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INSIDE THE ARDMORE PARK COOKING SPACE OF *FLAVORS'* FOOD EDITOR

SHELLEY SKILES SAWYER never met a vegetable she didn't like. Well, except bell peppers. She hates bell peppers. "I love jalapeños, Hungarian wax peppers, poblanos ... but I can always sniff out a bell pepper," the lifelong epicurean says. "If something is so much as garnished with bell pepper, I can't enjoy it. I love my ratatouille and gazpacho because I make it without them."

For *Flavors'* managing food editor, it's essential to have a quality kitchen for cooking things on *her* terms, though she admits she'd be perfectly content to cook over a humble fire pit if she had to.

She and husband Cole, a former vice president at Fidelity Investments, have called their 1925-era South Buckhead residence home since 2006. For six years, they lived in a house just three blocks away, so they already knew they loved the neighborhood. "We like older homes, despite the attendant problems they can have," Sawyer notes.

When the couple purchased it from the previous owner, an interior designer, the house was already "visually perfect," Sawyer recounts. She and Cole love to entertain, so they found the layout, with a spacious living room and connected



Cole and Shelley Sawyer.



Shelley and Cole Sawyer's custom-crafted cooking space makes family meals a joy to prepare. After living in the house for nearly nine years, they gutted and re-configured the area to maximize square footage, adding custom countertops and topping them with leathered quartzite.



The kitchen's crowning component is a vintage Italian gilded tole chandelier. It illuminates the well-equipped Wolf range where Sawyer spends so much of her time whipping up elegant, seasonally driven dishes most days of the week.



The stylish bar of this South Buckhead kitchen is awash in a neutral Farrow & Ball gray called Mole's Breath and features custom cabinetry, a backsplash of antiqued mirrored glass, stainless steel countertops and slate floors. A shimmering "Champagne bubble" ceiling fixture from Currey & Company presides over the scene.

formal dining room, to be ideal. But the vintage building still needed several structural changes, including the conversion of a mudroom and a rebuild of the front walk. Removing the original dark-veined Cherokee stones—its quarries now exhausted and the material virtually impossible to replace—and repurposing them for a chimney was one of architect Frances Zook's brilliant moves.

The kitchen was outdated, so Zook and builder Jim Delaney, of Paces Building Group, helped give it the TLC it so badly needed, while honoring the historic character that makes the residence so special. Sawyer says they tore the room down to the studs. "The frame-out guy let me take a mallet to the vent hood myself," she recalls. "I got to deal out the first blows to the kitchen. It was awesome."

With 10-foot ceilings—a characteristic Zook said is a godsend when you're renovating—the team took the cabinets to the full height. "My biggest pet peeve [in kitchens] is cabinets that don't go all the way up; they just trap dust, and there's all this wasted space," Sawyer admits, adding, "I love shelving, and I love cookbooks." So she designed a way to accommodate both into an archway of built-ins framing the door to the bar.

The bar represents a clever conversion of the former mudroom and was created partly by sealing off a door. Revamped for a modern era, this ancillary space became incredibly elegant, with an antiqued mirror backsplash, stainless-steel countertop, "Champagne bubble" chandelier (from Currey & Company) and cool-hued slate floors. It's also saturated, straight to the ceiling, in a rich gray.

"I kept a chunk of plaster from the original kitchen wall, but it was impossible to match," Sawyer says. "I finally found a color that was as close as I could get, called Mole's Breath." The Farrow & Ball shade serves as a natural backdrop for colorful, sentimental artwork throughout the cooking space. The kitchen cabinetry and woodwork, meanwhile, are awash in Benjamin Moore's White Dove, a color



that beautifully offsets leathered quartzite countertops featuring earth-toned veins that coordinate with the hardwood floors. Shining above is an antique Italian gilded tole wheat chandelier that Sawyer claimed from a beloved neighbor's estate.

Naturally, the appliances were of utmost importance to Sawyer, who actually got her start in law in 1991 at a large Atlanta firm. Eventually, her long-standing passion for food ("I worked for a caterer in Dallas when I was in high school and college, and later realized I was catering all the parties for the summer associates [at my firm]," she says.) paved the way to a stream of restaurant reviews for "bohemian newspapers" around town, a weekly column in *Creative Loafing*, food features for CNN and a coveted role as editor of the *Zagat Atlanta* restaurant guide from 1997 to 2014.

These days, the managing food editor of *Flavors* edits books on the side while

she weighs her next moves. Luckily, she does some of her best thinking over her gas six-burner Wolf range (complemented by a Wolf electric wall oven, Sub-Zero refrigerator and Bosch dishwasher). "Four burners is never enough," insists Sawyer, who tends to cook multiple sauces and side dishes at once.

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"I'm a very, very messy cook," adds the editor, whose favorite dishes are fresh ratatouilles and gratins, usually made with minimal amounts of cream, blanched vegetables and vats of homemade stock,

The entryway to the bar is customized with clever shelving showcasing Sawyer's colorful cookbook collection, plus her children's artwork, a few fun pitchers and favorite tureens.



