

Three chefs, one mission

Talented trio Michael Bonacini, Massimo Capra and Jason Parsons bring the art of fresh seasonal cuisine to the home kitchen

Three prominent cooks, one kitchen. It's easy to see how such a scenario could end in disaster. But for the guest chefs on Citytv's *CityLine* – restaurateurs Michael Bonacini, Massimo Capra and Jason Parsons – a crowded kitchen has led to dynamic television for more than 10 years. Indeed, the trio have enjoyed their collaboration so much that they've now co-authored a new cookbook, *3 Chefs: The Kitchen Men*.

While they differ in disposition and background, all three share a devotion to delicious home cooking – particularly on special occasions

like Thanksgiving.

"It's beautiful to get the family together," says Massimo, the 50-year-old (but "18 at heart") co-owner of Toronto's Mistura Restaurant and Sopra Upper Lounge. "Planning is the key to a successful Thanksgiving," adds the chef, who has been married to his wife, Rosa, for 24 years and has two sons, Andrew, 22, and Daniel, 20. "I come from a family where we sit down at lunch and plan dinner, and at dinner we plan lunch again."

The animated, moustachioed Massimo learned the foundations of cooking while growing up in



L to R: Michael Bonacini, Massimo Capra and Jason Parsons

Italy. His parents struggled to make a living as farmers, but there was always plenty on the kitchen table. "My mother raised a barnyard full of chickens and other birds. Food, we were not short of, ever." From his humble beginnings he went on to train at some of Italy's most luxurious restaurants, eventually landing in Toronto.

Massimo's co-author Jason Parsons, 39, was also born abroad. Now the executive chef at Peller Estates Winery Restaurant in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., Jason moved to Canada from England when he was 10, but picked up his passport again as an ▶



Homemade honey sage and sea salt doughnuts

INGREDIENTS makes 12-16 doughnuts

- ¼ cup warm water
- ½ oz instant yeast
- 5 cups flour
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 eggs
- 1¼ cup warm milk
- ½ cup shortening
- 3 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp sea salt
- 12 fresh sage leaves, chopped

1 Preheat a deep fryer to 350° F. Mix the water and yeast in the bowl of an electric stand mixer. Let rest for 5 minutes.

2 Add 2 cups of the flour, plus the sugar, salt, eggs, milk and shortening. Mix on low speed.

3 Add the remaining 3 cups of flour and mix until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl.

4 Remove from the bowl and knead the dough for 1 minute. Cover with a damp cloth and rest at room temperature until the dough doubles in size.

5 Roll out the dough to about 1 inch thick. Using a cookie cutter, cut it into small rings.

6 Place the rings on a baking tray. Cover them with a damp cloth, and leave at room temperature until the doughnuts double in size.

7 Deep-fry immediately until golden brown. Just before serving the doughnuts, drizzle them with the honey, sea salt and chopped sage.



Individual turkey pot pie

INGREDIENTS serves 5

FOR THE PASTRY

- 3 cups cake and pastry flour
- 1¼ cups shortening
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- ¾ cup cold water

FOR THE PIES

Pie dough to line and cover five 4-inch springform pans

- ¼ cup butter
- ½ cup sliced shallots
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- 3 cups sliced mushrooms (any mix of shiitake, portabello, oyster)
- salt and pepper

- ½ cup chopped bacon
- 1 cup chopped Brussels sprouts
- 1 cup diced, cooked potatoes
- ¼ cup sage leaves, roughly chopped
- 2 cups turkey gravy
- 2 cups shredded roasted turkey meat

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

PASTRY

- 1 Crumble the flour and shortening in a large bowl.
- 2 In a separate bowl, dissolve the sugar and salt into the water. Slowly mix the water solution into the flour and shortening to form a soft dough.
- 3 Cover with plastic wrap and chill in the fridge for at least 45 minutes.

PIES

1 Line springform pans with two-thirds of the pastry.

2 Melt 2 tbsp of butter in a frying pan over medium-high heat. Sauté the shallots and garlic (without allowing to colour) for 1 minute. Add the mushrooms and sauté until cooked through. Season with salt and pepper and distribute among the pie pans.

