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Issue 14

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ON THE COVER

“Setting”

Pastel on paper

By Wayne Brekke 2013

Photographed by David Ahlquist

After a long stretch of working with acrylic and mixed media, pastel on paper was a welcome change. “Setting” introduces a dreamy sense of form and bold colors that take the eye over the entire piece.

The blended lines, distinctive curves, and, of course, the tasty subject matter made it a pleasure to explore. Ink accents give it a more rustic approach. I love food, wine and cooking, so making art with these things in mind is more than inspirational, it's appetizing. – Wayne Brekke

No. 14

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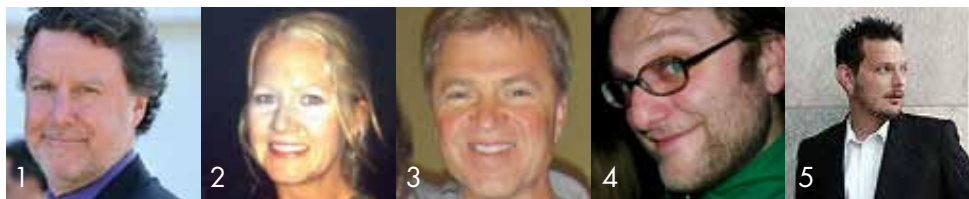


artwork by Jamie Danielle Hardy



EXPERTS PANEL

MEET THE FULLY QUALIFIED PANEL OF INDUSTRY EXPERTS WHO HAVE DEVOTED THEIR KNOWLEDGE TO THIS ISSUE...



1 Michael Campbell

2 Evie Clercx

3 John Finocchiaro

4 Paul Kulik

5 Marq Manner



6 Jason McLaughlin

7 Brian O'Malley

8 Oliver Pollak

9 Ann Summers

1 Michael Campbell

Michael Campbell is a regular humor columnist for *Food & Spirits Magazine*, where his "Dumpster" essays close every issue. His first book, *Are You Going To Eat That*, is a collection of 60 humor essays released in September 2009 by Prairie Moon Publishing. He has written for nationally-distributed entertainment newsletters *Coffee Break* and *Facts of Life*, and his off-beat observations have appeared in various issues of *Reader's Digest*. His weekly humor blog, MC, (mcwritingessays.blogspot.com) reaches thousands of readers, and he was recently named Humor Writer of The Month by the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop. Campbell is also an avid singer/songwriter with three CDs of original music, and was the founder of Mick's Music & Bar in Omaha.

2 Evie Clercx

Evie Clercx owns Empire Beverage Group: a beer, wine and spirit brokerage and brand management company that services the ND, SD, NE, IA and ID markets. Prior to starting her brokerage, she worked in the wine and spirits distribution, restaurant and marketing industries. Evie's passion is pairing food and wine, and she regularly conducts wine training seminars that focus on basic varietal knowledge, wine service, wine and menu pairing for restaurant professionals.

3 John Finocchiaro

John Finocchiaro is a past owner of Finocchiaro Wine Company, Inc., a Nebraska wholesale wine, spirits, and beer distributorship dating back to 1935. He also formerly co-owned Johnson Brothers Finocchiaro, LLC. John is a former Certified Public Accountant and a Certified Specialist of Wine.

4 Paul Kulik

Beginning at 19, Paul worked through a number of restaurants in Omaha, Washington DC, Berlin, Chicago and Paris before opening The Boiler Room Restaurant in the Old Market. He is a firm believer that a strict commitment to quality and learning makes the job enjoyable. Paul has contributed food columns at the Reader and Omaha Weekly and has been a chef instructor at Omaha's MCC Culinary Arts Institute. Paul is also a partner in Dundee's Amsterdam Falafel and Kabob. Updates to Paul's menu, which changes daily, can be found at www.theboilerroomrestaurant.com.

5 Marq Manner

Marq Manner is a fan of Americana. He is interested in small town cafe's, roadside BBQ, getting a hotdog from a stand made in the likeness of George Washington,

and the grittier eating atmospheres found in out of the way places. Marq has been writing about the local music scene for The Omaha City Weekly for the past five years and has also written music features for many other rags and blogs.

6 Jason McLaughlin

Jason holds the rank of National as a BJCP judge (Beer Judge Certification Program), is a craft beer aficionado, a writer for the Nebraska Beer Blog, and award winning homebrewer living in Lincoln. Jason's love for outstanding beer started early when his lifelong friend Adam Curfew of Salt Lake City got his start at Squatter's brewery. The rest is history, as Jason travels around the country judging beer competitions, and attending related events. Beer tasting and evaluation is his passion, and he can appreciate a great example of any style regardless of hype. His idea of a nice summer day is a lawn chair and a pint of Russian Imperial Stout.

7 Brian O'Malley

Brian O'Malley is a chef-instructor at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College. As President of the Heartland Chapter of the American Culinary Federation, Coach of the Junior Culinary Competition Team, Board Member of the Nebraska Food Cooperative and the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, and Muse Extraordinaire for Sage student bistro O'Malley spreads his passion for local and sustainable cuisine throughout the community.

8 Oliver Pollak

Oliver B. Pollak taught history at the University of Nebraska at Omaha for 38 years. He earned his doctorate at UCLA and law degree at Creighton University. He has published ten books and hundreds of scholarly and popular articles on many subjects including food and wine.

9 Ann Summers

Ann R.B. Summers is a healthy living author who writes professionally about food, science, nature, nutrition and fitness. Check out her blog site at annrbsummers.com for more on her recipes, children's science books, her newly updated e-book, and her online nutrition and fitness articles. She is a cook, food fanatic, mom, jewelry designer, editor, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



As I hope you've come to expect, this issue of *Food & Spirits Magazine*, our 14th, is loaded with some excellent articles and accompanying photographs from our regular contributors. Some of our former writers are also making a timely reappearance, along with a talented batch of newcomers. If we've established high

expectations in the past, I don't think you'll be let down this time around.

We also decided to do a few things differently in this issue. We got a little bit 'artsy' and we went back to high school.

You see, we've always talked a big game when it comes to evangelizing the creative community here in Omaha. After all, *FSM* has been built on the valuable contributions of the many talented writers, photographers, illustrators and designers that have graced our pages. Not to mention all of the extremely talented and creative folks within the food and spirits industry, which we cover. So too, we couldn't be happier about the dynamic developments our fair city has been seeing over the past couple of years.

"If we've established high expectations in the past, I don't think you'll be let down this time around."

Although all of our contributors are artists in their own right, we've always wanted to work with some 'actual' artists (you know, painters, sculptors, installation artists, etc.). We got that opportunity this issue when some exceptional local artists stepped up and helped us produce some the pieces you'll see in the coming pages.

Hopefully, you've noticed one such piece on our cover. It was done by local impresario **Wayne Brekke**, who among many other things, is a writer, musician, dad, husband, podcaster and just an all-around good guy. Obviously, he's a pretty darn good artist, too. You'll also find paintings by **Mark Daniels** and **Sydney True**. Additionally, we've got some great photos of an installation art piece by **Jamie Danielle Hardy**. All of them were kind enough to collaborate with us on this issue and we couldn't thank them enough.

You'll also notice many of the articles work around the theme of food and spirits as art. On the food side of things we'll take a look at cake decorating and cheese as the delectable art that it is, while

in spirits we'll look at beer bottle art and the emerging craft cocktail industry. To round the theme out, we even got another type of artist to lend us a hand by contributing an article. **Scott Zrust**, drummer for local sensations **Rock, Paper, Dynamite**, takes us on one of the band's recent road trips to enlighten us on what a group of kick-ass musicians eat on the road.

'Artsy' indeed.

"Any good publication is always looking for new ways to get more people in the community engaged, and we are too."

Any good publication is always looking for new ways to get more people in the community engaged, and we are too. That led us to revisiting the halcyon days of high school. Through mostly happenstance, we were able to connect with some of the dedicated teachers at **Benson High School**.

Justine Garman, a journalism instructor, and **Ronda Bruggeman**, a culinary arts instructor, teamed up to allow us to do a two-page spread on the culinary arts program at Benson High School. Current student and aspiring journalist, **Nautica Lloyd** turned in commendable design and an excellent article, while student photographers, **Rhylee Richardson** and **Perryanna Thomas** added the art. **Ted and Wally's Premium Homemade Ice Cream** stepped up to the plate and kindly agreed to sponsor the section which helped make it all possible. We're honored to be involved with such a community-based project and we'll certainly do more of this in the future.

And as always, we thank you, our readers – it wouldn't be worth it unless we had you along for the ride, too. We very truly hope you enjoy it.



Continental Drift

Lessons learned – and unlearned – from my time in the Eurozone

story & photos by Bill MacKenzie



Every little boy has his first romantic crush. Don't tell anyone, but mine was with food: mashed potatoes and gravy, to be specific. Mom used to tell the story of when the family was dining at the precursor of *Mr. C's*, back in the mid-1960s. Following dinner the waitress came over and asked me what I wanted for dessert, since I was a good little boy and had eaten all of my dinner. "We have chocolate ice cream, and cherry pie," she offered. "Well," I reportedly exclaimed, "what I really want is more mashed potatoes." Mom said the waitress looked stunned. She left, only to return with a small plate of mashed spuds...and the chef. "I want to meet the young lad who loves my mashed potatoes more than pie or ice cream!" the chef exclaimed.

And so it went. I later grew up to love more than potatoes, of course. My next love was blueberry pie: my grandmother's blueberry pie, to be specific. I still daydream about those pies. Our Irish Catholic family wasn't big on fancy meals. It was pretty much American comfort food, with spaghetti and meatballs or lasagna thrown in for a little ethnic variety, and cooked by mom, or grandma, at each and every home meal. Many of you can relate to that, I suspect.

By high school at Creighton Prep I had made friends with other kids from all across town. Most shared the same "meat and potatoes" background. However several of my friends came from different backgrounds, and meals over at their homes introduced me to some real culinary variety, including Lebanese, Mexican, Polish and traditional Italian. My taste buds responded as if I had hit the culinary lotto. College brought more friends from across the country, and they helped introduce me to even more cultural and caloric variety. Omaha, like America, has blossomed with ethnic diversity in recent generations. It is almost to the point where it is getting difficult to find old fashioned "meat and potato" restaurants.

I have long loved to travel; Seeing new sights, meeting new people, and yes, feasting on new and different (to me) foods. College friends moved to New York, D.C., Florida and California. Visiting them allowed me to sample ethnic foods in Chinatowns,

Little Italy, Little Bombay, North Beach, Cuban neighborhoods and a good many other ethnic enclaves. While I always enjoyed seeing my buddies, I traveled as much for the chance to take in new sights, aromas and tastes.

In the 1990s my best friend moved to London, where he would live for 12 years. London was my first trip "across the pond." While it was a huge bonus to have a "local" show me some of the sights, his work schedule left me as a solo traveler much of the time. Not to fear, as I had already discovered that I traveled best when using the "trial and error" method. By stumbling upon pubs and little ethnic restaurants quite by happenstance, I ended up having some of my favorite dining experiences (Then there was the Pakistani restaurant that served Lipton Cup o' Soup as their soup de jour – you can't win them all).

"By stumbling upon pubs and little ethnic restaurants quite by happenstance, I ended up having some of my favorite dining experiences."

Earlier this year I had an opportunity to spend eleven days in Europe. A good part of my time was spent attending a conference. That was fine, as my work helped pay my way, and allowed me to extend my time by tacking on an extra week or so in Paris. I traveled with my husband, who has been to culinary school and owned a restaurant "in a previous life."

Our travels took us to western Germany and then to Paris. Most US travelers to Germany fly into Frankfurt, and so it was with us. The city resembles a larger American city probably more so than any other European burgh, as it was largely rebuilt following WWII. Construction cranes and American style skyscrapers dot the sky. I found that to be equal parts reassuring and off-putting. Oh, and if you have never spent time in Frankfurt, everybody and their dachshund speaks English.

This was my first visit to the German interior. Our first impressions were how forested and green it was, even in late winter. Our second impression came from our taxi driver, who appeared vaguely Middle Eastern. He set off for the city center and soon had the late model Mercedes taxi up to 180 km/h (111 mph). The ten minute ride truly was quite a rush! The Germans really do love their cars, and there must be something in the German federal constitution that guarantees the right to drive at near the speed of sound, even in urban areas.

It didn't take long for us to agree on the next big impression concerning our surroundings. Everyone is thin – pencil thin even. Well, except for the American tourists. *Could this be Germany?* The land of sauerbraten? And Wiener schnitzel? Of beer steins the size of cowboy boots? To heck with the French paradox. *What the heck is going on here?*



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We were soon determined to find out. We set out from our hotel (the über traditional German Holiday Inn Express), walking around downtown Frankfurt, past park, museum, opera house and skyscraper after skyscraper. We must have walked two miles before we decided we were hungry enough to look for a place to eat a proper Sunday lunch.

Nothing was open. Nada bookstore or a department store. Not the Apple store! Not even a Starbucks! A few sidewalk cafés seemed open, but they were sparsely populated, even on a mild late winter day. It seems German "blue" laws endure into the 21st Century.



"If you live in a land where you wear shoes out every few months, and avoid consuming virtually all fried foods, you can eat whatever else your heart desires."

So we walked the half mile or so down to the Main River, which bisects the city, much as the Seine crosses Paris. And there we found a lovely "modern German" restaurant, Main Nizza, doing a bustling business.

We were introduced to the owner, a gregarious British fellow, who welcomed us to Germany, to Frankfurt, and to his restaurant. We were seated at a banquet with a glorious view out the wall of windows overlooking the Main River. This restaurant reminded me of what Rick's Boatyard could have been if they had only tried. The food was essentially a fancy version of German comfort food. We really liked it, including the apfelwein. We also noted that the only amply proportioned people we saw in all of Germany were seated around us in Nizza. More than a few were Brits and Americans, as it turned out.

That night we walked the neighborhood around our hotel, trying to decide where to have dinner. Fortunately, most of the restaurants were of the 'mom and pop' variety, either pizzerias, Japanese or Turkish. We opted for the latter. I confess to have never eaten at a Turkish restaurant before, and though I am certain there are differences with Greek cuisine, I will only say that if you enjoy Greek food, you will enjoy Turkish just as much. The similarities dwarf the differences.

The bulk of our time in Germany was spent in the charming little university city of Heidelberg, located on the edge of the Black Forest. The University of Heidelberg hosted the conference I attended. The city seemed designed for walking, and we did a lot of it (we ended up wearing out three pairs of shoes during our



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time in Europe). Like Frankfurt, we found the restaurants to be predominantly family-owned. Being a university town, Heidelberg is full of culinary options. Surprising to us was the number of excellent Italian restaurants. There was even an American style Jazz and BBQ restaurant. Well, that's what it claimed to be anyway.

In five days in Heidelberg, we walked virtually everywhere we went, along the famed Hauptstrasse (main pedestrian street), up the hillside to the ancient Heidelberg Castle, and along the Neckar River. We dined several times on classic German cuisine, including a lunch at the historic Hotel Ritter in the Old City. The hotel and restaurant date back to 1592. Yes, that is not a typo. I can now cross "eating at a 400 year old restaurant" off my bucket list. We were delighted, not only by the food (deer was included on the menu), but by the fact that a few older gentlemen seated at the next table wore suspenders and had beer bellies. At long last! Truth be told, while we enjoyed every restaurant meal in Heidelberg, our favorite meals in the city were actually found at Italian and Middle Eastern restaurants.

Following our time in Heidelberg, we were off on the High Speed German Bahn railway into Paris. Less than four hours from Heidelberg Centrale to Paris Est, with only one change of train, and a semi fast food lunch at the rail station in Mannheim. Even our complimentary meal served in 2nd class on the train was better than what you would find flying first class on most airlines.

We arrived in Paris late Friday afternoon, to the sound of honking horns and a thousand motorbikes. Despite the romantic portrayals of Parisian life found in scores of movies and travelogues, Parisians live a fast life typical of most large urban cities. They just do it with a bit more panache than can be found in London or New York.

High speed or not, Paris is the height of romance and beauty. If you have been there you already know that. If not, for goodness sakes, what are you waiting for? Paris is great for walking – just be sure to bring your umbrella. I always wondered what it would be like to stroll in the rain or snow along the Seine, or through the Latin Quarter or the Montparnasse neighborhoods. Well, we got to find out. Paris had its heaviest snow in many years while we were visiting. Apparently the city budget for snow removal is close to €0. I'm not sure how you say "let it melt" en francais, but that must be the city street department's official motto.

Anyway, snow and rain be damned. We transversed many miles on foot, both in sun and snow, and loved almost every minute of it. The wonderful thing about Paris is that behind the next curve on just about every narrow side street will be a quaint little café or bakery, or both. The movies really do get that part right. Which leads me to my impression of the French: how do they stay so darn thin, eating all those éclairs, macaroons, fancy chocolates and all that cheese? Come to think of it, their wine isn't calorie free, either.

Scientists and dieticians have studied the European diet for decades. I have a word or two of advice for all of them. If you live in a land where you wear shoes out every few months, and where you avoid consuming virtually all fried foods or "fast food", you can eat whatever else your heart desires, and not gain weight. Portion control plays a part in this as well. There are no "super-sized" meals to be had, and while our restaurant meals were universally filling, by the time we were full there was nothing left to take home.

I have been back at home for a few months now since my European adventure. You may be wondering whether I have since adapted my diet to take into account the lessons learned in my travels. Unfortunately not. Maybe I will just blame it on our lousy weather!



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Must Eat in Class: Benson High School's Culinary Program

by Nautica Lloyd, photos by Rhylee Richardson and Perryonna Thomas

Benson High School's Food Program offers a wide variety of courses for their high school students; Foods and Nutrition, Culinary Skills and Entertaining with Foods are all on the curriculum.

