

PERSONAL JOURNAL.



Turning Heads With Tops
For Less Than \$30

D2

The high cost of discount hotel rates —
THE MIDDLE SEAT D3

Lance Armstrong's busy year without the
Tour de France — SPORTS D7

© Copyright 2011 Dow Jones & Company. All Rights Reserved.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Thursday, June 30, 2011 D1

Chefs Solve a Modern Kitchen Crisis: Recipe Clutter

BY ALINA DIZIK

Home cooks have more places than ever to go to find recipes—which in some kitchens has led to a bit of a problem.

Whether it's a pile of food-splotched printouts or a cluttered digital desktop, many cooking enthusiasts are swimming in recipes, with no good system for storing them. Is there a better way to collect and store recipes so they can be easily retrieved later on?

Even the pros struggle. Most chefs rely on some combination of digital readers, apps and email—so much the better if the device fits in the back pocket of chef's pants—plus traditional paper notebooks or index cards. They often include a photograph with each recipe. And many say they are still waiting for a single elegant storage solution.

After his \$1,200 laptop got "totally fried" in a spill of red wine jus, Joseph Gillard, executive chef at the Napa Valley Grille in Los Angeles, knew he needed a cheaper yet more-reliable way to access his 250 recipes in the kitchen.

He began using his Kindle, first purchasing e-versions of dozens of cookbooks from his personal collection so he could pull up recipes quickly when needed—for example, when training employees. "I'm using it as a mobile reference library," says Mr. Gillard. As for recipes he writes himself, he emails them to himself so he can get to them on the Kindle, too. Now, he's debating upgrading to an iPad, which he plans to perch on a kitchen stand and connect to a fast Internet connection.

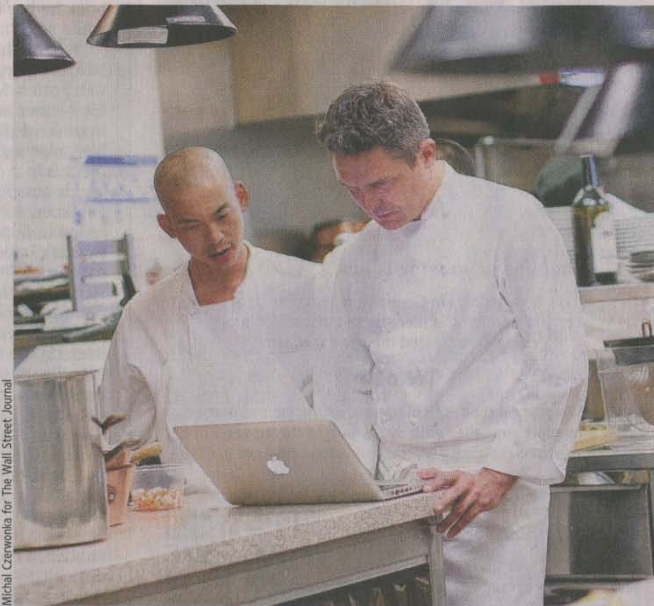
When chefs are experimenting, designing a new dish or updating a traditional recipe, most still prefer to take notes on paper. When Patricio Sandoval, chef and founder of Mercado restaurants in New York, Miami and Chicago, completes a new recipe, he tests it in the kitchen, then types it up in digital form to share with colleagues at work. He says the act of writing down a recipe, then reading over the scribbles, helps him recall the brainstorming process. "Writing is more natural," says Mr. Sandoval who keeps a collection of handwritten menus and a spiral notebook filled with old recipes for creative

taco and ceviche combinations.

Keeping clear recipe records is more important than ever. "The cooking that's emerging is a lot more formula driven," says Brad Barnes, senior director of culinary education at the Culinary Institute of America, in Hyde Park, N.Y. Processes used in Modernist cuisine, such as sous vide cooking or spherification, often call for exact measurements and temperatures, making it impossible to recreate recipes on the fly, he says.

Students at the institute are encouraged to take notes by hand and file the recipe digitally. It's important for students learning a dish with many precise steps to be able to add annotations, Mr. Barnes says. In 2007, he co-founded GigaChef.com, a free website where chefs can share and organize recipes. Users, many but not all of them professionals, can access recipes with space to type notes at the end, plus an ingredient library and food-industry job descriptions.

