

## Souped up

**Marjorie Druker's  
New England Soup Factory  
bowls 'em over**

If members of the oft-discussed global village were to sit down and plan a dinner party, probably the only thing they'd agree on is that soup should be on the menu. As ancient as cooking itself, soup is a dish for the ages, and for all cultures: functional, flavorful, and filling.

In these parts, the New England Soup Factory has done for soup what *Good Will Hunting* did for Southie: given it the star treatment. What started out as a 10-gallon-a-day operation is now one of the area's best sources for takeout, dishing up everything from a tangy salad niçoise to all manner of soups — 200 gallons of soup a day, seven days a week.

Chef-owner Marjorie Druker is the hand that rocks the ladle. After entering the gourmet catering and takeout biz at age 17, Druker — in quick succession — met her husband (and shop co-owner) Paul Brophy, graduated from Johnson & Wales University, and created the original recipes for a once-lily operation called Boston Chicken. These days, Druker mines the world's culinary caches for inspiration, finding it in Africa (chicken-and-peanut soup), in Italy (eggplant parmesan soup), even in her own Jewish home (the Drukie sandwich — salami, cheddar, caraway coleslaw, and honey mustard on rye).

**Has food always been a big part of your life?** I grew up in a wonderful food family. Beautiful food was always being served in my house. The table was always set magnificently, whether it was on a Sunday or it was your birthday or if it was just dinner. Even at breakfast, my mother would always have little bowls of chilled fruit, French toast, and fresh bagels. By the time I was three or four, I was heavily involved with food. When I'd have a report to do — say, on China — I would go find out what people ate.

**Was it your childhood dream occupation?** I really wanted to be a dancer, but I hit puberty and my mother said, "You know what, Marge? I don't know if you can be a dancer anymore. You don't have the dedication. You don't love it enough." But I really loved food and I had a total and complete dedication to it. My mother went back to work full-time when I was in sixth grade and left a note on how to make a split chicken breast. So I just started to go wild with the spice cabinet and put all these spices on it, and I made a beautiful salad, which is my favorite food. And my mother and father were just blown away. From then on, I made dinner almost every night.

**Who made the biggest impression on you while you trained?** When I was at Johnson & Wales, I got a really good opportunity to work at a resort called South Seas Plantation. They sent me there for three months. I met my husband on the first day. He was the other student they sent. We met and fell in love and moved in with each other two days later. We've been



together for 16 years — since we were 19. So I graduated, did some catering here and there. Then my friend came to me one day and said, "Marge, I'm going to open up this store and sell rotisserie chicken. Be my chef." I said sure. I worked for him for a year, and that was Boston Chicken. When it went national, it was so bizarre, because I remember making all these recipes for baked beans and mashed potatoes and chicken soup.

**Do you regret leaving something that became that big?** I was 21 when I created the menu for Boston Chicken. All those side dishes and all of that stuff was my original stuff. I'm still really friendly with the owner, and I'm happy. It's really a bad thing to ever look back in your life and resent something you've created that's been successful. It only makes you better at

## New England Soup Factory

2-4 Brookline Place  
Brookline (617) 739-1899  
Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-  
9 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

244 Needham Street  
Newton (617) 558-8988  
Hours: Monday-Saturday, 8 a.m.-  
9 p.m. Sunday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

doing what you want when you're ready, when you're able, and when you can afford to. There are some people who are trailblazers. Some lead and some follow. I like to lead. I can't follow people.

**When did you know it was time to open the Soup Factory?** When I opened this business, I said to myself that I'd cooked for so many people who appreciated it that I've really got to open a store where people

can get all this food all the time. So I started it with my husband. We started with three people. Now we have 50 people. We have a whole prepared-foods kitchen, and I work with each chef so they know my philosophy about food and how to handle it.

**Soup is the foundation of your business. Where does the attachment come from?** I always made soup as a kid. My mother would force us to buy school lunches because she hated making them. I said, "You know what, Ma? Don't worry about it. I'll just make it myself." One time I had a date with a guy and he made me chicken soup and I liked it. I thought, "That was good, but I can probably make it even better."

**Why choose takeout over sit-down restaurants?** I'll tell you. When I worked in restaurants, I was always under the gun to get my station set up, get the line set up. It was incredible pressure and stress. You're dealing with so many personalities. The bartender's giving you orders, and so is the waitress. You've got your general manager. There was a lot of complicated politics, and you can't spend as much time loving. But if you're a restaurant like L'Espalier and you're serving only one meal and getting \$100 a person, then you can afford to do that. But I need to be open breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We have a very calm atmosphere and a wonderful kitchen. We laugh and giggle and we know each other's family history. We get to enjoy each other and don't have to worry about getting this table out and this table turned.

**Any cuisines you're particularly fond of?** We make so many different flavors [of soup], and each one has a different emphasis on different cultures. We do Latin. We do Caribbean. We do Eastern European. We do French. Spanish. Moroccan. It's limitless. I have all kinds of extracts and flavors and lemon oil. Say you went and had a lobster-bake dinner. It's going to have lobster and a steamed onion and corn and butter and a glass of wine. So I take all those ideas and say, "Okay, we're going to make a soup." I try to blend a dinner into a bowl.

**Any food you're addicted to?** I love hearts of palm. I have them all over the house and my husband gets sick. I love pickles and olives and caperberries. I'm a salty person. I love hot peppers and pickled things. But I have this new favorite food called Bubbie's Pickles. In Yiddish it means grandmother. They're the most Jewish-y, authentic pickles.

**It's time to make dinner at home. Who cooks?** I do the cooking and I make dinner almost every night. And the reason I do that is because for the first few years, my daughter Emily and I ate out of a bag every single night while my husband closed the store. I felt once I could get my life into some kind of order I was going to be the mom I needed to be and have a healthy, good, yummy dinner on the table every night, because it took a big toll on Emily. Every night I try to have a big salad, fresh green beans, whole stuffed artichokes.

— Rob McKeown