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Pull Up a Chair at

The Campagna Table

with Mark Strausman



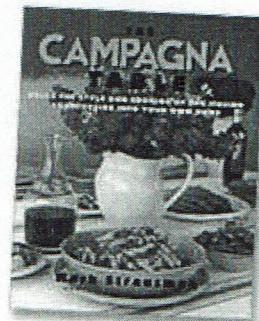
What:
Cooking demonstration and book signing with Chef Mark Strausman

When:
2-4 p.m. Saturday
February 17th

Where:
Allentown
Wegmans, 3900
Tilghman Street

Tickets:
On sale at the
Customer Service
Desk \$25 per person

More Info: Call 336-7900



You can get Mark Strausman's book in the store or [buy the book online](#).

A New York Chef Goes Country — Italian Style

By Missy Carducci
Wegmans Internet Editor

Judging by his cooking, you'd never know Mark Strausman was born in Queens, NY, to Eastern European parents. Mark's simple, satisfying dishes, like his signature Penne A.O.P. (for aglio (garlic), olio (oil), and pomodoro (tomato)), take their cues directly from Italy's countryside. So, it's no mere conceit that the name of his successful restaurant Campagna, which is physically entrenched in the flatiron district of Manhattan, translates as "country" in Italian and offers all the flavor and spirit of the region that inspired it. Years of research in Italy unearthed a trove of classic recipes that Mark has adapted "oh so respectfully" or simply adopted as is for a grateful clientele — and for you.

With a page-turner of a cookbook aptly named The Campagna Table under his belt and a growing mission to help people get a handle on meal planning as well as cooking, Mark is coming to Wegmans to show you personally how Italian is done. Along with that, Mark brings the kind of experience that comes from cooking for the "movers and shakers" in famous restaurants on Manhattan's Upper Eastside as well as for the privileged patrons at some of Europe's most respected five star hotels. A number of years ago we noticed that Mark's focus on quality — using fresh, seasonal ingredients indigenous to the Italian countryside he loves — fit so well with Wegmans that he now consults with us on many of our Italian food projects. When you taste the results on February 17th, whether you're Italian or not, you'll thank God Mark's a country boy at heart.

The Italian Connection

What persuaded an admittedly "nice Jewish boy," who studied in Europe and prepared classical French cuisine in some of the world's most prestigious restaurants and hotels to "put down the butter and pick up the olive oil"? Chalk it up to a late eighties culinary epiphany. He got into ingredients literally fresh from the farm and bonded with a fellow chef who was a "real Italian grandmother," as they turned a swanky East Hampton eatery into a "country kitchen." Identified only as a Roman chef named Maria in his long awaited cookbook, this Italian matriarch taught Mark the "single best way to cook every vegetable in an Italian kitchen." Patrons at Campagna and readers alike get the benefit of her influence in colorful platters of vegetable antipasti, which enjoy a prominent place in both venues.

Don't leave your old cooking ways when you're coming to the table. . . .

He Met a Chef Named Maria and Suddenly . . .

The restaurant's long farmhouse table continually overflows with such typical Italian country fare as Peas and Prosciutto [pg. 86], Cauliflower Stained with Red Wine [pg. 94], and Maria's Drowned Zucchini [pg. 88] — so named for its slow stewing in onion and garlic until it becomes "almost like a relish." Just as Mark learned under Maria's watchful eye, as well as in professional kitchens in Switzerland, Germany, and America, you'll soon come away with a new appreciation that "vegetables are truly alive and a part of life." Plain or fancy, they can infuse your meal with excitement rather than being something of an afterthought.

Plan for Success

Whether you're thinking of cooking his Winter Vegetable Roast [pg. 97] or a whole menu from first course to last, Mark wants you to know that good planning is as much a part of good cooking as choosing the best ingredients and setting an inviting table. If you use his book to your best advantage, absorbing Mark's observations and suggestions, it will help you navigate through the week, especially the "Quick Cook" and "Slow Cook" chapters. They're filled with recipes that work well when you're most pressed for time and for "weekends and winter days when you want to spend the extra time to prepare a special meal."

Mark's Campagna Comes Home

According to Mark, "every type of cooking has its time and place" — and he backs it up with practical ideas and professional tips to make that a reality in your home.



Short Cuts

Wegmans: You're definitely a champion of people who love cooking, but frequently find they have little time for it. Do busy metropolitan Italian families (with two working parents) take short cuts we can employ to get great home cooked dinners on the table night after night?

Mark: Sure they do. To take a short cut is fine, but in the context

to what? You want to use the best ingredients, because that doesn't take a lot of time, does it? But, you don't want to give a hard and fast rule about shortcuts. For example, for certain dishes you can use frozen spinach over fresh spinach. But, if I were serving it as a vegetable alone I wouldn't do that. You have to take it on a case by case basis. However, one of the best 'shortcuts' is good menu planning.

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Knowing What to Cook

Wegmans: You quote an amazing statistic which estimates that 80% of Americans don't think about what they're making for dinner until 4p.m., and assert that "knowing what to cook is half the battle." What's your strategy for helping people to getting better at meal planning and building a basic repertoire of recipes to fall back on?

Mark: If you're going to do a meal maybe you shouldn't do all the cooking. Perhaps you could buy an appetizer and put your energies into the main course, if that's the one you want to do.

Don't leave yourself five things to cook when you're coming home from work. As to dishes you should always have, one of them should be a quick sauté dish. Get some chicken breast or veal scaloppini and make it quickly by sautéing. [Mark's technique tip: Make sure you use a hot pan and lightly flour the meat first.] But there's no overall rule for all foods. You want to have recipes that work in all four food groups. You want to have a simple, chicken dish, a simple pasta dish, etc.; recipes that you know work and you can pull out of your hat at the last minute. And, they should use ingredients that you can find anywhere. I think that that's important, making sure you're not using anything that's esoteric, nutty, and hard to find. That's frustrating.

