

Tis the season : Celebrity chef Bradley Ogden releases festive cookbook just in time for the holidays

GABE SAGLIE | September 22, 2011 10:24 AM

I really love Thanksgiving," says chef Bradley Ogden, as he sits in the modern dining room of his Root 246 restaurant in Solvang and leafs through the pages of his upcoming culinary tome, "Holiday Dinners with Bradley Ogden: 150 Festive Recipes to Bring Family & Friends Together" (Running Press, \$30). "It's always been a favorite time for me to cook, certainly in the restaurant, but also on a very personal level."

It's a way for him to really showcase his skills among loved ones.

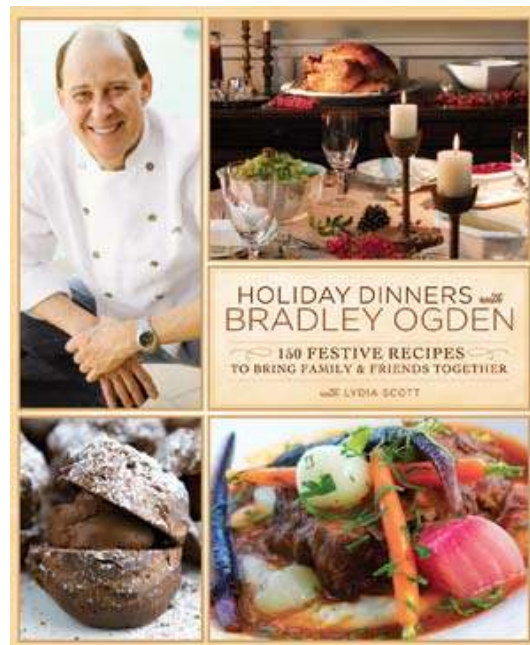
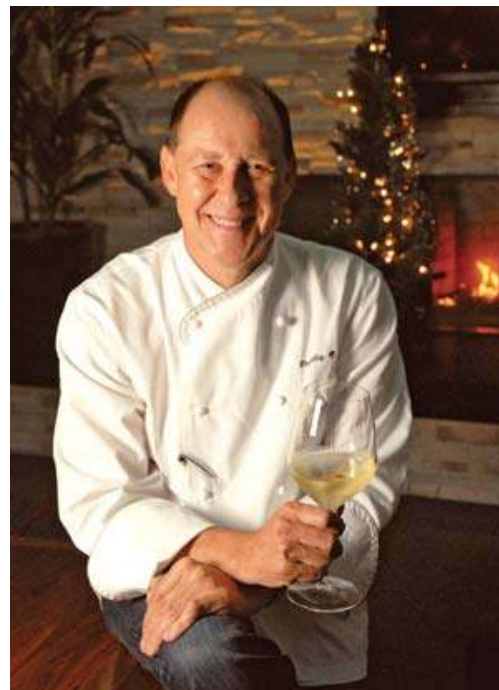
Mr. Ogden's first cookbook in two decades is set for release Tuesday and is a deliberately designed, thoroughly explained and beautifully photographed guide for the average cook through three of the most daunting meals of any year: Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.

"I'm a traditionalist," he continues. "To me, the holidays equal family and friends, and food transcends. It's timeless value. You touch people with what you do in the kitchen and what you give them to eat."

If that's true, Mr. Ogden has been touching people for decades. The honors graduate from the Culinary Institute of America worked at the famed The American Restaurant in Kansas City before gaining acclaim in the mid-1980s as head chef at San Francisco's renowned Campton Place Hotel. In 1989, he opened his first restaurant, the Lark Creek Inn, which soon became one of the Bay Area's most celebrated eateries. He would go on to become one of the country's most prolific restaurateurs, running hot spots like One Market Restaurant in San Francisco and Arterra in San Diego. Today, Mr. Ogden is chef and co-owner of the Lark Creek Restaurant Group's eight eateries and his celeb-friendly namesake property at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, which won the James Beard Foundation's Restaurant of the Year honor in 2004. He was brought on to open Root 246 at Hotel Corque in Solvang in 2009. Finally, he's found time to release a new cookbook, with Lydia Scott, which was inspired by his love for holiday cooking and desire to make it more accessible for the home chef.