(above) A high-end Sub-Zero refrigerator and electric Wolf wall oven completed the Sawyer's dream kitchen. They accessorized the space with pieces that reflect their personality. From this vantage point, once can glimpse the adjacent family room, a cozy space a bit more secluded from the kitchen than contemporary house plans dictate, but the Sawyers—who pile in here with TV trays for football games—like it that way; (right) Sawyer's Ratatouille. Find the recipe on the next page.



which she crafts from vegetable trimmings and leftover bones. Soups and stews are Sawyer's low-maintenance go-to, and her kids—son Sam, 16, and daughter Adair, 19—love them, too. "I can put anything in a pot of soup and they'll eat it," Sawyer says. "It's a really awesome way to get a lot of vegetables into them."

Sawyer says she's the kind of cook who works intuitively, using momentary inspiration and available ingredients, selecting fresh herbs, vegetables and more based on the season and her adventurous tastes. "I love kohlrabi and celery root. Things that are coming into favor now, I've been cooking with for years," she explains. "I love spring lettuces, fennel and asparagus. It's exciting every time something new comes into season."

Likewise, Sawyer's family is always up for trying the exotic or unexpected. "Cole certainly is a foodie. I know people whose husbands don't eat anything green or don't want to try anything new," says Sawyer, whose kids are just as intrepid and accommodating. As it turns out, with a world of other ingredients, no one in the family ever has a chance to miss those bell peppers.

Ratatouille

Yield: 8–12 servings

- 2–3 medium purple eggplant
kosher salt as needed
- 2 large Vidalia onions
- 3–4 small zucchini squash, about 1 pound
- 3–4 small yellow squash, about 1 pound
- 1 poblano pepper, seeds and ribs removed, chopped
- 1 banana or Cubanelle pepper, seeded, chopped
- 3 heirloom tomatoes, peeled
- 1/3 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/3 cup Worcestershire sauce
- 1 clove garlic, chopped (optional)
- 1–2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- 2 teaspoons cumin or to taste
- 1/2 cup olive oil
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 cups mozzarella cheese or to taste
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Slice eggplant into 1/2- to 3/4-inch thick rounds and spread in a single layer on sheet pans. Sprinkle very liberally with kosher salt, slightly tilt pans and let sit for 30 to 45 minutes to pull bitter juices from eggplant. Rinse eggplant slices and pat dry with paper towels.

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare 9 x 12-inch Pyrex pan with cooking spray or a light coating of olive oil.

Peel and slice onions into 1/4-inch slices. Cut zucchini and yellow squash into lengthwise slices. Cut tomatoes into 1/4-inch rounds.

In a small bowl, combine vinegar, Worcestershire, garlic, oregano, thyme and cumin and mix well. Slowly drizzle oil into mixture little by little, whisking constantly, until all oil has been incorporated. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Place a layer of eggplant slices on bottom of pan, spoon a little sauce on top and season with a little salt and pepper. Top that with onions and a sprinkling of chopped peppers. Top that with a layer of zucchini, then a layer of tomatoes, then a layer of squash and another sprinkling of chopped peppers. Continue layering vegetables until you run out of room or vegetables (they will cook down a bit as they lose moisture so they can be slightly mounded, but be sure to cook this over a sheet pan to catch excess juices).

Pour sauce mixture evenly over vegetables, cover tightly with foil and bake 1 hour. Remove foil, top with both cheeses, return to oven and bake another 10 to 15 minutes until bubbly. Let cool 10 minutes before serving. To serve, cut into squares and spoon some of the juices onto each serving.



Prosciutto, Arugula and Goat Cheese Rollups

Yield: 8 servings

- 12 slices prosciutto*
Lemon Vinaigrette (recipe included)
- 1 cup softened goat cheese
- 6 fresh figs (may substitute dried if unavailable)
- 2 cups arugula, preferably locally grown
zest of 1 large lemon

On a sheet pan lined with parchment paper, place prosciutto slices, leaving about 1/2-inch on either side of each. Prepare Lemon Vinaigrette and stir 1 tablespoon into softened goat cheese, mixing well. Spread a thin layer of goat cheese onto prosciutto slices.

Stem figs and slice into 4–6 pieces, depending on the size of your figs. Place a few slices randomly down each prosciutto slice, some to the left, some in the center and some to the right. Top with arugula leaves, allowing them to overlap the edges a little, then, using a teaspoon, drizzle arugula with a little Lemon Vinaigrette. Sprinkle entire surface with lemon zest. Carefully roll each piece, gently pressing down so that they'll hold together. Cut each roll into 2 to 3 pieces, depending on how wide your prosciutto slices are.

These can be assembled an hour in advance (no more), gently covered with plastic wrap and refrigerated until service time so arugula will not wilt.

*Have your butcher cut slices that are thin, but not so thin that they easily tear. If your slices are coming from the narrower end of the ham, purchase 6 to 8 additional slices. Once rolled, slice into 2 pieces, not 3.

Lemon Vinaigrette

- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

For the Lemon Vinaigrette

In a small bowl, combine lemon juice, vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper and mix well. Slowly drizzle oil into mixture little by little, whisking constantly, until all oil has been incorporated and dressing emulsifies. Extra vinaigrette can be refrigerated for up to 1 month.