

Easy recipes chefs cook for themselves

What do these chefs cook at home? Stuff any of us can pull off

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By JOYCE SÁENZ HARRIS / The Dallas Morning News

jharris@dallasnews.com

Even chefs need to cut themselves a break once in a while.

Imagine: It's your one precious day at home, away from the restaurant kitchen. You don't have to wear the toque, but you still have to cook. Because, after all, the kids need food.

Or friends come by for drinks and a nosh. Or your mother is under the weather and needs coddling and a lunch tray in bed. Or your significant other is very, very hungry and you, after all, are the cook in this house.

You have to come up with something on the fly, and you don't have the time or energy to make it fancy. You need to be able to dip into the pantry and the fridge and put a decent dish together in no-muss, no-fuss fashion.

You need a respectable form of convenience food.

What a chef considers to be convenience food probably would not include preschooler faves such as instant mac 'n' cheese, SpaghettiOs or frozen, breaded chicken nuggets.

So what does a chef stock for convenience?

The answers may surprise you. Here, three of the area's top chefs share secrets for making fallback meals in a hurry.

DAVID UYGUR, Lola the Restaurant



David Uygur's spaghetti with bread crumbs is flavored with anchovies.

As executive chef at Lola the Restaurant, David Uygur (pronounced U-gur) works with ingredients such as smoked Scottish salmon, foie gras, mussels, lamb and duck, combines them with local produce and cheeses, and creates dishes for discriminating palates.

At home, his wife, Jennifer, has a discriminating palate, too. Her taste buds discriminated against anchovies for years while her husband happened to love them, at least the high-quality kind. He even puts Spanish anchovies into some of his dishes at Lola.

David likes the little fishies so much that he buys Talatta salt-packed Sicilian anchovies in 1-kilogram cans at Jimmy's Food Store. (Co-owner Paul DiCarlo says these are

“a big holiday item” for making pasta con sardi around Christmas or for the Feast of St. Joseph, which falls on March 19, during Lent.)

Long story short: David finally got Jennifer over anchovy hatred by proving to her that not all anchovies are the cheap, mealy kind served on mass-market pizzas.

“If you spend a little more money, my experience tells me that they’re going to be a lot better,” he says.

David’s recipe for spaghetti with bread crumbs uses Talatta anchovies as well as kitchen staples such as garlic, lemon zest and, of course, olive oil, which he calls “the ultimate pantry item, up there with salt and sugar.” He always keeps a box of dry spaghetti around, usually De Cecco or another brand of similar quality.

Even for an anchovy lover, it takes a while to use a whole kilogram of fish. David says that after he opens the can, he covers the remaining anchovies with kosher salt, then keeps the can tightly sealed in a zipper-top bag in the back of the refrigerator. Stored this way, he says, the anchovies can be kept for up to six months.

A prep hint from the chef: David prefers to clean anchovies lightly, letting them break apart under running water before cooking, rather than soaking them in an attempt to remove the packing salt.

David adds: “This dish is really more than the sum of its parts, but it is very important to note that when cooking simple food, the quality of each individual ingredient is key to a fine outcome. The anchovies, olive oil and dry pasta should be the best you can find, and the parsley and garlic should be fresh.”

Lola the Restaurant, 2917 Fairmount at Cedar Springs, in the Uptown neighborhood; 214-855-0700; www.lola4dinner.com.

BRIAN OLENJACK, Olenjack’s Grille



Brian Olenjack enhances shrimp pasta with a bottled salad dressing.

you can do so much with it.” He also likes to use bottled teriyaki sauces as Asian-flavored marinades.

To save time on this recipe, Brian uses raw shrimp that have been peeled. But he says a home cook could use frozen, peeled shrimp for convenience.

Brian uses a mixture of fresh vegetables: zucchini, yellow squash, carrot and cabbage. But, in a pinch, he says, you could substitute a mix of frozen vegetables such those by Green Giant.

At his Arlington restaurant, Olenjack’s Grille, executive chef and owner Brian Olenjack uses fresh local ingredients and traditional French cooking techniques. One dish on his menu is a shrimp pasta with roasted garlic, jalapeños and tomatoes.

At home, Brian also likes to make shrimp pasta, but he simplifies the process with a few shortcuts. He says home cooks can make his shrimp and vegetable pasta with even more shortcuts, if they like.

To give the shrimp an Asian-American flavor, Brian uses a ginger-mandarin blend by Briannas, a salad dressing line from the Del Sol Food Co. in Brenham.

For other dishes, he sometimes uses dressings such as Newman’s Own Balsamic Vinaigrette “because

Finally, he uses dry pasta, usually penne or capellini. He isn't particular about the brand, as long as it's a good product.

"With this stuff, I can make a meal for five or six people in 30 minutes," Brian says.

"At home, I'm cooking for my wife and three boys," who are ages 4 ½, 3 and 1. "So convenience is one of the best things in life."

Olenjack's Grille, 770 Road to Six Flags E., in Arlington's Lincoln Square shopping center; 817-226-2600; [www.olenjacksgrille.com](http://www olenjacksgrille.com)

JOHN COLEMAN, The Ritz-Carlton, Dallas



John Coleman makes quesadillas with cheese and vegetables and dips them in barbecue sauce.

As executive hotel chef at the new Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, John Coleman basically is in charge of feeding every Ritz guest or visitor who isn't eating next door in Dean Fearing's new restaurant.

That's a bunch of breakfasts, room-service meals and special-occasion dinners, all of which must be delivered with the Ritz's signature elegance and opulence. Those responsibilities keep him very busy, with long hours spent at the hotel to make sure expectations are met.

When he's at home in North Dallas with wife, Kat, and their three daughters (ages 7, 2 and 1), family meals are a different story.

"Honestly," John says, "we live on quesadillas. I'll look in the refrigerator and see what's left over, and I'm the Quesadilla King.

"A little barbecue sauce, a little ranch, and you've got dinner."

It's not quite that easy, of course, when your girls maintain a stern policy of "No green stuff, just cheese!" in their quesadillas.

Fortunately, John says, "They actually love guacamole, so we do make a lot of fresh guac." His favorite no-mess method is to put the avocado halves in a zipper-top plastic bag "and mash it up in there, so there's nothing to clean up."

For his and Kat's quesadillas, John buys large flour tortillas at Central Market and uses shredded pepper Jack cheese. He'll also add bits of leftover meat, usually chicken or sausage.

The girls prefer their cheese quesadillas made from small flour tortillas, "and, for them, I'll use a Mexican-blend shredded cheese in a bag," he says.

Sauces are the key to jazzing up quesadillas. "Now that I'm here in Dallas, I've become fond of Sonny Bryan's

barbecue sauce,” John says.

He usually adds a Baja-style dressing to his ranch dressing to boost the flavor. John also loves Firehouse Subs’ Captain Sorensen’s Datil Pepper Hot Sauce, which he discovered in Florida and can buy at the chain’s Dallas-area restaurants. (Firehouse Subs has restaurants in Carrollton, Euless, Farmers Branch, Frisco, Lewisville, Little Elm, Plano and Rowlett.)

The Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, 2121 McKinney Ave.; 214-922-0200; www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Dallas.