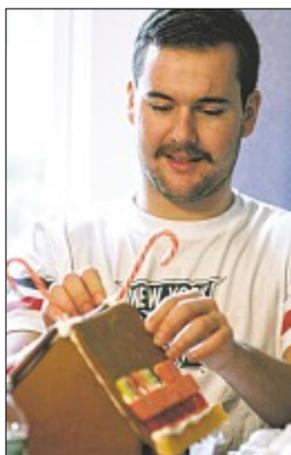




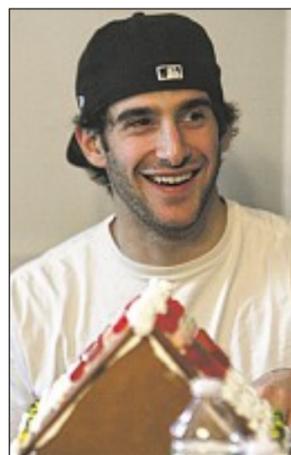
Joey Lipton



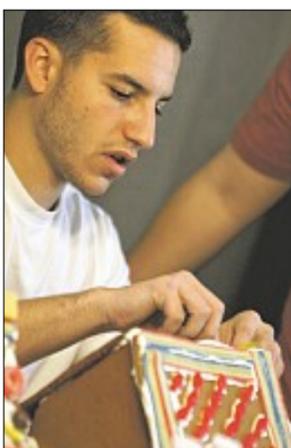
Joe Spinner



Burke Johnson



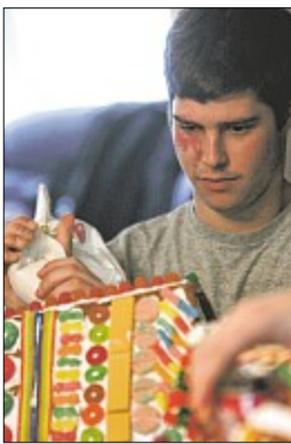
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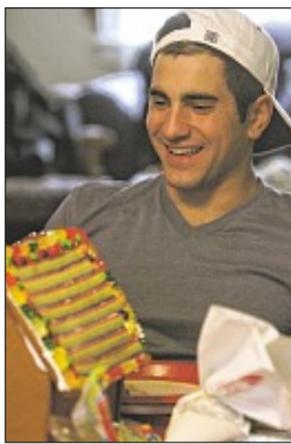
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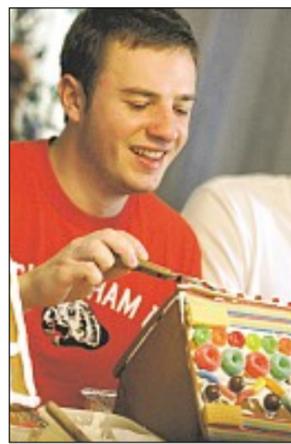
TJ Fahey



Mike Mezansky



Dan Green



Tom Waitt

## Gingerbread MEN

Larchmont friends carry on a holiday decorating tradition

Liz Johnson  
ewjohnson@lohud.com

A group of friends getting together each year to decorate gingerbread houses? That's not so unusual.

But 19 of them — and all men? Year after year ever since middle school? Now that's a holiday tradition worth carrying on.

Even so, this year might be the last for this particular group of friends from Larchmont. They will be scattering across the country for different jobs after college graduation, so their long-running ritual of affixing pretzels and icing and gum drops to home-baked gingerbread has taken on a little more meaning.

"They're very sentimental about each other this year," says Betty Comerford, who hosts the gatherings each year for her son, Phil, and his friends. "It's about so much more than the gingerbread. They're just such a unique group of boys."

The tradition started about 10 years ago, after Betty — a Home and Careers Skills teacher at the Hommocks Middle

SEE GINGERBREAD, 3B

Photos by Tania Savayan/The Journal News. See more photos at LoHud.com/food

## Make two impressive meals for Christmas

Susan M. Selasky  
Detroit Free Press

Christmas Day is special, and the meals you serve throughout the day should be, too.

Crepe Purses with Salmon Filling are a nice brunch or lunch option. Rich and luscious Beef Wellington with Madeira Sauce will serve as the centerpiece for a festive holiday dinner.