Benson's Food and Nutrition program provides students with the basic skills of cooking. This course involves the study of cultural and social aspects of nutrition and food. Students are given an introduction to nutrition and safe food preparation for the home. Students also prepare foods associated with every section of My Plate, which is the USDA's model for illustrating the five food groups that are the building blocks for a healthy diet.

The Culinary Skills class uses the ServSafe curriculum to practice the proper handling of food in the restaurant and hospitality industry. In Culinary Skills, students adhere to the standards set by the National Restaurant Association Pro Start Curriculum.

"You get more freedom, you get to make what you want," said senior Johnathan Blatch.

Benson's Entertaining with Foods class just happens to be one of Benson's most popular food courses. This course lets students cater functions all while learning. This course gives students the freedom to cook what they please. Students spend their time preparing specialty desserts, meats and sauces as well as both regional and ethnic cuisines.

"It's a very creative, cooking class to take," said senior Breanna Willis.

Benson has a very hands-on food program and students learn many skills that will help them in the future. While the students are in Benson's Food Program, they are being taught recipe reading skills, etiquette, customer service, time management and much more. All while guaranteed to have fun too.

The culinary program is headed by Mrs. Ronda Bruggeman. Bruggeman attended Battle Creek High School in Battle Creek, NE where she graduated in 1994. After high school, Bruggeman



Ronda Bruggeman

traveled to Wayne, NE to attend Wayne State College. In 1999, she graduated with a Bachelor's in Family and Consumer Science with a minor in Sociology.

During her time in school, Bruggeman taught different summer camps at Metro Community College. In April of 1999 to August of 2001 Bruggeman was a Camp for Kids Instructor. She was a Family and Consumer Science teacher at Bellevue East High School and Life Management teacher at Wilson Jr. High in Council Bluffs, IA. Bruggeman graduated again in 2006 from Peru State College, with a Masters in Curriculum Instruction with an Emphasis in Technology.

"I think it's an excellent opportunity for students to show their culinary skills," said Principal Mrs. Anita Baldwin.

In April of 2003, Bruggeman came to Benson High as Family and Consumer Science teacher and Culinary Arts Instructor. She has been trained at some of the best culinary schools such as CAFE Leadership at Johnson & Wales University and CAFE International Breads at The Florida Culinary Institute.

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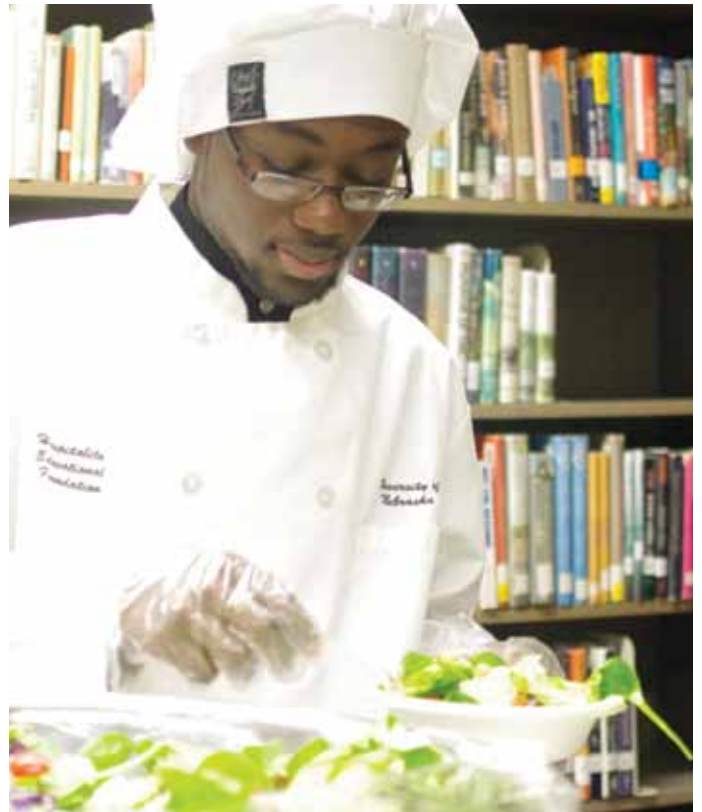
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Student Chef John Blatch prepares a salad.



One of the many dishes prepared by the students.

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Cook Before You Leap?

A Culinary Jump to an Artistically Tasty Dish by Charles Schlusel

One of my favorite cooking idioms is “you eat first with your eyes first” and I always want my food to be as beautiful as it is delectable. My background is in culinary education at *Metro’s Institute for the Culinary Arts* and my favorite class ever was a sauce class with a large tome of several hundred pages devoted almost exclusively to hundreds of variations derived from the five classical French mother sauces. In other words, somewhat technical stuff.

My friend Dave, on the other hand, is always pushing the envelope in everything he does; he lives life on the edge and is often taking a leap of faith trusting there will be a place to land. This philosophy extends to his cooking style as well. Dave’s education is as an art major, his culinary schooling was a question of ‘here and there’ as he waited tables at some wonderful restaurants, quizzing the chefs between delivering courses to his diners.

“Not all jumps turn out so well, but this one ended with a safe landing and a sublimely tasty recipe.”

I often get a call from Florida as he excitedly starts telling me about a new dish he is inventing to try out on his family. As I listen I’m thinking “nooooo, you can’t do that, it’s not a proper culinary technique, it’ll never work.” But, as often as not, as he continues to describe the dish, it not only works, but is often intuitively brilliant, often to my surprise. He tends to jump first and ask questions later, while I prefer the tried and true classic approach.

A few months ago, he started suggesting some ideas for a sauce we could cook together over a Skype call. I was once again silently questioning his cooking acumen. But as we continued the conversation and ideas were volleyed back and forth, I sensed a delicious dish starting to coalesce into existence; green peppercorns and shallots, fish sauce and coconut milk, classic French *beurre blanc* techniques and delicious Asian flavors melding together.

My yin balancing his yang as the synergistic sum of our ideas became greater

than its individual parts. Not all jumps turn out so well, but this one marched into uncharted culinary territory and ended with a safe landing and a sublimely tasty recipe in hand.

The following is the result of that phone call, and the beautiful plating was also a collaboration of ideas between Dave, my photographer/food stylist extraordinaire, Jacob Herrman and myself. My hope is that this will encourage you to embark on your own culinary adventures. Don’t be timid about experimenting. Play with your food and above all, have fun in the kitchen.

Sweet Chili, Caramelized Scallops and Shrimp with a Green Peppercorn Coconut Curry Beurre Blanc (yields 4 servings)

Beurre Blanc Sauce

- 1 Tbsp finely chopped shallots
- ½ cup Gewürztraminer Wine
- 2 Tbsp fresh lime juice
- 2 tsp fish sauce
- 1 Tbsp Thai red curry paste
- ½ tsp sugar
- 1 cup unsweetened canned coconut milk (not from the dairy aisle)
- ½# unsalted butter (cut into ½ inch chunks kept cold until incorporated into sauce)
- 1 tsp lime leaves chopped fine (available in the freezer section of Asian grocery stores)
- 2 tsp green peppercorns (in brine, rinsed and drained)

Seafood

- 16-20 size shrimp
- 4 medium scallops
- 1 Tbsp olive or vegetable oil
- ½ cup Mae Ploy sweet chili sauce

Directions

1. Add the first six ingredients and simmer in a large heavy bottomed sauté pan until almost all the liquid is gone.
2. Stir in the coconut milk and lime leaves, turning up the heat to medium high and bringing the sauce to a simmer.
3. Add the cold butter chunks, whisking continuously, removing immediately from the heat once butter is completely incorporated to prevent sauce from breaking.
4. Add the green peppercorns and salt to taste.
5. Hold the sauce in a warmed thermos or placed in a double boiler with hot water on the back of the stove (use within 30 minutes or sauce may break).
6. Heat 1 Tbsp olive or vegetable oil in a large sauté pan over medium high heat, searing the seafood for a minute or two per side until just cooked thru, brushing with the sweet chili sauce the last minute or so of searing to caramelize the sauce.

To serve

Pool a little sauce on each plate and artfully place the scallops and shrimp on top of the sauce, if desired serve with jasmine rice mixed with cilantro and grilled pineapple chunks, a tiny splash of rice wine vinegar or lime juice and toasted macadamia nuts seasoned with salt and pepper to taste. Edible flowers make for a delicious splash of color.

photo by Jacob Herrman

Dining at the Metropolitan Hotel

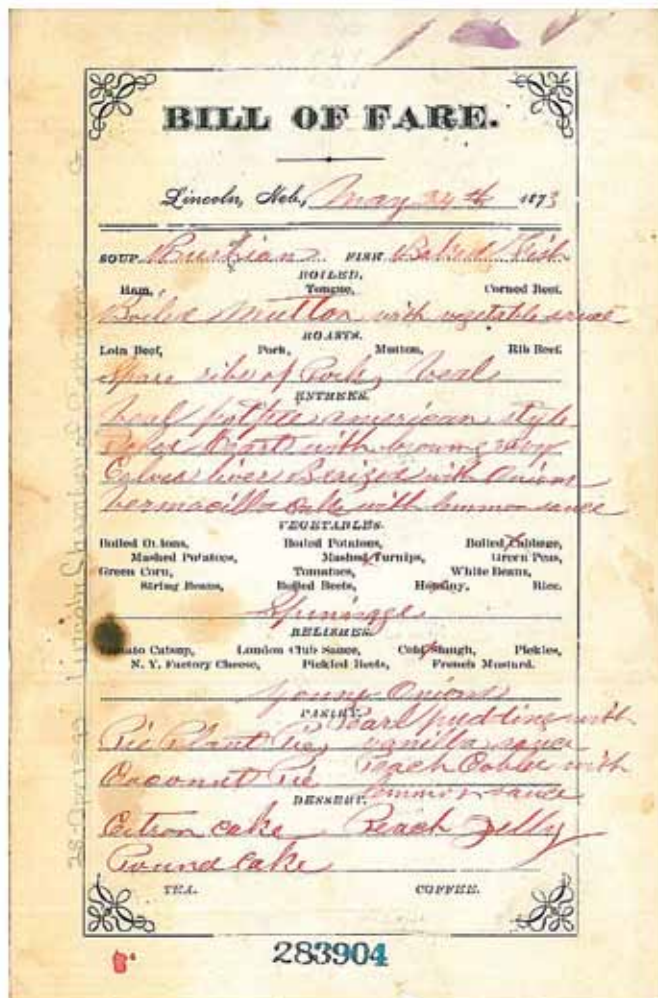
(Saturday, May 24, 1873)

by Oliver B. Pollak

The first printed American restaurant menus appeared in the 1830s at Delmonico, the New York pioneer of haute cuisine and wine. "Bill of Fare", popular for much of the 19th century, was by 1900 eclipsed by "menu." The passage of time, changing tastes and recipes, requires translation through 19th century cookbooks.

The village of Lancaster became Lincoln, the state capital in 1867. Connected to the transcontinental railway in 1870, the population rose from 2,500 in 1870 to 7,000 by 1875. The Metropolitan Hotel, at the corner O and 8th Streets, was one of about a dozen Lincoln hotels in the 1870s. The hotel's 45 rooms accommodated 80 guests. The hotel staff of ten included seven women. The dining room seated 38.

The Metropolitan bill of fare combined boilerplate food items accompanied by hand written entries, based on availability. Much of the food was canned or tinned, a popular preserving process. Refrigerated railway cars appeared in 1875.



Menu Courtesy of the Jane Pope Geske Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors, Lincoln City Libraries, Lincoln, Nebraska

Russian soup is no doubt borsch for which Wikipedia provides six different spellings, not including Cyrillic or Yiddish. 'Cold slaughter' and 'spinnage' were proofreading failures. Baked fish was probably a local catch. Boiled cow or buffalo tongue were delicacies.

I have partaken of many lamb or agneau dishes: kabobs, shawarma with tzatziki sauce, cevapcici at Dario's, lamb sausage, lamb burgers, rack of lamb, lamb chops, leg of lamb with mint sauce, but I have not seen mutton on a modern menu. Lamb is young, mutton is sheep gerontocracy, tougher and stronger tasting. Boiling or stewing mutton would soften the texture; the vegetable would make the meat more palatable.

Disappeared dishes, items not on contemporary menus, include Veal pot pie, American style, Vermicelli cake and New York factory cheese, perhaps a precursor for New York Cheese Cake. Baked Heart, organ or offal, today would be pet food (or only found at exclusive restaurants). Menu silence raises questions; why no oysters, chicken, game, deer or buffalo? The only French is "entrée."

Relishes are important sauces and condiments. They came in bottles or on serving dishes. London Club Sauce, claiming to be half the price of Worcestershire sauce, was served at Boston's prestigious Parker House (remember Parker House rolls) in 1865. Young onions are scallions or spring onions. Green corn is young corn and is yellow. Today, relishes are not on the menu, they are already on the table. Tomato catsup appeared in 1876.

Finally, it's time for pastries, desserts and sweets. The more obscure pie plant pie (rhubarb pie) and the tapioca pearl pudding joined the ubiquitous pound cake.

The Metropolitan cooks had no gas or electricity. Coal and wood provided the heat for baking, braising, broiling, roasting, steaming and stewing, but Lincoln did have many grocers, meat markets, bakers and printers.

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O Flavor, Where Art Thou?

by Ann Summers



Our flavor seeking odyssey begins with *The Odyssey*, as we find our freshly bathed hero, Odysseus, rubbing himself with olive oil before approaching a beautiful princess. But the ancient world had been using olive oil for lots of wonderful things since before Homer wrote down his adventurous tale of bathing in the 8th Century BC. To get olive oil you need a Mediterranean climate, olive trees and something to crush the olives along with their pits. You'd strain the pulp through fine linen; let the liquid sit to separate the oil (on the bottom) from the water and bitter juices (on top,) then drain the oil from a bottom spout, and the rest from an upper one.

All over "the Med" folks did this, and shipped the stuff to northerly climes via ships in the pottery equivalent of canning jars. The trade networks of Greece and Turkey soon became (like most everything) Roman, and by the time that empire fell, southern Europe, Adriatic States, and North Africa and the Near East all produced their own oils and their own marketing. Enter California, and then the American Southwest, and South and Central America, each producing oils with different and distinct characteristics.

"Even Bronze Age brewers knew the marvels of vinegar because it tastes good, but it also restores a feng shui-like balance to dishes."

Sour Grapes

If olive oil is olive minus juice and pulp, what is vinegar, then? Since the earliest record of wine dates to around 7000 BC, it would be no great leap of faith in human ingenuity and hunger to put more bacteria into the same hands that made the wine in the first place. You see, *vin aigre*, or sour wine, as its Latin-based name suggests, is an acidic solution, got in a further chemical reaction after the sugar-eating bacteria had turned grape water into wine, some alcohol-slurping bacteria turn the alcohol into acetic acid.

One might argue that this is not the greatest trade-off; why throw good wine after bad? Even Bronze Age Brewers knew the marvels of vinegar because it tastes good, but it also restores a feng shui-like balance to dishes. Many cuisines of the Southern Hemisphere use citrus for that much-needed acidic sproing to the palate, but if you weren't in those latitudes, or didn't have tamarind or annatto, or yuzu (all sour additions to Eastern diets) then you might want to make some vinegar. The highly acidic product was also resistant to bacterial growth, and was ideal for preserving food without dehydrating it the way packing it in salt does. And if you had no salt, you would ferment the living daylight of all your leftover wine, thus saving your food from rotting and your land-bound relatives from the temptation of drinking too much.

Love Makes the World Go Round

But much more than wine or vinegar was consummated from these bacterial bacchanalia. Ah fermentation love, in the Biblical sense: grape juice begets wine or grappa, crushed grain begets bread

or beer, milk begets cheese or yogurt, rice gruel begets sake or rice vinegar, cane or palm juice begets cane or palm wine or liquor, raisins beget khall inab or raisin vinegar, corn mash begets bourbon, apple cider begets hard cider or cider vinegar, cabbage begets kim chee, and potatoes beget vodka. But while love can be inevitable, fermentation needs very distinct types of environments and species of bacteria to turn out well. Anyone who has ever bought a wine-making kit for \$29.99 can tell you that. And while fermentation was known to many, it was only when Louis Pasteur magnified the little squiggly things responsible for the magic that it was really understood by science.

Yo' Mama

So what to do if you were a Nebraska rancher in the 1800's and you wanted vinegar? You might hop a ship to Modena in Italy and spend your fortune on some aged balsamic, but most likely you'd go and ask your neighbor's mother. Sorry, scratch that. You'd ask your neighbor for his mother. And no, he would not level a shotgun at you and tell you to "git." He would go and fetch a crock with a wobbly, slimy, half-live brownish thing, and scoop some of it into your crock which you would have had the foresight to bring.

You would carry this unspeakable-looking thing tenderly home, and pour into it some of whatever fruit-derived alcoholic stuff you have, perhaps Aunt Frieda's gooseberry wine that had been sitting on the shelf for donkey's ages. You would cover the crock, store it in a cool dark place and wait for it to make vinegar while you ranched up the doggies. Your mother now, is a mother of vinegar, very similar to the sourdough starter containing yeast that you might also have borrowed from your Great Plains neighbor, at least until he started getting the shotgun out anyway because you didn't loan him anything back.

"Health claims abound. Olive oil is loaded with polyphenols and is about the best oil you can ingest."

Alternative Medicines

History tells us that vinegar has been used for things such as treating sprains (soak a towel in it and swathe affected area,) rinsing fruit and veg to limit mold growth, mixing with plaster of Paris to delay hardening for home wall repair, soaking lamp wicks to keep them from smoking, and as an antidote for ammonia poisoning. Vinegar can pickle anything you can fit into a jar (see my last article or reference the mid-19th century *White House Cook Book*,) and Elizabeth David, 1950's British Hall of Fame Cookery Superstar said vinegars are indispensable for rich dishes, particularly for her "Sour Red Cabbage and Sausage." According to some, vinegar is a wonder-medicine, and just looking at it will help you drop the pounds. This may be exaggeration, but it does bring a lot of flavor without bringing a lot of calories or salt as well.

