

Notion Launches a Series of Wine and Cooking Classes

Brush up on your skills before enjoying a six-course fine-dining experience.

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PHOTO BY LEAH LIZARONDO

What is better than having dinner at **notion**, one of *Pittsburgh Magazine's* **Best Restaurants**? Having a cooking class and wine class before your meal.

Notion's chef/owner, Dave Racicot, has launched a series of cooking classes and a series of wine classes by sommelier Jennifer Jin, held twice monthly on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, respectively. Each class costs \$125 and ends with a six-course dinner paired with wine. It is, unequivocally, the BEST fine-dining experience in town.



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On any other night, a six-course chef's tasting menu at notion with wine pairing runs the same price. The added bonus of learning how to cook from Racicot and how to taste wine from Jin (pictured above) is just something you don't want to miss.

I attended the first in the cooking series, "Kitchen Tips and Techniques." Racicot welcomed us to class with some Champagne and popcorn dressed with truffle oil and chives. I'm not sure if it was the class and the company — but it certainly was the best popcorn I've ever had! (I've recreated the recipe below.)



PHOTO BY LEAH LIZARONDO

In this class, Racicot taught us important basics such as *mise en place*, the practice of having tools and ingredients in place, allowing chefs (professionals and home cooks alike) to work efficiently.

Then Racicot delved into some details that he swears by — from the types of salts he uses to his practice of cleaning as he goes (boy, does he ever; I thought I was bad!) to how to pick the right knife. His advice: “Buy a small knife; big knives are for Vikings.”

He showed us his favorite knife: a Masahiro 5.5-inch, one-sided utility knife. In the current issue of **Popular Mechanics**, he talks about how he uses it for everything at notion. Knives are one of the most important kitchen tools, and often knife purveyors sell sets with what seems like too many pieces. In reality, you will only use a couple or so. I almost exclusively use my 6-inch **Global knife**.

Racicot went on to demonstrate some basic knife skills and cuts, from brunoise to julienne and chiffonade. This made me realize how much I need to keep my knives sharp!

Finally, he demonstrated some cooking techniques — among them: how to make stock and how to braise and sauté.

There were lots of things to remember; everyone was taking copious notes and left inspired to cook at home.

I would have been happy with just the class but then, like some major icing on the cake, we sat down to enjoy the aforementioned six-course dinner with wine. It was almost a four-hour evening — I met fantastic people, left with new kitchen skills and enjoyed an amazing dinner.

There is no better way to enjoy a fine-dining experience in this city. Other cooking classes in the notion series will cover cooking with root vegetables, soups and sauces and the technique sous vide. Wine classes will explore different regions such as the Pacific Northwest and South America. To get a full listing of classes, check out **notion's events page**. Classes are limited to eight guests, so make sure you reserve seats early.

Truffle Popcorn

servings: 4

- 1/2 cup popcorn kernels, popped
- 1/4 cup Earth Balance spread or unsalted butter, melted
- 3 tablespoons truffle oil
- 2-3 tablespoons chopped chives
- Fine salt and ground black pepper

1. Place popcorn in a large bowl, add butter and truffle oil and toss to coat.
2. Add chives, salt, and pepper.
3. Toss to combine. Enjoy!

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