

Created by: Debra C. Argen

with Chef Michel Nischan - New York Culinary Experience - The International Culinary

I learned about "**Healthy, Sustainable, Local**" cooking with **Chef Michel Nischan** CEO, Founder and President of [Wholesome Wave](#), as part of the fourth annual [New York Culinary Experience](#) hosted by [New York magazine](#) and [The International Culinary Center](#).

Chef Michel Nischan's Vision

On April 28, 2012, as part of the two-day New York Culinary Experience hosted by New York Magazine and The International Culinary Center in New York, I had the opportunity to cook with Chef Michel Nischan. During the class, I learned about his culinary philosophy, and the importance of "Healthy, Sustainable, and Local," as well as learned to make Butter Roasted Oysters, Grilled Eggplant "Custard," and Meatloaf over the course of 2 hours and 15 minutes.

As a child of displaced farmers, Chef Michel Nischan became a "sustainable food pioneer" and founded **Wholesome Wave**, whose "mission is to improve access and affordability of fresh, healthy, locally-grown produce to historically underserved communities. Doing so creates economic viability through local food commerce that can rebuild our nation's food system."



Debra Argen and Chef Michel Nischan

"Their vision is to help lead the way in developing a more vibrant and equitable food system for everyone by fostering stronger relationships between local and regional agriculture and under-served individuals from both urban and rural communities."

"Wholesome Wave is a national 501(c)3 organization dedicated to supporting small and midsize farms, and making fresh, healthy, locally grown fruits and vegetables available to all people, regardless of income. Wholesome Wave partners with farmers markets, community leaders, healthcare providers, like-minded nonprofits and government entities to implement programs that benefit both consumers in underserved communities and the farmers who provide for them.

They operate by partnering with community-embedded organizations to implement our programs, including our Double Value Coupon Program, the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription ProgramTM and Healthy Food Commerce Initiative. Wholesome Wave programming is now in 26 states and the District of Columbia with more than 50 partners implementing the DVCP and FVRxTM in more than 250 participating farmers markets."

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Healthy

An important lesson that we learned in the class was about "flash points." Oils have different flash points, which is a term used to describe when the oil begins to smoke when it reaches a certain temperature.

Extra Virgin Olive Oil has one of the lowest flash points, and when it reaches a high temperature, it creates harmful free radicals. While wonderful to use as a dressing or to drizzle after cooking, we should not be sautéing or frying with Extra Virgin Olive Oil.

He explained that free radicals are highly oxygenated compounds that cause damage to our bodies, similar to the damage that water does to steel in an outside element, which leads to corrosion. The smoother our arteries are and the surface of our organs there is less chance for us to develop gallstones, kidney stones, and plaque build-up. The body creates free radicals whenever a cell dies and divides, and although this is a part of the aging process, it is something that we want to fight, not to help speed it along.



Chef Michel Nischan

To prevent causing free radicals when sautéing, Chef Michel Nischan likes to use grapeseed oil, as it is flavorless and has one of the highest flash points at over 460° F. You can sauté fish until it is nice and brown, and then finish it with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil to give it flavor and retain the nuttiness of the olive oil.

Sustainable and Local

Sustainability and eating local food is something close to his heart, and he explains that at his restaurant, the [Dressing Room](#), located in Westport, Connecticut, they purchase their beef from a local farmer who sells them the whole animal. At the restaurant, steak is a special on the menu, because all of the meat, including that used for the hamburgers, meatloaf, and for the steaks, are all from the same animal. By purchasing their meat in that way, they can support local, artisan agriculture.

During the class, we made Chef Michel Nischan's recipe for meatloaf, which used high quality, local pasture-raised ground beef, diced cooked parsnips, carrots, celery root, and onions, soft fresh breadcrumbs, milk, eggs, and other seasonings. Although it may seem odd that there were vegetables in the meatloaf, the vegetables added a lot of flavor, and helped to keep the meat very moist, so that it did not need sauce or gravy served with it. It also may be a great way to include vegetables in your family's diet for those "meat and potato" only family members.

