

In My Kitchen

Julie Balistreri, of the family-owned Balistreri Vineyards in Denver, shows us around her bustling kitchen, where traditional Sicilian fare is always on the menu.
By Kat Valentine

Kitchen Cred

Balistreri Vineyards, which opened a Denver tasting room in 2000, currently releases 3,200 cases of Colorado wines each year. Most of the grapes are sourced from small growers on the Western Slope and released as varietals such as Sangiovese, Merlot, Syrah, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Viognier, Muscat, and port. Winemaking may be the Balistreri family business, but with three generations living under the same roof and weekly Sunday dinners set for 16, the kitchen remains the center of their home.



Fail-Safe Recipe



Pizzelles (Makes approximately 60 cookies)

- 6 eggs
- 3 1/2 cups flour (approx.)
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 1/2 pound butter, melted
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 tablespoons vanilla
- 1 tablespoon anise extract (1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon if using anise oil)
- grated orange peel (zest) of one orange

Beat eggs, adding sugar gradually. Beat until smooth, then add butter, vanilla, anise, and orange zest. Sift flour and baking powder together; gradually add to egg mixture. Drop by the 1/2 teaspoon onto a hot pizzelle iron.

Gather 'Round

"We sit down family-style when we entertain, even during holidays. All the food is on the table when we sit down for dinner. It keeps us all connected and talking."

Better With Age

"When you find a wine you really like, buy at least four bottles if you can't buy a case, so you can see how it ages. Enjoy one now, one in six months, one next year, and one in three years."



Gone Fishin

With such a large family, it's understandable that Balistreri collects large serving dishes. "One of my favorites is this huge fish-shaped soup tureen," she says. "It's so heavy that you have to put it on the table before you fill it. My brother John (an artist) made it especially for my Dad's fish soup, so it's kind of a family tradition."

Home Cooked

"We make a lot of things from scratch," she says. "We always make our own pasta, and we even make our own ricotta cheese. It's a gallon of milk, a quart of cream, a quarter cup of vinegar, and a teaspoon of salt, and that's about it. We put everybody to work, so it's quality family time."



Sausage Snobs

"We are pretty particular about Italian sausage," Balistreri explains. "You don't get the good stuff from the grocery store." Instead, the family heads to the Belfiore Italian Sausage shop at 5820 W. 38th Ave. in Wheat Ridge. "It comes in tubes, not links, so we'll slice it, brown it in olive oil, then sauté it in a cup of red wine and serve it over fresh crusty bread with a salad."

Low-Tech Gadget

Balistreri learned much of her traditional Sicilian cooking from her grandmother, who always kept a round river rock on hand. "Every Sicilian kitchen should have a good rock. The best are baseball-size and flat on one side. I use them for pounding meat, cracking green Sicilian olives, or crushing bread crumbs and herbs. It gives you better control than mallets or pestles, and you just throw it into the dishwasher when you're done."



Quick Tip

"We take fresh basil from our summer garden, add olive oil, then put it into ice cube trays and freeze it," says Balistreri. "The olive oil preserves it so the basil tastes fresh; you can just drop a frozen cube into pasta sauce any time."