Novel nutrition

A dinner party helps bring *The Paper Palace* to delicious life

by JUDY GELMAN

Miranda Cowley Heller

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Costco's suggested Book Club read provides insight into a selected novel, as well as an appropriate recipe to accompany your own book club's discussion.

Miranda Cowley Heller's debut novel, *The Paper Palace*, is set at the Cape Cod family summer home of 50-year-old Elle, a happily married mother who faces a life-changing decision: choosing between the life she has with her husband and the one she imagined with her childhood love.

Elle's memories reveal the pivotal moments and relationships that have brought her to this juncture. "The connection of food to those memories and moments pervades the novel," explains Heller. "Many scenes that tell the emotional stories from Elle's past involve food. During Elle's day we will see the family at breakfast, a picnic lunch on the beach and a barbecue dinner where Elle's search for a decent bottle of white wine in the hosts' fridge ultimately leads to her epiphany."

Heller suggests re-creating the dinner party that opens and closes *The Paper Palace* for a book club meal. "The novel quite literally begins with the uncleared table and, in the final chapters, we see the table is set for that party, the dinner being cooked, the guests arriving and sitting down to dinner.

"After martinis, cheese and crackers, and salted radishes, Pasta Bolognese [see recipe] would be the main course," says Heller. "The recipe for Bolognese is mostly laid out in the novel. Add a cucumber salad with dill and mint, and delicious artisanal bread. Serve with a hunk of Parmesan, claret, Sancerre and a dessert of fresh pears and sorbet, decaf espresso and grappa."

Heller imagines the table set with a white linen tablecloth and napkins and a white bowl filled with limes and green pears in the center. "If it could be on a screened-in porch in the summer, even better."

For mood, Heller suggests enjoying music and poetry mentioned in the novel after dinner. "Listen to Fleetwood Mac and Earth, Wind & Fire, and then take turns reading Shelley's poem 'To a Skylark.' " ■

Judy Gelman is the creator of the website bookclubcookbook.com.

COSTCO CONNECTION

The Paper Palace (Item 1567275; 7/6) is available in most Costco warehouses.

Miranda Cowley Heller's Pasta Bolognese

1 Tbsp olive oil
4 Tbsp butter, divided
½ cup onion, chopped
⅔ cup each celery and carrots, chopped
½ lb ground veal or chuck
¼ lb ground pork
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 cup whole milk
Pinch of grated nutmeg
1 cup dry white wine
1½ cups canned Italian plum tomatoes, diced, with juice
½ cup fresh tomatoes, chopped
2 tsp tomato paste
1½ lb pasta, cooked and drained
Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, for serving

Place oil, 1 Tbsp butter and onion in a large saucepan over medium heat. Cook, stirring, until onion is translucent. Add celery and carrots. Cook additional 2 minutes.

Add meats to pan; season with salt and pepper. Cook, stir and crumble meat with fork, until browned. Add milk; simmer gently, stirring frequently, until it cooks away. Stir in nutmeg. Add wine; simmer until evaporated.

Stir in tomatoes and paste. When sauce begins to bubble, reduce heat to low. Simmer uncovered for about 3 hours, stirring occasionally, adding 1/4 cup of water at a time, if sauce dries out. Salt to taste.

Toss sauce with pasta and remaining butter. Serve with grated cheese. Makes 3 to 4 servings.

Adapted from Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking *by Marcella Hazan (Knopf, 1992; not available at Costco)*