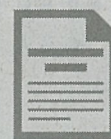


LIFE

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In search of style, plus
Website helps others
find plus-size fashion

Eric's A to Z

Who: Heidi Fink

Lives: Victoria

Why she's here: Talented chef and cooking instructor; ability to inspire all levels of cooks; knowledge of the world's cuisine; dedication to supporting sustainable local food production.

Quote: "By the time I was 11, I was making family suppers, simple things, such as baked chicken. I was interested in cooking early, but had no concept it would be a career; it was just not on the radar."

'H' is for Heidi

Many full-time cooking instructors I know work at a college or culinary school, employed there after lengthy service in professional kitchens and attending cooking school themselves. It's a natural progression, but one instructor I know took a different path and it hasn't hindered her ability to get her students to cook with skill and flare.

Her name is Heidi Fink, 34, mother of two boys, Ruben and Leo, wife of Marcus Dominelli, a guitar-maker. Born in Edmonton, at age one she moved to Port Alberni, where her parents, Hardy Fink and Cynthia Bonesky, ran a gymnastics school.

"I was there all the time," Fink says.

She enjoyed the sport and even taught, but says she was not good enough to pursue it. "I wasn't particularly talented," she says.

That healthy activity was by accompanied by a youth filled with culinary inspiration. Hardy and Cynthia were in a gourmet supper club and she got to sample.

"My mom would sometimes serve the leftovers when we came home for lunch. We'd have stuff like French onion soup," she says.

Fink's grandmother, a caterer, also dazzled her taste buds.

"I would watch her make these gorgeous sandwich platters and other things," Fink says.

"By the time I was 11, I was making family suppers, simple things, such as baked chicken. I was inter-

ested in cooking early, but had no concept it would be a career; it was just not on the radar."

At 16, she got into health food, tried new ingredients and pored over *Canada's Food Guide*. Despite this keen interest in food, she studied anthropology at university.

In third year, Fink took half a year off and toured Asia, including India, where dishes she tried reminded her of those served by her Punjabi neighbours in Port Alberni. "The food was so amazing," Fink says. "[In letters home] Mom said all I ever did was talk about the food."

When back home, she yielded to her passion for cooking and worked as camp cook for a tree-planting operation, after making a half-hearted attempt to continue her schooling through distance education.

"I kind of jumped in with both feet, had really no experience," Fink says. "I pulled it off — no one ran me out of camp anyway!"

In 1997, she took an entry level position at Victoria's famed Rebar restaurant.

"Rebar wasn't like a regular restaurant; there was not a formal structure. A huge number of staff were women; everyone seemed more or less equal," Fink says.

Fink was a natural and her cooking skills blossomed in this environment; within two years she became head chef.

"Audrey (Alsterberg, the owner) always wanted super fabulous food, so I got to use all these wonderful ingredients," Fink says.

In 2000, she took maternity leave, then went back to Rebar for a time on a casual basis and, privately, started giving cooking classes.

"I really liked it, thought

it would bring in some extra money while being a stay-at-home mom," Fink says.

Her classes were popular, her second child arrived, and when returning to teach in the fall of 2005, she discovered her students missed her. Many provided glowing testimonials for a cooking class e-mail list she started.

"Some sort of critical mass had occurred and my classes were all filling up. I thought maybe I could actually do this for a living," she says.

Fink teaches her well-researched classes at locations around Victoria, such as Fairfield Community Place, Thrifty Foods Cooking and Lifestyle Centre, and French Mint.

