

THE FOOD JOURNAL

Dedicated to pursuing food history and supporting culinary collections at the Los Angeles Public Library

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CHSC Lunch with Kimmy Tang

By Richard Foss, CHSC Speakers Bureau Committee Chair

One of the benefits of being part of the CHSC is the opportunity to attend our members-only events, and we had a very successful one in November. On the 11th forty people got together for a very special lunch at Mon Cheri Bistro hosted by Kimmy Tang.

Kimmy has been experimenting with Vietnamese fusion cuisine for years and founded several restaurants, and at Bistro Mon Cheri she continues her explorations. Her creative process is usually only communicated via the dishes on her menu, but just for us she offered eight courses of Vietnamese fusion and explained the ideas behind each.

The variations are sometimes determined by contemporary ideas about presentation, as with the Bo Luc Lac or "shaken beef." This is usually evenly coated with a mild peppery sauce, but Kimmy puts this on the side, and serves the beef over baby chard topped with crisp shards of cassava. It's beautiful and has a greater variety of textures than the traditional version.

Other ideas were whimsical, as in the dessert of custard-stuffed steamed wontons drizzled with chocolate and shredded sushi ginger, a novel combination of Asian and European ideas. Kimmy explained that finishing a meal with sweets is not traditionally Vietnamese, but is becoming part of their food culture. She was a charming and informative hostess throughout the event, which lasted over two hours.

To learn about more events of the Culinary Historians in 2018, make sure your membership is current and your email address is up to date.



Photo credit: Nancy Zaslavsky



Upcoming Programs at the Central Library's Mark Taper Auditorium:

February 10, 2018

Barbara Fairchild in conversation with Nancy Zaslavsky
"Bon Appetit and Me: 32 Years in America's Food Revolution"

March 10, 2018

Melissa Pugash, James Marcotte, Lisette Gavina-Lopez, Mike Sheldrake
"History of Coffee in Southern California"

April 14, 2018

Andrew Friedman
"New World Order: Chef vs. Owners in 70s/80s L.A."

May 12, 2018

Susie Wyshak
"How Trader Joe's Changed the Way America Eats"

June 9, 2018

David Karp
"The Elements of High Flavor in Fruit"



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Charles Perry
CHSC President

Why not eat ZOMBIES?

After the zombie apocalypse, the economy will collapse. If you are one of the 3% of Americans who live on a farm, you'll be sitting pretty (if you raise something edible, that is, and unless stumbling zombie hordes don't trample your crops), as long as you have an adequately fortified farmhouse to retreat to. You may have to keep your eyes open as you do your chores, and harvest may be awkwardly interrupted from time to time, but zombies are slow and clumsy, so you have a chance.

If you live in a suburb, though, don't imagine that your backyard garden will sustain you, no matter how many zucchinis it produces in summer. And city dwellers will be at very serious risk, because food will no longer be delivered to markets. Fresh produce will rot immediately, and as the electrical grid fails all the frozen food will do the same. That leaves canned goods. *How long before they are all consumed?*

One potential food source, however, will be plentiful, all too plentiful: zombies. Should we eat them?

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Nancy Zaslavsky
CHSC Vice President,
Programs

Program Notes

I get a kick out of perusing old Program Notes columns to enjoy flashbacks of the stunning past speakers at our monthly Central Library meetings. CHSC's Secretary, Hae Jung Cho, keeps members up-to-date with e-mailers on who's up next (including Speakers Bureau outreach lectures). May I suggest that you mark your calendar now with "CHSC 10:30AM" every second Saturday of the month, except July and August, to not miss one outstanding talk in 2018? To get an idea of what you may have overlooked, we started the 2017 fall season off with September's always-vivacious speaker, Linda Civitello, and "America Takes the Cake," referring to her latest book, *The Baking Powder Wars*. October brought Bill Esparza who spoke on L.A.'s Mexican restaurant food history with, "Pocho Gastronomy is the Future of Mexican Cuisine in America" as he introduced his new book, *L.A. Mexicano*. (Both books won prestigious awards in 2017.) The Library was closed the second Saturday in November for Veteran's Day, but not to be undone we feasted at a members-only lunch at Kimmy Tang's Vietnamese restaurant, Bistro Mon Cheri, in Pasadena. As you recall, Kimmy was a delightful speaker on, "The History of Vietnamese Food" panel in 2016. And to wrap up the year in style, Kathleen Hill charmed us with, "What is It?: A Collector's Kitchen Treasures" about her life searching out fascinating old kitchen gadgets. If you did miss a program, please visit our new website, www.chsocal.org. The new site design is terrific even though it's still being updated with content and program videos are being added as quickly as possible. The website is also where you can renew your membership due in January each year, or bring a check, cash or credit card to the next monthly program (the date's on your calendar, remember?).

