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What's Cooking Close to Home? Culinary Getaways

By Jackie Smith, *Special to The Seattle Times*



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Chef Robert Houot speaks with cooking-class student George Annillo of Seattle while they work with others to prepare a meal during a "French Regional Cuisine From Alsace" cooking class at L'Auberge Edge of Seattle bed-and-breakfast in Woodinville.



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Chef Robert Houot, center, leads a cooking class at L'Auberge Edge of Seattle, a bed-and-breakfast in Woodinville.



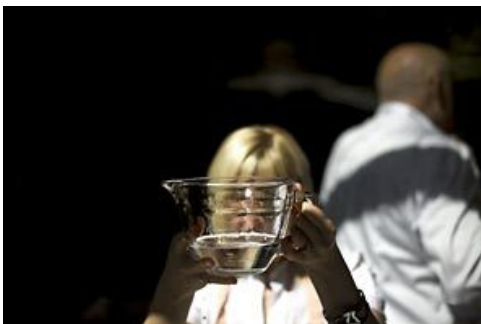
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L'Auberge Edge of Seattle bed-and-breakfast owner Nancy Gates Douglas laughs with cooking-class students.



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Two bottles of wine sit atop a counter in the L'Auberge kitchen.



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Nicole Solomon of Renton measures ingredients during a French cooking class at L'Auberge Edge of Seattle bed-and-breakfast in Woodinville. She took the class with fiancé Andrew Ross.

If you go

Cooking classes with a sleepover

Western Washington

L'Auberge Edge of Seattle, 16400 216th Ave. N.E., Woodinville; 425-844-4102 or www.edgeof-seattle-getaway.com. Accommodations include ground-floor bedroom suites and a studio apartment. Rates vary by length of stay and room, and include continental breakfast. Catered dinners can be arranged for overnight guests, price varies. Culinary classes are \$99 per person; menu and schedule at www.edgeof-seattle-cooking.com. Thursday Tea Service, 2:30-5 p.m., \$35, minimum four people; reservations required.

Camano Blossom Bed and Breakfast, 1462 Larkspur Lane, Camano Island; 360-629-6784 or www.camanoblossombandb.com. Four second-floor guest rooms. Rates per night: \$108 single, \$138 double, including full hot breakfast. Cooking class or Chinese dinner, \$45 per person.

Farm Kitchen, 24309 Port Gamble Road N.E., Poulsbo; 360-297-6615 or www.farmkitchen.com. Three-bedroom furnished home (accommodates up to 10), \$350-\$425 per night, depending on season. Culinary classes average \$60-\$75 per person. Monthly wine dinner varies in menu and price.

Eastern Washington

Mary Kay's Romantic Whaley Mansion, 415 Third St., Chelan; 509-682-5735 or www.whaleymansion.com. Six guest rooms on second and third floors, rates from \$105-\$165 per night, depending on season; small boxed breakfast is included. Culinary class prices vary with menu.

Other resources

Washington Bed and Breakfast Guild: 800-647-2918 or www.wbbg.com

Chelan tourism: www.golakechelan.com or www.lakechelanonlinenews.com

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By Jackie Smith

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WOODINVILLE — Monet would have loved it here.

On a recent summer afternoon, the sun-dappled formal garden stretched from a patio where guests sipped Champagne to the distant towering trees that cocoon this five-acre estate. It was an Impressionist painting of a French garden party come to life.

In reality we were some 20 miles east of Lake Washington at a bed-and-breakfast called **L'Auberge Edge of Seattle**, but it certainly seemed we were at a French countryside inn — just the atmosphere that proprietress Nancy Gates Douglas strives for at her all-things-French B&B.

The genteel garden party didn't last long though as the bubbly was set aside for neck-to-knee aprons and we headed to the kitchen to begin the real purpose of this visit — learning to cook a French meal.

Culinary tourism, those extended French- and Italian-countryside culinary getaways (learning + fun = good vacation), sounded intriguing. But mixing their hefty summer pricetags with soaring airfares and a weak dollar has left them simmering on the back burner for many Americans this year. Instead, I went looking for what was cooking closer to home. Voilà: The first stop was nearby Woodinville.

During the six-hour session at L'Auberge, guest Chef Robert Houot (in French, "Roe-bear Who"), would lead a dozen adults through hands-on chopping, chuckling and chattering to create and consume a four-course menu, beginning with a Three Onion Soup Gratinee and concluding with Apple Tarte Alsacienne (a tart with vanilla flan).

Class participants Nicole Solomon, from Renton, and her fiancé, Andrew Ross, from Liverpool, England, were looking for a weekend getaway when they found the L'Auberge Web site.

"We love cooking and we were looking for a getaway and we saw the cooking class and thought, 'My gosh, that's great,' " she says. "The French thing got us — I used to live in France and speak French fluently."

