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## PACIFIC NORTHWEST

# ‘Dishing’ with The Diva

## Kathy Casey’s new book has the stuff to stuff us

BY GREG ATKINSON  
*Special to The Seattle Times*

KATHY CASEY knows how to make an entrance. With her blue eyes flashing and her glossy red lips extended in a big, warm smile, she enters a room with the energy of a cyclone. But inside this whirlwind of a woman there is no destructive force; quite the opposite, she is creativity personified.

Casey has a new book out – “Dishing with Kathy Casey: Food, Fun & Cocktails from Seattle’s Culinary Diva.” She’s barely brushed the sawdust off her shoes from setting up a television studio in her Ballard headquarters. And she’s been working for months on her new store in the Pike Place Market, “Dish D’Lish, Food T’ Go Go.” If she has all the subtlety of a supernova, it might also be said that she commands just as much attention.

Casey was only 23 and executive chef of Fullers restaurant at the Seattle Sheraton when Food & Wine magazine recognized her as one of 25 “Hot New American Chefs” in 1985. She had already won admirers among her Seattle peers. The culinary community acknowledged her as the bad girl to watch when, flouting hotel policy to buy foods from specific vendors, Casey eschewed them and sought out hand-crafted cheeses, foraged for wild mushrooms, and gathered

fruits from neighbors’ backyard trees. The spontaneity and freshness of these foods caught the right eyes, and it wasn’t long before the national press was talking about a revolution in Northwest cooking.

It would be a mistake to say Northwest regional cooking began with Casey, but it would be an easy mistake to make. Casey’s work so closely paralleled the burgeoning of a recognizable local style that during the past 15 years of the



E. JANE ARMS (FRONT)

*Bite-sized sesame cheddar olive poppers may just be the perfect pass-able hors d'oeuvre.*

20th century, she became an ambassador for the region's table. She has appeared on "Good Morning America," "CBS This Morning" and "The Larry King Show," and her work has been featured in dozens of publications. With the arrival of "The Pacific Northwest: the Beautiful Cookbook" in 1993 and a PBS companion series, Casey the iconoclast became the icon.

In the meantime, working closely with her husband John Casey and a handful of colleagues, she developed Kazy and Associates, a successful culinary consulting firm. When the firm morphed into Kathy Casey Food Studios in 1999, Casey received the mayor's Small Business of the Year Award. But the now-mature businesswoman had lost none of her brazenness. Her food studio was and is an uncompromisingly unconventional endeavor.

It was in the test kitchens of the studio that Casey developed the recipes for "Dishing." True to its subtitle, the book is as much about fun as it is about food. Colorful close-ups of Casey's finished dishes by photographer E. Jane Armstrong border on food porn, conjuring the kind of ecstasy that might occur if a very hungry reader were just about to sample a sesame cheddar olive popper or a forkful of "Oozy Chocolate Grand Marnier Cake." But beyond capturing the giddy mood of the collection, the photos provide a useful visual goal for the home cook. It's always nice to know what the finished dish is supposed to look like.

While I never judge a cookbook by its cover or its photos, I do sometimes jump to conclusions about a collection of recipes based on the head-notes. Every good cookbook provides a few words at the start of the recipes, and these

### SESAME CHEDDAR OLIVE POPPERS

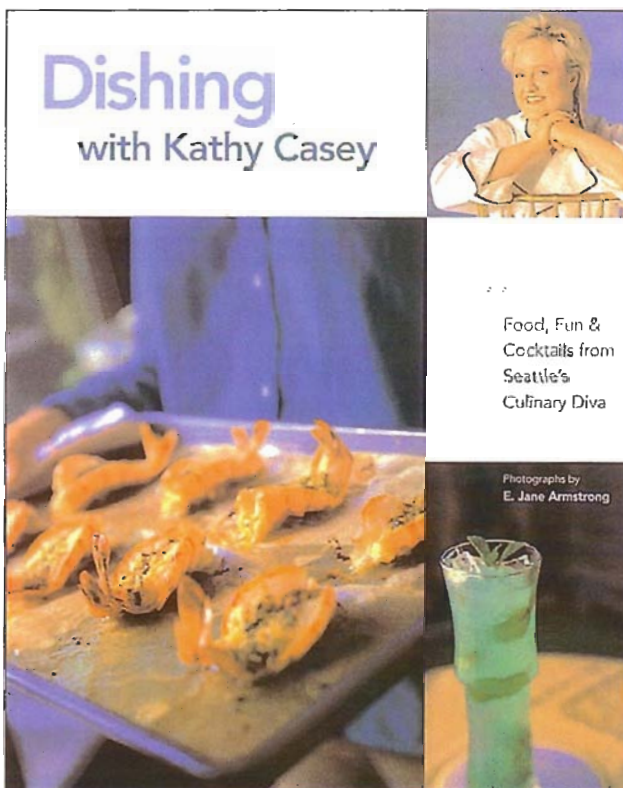
Makes about 24 poppers

*In making these morsels, I found a couple of time-savers. First, press the dough into the shape of a log and cut it into exactly the number of pieces you need. Then to wrap, use the thumb of one hand to press each piece of dough into a flat pancake in the palm of the opposite hand, then press the pancake around an olive.*

**1 cup (4 ounces) finely grated sharp cheddar cheese**  
**2 tablespoons butter, softened**  
**1/2 cup sifted flour**  
**Dash cayenne pepper**  
**1 jar (about 24) medium-large pimiento-stuffed olives, drained**  
**1/3 cup mixed white and black sesame seeds**

1. Beat the cheese and butter together in a mixer or a food processor, then stir in the flour and cayenne.
2. Shape 1 heaping tablespoonful of dough around each olive, covering it well and forming the dough into a ball.
3. Place the sesame seeds into a small bowl. Roll each ball in the seeds and place the balls on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 400-degree oven for 15 minutes. Serve hot.

— Adapted from "Dishing with Kathy Casey"



little captions can set the tone for the whole book. A head-note by Julia Child practically speaks with the author's singsong New England accent, inviting us into her kitchen to taste something really sumptuous. Casey's recipe headers seem to wear her trademark red lipstick, and while not all of them contain exclamation points, they're full of excitable words that allow the reader to think the diva has entered the building. "I love this," squeals at least one recipe opener, and verbs like "pouf," "twist" and "shake" abound.

But the whole point of Casey's book is to provide home cooks with more than a reference for entertaining at home; she wants to generate enough excitement to motivate those cooks to get into the kitchen and make something fun to eat. And if the headings and the flashy photos seem to be all about the pouf and twist, be assured that the recipes themselves will produce the real McCoy.

I made a batch of sesame cheddar olive poppers as soon as I got a copy of "Dishing," and it feels like I haven't stopped making them since. I've served them at four events and plan to make them at several more. Instead of pimiento olives in one batch, I used garlic-stuffed olives and liked them even more. In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if these might be the perfect pass-able hors d'oeuvres.

*Greg Atkinson is chef at IslandWood. He is also author of "The Northwest Essentials Cookbook" (Sasquatch Books, 1999).*