The California Bear-Chef first appeared in the *Pan-Pacific Cook Book*, 1915.



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Address Correction Requested



The Culinary Historians of Southern California

Many thanks to CHSC Member Jill Walsh for her \$500 sponsorship of the CHSC newsletter!

Thank You!

Events Around Los Angeles

Conversation@PAM: Fusion Food
February 8, 2018, 7 – 9 PM
USC Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena
<http://pacificasiamuseum.usc.edu/calendar>



A culinary conversation with Chef Erwin Tjahyadi (Komodo, Bone Kettle) and Chef Ricardo Zarate (Paiche, Rosaline). Moderated by Jonathan Gold of the L.A. Times. Free food tastings at the event!

Hanging with Chef Geoffrey Zakarian at Georgie hosted by Billy Harris
February 11, 2018, 6:30 – 10 PM
Georgie Restaurant, Beverly Hills
www.billyharris.com/dinner-series-landing



An intimate seated dinner hosted by culinary MC, Billy Harris. Guests enjoy a multi course, wine-paired dinner, chef meet and greet plus a hosted cocktail hour with hors d'oeuvres. Proceeds benefit No-Kid Hungry. Communal seating. 21+ guests only. Limited dietary restrictions can be accommodated.

Electric City Butcher: Pork 101
March 29, 2018, 7– 9 PM
Electric City Butcher, Santa Ana
www.electriccitybutcher.com/events



This most requested hands-on class will teach you how we source animals, how to identify the parts of a DG Langley pig, the basics of breaking it down, how to prepare your favorite cuts, plus knife skills and seam butchery. Take home 4 lbs. of pork, get a tool bag (boning knife, twine, handouts, coupons), and 10% off any purchases in the shop that evening. Light food and refreshments served afterward.

FoodieCon
April 7-8, 2018
Los Angeles, California
<https://www.foodiecon.org>



'Comic-Con' style consumer show that showcases all things food! This 2-day shopping and educational event offers the chance to meet culinary purveyors, purchase the newest food trends, and experience cuisines from food artisans, restaurants, food trucks, craft breweries, wineries, and more.

California Strawberry Festival
May 19-20, 2018
Oxnard
<http://castrawberryfestival.org>



Ranked among the top Festivals in the nation. Award-winning attractions, interactive exhibits, gooey contests, the largest collection of Fine Arts & Crafts, and an assortment of delicious strawberry foods and beverages. The Strawberry Promenade offers cooking demonstrations and presentations. Strawberryland For Kids boasts free rides and puppet shows.

Learn to Grow Microgreens
Every Monday, 10 – 3:30 PM
MicrogreensLA Farm #1, Redondo Beach
www.eventbrite.com/e/learn-to-grow-microgreens-with-farmer-joe-tickets-36820698701?aff=es2



Learning to grow microgreens can be rewarding and nutritious, but there are lots of challenges. Farmer Joe, the owner of MicrogreensLA, can help with his one day instruction, training and Q&A. Become a confident grower and receive a kit that will allow you to grow up to 8 different varieties.

San Diego Museum of Man
Balboa Park, San Diego
<https://www.museumofman.org>



This year the museum has 3 exhibitions related to food: *Living with Animals* explores the relationships we have with animals - as pets, as pestilence and on our plates; *Beerology* reveals fascinating stories and phenomenal artifacts that show how modern civilizations have ties to ancient craft brewing; and *Cannibals*, a thoughtful (and gore-free) exhibit demonstrating that cannibals aren't who you think, how European explorers falsely used the label to enslave others and how many things we do today make us cannibals, too.

A Letter from the Editor

When future food historians talk about today's culinary scene, I wonder what they'll say about the current wave of sexual harassment and misconduct cases that have resulted in some of the most celebrated chefs, including Mario Batali, John Besh and Johnny Iuzzini, to depart in shame from their roles within our culinary world?