3 In a separate skillet, melt the remaining 2 tbsp of butter over medium-high heat. Add the bacon and sauté for 2 minutes, then add the Brussels sprouts, potatoes and sage, continuing to sauté until warmed through. Season the potatoes and sprouts with salt and pepper and layer evenly over the mushrooms.

4 In a third pot, warm the turkey gravy and mix with the cooked turkey meat. Scatter the meat over the potatoes and Brussels sprouts to fill the pie.

5 Cover with the remaining pastry and pinch the two pieces of dough together. Chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

6 Bake the pies in the oven for 12 to 15 minutes. Let rest for 2 to 3 minutes before serving.

Roasted stuffed peaches with rum and chocolate



INGREDIENTS serves 4

- 4 peaches, firm but ripe
- 1 cup amaretti cookies
- 2 tbsp dark rum
- 1 tbsp Amaretto liqueur
- 4 tsp cocoa powder
- 3 tsp granulated sugar, plus more for dusting
- pinch salt
- a few homemade or good-quality butter cookies (if needed)
- ½ cup white wine
- ½ vanilla bean
- 2 tbsp butter

- 1 Preheat the oven to 450° F.
- 2 Split the peaches in half and remove the pits. Scoop out some of the flesh to make a cavity for the stuffing and reserve.
- 3 Pulse the reserved peach flesh, amaretti cookies, rum, liqueur, cocoa, sugar and salt in a food processor until finely chopped. If the mixture becomes too thin, mix in a couple of butter cookies.
- 4 Fill the peach halves with the mixture and place them in a baking dish large enough to accommodate the peaches in a single layer.
- 5 Pour the wine around the peaches and place the vanilla bean under them. Melt the butter and drizzle it over the peaches, then sprinkle evenly with sugar.
- 6 Bake for 15 to 20 minutes. Cool slightly and serve.

adult, earning his cooking stripes with Albert Roux in Amsterdam and Gordon Ramsay in New York City, and working in the U.K. and Bermuda.

Today, Jason creates recipes to complement the wine of the Niagara region, where he shares a home with his wife, Meg, and their three dogs, Indy, Molly and Basil. At work, he enjoys teaching his “brigade” of 35 chefs-in-training. At home, he loves playing host.

“Our spare rooms seem to be never empty,” he says. “On Sunday mornings, I go into the kitchen, when it’s quiet and I’m by myself. I love it when everyone wakes up and they come down and say, ‘When did you make all this stuff?’” At Thanksgiving, it’s the more the merrier as far as Jason is concerned. “Our families are great people to experiment on,” he says with a laugh.

The third chef in the troupe, 51-year-old Michael, puts the Bonacini in Oliver & Bonacini, the

powerhouse restaurant company he started with businessman and philanthropist Peter Oliver in 1993. The hospitality gene is in Michael’s blood: his parents ran a hotel in south Wales for more than 30 years and his sister, brother and other relatives have also food-centric backgrounds. Even his son, Oscar, 14, occasionally makes his dad scrambled eggs and French toast, though Michael’s wife, Valerie, a schoolteacher, comes through with dinner most nights.

“Between running a business, a teenage son at home and trying to take care of the day-to-day tasks, life has a habit of getting in the way at times,” admits Michael. But when they’re entertaining, like at Thanksgiving, he can usually be found at the stove. And when time is tight, to keep that day running smoothly, he suggests, “a little prep, a little forethought and not too much hard work. Simple always wins.”



With straightforward and fresh recipes for the beginner cook and more advanced dishes for the adventurous, *3 Chefs, The Kitchen Men* has food ideas for anyone, including those looking for a stylish

way to use up that leftover Thanksgiving turkey. From Massimo’s rustic elegance to Oliver’s classical techniques to Jason’s meticulous detail, distinct styles are found throughout. Fun banter and lush photographs make this book a pleasure to read – and give home chefs the information they need to make culinary masterpieces.