



PHOTOS COURTESY REBECCA ELMAN

Hungry to Learn

Personal chef Rebecca Elman teaches live cooking classes online.

BY SARAH RAFACZ

Making the switch to teaching cooking classes online was an adjustment at first, but personal chef Rebecca Elman found that she can still connect with people through food — even in cyberspace.

Elman moved to the area two years ago with her husband, Ben, and son, Theodore. (In the previous decade, she worked as a personal chef and caterer in New York City.) She wrote about food for several local publications, attracting the attention of RE Farm Café's Duke Gastiger. For a short time, Elman taught cooking classes at RE. Then, as goes so many other stories of this year,

the pandemic hit.

Eager to start cooking again, she launched her live online classes in the summer (thehiddenhostess.com). Because the classes are virtual, “the simpler, the better,” Elman says.

“This is definitely more focused,” she says, “where we’re



cooking one dish or learning one technique all together at the same time.”

Classes, which start around 5 p.m., are offered about once a week and have a 10-person limit. “You can be really interactive,” Elman says. “I can look at everybody’s dishes. People can ask tons of questions. You get to know people a little bit throughout the class.”

This winter, she wants to focus her classes on comforting foods — like soups, mushroom risotto and sauces. One class is \$30-\$40 (and a series of three classes is \$70-\$80), and Elman sends the ingredient and equipment list

ahead of time.

She also encourages friends and family members to sign up for a class together, especially if they live far away from one another. “I think it’s a great way to do something together, without being physically together.”

Elman’s cooking philosophy is rooted in seasonal, organic, healthy and delicious food. It’s the way she cooks for herself and her family — so it’s also how she teaches other people to cook.

“I love all food,” she says. “It’s just a great way to express myself and for people to express themselves. And we all cook. And we’re all cooking a lot more right now as well. I think it’s good to try new foods and to try new recipes, especially now, and I’m doing that as well. I’m always trying to learn new things.”

While none of us knows exactly when life will be back to something resembling normal, Elman already has plans for when it does. In addition to her family’s home, Elman’s property in Boalsburg, located on Main Street, also has a tavern, which was built in 1804. She plans to put a kitchen off the back of it so she can teach cooking classes and run a catering business.

“That’s the future, and we’ll see how long this all takes,” Elman says. “But we will all be together at one point in the future. To be able to share food and break bread together and drink wine is something we can all look forward to.” •