Here are some finer points:

■ **Crepes:** They are delicate and can be time-consuming to make, but once you get the hang of the cooking technique and timing, they are a breeze. To save time on Christmas Day, make the crepes up to two days ahead and the filling the day before. You also can make and freeze the crepes far in advance — they'll keep a good two months in the freezer. Fill them with sweet or savory fillings and roll them up burrito-style. Or pull up the edges and enclose a filling to make a sack. Tie the top together with a chive for a pretty presentation.

■ **Beef tenderloin:** From classic beef Wellington to fillets that are simply seasoned and roasted, beef tenderloin is a holiday treat. For beef Wellington, a fillet of beef is covered with a pate or duxelles (a mushroom mixture), wrapped in a sheet of puff pastry and baked. The tricky part is roasting the meat without overcooking it and keeping the pastry wrap from getting too soggy or mushy. We adapted a recipe from Cook's Illustrated, following these key steps:

■ **Dry-age** the meat for at least one to two days in the refrigerator. (You can start today!)

■ **Make the duxelles** ahead of time: Spread out on a parchment-lined sheet pan and refrigerate overnight.

■ **Sear the beef tenderloin** on all sides before spreading the mushroom mix on it and wrapping in the puff pastry. A good sear provides a crusty exterior and seals in all the juices.

If you don't want the expense of a center cut tenderloin, buy the whole tenderloin and cut it yourself. Freeze the tapered end for another use.

### Crepe Purses with Salmon Filling

**Crepes:**  
2 large eggs  
1 cup low-fat milk  
1/4 cup water

SEE CHRISTMAS, 2B

## These cookbook gift ideas will suit any taste

Los Angeles Times

Fall is the harvest season, right? That's especially true when it comes to cookbooks, which every year arrive in a seasonal flood that puts apples and pears to shame. By some counts, as many as three-fourths of all cookbooks in the United States are published in the couple of months leading up to the winter holidays.

Small wonder, as cookbooks make perfect gifts. They're relative-

ly affordable, easily found, and, if used appropriately (read: cooked from), they'll continue giving for years.

But sorting through that massive flood is no easy task. We looked at several dozen books this fall, reading and cooking from most of them, before narrowing it to this select group. There's a little bit of everything here, including the utterly beautiful, completely uncookable "Noma" (got birch sap?) and the irresistibly homey "Southern Pies."

### "Heart of the Artichoke"

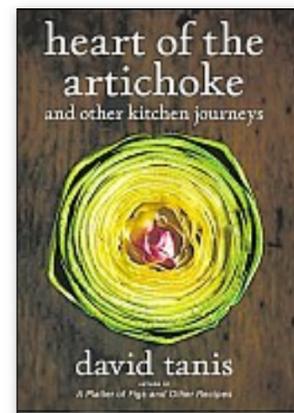
By David Tanis  
(Artisan, 344 pages, \$35)

Six months of the year, David Tanis is downstairs chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley where, he writes, "every day I get to design a menu quite similar to the kind of food I also cook at home — relatively simple dishes, somewhat traditional, fresh, clean, gutsy." The other half of the year he cooks dinner parties from his tiny Paris kitchen.

He draws on both halves of his life in writing this, his second cookbook. (The first is "A Platter of Figs and Other Recipes.")

I've always loved his cooking, and reading through this book, I've stuck a good couple of dozen markers between the pages, there are so many recipes I'm eager to cook. These are not cheffy recipes that require the help of an assistant to com-

SEE COOKBOOKS, 2B



### Send us your child's photos

Did your child cry at the thought of snapping a photo with Santa? Did your child throw a fit while you snapped a photo in front of the tree? Hudson Valley Moms Like Me seeks the most Hysterical Holiday Photos of 2010! Upload your picture for a chance to win ticket prize packs to Stomp, the Gazillion Bubble Show or The Flying Karamazov Brothers. Deadline is Dec. 30.