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Meatloaf Mixture

When making the meatloaf, Chef explained that we should break the meat up by hand to make it very loose, and then gently fold in the other ingredients to incorporate them so that we do not overwork the meat.

An interesting trick that we learned for baking the meatloaf was to mold it in a loaf pan and then turn it upside down onto a parchment lined baking sheet and then bake it. Removing the meat from the loaf pan helps the meat to cook more quickly, an important factor for many home cooks with limited time.



Meatloaf Ready to be Baked

We also learned to make Grilled Eggplant "Custard," a playful reference to the name "egg plant" as custard uses eggs, and referred to the mouthfeel of the cooked eggplant. We cut the eggplants in half lengthwise, placed them face down in olive oil to soak up the flavor, and set them aside. Next, we sautéed sliced tomatoes and herbs, put them into a food mill to grind into a sauce, and then heated it to serve over the eggplant. We turned the eggplant halves cut side up, and grilled them under the broiler and finished the dish by spooning on the tomato sauce and sprinkling them with parmesan.

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Chef Jon Vaast
International Culinary Student Ronald Fan



Finished Presentation of Eggplant and Meatloaf

Although I live in Connecticut and often see the oystermen out on the Sound in their boats hauling in their traps, I never knew that Connecticut oysters are world-renowned for their size and delicate taste. The oysters also play an integral part in maintaining the health of the South, as oysters help to restore oxygen in areas that have low oxygen levels and they help to eliminate hypoxia. The oystermen farm the oysters by farming the oysters in traps and then moving the traps from place to place in the Sound and then finish them off in cold, super clean waters so that the oysters are really plump and delicious.

A definite highlight of the class was learning to make Chef Michel Nischan's Butter Roasted Oysters, which

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were so delectable that I want to give a huge "shout out" to the Connecticut oystermen as thanks.

His likes his beurre blanc recipe for Butter Roasted Oysters to be particularly oniony, more so than if he was making the sauce for fish or pork, because it goes over raw oysters which are then broiled until the sauce is golden brown. The higher amount of sucrose in the onions allows the sauce to brown faster without the beurre blanc breaking (separating) under the salamander (or broiler).



Debra making Beurre Blanc Sauce

The trick to making a beurre blanc sauce is to whisk in your butter a little at a time, until the reduction catches and the fat starts to emulsion, when that happens you can add more butter in small amounts. You want to have your pan half on, half off the burner, and not add the butter so fast that it cools the sauce, which will break the beurre blanc. For it to remain stable, you want to make the sauce at a high heat without letting it break.

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Oysters with Beurre Blanc Sauce Ready to be Broiled

Chef Michel Nischan, along with **Jon Vaast**, his Executive Chef at the Dressing Room, worked with each of the approximately 24 students in the class to create a lasting memory, graciously assisted by **The International Culinary Center Chef Pascal Beric** and his team of The International Culinary Center students and volunteers. Healthy, sustainable, and local; it is a good philosophy for us all to live by.



Volunteer Mike Vollner and Chef Michel Nischan Finishing Oysters



Butter Roasted Oysters

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Read the [Chefs' Recipes](#) section where **Chef Michel Nischan** graciously shares his recipes for Butter Roasted Oysters, Grilled Eggplant "Custard," and Meatloaf.

Read about other classes in the [Gastronomy](#) section and interviews and recipes from the other classes in the [Chefs' Recipes](#) section.



Chef Jon Vaast and Chef Michel Nischan

Visit **Luxury Experience's Facebook** page to listen to interviews with the chefs and see more photos from the event. www.Facebook.com/luxuryexperience.



**International Culinary Center Chef Pascal Beric and
International Culinary Center Students Koray Karakilic,
Aidan Nemergut, and Luke Davin**

To attend the **New YorkCulinary Experience 2013**, please visit the **New Yorkmagazine** website: www.NYmag.com/nyce.

Regarding taking classes throughout the year with the excellent chef instructors at **The International Culinary Center** at their New York, California, or Italian Campuses, please visit the website: www.InternationalCulinaryCenter.com.

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