

## Dining & Wine

### Diner's Journal

Notes on Eating, Drinking and Cooking

April 26, 2010, 8:00 AM

## The Temporary Vegetarian: Healthy Eggplant Parmigiana

By ELAINE LOUIE



Michael Scelfo, the 36-year-old executive chef at both the Temple Bar and the Russell House Tavern in Cambridge, Mass., invented this variation on eggplant parmigiana three years ago.

It was a dish born of desperation.

His twins, Joshua and Mae, were four years old, and his son Andrew was a newborn. As busy as Mr. Scelfo is, he cooks for his family on Sunday and Monday nights. One night, he wanted to make eggplant parmigiana, a dish he had grown up with in Merrick, N.Y., where his maternal grandmother, Rosemary Heyen, who was Italian, made it on many Sundays for supper.

As he was making the dish, he realized he had no time to fry the eggplant, so he just cut the eggplant into cubes and tossed them with fresh grape tomatoes, fresh basil and parsley, olive oil, pecorino, mozzarella, tomato puree, spices and panko, the Japanese bread crumbs. His toss-with-your-hands version of the classic dish is significantly less greasy. "When you fry the eggplant, it takes on a lot of oil, and when we use breadcrumbs, as a layer, it tends to act as a sponge, in a not good way," he said.

At home, he serves it once a week, and at the Temple Bar, it rotates on the vegetarian menu. It is a simple and tasty dish.

## Eggplant and Roast Tomatoes Gratin

*Yield* 4 servings

*Time* 1 1/2 hours



### *Ingredients*

#### FOR THE BREAD CRUMBS:

- 1/2 cup grated pecorino
- 1 cup panko (Japanese bread crumbs)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons minced parsley

#### FOR THE EGGPLANT AND TOMATOES:

- 1 cup red grape or tear-drop tomatoes
- 1 cup yellow grape or tear-drop tomatoes
- 14 basil leaves, roughly chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 1/4 cups tomato puree
- 5 large garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 to 2 1/4 pounds eggplants, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive, plus more for drizzling
- 1 cup fresh whole milk buffalo mozzarella or other mozzarella cheese, grated or finely chopped.

### *Method*

1. For the bread crumbs: In a medium bowl, combine pecorino, panko, salt, pepper, olive oil, and parsley. Mix well until crumbs are evenly coated with oil. Set aside.
2. For the eggplant and tomatoes: Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a large bowl, combine red tomatoes, yellow tomatoes, basil, red pepper flakes, salt, black pepper, tomato puree, garlic, eggplant and 1/3 cup olive oil. Add half of the bread crumb mixture. With your hands or two spoons, gently mix the vegetables and bread crumb mixture until thoroughly combined.
3. Pour into a 9 x 13 baking dish and top with remaining bread crumb mixture. Sprinkle the mozzarella over the top. Bake, uncovered, until eggplant is tender and top is lightly browned, 45 to 60 minutes; if after 30 minutes the top is browning too rapidly, cover the dish with foil for the remaining cooking time. Remove from oven, and let rest for 10 minutes before serving. Drizzle olive oil to taste over each serving, if desired.

Source: Adapted from Michael Soelfo, Executive Chef, Temple Bar and the Russell House Tavern