It might have been a surprise to read about and it certainly has shaken up the culture of this industry. On the other hand, if you've ever worked in the restaurant industry, the news wouldn't have been a surprise at all and many angry insiders are saying it's long overdue that the truth came out. This is such a sobering and unpleasant subject, given that food and hospitality are typically presented in an appealing, cheerful and even luxurious manner, yet until now, has been kept in the shadows and something that few talked about openly.

We're continuing to hear about cases in other industries, such as politics, media and education, yet there's still some controversy here. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is oft-quoted for their statement that nearly 37% of all sexual harassment charges filed by women come from the restaurant industry - more than 5x the rate for the general female workforce, yet Forbes.com ran an article last September stating that this percentage couldn't be validated through research and the broad assertion is a myth.

The saddest part of this crisis is that the abusers of power have (and continue to) irreparably discredit the industry and drive the focus away from its true purpose and accomplishments. When learning of the details of these heinous and pervasive offenses, it's the victims that we should be thinking about and how to make the workplace more conducive and supportive for their success. The industry is already challenging and backbreaking enough with slim profit margins and high turnover rates, that someone who wants to do a good job should be given the opportunity and professional protection to thrive instead of being preyed upon. If we don't work to fix these very serious wrongs, this industry will lose out on the skill, experience and earnestness of its emerging talent who just want to be rightfully rewarded for creating delicious, innovative and high quality food. I hope the historical record of the future will be able to demonstrate positive resolution of this dark chapter and can definitively tell a more hopeful story.

Sharon
 Sharon Tani



Wanna try tricking your tongue?

Have you ever wished raw lemon juice could automatically taste like lemonade? Would you be willing to drizzle Tasbasco sauce on your tongue and discover that it can taste like a glazed doughnut? Try the mysterious Miracle Berry.

Otherwise known as *synsepalum dulcificum*, the Miracle Berry grows on a small emerald tree and is a red berry native to Ghana about the size of a large jelly bean. Scientists say that this fruit temporarily binds the taste receptors on the tongue, through a protein called miraculin, and makes sour foods taste sweet for up to an hour.

Though it hasn't been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for distribution as a healthy sugar substitute, it's acquired a bit of a cult following, not only as a fine-dining, "flavor-tripping" gimmick, or by chefs and bartenders looking to innovate with fresh, sustainable ingredients, but also among cancer patients looking to mask the prevalent metallic flavor that often dulls the appetite after receiving chemotherapy.

The fruit is highly perishable and relatively expensive at \$2 or more per berry, but can be purchased via the internet since suppliers in America are limited.

Source: Farrell, P. & Bracken, K. (2008, May 28). A Tiny Fruit That Tricks the Tongue. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/28/dining/28flavor.html>

The Culinary Historians of Southern California

www.chsocal.org



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Questions? Please contact: membership@chsocal.org

This past Halloween, artisan ice cream shops Salt & Straw served up "Crawly Critter Ice Cream" -- matcha ice cream with dark chocolate covered crickets and coconut toffee-brittle mealworms. On Amazon, their hickory smoked bacon flavored crickets are a top seller. This past baseball season, over 900 orders of chile lime grasshoppers were sold during three home games of the Seattle Mariners. In 2015, JetBlue added EXO Cricket Powder protein bars to its snack line-up on select flights. There are restaurants in Los Angeles that have offered their diners ant

beer, grasshopper guacamole, silkworm pupae soup, and a water bug dip to accompany fish and veggies. *Food and Wine* magazine wrote five articles about eating and drinking with insects in 2017, and according to *Fortune* magazine, in the past few years more than 25 startups began selling insects as food in the U.S. and Canada. (And for journalistic authenticity, I personally taste tested four flavors of Chapul Cricket Powder Bars just for this article and I thought they tasted pretty good! The texture and flavor is very similar to traditional Power Bars).

The scientific term for the human use of insects for food is *Entomophagy*. The eggs, larvae, pupae and adults of certain insects have been eaten by humans for thousands of years. Insects that are the most often eaten are crickets, grasshoppers, ants, cicadas and various beetle types. There are over 1,900 known species of arthropods that are edible for humans, and the most common areas of the world where people eat bugs include Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. In that part of the world, over 2 billion people farm and eat insects. In Cambodia huge tarantulas are fried and sold in the markets and in South Africa juicy worms are often dried and salted and munched on as snacks.