The more recent history of olive oil includes its use as a laxative, holy anointing oil, a digestive, lamp oil, sunburn treatment, skin softener, wood conditioner, preservative, and antiseptic. More and more, olive oil has rewarded eager diners with ice cream, popcorn dressing, cakes and scones, and oil-poached seafood or fowl. Artisan prices are being paid for EVOO (as some chefs abbreviate extra virgin olive oil,) but as a recent exposé in *The New Yorker* pointed out, buyers must beware and make sure they are getting the real thing, since it is one of the foods most often diluted with sub-standard product and sold at premium prices.

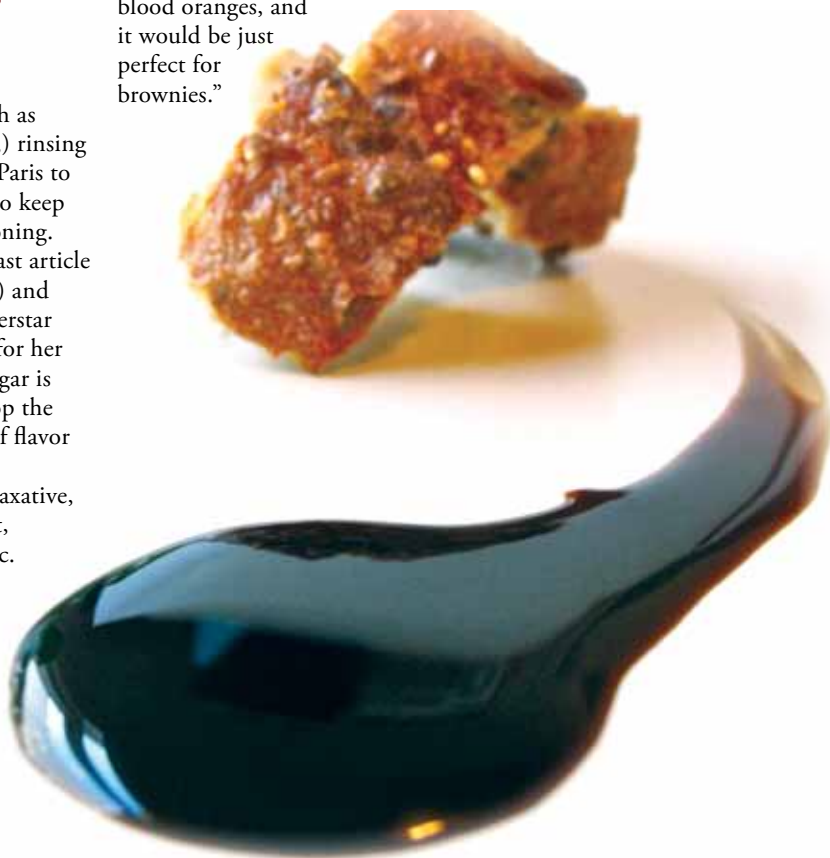
Health claims also abound. It's an unsaturated oil that is unprocessed with heat or hydrated to form trans fatty acids; it is loaded with polyphenols and is about the best oil you can ingest. But there are way better reasons for using it. Try making up a classic vinaigrette with real olive oil: A dab of Dijon mustard, dash of salt, a tablespoon of lemon juice or good vinegar and a quarter cup or so of olive oil. Whisk. Couldn't be easier. Get crazy and add herbs, honey, anchovy, or minced garlic. Then do the same thing with some clear oil your aunt might have used. If you can stand to taste the latter, you'll put your money on, and finish the former. How to be sure you get the good stuff? Check your sources.

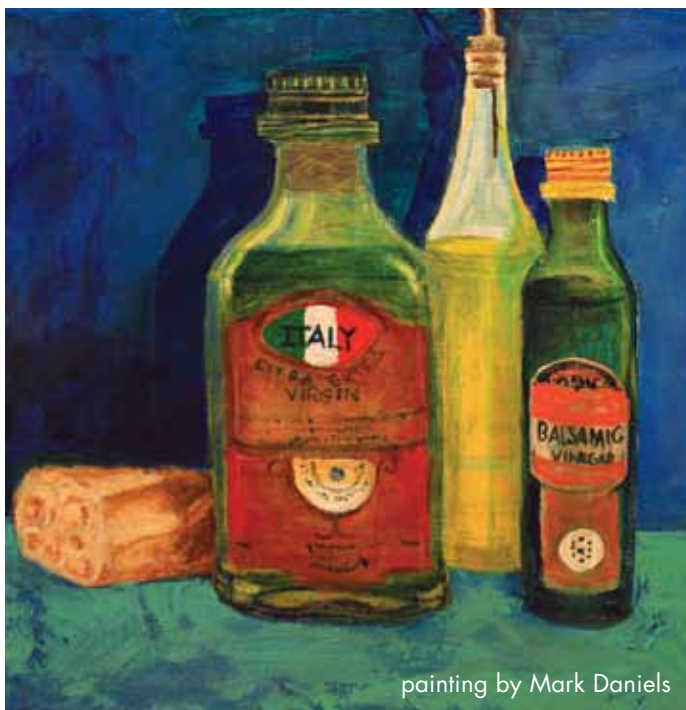
Chef2 Brings the Odyssey of Flavor to Omaha

Ancient history becomes new artisan in an Omaha original olive oil and vinegar store. *Chef2* sells tasty small batch oils and vinegars, infused, flavored and specialty oils and vinegars, delectable gift baskets, and an array of health and beauty items featuring these ingredients. To help one navigate the culinary and dietary waters, Chef² holds tastings as well as classes on everything from learning professional cooking methods to molecular gastronomy and cocktail chemistry. At the helm of this flavor adventure, coming soon to midtown crossing, are Jim Trebbien, his son Ben, wife Patty, and head chef Mike Combs. Mr. Trebbien and Mr. Combs form a phalanx of gastronomic influence from *The Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metro Community College*; son Ben is a business management specialist, and Patty is a registered dietician.

Jim Trebbien believes that through a common desire to achieve excellence and innovation, new restaurants in Omaha, especially those in the community of *Midtown Crossing*, are coming into a culinary Golden Age, wherein suppliers like Chef² can enrich and enlighten diners and home cooks, while working with top local chefs and kitchens. "We have a very vibrant food community here," says Jim, "and we're excited to be a part of it."

But after all, an odyssey is all about seeking out new lands and new ideas. Take for example manager Ben Trebbien's favorite olive oil: "It's infused with blood oranges, and it would be just perfect for brownies."





painting by Mark Daniels

The frontier of modern, healthy desserts has, it seems, gotten yummi-er.

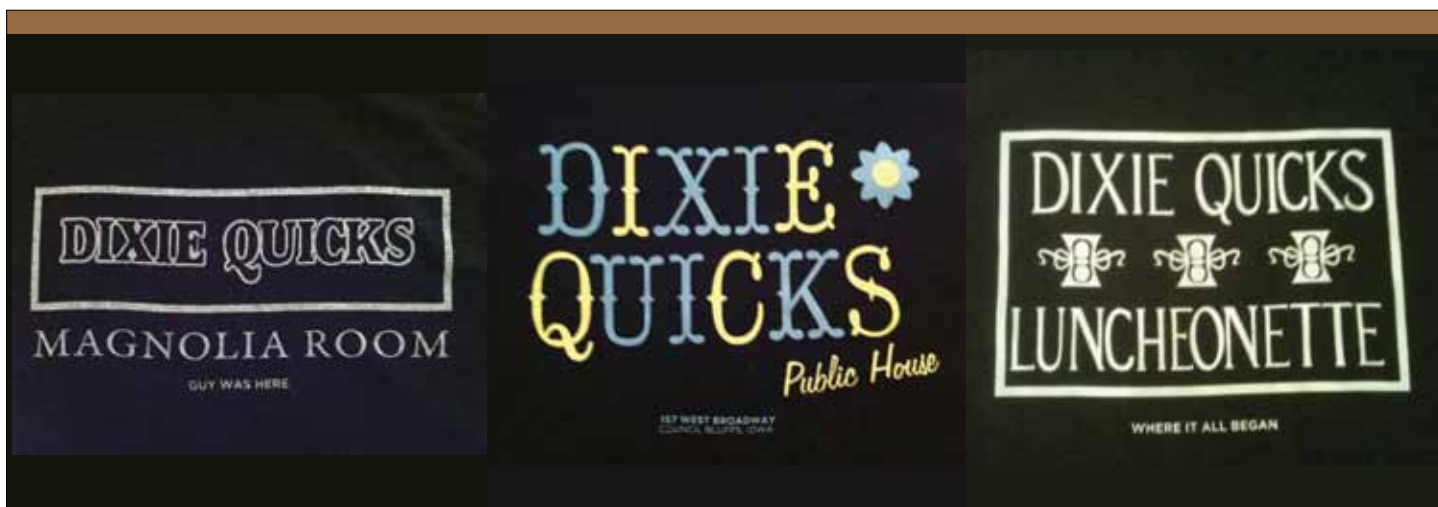
But check out Patty Trebbien. As a registered dietician, she is excited about the health benefits of the olive oils and their potential for use in those desserts (as a replacement for high-fat butter, and

even worse trans-fat oils and shortenings) but she's also looking forward to introducing folks to the tastiest salt-substitutes ever: balsamic vinegars. Her favorite, a white champagne balsamic has a mild flavor, gentle acidity and an unaccountable salty finish.

Setting a course to ensure quality, host tastings, and teach classes will be Chef Mike Combs, who knows his olive oil and vinegars like Odysseus knew how to row a boat and motivate a crew. He loves the Spanish olive oils for their robust flavor and body, and along with luscious Spanish oils, his fleet consists of Italian, Chilean, Greek, and California extra virgin olive oils. The vinegars will come from some of the same regions, particularly the region of Emilia Romagna, Italy, where Modena — the beating heart of Italian balsamics — is located. He will also include some red wine vinegars, prosecco (a sparkling Italian wine) vinegar, and some from celebrated local producers such as George Paul. Chef Mike says Chef² ensures good storage conditions, freshness, and a familiarity with the oils and vinegars, even bottling the product on site in front of the customer. This emphasis on preserving flavor takes knowing your source to a whole new level.

The Voyage Home

Just as it took Odysseus a while (what's ten years, anyway?) to get home to his faithful wife and son, it took a while for flavor and healthfulness to take precedence in our diets. We still care about how food looks, and how satisfying it is, but we also care about how it tastes, where it comes from, and whether it is good for us. Increasingly, we look to time-tested and even ancient foodstuffs to grace our table, hoping that in the end, we come back to our own hearths with new traditions of tastiness, based on well-tried and well-traveled ingredients.



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“28”

Knives, spoons, forks, wax, string
By Jamie Danielle Hardy 2013
Photographed by David Ahlquist

In this work, “28”, I am focusing on the moment when youth confronts age, where fuel turns into power. I took 10 second videos of my plate after eating 28 meals. I then hung this cutlery in the windows of Petshop gallery – as a way of introducing the viewer to the work – cleansing the palette in a way. 28 sets of knives, spoons and forks, all coated in wax – preserve the memory of the meal and absolve these tools of their potential. – *Jamie Danielle Hardy*

Rock, Paper, Dinermite

A Cross-Country Guide to Eating on a Broke-Rock-Band Budget

story and photos by Scott Zrust



Editor's Note: Omaha has developed a reputation as a 'music town' around the nation, so we figured a good way to visit some of the food our community encounters was to talk to one of the finer bands in Omaha as they hit the road. Scott Zrust, drummer for 'Rock, Paper, Dynamite' shows us some of the food their band ate on the road. Besides being a kick-ass drummer, Scott has a Culinary Arts degree from Johnson & Wales and has been cooking for 14 years professionally.

"No matter how much money you have in your pocket, there is always a way to find cheap and satisfying food in almost every city."

A tour of cheap eats, as seen through the eyes of Omaha band 'Rock, Paper, Dynamite', reveals that life on the road for touring bands may not always be as glamorous as you may think. However, aside from our late night, fast food pit stops and gas station grub, we did find a few tasty gems.

You might think that when the entire town shows up to see you play, that your food budget would be limitless but, I can tell you

with some authority that is not the case in the highly populated metropolis of Imogene, IA (population 37). Fortunately for us, our good friend and fan, 'Nurse' Abbey, has such wonderful parents; biscuits and gravy, bacon, eggs, freshly baked cinnamon rolls and cookies, and plenty of fluids rehydrated our impoverished bodies after our show. *The lesson?* Sometimes you can score some great food by finding a sweet place to crash.

Our next stop was in Kansas City and, as everyone must know, when you're in Kansas City you eat BBQ. BBQ at its *absolute finest* can be found in a gas station in a place called *Oklahoma Joes*. I've never wanted to cry after eating a meal until I sunk my teeth in a 'Z-Man Sandwich.' It was a heaping pile of smoked beef brisket, smoked provolone and topped with two onion rings on a toasted Kaiser bun. I can't think of a better way to describe how amazing this sandwich is other than abso-damn-lutely delicious, and the fries are no joke either. When in Kansas City, eat here.

Coming south to Tulsa brought us to a specialty sandwich shop called *Dilly Deli*. We all agreed that there wasn't anything special happening here. Joe had the 'Cynn 2.0' which was roast beef, provolone, an onion ring and horseradish aioli. The beef was dry, the cheese was crusty, and the bread cut my mouth 'real-proper-like'. Moving on.

Zombie Burger in Des Moines, IA was recommended to us by several people and I can now understand why. Other than having really cool zombie décor and an extensive zombie-themed burger menu, there is also a fantastic beer selection that is very reasonably priced, especially considering that there is a good amount of Belgian beer on it. I ordered fried cheese curds and the Trailer Trash Zombie Burger simply because it sounded like the 'fattest' thing on the menu. It was house ground beef, American cheese, fried pickle, chicken-fried bacon, cheese curds and ranch and it was as good as it sounds. It did the trick and I was disappointed I couldn't force myself to gulp down one of their 18 milkshakes that are on the menu. If you find yourself in Des Moines, Zombie Burger has RPD's seal of approval.

We've been to Topeka a few times and this time around we gave the *Celtic Fox* a try, mostly because we were playing a show there that night. The majority of us ordered the Rueben Sandwich with fries. For as busy as the place was, our food was delivered quickly. This was one of the better Ruebens I've tried and I've had a few. I'm pretty sure the fries weren't house-cut, but they were seasoned well and cooked to crispy perfection. If you are in Topeka, it's worth a try. When in Omaha, our favorite place for a Rueben is *Crescent Moon*.



A short 12-hour drive south landed us in Fort Worth, TX. We checked into our hotel just in time for breakfast. We smashed a couple of Texas-shaped waffles and slept for the next six hours before heading to Azle, TX for our show at the *Nos Bar*. When we woke up, we headed to San Antonio for the SXSW Spillover BBQ Music Festival at the *Night Rocker*. I was expecting higher-quality BBQ since it was delivered to your plate directly from the smoker. But, even with weak results, we were all famished so we all went

back for seconds and I suppose that says something. The house-made beef sausage was tasty, but so greasy I had trouble wolfing down even one. The slow roasted flank steak wasn't cooked correctly for the cut of meat and ended up tasting and chewing more like BBQ meat-flavored bubble gum. On the plus side, the slow roasted chicken was tender and delicious.

Our final stop on the tour was Austin, TX where we played at *Lambert's BBQ*, which is a sister restaurant of the famous *Stubbs* food smelled like heaven, but was

BBQ and live music venue. The somewhat pricey for our little-to-no food budget, which can often happen at the end of a tour. We strolled down the legendary Sixth Street in Austin and stopped for a slice of pie at *Sixth Street Pizza*. \$5 for a giant slice of 'za and a soda left our wallets and bellies happy. Before heading home the next morning, we stopped to stuff our gullets at *La Mexicana Bakery*, just outside of Downtown



Austin. We each ordered an array of tacos; linguae, barbacoa, and al pastor filled our table. These were (and I hate saying it because South Omaha has some pretty amazing Mexican restaurants) the best tacos I've ever had. House-made tortillas, fresh cilantro, onion, pickled jalapeno and a squeeze of lime was all that was needed for us to unbuckle

our belts and order more – simply delicious.

“La Mexicana Bakery, just outside of Downtown Austin (I hate saying it because South Omaha has some amazing Mexican restaurants), had the best tacos I’ve ever had”

My final thoughts about eating on the road on a broke-rock-band-budget: No matter how much money you have in your pocket, there is always a way to find cheap and satisfying food in almost every city. Unfortunately, there are also many eateries that you are very disappointed you never got to try, but there's always next tour.

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Cheese as Art

by Miranda McQuillan

Behold the power and the beauty of Cheese! The Art of Cheese making is a long standing, artisanal, creative process, full of culture, legacy and ideas on how to engage and thrill the senses.

“An artisan is a person engaged in or occupied by the practice of a craft, who may, through experience and talent, reach the expressive levels of an artist using their hands, mind and heart in their work and what they create.” (Merriam Webster)

I can say without doubt, that cheese makers are artists that spend countless days, hours and months – even years – servicing their masterpieces. They use their surroundings as inspiration, as well as to find ingredients. They self-critique using all of the senses, they “go back to the drawing board” and they are committed to the role that better food, including their cheese, plays in our lives.

“Cheese makers are artists that spend countless days, hours and months – even years – servicing their masterpieces.”

My first experience with the artistic nature of cheese was the first time I cut into a wheel of Parmigiano Reggiano 12 years ago. Though it’s a bigger house cheese today, made en masse, it’s considered the “King of cheese.” Those that make it are considered master cheese makers, maintaining what is called *alimentary control* in Europe. You could say it is one of the first artisan cheeses available to the world.

