



→ KITCHEN GRADE

Wearing starched uniforms and being able to cut vegetables into precise matchsticks are de rigueur for cooking-school students preparing for a restaurant career. These standards probably don't appeal, however, to those of us who simply want to "kick it up a notch" in our home kitchen. Realizing this, cooking schools are transforming the demanding realm of the professional into a comfortable setting for the novice.

"When people attend one of my classes, I see their eyes light up," notes Monika Reti, owner and instructor of Hipcooks in Los Angeles. "What I'm offering is not cooking classes but a new philosophy. I want noncooks to take back the kitchen." And the Hipcooks philosophy of ignoring measuring cups and strict recipes hits home for a cross-section of urbanites. "There's a void that wasn't being filled," continues Reti. "People, especially those moving into their first homes, really want to hang out in their own space."

At Company's Coming in Washington, D.C., instructor Jinny Fleischman noticed that a generation of people who didn't know how to cook or entertain were also tired of eating out so often. Company's Coming offers a dinner-party environment for every class. "Hosting a meal at home gives people a different way of relating to each other. It's freer than going out," says Fleischman. And no one brings you a check.

Whether it's due to an increase in cooking shows on TV, the real-estate boom, or the cocooning effect, beginners are ready to pick up a knife. Can't distinguish a cutting board from a floor tile? No biggie, says Reti. After all, she remembers a student who interrupted her to ask what seasoning a dish meant...that's adding salt and pepper, by the way.

— by LITTY MATHEW

2,634

The amount in dollars spent by the average household on dining out in 2005

source: U.S. Bureau of Labor