



By Erin Rossiter ■ Photos by Tricia Spaulding



Passion

Pleases the Palate



Rebecca Lang serves up her specialty
the quick-fix southern way

Rebecca Lang stirs with the notion of chocolate pie and delights with a surprise bite of pimento cheese. She pairs warm memories with down-home sustenance, turning to casseroles and cocktails for girl talk. Singeing meringue in a mentor's company, well, that's a chapter in Lang's food story, too.

"Sometimes it's the atmosphere, or the people you're with. It's not necessarily the one thing that goes in your mouth. Maybe it's a combination of everything," Lang said, smiling. "If it's something fun and I'm passionate about ... (I) just can't stop (my) fingers from going."

Blue jeans casual, feet curled underneath her body, Lang appeared at ease dishing on her greatest loves. A photo roundup reflected the Athens woman's first betrothals — husband Kevin, son Camden, 4, and their newest arrival, infant daughter Adair. A short walk to the kitchen flashed her other devotions: Southern cuisine and food writing. She described how those worlds merge each day.

"It may not be quiet, but we sit down every night and have dinner. We don't talk about hugely important stuff, but it's nice to just sit down," Lang said. "Then, we separate, divide and conquer, and do bed time and bath time."

As a trained chef, cooking instructor, food writer and, now, TV personality, Lang, 33, speaks to women, mainly, who crave quick and tasty sit downs with friends and family. Her message to them resonates: You can do it, too.

"She knows what she knows, and she knows what she doesn't know about being able to reach the consumer of (her) generation," said Nathalie Dupree, chef, cookbook author and TV personality. "I think she definitely is a star on the rise."



Fried Chicken

Ingredients:

- 3.5 lb. cut up whole chicken
- 1/4 cup salt
- 1 1/2 cups vegetable shortening
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 cup all-purpose flour

Directions:

- Place chicken in a large mixing bowl. Sprinkle with 1/4 cup salt and cover with cold water. Cover and soak chicken for 45 minutes.
- Remove chicken from salt water; drain on paper towels.
- Heat shortening in an 8-inch cast iron skillet or a large deep skillet to about 360 degrees.
- Sprinkle chicken with salt and pepper. Coat each piece completely with flour and gently place chicken in hot shortening. Fry 10 to 12 minutes per side or until golden brown, about 25 minutes total.
- Check the temperature of the oil occasionally. If the oil is too hot, the chicken will be too brown on the outside but not fully cooked through.
- Fry chicken in batches to prevent the skillet from becoming crowded.
- Drain cooked chicken on a cooling rack or the more traditional folded brown paper grocery bag.

Serves 4-6

For more than 10 years, Lang has pursued her craft to help women connect with their home-making roots. She has edited and written her own cookbooks, including "Southern Entertaining for a New Generation." Her articles and columns appear in magazines, newspapers and online such as the weekly feature called "Girls' Night In" on Myrecipes.com. And, recently, Lang began filming home cooking demonstrations and entertaining tips as a Southern Living contributing editor. The segments appear on the nationally syndicated morning program called "Daytime." (airs 9-10 a.m. Mondays-Fridays on Retro Television Network, WSB-TV DT2 in Atlanta and Athens).

Not bad for a University of Georgia graduate who stymied journalism teachers during career guidance talks.

"We were sitting in all these newspaper reporting classes, and the instructor is going around the room and he's asking everybody, 'Well, what do you want to write about?'" Lang said, describing the Pulitzer dreams and front-line seekers surrounding her. "When he got to me, I said, 'I want to write about food.'" Silence followed. "I remember the

I fry my chicken in my grandmother's cast iron skillet. **I believe your skillet should always be older than you are.** Just like fried chicken, a good skillet is a staple in any respectable Southern kitchen.





Rebecca Lang in the kitchen of Cook's Warehouse in Decatur making her Roasted Tomato Soup for a cooking demonstration during the Decatur Book Festival.

instructor being like, 'What is this ridiculous girl saying? She wants to write about food?'

