



## **CALIFORNIA CUISINE: WHAT IS IT?**

Whereas there is no standard definition for California Cuisine, the history of this style of cooking goes back to the 1970's with the start of the nouvelle cuisine rage - which had roots in France. Nouvelle cuisine, popularized by French chef Paul Bocuse, and cuisine "minceur" ("slimness"), an elevated style of nouvelle cuisine established by Michel Guerard, shunned the rich and grandiose concoctions of la grande cuisine by focusing on the use of simple, fresh, local ingredients to which minimal preparation was applied. Chef Alice Waters fully embraced this philosophy of using fresh & local ingredients in her famous Berkeley, CA restaurant, *Chez Panisse* - and is thus credited with coining the term 'California Cuisine' upon its opening in 1971.

Cooking 'cali-style' is typically characterized by marinating lean meats, fish, poultry and vegetables, and it is highlighted by the use of seasonal, fresh local ingredients. It also reflects the diversity and ingenuity of the people of the state of California. If the ingredients are fresh and the dish imaginative, you're probably eating California cuisine, regardless of whether the cooking style is Chinese, Japanese, Italian, French, or Mexican.

Thus, California cuisine has no real set of recipes. All you really have to do is take your favorite dish and go with it. While California cuisine has no set rules, trends do exist. Many dishes include avocado, artichoke, citrus fruits, almonds and mushrooms (not all on one dish - but that is a possibility) because these are very common locally grown ingredients. Rice and pasta replace potatoes and corn as the prime source of starch. And due to California's long coastline, seafood is fairly common. As for meat, beef and chicken are used more frequently than lamb or pork. Sauces, if any, are simple. And cooking with vegetable oils occurs much more often than butter or lard.

### **FROM A 1984 NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE:**

Freshness is the cornerstone of the cooking style that has been dubbed California Cuisine, which, despite its faddist tendencies, is remarkably straightforward. But, as was clear from a recent two-week visit to this state, there are a number of other characteristics, among them the following:

- \* Grilling, especially with mesquite.
- \* Combining cuisines that scarcely had a nodding acquaintance before, such as Japanese and French.
- \* Replacing stock-based sauces with compound butters or no sauce at all.
- \* Using baby vegetables to garnish almost every plate.
- \* Serving fish, chicken, squab and quail rather than red meat.
- \* Elevating country food to the status usually reserved for truffles and caviar.