HOME

In the Kitchen With ... chef Bette Fraser

Editor's note: *In the Kitchen With ... features people in the local culinary scene at home in their own kitchens. To suggest someone to profile, contact athome@bendbulletin.com.*

By Penny Nakamura
For The Bulletin

Just about three years ago, chef Bette Fraser moved to Bend full-time, and since then, her business The Well Traveled Fork has risen almost as fast as yeast can make bread rise.

Fraser's culinary business takes a multipronged approach to food.

"We cater, we take people on local farm tours, and we take them to secret food spots in town, and we teach them to cook," said Fraser, an upbeat woman who knows her way around both a farm and a kitchen.

Fraser attributes her success to the fact that people are more aware about eating sustainably and they want to know where their food is coming from.

With Thanksgiving arriving fast, Fraser wanted to perfect her pecan pie in her home kitchen. She's comfortable with demonstrations, as she teaches regular cooking classes in her large main kitchen.

"The eggs come from a local farm," says Fraser, while cracking them into the bowl and whisking them briskly. "Even the whiskey is local, from the Oregon Spirit Distillers."

Fraser whisked the whiskey and some brown sugar into the bowl of eggs before adding the pecans. Her homemade pie dough had been chilling in the oversized refrigerator, and Fraser pulled it out and poured in the pecan filling.

Because her business has many facets, there is always plenty to do. Though it was still early, Fraser and her young Ivy League-educated assistant, Aliza Rosenstein, had already prepped for an elementary school class they would be teaching at a local farm the next day.

"We're going to make a big pot of soup for everyone at the farm," says Fraser. "Everything in our soup will be from what the kids harvest on the Red Tail Farm. I think it's really important that kids know where their food is coming from; we need to teach them."

Fraser mentioned that her eventual Thanksgiving turkey was being raised on that farm, and she knew it would be farm-fresh, never frozen.

"That's the problem — a lot of kids and even adults don't know where their food has come from or how it was raised," said Fraser. "I've known kids that say they think chicken McNuggets come formed that way from a chicken."

See **Fraser** / *F4*



Ryan Brennecke / The Bulletin
An assortment of salts that Fraser frequently uses in her dishes.

Fraser

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Most prized possession

Fraser moved quickly and took the pie from her main kitchen into her prep kitchen, and popped it into her 1920s Wedgewood original stove, her most prized possession in either kitchen.

"My sister-in-law gave this to me; it's all original. It's been in the family since it was new," said Fraser, who's proud to show it off. "We had it refurbished, but all the pieces are original. It's all cast iron, and it works better than any oven I've ever worked with. They just don't make them like this any more."

As we moved out of her prep kitchen, back into the main kitchen, Fraser pointed to the brick oven on the sidewall, which is made specifically for her favorite food.

"Pizza. I love pizza, and we make it in this brick oven," says Fraser.

Her main kitchen has Blue Star Ovens with French doors. She says it's the next best thing to her prized Wedgewood oven.

"Because it has these French doors, it accommodates the commercial-sized pans and baking sheets," explained Fraser, pulling the doors open.

Betting on Bend

Fraser explained she and her husband found Bend while on a skiing vacation.

"We came here to ski seven years ago. We had friends in Portland who asked us if we ever skied at Mt. Bachelor," recalled Fraser, a Southern California native. "We had these perfect days of skiing here, and we loved the town. So before we left, we had bought this property."

Fraser says she was also surprised at what a vibrant culinary scene Central Oregon offered.

"People are so friendly here. I would ask local farmers and local food producers if I could bring tour groups to their farms and they welcomed it," said Fraser. "It was — is — really refreshing."

With an easy smile and laugh, Fraser made fast friends with most of the local restaurateurs, farmers and ranchers, who are now parts of her culinary tours.



Photos by **Ryan Brennecke** / The Bulletin

Bette Fraser assembles her pecan pie in her main kitchen. The kitchen island is 11 by 4½ feet, so it has a large prep surface. The ovens behind her have French doors and can fit commercial-sized pans.





LEFT: Fresh herbs grow in a window. **RIGHT:** Fraser's Wedgewood stove.

Her farm-to-fork approach has brought customers to her catering business, who were willing to pay a bit more for her seasonal menus, which don't carry a heavy carbon footprint.

Then this summer, she filled another void in the culinary market.