Photographs are essential to Tony Esnault, executive chef at Patina restaurant inside the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. The chef



Michal Czerwonka for The Wall Street Journal

Please turn to the next page

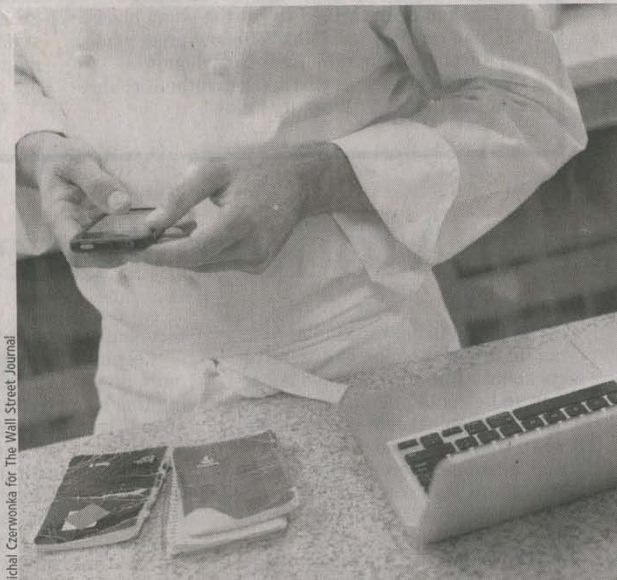
Patina executive chef Tony Esnault (right) and his sous chef, Jeffrey Yuguchi, at work.

How Chefs Solve Recipe Overload Crisis

Continued from the prior page snaps pictures of dishes with his iPhone, then pastes the images alongside recipes in individual documents stored on his laptop. "It's easier [to recreate] because you can see what you eat," Mr. Esnault says—and especially helpful in a complicated presentation like chilled lobster with fresh almond gazpacho. He keeps certain recipes, such as those for basic vinaigrettes, in a notebook he began 20 years ago while studying in France.

What's the secret ingredient in a good organization system? Categories. Mr. Esnault sorts his recipes according to main ingredient (fish, meat, vegetable), placing each recipe document into a color-coded folder on his computer desktop. Fiona Faulkner, a cookbook author based in Somerset, England, says it's important that the categories fit your lifestyle. Her folders have titles like Comfort Food Lunches, Impress 'em Weekend Dishes and Back on the Wagon (for diet-friendly options). "It makes more sense to me that way," she says.

For cooks researching or writing their own recipes, sites like Delicious or Evernote offer tools for recording, storing and retrieving on many different devices. Those who rely on published recipes may find it difficult to keep track of sources. Targeted apps like Recipe Box make it easier to transfer recipes on the Web from one site to another. Using



Michal Czerwonka for The Wall Street Journal

Patina's executive chef, Tony Esnault, uses his iPhone to create digital recipe files but won't give up his old notebooks.

another app, BigOven, users can snap a photo of a print recipe, and the app converts it to text that the user can edit.

Many chefs don't like to rely on recipes published online. Virginia Willis, an Atlanta cookbook author and professional recipe tester, advises home cooks to avoid random recipe searches and stick with recipes that seem to have undergone stringent testing, such as those on sites like Epicurious, Martha Stewart and Cooks Illustrated. Before adding a recipe to her own digital library, she searches the website

and the comments section for information about testing. Never save a recipe simply because it sounds good, she says.

When Christy Vega Fowler began running Casa Vega, her family's restaurant in Sherman Oaks, Calif., she worried about losing 50-year-old recipes like a 16-ingredient mole sauce that simmers for six hours. She made a quick decision. She bought a fireproof file box and locked up the recipes. They're hard to get to, but the recipes are safe for now, she says.

Some chefs refuse to give up old-school methods. For

The Cloud, for Cooks

Find tools for storing recipes and planning meals on websites including:

■ **KitchenMonki.com** Free site where recipes are public or private; no automatic transfer between sites; users create grocery lists.

■ **BigOven.com** Recipes, user reviews, nutritional values; app puts print recipes into digital form for storage. Free basic membership; \$16 a year to post private recipes.

■ **BakeSpace.com** Social network for foodies. Swap recipes, customize files.

■ **Saymmm.com** Organize recipes by ingredient, course and cuisine; meal-planning calendar. Basic membership is free; \$3 a month to get a calorie counter and price-tracking for grocery lists.

many chefs these involve a pocket-size notebook made by Moleskine, with plastic-coated covers and an elastic bookmark. Robb White, the dean at the Culinary Institute of Michigan, has filled more than 300 with recipes, each one with a sketch of the dish or a plating idea on the back. Notebooks are designated by entrée or appetizer type, and he stores them by year. His system helps him spot and keep track of food trends, he says. "I get made fun of a lot—all my chef buddies think I'm nuts," Mr. White says.