Throughout his career, Mr. Ogden, who lives in the Santa Ynez Valley, says he's managed to translate to each of his dishes his singular mantra: organic, local food must prevail. "The farm-to-table concept is nothing new for me," he says. He traces his culinary roots to his upbringing on his family's farm in Michigan.

"We picked our own corn, caught our own fish, and harvested tons of root vegetables when it got cold," he says.



In the foreword of his new book, he writes, "There is no exception to my love of all things fresh from the farm." He continues, "There is nothing more flavorful than the simplicity of a farm-fresh egg or a trout taken from an icy creek and placed directly into a sizzling frying pan."

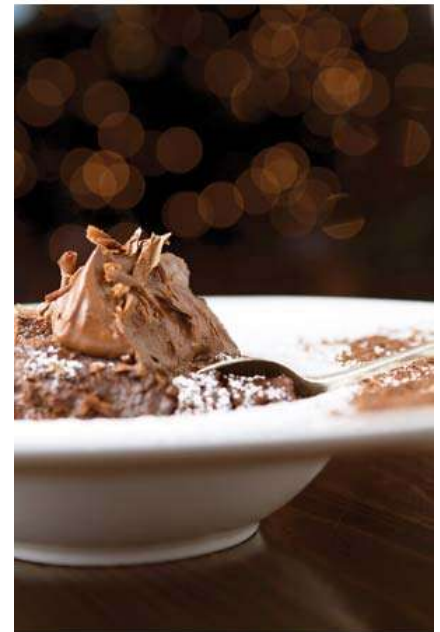
"Holiday Dinners with Bradley Ogden" is a collection of recipes that he's used for his own festive occasions over the years and prepared at many of his restaurants. Each hinges on the use of fresh, local ingredients. Mr. Ogden is unwavering in his encouragement of it, pointing to what he describes as "the ethics" of cooking. "You've got to know exactly what goes into everything you're eating," he insists. In a section of the book in which he explains his insistence on the freshest of ingredients, he writes, "Organic and local food not only tastes better, but it also benefits farmers, animals, the environment and your health."

Mr. Ogden has crafted three main chapters, each focusing on the big holidays. And his personal inventiveness is evident in the most traditional of dishes. His Thanksgiving lineup includes his signature recipe for Sage-Butter-Roasted Turkey and several bird-inspired alternatives, like Wood-Grilled Turkey Chop with Wild Mushroom Gravy. For cooks looking for something meatier, Mr. Ogden features savory options like Braised Short Ribs with Onions and Sugar Pumpkin. All the conventional accoutrements are included, too, all with that distinguishable Ogden flare, including a Corn and Sage Stuffing and Sweet Potato Gratin. To fill the sweet spot on the Thanksgiving menu, Mr. Ogden offers his take on classic pumpkin pie — "my favorite all-time food," he writes (part nostalgia, part taste, he tells the News-Press) — not to mention Three-Layer Pumpkin Pie.

What makes one of the most important meals of the year that much more approachable for the at-home chef are the author's practical suggestions, which are interspersed among recipes and color photos. On a page dedicated wholly to choosing and cooking the turkey, Mr. Ogden recommends only "fresh natural, organic, free-range turkeys from small regional producers, as they will have the best texture and flavor." Among his techniques for maximizing flavor and texture, Mr. Ogden calls for a V-shaped pan because "it holds the turkey in position during roasting" and keeps the bird elevated, "allowing air to circulate and promoting even cooking and browning."

The book's Christmas chapter features its own share of classic comfort foods, including Coffee-Spiced Prime Rib Roast. He expresses special fondness for his Candied Yams — "One of my faves," he says — which feature a spicy profile of cinnamon, allspice, kosher salt and black pepper. His Chocolate Brioche Pudding aims to please any sweet tooth, while beverages include two takes on Eggnog.

