

Gourmet Cooking for a Non-Gourmet Cook



★★★★★ 2 RATINGS //

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Ever wanted to learn to cook like a gourmet? Jan Ross enrolled in a French-style cooking school and discovered that you don't have to be a master chef to make a mean French meal.



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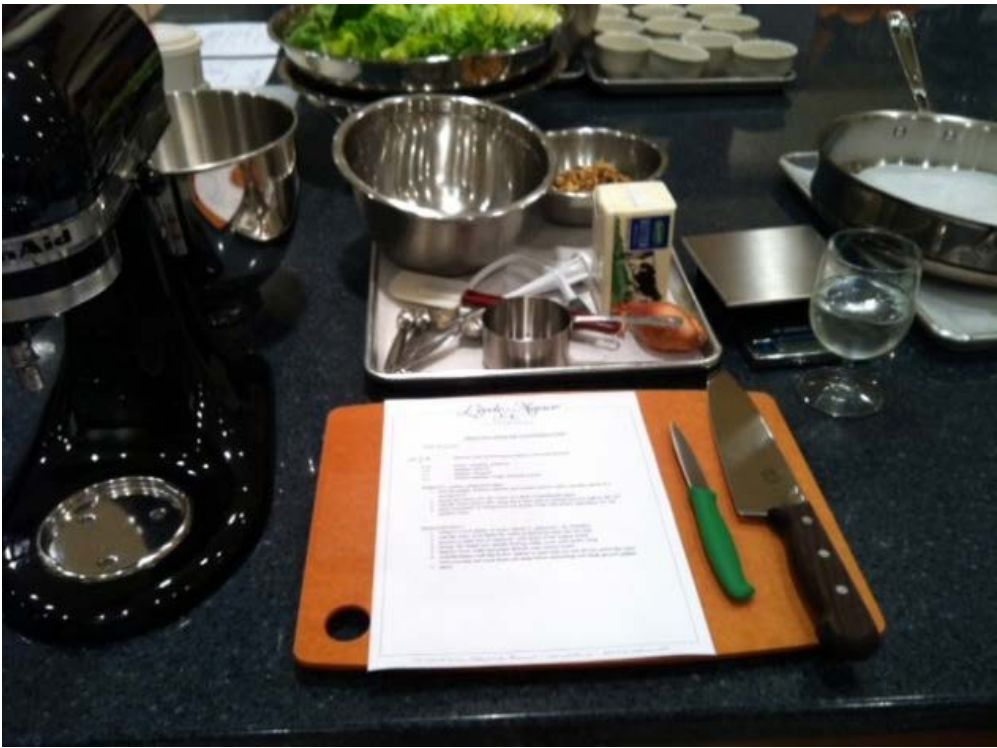
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I went to a gourmet cooking class recently.

This statement would seem more hilarious if you knew me.

My grandmother hated cooking. My mother hated cooking. I won't say that I hate cooking, but I will tell you that I just recently figured out the correct way to make both jello and iced tea. Our daughter is a gourmet cook and we often wonder how she came by the culinary gene. Our assumption is that her paternal grandmother was an excellent cook and she must have inherited that elusive, cupcake-shaped piece of culinary DNA from her. She inevitably knows what spice to use, how to make perfect sauces and salad dressings, and her baked goods are to die for. I, on the other hand, had my husband beg me to please, in the name of all that is holy, stop making Hamburger Helper every week.



So when I walked into the professional kitchen of **L'Ecole de la Maison** cooking school at the **Osthoff Resort** in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, I was a little intimidated. I was presented with a pristine white apron and welcomed by the two assistants to Chef Scott Baker, who would make a grand entrance later, and noticed that each of the work areas, carefully appointed with cutting boards, knives and, quite frankly, some other kitchen items that I had never seen before, each had a different recipe printed and placed on the counter. Apparently, we would not be preparing everything together (although we did end up working together quite a bit) and would be solely responsible for our recipes.

So I did the only sane thing. I walked around and looked at every single recipe. Thank heavens I was early, because some of the recipes included items such as *Coquilles St. Jacques au Gratin* and *Classic French Onion au Gratin*. I was all about the au gratin—hey, I can grate cheese—but the other items were a little scary. Luckily, I managed to snag *Haricots Verts with Walnut Butter* because I remembered enough high school French to know that haricots verts were simply green beans, and how hard could it be to prepare green beans? I was thrilled.

The rest of the members of the class sauntered in and we began slicing, dicing, chopping and various other culinary jobs for which I had to pretend at least some tiny amount of knowledge. Luckily, *Haricots Verts with Walnut Butter* ended up being one of the last things we had to prepare, so I managed to look pretty busy wandering around and watching what everyone else was doing.

I actually felt pretty confident peeling potatoes or mixing up bread dough, but I knew I was in trouble when the woman at the station beside mine peeled an onion in about five seconds by somehow putting her thumb on the sharp knife and just whipping the peeling off. Then she turned the knife and rolled it in some effortless motion that chopped the onion into microscopic and perfect pieces in about 10 seconds. Why can I not chop an onion like this?



At one point, I was dicing up some parsley for the walnut butter and must have been doing a pretty pitiful job, because the chef came over and showed me how to chop. In reality, this didn't bother me too much because I had finally sized up the class and realized I was not the only incompetent buffoon. There were people in the class like the onion lady who kept amazing me with her prowess and who managed to

communicate with the chef without sounding like a clueless moron but there were also others just like me who were equally butter-fingered.

Actually, I was quite literally butter-fingered by now; who knew that you could add spices and diced up walnuts to butter, whip it up, and have a spread for your haricots verts that was absolutely delicious? I sure didn't. I also didn't know that you could take that ball of butter, put it into some parchment paper, roll it into a smooth and pretty roll, refrigerate it and it would slice into cunning little slices.



I even managed to help with some of the other recipes, like the *Crepes Suzettes* with raspberries. If you have made pancakes, you can make crepes. It's really not that hard. In fact, the main thing I learned at this cooking class is that gourmet cooking is not as hard as it seems. We took an incredible array of raw ingredients and whipped them together into one of the best French meals I have ever eaten.

Every single item on the menu was absolutely delicious and perfect in every way. Although I have to say, the *Haricots Verts* with Walnut Butter? Pretty darn awesome.

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JAN ROSS



After a lifetime of travel, Jan Ross can pack a bag and hit the road with very little notice, although she will always have a little black dress and some snazzy shoes in there. She loves to travel with her husband of more than 35 years as he is a great photographer and she is often way too busy having fun to think about taking pictures. Active travel or relaxing, she is up for it all!