There was no Food Network at the time. Some cooks appeared here and there on TV, including then-Georgia resident Dupree. But most of Lang's early impressions were iron cast during Sunday visits to her grandmother's. Entering Claudia Adair Thomas' kitchen promised intoxicating aromas, a table full of Southern staples and no evidence of hard labor.

"There's no telling what time she got up and started frying chicken and making biscuits and cobbler and everything else. I didn't understand how hard it was, feeding five or six for a huge meal. That's a lot of work," Lang said of her grandmother, whom she called "Tom."

"I look back and think that was amazing. She could do all that and not have a measuring spoon in the sink!"

Lang realized in college she'd have to map her own way to a food writing career. She took a risk and telephoned Dupree, a James Beard award winner, author and TV chef with a reputation for Southern cuisine. The call led to an apprenticeship.

"I remember one day I had the meringue in the oven, and I had not been watching it as closely as I should have. She

smelled it from three rooms down," said Lang. "Nathalie came in the kitchen and said, 'the meringues are browning.' I said, 'How did you know that?'"

Experience, Dupree explained in time. The woman encouraged Lang to consider culinary school. At the Charleston, S.C. campus of Johnson & Wales University, a young Lang learned entertaining the right way was not necessarily glamorous.

She learned to keep her fears on low and gulp down the pain of heavy lifting, long hours and the occasional burn. Cultivating the culinary secrets left out of textbooks became a priority, too. When the granddaughter returned home to McRae on breaks, she compared kitchen notes with her Tom. Their differences were akin to a musician who plays a song by ear versus one who performs the same score with sheet music. A direction as simple as adding cream cheese to shrimp and grits could produce the sweetest of all concoctions.

"She would always stir (the cream cheese)," said Lang, before echoing her grandmother's voice.

"Rebec, it can't take much more," her elder said.

"Yes it can," Lang answered. "Just keep adding it in."

"And she'd just stir and stir and stir."



More and more women today approach their stovetops as Lang does — **hand-written recipes from grandmother on file,** cocktails on ice, double pour of laughs at the ready.

Home cooking and Southern cuisine cultures have changed since Thomas' time. Whereas free classes once existed for young brides nurturing their culinary art over time, today's women marry, become mothers and thrust themselves into the kitchen, seemingly all at once, Dupree explained.

That's who the charismatic Lang is poised to assist, having taken a fast-paced track of her own. She moved to Birmingham, Ala. and edited cookbooks for Oxmoor House Books, a Southern Living affiliate, after culinary school. Marriage, a move to Atlanta, and work at Cook's Warehouse, where she continues to teach, followed.

Lang wrote her first cookbook on entertaining, followed by another titled "Mary Mac's Tea Room." Add to the resume a son, another move to Athens, more teaching engagements and writing credits — including Athens Magazine, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and various other publications.

No wonder then, at nine-months pregnant with daughter Adair, Lang assured "Daytime" interviewers she could teach her craft on national TV. By January, her long-awaited contract from publisher Andrews McMeel

arrived in the mail, her second big break in as many months. "Quick-Fix Southern" by Rebecca Lang will be turned over to editors this summer.

"Anytime you're passionate about what you do, people are attracted to you," Dupree said. "[Rebecca] wants to make the world a better place, a place where food is embraced rather than feared, in a way that is practical for the family."

More and more women today approach their stovetops as Lang does — hand-written recipes from grandmother on file, cocktails on ice, double pour of laughs at the ready. And she can't wait to join them.

"I taught a 'Sunday Lunch in the South' class in San Francisco and it sold out in days," Lang said. The familiar menu featured fried chicken, red velvet cake and biscuits. The crowd was smitten.

"Afterwards, they couldn't believe (the grits)," Lang said. "I told them, 'People don't like grits because they haven't had good grits. Of course they're no good when they're raw and taste like sand. But if you load them up with chicken broth and cream cheese, they turn out pretty good.'"

Just don't forget to stir — the martinis, that is. ★