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Jill's way

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Jill Prescott has studied at the best classical French cooking schools, she's hosted Julia Child (three times) at her Ecole de Cuisine cooking school and she vacations in France by working at bistros and bakeries to brush up on her skills.

Not a bad life. Most people would be satisfied. But Prescott is about to add a cooking show to that list. Not only that, but she is about to become one of the few, if not the only, cooking show hosts who uses the words "swill" and "vile" on a regular basis.

Naturally, these words will not be used in association with the technique-based recipes she presents. No, viewers of "Ecole de Cuisine: Professional Cooking for the Home Chef," (debuting at noon Saturday on Channel 10) will hear these words when Prescott talks about canned and packaged foods, which she will tell you are not really foods at all. The Milwaukee Public Television show, taped at her cooking school now based in Kohler, will repeat episodes at 2 p.m. on the Tuesday following the original Saturday broadcast. A companion cookbook also is in the works. Prescott's first show, devoted to the right way that is, the French way to make a variety of stocks, opens with a short course in what a stock is not. A stock is not something you buy in a can, and a stock is certainly not something that you rehydrate from powdered form. Bouillon cubes? That, my dear, is definitely swill. According to Prescott, we are not supposed to be in possession of these. To illustrate her point about packaged goods, she reads ingredient labels in this first episode. "Salt. Water," she says. And what's this? "Monosodium glutamate," she says, sounding like a teacher who has found a student chewing gum in class. "You know why they put monosodium glutamate in? To bring up the flavor of nothing. Do you really want to have that for dinner? I don't think so." She looks at a can of soup. "Monosodium glutamate. There it is again. Bring up the flavor of that chicken water." And bouillon cubes, she says, are even worse. "It is not food," she says. "This is what you don't want to eat. This is swill." So goes the first episode of the first cooking show that Milwaukee Public Television has produced in about a dozen years. Cooking shows are popular on public television, but Milwaukee's Channels 10/36 doesn't get many local proposals for them. "They're very popular and they're the kind of thing that stations like," said Luise Fuzy, director of program production at Milwaukee Public Television. MPT gets show proposals all the time, but the key to getting them on the air is having funding attached, said Dave Foran, director of public relations and marketing for Milwaukee Public Television (Channels 10/36). Prescott's show had that funding, from Viking Range Corp., maker of professional quality ovens and ranges. "We need to have some sense that these things can be self-sustaining. They must have a very solid chance of having funding attached to them," Foran said. The marketing and programming folks at Milwaukee Public Television think this show will be picked up by a healthy share of public television stations across the U.S. "Believe me, we would not be producing the series if we were not optimistic for its distribution," Fuzy said. Interest is already good, with 53 public television stations saying they'd like the show. Of those, 15 are in the top 30 public stations in terms of viewership. Another thing that made this show attractive, according to Fuzy and others at Milwaukee Public Television, was the high profile of the cook involved. "We lucked out," she said. "It's a good solid series," said Tom Dvorak, director of program operations for Milwaukee Public Television. "It isn't just run-of-the-mill local talent. People will know her. I know there are students from across the country who have taken her classes." Prescott's friend Joe Bartolotta, who runs Bartolotta's Lake Park Bistro, Bartolotta Ristorante in Wauwatosa and Nonna Bartolotta in Brookfield, believes the time is right for this kind of serious cooking show. He's happy to see his uncompromising friend get her own show. "I think there's a certain market right now that is very interested in that. It's for the serious cook who really has passion, and a palate," said Bartolotta, who has traveled to France with Prescott and Lake Park Bistro chef Mark Weber for eating vacations. "I hold Jill in very high regard," Bartolotta said. "I think she is a survivor. I think she is a very tenacious business woman. And I think that she is one who sets her goals and really goes after them. I think that her dream has been to elevate the level of cooking through her school. "She is very, very outspoken about her beliefs." For Prescott, the show was the natural next step for her school. "It gives me direct