Soup, So You Don't Go Nuts

Wegmans: You rightly extol the virtues of "a well-made soup" as the quintessential one pot meal, a satisfying comfort food that's easy, works equally well at lunch or dinner, and can even draw the family together. So, what's your favorite?

Mark: I like them all. But, I recommend making two or three batches of soup on the weekend and freezing them in smaller containers so you can have soup during the week. In the front of the book I tell people to save deli containers because they become great storage and freezing containers. So you could possibly have three or four soups in your freezer at a time. You can build that way without compromising. There's nothing easier than defrosting soup in the microwave and eating it, which answers the shortcut question. I want you to eat good food, and I want you to use my recipes. But, you have to navigate through cookbooks and decide when to use these recipes so you don't get frustrated. Like in my book, there's Quick Cook or Slow Cook. Ultimately, you want to end up with a finished product that you're really proud to serve your family. I think that's what's it's all about.

Navigating Through Recipes

Wegmans: Can you elaborate on your idea of "navigating" through recipes to help make appropriate meal choices?

Mark: My approach is to tell everyone, make this on Saturday, make that on Tuesday night, and so on. See this pasta here, it's a 10-minute cook — make that Wednesday night. That pasta there, the Brunelleschi with Red Wine Beef Sauce [pg. 147] where it cooks for 3 hours? Make it on the weekend, triple your recipe, put it in pint containers, freeze it and then all you have to do is come home and defrost it, boil some rigatoni and you've got dinner. The best way to put a good dinner on the table is planning. That's what *mise en place* [every thing you need to take to the stove for a meal] is. Take *mise en place* one more step and that's planning a meal. If you learn how to plan better, you'll get better results. The thing about navigating is to use everything in the correct context. Six o'clock in the evening on a weeknight isn't the time to tackle a challenging recipe, but on the weekend it can be recreational.

The Versatility of Seafood

Wegmans: You feature 8 seafood dishes out of 17 recipes in your Quick Cook Chapter. Are you trying to get Americans to eat more fish, which is common in Italy's coastal regions?

Mark: Well no, but I think that a lot of it is that seafood cooks quickly. That's an important thing when it comes to putting good food on the table. You use something that doesn't take a lot of

prep time and that's also available. Where we are, seafood is one of those dishes. Pot roast takes 3 hours, I'd say there's almost nothing coming out of the sea that takes that long. Chicken is a quick cook, but at a certain point it's almost boring. Everybody thinks fish is fish, but seafood offers you this almost endless possibility of things to use and gives you more options and variety to give your family. You can eat seafood three days a week, but one day it's scallops, one day it's sole, and one day it's something else.

The Truth About Risotto and Polenta

Wegmans: Would you say risotto and polenta are for people with lots of time on their hands or for weekends only because of the labor-intensive nature of these dishes?

Mark: If you know the technique, I think risotto is something that you can do during the week because it's a 20-minute cook. As long as you don't chop up all sorts of extra ingredients and put them in there. It doesn't need mushrooms and carrots and onions and peas, cilantro, and lemon grass. If you do a tomato risotto or a spinach or saffron risotto, something simple, that's great. I wouldn't say that polenta is a complete dish like risotto, instead it's usually served along with something else. It's better for the weekend when you make a beautiful beef or lamb stew, and instead of serving potato or rice you use polenta. If you use "instant" polenta (it just means that they've taken the corn and ground it finer) it's very fast.

On Eating the Italian Way

Wegmans: You tell your readers that it's up to them to decide whether to serve vegetable dishes as antipasti (before the main course) or as contorni (along with it), referring to two of the five courses recognized in Italian cuisine. Is the timing of courses the only thing that differentiates them in Italian eating?

Mark: In Italy, the courses are part of their tradition: Usually they have an antipasto, which means 'before the pasta,' and a pasta or a main course, but not both. If you came to visit, that would be a different story. I've eaten in Italian households a lot. After I'm there a while I see what they really eat, because they don't have time. They'll bring out some artichokes, pickled vegetables, slices of salami and roasted pepper, maybe some mozzarella. Then you have some kind of main course: pasta, or it could be a meat, with maybe a potato. Then, they always serve salad, and fruit for dessert. I'd estimate that most Italians have pasta five times a week, though their portions tend to be smaller. They'll have pasta with tomatoes one night, they'll have pasta with vegetables another night. They're not going to have pasta with chicken! The mom may make a ragu sauce (a meat sauce), but that would probably be served on Sunday. I've always had lasagna on Sunday, never during the week. That's why I have Quick Cook and Slow Cook, because even Italian women know that it's a four-hour operation. So they make it Saturday and eat it Sunday.

Pasta Pointers

Wegmans: Even those of us of Italian extraction might balk at the idea of serving spaghetti mixed and briefly simmered in the sauce as you do in the book. You say this is the "whole reason for cooking it al dente," so the pasta will absorb the liquid and flavor at the same time. Are there any other good Italian conventions when it comes to pasta?

Mark: That's the only way pasta is served in Italy, mixed in the

pan with the sauce — not the sauce ladled on separately. It's also for when you're doing rigatoni: you know, why are there holes in it? So the sauce gets in. Also, in Italy, they never use a spoon. Pastas in Italy aren't complex, I'd say they are simple. That's the main difference. You don't find pasta with chicken in Italy, it doesn't exist — it's like a moral mistake. If we can learn from the Italians, it's how they respect food and how they eat very simply. It doesn't mean it's not flavorful, it just means it's simple.



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