

Introduction

I do not claim to be a mycologist or any type of mushroom expert—what I am is passionate about wild mushrooms, specifically morels. It doesn't hurt that I have been a food writer/journalist for more than twenty-five years, taught at a culinary school, and have been a food consultant and Editorial Director for all the books on food, culinary and nutrition for McGraw-Hill—but most of all and paramount in my life, I love to cook, experience, and create food . . . morels are way up there on my passion meter. About fifteen years ago, when interviewed on radio talking about wild mushrooms and asked about finding and picking wild shrooms, my response consisted of a mention “if you don't have a mushroom expert with you, make sure to leave some mushrooms in the fridge for the medical examiner.” While this received a great laugh, I reminded the interviewer, I wasn't kidding. Along with credible identification of these prized fungi is the knowledge that you never eat raw wild mushrooms! They must be cooked prior to consumption.

Why this passion? Always adventuresome, always not quite mainstream (in lots of ways)—my food tastes and experiences were fueled throughout my childhood—not guided by parental modeling or instruction, but by parental exposure. My Midwestern, potato chip company owner father who ate nothing but ground sirloin and a plain steak, and my New York, Mahattanite mother who had far more an adventuresome palate, but no particular interest in preparation of anything, including daily meals, knew early on my experience needed to be different. And that, most definitely was provided. They took me for meals everywhere, especially fine dining in New York and any other city we traveled to—they watched as I consumed Peanut Stuffed Lobster at the old Clam Shop in Detroit, as my father gasped in disbelief. But, the point is, they did it. They provided the canvas . . . and how grateful I am to those parents that put me first in so many ways.

As a child I always wanted the “weirdest” thing on the menu—wild boar, absolutely. Wild mushrooms, all the better. Was it always the most expensive? Not necessarily, but sometimes. Key for me, the experience. And, that hasn't changed much today. I still seek out the unusual, and always with the best result—my husband insists I always pick the best thing on the menu, sniff out the most esoteric ingredients, and call it my own (as in adoption), or find the most interesting restaurant by happenstance.

In the 1990s I met Joe Breidenstein from Walloon Lake, Michigan—a bright, tender, and generous man who was passionate about morels. He developed morel week-

end outings, simultaneously promoting Michigan, local woodsy finds, and a bevy of mushroom specialists as friends and compadres, I would go up during spring and fall and do mushroom cooking for his guests. Even when I moved to Illinois for five years, Joe continued to use my recipes for his weekends. Joe became a close and treasured friend—a special friendship that lasted until his death in 2009. I loved Joe, I loved his passion, and I loved morels.

And thus, I dedicate this book in his memory with the hope that you will become as passionate about our favorite wild mushroom—the prized morel.

Author's Note

So do we call it a philosophy of cooking? Or just what goes into my thought process and delivery of foods cooked in my professional kitchen and throughout this book . . . geared to making foods delicious and healthy by eliminating as much fat, sugar, and salt as possible, using substitutes and creative alternatives, without diminishing flavor or quality of the final products.

I am not a dietitian or nutritionist, just a passionate food writer and journalist determined to keep the foods I share within a legitimate dietary framework and make them absolutely delicious. No one should walk away feeling they have missed anything! The added bonus of these recipes, a focus on one of my personal favorites—morels.

We all understand that morels pair beautifully with butter and cream; that is a given. Talk to any forager, chef, or promoter of wild mushrooms (especially morels). And, I couldn't agree more . . . if it is done in moderation for most people, it works in helping to keep a healthy diet. But for people like my husband who is a survivor of a heart attack, open heart surgery, diabetes, and cancer, we are talking making foods that are healthy and delicious and making it a life choice.

