

master cooking **class** — by Rebecca Baugniet

An ambitious class delivers a wealth of tips and techniques, as well as a feast

Something about watching Heidi Fink before her class starts reminds me of a hockey player getting in the zone as the national anthem is playing. There is a slight sway, and as she surveys the countertop in front of her, you can tell she is mapping out her game plan. Once the class begins she is on, leaving no seed or spice left unturned. Every element of cooking that comes up in the course of the class is explained in detail.

I've come to the *Thrifty Foods Cooking and Lifestyle Centre* for Heidi's Authentic Indian Cuisine III class. It is one of several cooking schools that Heidi teaches at (*French Mint, Fairfield Community Place, Terralicious*) and based on the brief introductions of my fellow classmates, she obviously has a following. On the menu tonight: Butter Chicken, Mumbai Spiced Vegetables, Classic Saffron Pulao, Naan Bread, Chopped Onion and Tomato Relish and Green Almond Chutney. As I flip through the generous handout students received at the start of the class, I wonder how this Red Seal Chef, cooking instructor, food writer and recent guest chef on a reality television series (*XWeighted*), is going to manage to demonstrate each of these recipes, and feed us in a mere three hours. I would need a full day, at least, to get through this menu. But this chef clearly has both cooking and teaching (simultaneously) down to a fine art.

Heidi begins by explaining that Butter Chicken is traditionally prepared by using up leftover tandoori chicken. We are directed to the page of our handout that holds the recipe for Tandoori chicken, and offered samples of some that has been marinating all day, and just been cooked up for us to try.

Flipping back and forth through the handout, we watch as the chef gets started on the spiced vegetables and rice pulao, passing around the black mustard seeds for us to look at, or explaining what the Asafoetida spice is made from as she goes. It is clear why she states in her course calendar that Indian Cuisine I is a prerequisite for this class. This is not the place for beginner cooks. Although even the more basic techniques are demonstrated, you will gain more from this advanced class if you have already attained a certain comfort level with culinary multitasking; an ability to hop from dish to dish without losing track of what is in each pot, and what stage each dish is at, is necessary to keep up with Heidi's instruction.

Heidi's creativity and determination to achieve an optimal taste experience from each dish has paid off. Every part of the meal is cooked to perfection; each flavour stands strong, yet the ingredients remain fresh and crisp – the chicken is tender and moist, and not a single mushy vegetable can be found. With my handout full of recipes and a complete list of all the local places to find all the necessary Indian ingredients I am inspired to recreate this feast at home. However, lacking two kitchen assistants of my own, I may just keep it simple, upgrading my cupboard basmati to Heidi's recommended brand (Lal Qilla), and cooking up a curry using the technique that she guarantees will "make the flavours bloom, and transform your curries". Having tasted the results, I trust her completely. Here's my advice: don't wait for the *Food Network* to catch on... take her classes in person while you can.

For more *Thrifty Foods Cooking & Lifestyle* classes visit: www.thriftyfoods.com and for Heidi's schedule: www.chefheidifink.com



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