Government organizations (DOC in Italy/the AOC in France etc.) assure *terroir* – that your cheese is made on the same land, in the same climate/country, using no artificial ingredients etc., as it first was and always has been. It’s important to that craftsmanship.

Similar to how a Picasso and a Picasso print are valued differently, the original is always the one that brings the most at auction.

With Reggiano, there are even special cutting and carving tools, not just a knife or a wire. The blades of some of the tools look like big, flat, silver paint brushes, designed to crack that 75 pound wheel. You score the wheel with the carving tool, insert the “paint brushes,” and twist them to crack the wheel.

That moment when the rind cracks and the air touches the paste, that cheese is “born” and breathes for the first time. The cheese reveals its beauty, simultaneously speaking to your eyes, ears, and nose. The smell of a fresh wheel starts the wanton need of your taste buds for that first, sweet, nutty, sharp, intense, stinky, soft, crumbly, crystal crunchy taste. When I am cutting cheese, I have people smell the half wheel before we taste it. It’s like regarding a painting or sculpture for the first time – something to behold, creating a passion which brings you back for more.

This European cheese artistry influenced mainly Wisconsin, Vermont and California for a long time, but recently has reached into almost every state in the U.S. The burgeoning American artisanal landscape is prime for the picking with brewers, vintners and cheese makers all throwing their hats in the ring and producing rustic cheeses, brews, wines and spirits that delight and rival their counterparts. They are cultural forefathers and mothers that took those huddled cheese masses and helped turn them into some of the best cheeses, loved all over the world, which was unheard of for American cheeses just ten years ago.

Humboldt Fog, from *Cypress Grove* in Northern California, is a long standing goat cheese made in the U.S. that has amazing craftsmanship. It’s goat brie that is aged like St. Andre. Sitting about six inches tall, the effect is a soft, brie texture at the rind, and a bit thicker, richer texture in the middle. It’s like two cheeses in one.

Rogue River Blue from *Rogue River Creamery*, as well as Maytag blue from Newton Iowa, are two of the most highly acclaimed American artisan cheeses. Due to demand, they are produced in quantity now, so they are not handled in that small batch manner. However, the attention to authenticity and truth in cheese was started by these up-and-coming cheese companies and, as with their European counterparts, it matters to them.

All over the U.S., there are great local cheese makers creating small batch cheeses, partnering with local brewers and vintners. Here in Nebraska, *Shadow Brook Farms* in Lincoln and *Honey Creek* between here and Missouri Valley (tours available) make some delicious goat cheeses. *Branched Oak* makes cow’s milk cheeses, and *Jisa’s* from Brainard, NE is a distinct and fun farmer’s cheese with a variety of flavors, including cheese curds and sold at the *Old Market Farmer’s Market* and all over.

These artists are taking back the land. As artisan cheese makers in the USA, the impact they have had in some communities is phenomenal and something to be truly proud of. Farms that were set for foreclosure were salvaged and repurposed for our newfound love of great cheese. Cheese has created a call for a new beginning for something that might have seemed unimportant or uninteresting. This is art for our sense of taste, incorporating the way we love our land and animals that begets artistry and beauty as by-products.



Pepper Cheese from local cheese maker, Honey Creek Farms.

Mushrooms

Nature's Wonder Food by Rachel Mulder

Mushrooms are one of nature's healthiest foods. They are low in fat and calories and high in protein and fiber. They are known to enhance the immune system and provide essential vitamins and minerals. They are one of the only vegetarian sources of vitamin D2 which is the most bioavailable form of the nutrient as well. As if that wasn't enough, mushrooms are also as high in anti-oxidants as many vegetables and full of B vitamins, which boost the metabolism and increase energy.

The most popular mushroom used in American cuisine is the button mushroom and its matured version, the portabella. These mushrooms are incredibly easy to find as all grocery stores, and even some gas stations carry them. They are a great way to add bulk and protein to a meal without adding meat. Button and portabella mushrooms are a good source of vitamin D, which reduces depression and helps your immune system. These mushrooms promote the maturation of dendritic cells (the immune system

"The American Cancer Society says that shiitakes may be useful in preventing/treating cancer because they enhance the immune system."

cells) in bone marrow, which boosts immune function. It is also believed that a special type of carbohydrate in this type boosts your metabolism and aids in weight loss. Button mushrooms are useful in preventing prostate cancer, which is great motivation to swap them for the meat in some dishes as meat.

My favorite mushrooms are shiitakes. Dried ones can be found at a specialty health or Asian-style markets to be rehydrated for cooking. A lot of people believe the sun-drying process brings out more of the umami flavor of the mushrooms, which are chewy and rich-tasting. The stems are difficult to chew so they should be used more as a flavoring than for the bulk of the dish. The American Cancer Society says that shiitakes may be useful in preventing/treating cancer because they enhance the immune system. They contain lentinan which is a natural anti-tumor compound. They are also good for lowering cholesterol and inhibiting viruses. Japanese culture believes they boost qi (often translated as life energy) and prevent premature aging. Another mushroom touted to have these benefits is the maitake, especially against breast cancer, though the flavor isn't as nice.

It seems that everyone's favorite mushroom in the Omaha area is the morel. Their flavor has been likened to the truffle but it varies depending on the soil it was spored in. Morels are likely so prized because of their short season and the

ceremony of their retrieval, as well as their unique taste. We all have that one friend that somehow magically procures bags of morels every year. We beg, plead and threaten them in an attempt to gain access to the enchanted fairy ring, but it seems the only way to they'll give up their hiding spot is through blood or marriage. If you can't con someone into taking you mushroom hunting with them, then you'll have to luck out at the farmers market or find some stranger on Craigslist that sells them.

Porcini mushrooms have become more popular in restaurants, especially in pasta and risotto dishes because they have a nutty, smooth, creamy texture and taste. They are low in fat and digestible carbohydrates, but high in protein, vitamins, minerals and fiber. They also contain ergosterol, which increases cytotoxicity, the process of attacking enemy cells. They are also believed to have anti-inflammatory effects.

Oyster mushrooms are another popular choice and are torn up rather than sliced for cooking. They are slightly sweet tasting and versatile and are usually used in stir-fries and sautés but can be used for most anything because they cook so evenly. They are very high in anti-oxidants and iron, and are being studied as a possible defense against HIV.



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by Marq Manner



“Martinsburg is a small rural area of only 94 people with only one business operating anymore – Bob’s Bar & Grill.”

The holy grail of Nebraska food trips has always eluded me. I spend a lot of time up in the Wayne and Sioux City area, either going to shows or visiting friends, and *Bob’s Bar & Grill* in Martinsburg, Nebraska seemed to get mentioned every time I went – people knew my love of old dive bars and small town eateries. The grimmer and more lived-in the better and this, they said, would be my oasis. It was all talk though, and for years it just remained a myth lying out there amongst the farms and corn fields. I was heading up to Sioux City and Wayne to see some music recently and made a coordinated effort to visit Bob’s Bar & Grill – *this was going to happen!*

I recruited my friends Mitch and Chad to show me the full experience. Mitch’s family owns a farm property just a mile down from Bob’s and grew up on the place. Chad, an author and teacher in the area, was always the biggest supporter of Bob’s and talked about it in a way that only an author could. We took off from Wayne in Mitch’s pick-up truck, blasting old country music, and hit the rural roads that I love so much.

If you wanted me to show you where Bob’s Bar & Grill was again, I would not be able to. There were many turns and twists down small roads and they might as well have put a hood on my head before revealing that we were finally there. Martinsburg is a small rural area of only 94 people, with only one business operating anymore – Bob’s Bar

& Grill. Very few people would find the rundown building as beautiful as I did. A white, vinyl-sided building where one can barely make out the faded words on the old 7-Up sign that announced the name. No need for them to spruce that up as you would never accidentally run across the place. If you are going to Martinsville, you are going to Bob’s – or you’re one of those 94 people going home.

When entering, I did not find the place to be as dirty and rundown as I was led to believe. It is much ‘lived in’ though. The place was full of farmers and families on the early Saturday afternoon and only one row of tables was available. The grill was in full sight walking in and full of large burgers in various states of being prepared. There was a surprising amount of signage stating that any injuries you incur are on yourself (yikes). I was hoping that was for the bar patrons later in the evening.

There were some defunct video games in the back and a small bathroom with the sink outside in plain sight of those eating. You know who washed their hands and who did not, and thankfully, we never saw one of the staff quickly exit and head back to the grill. The linoleum floors are well-worn, the tables are the sturdy small town diner variety and lined up in rows. You have a good chance at some communal eating with the good ‘ole boys here.

We ordered cheeseburgers of course, a plate of fries, and a half-and-half order of fried mushrooms and cheese balls. Our drinks came as they should be served in a joint like this: In cold cans with a glass of ice. Next up was a mountain of crinkle cut fries and an even larger mountain of fried mushrooms and cheese balls. It’s a good thing that we had others meeting us there as there is no way that we would be able to eat the burgers after so much of this fried goodness.

The burger arrived on a disposable plate and was easily twice as big as the normal sized bun they served it with. The burger was hand patted, juicy and not overly seasoned. It was not something you could just pick up with ease and go at it. I ate some of the meat that was hanging off the bun first but ended up cutting it in half and just went at it with a fork.

The whole meal was a tasty experience and full of indulgence. I am sure very few people leave Bob’s and do not take a nap soon afterwards. I want to go back there again at night to see what the place is like during bar hours and that may happen during my next trip up. The atmosphere, isolation and the amount of greasy bar food with no gimmicks makes Bob’s Bar and Grill worthy of that day trip alone.



LOCALMOTIVE

Changing Late Nights in the Old Market

by April Christenson



On any given Friday or Saturday night, you're likely to find a group of hungry people congregating on the corner of 11th & Jackson in the Old Market. Until recently, there weren't many options for late night food in the Old Market, especially good late night food. *The Localmotive* food truck is on a mission to change that.

Localmotive owner Patrick Favara and partners David Burr and David Scott had been mulling over the idea of a food truck (or something like it) for a long time. Burr is an Omaha native and veteran of Omaha's food and drink industry, having spent time working at Omaha staples like *Dario's Brasserie*. Favara and Burr, friends for over ten years, often found themselves lamenting the lack of good late night food in Omaha, a problem that particularly plagues service industry workers whose shifts often end late at night.

"We started following national trends," Favara said. "[We noticed food trucks] and thought we could tap into that market here in Omaha."

"People who live and work downtown depend on us... If we shut down service, it affects people."

On March 4, 2011, the Localmotive opened for business for the first time. Soon after, they partnered with *Ted & Wally's* in the Old Market and put up shop in their parking lot at 11th & Jackson Streets. A little over two years later, they have experienced a great reception and are quickly becoming an Omaha late night staple.

"Growth has been fantastic, beyond expectations," Favara said. "We have an incredible relationship with our customers. We know our customers. Someone comes up and I already know what they are going to get."

Favara said the Localmotive's downtown customers are a mix of service industry workers, bar and restaurant patrons and Old Market residents.

"People who live and work downtown depend on us for their meal at that time of day," Favara said. "If we have to shut down service for a night, it affects people. We've had a great reception from downtown."

At its inception, the Localmotive's menu consisted of mainly hot and cold sandwiches. Since then, it has evolved to include daily specials, frites and their signature item, rounders – a fluffy ball of dough, stuffed with different combinations of ingredients and deep fried to golden perfection. Some rounder varieties include Reuben, chicken cordon bleu and chorizo and egg. For a mere \$5, less than you might spend at a fast food drive thru, you can get three hearty rounders with a side of housemade dipping sauce.

Regular menu items at the Localmotive include a chicken sandwich with house bacon, provolone, caramelized onion-green chile jam and chipotle aioli on focaccia. The chicken is free-range from local *Plum Creek Farms* in Burchard, Nebraska. Using locally sourced ingredients is important to Favara.

"We try to do everything locally," said Favara. "Most items [on the menu] are made from scratch, except for a few breads which we buy locally from *Le Quartier*."

Their menu also includes a vegetarian sandwich with Portobello mushrooms, asparagus, red peppers, pickled red onion, arugula, balsamic vinegar and basil-edamame pesto on French batard. Recent daily specials at the Localmotive have included chile rellenos (a roasted poblano pepper stuffed with Plum Creek Farms chicken, house bacon, cream cheese and cheddar) and pork tacos with cilantro jalapeño chimichurri.

Favara, Burr and Scott's flair for the creative has extended beyond their menu to several collaborations, including participating in local food truck festivals at *Lucky Bucket Brewery*, *the Old Mattress Factory*, and the College World Series. If you are more of an early bird than a night owl, the Localmotive offers traveling lunch service and can be found at the *Omaha Farmer's Market* on weekends in addition to their standard late night service (10:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. weekends) at 11th & Jackson in the Old Market.

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THE SUPPER CLUB

Culinary Students Share
an Inspiring Meal at V. Mertz

by Brian O'Malley,
photos by Pat Ratigan



Members of the *Institute for Culinary Arts'* culinary student organization, Omega Omega Omega periodically gather to share a meal – this is *Supper Club*. But it's not just about eating. They seek out and share engaging, meaningful, delicious food experiences in different venues, and through words and photographs, they capture and then share those experiences.

V. Mertz is a modest yet elegant restaurant, tucked away inside the *Old Market Passageway*. Its gourmet fare and intimate setting blend seamlessly to create a one-of-a-kind experience.

The restaurant opens each evening, Tuesday through Saturday, for dinner service and offers its patrons meals from both regular and tasting menus. For this experience, head chef Jon Seymour treated members of Tri-Omega to a special, reserved spread. This exclusive menu consisted of six courses and two desserts, each expertly paired with a number of different wines.

“For this experience, V. Mertz head chef Jon Seymour treated the members of Tri-Omega to a special, reserved spread.”

At the beginning of the meal, diners were served an amuse bouche comprised of tomato gelée, shaved shallot and oregano on a crisp bacon wafer to whet the appetite.

“The first thing to hit my tongue was the bacon – crispy, salty and smoky,” said second year culinary student Pat Ratigan. “The gelée then cuts the bacon with smooth, refreshing ‘meltiness’ and subtle spicy, herbaceous notes, finishing with the crisp, bright shallot.”

The first wine served, Hochterrassen Grüner Veltliner, was paired with the first three courses. This wine has a fruity aroma and crisp, delicately sweet notes of apple and pear.

The first course of the experience was a diver scallop crudo with green apple, horseradish, and dried beef powder, rolled together and served as one bite in a deep, sloping white bowl that captured and focused the aroma of the preparation. The tartness of the apple

flawlessly prepared the mouth for the delicate scallop while the bite-sized course as a whole left the mouth with residual flavors of horseradish and salty umami.

Next, diners enjoyed a seared cobia (black salmon) in pork broth, sweet pea purée and shungiku greens. Floating in the broth were tiny tapioca pearls that created a lovely contrast in mouth feel against the broth. The cobia was flaky, tender and full of flavor, which paired nicely with the smoky ham flavor of the broth. There was a fresh, vibrant taste from the purée, and a slight bitter note from the greens – those played into the overall flavor in an interesting and pleasing way.

The third course was duck confit ravioli served on a spoon, with thickened duck jus, chicory and pickled garlic. This dish had a spicy, savory aroma that lingered in the air and tantalized the table. It hooked everyone with a single taste. The savory jus, full of hearty, earthy tones, was occasionally interrupted with alternating notes of spicy garlic and mildly bitter greens.



Seared cobia in pork broth, sweet pea purée and shungiku greens.

Next to come, in the fourth course, was bacon-wrapped bok choy with bean sprouts, sesame, and Korean pepper. The first bite of this dish was warm with smoky notes from the tender bacon. The heft filled the palate. The wine chosen for this course was Broc Cellars Carignane – a dark, smooth wine with complimentary notes of spice, smoky plum and cherry.

“Every member of Tri-Omega present was impressed with Chef Seymour’s unique and exciting combinations.”

Finally, the fifth and sixth courses consisted of grilled squid with pickled fennel, house mustard, and grilled foccoccia with parsley oil, seared Wagyu beef on parsnip purée with charred winter vegetables and miso paste. The squid was tender, completely absent of any of the “rubbery” qualities often associated with squid, and perfectly dressed with accents of lemon and mustard. The beef was exceptionally juicy and tender, with a deep and satisfying crust formed from searing.

“The course that stuck out in my mind was the Wagyu beef with charred leek, pearl onions, and parsnip purée,” said Tri Omega

member Angela Thomas. “The beef was so tender and perfectly seared. The pearl onions were cooked two different ways; a pickled onion to add sour and bright flavors, and a grilled onion that was sweet and mild. The parsnip purée was smooth and flavorful. This dish was a marriage of contrasts and the flavors still sit in my mind.”

This extraordinary masterpiece of flavors and sensations was served with Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso – a favorable, peppery red wine with a mild acidity and a warm, well-matured finish.

