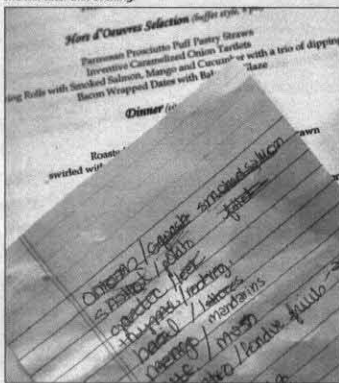




NOON Call Bergold shops at the supermarket for a Hinsdale party she will cater that evening.



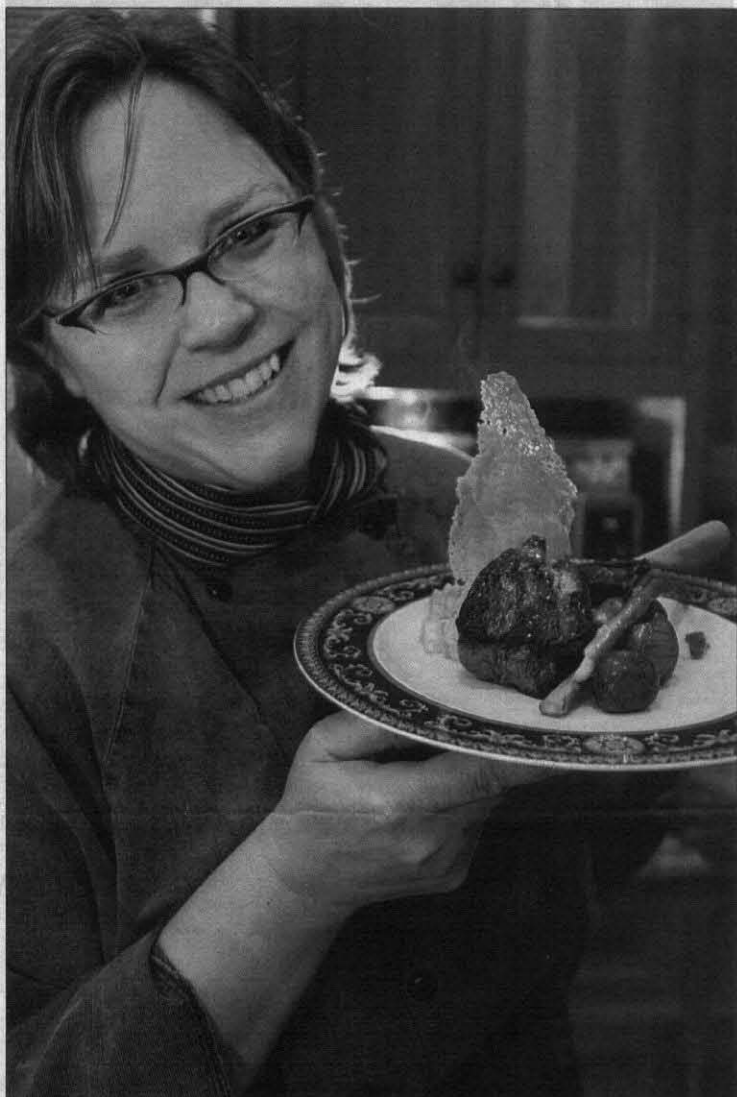
1 p.m. Bergold's shopping list is organized by sections of the store.



4:13 p.m. Bergold chops leeks: One good knife will get you everywhere in the kitchen, she says.

'Plan a menu and keep it simple.
A few good-tasting and -looking dishes are better than a huge spread of stuff that is so-so.'

— Call Bergold, personal chef



7:50 p.m. The chef arranges filet steaks with an Asiago cheese fan.

Personal touch

A chef brings her passion for cooking into other people's kitchens

By **Kenn Ruby** | Special to the Tribune
Tribune photos by **Bob Fila**

The first thing Call Bergold does when she goes into anyone's house is turn on the oven.

As a personal chef with her own company, ChefCall, Bergold doesn't have time to wait for ovens to heat.

We discovered this after she invited us along one recent winter day when she was catering a party in Hinsdale. Following Bergold for a day sounded like a great idea. Eight guests, five courses, lots of food.

Piece of cake?

Well, you be the judge.

Noon We go shopping at Wild Oats Market in Hinsdale. A personal chef has to know the ins and outs of a grocery store. Bergold has the evening's menu and a shopping list that's organized by sections of the store. When she sees something that catches her eye, like the beautiful clementines or baby red-skin bananas, she strays from the list. And she grabs two baguettes of her favorite bread (from Chicago's Labriola Baking Co.) and cheerfully exclaims, "I do not believe in the low-carb diet craze!"

