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## **The Course Corrections**

### **A chef's wife lightens the menu at Fiola — but keeps dessert**

By [Vicky Hallett](#) Posted on January 10, 2012

Maria Trabocchi loves food — but she loves her clothes more. So she makes sure she can fit into her wardrobe.

Although Maria Trabocchi isn't the chef at Penn Quarter's [Fiola](#) — that's the job of her husband, Fabio — she's managed to make her mark on the menu. Every day at lunch, the Italian restaurant offers a low-calorie, low-sodium meal with her name on it.

"He always cooks light for me," explains Trabocchi, Fiola's director of special events, who convinced her husband that some of their customers would want to eat the same way. The success of "Maria's Light Menu" (\$19) — which typically consists of a salad, grilled fish with a side vegetable and a sorbet — proves she was right. "And it's not a woman thing. Men and women, so many of our guests, are health-oriented," she says. For 2012, Fiola's toying with the idea of offering light specials at dinner, too.

It's not that other restaurants don't offer smart choices, Trabocchi says. But she wanted to make sure that they were easy to find — and that they had the same care put into them as the hearty pastas. "Just a green salad doesn't excite me," says Trabocchi, who prefers to stick her fork into unusual ingredients, such as blood oranges.

But what makes the offering really stand out? It's three courses, which sounds indulgent to Americans watching their weight. But to Trabocchi, who's Spanish, anything less would practically be starvation. For instance, she'd never consider skipping dessert. "I like sweetness at the end of a meal," she says. Pastries are her weakness, and she's a sucker for anything with fruit. (One of her favorite treats to make at home is pomegranate seeds combined with fresh orange juice.)

Trabocchi's definition of "eating light" doesn't translate into giving up your love of food. "I just love my clothes more, and I don't want to buy a new wardrobe," she says. So some days, she also samples the pappardelle and panettone but limits herself to a few bites. "A little piece is enough for satisfaction. If I didn't have it at all, I'd crave it more," she says. "You don't need to say no to anything. But you need to know when to stop."

She credits her philosophy to her European upbringing, which she's trying to emulate with her children, ages 8 and 10. Trabocchi buys almost everything they eat fresh each day, often from farmers markets or Whole Foods. "I don't have anything frozen. My freezer is for ice and limoncello," she says.

The snacks in the kitchen all come from the fruit bowl. Even when they have a richer dessert to dive into, it's a family rule to eat a piece of fruit first. And the kids pitch in when preparing meals, so they're constantly learning about the superiority of seasonal ingredients.

What she's really trying to teach them is an idea that's often forgotten in this country: "Being healthy doesn't mean depriving yourself."

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