

## A Moveable Feast

**To stay in touch and share with my friends the latest news about : my new life in Paris, becoming a cook, recipes, restaurants, wisdoms and insights (if any gained). The title is an allusion to Hemingway's book about his early years in Paris. He was writing just around the corner of my new home in the Montparnasse cafes....**

**July 07, 2008**

### **Meeting Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg**

What a weekend I had. It was so full of events, incidents and encounters, some planned, some not, that I would need alone ten different posts to cover everything. I'll try to describe them one by one over the next days and weeks (if I find the energy after or between my shifts.)

One of the most touching and inspiring encounters of my weekend was the one with Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg. They are the authors of "Becoming a Chef", a book that I read back and forth several times a couple of years ago, when I was still dreaming (and hesitating) about changing careers. I can indeed recommend it to anybody who is thinking about moving into that profession.

I met Karen and Andrew during a round table discussion at the Festival "Gastronomy by the Seine" (in which I was a little bit involved, but that will be one of the other 10 posts). After the round table I introduced myself to Karen and Andrew, told them my story and thanked them for writing this book. I was very touched by the warm reaction and interest I received from both of them.

After this encounter I was inspired to pull out the book again, and I found that now, that I am at a different step of my career move, it is worth reading it again. Now the stories and insights have a new meaning to me, and different chapters than a couple of years ago are becoming important. I can relate now much more to some recommendations and experiences described, and feel that reading the book again will help me in my current confusion and sometimes frustration about the transition I am in, and give me new motivation to move on as planned.

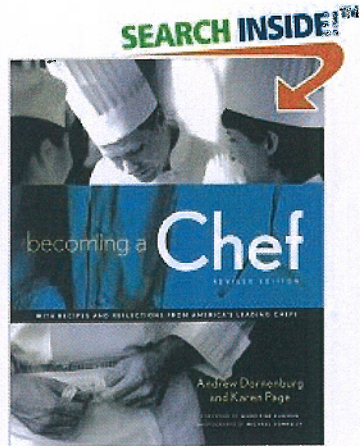
A lot of testimonies in the book remind me that I need to refocus on learning about products and food, and get less hung up and upset about the social environment and very difficult style of communication in this profession.

The book is now my Metro literature, (4 times 10 minutes a day), and the one phrase that I read today, that suggested to me that I am maybe sometimes<sup>\*</sup> expecting too much from my colleagues and chefs, and need to complement my restaurant experience with more homework, is the following from the chapter APPRENTICING:

*"Although starting at the bottom, you may learn very good technique and speed, you must seek out on your own the how's and why's of what you are doing. Chefs and coworkers do not always have the time to explain more than the minimum a cook needs to know in order to accomplish a particular task. Much of my own on-the fly learning came with the caveat, "... and I don't have the time to tell you why it works best this way - just trust me that it does and do it that way." I learned*

*the techniques, but I didn't learn the theory behind them until I weant home and did some reading on my own."*

Good advice that reaches me at the right moment....



**Becoming a Chef**  
Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page  
**Paperback:** 400 pages  
**Publisher:** Wiley; Revised edition (October 10, 2003)  
**Language:** English  
**ISBN-10:** 0471152099  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0471152095



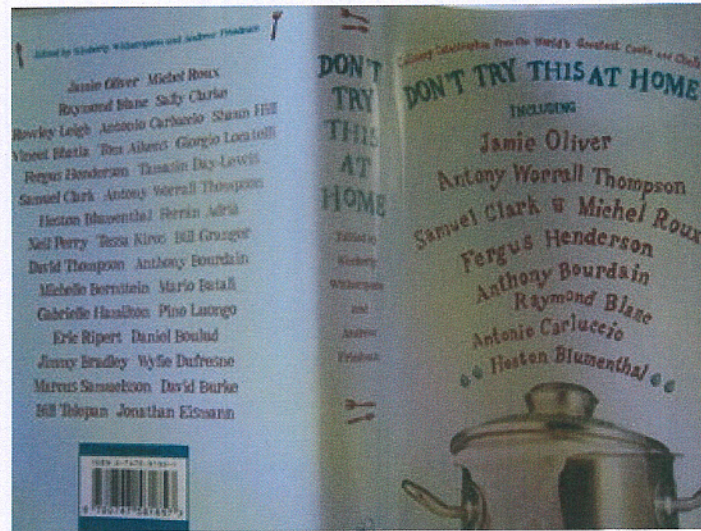
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**January 21, 2007**

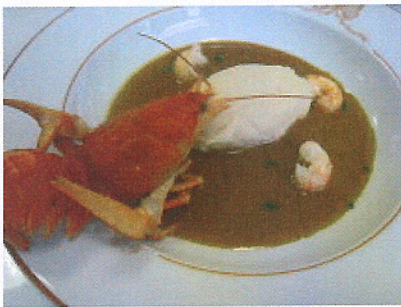
### **Don't try this at home**

"Don't try this at home" is a book that was sent to me for Xmas by a regular reader of this blog who often posts comments here under the mysterious name of "Mami". I recommend this book to anybody who would love to read some entertaining stories about how small or big kitchen disasters strike famous ("Anglo"-) chefs like

Jamie Oliver, Anthony Bourdain, Mario Batali, etc... I believe Irene would call it "hysterical".



I called the editor on Friday to make sure in the next edition they include a story from our classmate, famous Anglo-chef-to-be, Viju, on how he last week prepared the sauce for a dish of our regional "Lyonnais" menu.



The sauce, to be served later for a starter, called *quenelles de brochet aux écrevisses* (on the picture), and which by the way tasted *très délicieux* in the end, is prepared similar to a sauce Américaine, which means as part of the procedure Cognac is added to a mix of *sautéd* crushed crayfish (*écrevisses*) in the shell, carrots, onions and shallots in a hot pan with the objective to create a flame, "flamber" in French. Before Viju flamed the sauce, I heard somebody shout "Watch out!", so I had the reflex to turn around, my camera in hand and got him seconds after pouring a huge amount of Cognac into the pan and having the flame jump right from the burner into the pan. You can notice Irene escaping into a corner, apparently anticipating what would happen. While we were frozen, watching half amazed, half scared to death, Viju appeared to remain cool and in control, not seeming a tiny bit impressed, and once the flame had extinguished, just said "**flambé**!". Which made us burst out laughing, in big relief, to see him making

jokes and not being flambé himself.



Unless you have the latest professional, at least 5 m high ventilation equipment in your kitchen, while it might indeed impress your guests, still ... I don't recommend to try this at home ! Or use just very little Cognac in the pan and more for the *digestif*...

I found an interesting anecdote on Wikipedia about the "invention" of this technique :

*"Although the practice of igniting food for show can be traced to the Moors in the 14th century, modern flambéing was discovered in Monte Carlo in 1895, when Henri Carpentier, a waiter, accidentally set fire to a pan of crêpes he was preparing for the future Edward VII of the United Kingdom. He discovered that burning the sauce affected its flavor in a way that he could not have anticipated."*

And then there is the last sentence of the Wikipedia article : *"For safety reasons, it is recommended that alcohol never be added to a pan on a burner"*. That's obviously for amateur home cooks only...

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