

'Lost Recipes' tells story of bygone restaurants

By Beth J. Harpaz, Associated Press

A new cookbook called "The Book of Lost Recipes" remembers classic dishes from long-gone hotels, iconic restaurants and roadside eateries of yesteryear. But the book is more than a collection of recipes. It also chronicles the evolution of American food culture, telling stories of how and why certain dishes and restaurants became popular when they did.

"A good restaurant, a restaurant that becomes famous or that a community cares about – it has to do with food, but it has to do with so much more," said cookbook author Jaya Saxena, a writer for the *Daily Dot*. "The things people are driven to eat are influenced by the economy, politics, immigration trends and all kinds of other things."

A recurring theme in the book, out this month from Page Street Publishing, is how immigrant chefs took ethnic food mainstream. There are recipes from establishments like Paoli's Restaurant (Italian) in San Francisco, Ruby Chow's (Chinese) in Seattle, and iconic Jewish delis like Ashkenaz's in Chicago and Wolfie's Rascal House in Miami.

Celebrity culture gets its turn in the book, too, with recipes from Chasen's, a West Hollywood joint that hosted the likes of Liz Taylor and Ronald Reagan, and the Pump Room in Chicago, which Frank Sinatra referenced in a song. Other dishes in the book were beloved by regular folk, like chicken soup and mac-and-cheese from Horn & Hardart's, the famed automat.

Many recipes offer a window into travel trends and pop culture. Saxena describes, for example, how tiki culture, a fake, kooky mashup of South Pacific motifs, reigned supreme at the Kahiki Supper Club in Columbus, Ohio. And how a dude ranch

in Tucson, Ariz., opened an upscale restaurant called the Tack Room so that its guests – who came to Arizona to escape cold weather – could enjoy fancy meals like veal with chanterelle mushrooms after a long day of riding horses.

Saxena not only pored over old guidebooks to see what restaurants were recommended as worthwhile for diners to seek out on their travels, but she also tracked down descendants of chefs and restaurant owners to get their stories. Once she had an original recipe in hand, she scaled it down from restaurant-size portions to family-size. She has no formal training as a chef, but with help from her mom and others, each dish was tested in a home kitchen.

A few of the lost recipes sound archaic today or involve obscure ingredients, like one for roast venison with currant port sauce from New York's long-defunct Planters Hotel. But other dishes would be right at home in any hipster cafe in Brooklyn, like bratwurst and sweet-and-sour lentils, created by a German immigrant, Henry Thiele, a famous restaurateur in the Pacific Northwest who was admired by none other than a young James Beard. The sausage-and-lentils dish is one of Saxena's favorites.

"This recipe from 50 or 60 years ago tasted current, like the upscale comfort food that has become such a big thing," she said. "I could see people eating this for hundreds of years in Germany but it also appeals to a modern palate."

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Ashkenaz's Blintz Treat

(From "The Book of Lost Recipes" by Jaya Saxena, Page Street Publishing Co., 2016)

Start to finish: 20 minutes

Servings: 6

For the crepes:

1 C all-purpose flour

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ C water

Pinch salt

Vegetable oil (for cooking)

For the cheese mix:

1 pound dried farmers cheese or dried baker's cheese

1 egg

6 T sugar

For garnishing:

Sour cream, apple sauce and sugared blueberries

To make the crepes, heat an 8-inch pan over medium-low heat. Whisk together the flour, water and salt, and grease the pan lightly with vegetable oil or butter, using a towel to apply so all corners of the pan are covered. When the pan is hot, pour about half a ladle of batter into the pan, and turn the pan to spread it as thin as possible. When the crepe begins to curl (after about a minute), flip it onto a paper towel.

For the filling, stir together the cheese and eggs, sprinkling sugar on top of the mixture as you turn it in. The mixture should still be firm. Lay about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the mixture on the blintz in a 4-inch row. Fold the sides of the crepe over, and roll the blintz back to front. Heat a half-inch of vegetable oil in a pan. Once the oil is hot, fry blintzes (being sure not to crowd the pan) for 2-3 minutes per side, until they're lightly golden and crispy. Remove blintzes to a paper towel to drain, and place on a heated serving platter.

Serve with sour cream or apple sauce, and sugared blueberries.

Nutrition information per serving: 234 calories; 72 calories from fat; 8 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 60 mg cholesterol; 110 mg sodium; 29 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 19 g protein.