During the shopping expedition, Bergold traces the route that led to her culinary career. (Catering is just one of her skills. She also teaches in-home cooking classes, and cooks

a week's worth of meals for families who may not have the time, or desire, to cook for themselves.)

After graduating from Bradley University in Peoria with a degree in Journalism, she worked for Today's Chicago Woman in the early 1980s. She wasn't a big fan of its restaurant reviews and told the editor she could do better. To Bergold's surprise, the editor agreed.

1 p.m. We arrive at the house, where she is welcomed by Elizabeth and John, who won her services at a charity auction last year and liked her so much they hired her again. Although Bergold's least favorite part of the job is "schlepping all the groceries," she loves laying everything out in the kitchen and making stations for each course. For anyone giving a party, she says, "Plan a menu and keep it simple. A few good-tasting and -looking dishes are better than a huge spread of stuff that is so-so." Soon the butter is sizzling.

2:30 p.m. Bergold opens the sushi she purchased at the market for her lunch. She doesn't touch it until 3:45.

In 1992, Bergold switched jobs to work as an entertainment director for the East Bank health club. She didn't do much with food but found herself spending a lot of time with the chefs.

"I was a kitchen junkie," she recalls. Her boss inspired her to go to night school at the Cooking

PLEASE SEE CHEF ON CENTERSPAGE

INSIDE GOOD EATING

UNCORKED

A genial grape

Sure, merlot is easy to drink. But it also rises to greatness in some wines.

Bill Daley reports. **PAGE 2**

CHEAP EATS

A step above

French toast and panini go past coffee-shop fare at Taylor Street locale. **PAGE 3**

BOOKSHELF

'The Good Cook'

Anne Willan's practical, authoritative voice leads us to kitchen success. **PAGE 3**

Personal touch

CHEF:

CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, where she earned a degree in restaurant management.

3:06 p.m. She pulls out her spice bin, a giant container with every seasoning under the sun. She opens the garam masala, a traditional Northern Indian blend of dry-roasted spices, which will go into tonight's soup. "I use this spice blend a lot because you get a very complex flavor dynamic," she says.

3:20 p.m. Bergold gets out the dough for the caramelized onion tartlets she'll serve as appetizers. "We just passed the half-pound-of-butter marker!"

3:23 p.m. She adds the finishing seasoning to a vegetable mash of parsnips, carrots and Yukon Gold potatoes.

3:35 p.m. Bergold pours an entire bottle of port into a pot for poaching pears, which will be part of a salad of butter and bibb lettuce. "Nothing says lovin' like a good bottle of wine!"

3:50 p.m. She breaks out the basil, and its aroma drifts across the room. She puts the leaves in a blender with olive oil to make a drizzle for the soup.

A friend of a friend got Bergold her first cooking job at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Club. As a rookie, she was given the most tedious job: Her hands were orange from all of the carrots she peeled and her co-workers used to lock her in the cooler for fun. Her parents didn't understand how she could squander an education to peel carrots, but she kept at it, moving from station to station in the kitchen. "And I loved them all," she says.

4:13 p.m. She zaps pistachios and dried cranberries in a blender. They will coat goat cheese medallions for the salad. She talks about knives, about how the proper use of a knife is an essential skill. "One good knife and good knife skills will get you everywhere in the kitchen."

4:20 p.m. The server, Margaret Wnek, arrives. Bergold, who by this time knows the kitchen as if it is her own, can easily tell Wnek where to find anything she needs.

4:36 p.m. Bergold needs to crack some eggs, and with no clean dishes in sight, finds a Scooby Doo bowl in the cupboard "because it's getting to be that time." She sings the "Scooby Doo" theme song.

In 1996, Bergold was offered a position as executive chef at Cab's Wine Bar Bistro in Glen Ellyn.

"I was freaked out," she says, "but it was still a great experience."

After a year, the commute from her Chicago home got to her, and she landed an even better gig: owning and running a restaurant, Cafe V, in the National Vietnam Veterans' Museum, over a small counter restaurant that "made a good sandwich." The museum, a pet project of Mayor Richard M. Daley, gave Bergold the opportunity to cook for Hillary Clinton and Al Gore—while the Secret Service watched over her shoulder. ("They had to taste everything first.")

When Cafe V closed in 1999, Bergold took a year off, cooking professionally to recover. "It was like someone in my family died," she recalls.

4:37 p.m. Less than 90 minutes before the appetizers will be served, Bergold starts arranging spring rolls, baking puff pastry straws and wrapping dates with slices of bacon.

