebrowski said. "She put a ton of cornstarch in it to firm it up...she did a great job."

Zebrowski trained employees who helped frustrated customers calling the company's 800 number. She taught them how different ingredients serve different purposes and how to help people substitute ingredients. The company also conducted studies to see the kitchen equipment that most households had in order to help formulate directions on packaging. "I've got every cookie sheet known to man in my cupboard because I did a lot of testing on the Nestle cookie dough. I wrote all the labeling directions for them," Zebrowski said. "It's amazing the difference depending on the kind of metal you put it on."

### Personal Chef and Author

Near the end of her time at Nestle, Zebrowski worked on teams to develop new products, working with representatives from various departments. While many companies have marketing departments, it's likely that most don't employ any chemists who specialize in bread products. "They needed someone like me who knew the consumer versus a scientist who was just looking at it from the scientific standpoint, or the finance person who was looking at it from a financial situation and trying to save a couple of pennies," Zebrowski said.

After years at Nestle and as a freelance consultant and food stylist, Zebrowski quit her job to spend more time with her family and develop several cookbooks. She authored the *No Brainer Cookbook* after conversations with test kitchen employees in her carpool group about what they would cook for their families when they got home. She drew material from the hundreds of recipes she has created over the years. "I always tell people you can cook," Zebrowski said. "If you can read, you can cook. The book's very simple and it uses really easy terms."

Zebrowski still consults for Nestle and freelances on food styling jobs. She also stays busy as a personal chef for clients across the South Bay. Some clients will hire her to cook for dinner parties while others want their refrigerator filled with entrees to convenience their family during a busy week.

Although she's happy as a freelancer and personal chef, Zebrowski said she loved her corporate job, which gave her so many skills and opportunities. "I know a lot of people have negatives about working for corporations, but I've always had great experiences," Zebrowski said.

"I've been very fortunate to work for such terrific people and that's really what I love... it's a cool thing to do because food pleases everyone. How cool is that to be able to do something that pleases people?"

For information about Zebrowski's cookbooks or personal chef services, e-mail her at zebrowm@aol.com. •



### TORTILLA SOUP

Here's a version of chicken tortilla soup that's both super-easy and delicious. To make it even quicker, use crumbled baked tortilla chips in place of the homemade tortilla strips and skip Steps 1-2. Serve with vinegary coleslaw, lime wedges and hot sauce.

Servings: 6 servings, about 1 1/3 cups each

Total Time: 45 minutes

Ease of Preparation: Easy

Health: Low Calorie, High Fiber, Low Cholesterol, Healthy Weight

#### Ingredients:

Tortilla Soup  
8 corn tortillas, halved and thinly sliced  
Canola or olive oil cooking spray  
1-tablespoon canola oil  
3 Anaheim or poblano peppers, diced  
1 medium onion, diced  
1-teaspoon ground cumin  
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces (see Tip)  
4 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth  
1 14-ounce can diced tomatoes with green chiles  
2 tablespoons lime juice  
1/2 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese  
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

#### Steps:

1: Preheat oven to 400°F.  
2: Spread tortilla strips in an even layer

on a baking sheet and coat with cooking spray. Bake until browned and crispy, 12 to 15 minutes.

3: Meanwhile, heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add peppers and onion and cook, stirring, until the onion begins to soften, 3 to 5 minutes. Add cumin and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add chicken, broth, tomatoes and their juice. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until the chicken is cooked through, 12 to 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in limejuice. Serve each portion topped with some of the baked tortilla strips, Cheddar and cilantro.

#### Nutrition: (Per serving)

Calories - 288  
Carbohydrates - 25  
Fat - 12  
Saturated Fat - 4  
Monounsaturated Fat - 4  
Protein - 20  
Cholesterol - 56  
Dietary Fiber - 5  
Potassium - 404  
Sodium - 483  
Nutrition Bonus - Vitamin A (40 daily value), Iron (15 dv).

Tip: To trim boneless, skinless chicken thighs, we like to use kitchen shears to snip the fat away from the meat.

By EatinWell, Courtesy of Arcamax.com •

## VALENTINO'S

Pizza, Pasta & More

**El Segundo**  
Now Open  
Sundays



"A Taste of Brooklyn"

**Catering**  
Available

<p><b>1 LARGE 16" PIZZA</b> with one topping <b>\$11.99</b></p>	<p><b>2 MEDIUM 14" PIZZA</b> with one topping <b>\$15.99</b></p>
<p>Plus Tax. Extra toppings additional cost. No substitutions, please. Please mention coupon when ordering. One per customer. Expires 11/08/09</p>	<p>Plus Tax. Extra toppings additional cost. No substitutions, please. Please mention coupon when ordering. One per customer. Expires 11/08/09</p>

**EL SEGUNDO**  
150 S Sepulveda Blvd.  
**310-426-9494**

**MANHATTAN BEACH**  
976 Aviation Blvd.  
**310-318-5959**

DELIVERY IN LIMITED AREA AT BOTH LOCATIONS