



Peribatotic Cindy Pawlczyn oversees nine kitchens.

and dinner schedule. Spicer owes her national reputation to her artful use of seasonings, her insistence on the freshest ingredients, and a wizardry at giving her Provence accented-Contemporary-American cuisine a Louisiana glossing.

Sporting a twirled bandanna instead of a toque, Spicer prepares her trademark dishes, such as the olive *tapenade*, cream of garlic soup, and grilled shrimp on black bean cakes, all served in a graceful, 200-year-old Creole cottage with a leafy French Quarter courtyard, which she opened in 1990 with partner Regina Keever.

Moving to New Orleans at the age of 7, Spicer grew up with excellent food prepared by her Danish mother, who mastered recipes gathered as she traveled with her naval officer husband. That, added to the lusty tastes and food obsessions of the area, inspired Spicer. She considered going to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, but her father convinced her to get a liberal education. She left college after one year, however, to work at a number of odd jobs that ultimately led to a string of cooking apprenticeships at French kitchens in New Orleans hotels and several stints at restaurants in France.

What does she do on Sundays when she is off? "My laundry," she answers, adding that she also visits friends and family. Still single, Spicer mostly dates others in the same business. "They have similar schedules, which makes things easier," she says, adding that having children was never one of her main ambitions. She owes her trimly athletic appearance to genes and what she calls "lifestyle exercise...standing all day, lifting pots, and running around the kitchen." She admits to terrible eating habits, tasting constantly, having no full meals, then being starved around midnight, when she grabs "all the wrong foods."

LAURA CHENEL/46, cheese-maker, Sonoma, California

Making goat cheese may seem like a far-out ambition for a woman, unless she happens to be Laura Chenel, who loves the rolling hills of the Sonoma wine country, good food, and gentle winsome goats. Today she produces piquant, creamy goat cheese, including the pungent, aged crottin, the herb-and-olive-oil-marinated Cabécou, the firm and satisfying tome, and the milder, fresh herb-and-pepper-dusted varieties.

After drifting through courses in anthropology, Chenel dropped out three units short of a degree and took odd jobs such as waitressing. When she married, she and her husband ran a small farm in Sonoma County and for three years kept bees, chickens, herbs, vegetables, and fruit and tended goats for their milk. Goat cheese was just becoming fashionable in Bay Area restaurants.

When she and her husband separated, Chenel learned French, studied books on cheese-making, and went to France, working at four different goat cheese dairies. Following a divorce (he won custody of half her beloved goats), she began experimenting with cheese cultures and temperatures in her Santa Rosa home. Finally, she took samples to the renowned cook and restaurateur Alice Waters, who became a customer.

Borrowing money from several friends, living on a shoestring, and subsisting largely on goat cheese, Chenel bought and remodeled a sausage plant and began her business with just a few part-time employees. Two years ago she signed a long lease on the Stornetta Dairy, when the owners moved, where she now has 14 employees, 150 goats (soon she'll have 450), and sells her cheese nationwide through distributors. >