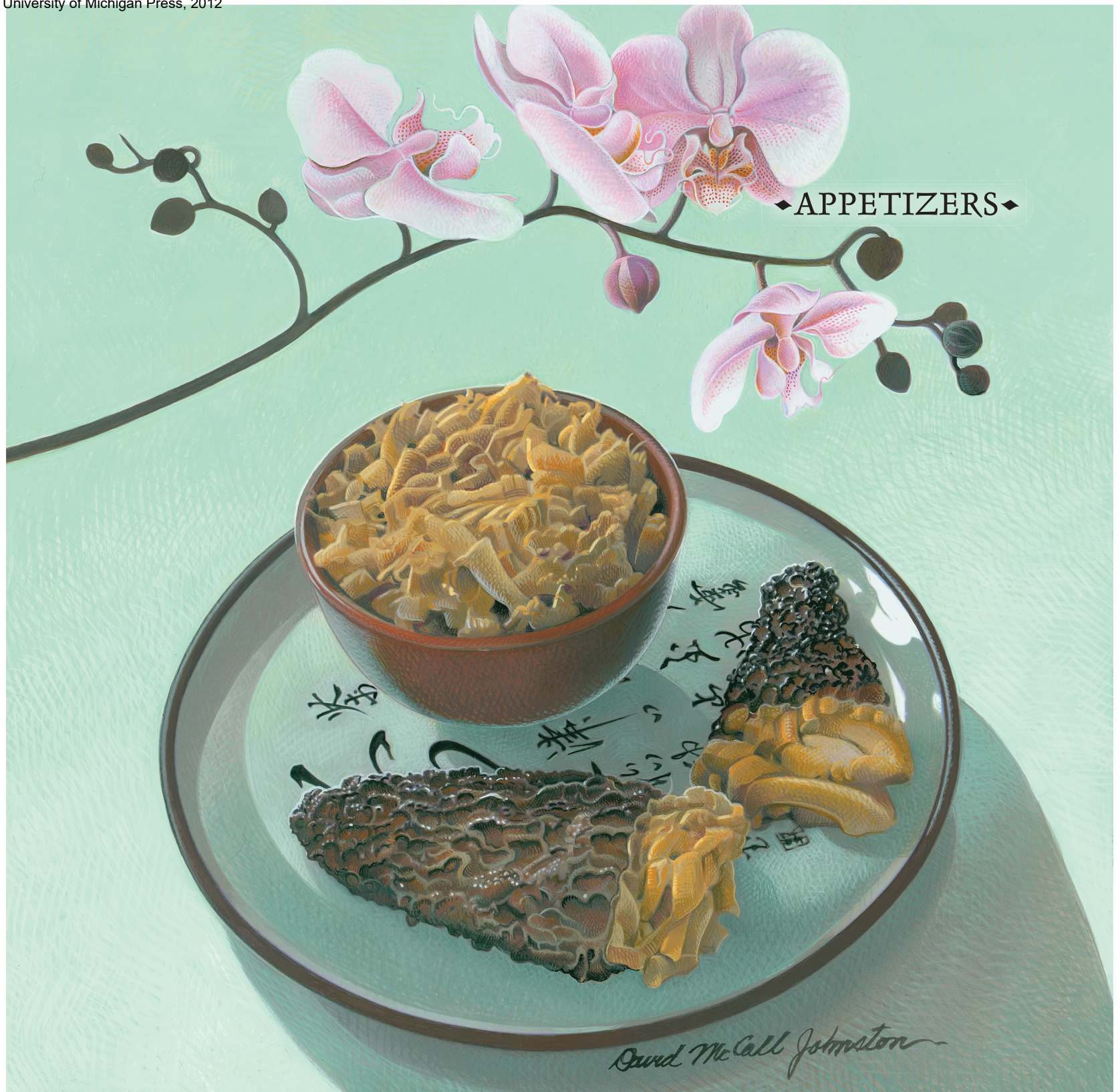
David's first major medical crisis was in 1987. Here we are in 2011 and he is healthy and, without question, well fed. His doctor applauds his "numbers" and the fact that he has maintained his health through myriad health issues. Much is certainly attributed to the food that is prepared for him and portion control. Yes, David is fortunate to have a wife who writes cookbooks and develops recipes—but anyone can take this book and competently prepare any and all of the recipes included. As I say in all my cookbooks, prepare the recipes as directed, and you will have a successful outcome: add your own creativity, and learn to create. This goes for fats, sweeteners, herbs, spices, grains, vegetables, and proteins.

You will notice throughout, I do use olive oil (usually extra virgin), olive oil spray, and butter substitute. If you aren't concerned about restrictions, make your own decisions and adjustments. For many recipes utilizing sugar, I may use agave nectar, which is lower on the glycemic scale, or turbinado sugar from evaporated cane juice. In that

case, obviously, regular sugar will substitute just fine. I also keep the salt low, so adjust to your own tastes and sensibilities.

A Note Regarding Olive Oil Spray

The best olive oil cooking spray is a good quality olive oil put in a small spray bottle made for that purpose. This process is not only less expensive than canned commercial sprays; it also protects nonstick pans from damage and build-up on the surface of the pan's manufactured coating. Where indicated throughout the book, olive oil spray is in fact, good quality olive oil in a specific spray container.





Wow your guests with this easy and elegant appetizer of cheese, artichokes, ramps, and morels with a hint of rum . . . add some fruit to accompany the brie en croûte along with biscuits, crackers, or flat bread.

Brie en Croûte with Artichoke, Ramps, and Morels

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place oven rack to middle position.

Coat a 9-inch quiche dish with cooking spray and set aside.

Coat a medium-sized sauté pan with cooking spray and sauté morels over medium heat for 6 minutes. Add rum and stir about 2 minutes or until rum is absorbed. Add ramps and cook for an additional 4 minutes or until ramps are lightly brown. Set aside to cool.

In a microwave or on the stove, steam the frozen artichokes until defrosted and lightly warmed. Set aside to cool.

While morels, ramps, and artichoke hearts cool, lay one circle of pastry in the bottom of the prepared quiche dish. Place brie wheel in center of bottom pastry. The wheel should be smaller than the quiche dish, allowing for at least 1 1/2 inches to fill with your mixture.

In a food processor, process the morels, ramps, and artichokes on pulse, only to rough chop (or chop with a knife). Place chopped mixture around the outside of the brie in the pastry (this should fill in the space between the brie and the sides of the dish). Place the remaining pastry circle over the entire top of the dish. Trim away any excess pastry and reserve for a design. Gently pinch together edges all around the circle and lightly crimp to form a nice decorated edge. Make sure pastry is flat on top and contains no air bubbles. Brush top and sides of pastry with beaten egg, and add a cutout decoration to top if desired.

Bake the pastry-covered brie in the preheated oven for 60 minutes, or until pastry is nicely browned.

Yield: 12–16 servings

Ingredients:

Olive oil cooking spray

8 ounces fresh morels, lightly
brushed and rinsed

2 (9-inch) pie crusts (homemade or
prepared), rolled out and chilled
in the refrigerator

1/2 cup sliced ramps (white and
light purple parts only)

1/4 cup spiced rum

1 package (12 ounces) frozen
artichoke quarters

1 (16-ounce) brie wheel, unwrapped

1 egg, beaten

Special Equipment:

1 fluted 9-inch quiche dish or
pie plate

Food processor

Pastry brush