"We started a new cooking class, because people were looking in their (Community Supported Agriculture) boxes every week, and were wondering, what can I do with bok choy or wheat berries?" explained Fraser. "There were things in their boxes that they weren't sure what it was, so we had these cooking classes on what to do with your CSA box."

Designing

Because the Frasers bought a lot on Bend's west side, Fraser knew she could design her dream kitchen.

Already having conceived the idea of the Well Traveled Fork, she knew she would need a large kitchen for classes.

"I insisted I have this large kitchen island with nothing in it. It doesn't have a prep sink or stove. I knew I would need the space; you always need a large prep surface," explained Fraser, who says this island is 11 by 4½ feet.

Fraser also had the foresight to plan for an indoor herb garden in her kitchen window. "In California you can grow herbs year-round outside, but I knew that wouldn't be possible here. So I also had the builder put this indoor garden in the south facing window next to the sink. Now, I can use fresh herbs year-round here too."

Her other kitchen ideas included the brick pizza oven and her smaller prep kitchen, which is built directly behind her main kitchen and can be closed off by a door.

She strategically planned her kitchen to open up to an outdoor dining area, where Fraser pointed to her outdoor garden on the deck that is protected from deer.

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"I grew tomatoes in that topsy-turvy garden, and it worked so well I bought another one," said Fraser.

Culinary avatar

With the many hats she wears, Fraser said she has no regrets in leaving her successful catering business in Southern California behind, or for having chosen a career in the culinary world.

"I actually graduated with a business degree, and I did that for a little while, but I didn't enjoy it. So I left and started making candy; it was 'Bette's Brittle,'" recalled Fraser, 57, who's been in the culinary business for more than 20 years. "My candy business was featured in Food & Wine magazine, and the L.A. Times. Then I started a catering business that grew by word of mouth in Southern California." Despite her successes, Fraser says her passion is now teaching people to eat locally, and bringing people together with local food producers.

Fraser is most pleased when people make connections with their local farmer and food producers. Her other farm-to-fork tours go to dozens of local farms, ranches and food artisans that include cheese producers and beverage distillers.

"There is so much local product out there; I don't think people are really aware just how good it is here and how much local food is available," says Fraser. "We're very lucky to be in Central Oregon."

• What are the three ingredients you'll always find in your home kitchen cupboard or refrigerator?

Wine, cheese and milk. I also always have fig jam.

• Favorite home meals you like to prepare?

Pizza.

• What is your favorite home appliance in your kitchen?

1920 Wedgewood stove. It's been in the family, and it's the best oven I've ever used.

• What is your favorite hand tool/cooking utensil?

My knives.

• Any appliance that you disdain?

Electric can openers.

• What is your spice of choice?

Salt. There are 200 types of salt. One of the best salts comes from 3,500 feet under the sea in Japan; it's the premium salt of the world. It costs $18 for less than an ounce. I have many different types of finishing salts, and they're bought from The Meadows in Portland.

• What chefs do you admire most?

Jacques Pépin and Julia Child.

• What restaurants do you enjoy?

When I travel, I love to try all kinds of restaurants. I have been fortunate to dine at some fabulous restaurants, such as The French Laundry, Le Cirque and John Georges in New York, Alain Ducasse in Paris, La Pergola in Rome, Merrimans on the Big Island. I am always looking for an exciting dining experience with local, seasonal food and wine.

• Favorite cooking memory?

Learning to cook with my mom and grandma. I have many happy memories of cooking and baking with them. My brothers, however, will insist that I only made drop biscuits that they lovingly called "drop bombs." But I guess that is what brothers are for, to continually critique your cooking. My brother was just here for a visit and commented that my cooking had improved since my "drop bombs"!

• Favorite room to eat meals?

On our deck.

• Best meal you've eaten in your life?

My husband and I had the best four-cheese pizza sitting on the beach in Bora Bora about nine years (ago). Everything about it was perfect.

• Ideal dream kitchen?

(I) have it.

• What do you like to do outside of the kitchen?

Ski. That's why we moved to Bend.

• If you weren't in the food industry, what profession would you have chosen?

Would have loved to be a professional skier, but I'm not good enough. I was in the investment business before dropping out and pursuing my dream.

• Favorite food quote?

"Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy," by Benjamin Franklin, and "Life in not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the number of moments that take our breath away."

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