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# GINGERBREAD: Annual tradition started in middle school

CONTINUED FROM 1B

School in Larchmont — decided to change an annual tree decorating party she threw for the children into a gingerbread one, so everyone would have something to take home. She still hosts parties for all three of her children — her daughter, Sarah, is a freshman in college and her other son, Michael, is a junior in high school — and takes two full weekends to bake all the parts for the houses. “The oven doesn’t stop running from 8 a.m. to 10 at night,” she laughs.

“This tradition is only one of many examples of the Comerfords going out of their way to show us a great time,” Zach Berger, a senior at Wake Forest, wrote in an e-mail. “Whether being there to watch a football game, have a barbecue, make gingerbread houses or just hang out, Betty has always made us feel at home and feel like a part of the family. The gingerbread houses are just one example of her efforts to make sure that we all stay close.”

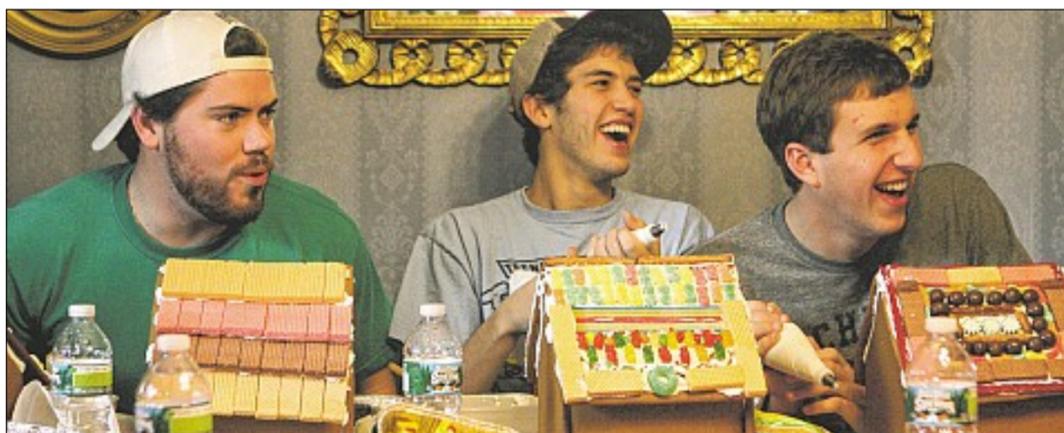
And stay close they have. This year, on the weekend after Thanksgiving, the friends planned an entire schedule of togetherness: an annual football game; a formal portrait (where they dressed in suits!); and a cocktail party — with their parents (gasp). And, of course, there was the gingerbread party.

Each guy has his own seat at a folding table, which Betty rents for the occasion, and there are communal bowls of candy for decorations. (See the recipe for Betty’s candy suggestions. She says striped gum works great for shutters.) “Some kids are really creative and are able to make intricate designs,” says Phil. “Some kids focus on their passions, like sports logos. You’re able to see what kind of person they are.”

And that’s evolved over the years, says Betty. “You really see all their personalities come out,” she says. “This one boy, Rory — I’ve told him, ‘You must have been a child who never colored outside of the lines!’”

One of the most memorable houses, Phil says, was made by Tim Dolan, who now goes to Dartmouth. One year, he decorated his house entirely in pretzels. Everyone teased him at the time, but the following year — you guessed it: “That was the one I’ll remember,” says Phil. “And I’ll remember forever.”

Phil, who is a finance and accounting major at the University of Michigan, says he knows some people might make fun of him and his friends — after all, it’s not the manliest of activities to deco-



From left, Rory Fugazy, Scott Krenkel and Philip Comerford decorate gingerbread houses at the Comerford home in Larchmont.

rate gingerbread houses. “But I think you need to step back and say it’s kind of funny,” he says. “You don’t take yourself too seriously. We’re 20 or so — but we’re still decorating gingerbread, and that’s fun. We’re sitting around, having conversations and making jokes and laughing. And that’s part of the holidays, too — being able to enjoy hanging out.”

Will they ever do it again? That remains to be seen. But this holiday tradition has helped make these friendships ones that Phil thinks will last a long time.

“There’s a lot more technology now to help stay in touch,” he says. “It’s a lot easier to remain friends, even across the country.”

