

Chef Ana Sortun

In her memoir, *Eating My Words*, food writer Mimi Sheraton included Ana Sortun as one of the country's "best creative fusion practitioners," describing the chef's food as "inspired and inspiring." With a degree from La Varenne Ecole de Cuisine in Paris, the Seattle-born Sortun opened Moncef Medeb's Aigo Bistro in Concord, Massachusetts, in the early 1990s. Stints at 8 Holyoke and Casablanca in Harvard Square, Cambridge soon followed. When Sortun opened Oleana in 2001, she quickly drew raves for her creative combination of farm-fresh ingredients and eastern Mediterranean spice blends. Sortun's food, explained Catherine Reynolds in the *New York Times*, "is at once rustic-traditional and deeply inventive." After a visit to Boston, Tom Sietsema of the *Washington Post* wrote of Oleana, "Should you have time for only one place to eat, make it this space." The judges of the Beard Foundation awards certainly agreed, as they awarded Sortun The Best Chef: Northeast honor in 2005.

Chef Sortun's cookbook, *SPICE: flavors of the eastern Mediterranean*, published in May 2006 by Regan Books, is already a best seller according to the *Boston Globe* and the *LA Times*. "This is not fusion food, nor has Sortun forced any technique or tradition. Instead she has allowed the flavors of the regional food, and her tangible love of it, to determine her cooking -- and her cookbook," says Amy Scattergood of the *LA Times*. *SPICE* was nominated for best international cookbook in 2007 by the James Beard foundation.

2006 also brought the addition of Siena farms, owned and farmed by Chef Sortun's husband, Chris Kurth. The farm, named after their daughter Siena, provides the restaurant all of its fresh organic produce.

In late June, 2008 Chef Sortun and Pastry Chef Maura Kilpatrick open Sofra, a Middle Eastern café and bakery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Buried in Vermicelli (shaariya)

Serves 4

From Fez, this Moroccan chicken dish (named shaariya medfouna), is hiding under a mound of crushed vermicelli.

4 boneless skinless chicken thighs or 4 long island duck legs
3 cups water
2 large onions, sliced
1 teaspoon + ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground ginger
½ teaspoon saffron threads or powder
Salt and pepper, to taste
½ teaspoon of ground turmeric
5 tablespoons butter
2 teaspoons honey
1 teaspoon orange flower water (optional)
½ cup chopped fresh parsley
¼ cup chopped fresh coriander
½ cup toasted marcona almonds
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 pound dried vermicelli nests
2 teaspoons of demerera sugar
½ teaspoon of sea salt or fleur de sel



(continued)

1. Use one 3 quart All-Clad sauté pan. Over medium heat, add 1 tablespoon of butter and ½ tablespoon of vegetable oil. When the butter begins to brown, add the onions and cook until they begin to soften and turn translucent. Add the turmeric, saffron, ginger & cinnamon and continue to cook until the onions get sticky and soft.

2. Season the chicken or duck legs on both sides with salt. Tuck them under the onion mixture and add the water to the pan. You can push the onions to one side of the pan, add the thighs in one even layer and then smother the onions over the thighs.

3. Cover and simmer on very low heat for 35 minutes until the thighs are tender when squeezed with a pair of tongs and the onions have melted into the sauce. You can also put this stew in the oven, covered at 350 for 45 minutes. You should have enough liquid left in the pan to make a broth for the stew. You can always add another cup of water.

4. Whisk 4 tablespoons of the butter into the liquid, then the honey, and orange flower water, if using. Simmer 2 minutes more. Taste for seasoning and add more salt and pepper, if you like. Stir in the parsley and coriander.

5. Grind the toasted almonds in a food processor fitted with a metal blade. Stir in cinnamon, sugar and fleur de sel then set aside.

6. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Working in a large bowl, crush the vermicelli nests with your hands. Drop the pasta into the boiling water and cook, stirring often at the beginning, for 5 minutes or until it is tender but still has some bite. Drain and return to the pot.

7. Cut the remaining 6 tablespoons butter into small pieces. Stir them into the pasta with salt.

8. Cover the chicken stew with the vermicelli's and sprinkle the top with the almond mixture. Serve right in the pan.