



I probably should have written this one last summer.

That's when the walls in my 1970's closed kitchen did NOT come down. Anyone who watches HGTV (and who doesn't?) knows that an open floor plan and open kitchen are all the rage. Combining the kitchen, living and dining rooms into one large space brings families together. Starting with the post-war housing boom, open concept design picked up momentum and continues to grow.

That's not to say that there haven't been plenty of holdouts. My house near Pleasant Lake is one of them. Built in 1973, it's was a lot like my mother's closed kitchen on Trinity Court. Although wider than most, both are essentially galley kitchens with a small eating area. Well, mine was and still is. Mom's kitchen, along with the rest of house, has been torn down and replaced with a McMansion.

With the old cabinets heading to the dumpster and the walls about to go down to the studs, I received plenty of advice. Much of it entailed taking down the wall between the kitchen and the dining and living room. It was time to break down the barriers and enjoy the free flow of open concept living.

I don't think so.

I listened and smiled politely. This long and relatively narrow space, takes up about half the front of the house. It was enough of a bowling alley already. I felt no needed to extend it. Besides, call me old-fashioned, a nineteenth century holdout but I like a closed kitchen.

I discovered this personal peculiarity years ago when I rented an apartment on a rose farm. Yes, I lived on a rosary. Anyway, my apartment was a three-story corner of an old barn. It had a wonderful farmhouse kitchen. Okay, it was a little dark but the work area was roomy and there was plenty of space for a large table. Signing the lease, I imagined it would be the perfect backdrop for Thanksgiving dinner.

It was fine for small dinner parties but Thanksgiving – no thanks. Any big, complicated meal generates a lot of mess. From my seat at the table, I could see dirty dishes piled high in the sink. A clutter of pots and pans plus the turkey carcass adorned the kitchen counter. Maybe no one else noticed but I did. How could I relax and enjoy my guests with pandemonium reigning in the background? Once was enough, that was my first and only open kitchen.

Post renovation, my shiny new, red kitchen breaks down into four sections. From either side, you enter through a hallway. At one end, a pantry and a powder/laundry room flank the hall. At the other end, there is another pantry (you can't have too much storage) and a small mudroom. As long as we all like each other, the work area is big enough to accommodate two sous-chefs and me. Since everyone likes to be in the kitchen, I have a small eating area. A handful of friends can watch the cooks while they sip, nibble and enjoy lively conversation.

However, when everything is going wrong or dinner is taking longer than planned, it's really nice to know I can steer everyone (except maybe the sous-chefs) into the living room. Like Julia, there are times when I need the comfort of knowing, "You're alone in the kitchen." Even better is enjoying dinner without a pile of dirty dishes in the background.

Open or closed, I wish you happy cooking in your kitchen and bon appétit!

Fettucine with Mushrooms & Kale

I've been going a little nuts with pasta this winter. As long as you have the space, you can make this quick and easy dish with a handful of people looking on and chatting. Enjoy!

Serves 8

Olive oil

12-16 ounces thick cut bacon, chopped

1 teaspoon dried thyme

Pinch (or to taste) chili flakes and/or smoked paprika

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1 onion, cut in thin wedges

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 1/2 pounds mushrooms, trimmed and cut in bitesize pieces

1/2 cup chicken broth

1/4 cup dry white wine

2 tablespoons cognac

1/2 cup heavy cream (optional)

16-20 ounces fettucine

1 pound baby kale

1 cup (about 3 1/2 ounces) grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese plus more for serving



Put a large pot of salted water on to a boil. Cook the fettucine according to package directions less 1-2 minutes.

Meanwhile, lightly coat a large skillet with olive oil and heat over medium. Add the bacon and stirring occasionally, cook for 2-3 minutes.

Add the onion, sprinkle with thyme, chili flakes and smoked paprika, season with salt and pepper and sauté for about 2 minutes.

Add the mushrooms and sauté until lightly browned.

Add the garlic and cook 2 minutes more.

Add the chicken broth and wine and cook until reduced by half. Remove from the heat and stir in the cream and cognac.

Reserving a little of the pasta water, drain the fettucine. Return the fettucine to the pot, add the mushroom mixture and kale and toss to combine. If the pasta seems dry, add some pasta water. Cover and cook on low for 1-2 minute. Sprinkle with about 3/4 cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano and toss to combine. Cover and cook 1 more minute.

Transfer the pasta to a serving platter or individual plates, sprinkle with the remaining 1/4 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano and serve. Pass more grated parm for the cheese lovers.