True. But it’s awfully hard to pass the gumdrops. Or the pretzels.

## Gingerbread Dough

Betty says: “This is a very kid-friendly dough, easy to work with and not heavily spiced like some gingerbread. And it makes your house smell so good when it’s baking! This recipe will make 1 gingerbread house with plenty left over for gingerbread men.”

- 1 cup butter, softened to room temperature
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 1/4 cups molasses
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 6 cups all-purpose flour

Cream the butter and the brown sugar using an electric mixer until light and fluffy.

Spray a liquid measuring cup with nonstick cooking spray and measure the molasses. Add to the creamed mixture.

Beat in eggs, one at a time.

Add in the cinnamon, ginger, salt and baking soda along with 2 cups of flour.

Mix on low speed until combined. Add in 2 more cups of flour and mix on low speed.

Add in remaining 2 cups of flour. Dough will be very thick, so keep mixer on low speed. Divide dough into 4 thick pancakes and cover each with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Roll out dough to 1/4-inch thick on a lightly floured board. Cut out shapes using cookie cutters or make your own template for a gingerbread house out of cardboard.

Betty’s gingerbread house consists of 3 rectangular templates: the roof template that’s 7 inches wide by 9 inches long; the side template that’s 4 inches wide by 7 1/2 inches long; and the template for the front and back of the house, which measures 7 1/2 inches wide by 8 1/4 inches long. You need to bake 2 of each piece. To save time from having to recut template after each piece, you can roll out your dough on foil and then transfer foil to baking sheet. Bake 15-18 minutes or until lightly brown.

Use the leftover dough to make gingerbread men; they bake for less time than the pieces for the house. The roof takes the longest to bake because it is such a large piece.

## Royal Icing

Royal Icing is the icing needed to glue the house together. Be sure to keep a

damp cloth over it, or it will get hard very quickly. I usually double the recipe when I make it because I like to use a lot of icing.

- 3 tablespoons meringue powder
- 6-8 tablespoons warm water
- 5 cups sifted confectioners’ sugar

Place the meringue powder and warm water into a mixing bowl. Beat until well-mixed.

Add in confectioners’ sugar, 1 cup at a time. If it starts getting too thick, you may need to add water, but add just a small amount at a time.

Beat icing on a low speed for about 10 minutes. You want the end consistency to be almost like marshmallow fluff.

Divide the icing in half and place half in a sealed container, and the other half I use to make “icing bullets.” Place about 1 cup of icing onto a piece of plastic wrap; seal up both ends. Make several of these “icing bullets” to use in an icing bag when ready.

When it’s time to assemble the house cut off the plastic wrap from one end of the icing bullet and place into an icing bag with a large tip. Then use a twist tie to seal off the icing bag to make it easier to work with.

Purchase round 16-inch cardboard circles as the base for the house. Start by placing a line of icing onto the cardboard circle the length of

both sides of the house. Place edge of the two side templates into the icing, and use cans to hold up sides on inside and out until dry. Be sure the sides line up to be the exact distance to fit the front and back of the house. Then repeat with a line of icing to hold up the base of the front and back. Again, use cans to hold pieces in place overnight. Do not place on roofs until the next day to give the sides and front and back plenty of time to set. The next day, use the icing bag to place a layer of icing down roof sides to hold roof in place. Again use the cans to hold up

roof in place overnight. Assemble the house a few days before the decorating to make sure the house is solid.

## For decorating:

Now the fun part — decorating! It’s best to start with the roof and work in small sections at a time so the icing doesn’t dry out before you have had time to place on the candy. You can also use the icing bag to get detailed around the windows and doors. In addition, use the candy to decorate the yard around the house. The more candy the better and variety is essential.

## Some of Betty’s favorites:

- Gummy Bears
- Gummy Lifesavers
- Candy canes
- Skittles
- Twizzlers
- M&M’s
- Tootsie Rolls
- Swedish Fish
- Chiclets
- Smarties
- Big/small gum drops
- Dots
- Candy wreaths/Santas/trees
- Sugar wafers
- Peppermint green and red swirls
- Chocolate nonpareils
- Kisses
- Pretzel rods and sticks
- Striped gum

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