In the U.S. there's a strong "ick" factor just thinking about consuming insects as food, however in reality, bugs are good for you, for the environment, and for our food future! Insects produce less greenhouse gases and need much less water than traditional "proteins." It only takes one gallon of water to produce a pound of grasshoppers, whereas it takes 2500 gallons of water to produce a pound

of beef. Small grasshoppers have as much protein as lean beef with less fat per gram. Mealworms provide the same amount of protein, vitamins and minerals as fish, and ants contain a good amount of calcium and are low in carbs.

One of the most popular ways to encourage Westerners to eat bugs is with products made from cricket flour. The crickets are harvested, dry roasted, finely ground, and added into other flours (usually cassava and coconut). This yields a nutty, toasty, slightly earthy tasting flour (similar to hazelnuts and buckwheat mixed together) that is gluten free, fiber rich and full of healthy fats and nutrients. But educating the Western consumer is key. Megan Miller, Co-Founder of Bitty Foods, a San Francisco based company producing cricket flour products explained, "When the consumer has experience and education with insects as food, these types of products are successful. This category is still a novelty in the U.S. Professionals know it's good for the environment but there often needs to be a way to eliminate the visual barrier for the consumer so there's nothing creepy to look at."

The growing interest in this food category is based on many factors. A strong endorsement by The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, broader information regarding insect nutrition, and the low environmental impact of farming bugs for human consumption. As the world's population grows and food sources become more challenging, it makes sense to re-look at the benefits of what we think of as just pests.



Carole Rosner is a native Angelino who enjoys cheesy comfort food, beautifully decorated desserts, secret neighborhood eateries, and easy to follow dinner recipes. Her lemon coconut squares are always a hit, the oldest cookbook she owns is from 1937, and she's a fan of competitive cooking shows.



Chocolate Chip Cookies courtesy of Bitty Foods

TIME: 1HR
SERVINGS: 32 COOKIES

INGREDIENTS
 2 1/3 cups Bitty Flour
 3/4 teaspoon baking soda
 1 teaspoon kosher salt
 2 sticks cold unsalted butter
 1 cup molasses sugar (can sub dark brown)
 3/4 cup granulated sugar
 2 eggs
 1 cup chocolate chips (mix dark & semi-sweet)

DIRECTIONS
 Preheat oven to 335 degrees. Sift dry ingredients into a bowl and mix well. Beat half the butter in a stand mixer using the paddle attachment until smooth. Add sugars and the rest of the butter and beat until creamy. Add the eggs one at a time and beat gently. Add dry ingredients gradually until combined. Stir in chocolate chips.

Refrigerate dough for :15 minutes. Line baking sheets with parchment paper and roll out balls. Arrange the dough evenly on the lined sheets and bake for 10-12 minutes, rotating the trays halfway through. Allow to cool until bottoms are firm, then transfer to cooling racks.

CHSC Annual Book Sale

On Sunday, December 3, 2017, the CHSC held its annual book sale at the Hollywood Farmers Market on Ivar Avenue, north of Sunset Boulevard. Board members, Madeleine Beaumont and Sandeep Gupta, were on hand, as well as LAPL liaisons Ani Boyadjian and Stella Mittelbach. Sales were brisk and the weather was mild. Customers who bought five hardback books or more received a free library tote bag.

The CHSC wishes to thank all the volunteers who came out to help and those who donated cookbooks throughout the year. Proceeds will be used to support the library's culinary collection.



Photo credit: Stella Mittelbach

A Trip Along Route 66: Annual CHSC Members Party

What a fun and delicious event for everyone at the Annual CHSC Members Party on Sunday, November 5, 2017. The event was entitled, "Road Trip to the Harvey House Hotels," and celebrated the historic hotel's menus and dining rooms. Every attendee made a selection from the provided packet of recipes, prepared the dish in advance to feed ten people and brought it to share with others at the event.

The theme was "A Trip Along Route 66" and the menu represented nostalgic recipes from The Harvey House's Chicago, Illinois, Albuquerque, New Mexico and Winslow, Arizona locations. Some of the recipes included in the packet were for Risotto Piedmontaise, Stuffed Zucchini Andalouse, Ham with Citrus Baste and Cumberland Sauce, Chicken a la Marengo, Fruit Salad with Maraschino dressing and Quick (or Ersatz) Dobos Torte.

