



NOTABLE EDIBLES:

Why the Economic Downturn Should Drive You to the Bar

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Most watering holes are filled with a soundtrack of cocktails being shaken, ice cubes clinking and bottle tops popping. But in the Underground Lounge, a sous terre at West 107th Street and Broadway, that music of mixology is occasionally broken by the sound of cracking chicken bones and the sizzle of onions as they hit a hot skillet.

The Lounge is home to Recession Cooking Classes, a sporadic culinary education program run by Katy Keiffer (a cookbook publicist) and Erica De Mane (a chef and cookbook author). Culinary missionaries, their goal is to get you cooking— even if they have to find you in a subterranean bar.

“Learn what Italians have known for centuries: It doesn’t cost a lot to eat well!” proclaims one flyer. And you will: As reggaeton pumps through the bar’s speakers, Keiffer and De Mane show their students how to make use of a whole chicken— cheaper than the sum of its parts—from deconstructing the bird to making the sweet-and-sour Sicilian dish *agro dolce*, a cinnamon-spiked gift from a long-ago Arab invasion.

“Cinnamon in savory dishes is like a revelation. It’s a Moorish flavor used in Sicilian cooking,” De Mane explained to students in one recent class, chopping celery. “I buy herbs from the Greenmarket. If I don’t use them in a week, I dry them on the windowsill to use later.”)

The classes—which cover such topics as chicken basics, cooking with squid and De Mane’s specialty, Italian poverty food— are held once a week in a makeshift kitchenette set before a smattering of low tables where cooing couples typically mingle for the bar’s live music. (Keiffer has been living above

the bar for the last 20 years. “This is my only way to deal with the bar noise,” she says. “If I have to put up with drunks at 3 a.m., I’m at least going to make use of the space on my own terms.”)

For \$20, instead of a hangover Recession Cooking students get detailed cooking instructions (recipes are also posted at ericademane.com), a shopping list, a bottomless glass of wine and a meal at the end of the lesson. And learning how to fix your own home-cooked meals on the cheap will always leave you with more change in your pocket to tip your bartender.