This section also features a personal note on wines, which Mr. Ogden's son, Bryan, 32, also an accomplished chef, helped prepare. The wide range of diverse flavors on any holiday table can make wine selection tricky, so Mr. Ogden makes general suggestions. His red of choice is pinot noir. "Since it is a light wine with savory, earthy notes, it complements many foods," he writes. Fruit crispness that cleanses the palate makes pinot grigio his preferred white wine, and he declares that



sparkling wine "elevates any meal to a special affair." The younger Ogden's specific wine suggestions for several dishes are found throughout the book.

The author also offers a list of recipes, inspired by his childhood memories, that he says would make ideal gifts to bring to any holiday dinner, like Spice Plum BBQ Sauce.

For the New Year's Day feast, Mr. Ogden shares another personal favorite, Blue Corn Cakes with Caviar and Creme Fraiche, along with a recipe for Yankee Pot Roast. He also includes some of his favorite countdown cocktails, like his "Eye-Opening Bloody Marys," which he mentions in a special section on hangover remedies. The popular morning sipper, he says, forces your body to process new alcohol, thereby giving it a break from the toxic effects of the booze you've already consumed; a temporary but effective fix, he calls it.

Each of the main chapters concludes with a common sense timeline aimed at helping the at-home cook plan and organize the dinner party. The Thanksgiving section, for example, suggests ordering your fresh turkey three weeks out and making the Jellied Cranberry Sauce one week ahead. Each chapter also includes four sample menus to match individual lifestyles and personal holiday realities, like an "Intimate Christmas Dinner for 2" menu and a four-course "Football Dinner Party" menu for New Year's Day.

Among the book's most attractive attributes are the lush, vivid snapshots by Solvang photographer Jeremy Ball. "And they weren't staged," says Mr. Ogden. "They'd come out of the oven, into my hands, and it was like, 'OK, take the picture!' " The photos were taken over five days in January at the Santa Ynez home of friend Maria Murdock, who is pictured in the book, daughter of the late Rosemary Clooney.

As for how he spends his holidays, he's often at the restaurant, but come Christmas day, "I go more traditional and do more of an at-home meal, like my prime rib roast."

With, of course, family and friends.

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FYI

"Holiday Dinners with Bradley Ogden: 150 Festive Recipes to Bring Family & Friends Together" (Running Press, \$30) by Bradley Ogden with Lydia Scott will be released in bookstores Tuesday.

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THANKSGIVING FEAST

Corn and Sage Stuffing

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter plus 2 tablespoons

1 1/2 cups turkey stock, divided

3 ears corn, husks and silk removed

3 large eggs

2 medium yellow onions, chopped (about 2 cups)

2 stalks celery, chopped (about 1 cup)

1 small green bell pepper, chopped (about 1/4 cup)
1 small poblano chili, finely chopped (about 2 tablespoons)
1 tablespoon kosher salt
2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
2 1/2 cups crusty day-old French bread, cut into 1-inch pieces
2 1/2 cups cornbread, cut into 1-inch pieces
1/3 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
3 tablespoons finely chopped sage
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh thyme
1/4 cup finely chopped chives

Adjust an oven rack to second lowest position and heat the oven to 375 degrees. Grease a large baking dish with the 2 tablespoons of butter and add 1/2 cup of the turkey stock; set aside.

Stand the corn upright inside a large bowl and, using a paring knife, carefully cut the kernels from the corn cob, then use the back of a butter knife to scrape off any pulp remaining on the cobs; you should have about 1 1/2 cups of corn. Set aside.

In a small bowl, combine the eggs and the remaining cup of turkey stock; mix well. Set aside.

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions, celery, green peppers, chilies, salt and pepper; cover. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are tender and translucent, 5 to 8 minutes.

Transfer the vegetable mixture into a large bowl; add the French bread, cornbread, parsley, sage, thyme, chives, corn and egg mixture; toss gently until moistened and combined. Place the stuffing into the prepared baking dish and cover; if you don't have a cover for the baking dish, you can cover the dish with parchment paper and aluminum foil. (Recipe can be made up to a day ahead at this point and stored in the refrigerator until needed.)

