Eric’s A to Z

‘H’ is for Heidi

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 supper, 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.”

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 flair.

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

“I was there all the time,” Fink says. She enjoyed the sport and even taught, her says she was not good enough to pursue it. “I wasn’t particularly talented,” she says.

Her healthy activity was 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 those gorgeous sandwich platters and other things,” Fink says.

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At 16, she got into health food, tried new ingredients and drove her passion for cooking and her classes are all filling up.

Her classes were popular, her second child arrived, and when returning to teach in fall of 2008, 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 are listed on her website, www.chefheidifink.com, including authentic Indian cuisine, pie making, Asian vegetarian, sushi and taco party. At the class, participants receive a recipe book 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 class@chefheidifink.com.