contact with the general public," she said. The idea for the show goes back about four years, when someone at her school Prescott can't recall who exactly suggested she look into getting her own public TV show based on her cooking school. Prescott said she went to Channels 10/36 and filled out lots of forms, which were then reviewed by lots of committees. Then she got a letter saying the station was interested, and a pilot was made two years ago. "They were pleased," Prescott says of the pilot. "I was horrified." Seeing herself and hearing her voice convinced her that she needed a talent coach. "For me, it was very hard. I had great fear of the camera," she said. The station brought in director Ed Dudkowski, listed as performance consultant in the credits. "He watched the pilot and he watched me in action (at the cooking school) and he said, 'Jill, you are a natural for this. You don't feel it, but you are. Now we just have to make you do this with the camera.'" Prescott also sought the counsel of a friend who has some experience with cooking shows. In July, she rang up Julia Child and expressed her apprehensions about doing a cooking show. "I said to her, 'Aren't you afraid of saying something wrong or being criticized?' And she said, 'Jill, I don't give a damn. And neither should you. Don't act. Just be yourself. Don't try so hard that you're not doing what you do. Just do what you do.'" Julia has remained a friend since she came to my business in Mequon," Prescott said. It was Child who told Prescott during an unpleasant breakup with a business partner at the Mequon site, "Well, dearie, everybody has a partner but once." When the show airs, viewers will see a polished package. The musical score was written by Peter Buffett, the local New Age music composer who wrote some of the music for Kevin Costner's "Dances with Wolves." Emmy Award-winning executive producer Charlie White is at the helm. Among other things, White has served as director for "Dollar Signs," the weekly financial program produced by Milwaukee Public Television. The result is a first episode with a Jill Prescott who seems at ease, especially when she's bashing canned and packaged food products. Beyond taking jabs at foods that she believes are not really food, Prescott says she hopes to demystify the basic techniques of French cooking for the home cook. "I'm trying to take the confusion out of cooking," she said. "I want to show people how easy it is to cook correctly. People have had so many failures in the kitchen due to taking exceedingly bad cooking lessons. I took so many bad so-called cooking classes. They were cookware shops trying to sell gadgets. They didn't know technique, they didn't know quality of food." She believes this is one reason that serious home chefs fail. For instance, if a home cook uses cream that's 36% fat as opposed to the 40% fat cream that a recipe really requires, it won't work out very well. Part of her mission is to show people how to shop and what to look for. Using what she has learned at the Parisian cooking schools Ecole Lenotre, La Varenne and the Ritz Hotel in Paris, the 13 episodes deal with basics such as how to make stocks, sauces, creams, soups, pasta and chocolate desserts. What is learned in each show can be used as a building block for many recipes, she said. For instance, the program titled simply "Creams" shows how to make a creme anglaise, which can then be used to make a pastry cream, a base for ice cream and other uses. Once the techniques are learned, they will serve you well, Prescott said. "There are rules. There are reasons. They're all going to create success," Prescott said. The final episode will bring together guest chefs Weber from Lake Park Bistro, Osteria del Mondo chef and owner Mark Bianchini, and chef Scott Wittkopf from the American Club in Kohler. All instructors at Ecole de Cuisine will make entrees using techniques taught at the school. This rich stock has many uses as a base for soups, sauces and braising and stewing bases. Chicken Stock 5 pounds poultry spare parts (wing tips, necks, backs and bones) 1 cut-up whole chicken 2 1/2 to 3 pounds (a larger stewing chicken maybe used as well) Cold water 2 medium onions, peeled and quartered 6 carrots, peeled and cut into 4 pieces 2 leeks, cleaned and tied 3 ribs celery with leaves 2 cloves garlic, peeled 1 bouquet garni made with 4 sprigs fresh parsley, 3 sprigs fresh thyme, 12 black peppercorns and 1 Turkish bay leaf, tied between 2 leek leaves Place poultry in stockpot and cover with cold water to 3 inches above level of poultry. Bring just to a boil. Immediately lower heat to simmer. Occasionally skim surface of scum. Continue to skim any gray foam for about 30 minutes. Do not allow stock to boil. Add onions, carrots, leeks, celery, garlic and bouquet garni. Simmer, uncovered, for about 5 to 6 hours, skimming if necessary. Strain stock into another large container using a chinois or fine-mesh strainer. Cool to room temperature quickly by placing pot into a sink filled with cold water, changing water occasionally if necessary. Refrigerate overnight. Remove fat layer from surface. Store stock in 2- to 4-cup amounts in freezer. Makes about 1 1/2 gallons. Variation: A turkey stock suitable for a flavorful soup base may be made by substituting turkey bones for chicken bones. The recipe may be halved, eliminating the cut-up chicken and utilizing only the turkey carcass. This recipe calls for one of the stocks made in the first "Ecole de Cuisine" cooking show. Other vegetable cream soups can be made by substituting broccoli, spinach, corn or asparagus. The vegetables should be simmered in sauce after stock has been added. Ecole de Cuisine's Cream of Mushroom Soup 3/4 cup (11/2 sticks) unsalted butter 3/4 cup finely chopped onion