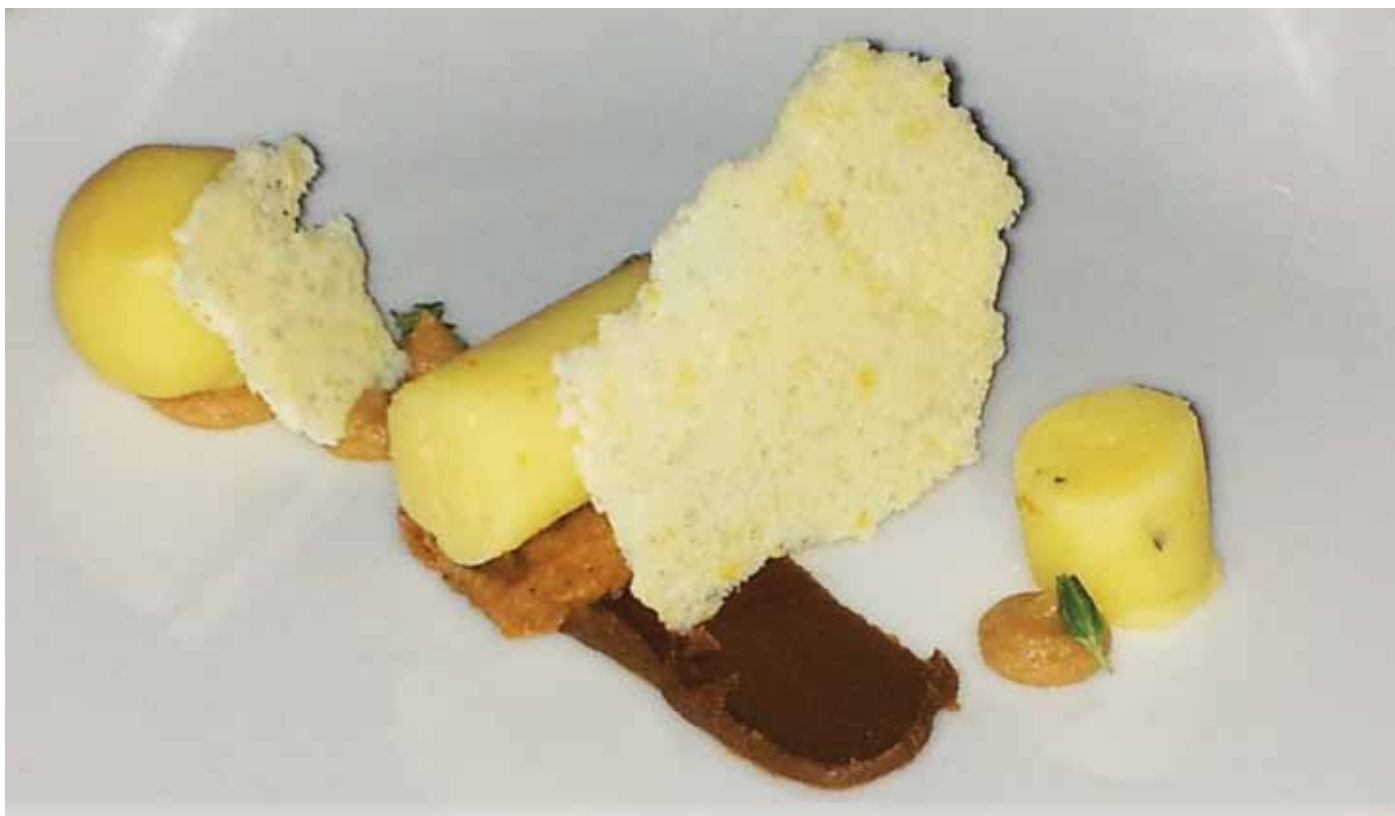
The final course of this meal consisted of two beautifully plated dishes, paired with Glacial Till Vignoles 2009, a sweet wine that is crafted in Nebraska. Unlike most wines, the Glacial Till Vignoles was thick, velvety and mead-like, with an aroma of honey, caramel and hints of cider.

The first dessert was a passionfruit sorbet with grilled pineapple, oregano and white pepper. The sweetness from the pineapple stood strictly against the intense, exotic sweetness of the sorbet, and the straightforward and powerful earthiness of the oregano and white pepper.

The second dessert was a tart comprised of lemon custard and white chocolate, caramel and hazelnut creme on thyme shortbread, topped with crisp milk meringue, and a liquid ‘Lemonhead’ white chocolate truffle. This dessert masterfully, and a bit surprisingly, combined these components into a truly edible work of art.



Grilled squid with pickled fennel, house mustard, and grilled foccoccia with parsley oil.



The lemon tart at V. Mertz is truly an edible work of art.

“The dessert courses outshined nearly every other dessert I’ve tasted in any restaurant,” said Baking and Pastry student Cathy Curtis. “The passionfruit sorbet was a sharp pop of sour and sweet, and the grilled pineapple brought a lovely bright flavor to the dish as well.”

Of the second dessert, Curtis went on to say, “The lemon tart was my favorite, with delightful thyme short dough, topped with a tangy barrel of lemon curd, and a white chocolate, liquid-centered lemon truffle on the side. As the citrusy, sweet liquid melted into the white chocolate, the flavor experience was divine.”

Overall, every member of Tri-Omega present was impressed with both the service they received and the phenomenal food. Chef Seymour and the entire staff created a dining experience that more than met the expectations of the Supper Club. Chef Seymour’s ability to infuse unique and exciting combinations into single bites is astounding and unparalleled.

“I thought that the menu flowed very well together,” said Tri-Omega President, Jason Volkmer. “As each course came, it progressively got better in terms of presentation and complexity. Everything was well balanced. Service was superb, wine pairings were well done and staff was very knowledgeable about [them].”

Biographies

Cathy Curtis – Baking and Pastry Student

As a member of the school’s culinary competition team, Cathy seeks and relishes food that is both delicious and beautiful, and anticipates each shared meal with Supper Club as part of that pursuit.

Ashley Muth – Spring 2013 Baking and Pastry Certificate Recipient

Having a lifelong love of all things sweet, Ashley developed a palate – and love – for food. She further developed both palate and love for baking while living in San Francisco, frequenting great

restaurants and bakeries. After moving to Omaha, she enrolled in the Baking and Pastry certificate program and is currently a pastry cook at a local restaurant.

Caitrin Shirazi – Baking and Pastry Student

Caitrin is a recent University of Nebraska at Omaha graduate and first-year culinary student working towards degrees in Culinary Arts: Baking and Pastry and Restaurant Management. Caitrin heard the culinary call 11 years ago when she was hired as a kitchen assistant at the age of 15, and has filled various roles in the industry ever since.

Angela Thomas – Baking and Pastry Student

Angela grew up in Montana and now enjoys her time exploring Omaha and attending classes at Metropolitan Community College, where she is working towards an Associate’s degree in Culinary Arts and Management: Baking and Pastry.

Pat Ratigan – Culinary Arts Student

Pat is a second-year student in the culinary arts program and, while still relatively new to the industry, has been a serious food lover for many years.

Jason Volkmer – Culinary Arts Student

Jason is a second-year student in the culinary arts program, and the kitchen supervisor at an upscale local hotel.

Omega Omega Omega (Tri-Omega) is the culinary student organization at the Institute for Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College. Supper Club is one of many programs they are building and sharing, along with Road Scholar trips, Symposium Trofi book clubs, pop-up restaurant projects, and much more. Their mission is to provide opportunities to engage each other, the community and the hospitality industry in order to grow as cooks, bakers, managers and citizens.

Cake Decorating

An Art Form All Its Own

story and photos by Linda Lichtenwalter-Evans

You eat with your eyes first. It is no secret that a professionally designed cake looks more appetizing than a plain frosted cake. I myself am a baker and I think that I make some pretty delicious sweets and treats. However, it's not always enough to make something delicious. You have to make it look pretty too.

One day a good friend of mine informed me that there was a sale on a series of cake decorating classes at a local craft store. This being something that I wanted to do – even needed to do – I immediately jumped on the opportunity. Once I got into the classes I quickly learned how much I didn't know.

“It's not always enough to make something delicious. You have to make it look pretty too.”

In my first class, we began with learning basic buttercream techniques, such as flowers and borders. This was a great starting point for these classes, as buttercream is an easy ingredient to work with. All that I learned I was able to put to immediate use in my cake and cupcake projects. Some of which I could even apply to cookie decorating.

In the next class I was taught how to work with royal icing. These methods were new to me; the extent of my royal icing experience was simply piping it onto sugar cookies and gingerbread men. I had no idea the complex work one can do with this type of icing. I did discover that it is a bit harder to work with however.

The consistency is hard to get perfectly right and you have to make sure no grease comes in contact with it, or it simply won't set up. I learned this the hard way, and had to scrap my first batch. It also hardens quickly, so I discovered I had to work fast. Those hurdles aside, as with any new technique, the more you practice, the easier it becomes.

The final two courses in the series were working with fondant and gum paste – the fun stuff! I had never worked with these ingredients and found them rather intimidating after watching the variety of cake decorating shows on TV. Fondant and gum paste are very expensive, so they aren't ones I wanted to just try and figure out on my own. We first learned to work with fondant, which is quite a bit easier to work with than gum paste. With any of the flowers, there were multiple layers of fondant, each requiring several detailed steps. Its no wonder fondant work on cakes can be so expensive. One flower the size of a golf ball easily took me a half hour of work!

In the final course, we got to do some more complex work with gum paste. I also learned how to wire together flowers and leaves for beautiful displays on cakes. This course I probably enjoyed the most, though it was definitely the most challenging. I was able to do a lot of detail work using color dusts and food color markers to bring the flowers to life, this probably being my favorite step. It allowed for a different form of artistic creativity.

The wiring steps were quite tedious though. I felt like all thumbs when trying to cover and twist together several tiny wires. However, seeing the flowers and leaves come together to create bouquets and sprays made all the work worthwhile. My favorite part of the whole class though was making a lily. It took several hours to complete,

and I was involved in all parts of the class, and gave a beautiful final piece to use on a cake or in a vase for display, as I did.

These classes gave me a great knowledge base to work with in my future baking projects. This experience has also opened me up for taking more advanced classes in cake decorating. I view cake decorating in a new light now.

It truly is an art form of its own. The overall design of a cake takes an artistic eye. One must piece it all together to make it look interesting and of course delicious. The real skilled work is definitely when fondant and gum paste is brought in. The beautiful possibilities one can make with a little color dust and a lot of time are endless.

Though it was time consuming and tedious, the outcomes were incredibly rewarding. I thoroughly enjoyed my experience, and recommend it to anyone, baker or not!



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Share Our Strength's Jeanine Markt

by Keri Davis



Share our Strength's *Cooking Matters* empowers families at risk of hunger with the skills, knowledge and confidence to make healthy and affordable meals. With the help of our volunteer culinary and nutrition educators, course participants learn how to select nutritious, low-cost ingredients and how to prepare meals in ways that provide the best nourishment possible for their families.

Why get involved?

"Volunteering for Cooking Matters gives me a hands-on way to get involved in the community where I live and work. It lets me share what I know best (which is cooking) with people in need."

– Cooking Matters Volunteer

Hunger doesn't discriminate. It strikes children in rural and urban settings, from single and two-parent households, and it crosses all racial and ethnic lines. What all these children have in common is that hunger puts them at greater risk of suffering the lifelong consequences of impaired health and academic performance. Your involvement provides the knowledge, skills and confidence families need to make the most of whatever resources they have and feed their families.

Who is making a difference?

Culinary instructor Jeanine Markt has been volunteering with Cooking Matters since November of 2011. Ever since she came on board, Markt has taught multiple Cooking Matters courses, led a handful of Cooking Demos and has been a huge help with the behind the scenes work. Markt started right out of high school doing office work and then worked to achieve her degree in Elementary Education. She taught First grade and Pre-Kindergarten for about three years, when her family decided to relocate to Iowa City, Iowa.

Once there, Markt opened her own personal chef business, where she would prepare meals for her clients. Her business ran successfully for eight years, before her family made another move to Omaha, Nebraska. Once here, Markt decided to forgo the personal chef business and began to look for different ways to use her education background and her culinary skills. After attending a volunteer orientation, Markt was hooked. She loved the Cooking



Matters program and was excited about the opportunity to work in the Omaha community.

Markt feels it is imperative to introduce individuals to things that they may not normally eat or try and volunteering with Cooking Matters has allowed her to do just that. Markt hopes that what participants learn during the signature six week series will be information and skills that they can carry with them through the years to come.

Markt believes there is huge value in providing those in need, a different perspective on food and healthy eating. She hopes that her participants learn to "respect food and have a better understanding of where it comes from." Markt's favorite memory from a series is watching the kids learn. She loves seeing that they "really enjoy learning and trying things that they may not get to at home." Markt's advice to someone who is thinking about volunteering is, "Just try! Especially if you have an interest, or even if you don't, just get involved." Markt feels it is important for someone to pick something they are interested in and just get involved in their community.

Interested in volunteering? Contact Keri Davis at kdavis@thevnacares.org or visit our website at cookingmattersomaha.org.



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Share Our Strength's *Cooking Matters*® empowers families at risk of hunger with the skills, knowledge and confidence to make healthy and affordable meals. With the help of volunteers, participants learn how to prepare nutritious, low-cost ingredients in ways that provide the best nourishment possible for their families. For more information about volunteering with Cooking Matters, contact Keri Davis, Assistant Coordinator at 402-930-4069 or e-mail kdavis@thevnacares.org



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The Julep

by Binoy Fernandez

Every year, on the first weekend of May, the horses race. It's the day for Churchill Downs, for floppy hats and sundresses, for an off-white suit, fedora, and pocket-watch, and it's a day for Juleps. The exact reasons why Churchill Downs adopted the Georgia Mint Julep as the official cocktail of the Kentucky Derby are probably lost to the mists of antiquity, yet, for at least one day a year, the martini requests fall silent, and the nation pays homage to a piece of history.

Consider that when most drinks are inspired by the theater, big screen, a celebrity or sports star, the julep is a drink that inspires poems and passionate letters. It is a drink that defines a time and a culture in American history. F. Scott Fitzgerald makes special mention of it in *The Great Gatsby*, and, in 1937, S.J. Buckner, Jr. describes, in detail, the steps to craft a julep to General Connor in a letter suddenly cut short because he inspired himself to make one.

“The Julep is a drink that inspires poems and passionate letters, a drink that defines a time and a culture in American History.”

We often talk about the copper mug and the Moscow Mule, but before the mule there was the silver julep cup. Oftentimes handed down through the generations where each successive generation adds to the dings and dents, each one containing what is, likely, a forgotten memory.

The version we all know is the Georgia Mint Julep, where we use a good (make sure it's good), American whisky as our base with muddled mint and sugar. We take out our hammer and lewis bag, powder up some ice, packing it in until we have a nice dome over the top of the cup. We then slip a straw through the fresh mint garnish, wait until we have a nice layer of frost over the silver, and then sip through the straw a veritable nectar even the gods would envy.

So, what's the deal with this excessively boozy, tasty, libation? Well, if whisky isn't your thing, fear not, because the julep doesn't describe one drink, but rather a type of drink. You can use any spirit in a julep: rum, gin, brandy, tequila, even vodka. Almost all julep recipes I've come across have a few elements in common, though: first, you want to use a silver cup. The reason why isn't clear, but, traditionally, a julep always gets served in a silver cup. Second, they all have mint to them, the fresher the better. Third, we always powder the ice. The garnish can include anything from a fresh sprig of mint to a fruit salad.

I generally reserve straws for stirring and doing my taste to make sure I made the drink

properly, but this drink must be consumed through the straw. If you sip this beverage as you would any other you'll have two things happen: the first is that all you'll get is the booze and none of the mint or sugar, you'll lose the dimensionality of the drink. The second reason is you'll get that metallic tang to the drink. The first time I had this drink I couldn't stand it. It tasted only of bourbon, and finished extremely sweet.

I'll close this out with a story about how I came to love the julep. It was May 5, 2012, and it was Derby day. Being a bartender I felt compelled to place a bet on the horse I'll Have Another, and having placed the bet that morning I decided that it was appropriate to fix myself a Georgia Mint Julep. I didn't have the silver cups at the time, but I did have Collins glasses, and so I grabbed one of those, swung by the Farmer's Market to get some fresh mint, and fixed some up for my friends and me.

It was a warm day, the powdered ice was frosting the glass nicely, and we were chatting on the patio, waiting for post. Anyway, first sip was off the rim of the glass, as always, and it lived up to expectations: pure bourbon on the palate. Then conversation starts and I'm not paying attention and I sip through the straw. A mistake I do not make most of the time. Oh. My. God. Perceptions transformed, my mid-western drawl became a little southern, stars aligned in the heavens, and I *understood!* This drink truly is one of the classics, a drink that stands alongside the Old Fashioned, the Manhattan, and martini. This summer I invite you to try a Mint Julep.



Crafty Cocktails

by Jesse Erickson



Yet another atomic bomb has landed in the bar and alcohol world. This one is called *Craft*.

We're in a slow progression away from the wonderful classic cocktails of yester-years such as the Manhattan and the Negroni, as well as both the traditional Old Fashioned and its modernized cousin. It has become a new challenge for bartenders to create something new and exciting for you, the hearty (or casual) drinker. These new concoctions have been labeled by many as "craft cocktails," but what does that even mean?! This article, hearty drinker, will figure out just what those two words tied together really mean, both to the bartenders behind the new wave drinks, and to those of you who are daring enough to drink these crafts.

To begin with it, it might be easier to figure out what each word means on its own. Let's begin with the word *cocktail*, which according to Dictionary.com, means "any of various short mixed drinks, consisting typically of gin, whiskey, rum, vodka, or brandy, with different admixtures, as vermouth, fruit juices, or flavorings, usually chilled and frequently sweetened."

"With the new craft cocktail revolution, it's hard to say that what is poured into your glass is NOT a piece of art."

That's a rather unsatisfying definition but an honest one nonetheless. The Jack and coke, or gin and tonic served at every bar is indeed a cocktail. How does a cocktail become that of the craft-y variety?

Let's now look at the word *craft* to try to differentiate between a cocktail and a craft cocktail. According to Dictionary.com, craft means "an art, trade, or occupation requiring special skill, especially manual skill: the craft of a mason." Speaking from personal experience, bartending is most definitely an occupation that requires special skills, but I'd never thought about it as art.

With the new craft cocktail revolution, it's hard to say that what is poured into your glass is NOT a piece of art. The bartender has now become an artist, his canvas is the empty space in a glass, and his paint brush is a jigger. These cocktails are similar to sitting in front of the Mona Lisa or a Monet, awe inspiring to your taste buds. They should make you ask yourself "how did he do that?"

