

Theme Music

Introduction

Marion Kane:

Hello. I'm Marion Kane, Food Sleuth, and welcome to this episode of "Sittin' In the Kitchen". Today I'm talking apples with Toronto pastry chef Joanne Yolles, in particular apple desserts, and most particularly that iconic one *tarte tatin*.

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Marion Kane:

I'm with Joanne Yolles, my long-time friend and colleague because she is a fellow foodie. She is a renowned-in-Toronto pastry chef. Joanne.

Joanne Yolles:

Hello Marion. Joanne Yolles. Friend. Colleague. Pastry chef. Mother. I could probably think of a few other things. We'll keep it at that.

Marion Kane:

Okay. You've worked in quite a few well-known Toronto restaurants, most noticeably for many years Scaramouche and then Pangaea and now you are teaching pastry at George Brown College, or you're teaching baking, correct?

Joanne Yolles:

Yeah, that's correct, in a nutshell.

Marion Kane:

Joanne, what do you think when I say the word "apples"?

Joanne Yolles:

Well, there is a classic apple tart which is my all-time favourite dessert. It's basically a thin layer of puff pastry a thin layer of a sort of thick apple sauce, and then really thinly sliced apples baked on top, then just simply glazed. Simple but it has to be done perfectly. The crust has to be perfect.

Marion Kane:

What kind of a crust does it have?

Joanne Yolles:

Usually puff pastry but it could be a nice flaky pastry.

Marion Kane:

You could actually buy the pastry frozen.

Joanne Yolles:

(Gasps). Well, you could.

Marion Kane:

(laughs). I'm going to get that recipe from you today. We actually collaborated on a dessert. We had a good time. It was about six or seven years ago when I was working on a column at the *Toronto Star* about *tarte tatin* — the origin of the thing, how it was invented by accident in France by two sisters who realized they could make an upside down one-crust apple dessert — and you and I started experimenting and it wound up being a frenzy of baking at each other's houses. I think we made *tarte tatin* at least six times, and we did perfect it in my opinion. Now how do you feel the apples play a part in this dessert?

Joanne Yolles:

The choice of apples is important because if you'll recall, we cooked those apples for a very long time on the stove in a very hot caramel so we had to find an apple that wouldn't fall apart under those conditions and would hold their shape and taste good with the ultimate finishing of the tart.

Marion Kane:

Drumroll. What apple was it?

Joanne Yolles:

At the time it was Royal Gala apples but I think since then there's all these other apples on the market. I think we have to go back, don't you think, to our stoves and try it with all... because now there's Honeycrisp and Red Prince or whatever they call them. There's all these new apples and we haven't tried those yet.

Marion Kane:

I remember that you devised a method that is not always used in *tarte tatin* for cooking the apples.

Joanne Yolles:

Some people make the caramel ahead of time and put apples into it... *tarte tatin* is a nice caramelized apple tart... so some people make the caramel ahead and then put the apples in and cook the apples in the caramel. But we started with all the raw ingredients. We put a whole lot of butter and sugar in the bottom of the pan and then the other thing was we used large pieces of apple. I believe... did we use halves or quarters?

Marion Kane:

I believe we used quarters and I believe... no I don't believe, I know... that I went out and bought a copper *tarte tatin* pan which cost me quite a bit but it's specifically for *tarte tatin*.

Joanne Yolles:

I did the same thing. Our little get-together there cost a few hundred dollars. It's a beautiful pan though and the tart comes out perfectly every time in that pan.

Marion Kane:

Yeah.

Joanne Yolles:

It really does. Not that you have to have it though. We had success with other pans.

Marion Kane:

With skilletts. Iron skilletts.

Joanne Yolles:

Yeah because I would make similar ones at the restaurants that I worked at. We certainly didn't have special copper *tarte tatin* pans. It's definitely doable.

Marion Kane:

To sum up — we peeled the Royal Gala apples, and we're tentatively suggesting we could use others now that there are new varieties, but they were the perfect apple. We peeled them, cut them in quarters, set them in the *tarte tatin* pan with the butter and sugar and caramelized them.

Joanne Yolles:

And if you'll recall we used extra apples on top because as the apples cooked down, and they cooked for about a half hour — forty minutes — it takes a while. As the apples cook down they shrink so we had extra apple quarters piled on top which we inserted in as the apples were shrinking so that when you ultimately turn out the tart the apples are all tightly packed and it looks beautiful.

Marion Kane:

Yes. Wow. I can taste it now. That *tarte tatin* was a military operation yet inserting extra apples... What are the properties of that Royal Gala apple that we needed for *tarte tatin*?

Joanne Yolles:

They were crisp to begin with. Crisp and a little bit on the tart side and not too juicy. Obviously they exude juice. You want that apple flavour but the main thing was they didn't fall apart and they kept their shape. When we cook the apples we don't want to add any extra liquid because it will make the crust soggy. You want a sort of thick apple sauce for that purpose. So we just cut up apples, add a bit of sugar, and sometimes a little cinnamon or even just a cinnamon stick to give it a hint of cinnamon flavour, and just cook them down. You don't need extra liquid because most apples have their own juice that will come out as you cook them.

Marion Kane:

To add another little wrinkle to this whole apple discussion or to sow the seeds of another issue, I find that apples at different times of the season can behave differently. This is a very, very disturbing thing. I have actually made *tarte tatin* with Royal Gala when it hasn't worked very well because the apples were too watery. They came from somewhere where they didn't get enough sun or I don't know what factor played into this. I've certainly used Northern Spy that had lost their tartness and I couldn't use them. Do you have any thoughts on this?

Joanne Yolles:

Also it depends where the apples come from too. You could take an Ontario Royal Gala and it could be different than a Washington state Royal Gala so yeah, it can vary throughout the season, it can vary from one country to another, one province to another. In terms of consistency it's sometimes hard to get a consistent product.

Marion Kane:

Are you going on an annual apple-picking this year?

Joanne Yolles:

I think I probably have to. You just eat so many while you're picking them, and they're so fresh. It's great.

Marion Kane:

There's nothing better than an apple right off the tree.

Joanne Yolles:

I agree. I agree, definitely.

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Conclusion:

Marion Kane:

That was me, Marion Kane, talking to the Toronto pastry chef and fellow foodie Joanne Yolles. You can find more about our adventures making the ultimate *tarte tatin* and the recipe on my website marionkane.com.

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