



Eric Arrouzé (dubbed Chef 911 by his students) runs an online cooking school from the living room of his East Vancouver apartment. **Page A37**

Lights, camera, action! Chef 911 shows how it's done

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By Wendy McLellan
Business Reporter

Eric Arrouzé stands at the chopping block in his tiny East Vancouver apartment mincing green onions to garnish the day's lesson for his students.

He sprinkles the onions over the dish, adds a sprig of herb, then reaches for the camera that's set up on a tripod next to the chopping block.

He snaps a few photos.

Later, Arrouzé will turn his step-by-step photos into a QuickTime movie clip to teach amateur chefs around the world how to recreate his Dungeness crab and tomato clafouti with zucchini salad on the side.

After years of training and working as a chef in some of Europe's finest resorts, Arrouzé is happy cooking alone in the little kitchen and sharing his skills through his online cooking school.

It's the perfect recipe to blend his passion for food, love of teaching and entrepreneurial talent.

"I am very happy because I do what I love to do — teach and cook," says Arrouzé, 36. "I have fun, and I do something different than other chefs."

Born in the southwest region of France, Arrouzé decided when he was still a child that he wanted to be a chef.

"At six or seven, I said I wanted to be a firefighter, but when I started to spend more time with my grandma, I wanted to be a chef instead. She was a great cook," he says.

At 16, he was working as an apprentice in a top restaurant in his city and, after completing three years of training, he began to work his way up the kitchen hierarchy in some of the best restaurants and hotels in Paris and on the Mediterranean.

At age 23, he was made executive chef at an exclusive five-star hotel on the French Riviera.

"I was there for three years and then I was bored," Arrouzé says.

Newly married, he and his wife moved to Montreal in 1993, where he found work as

an executive chef at a downtown restaurant.

Two years later, the couple moved across the country to Vancouver to escape Quebec's harsh winters and economic climate.

Arrouzé spent nearly three years working as second sous chef at Le Crocodile in downtown Vancouver, but found he was getting tired of the work.

"I was getting bored," he says. "I worked in hotels and restaurants, and it's very hard work. I was fed up."

Unwilling to give up his passion for cooking, Arrouzé took a job teaching at a private cooking school, then started working as a substitute instructor at Vancouver Community College and developing a series of courses on French cooking that he now teaches through the University of B.C. and other schools.

"I really enjoyed teaching," he says. "Cooking was like a job, then I found I had

something to give and people will pay for this knowledge."

Arrouzé's website, 911cheferic.com, began with a simple webpage he had to design for a class assignment to earn his B.C. instructor's diploma.

The name of the site came from his students, who nicknamed him Chef 911 because he was always rushing to their rescue when things went wrong in the kitchen.

With help from his wife, Frédérique Niel, who is a web designer, Arrouzé started with a few recipes and basic cooking tips for creating French meals.

He added a newsletter (written by Niel) and then more recipes before deciding he could turn the website into a business.

The newly designed site was launched in November 2002 after 14 months of development and about \$50,000 — the couple's life savings plus a bank loan.

"At first, we had a few sales, but things

weren't moving much," Arrouzé says.

"Then the *New York Times* published a story about online cooking schools and talked to me, and that started everything."

That was last October, and Arrouzé's website now attracts about two million visitors a month, who are attracted by hundreds of free recipes and information on the finer points of French cuisine.

For a monthly fee of \$7 US, subscribers — a few hundred so far — gain access to the 300 movie clips, an animated cookbook with Arrouzé demonstrating how to make everything from mayonnaise to beef bourguignon to creme brulee.

He also teaches basic techniques, such as how to properly slice garlic, make fish stock and debone a chicken.

He has students in 13 countries, including Australia, England, South Africa and France, although most are U.S. residents, he says.

Arrouzé creates each recipe then prepares the dishes, adjusting ingredients as he cooks. Using a digital camera, he photographs his progress every two or three seconds, then makes a four-minute movie of the process and downloads it to the website for students.

"People don't know where I am — they may think I have a great kitchen somewhere," Arrouzé says.

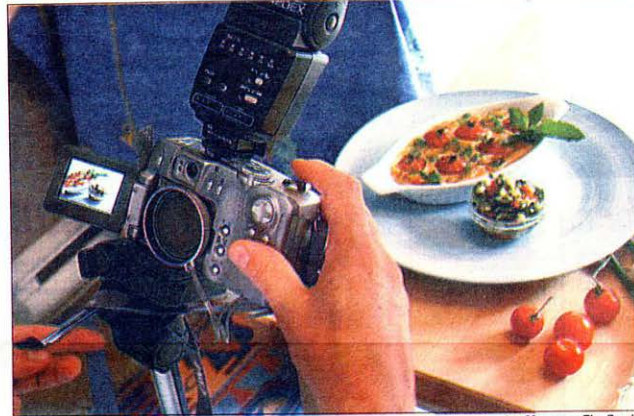
"It doesn't matter. What's important is what I do."

The website doesn't pay all the bills, but his subscriber list is growing by 15 per cent a month and he expects to pay back the bank some time next year, he says.

The next step is finding a bigger kitchen, then developing a line of ready-to-eat gourmet foods.

"I have fun. I like teaching and interacting with people. I get e-mail thank-yous from people and I've never met them," he says.

"You're not going to become a professional chef looking at my movies, but you will have enough information to recreate the recipes and you're going to cook great meals and have fun."



Jon Murray — The Provir
Eric Arrouzé photographs each step of the process as he prepares a French meal

Seven pointers for success from Eric Arrouzé

Low expectations for financial reward may be the best strategy for beginning an e-business, says Eric Arrouzé, who runs an online cooking school for amateur chefs. "I didn't have too many expectations — I didn't know what to expect, really," he says. "It just seemed like a logical step."

He may have started his cyber school with few ideas about success, but Arrouzé has learned a few other things along the way:

Figure out what you're trying to do: "If you go to a website devel-

oper, you have to be clear about what you want.

"Then shop around — there are a lot of crooks."

Cross-marketing brings business: Arrouzé promotes his website to his in-person cooking students, who pass the address to friends.

He also ensures that his site pops up on Internet searches for online cooking schools.

Make a plan: "You need an Internet marketing plan as well as a business plan," he says.

"You can have a great website, but if nobody can find you, it doesn't matter."

Learn to love technology: "I had to figure out a lot of things. I had to learn how to use a digital camera and how to make movies.

"There was so much technology, but I found out that I like computers and technology.

"I never knew that about myself."

Be prepared to wait for an income: Designing911cheferic.com took more than a year, all of

Arrouzé's savings and a bank loan. It costs about \$1,000 a month to maintain and it will be two years before he hopes to pay off the loan and start making a profit.

"A lot of e-businesses crash and don't make a cent," he says. "There are a lot of people trying to sell. You don't make money right away. You have to persevere."

Dream small: It may be slow to make a profit, but Arrouzé's entire business fits in his rented two-bedroom apartment and is easily

transported to Europe during vacations. He also had the good sense to marry a web designer.

The website only needs about 10 days of work a month to generate more recipes, regular newsletters and to answer questions from visitors, which leaves lots of time to teach cooking classes in person and for play.

"I don't have to be at the office all the time," says Arrouzé.

"I can be out playing squash and the subscriptions come in."

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