Eastgate architect Richard Person has taken seven or eight classes here including the Moroccan and Spanish cooking classes that have been interspersed among the French cooking lineup because, in addition to learning about cooking, he has fun and meets new people.

This isn't the only B&B offering cooking classes in this corner of the world. Some other finds:

Camano Island

The gravel drive meanders through five acres of the expansive lawn and gardens that surround **Camano Blossom Bed and Breakfast**. From almost any place in this rural getaway some 60 miles north of Seattle — but particularly from its Chinese-lantern-trimmed wraparound porch — there are stop-and-stare views of Skagit Bay and, in the distance, Mount Baker.

Guests staying in this peaceful four-bedroom retreat during the summer months are usually busy with family and island activities and events, says Melissa Mei Hsu, who's both owner and chef. Guests often opt to have Hsu, former owner of the Lotus Chinese restaurant in Mukilteo, cook and serve them a Chinese dinner after a busy day. Others roll up their sleeves for a hands-on culinary adventure.

"I set up a stove top on the kitchen counter and they gather around," she says. "They will take home recipes and eat a full meal. There's either an appetizer or soup, and a main course with rice."

Classes that don't involve an overnight stay require a minimum of four to six participants. "If two people are staying overnight and want the class, I will teach them — with advance notice, of course," she adds.

Because classes are offered on request, class sizes and menus vary. Hsu and the participants determine the meal based on food preferences and tolerance to spices.

She says most are surprised at how simple it is to cook a Chinese meal, but cautions, "You can't make a perfect egg roll the first time. Maybe after four or five ... it will look OK and it will taste good, but it just might not look perfect."

The acreage, with its flower-bed borders and Hsu's herb garden, encourages a kick-back-and-forget-your-cares stay. Horses whinny in a nearby pasture. It's hard to leave the comfy chairs in the west-facing sunroom. But when all is said and done, it is the kitchen that's the magnet. Guests are drawn to its room-sized kitchen island, often wanting nothing more than to visit with their host — or to grab a cookie.

Poulsbo

You'll get a taste of country life some 20 minutes from Bainbridge Island's Winslow ferry dock (10 minutes from Edmonds/Kingston ferry) at the 18-acre **Farm Kitchen**.

Guests staying in the three-bedroom, fully furnished '70s retro rambler with floor-to-ceiling windows or those who've come for a cooking class are drawn to the acres of organic gardens in this sprawling agricultural getaway where many of the herbs and vegetables used at Farm Kitchen are grown.

The modern commercial-sized Farm Kitchen is found in a remodeled 1970s-era barn where cows once dined.

Hands-on culinary classes feature the menus of both guest chefs and resident chef Barbara Jeantrout. Menus range from French-inspired to those highlighting Northwest seafood and herbs and include wine pairings that are "enough to enjoy but not enough to impair your ability with the paring knife," assures Anne Thatcher, who with Hollis Fay co-owns Farm Kitchen.

"Normally our weekend classes are on a Sunday afternoon so you could have a relaxing Saturday evening, get up and enjoy the farm Sunday morning and conclude your stay with the class in the afternoon," she says. But be warned that summer and fall weekends book far in advance (it's a popular spot for weddings, for one thing).

Participants usually hail from nearby Bainbridge Island, Port Ludlow, Seattle and Gig Harbor. However, classes taught two years ago by Susan Herrmann Loomis, who grew up in the Seattle area and is now a chef and author of several books including "On Rue Tatin: Living and Cooking in a French Town," drew fans from across the United States.

Lake Chelan

Mary Kay's Romantic Whaley Mansion, a landmark in this Central Washington town just over three hours from Seattle, has been welcoming bed-and-breakfast guests for nearly 25 years. The inviting 1911 wood-frame Edwardian home, with its 26 rooms, including six guest rooms, 8.5 bathrooms and two wraparound porches, offers limited views of Lake Chelan.

Co-owner Mary Kay Addis, a stickler for detail and history, has worked hard to preserve the mansion's original fixtures and furnishings. But the popularity of culinary classes begun off-site two years ago is prompting some modern-day changes to the stately structure. A commercial demonstration kitchen being added to the back of the home will maintain the historical integrity of the building yet bring future culinary classes on site. Its scheduled opening is late summer.

Culinary instructors Carol Addison, co-owner and longtime chef at Whaley Mansion, and Catharine Morehead, whose culinary skills were honed at a Whidbey Island B&B, will continue to span the globe with menus from Thai and French to Northwest cuisine; all featuring Eastern Washington-grown ingredients.

Morehead said that, in addition to culinary classes, there'll be getaway packages that include tours of Chelan-area wineries.

Freelance writer Jackie Smith of Kirkland is a regular contributor to NWWeekend.

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