They have to be both appealing, in presentation, color, the glassware that it goes into, as well as once you take your first drink, then your second, and so it goes. The flavor has to be balanced,

it has to quip your interest, uses fresh ingredients and typically seasonal ingredients as well. Simply put, a craft cocktail is "a non-classic using all fresh ingredients" according to Jake Moore from The Berry & Rye.

It's also been said that craft cocktails should take time, effort and imagination far beyond what it takes to pour a vodka soda. Jason Hutchinson from Jake's Cigars and Spirits in Lincoln defines a craft cocktail as "simple and rustic. The term craft itself means that it should take some time, preparation and presentation."

Many craft bartenders have started to do a lot of the work themselves. They no longer rely on buying their simple syrup, instead they make it themselves, putting their own tweaks on the sugar water to enhance it for certain cocktails. Alex Jochim of Jake's Cigars and Spirits has been making flavored simple syrups to enhance a drink beyond the simplicity of regular simple syrup. He's made rose water simple syrup, and lavender simple syrup that is featured in the cocktail called the Benalto.

Beyond personalizing the ingredients that go into each cocktail, Hutchinson also states "many people think a craft cocktail is incredibly complicated. It should be a drink that highlights the alcohol of choice used, pairing it with combinations not thought of before to make your drinking experience more exciting."

It is the bartenders' extra work behind the scenes that is creating these intriguing combinations that surpass the everyday imagination. For many craft cocktail chemists, it takes a lot of trial and error to discover a beautiful masterpiece for your enjoyment.

I believe Alex Diiming of Jake's Cigars and Spirits-Omaha and craft cocktail enthusiast has the most vague and yet the truest definition of what it is, "it's like pornography... you know it when you see it."





Bourbon County, NE

story and photos by Dylan Thaemert

Scotch has long been considered the classy, elegant, nuanced spirit in the whiskey family, while bourbon has been regarded closer to a toothless uncle. But, thanks to a spike in popularity in the last ten years, bourbon is starting to appear in many a sipper's glass. I'm going to look at this phenomenon and visit some of the best places for bourbon in Omaha.

Let's get some basics out of the way. Bourbon is made by fermenting grains distilled into a jet fuel-caliber, clear distillate which is then dumped into a new American charred white oak barrel and left alone for any number of years, from as few as two to rarely more than 15. To be considered bourbon the grain recipe or mash-bill must contain at least 51% corn (the same is true for rye, except where rye is the primary grain instead of corn). It does not have to be made in Kentucky to be called bourbon but it was invented there and the people are pretty proud of that. When a master distiller decides it's time for the whiskey to come out of the barrel the whiskey is diluted with water and bottled.

“The world of American whiskey is steeped in tradition and new brands of whiskey are appearing on the shelf every day.”

I think of a nice glass of bourbon like a kind of small dessert – in a given glass you may find flavors like brown sugar, dark fruits, cinnamon, oak, mint, nuts and vanilla. The grain recipe (the secondary grain is usually rye, sometimes wheat or malted barley) and the amount of time the juice spends in the barrel are the main factors that go into determining the flavor, color and texture of the eventual product.

Bourbon is typically sweet, while rye is spicy. Although rye actually predates bourbon as the first American whiskey, I won't say much more about it for now except that it's also seeing a huge

spike in popularity and that it is an entirely separate category from bourbon, i.e. “give me a glass of rye bourbon,” doesn't make any sense.

So what's new in the world of whiskey today? In some cases not much and sometimes a whole lot. The world of American whiskey is steeped in tradition. People have been making whiskey on the site of the Buffalo Trace Distillery in Frankfort, KY since the mid-19th century. The recipes are largely unchanged and the water and grain come from the same place.

“90-proof bourbon is becoming more popular due to a greater concentration of flavors and versatility for mixing cocktails.”

While 80-proof has long been the standard, 90-proof bourbon is becoming more popular due to a greater concentration of flavors and versatility for mixing cocktails. The craft cocktail boom, and the return to fashion of classic whiskey drinks like the Manhattan, Old Fashioned, and Sazerac, has also contributed to its popularity.

There are new brands of whiskey appearing on the shelf every day. When prohibition ended there were only five distilleries in operation in Kentucky. Today there are several large distilleries that produce many of the different whiskeys you see on the shelf. Jim Beam, for instance, has its popular flagship bourbon of the same name but also produces various small batch and single barrel bourbons like Knob Creek, Baker's, Booker's, and Basil Hayden's.

And while the major distilleries are producing more brands of whiskey, more “micro” distilleries are cropping up across the country. Companies like High West in Utah and Hudson in New York are taking part in the recent craft boom by producing products that are made with unique processes and/or in small runs. Tiny hand-labeled bottles, blue corn whiskey and endorsements by Al



The Campfire is a blend of bourbon, rye and peated scotch. It is like nothing else on the shelf and the flavors call for the glow of a campfire. I usually sip whiskey neat and recommend trying it that way first. Some whiskeys are just too 'hot' and will require some water or an ice cube to knock down the alcohol and bring out more of the flavors. To me Campfire has a pretty heavy dash of iodine on the nose. It seemed like it would be pretty intense, but with a sip the rye spices emerge first and open the way for a long, sweet bourbony middle. This whiskey is unfiltered, which gives it a kind of sticky mouth feel that I like. The finish is long with a pleasant lingering smoke from the peat that you just don't experience in other American whiskeys.

Next I had The Last Word, a classic cocktail that is traditionally made with gin but it is equally delicious with rye whiskey. It is equal parts rye, green chartreuse, lime juice and maraschino liqueur. It is the idea of a whiskey sour perfected: a deliciously tart and boozy summer drink. I used the Double Rye, also from High West, which is a blend of a two year old 95% rye and a 16 year old rye with a bit more corn in the mix. It is a bright but well-rounded rye that is good for sipping and great for mixing.

"The Library Pub on north 90th has an overwhelmingly large selection of whiskey."

Just a short drive from Benson, *The Library Pub* on north 90th is a comfortable bar that is away from the popular bar neighborhoods. It has a fantastic rotation of craft beer on tap and, even more exciting, an overwhelmingly large selection of whiskey. I was glad to get away from my usual haunts and try something new.

Capone can all be found in today's whiskey world and it's all fair game.

Alright, that's enough talk – *let's start drinking*. Normally I start and end at *Jake's Cigars and Spirits* in Benson. Jake's has been featured in this magazine before and for full disclosure, I am proud to say I work there. The bar is a rare combination of a comfortable atmosphere, a huge selection of excellent booze and cigars, and a diverse crowd of good people. Every Wednesday Jake's presents Whiskey Wednesday, where they feature a new whiskey at a special price. Recently the featured whiskey was the entire lineup of whiskeys produced by the aforementioned High West Distillery out of Park City, Utah.

"Jake's Cigars & Spirits presents Whiskey Wednesday, where they feature a new whiskey at a special price."

High West is an innovator in the world of American whiskey in that they are operating a distillery in Utah, but, maybe more importantly, they are sourcing and blending which are two somewhat controversial practices among purity snobs. Though they are now producing whiskey on-site, they operate on a relatively small premises so the majority of the whiskey they bottle is bought from other unspecified distilleries. What makes the products really different from the company they originally bought it from is the process of choosing the barrels and blending them together to make a new and unique whiskey.



I had the Four Roses Single Barrel 2012, a limited edition barrel strength bourbon served neat with a glass of ice on the side. This high rye bourbon (about 30%) comes in the same bottle as its readily available cousin, but at about 110 proof it is a different animal. I was surprised at how manageable the heat was with the initial sip. There is a huge taste of maple brown sugar but also some lighter stuff going on, maybe nutmeg and honey. I added two small ice cubes about halfway through my glass to see what a little water would do but for me, this is a bourbon that can be sipped neat, if it can be found. This was a big, delicious bourbon that more than satisfied its \$8 price tag.

“In addition to a number of classic whiskey labels, the Dundee Dell features the coveted Pappy Van Winkle line of wheated bourbons.”

Although they are well-known for their sprawling selection of scotch, the *Dundee Dell* also has a good selection of bourbon. In addition to a number of other classic whiskey labels, the Dell features the coveted Pappy Van Winkle line of wheated bourbons. Wheated bourbon behaves more like a scotch in the barrel than “normal” bourbon. While most bourbons will tend to reach an ideal age for bottling around 7-12 years, the “wheaters” only get more round, full bodied, and flavorful as they get older.

The 20 year is one of the most expensive bourbons on the shelf, but is pretty reasonable when you start comparing it to some of the better scotches. The cheaper 15 year is also very good. Regarding ice or water, this one is a ketchup and steak situation – *do not do it*, you will only give yourself a less memorable experience. If you do shell

out for a glass you will enjoy one of the best whiskeys out there. It is balanced like a great meal, with flavors of maple, toffee, vanilla, oak, dark fruits, candied nuts and twenty other things mingling together in supreme syrupy harmony.

“There is plenty of value to be found when shopping retail for a bottle. Brix, Spirit World and Jake’s offer a good selection of bourbons for around \$25.”

Though I am thankful for bars like these, let’s admit it – there’s no place like (drinking at) home. There are several shops around town where you can pick up a good bottle of bourbon to sip on or make cocktails in the comfort of your own home, or porch if you’re lucky enough to have one.

Though most of the whiskeys I tried on this tour would be between \$60-\$100 per bottle, there is plenty of value to be found when shopping retail for a bottle. Most quality booze retailers in the area such as *Brix*, *Spirit World*, and *Jake’s* offer a good selection of quality bourbons around \$25. Elijah Craig 12 year and Buffalo Trace are widely available, delicious bourbons that would be a good addition to anyone’s medicine cabinet.

Thanks for hitting the Omaha whiskey trail with me. I think bourbon is an important part of American history and our cultural fabric. When we drink it today we are continuing the tradition and helping to move it forward with the products we choose to buy. If you weren’t a whiskey drinker today, I hope you will be one tomorrow.

Benson First Friday

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YEAST INSPECTION:

Magical Moments with Beer

by Jason McLaughlin

There are many correlations between the creation of visual art and craft beer. The artist starts with a blank canvas and only their imagination as their strongest tool to create images never seen before. The brewer also starts with a similarly blank canvas and only their imagination to create unique flavors never tasted before. Craft brewers have long looked to these visual artists for exciting and bold packaging that reflect an appreciation for the hard work and “art” that went into crafting their delicious elixir. Here are a few of the greats.

Asian women dressed in nothing but long silk gloves, a floral print wrap around her waist and a Chinese symbol tattooed on the small of her back. It is sensual and classy all at the same time. It is a label that requires much more than just a glance.

The beer itself is the third of Dogfish Head’s ancient recreation project. It was created with similar ingredients preserved in 9000 year old pottery jars found in Northern China that included rice, honey and fruit. Dogfish Head’s version includes orange blossom honey, muscat grape juice, barley malt and hawthorn fruit and is fermented for about a month with sake yeast. The finished beer is a complex and unique ale that is unlike anything created for centuries.



“Created with similar ingredients preserved in 9,000 year-old Chinese pottery, it is unlike anything created for centuries.”

Chateau Jiahu Dogfish Head Brewery (Milton, Delaware)
Artist: Tara McPherson

Tara McPherson is a New York City based artist who was referred to by *ELLE Magazine* as “the crown princess of poster art”. Tara’s illustrations have been published in numerous big-time periodicals and she has also created posters for rock bands, including such names as Beck, Modest Mouse and the Melvins.

Tara was commissioned to do Dogfish Head’s Chateau Jiahu label art. The creation was a striking image of the back of a beautiful



“This big, juicy 9.5% ABV Imperial version of the India Pale Ale is world-class.”

Dreadnaught Imperial IPA Three Floyds Brewing (Munster, Indiana)

Artist: Randy Mosher

Randy Mosher has made a living creating the artwork and identities for breweries around the country. Beyond his art, Randy is also an expert on beer and the art of brewing. He wrote ‘Radical

Brewing' and 'Tasting Beer', both of which are widely respected references for beer enthusiasts and brewers alike. Randy also teaches beer-style courses at the Siebel Institute of Technology, a technical school located in Chicago that focuses on the science of brewing.

One of his most notable clients is Three Floyds Brewing, a small brewery in Northern Indiana which has a nationwide cult following. His artwork has been used on most of their bottled lineup including Dreadnaught Imperial IPA which features a playful portrait of a British officer in a red coat drinking a mug of IPA while a possible Indian assassin with a rifle startles him from behind. With the Taj Mahal in the background, the label is a look back to the time of the British Raj, which ties this version of an India Pale Ale to the story on the bottle.

Three Floyds is well known for massive and delicious flavors in their beer. Dreadnaught is a big, juicy 9.5% ABV Imperial IPA bursting with pineapple, gummy bear, mango, and passion fruit from the mighty hop additions, and enough caramel malt character to help balance the 100 IBU's. This Imperial version of the India Pale Ale is world-class.



“Nectar imprisoned in a bottle. Let it out... It is cruel to keep a wild animal locked up.”

Raging Bitch Belgian IPA Flying Dog Brewery (Frederick, Maryland)

Artist: Ralph Steadman

Ralph Steadman is a British caricature artist who is certainly best known for his partnership with author Hunter S. Thompson and their 40-year friendship. Ralph was responsible for the images in Thompson's works that featured gritty, rough and exaggerated images splattered with color. With a resume as long as the day, Ralph has also been responsible for the label art featured on everything bottled by Flying Dog Brewery in Maryland.

Known for their beers with an attitude, Raging Bitch IPA was originally created in celebration for their 20th Anniversary. The label features a particularly unhappy female dog with swollen nipples screaming with all her might. Splatters of water colors abound, making the label edgy and eye catching. The beer itself is a hybrid of an American IPA that is fermented with Belgian ale yeast

creating a medley of pine and grapefruit from the hops as well as a spice and fruitiness coming from the yeast.

“Two inflammatory words...one wild drink... Nectar imprisoned in a bottle. Let it out... It is cruel to keep a wild animal locked up. Uncap it... Release it...stand back! Wallow in its golden glow in a glass, beneath a white foaming head. Remember, enjoying a RAGING BITCH, unleashed, untamed, unbridled – and in heat – is pure GONZO! It has taken 20 years to get from there to here. Enjoy!” – Ralph Steadman



“A farmhouse-style ale that contains rose hips, rose petals and hibiscus which add a floral note.”

Baudelaire Beer iO Jolly Pumpkin Artisan Ales (Dexter, Michigan)

Artist: Adam B. Forman

Adam B. Forman is a Los Angeles based tattoo artist. One of the shops Adam has worked at in the past is High Voltage Tattoo, a shop owned by reality television star Kat Von D. and location of the TLC show “LA Ink”.

Beyond tattooing, Adam is an accomplished illustrator with a unique style reminiscent of images that may be found in a book of dark children fables. Adam's art is a magical match for Jolly Pumpkin Artisan Ales which is one of the more unique breweries in the nation. Among the many labels he has created for the brewery is Baudelaire Beer iO. It is a beautiful pencil portrait of a young girl with what looks at first glance to be a bow in her hair, but is actually a fly. The image is dark, but enchanting. With her symmetrical features and deep eyes, the label looks like something that would adorn the wall of an art gallery – not a bottle of beer.

What makes Jolly Pumpkin different than most other breweries is that they age their beers in wine barrels which contain naturally occurring microflora cultures including *brettanomyces* which give the beer a wild character. The style of iO is a Saison, farmhouse-style ale originating in the French speaking Wallonia region of Southern Belgium. Originally the style was brewed in the fall and winter to be consumed in the warmer months by the farm workers. Jolly Pumpkin's version contains rose hips, rose petals and hibiscus which add a floral note, tartness and a gorgeous red hue.



WHEN DID WINE GET COOL?

by John Finocchiaro

Recently I attended my college fraternity anniversary/reunion weekend along with hundreds of other fellow alumni. Interspersed between the as expected raucous times and occasional flights in the wayback machine was an exceptional dinner, complete with a slide show down memory lane, guest speakers, and loads of jovial conversation. At the dinner a rather insignificant item, for some reason, caught my attention.

“Wine became popular, not because of its perceived sophistication and class, but rather in spite of it.”

Present for each attendee to take home as a memento of the evening was a lovely, decorative wine bottle stopper, embossed with Greek fraternity letters. In my college days such an item was known as a “party favor”. Similar in spirit to a token that a groomsman or bridesmaid might receive for being in a wedding party, such a gift was always something simple, safe, and of common appeal. Sometimes a picture frame, a pen and pencil set, or a logo-etched beer mug were the chosen items. Other times it was a simple gift card. So, I thought to myself, just when and how did a wine stopper become a safe gift item of common appeal?

There was a time some years ago when wine was considered a specialty item. It was not hip. It was not popular. The masses had

not embraced it, nor did they especially want to. Culturally, the grand old U.S.A. preferred just about anything but wine as their beverage of choice. As a wine distributor, my father would tell me of the times pedaling his wares back when the public was not very interested in what he was selling. For those employed in the wine industry, wagering on a cultural change was risky business, but the winds of change were in the air long before ‘merlot’ became a buzzword in the ‘80’s.

America has always prided itself on being cutting-edge, advanced, and ahead of the curve when it comes to culture, technology, lifestyle and business acumen. Such pride is usually justified, but while much of the developed world preferred wine as their alcoholic beverage of choice, the spigot was somehow slow to turn here in the homeland. We found wine confusing. It came with rules and words we couldn’t pronounce. The bottles were hard to open. You had to have a special glass with a ‘stem’ on it. We were supposed to learn to swirl without spilling, sip without glugging, and sometimes we were even expected to – God forbid – spit. Yuck. We could not have made the world of wine any less appealing.