Place the baking dish onto a sheet pan. Bake for 45 minutes; uncover and bake another 45 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown.

Yield: 6-8 servings

Source: "Holiday Dinners with Bradley Ogden: 150 Festive Recipes to Bring Family & Friends Together" by Bradley Ogden

CHRISTMAS DINNER

Chocolate Brioche Pudding

Coffee ganache:

1 cup heavy cream
1 cup bittersweet chocolate, chopped
1 tablespoon coffee extract

Bread pudding:

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, for greasing baking dish
1 1/2 cups heavy cream, divided
2/3 cup dark brown sugar
4 large eggs
1/3 cup bourbon
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon vanilla extract
3 cups diced brioche, egg, or raisin bread, crust trimmed, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 1/2 cups Champagne Sabayon, for garnish (optional; go to newspress.com for the recipe)
Cocoa powder, for garnish

For the ganache: Bring the cream to a simmer in a small saucepan over medium-high heat. Place the chocolate and extract in medium bowl; pour in the hot cream. Stir until chocolate has melted. Reserve 1/2 cup of the chocolate ganache; set the rest aside.

For the bread pudding: Evenly spread the butter onto the bottom and sides of a medium baking dish; set aside. In a large bowl, whisk together 1 cup of the heavy cream, sugar, and eggs until combined; set aside. Gently whisk the remaining 1/2 cup heavy cream into the chocolate ganache until well blended. Whisking slowly, add the unreserved chocolate ganache into the egg mixture until well blended and smooth. Stir in the bourbon, cinnamon and vanilla. Pour 1 cup of the custard into the prepared pan and place half of the bread over the custard in an even layer. Distribute the reserved 1/2 cup of chocolate ganache, teaspoon by teaspoon, over the bread; add the remaining bread in an even layer. Pour the remaining custard over the bread. Cover with foil and place in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours, or up to overnight.

Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 325 degrees. Place the covered pudding in a larger pan lined with a kitchen towel. Carefully place the pan on the oven rack and fill larger pan with hot water to reach two-thirds of the way up the sides of the pudding dish. Bake for 20 minutes; remove the cover, and bake until puffed, golden brown, and a knife inserted in the center of the custard comes out clean, an additional 25 minutes. Transfer the baking dish to a cooling rack and cool the custard until warm, about 10 minutes.

Place a serving of warm pudding onto an individual plate, dollop with an oval-shaped portion of sabayon, and dust with powdered cocoa.

Yield: 6 servings

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NEW YEAR'S DAY CELEBRATION

Blue Corn Cakes with Caviar and Creme Fraiche

1 cup whole milk
1/4 cup buttermilk
1 large egg, separated
3 tablespoons butter, melted
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon granulated sugar
1/2 cup blue cornmeal (can substitute yellow or white cornmeal)
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
Vegetable oil spray
1 1/2 cups creme fraiche or sour cream
1 cup caviar or chopped smoked salmon

In a medium bowl, combine the milk, buttermilk, egg yolk, butter, salt and sugar; mix until thoroughly combined; set aside.

Whisk the egg white in a small bowl until it forms soft peaks; set aside.

In large bowl, sift together the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, pepper and cayenne. Make a well in the center; pour in the milk mixture and gently stir until just combined. Gently fold in the beaten egg white.

Coat the bottom of a large nonstick saucepan or griddle with vegetable spray. Place over medium heat. Using a tablespoon, drop the batter into the pan to make small cakes, being careful not to crowd the pan. Cook until the edges of the cakes are set and the bottom is golden brown, about 1 minute. Flip and cook until golden on the second side, about 30 seconds. Transfer cakes to a sheet pan and repeat with remaining batter. Top the cakes with a dollop of creme fraiche and a generous spoonful of caviar. Serve. Note: If you don't like fish or want a vegetarian option, substitute the caviar with chopped hard-boiled eggs, sprinkling chopped capers over the top.

Yield: 24 cakes or 6 servings

Source: "Holiday Dinners with Bradley Ogden: 150 Festive Recipes to Bring Family & Friends Together" by Bradley Ogden