

KITCHEN NOTES

Published Wednesday, November 8, 2006

Brown-Bagging Fun

www.Lunchology.com

LuNcHoLOgy adds a little something extra to lunchtime with its lighthearted but educational bags printed with games and learning tools. Themes include "Brain Teasers," "Animals" and "Language Learners: Spanish." The bags are geared to kids, but grown-ups should find them amusing, too. A package of 25 bags costs \$5 to \$7 at various grocery stores and up-scale gift shops; and via e-commerce at:

www.Lunchology.com.

Italy's unsung glories

"The Glorious Soups and Stews of Italy"

(Chronicle Books, \$19.95) by Domenica Marchetti

What it is: Despite the huge number of Italian cookbooks out there, author Domenica Marchetti's effort stands out with its focus on soups and stews - a subject she said "gets short shrift" in Italian cooking. "But if you go to any restaurant in Italy, there's always a wonderful selection of soups," she said. "It's this heart of Italian cooking that has been overlooked."

Using the Italians' broad definition of soups and stews - the latter includes what we would term braises - she developed and adapted the recipes, many "known only in their own little regions," she said. "Wonderful examples of regional cooking."

Praise and quibbles: Her explanations of technique are some of the most clear we have read. Cleaning artichokes, for example, is finally made clear to us. The dishes we tested, Cranberry Bean Stew with Fennel and Radicchio and Smothered Chicken with Escarole and Leeks, were full of complex flavor and so simple to prepare. Our quibbles are minor and number only two: a longing for more of the excellent photography and a wish that she had included total preparation and cooking times.

Why we think you'll like it: Marchetti pulls back the kitchen door curtains, giving us a peek into the meals she prepares for her young family, speaking to us in a casual manner about the cuisine she so loves.