Meanwhile, our western European friends had embraced wine as commonly as we do milk. Drink it when you want it. Drink it how you want to. If you’ve got a nice glass, that’s great, and if not, who cares. Sure there were rules, but those were largely for the pinky-raisers and black tie crowd. The masses weren’t too concerned about impressing anyone with their milk etiquette. Why bother? For some reason, we Americans got it backwards. We considered wine to be

of nobility and class, and if we could adhere to the near Victorian regulations that we ever so passionately promoted, then we too would be noble and cultured. Nobody likes rules, and snobbery will get you nowhere. So we drank beer instead.

“After a generation of insipid cavity-inducing wines, we began to discover real wine – the kind that actually enhances a meal.”

Wine became popular, not because of its perceived sophistication and class, but rather in spite of it. It took many years – a couple of decades in fact – of pop beverage wines, fizzy sweet sparklers, white zinfandel “Kool Aid” wines, and boatloads of wine coolers to acclimate the public to wine as a user-friendly and common beverage. From a strictly qualitative standpoint, the bait that hooked the American masses was the lowest on the food chain. Most of it was just plain nasty. It was only when we dummed it down that the public bellied up and began to feel comfortable. Slowly but surely, after a generation of insipid cavity-inducing wines flooded the market, we began to discover real wine – the kind that actually enhances a meal, with flavors and nuances unlike any other beverage. Now we get it. Now we love it. Now it is a commonly consumed product, appealing to the masses.

Many wineries may lay claim to turning the tide of the American wine industry, but in truth, there was no “big bang” that single-handedly changed the culture. The ship turned very slowly. Many different brands over the course of many years are to credit. However, a common thread does weave through all of these brands: They all made the world of wine more user-friendly and less stuffy. The very qualities of upper crust sophistication that the industry had promoted so fervently had proven to be the very barriers that needed to be overcome. Now, isn't that ironic.

“Content to learn as they go, today's young wine drinker is typically not lingering long on the bottom rung of quality.”

For those passionate about wine it is quite encouraging to see a younger generation embracing all of its magical qualities. The majority now seem to skip over the bubble gum phase that an older generation chose to first endure. They like a good glass of wine. Their fear of a penalty flag being thrown for violation of wine rules is far less inhibiting than it ever was for their predecessors. Content to learn as they go, today's young wine drinker is typically not lingering long on the bottom rung of quality.


I greatly appreciate quality stemware and a beautifully matched wine with a meal. Even wine ratings have their place in assisting consumers as they navigate through the plethora of wines out there, but rules and standards should enhance the wine experience – not define it. When a wine absolutely cannot be served without the proper glass, then something is wrong. If a wine cannot be enjoyed or purchased without a wine rating to testify to and define for us what we should like, then we have gone too far. Only when we softened the rules did wine become popular. That's when wine got cool.

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Extraordinary Argentine Wines

Flavor Abounds in Argentine Wine Country by Evie Clercx

Every day, I wake up and feel lucky to get to do the work I do. As a wine industry professional, I am often a guest at fabulous dinners, I meet winemakers from all over the globe and taste their art, and I travel to some extraordinary places. I consider myself an ‘experienter’, always ready to try something new. I think that is what attracted me to wine in the first place. Wine is, in itself, an experience; There is something romantic and adventurous about popping the cork on a bottle of wine and tasting what’s inside. Whether I’m drinking it for the first time or revisiting an old favorite, there’s always that moment in the first few sips where I simply forget everything else and just experience all the aromas and flavors the wine has to offer.

“Argentina is most known for Malbec, a grape originally from Bordeaux and transplanted in Argentina during the Phylloxera epidemic in the late 19th century.”

A few months ago, I was invited on a wine education trip to Argentina. I had not been to South America before and, besides enjoying the heck out of a Torrontes poolside or savoring every sip of Malbec with my barbecue, I really didn’t know much about the country’s winemaking practices. It was an invitation I readily accepted. I packed a bag, said goodbye to the Midwestern subzero temperatures and headed to Mendoza in the middle of their summer. I should also mention that just the week before, I broke my leg in a skiing accident (see above statement about me being an ‘experienter’) and was eager to heal whilst sipping some fantastic wines.

A Bit about Argentina Wine

Argentina is the 5th largest producer of wine in the world, an impressive and baffling statistic, considering up until the last few decades, it was extremely rare to find Argentine wines in the US.

That’s because the Argentine people consumed almost all of the wine they produced, about 26 gallons per person annually (a US person consumes between one and two gallons annually). That’s a lot of wine! However, in the 1990’s, due to political and economic shifts, they started exporting a significant amount of their wine. Now, North Americans can purchase and enjoy some of the finest products the country has to offer.

Argentina’s wine country is located at the desert-like foothills of the Andes, in the West Central part of the country. Argentina boasts some of the highest altitude wine regions in the world. Because of the height at which the vines grow, they receive copious amounts of intense sunlight (320 days per year on average), very little rain (8-10 inches per year) and are subject to erratic weather from the Andes. During my January visit – the middle of their summer – the Zolo vineyard received significant damage from a hailstorm that blew down from the mountains. This is not an unusual occurrence. In fact, many of the canopies are covered in mesh netting to minimize damage from these types of storms.

Because of the desert climate in which these vines grow, water is an issue. In Argentina, the Government controls the water and dictates how often the vineyards receive water. When they do receive their water they completely flood the vineyards to ensure the vines receive the maximum amount of water possible, especially during crucial growing times.

Argentina is most known for Malbec, a grape originally from Bordeaux and transplanted to Argentina during the Phylloxera epidemic in the late 19th century. While Malbec is difficult to grow in Bordeaux, it thrives in Argentina and they are able to produce some wonderfully complex, yet smooth Malbec wines. But Argentina grows much more than Malbec; They make wonderful white wines like Torrontes, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and rich, robust reds like Merlot, Bonarda and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Touring & Tasting Memories

Our group first visited the Altocedro vineyard, located in La Consulta, about 60 miles south of Mendoza. Winemaker Karim Mussie Saffie took us on a tour of the winemaking facilities, and

I was amazed at the traditional style of his winemaking methods. Saffie prefers to use the traditional cement tanks for fermentation and aging. According to Saffie, the porous nature of the cement allows for a consistent flow of oxygen, creating richer, more flavorful wines. He also uses a 100 year old gravity flow system for extracting the juice as a gentler alternative to other crushing techniques. When we had an opportunity to try his wines, every bit of tradition and quality control came through in each delicious sip.

La Consulta is known for growing flavorful red varietals, and Altocedro grows Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Temperanillo and Syrah for their wines. Their Malbec is juicy and complex, and filled with wonderful aromas and flavors of lavender, black cherry and pepper. Their Temperanillo is well-structured and layered with tar, black fruits and violets. Arguably my favorite of all was the Altocedro La Consulta Select, a blend of Malbec, Cabernet



The traditional cement tanks used for fermentation and aging at the Altocedro vineyard. Photo by Evie Clercx.

Sauvignon, Temperanillo and Syrah. It's an incredibly inky, rich, robust and delightful wine that changed with every swirl of my glass. I found hints of blackberry, bittersweet chocolate and smoke, and a delightful herbs de Provence undertone.

After tasting, Saffie led us in a blending game, where we tried to create an identical blend to the La Consulta Select using beakers and bottles of the different varietals. This exercise cemented my fate as a wine salesman and not a winemaker, as my blend was nothing like the original. It has, however, given my friends and me hours of fun blending wines together to see what we can come up with.

“While Argentina is known for their quality Malbecs, the Bonarda grape is actually the more widely planted varietal and produces the juiciest of wines.”

Next, we went to San Carlos to visit the TeHo and ZaHa vineyards. Located in the Uco Valley, the San Carlos area lies 4,000 feet above sea level. With its high altitude, cool climate and diverse soil composition, this area makes incredibly interesting wine. Both the TeHo and ZaHa Malbecs were inky, rich and complex, and tasted of smoke, lavender, sandalwood and beautifully juicy blackberry flavors. These wines are definitely a splurge, but absolutely worth it – they are delightful.

My favorite visit of the trip was to the Tapiz Vineyards, one of Argentina's most renowned and awarded wineries in the Uco Valley.

The property was breathtaking. Between the man-made irrigation pond, the miles of green vineyard canopy and the majestic Andes Mountains in the background, it was truly a sublime view.

Fabian Valenzuela, the winemaker, gave us a tour of the property. We sat with him and tasted through their new “Alta Collection” of wines. The Alta wines are a collaboration of Valenzuela and renowned French winemaker Jean Claude Berrouet, who spent 44 years as the winemaker at Petrus. Together they created a group of wonderfully full-bodied but elegant wines that deserve placement on any restaurant wine list. The collection includes Rose of Malbec, Chardonnay, Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon. I enjoyed every one of them, but the Rose was hands down my absolute favorite. With its hint of ripe, red fruits and the perfect amount of mouth-watering acidity, it definitely secured a spot on my “last meal” wish list.

After the tasting and lunch of empanadas, we were treated to a horseback ride through the Tapiz Vineyards. While gently trotting through the Tapiz vineyards on the back of El Cantador (my horse), I remember seriously contemplating moving to Argentina to become a wine drinking Gaucho.

“With its crisp acidity and citrus flavors, Torrontes is a perfect summer wine.”

We spent the afternoon at La Madrid Winery in the Agrelo District of the Lujan de Cuyo province. Agrelo is one of the oldest and most premier wine growing regions in Argentina, and each of the LaMadrid wines is made from grapes from one of three vineyards in the area. Winemaker Hector Durigutti strives to showcase the classic and beautiful terroir of the area, and his wines are all elegant, full and well-balanced. My absolute favorite of the collection is the La Madrid Reserva Bonarda. If you haven't had Bonarda before, I highly recommend trying this one. While Argentina is known for their quality Malbecs, the Bonarda grape is actually the more widely planted varietal. It produces the juiciest of wines, with flavors of plum, mulberry, damp earth and spice box throughout.

Our final vineyard visit was to Zolo, owned by Patricia Ortiz (who also owns Tapiz). Zolo strives to make outstanding value wines (about \$12 retail), and gets their juice from a multitude of estate vineyards throughout Mendoza. She treated us to a carriage ride through the Zolo property, and I was amazed at how many different soil types I saw in such a small geographical space. Tapiz winemakers Valenzuela and Berrouet also make the Zolo wines, and we tasted their Torrontes, unoaked Chardonnay, Malbec, Merlot, Bonarda and Cabernet Sauvignon. I absolutely adored the Torrontes with its crisp acidity and citrus flavors; It's a perfect summer wine.

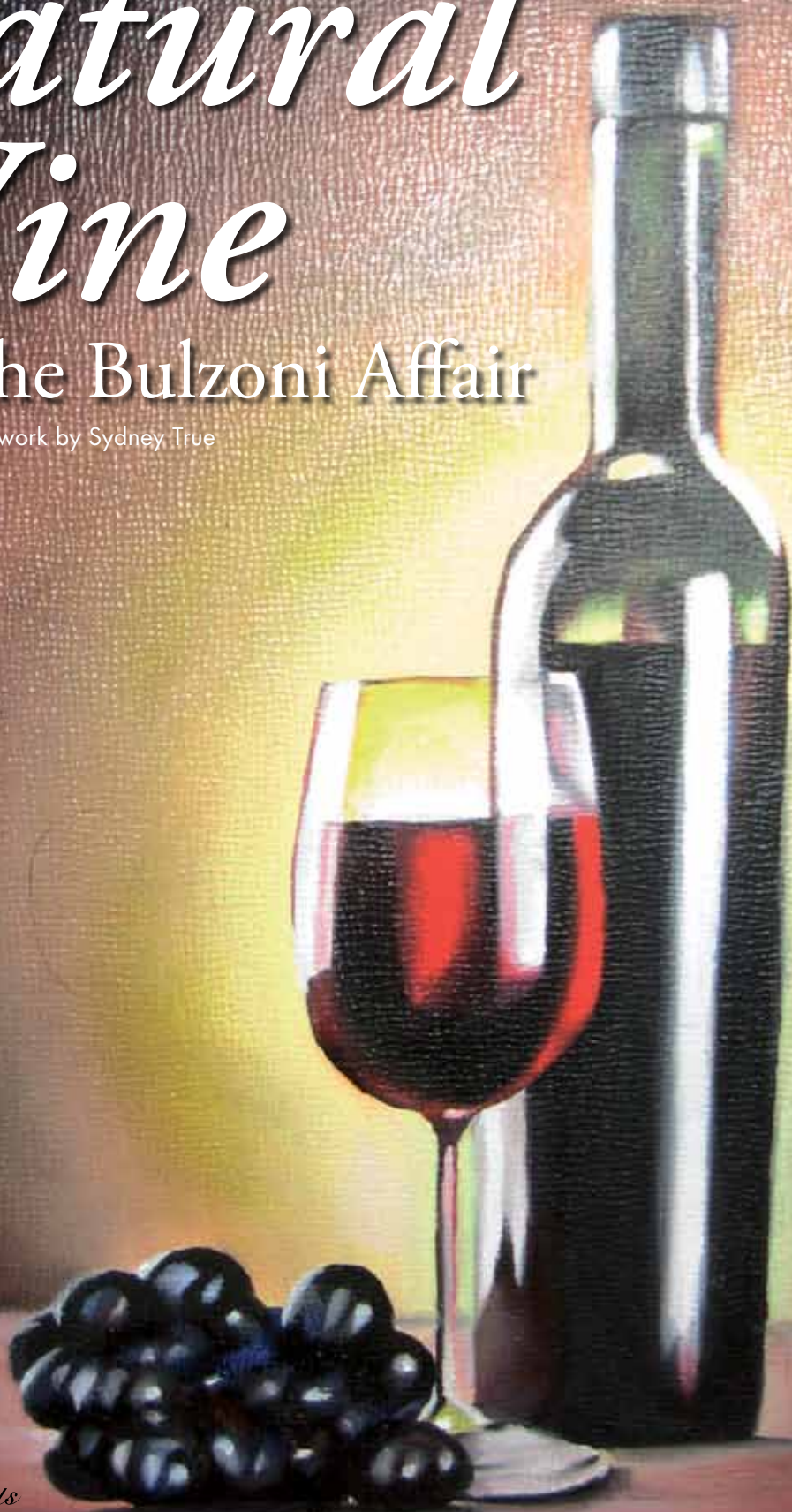
Over the course of the tours it was interesting to learn about all of the different winemaking practices taking place within such a relatively small region. What they all had in common, though, was impossibly high standards and a commitment to making truly beautiful wines. I came away from the trip with a deep respect for the winemakers and vineyard managers, as they continually navigate varied soil composition, drought and erratic weather conditions from the Andes to make outstanding wines every year. As for my dreams of becoming a wine drinking Gaucho...I am already planning a return trip to do just that.

Publisher's Note: Wines mentioned in this article are distributed in Nebraska by Quail Distributing and in Iowa by Global Wines.

Natural Wine

and The Bulzoni Affair

by Paul Kulik, artwork by Sydney True



When does making “natural” wine become a crime? In Italy, of course, where craven bureaucrats are eager to jump in the fray of the great wine labeling debate. Last July, Enoteca Bulzoni, a highly esteemed Roman wine shop, was the unfortunate recipient of newfound political targeting in the largely unregulated business of “natural” wine. For the crime of displaying a sign that reads “Natural Wine”, Roman agricultural authorities threatened fines and criminal proceedings. It is a chilling reminder of the very real world consequences of the passions on both sides of the natural wine debate.

The term “natural wine” carries with it an implied confrontation. *Why, if some wine is natural, what is the alternative?* Even worse, natural wine advocates increasingly splinter, leaving bitter and bitchy rivals. As the wine fair ViniVeri split from trade giant VinItaly, so did VinNatur split from ViniVeri. Not to be outdone, VinItaly now offers VinVit as their focus tent on natural wine. Each has loyalists and detractors. The world of natural wine is so fractured and polarized that it is easy to lose sight of how it began.

“Natural wine represents less than 1% of the world’s wine market and yet it is always controversial.”

Natural wine fails to fall into one of the “us versus them” – international versus regional, modern versus traditional, old world versus the new world, interventionist versus non-interventionist. Well, on the last one there is some disagreement.

Like the Slow Food movement that sprang-up as a reaction to perceived excess in industrial agriculture, natural wine merely broadened into organic viticulture. Organic vineyard management led to an even more esoteric, homeopathic and holistic farming. First developed in the 1920’s by an Austrian philosopher/mystic named Rudolf Steiner, Biodynamics found rabid devotees in some of the most traditional estates of Austria and Alsace. Steiner argued that farmland was a single complex organism and that proper treatment must coordinate lunar cycles, specific mineral and herbal dilutions, and an awareness of the “cosmic” forces that affect the soil.

Healthy soil leads to healthy vines. Though this ignores some of the more outré aspects of Biodynamics, it has been hard to forego at many of the world’s top estates. While some domaines, like the august Nikolaihof in Austria’s Wachau, champion tight certification by organizations like Demeter, many are simply quietly convert due to what Perez-Palacios sees as enhanced “floral” qualities. The fastidious vineyard practices are too mesmerizing for icons like Domaine de la Romanée-Conti to ignore and prove that Biodynamics have moved beyond the “kook” phase. Even Beaux Frères, an Oregon winery co-owned by Robert Parker himself, is Biodynamic.

Terrifying and bureaucratic certifying bodies (I was at Loimer in Austria’s Kremstal when RESPEKT conducted its review in front of a breathless vineyard manager) ensure organic and Biodynamics must maneuver through mountains of paperwork to prove every aspect of their farming complies with the regulations. Thus, growers proudly include logos on their labels and gallantly announce their approved wines to consumers.

So while organic growers and biodynamic growers have a crowded field of certifying bodies, natural wine has come to be the odd man out. It is without a single voice to define it and delineate it.

In her book, *Naked Wine*, pre-eminent natural wine advocate Alice Feiring points to Beaujolais as the start of the natural wine

movement. The “Gang of Four” as they became known, began as Jean Chauvet, a Morgon based négociant and scientist, started to reflect how little he could “add” to his wine. His work on carbonic maceration and natural fermentation inspired fellow Beaujolais winemakers Marcel Lapiere, Guy Breton, Jean Thévenet, and Jean Foillard to abandon chaptalization, pesticides, and sulfur.