4:57 p.m. She fills the "very delicate pastry crust" for the onion tartlets.

5:20 p.m. There's a buzz in the kitchen. It's obvious that the intensity and energy have picked up. Bergold says it's time to "kick it into high gear."

5:29 p.m. The appetizers will be served buffet-style, and Bergold's presentation of the appetizer table is unique. A combination of flowers, asparagus, apples, rosemary and votive candles is so beauti-



6:37 p.m. Bergold manages many things at once, a skill she calls "dancing the stove tango."

ful that you almost don't notice the food next to it. "I'm a frustrated artist," she says.

5:45 p.m. The first appetizers are on the table. An onion tartlet is furtively consumed; it's fantastic.

5:55 p.m. The bacon-wrapped dates, which prove to be among the most popular items of the night, come out of the oven. "These are the naughtiest things," Bergold says. "I looovee them."

One day Bergold saw an ad for The Chopping Block. At the time, cooking schools for home chefs were a small industry, but it immediately appealed to her. She taught classes at the Webster Avenue location for three years. One day a woman came in and asked if she knew anyone who could cook dinners at her home on Friday nights. Little did Bergold know that ChefCall Inc. would be born out of that meeting.

6 p.m. The guests don't touch the appetizers for nearly 20 minutes, but Bergold doesn't break a sweat. When the guests finally dig in, the comments are all positive. The host keeps coming back for the spring rolls filled with smoked salmon, mango and cucumber.

6:28 p.m. Bergold quickly sears beef filets in several skillets for steak au poivre. She'll finish them later in the oven, and deglare the skillets with red wine for a classic sauce.

6:37 p.m. Bergold manages several items at once, a process she calls "dancing the stove tango." It's a real art form. She starts sautéing wild mushrooms to go with the steaks and arranges the intricate salads.

7 p.m. The guests sit down at the table. The "soup duet" comes first. Bergold artfully spoons butternut squash soup and potato leek soup side by side into each bowl. A swirl of basil oil and a grilled prawn garnish each bowl. One guest remarks that the soup is "almost too pretty to eat."

7:31 p.m. The guests start on the salad. Bergold remarks, "There are some good eaters out there."

7:35 p.m. The intermezzo appears: an orange sorbet served in hollowed-out Clementines with their leaves still attached.

In 2003, Bergold created ChefCall, Inc. and designed her own Web site, chefcall.com. She began working for families, preparing lunches, dinners and even snacks for the kids, and she caters parties and events.



3:06 p.m. Bergold pulls out her spice bin crowded with every seasoning under the sun.



5:20 p.m. A buzz in the kitchen betrays an increase in intensity and energy as Bergold kicks it into high gear.



5:45 p.m. Appetizer display of a "frustrated artist."

7:50 p.m. The steaks, with an Asiago cheese fan on each, reach the table. The cheese fans look like snowflakes.

8:15 p.m. Dessert is chocolate fondue made from Callebaut chocolate chips. With the fondue, Bergold serves pieces of pineapple, a baby red banana, berries and cherries and finishes with a coconut macaroon.

8:23 p.m. Bergold spots a chair in the kitchen and sits down for the first time all day.

8:42 p.m. She announces to no one in particular: "Let the cleanup begin!"

9:20 p.m. The guests start to leave, and she is still cleaning. "We stay until the last dish is cleaned," she says. "I want to leave a kitchen cleaner than I found it."

10:14 p.m. Elizabeth raves about the night: "I like cooking, but this is like bringing a restaurant home!"

10:23 p.m. The family dog is licking up the crumbs in the kitchen. Another positive review.

10:26 p.m. Although it has been a long day, Bergold is far from tired. It will be well after midnight before she gets to sleep. Bergold says, "I get jazzed up on working all day."

Bergold now is working on opening another restaurant, but still continues her personal chef business, where her enthusiasm always is on display.

"I love sharing my love of food," she says. It shows.

Butternut squash soup

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

Yield: 8 servings

■ Chef Call Bergold often garnishes this soup with a drizzle of basil leaves blended with olive oil. Look for garam masala in spice stores or Indian markets. Some supermarkets also carry it.

1 medium butternut squash, halved lengthwise, seeds removed

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

3 yellow onions, chopped

3 cans (14½ ounces each) chicken broth

1 tablespoon and 1½ teaspoons toasted garam masala or curry powder, see note

1 tablespoon honey

¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1 cup whipping cream or milk

3 tablespoons dry sherry

¼ teaspoon coarse salt

Freshly ground pepper

1. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Place squash flesh side down on greased baking sheet. Bake until knife-tender, about 40-45 minutes. Scoop out the flesh; set aside.

