Feast Q&A: PR exec moonlights as cooking instructor

Paula Bruce teaches the popular Good Eats classes in Sacramento. Her classes include a series that teaches men to cook called "Just for Guys."

What is your favorite tool in the kitchen?
A: I use my hands before anything. But those silicone spatulas are fabulous. Also, a knife sharpener because you should sharpen your knives every day. I use a mortar a lot, too.

What is your favorite cuisine?
A: I would have to say Italian and Basque. For my family, I cook that the most. As long as it's fresh, does not have to be a lot of ingredients and a lot of fussiness to it, that's what I like to cook.

What is your guilty pleasure?
A: A good piece of chocolate.

Among your many cooking classes is the "Just for Guys" series. Is there a difference between how men and women cook?
A: There's a huge difference between men cooks and women cooks. Men are more free-wheeling. They are so much fun in the kitchen. Women tend to really follow the directions of a recipe. People learn in different ways. Some learn by watching and some by doing. I find women are more into learning by following instructions.

What's the biggest mistake beginners make in the kitchen?
A: They don't know how to take care of their knives. They don't measure properly. They'll just dump a measuring cup into a flour bin and throw it into a bowl.

How has the local food scene changed since you've been here?
A: The food scene has totally changed! The awareness of farm-to-fork is greater. There were no farmers markets back then. The restaurants have changed. The cooking shows have changed. We used to just have a small part of a department store. Now there are whole stores where you can find all these wonderful pieces of equipment.

Wine or beer with dinner?
A: Wine, probably because I was raised that way. I enjoy a good red. I do like bourbon though.

When was the last time you cut yourself in the kitchen?
A: Last week. And you know why? I was going too fast, my hands were wet and I knew it was going to happen and it did.

What piece of kitchen equipment is on your wish list?
A: A double oven and a six-burner cook top. And an ice maker.

What is it about cooking that gives you the greatest joy?
A: It's the one connector that brings family and friends together. Nothing connects people as deeply as food does. Sitting around a table and sharing is everything. It's where kids learn who they are and where they come from.

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Her cooking classes, including a "Just for Guys" series, are held in the culinary center at East Bay Restaurant Supply (522 North 12th St., Sacramento).