Lapiere’s powerful and influential importer Kermit Lynch echoes this non-interventionist approach. He regularly scolds the domaines he represents for adding too much sulfur or filtering their wine. Doing otherwise, he argues, robs the wine of its character. He, like so many advocates of natural wine, is quick to denounce any variance from the orthodoxy.

The Hangover

Behind tightly drawn eyelids, a coarsely over-brewed mug of blackstrap coffee in hand, and a dull, rhythmic throbbing of the temporal bone, the culprit is easy to spot. That hideous red wine, often served in acetate cups at receptions and impromptu cotillions is to blame. It contains sulfites, and as we know, sulfites cause headaches.

Sulfur, the oft derided eau de Satan, is an absolutely essential ingredient in winemaking. It is referenced by Homer and Pliny and is now tightly controlled by the EU and must be labeled as an ingredient to wine on US bottles in any amount above 10 parts per million. *Million*. Moreover, even if winemakers elect to add (or not add) sulfur, it still occurs as a byproduct of fermentation. *So if sulfur is as key an ingredient to wine as the yeast and sugar to make it, than why the big fuss?*

“In a wine world still dominated by the 100-point score, natural wine is the perfect counterpoint.”

Sulfur has become a lightning rod in the “natural” wine debate. Sulfur acts as an antibacterial and is often used in both winemaking and bottling to sterilize against unwanted microflora. While even the most ardent “naturalist” acknowledges the utility of sulfur, the question often turns to the quantity because many winemakers use it as a cure-all. Commercial wines often have levels of 350 or more PPM, nearly forty times what occurs naturally, to inoculate against any and all threats against their investment.

No sulfur, or *sans-sufre*, has become shorthand for a movement whose agenda is unclear. Without sulfur, opponents argue, the wine is fragile and susceptible to spoilage before and after bottling. Furthermore, as sulfur must occur in at least some level, and wine can’t be made without at least some intervention, “natural” wine is a non-starter.

In the 1950’s Jean Chauvet was already advocating for “*vin naturel*” by shunning chemicals in favor of his native Beaujolais’ more traditional techniques. The more confrontational “*vin naturel*” movement in France now encompasses an ideology so rigid as to alienate would-be allies amongst wine professionals and critics.

Natural winemakers are deft at defining in the negative. Non-intervention means no or little use of the technologies and techniques industrial agriculture relies on. To do so requires tremendous rigor. Wine is freakishly volatile and, without chemical additives, demands superhuman vineyard management and winery maintenance. As Alice Feiring notes: what goes in must also come out.

Natural wine represents less than 1% of the world’s wine market and yet is always controversial. Writers like Feiring and Eric Asimov

of the New York Times invite derision with every positive nod. And though Mike Steinberger of Slate deplores natural wines' "sloganeering", Robert Parker, non-ironically, calls natural wine "one of the major scams foisted on wine consumers", natural wine is retail giant Whole Foods' fastest growing segment. Marketing, it seems, is the only prism through which to view the issue.

Parkerized

When Jancis Robinson writes that industrialization has homogenized 90% of the world's wine, she singles out the oenology schools, chemists and consultants used to attract the attention of wine journalists. Though responsible for dramatic improvements in the conditions of vineyards and cellars everywhere, this cadre's blind obsession for the worldwide market at the expense of loyal, native drinkers pushes for ever more sanitizing and extracting techniques regardless of tradition. The term to describe wines that have lost their nativist character in favor of polish and extraction is "Parkerized".

Robert Parker's 100-point scoring system, oft derided (or even compromised as the scandalous departure of his very own Wine Advocate "pay for play" write Jay Miller uncovered) yet nonetheless obeyed, and its legion of copycats attempt to rate wine along a single axis of worthiness determined by that one drinker's esteemed palate. To many, this is an absurd distillation of the 6,000 wine growing appellations around the globe and the 1,238 different vinifera grapes that are grown in them.

The story of Ma and Pa Dubois sending little Marcel out to wine school in Bordeaux, or wherever, only to return to tell his dear parents that everything their family had done for generations was flawed, has been repeated in every ancient wine growing nook with resplendent effect. As Jean-Marie Fourrier of Domaine Fourrier says, "...after the Army everyone goes to Beaune (for school)."

"When winemakers insist that the clarity of their wine comes without the encumbrance of modern technology, it can be seductive, indeed."

Oenology curricula prefer controlled fermentations and chemical improvements where the vineyard may have failed. Reverse osmosis, micro-oxygenation, acid correction, designer yeasts, high-powered sterilizers like Valcorin, Ultra-Purple for color improvement, herbicides and pesticides, were like nails to a carpenter who just discovered a hammer, and dramatically transformed winemaking.

Bolstered with brash and iconoclastic wine critics keen on making a name for themselves, winemakers in emerging new world settings plucked ever more brix laden grapes to be honed by chemists into a windfall brand. Where nature is the enemy of consistency, well informed wine consultants can bludgeon the same pronounced



characteristics into a bottle vintage after vintage. And for a market whose tastes and attitudes toward wine were only now beginning to gel, these wines were sold as “brands” in the template of spirits or beer.

By the 2000’s the market generally cooled for chewy, alcoholic, oak-driven wine. Sommeliers and boutique retailers turned to cooler climates and traditional appellations. Wine directors became ever more introduced to vintners willing to push non-interventionist limits. These wines are, after all, *different*. Racy and willowy, at their best, these wines balance piercing, crystalline fruit with delicate whiffs of animal and earth. Ambitious importers scoured vineyards in search of over-achieving and often appellation-law weary winemakers. When winemakers insist that the clarity of their wine comes without the encumbrance of modern technology, it can be seductive, indeed.

“Organic and biodynamic growers are careful to distinguish themselves and self regulate. It is a keen marketing technique, after all.”

Even Robert Parker began writing about the dangers of the pursuit of technically “perfect” wine in 1987. By the late 1990’s his concern seems clairvoyant. What winemakers the world over had done was employ the new oaks, bacteria, cultivated yeasts, improvers, Valcorin, MOX, acidulation, colorizers, extractors, and vineyard petrochemicals that produce wines of tragic sameness. Ironically these wines, marketed along Parker’s preference for extraction and richness, erode what many consumers feel is the very reason to buy and enjoy wines: *the expression of place*.

I Know It When I See It.

After all, wine is a hedonistic affair. It is to be enjoyed and relished. Since time immemorial, wine has inspired song and lovers, birthed and unwound empires, and has been sanctified as Eucharist. Wine is the toast of kings and no other beverage makes food taste better. As culture flourishes so does its taste for wine. As demand outpaces production, costs skyrocket. And in this global marketplace many wineries struggle to make their mark.

Wine is a business, commonly, a failing one. It is enormously costly to finance an operation were the farmland often costs more than urban property; where vines must cultivate over decades before their juice demonstrates character; where the hours spent tending the vines are countless and yields are purposefully depressed; where one frost or hailstorm or mite or mold can annihilate the vintage; to be at the mercy of the rain and sun; where equipment sits fallow most of the year; where enormous tanks that store and ferment wine must be fastidiously cleaned and maintained; where cellars must be dug to store years upon years of wine – and those perfectly coopered new French barrels.

Organic and biodynamic growers are careful to distinguish themselves and self regulate. It is a keen marketing technique, after all, and slogans fit nicely on shelf talkers. In a wine world still dominated by the 100-point score, natural wine is the perfect counterpoint. Birthed from controversy, devotees declare wine “natural” in the same way Judge Potter Stewart infamously determined pornography: *they know it when they see it*. It is an impassioned world of disparate opinions where the mere conversation helps propel the visibility of the wine.

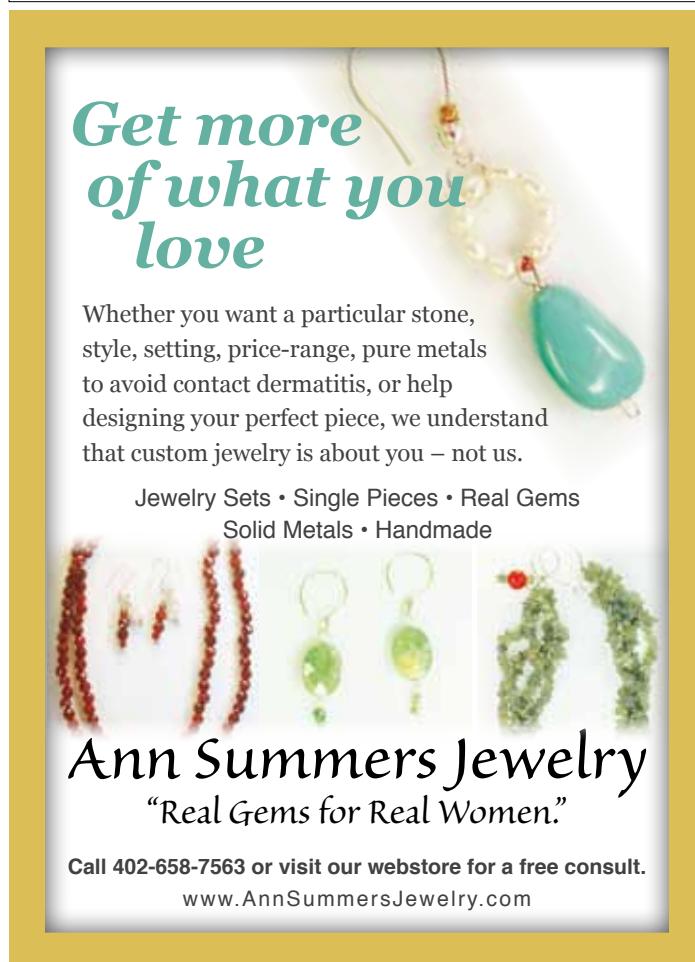


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The Isle of White

by Lucas Korth



White wine has a bit of a stigma attached to it. Go ahead and get a glass when you're out at *Bonefish Grille* with your ding-dong friends and nobody bats an eyelash, but order one at a bar, or God forgive you, bring a bottle to a cookout or a party, and you will find yourself the butt of loads of jokes.

"Oh, thanks for bringing this Fume Blanc, Luke. Will your boyfriend be coming later?"

"Oh wonderful, Sauvignon Blanc. I didn't realize that a bunch of old ladies would be coming tonight."

"Sauvignon Blanc is a superior varietal, but what makes the New Zealand breed so darn special?"

"We are your parents and we love you. Why do you insult us so?"

Anyway, I'm not here to rag on the Jeff Budweisers, the Todd Curzrites, or the Mike Hardlemonades of the world. In fact, I intend to enlighten the three of you still reading this about the wonderful white wines of New Zealand. But first, a brief disclaimer: I am not a wine expert; I don't know how to spell sommelier (that was a lucky guess); I don't know what *acescence* means (and neither does Microsoft Word, apparently). I am simply a fella who enjoys a good glass of vino blanco from time to time so please don't get too upset about my stupid opinions. Oh, and one last thing: I do realize that the "Lord of the Rings" movies were filmed in New Zealand and there will be no further mention of that, you damn nerds.

I first noticed my affinity for Kiwi wines two years ago. I was a casual white drinker, known to occasionally enjoy a Benson Mullet (glass of Chardonnay, shot of Tequila) on a steamy July afternoon.

But lo and behold, one particularly stifling summer day (the type that grabs you by the shirt collar and knees you in the groin when you step outside the door) my local watering hole was out of Chardonnay.

Soggy and parched, yet undeterred, I begrudgingly ordered a Sauvignon Blanc. I eagerly gripped the chalice with both hands, still trembling with anticipation. I brought it to my turgid lips. The liquid swirled through my mouth, its lush and piquant flavors scrawled a crude smile across my face. I had been quenched eternal. Wow, that last bit got a touch out of hand there didn't it? Sometimes I get going like that and golly, before you know it, I'm channeling John Grisham. In fact, I just got a call from a big-shot movie producer, and he wants to buy the rights to that last paragraph. He said Matthew McConaughey is on board.

Anyway, I guess I've established that Sauvignon Blanc is a superior varietal, but what makes the New Zealand breed so darn special? Noted wine critic, Mark Oldman, once said of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, "(it) is like a child who inherits the best of both parents — exotic aromas found in certain Sauvignon Blancs from the New World and the pungency and limy acidity of an Old World Sauvignon Blanc". Fellow critic, George Taber, considers Marlborough, the northeastern corner of New Zealand's South Island "the best place in the world to grow Sauvignon Blanc grapes". Still another critic likened drinking a Kiwi Sauvignon to "having sex for the first time". Hard to say if that's a good thing or not, but I'm going to go ahead and assume that it was drunk quickly, at bizarre intervals, whilst wearing socks, and an all-around unpleasant experience.

Yes, critics, this is all well and good, but how does it taste? The most common description I've come across is "alive with flavors of cut grass and fresh fruit". Hmm, that's not really doing it for me. Pretty pedestrian to be perfectly honest, but wait a moment — what's this? "Many Sauvignon Blancs from the Marlborough region are intensely acidic and reminiscent of cat's pee on a gooseberry bush". *Wow!* My God yes, that's the one. Unbelievably, that was actually intended to be a compliment, so I'm just going to continue regarding wine criticism as patently ridiculous. Better yet, I've come up with a description of my own and here it goes: Aggressively crisp and refreshing. Light sweetness up front transitioning cleanly into a pleasantly tart, almost grapefruit-esque finish. Oh, and a hint of cat urine.

Convinced yet? Well what if I told you that they're cheap! Yes friends, the wine industry in New Zealand is still very young, and in spite of all the critical praise its products receive, it is quite inexpensive. There are many marvelous bottles to be had for fewer than 20 dollars, and even some damn good ones under \$10. Personally I am a fan of Dashwood, Kaikoura Estates, and Frog Haven Estates. But don't rest on your laurels, because as these wines continue to grow in popularity, so will their price tag. As legendary English Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, once said: "Nothing lasts forever, in the cold November rain (may or may not be true)."

Well gang, hopefully now you see that drinking white wine isn't lame at all. In fact, if served properly it's pretty cool! But in all seriousness, get out there and buy yourself a crisp bottle of blanco. Live a little, you deserve it. Unless you're thinking about getting Moscato — in which case you can go straight to hell.

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FOOD & *Spirits*
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The Dumpster: We're Doomed. What's For Dinner?

by Michael Campbell

Global Warming. Underwear Bombers. Gluten. Life feels precarious. I've gone beyond worrying about where my next meal is coming from to worrying whether I'll make it to happy hour.

To console myself, I make every meal a Last Supper. Not the broken bread and bloody wine kind, but real comfort food that will send me to the pearly gates with a happy belly.

Show Me the Fat

The foundation of all comfort food is fat. Lard, oil, and butter all trigger our evolutionary dopamine, signaling "Everything is fine. Go back to sleep." Fat feels safe. Fat equals not starving. Fat is mother's milk. Heck, boobs are made of fat.

Skinny people make great models because they look like clothes hangers. But when you need real comforting, nobody wants a bony hug.

Cheese, the refined offspring of fat, is a brick of happy. Cheese needs no cooking, so guys like it. When it melts, it's like gravy. Cheese is fat you can hold in your hands. It's stackable. Without cheese, nachos are nothing more than corn chip and hamburger salad.

"Macaroni and cheese harkens back to a time when you were clothed, housed and fed by a servant. Good times."

Mac & Cheese, Please

Macaroni is a benign carrier like white bread: flavorless, with just enough structure to hold the food you really want to eat. Mac-and-cheese is a go-to comfort food because it's made almost entirely of cheese. Macaroni is just there so you can pick it up. That's why it's shaped like a handle.

Macaroni and cheese is comforting for another reason: your mom made it for you. It harkens you back to a time when you were clothed, housed and fed by a servant. Good times.

Kraft tries to capitalize on our pathetic loneliness by putting mac and cheese in a do-it-yourself box, but nothing says loveless more than powdered cheese and skinny noodles. Kraft macaroni

and cheese tastes like parents too busy for their kids. It has the same color and flavor as Hot Wheels track.

What goes with mac and cheese? Ketchup. And regret.

The comfort food I actually do make: grilled cheese sandwiches with tomato soup. Here's my recipe: Butter two slices of dense wheat bread. Butter the pan. Butter the butter. Smear yogurt on the inside of the bread slices. Do not use nonfat yogurt. This is a grilled cheese friggin' sandwich, for Pete's sake. Lay on some sharp cheddar cheese and dust lightly with cayenne pepper. If you are expecting nuclear obliteration or fire-and-brimstone, add a bit more cayenne. It will help you acclimate.

The recipe for the soup is: open the can.

"Wine, cheese and popcorn are a holy trinity, and it tastes even better if you wear flannel jammies."

Cheddar is Better

I love to wrap my arms and legs around a giant bowl of popcorn, with a side of cheddar cheese and wine. Wine, cheese and popcorn are a holy trinity, and it tastes even better if you wear flannel jammies.

If you don't have any servants, you may find some comfort in convenience store microwave burritos. They are fun to peel like a banana, without tasting like one. There is enough fat and salt in a burrito to kill you mercifully before you die of whatever cataclysm made you want a burrito in the first place.

Ice cream is nobody's comfort food, really. We keep dipping into it only because it looks so comforting when Meg Ryan eats it in, well, every Meg Ryan movie.

Comfort Food #3: breakfast for dinner. I don't know why this works except that the breakfast foods we choose are Froot Loops, pancakes and bacon, which is like having candy for dinner. The reverse doesn't work the same: nobody is comforted by roast beef and mashed potatoes for breakfast.

Maybe the world isn't really coming to an end. I know I can't eat comfort food every meal just to be safe. But when I'm feeling especially insecure, it seems smart to stock up on comfort, just in case. That's what survivalists do.

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