1 pound mixed mushrooms, (white, cremini, shiitake, ceps or porcini mushrooms, chopped or all white may be used), chopped
1/2 cup flour plus 1 tablespoon flour 9 cups or 21/4 quarts white stock (chicken or veal), hot 3 cups hot milk Sea salt and freshly
ground white pepper 11/2 cups whipping cream, hot 1/2 cup finely chopped mushrooms, sauteed in butter (for garnish)
Chopped chives and buttered croutons for garnish (optional) Heat butter in heavy Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion and
mushrooms. "Sweat" (soften) vegetables without letting them brown. Add flour and stir to make roux. Cook roux a few
minutes, but do not let it start to brown. Simmer until vegetables are very tender. Gradually beat in stock. Bring to boil, stirring
with whisk as it thickens. Pass soup through food mill to puree. Add hot milk. Heat soup again, but do not let it boil. Simmer
gently to correct thickness. Add cream. Cook until it reaches cream soup consistency. Season with sea salt and freshly ground
pepper. Add optional garnish or butter sauteed mushrooms. Makes 6 to 8 servings. This excellent dense chocolate cake may be
made using different liqueurs for flavors of chocolate with orange, raspberry, coffee, mint, almond, cherry, hazelnut or extracts
and with or without nuts and zests. See the variations listed. Grand Marnier Chocolate Cake with Shiny Chocolate Icing 4
ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped (Valrhona is Prescott's favorite) 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room
temperature Zest of one orange, finely chopped 1/2 cup sugar for batter 2 tablespoons sugar, for the egg whites 3 eggs,
separated and at room temperature 2 tablespoons Grand Marnier 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar Pinch of salt 1/2 cup sifted cake
flour 1/2 cup grated chocolate for garnish Shiny chocolate icing (see recipe) Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Prepare one 8-inch
cake pan by buttering sides and bottom, then placing a piece of parchment paper on the bottom and buttering parchment. It is
very important to have all baking ingredients at room temperature and the chocolate warm when mixing them into egg whites
as ingredients blend together easily when warm. Melt 4 ounces chopped chocolate in small saucepan over very low heat. Cream
room-temperature butter, orange zest and 1/2 cup sugar in mixing bowl until soft and fluffy. Beat in egg yolks and Grand
Marnier. Add warm (not hot) melted chocolate. Whip egg whites until foaming. Add cream of tartar and salt. Continue
whipping until soft peaks are formed. Add sugar and whip until stiff peaks are formed. (A copper bowl may be used to whip
whites, but cream of tartar must be eliminated.) Stir spoonful of whites into chocolate to lighten it. Beginning with another
scoop of whites, fold whites and flour alternately into chocolate mixture until just blended. Place batter evenly into prepared
pan. Bake in preheated oven about 25 minutes. Center of cake will be moist and leave damp crumbs when pierced with a
toothpick. Outside edge will be dry 2 to 3 inches from edge of pan. Remove pan from oven and allow it to cool about 30 minutes
on wire rack. Unmold onto wire cooling rack. Remove parchment paper. Bottom of cake will become top. After cake cools,
brush loose crumbs from sides. Meanwhile, prepare Shiny Chocolate Icing. Glaze cake with icing. Begin by pouring glaze on
top of cake. Spread with an icing spatula so glaze just runs down side of cake. Press grated chocolate on sides of cake while
icing is still soft. Allow icing to set in a cool room or in refrigerator. Carefully, using a wide flat turner, move cake to cake
platter. Cake may be refrigerated in an airtight container but must be served at room temperature. Serves 8 to 10. Note: The
flavor of chocolate is masked when served cold. It is very important to serve this type of cake at room temperature, not directly
out of the refrigerator. Variations: Raspberry: Replace Grand Marnier with Chambord in both cake and icing. Decorate top
rim of cake with fresh raspberries and then, using a pastry brush, glaze them with a mixture of 2 tablespoons red currant jelly
and 1 tablespoon water that have been melted together. Omit orange zest. Hazelnut or Almond: Fold in at the end 1/3 cup
chopped toasted hazelnuts or almonds and replace Grand Marnier with Frangelico (hazelnut liqueur) or Amaretto (almond
liqueur). Garnish sides of cake with additional toasted and chopped nuts. Orange zest may be left in or taken out. Coffee: Add 2
tablespoons coffee liqueur or 1 teaspoon instant espresso dissolved in 2 tablespoons water to batter and 1 tablespoon to icing.
Garnish with grated chocolate on sides of cake and with a rim of pure chocolate covered coffee beans around top rim of cake.
Omit orange zest. Plain chocolate: Add 1 teaspoon vanilla extract to cake batter. Do not add vanilla to icing. Extracts: If you
prefer the use of extracts over liqueurs, you may add almond, mint or orange extracts instead. It is important to taste the batter
for depth of taste as every extract has a different strength. This recipe can be used as a glaze for desserts or as a ganache for a
truffle. This glaze can be made in advance. Store in the refrigerator but reheat very carefully over very low heat. Buy the best
chocolate you can find. French Valrhona is Prescott's favorite. Just make sure to use bittersweet and a good brand. Also, note
that chocolate curdles if it gets too hot. The cream should be no hotter than what feels acceptable to touch. The reason for finely
chopping the chocolate first is that it melts very quickly when the cream is added to it. Shiny chocolate icing: 2/3 cup whipping
cream 7 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped 7 tablespoons clarified butter Place chopped chocolate in small saucepan.

In another saucepan, heat cream just until warm/hot, not boiling; pour over chocolate. Whisk gently together just enough to melt chocolate. (If there are chunks of chocolate that do not melt, place mixture over very low heat to melt any stubborn chunks . . . this is the reason for placing chopped chocolate into the first pan.) Add butter and whisk gently together.

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