2. Meanwhile, melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat; cook onions until very soft, but not brown, about 10 minutes.

3. Puree onions and squash in a food processor in batches; transfer to a large saucepan. Whisk in broth, garam masala, honey and nutmeg. Heat to a simmer over medium heat. Cook, stirring often, 10 minutes. Stir in the cream, sherry, salt and pepper. Serve hot.

Note: Toast garam masala in a dry skillet over high heat until slightly brown and fragrant, about 1 minute.

Nutrition information per serving:

238 calories, 59% of calories from fat, 16 g fat, 10 g saturated fat, 52 mg cholesterol,

20 g carbohydrates, 5 g protein, 581 mg sodium, 4 g fiber

Cornmeal crusted chicken with corn salsa

Preparation time: 45 minutes

Cooking time: 24 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

■ Personal chef Call Bergold often makes this crunchy chicken dish for clients with children.

For salsa:

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Zest and juice of 1 lime

1 clove garlic, minced, mashed to a paste with a pinch of coarse salt

2 cups fresh or frozen corn

¼ cup chopped cilantro

1 mango, peeled, diced

1 cup pickled beets, drained, diced

2 green onions, finely chopped

½ teaspoon coarse salt

Freshly ground pepper

For chicken:

¼ cup each: yellow cornmeal, fine breadcrumbs (such as Japanese panko)

½ teaspoon each: smoked Spanish or spicy Hungarian paprika, salt

Freshly ground pepper

¼ cup flour

2 eggs, beaten

4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, pounded to ½-inch thickness

½ cup grapeseed or canola oil

1. For salsa, whisk together olive oil, lime juice, zest and garlic in a mixing bowl. Add corn, cilantro, mango, beets, green onions, salt and pepper; toss. Set aside.

2. Combine cornmeal, panko and paprika, salt and pepper to taste in a plastic bag; place flour on a plate. Place eggs in a shallow pan or bowl. Coat chicken breasts with flour; coat with egg. Place in bag with cornmeal mixture; shake to coat.

3. Meanwhile, heat oven to 250 degrees. Heat oil in skillet over medium-high heat; add chicken, 2 pieces at a time. Fry, turning once; until golden and cooked through, about 6 minutes per side. Drain on brown paper bags; keep warm in oven. Arrange over salsa on plates.

Nutrition information per serving:

636 calories, 43% of calories from fat, 31 g fat, 4.5 g saturated fat, 168 mg cholesterol,

60 g carbohydrates, 34 g protein, 843 mg sodium, 7 g fiber

Salad of pan-seared sugared pears and prosciutto

Preparation time: 35 minutes

Cooking time: 6 minutes

Yield: 6 servings

■ Chef Call Bergold likes to use pears in winter salads. This version teams the pears with balsamic vinegar cooked down to a syrup, but you can finish the salad with a regular balsamic dressing, if you like.

3 cups balsamic vinegar

6 ripe pears, such as Bosc

1 lemon, halved

½ teaspoon sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

¼ cup sugar

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

½ pound prosciutto, cut into 24 slices

4 cups arugula

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 ounces Gorgonzola cheese

1. Heat balsamic vinegar to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium heat; reduce heat to a simmer. Cook until the liquid reduces by three-fourths to a syrupy consistency, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat; set aside to cool.

2. Peel, quarter and core pears; halve each quarter. Place in mixing bowl; squeeze lemon halves over pieces to prevent discoloration. Season pears with ½ teaspoon of the salt and pepper to taste. Add the sugar; toss well to coat each piece.

3. Heat the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat; add the pears, sliced side down. Cook until the pears start to caramelize, about 4 minutes; turn. Cook to caramelize the other side, about 2 minutes; set aside. Toss the arugula with olive oil and remaining ½ teaspoon of the salt and pepper to taste.

4. Place a small mound of arugula in the center of each plate. Place 2 pear slices on each slice of prosciutto; roll prosciutto around the pears. Place 3 prosciutto and pear bundles on each mound of arugula; crumble the cheese over the pears. Drizzle each plate with some of the balsamic syrup.

Nutrition information per serving:

388 calories, 45% of calories from fat, 20 g fat, 8 g saturated fat, 57 mg cholesterol, 43

g carbohydrates, 13 g protein, 1,057 mg sodium, 4 g fiber

Source box

Chicago has many personal chefs like Call Bergold. Find them through the United States Personal Chefs Association at 800-995-2138 (uspca.com) or the American Personal Chef Association at 800-644-8389 (personalchef.com).

■ To reach Bergold, call ChefCall, Inc. 312-656-1363, or go to chefcall.com.