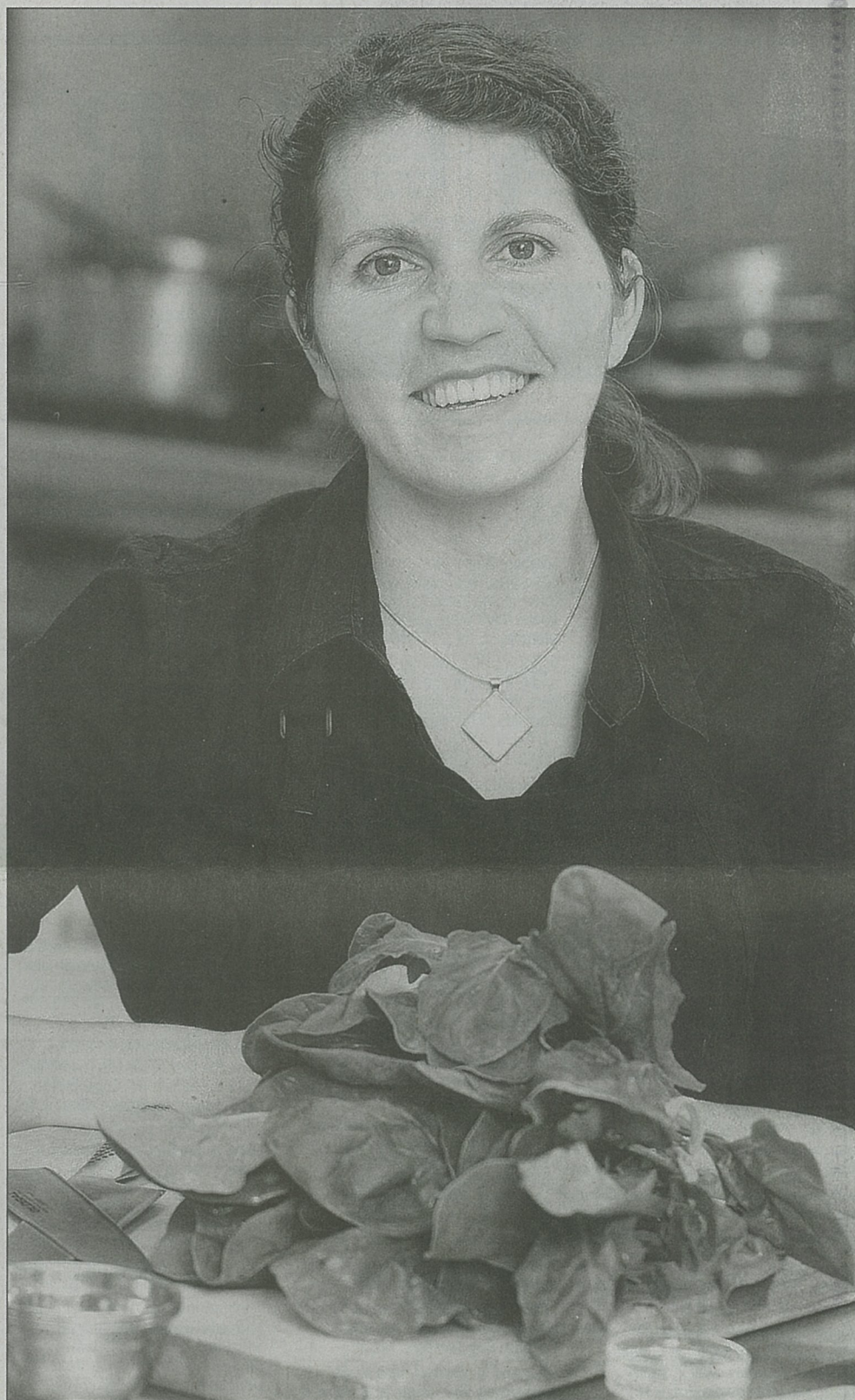
She teaches cuisines and cooking styles that interest her and importantly, her students, with influences coming from her journey to Asia, vegetarian cooking at Rebar and local foods.

Upcoming classes, all listed on her website, www.chefheidifink.com, include, authentic Indian cuisine, pie making, Asian vegetarian, sushi and taco party. At the class, participants receive a recipe booklet and a meal.

"I'm very relaxed; I like to make people feel OK if they make mistakes, want to make cooking a joy, not a stress," Fink says.

To register for a class, contact the facility it is being held at. There are links to them on Fink's website. Fink also does private classes and culinary tours of Chinatown. To be on her future cooking class e-mail list, e-mail classes@chefheidifink.com.

Eric Akis is the author of the best-selling *Everyone Can Cook* book series. His columns appear in the Life section Wednesday and Sunday.



BRUCE STOTESBURY, TIMES COLONIST

Victoria chef Heidi Fink is a popular cooking instructor who can be found teaching courses at Fairfield Community Place and Thrifty Foods Cooking and Lifestyle Centre.