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The Jimtown Store Cookbook
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Q: How do you describe your cooking style and food sensibility and how was it shaped?

A: Lusty, abundant, authentic, and "from scratch" are words that describe my cooking. Growing up in Sausalito during the 60's I happily ate avocados, artichokes, olives, crabs from the bay, and other beautiful Mediterranean ingredients available to those fortunate to live in California: My mother Caroline was an adventurous cook, and I loved to watch her prepare for dinner parties — I think I always enjoyed the styling of the table as much as the creating of the food. We watched Julia Child's "The French Chef" on TV, and often ate in ethnically diverse restaurants in San Francisco. My grandmother Luella and grandfather Henry lived in Southern California: We often visited them and were treated to freshly squeezed Valencia orange juice from their tree as well as Grammie's most perfect pies. They grew many wonderful things in their garden and cooked simply from honest ingredients. Sometimes simple was sophisticated like my grandpa Henry seasoning his cantaloupe with black pepper.

"Processed" wasn't in our collective culinary vocabulary. We also lived as a family in Caracas, Venezuela for several years and expanded our tastes to include South American flavors and ingredients. I especially loved our weekly Saturday trips to the colorful outdoor food markets. There are certain exotic smells one never forgets.

Q: Why did you decide to do a cookbook?

A: For the past 11 years our Jimtown customers have asked us for recipes. At first I was very protective, safeguarding what I thought was our equity, and my reply was always "wait for the cookbook". But then I realized that no real harm could come from sharing, in fact, giving freely is its own reward. Jimtown has always catered — we had a christening and a wake our first year — and joked that we made food for "the cradle to the grave." We also produced many rustic yet sophisticated wine country events for our neighbors in the Alexander Valley. I wanted to share our expertise in cooking in advance for parties, and our stylish ideas for combining and presenting foods. Cooking is rewarding, creative, and satisfying on so many levels, it nurtures the soul. To cook for others is a gift whether the cook is "gifted" or not. I think that because people are so busy today, the setting aside of distractions and other obligations to cook is an increasingly important act. Having a lively meal with family and friends and teaching children the pleasures of the table and conversation is deeply important. It's fun, it's life, and entertainment in the truest sense of the word. I hope The Jimtown Store Cookbook will inspire people to cook, and help them gain confidence in the kitchen.

Q: What do you think about the move we're seeing toward more natural, organic and basic foods?

A: The better and fresher the ingredients, the better and fresher tasting food can be prepared. Those of us fortunate to have a local Farmer's Market can easily prove this to be true. The organic movement is as important now as it has been for the last 30 years, and especially so in these times of biotech "tinkering." We need to support sustainable agriculture and encourage our government to support farmers practicing these techniques and make it a viable business option. Unfortunately organic produce is not always affordable or even available to many people. I see the concept of basic food as wholesome, well balanced, appealing meals prepared from honest, seasonal, non-chemically processed ingredients. Basic and simple are inherently unfussy but that doesn't have to mean without style or finesse.

Q: How does Jimtown fit in with that trend?

A: Jimtown supports and is inspired by the wealth of ingredients available to us from local farmers and purveyors. We are fortunate to live in a rich abundant area, and our food reflects this lushness. We love being able to visit and befriend the people who supply us. But we are also careful to give alternative suggestions for ingredients in our recipes when we specify one of our favorite sources that might not be available nationally. Cooking seasonally makes intuitive sense. We take our cues from the weather — salads are appealing in the summer when cooking outside on the grill instead of heating up the kitchen makes sense. At Jimtown we serve no tomato before its time. Holiday traditions call for certain favorites like Cranberry Relish and we might give an old recipe a new twist like adding a splash of grappa for depth of flavor, but we don't believe that one shouldn't buy cranberries because they aren't locally grown. There are always exceptions to the rules and each one of us has to decide what is best to cook given our circumstances.

Q: What was most enjoyable about the process of writing the *Jimtown Store Cookbook*?

A: Testing and re-testing our favorite recipes gave us a chance to perfect many of our signature Jimtown dishes. The cookbook project also gave us an opportunity to create new recipes to provide a balance in the book as a whole. Collaborating with our chef Vanessa Barrington, my mother Caroline, and my husband John on a daily basis was a pleasure not a chore. We honed our recipe writing technique under the professional guidance of our co-author Michael McLaughlin and surprised ourselves by becoming better, faster cooks. Jimtown has given me an opportunity to be part of a wonderful community and a chance to do what I love. I hope to share this experience with the readers of *The Jimtown Store Cookbook*.