The silent auction also featured a variety of culinary-related items and successfully raised \$1,016 for the Culinary Historian fund to support the Los Angeles Public Library cookbook collection. Some of the most coveted items included the ever popular Charles Perry Dinner, a box at the Hollywood Bowl and Dinner at Connie & Ted's restaurant.

Many thanks to CHSC Member Sheila Anderzunas for serving as this year's Party Chair. Kudos to CHSC Board Member Don Corbett for coordinating and presenting the Silent Auction. Much gratitude to CHSC Member Sonia Gottesman for graciously hosting this event in her beautiful Sherman Oaks home.

Renew your membership today and have the opportunity to enjoy special CHSC food events with us throughout the year.



Photos by Gigi Hooghkirk

Charles Perry: Why not eat ZOMBIES? Continued from Page 1

You may object that eating zombie is cannibalism, but I think most of us will agree that they are no longer human. The zombie infection clearly obliterates the human soul – it's kind of like demonic possession.

But will zombie be safe to eat? I believe so. The infection spreads by biting, so evidently the infectious principle resides in the saliva. The rest of the reanimated body is probably safe. There have never been reports of anybody being infected by zombie blood, for instance.

It goes without saying that this does not apply to zombies which are also infected with the ebola virus. Watch carefully for the signs – sniffing and blowing the nose a lot, a "fluish" look, internal organs liquefying, etc. You should assume that ebola-infected zombie meat will remain dangerous no matter how long you cook it.

Of course, zombie may have a disgusting taste. Probably will, in my view. But it must still contain nutritious fats and proteins or zombies wouldn't be able to move at all. Just stay away from the saliva, and probably the brains as well. In practice, though, the saliva/brains problem should solve itself because the only sure way to put a zombie down is to blow off or chop off its head. (To be on the safe side, I would also spray the area with bleach.)

Will zombie be tough? Again, I suspect so. It may require long braising, and with the economy having collapsed you'll have to do without onions, carrots, parsley, etc., so be sure to stock up on storable flavorings such as salt, pepper, thyme, bay leaves, wine, tomato paste, Worcestershire sauce, Sriracha and the like as long as they are available. But as the saying goes, hunger is the best sauce. Zombie may sound unappetizing to you now, but when the day comes, you'll just be glad to have it.

In this way, you may survive while the zombie plague runs its course. Once the zombies have eaten all the available human beings, they will undoubtedly starve and collapse. The infection may persist in them and they may even remain technically undead, but since they will be immobile, they will no longer pose a threat.

By that time, we may even have developed a taste for zombie meat and may look back with nostalgia on the days of zombie *bourguignon*.

Noteworthy News from CHSC Members

Linda Civitello will be delivering her presentation, "Baking Powder Wars," for the Culinary Historians of San Diego on Saturday, February 17, 2018 at 10:30 AM in the Neil Morgan Auditorium at San Diego Central Library

Charles Perry will be presenting, "The Great American Soda Fountain," at San Pedro Library on February 10, 2018 at 2 PM. He'll also be presenting "The Tiki craze of the 1960s" at the John C. Fremont Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library on February 24, 2018 at 1 PM. Further along, he'll be at the Sunland Library presenting, "The Great American Soda Fountain," on July 21, 2018 at noon.

Hae Jung Cho is making an appearance at Pacific Palisades Branch Library to present "Kimchi History" at 2 PM on February 17, 2018.

Marilyn Beaudry-Corbett, PhD has made a generous gift to the Radcliff Institute for Advanced Study. Marilyn attended the Harvard Radcliff Program in Business Administration 1954, which was very important to her success in business before becoming an archeologist. The Marilyn Beaudry-Corbett Schlesinger Fund will annually name a Marilyn Beaudry-Corbett Schlesinger Fellow. It is her hope that it will encourage women to pursue advanced study. The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America is the repository for materials on the likes of Amelia Earhart, Helen Keller and Julia

Child. The library also has one of the largest collections of cookbooks and food related ephemera anywhere.



A long time ago in kitchens far away, there were tales of food stylists that started as home economists employed by large corporations as recipe developers and testers. While selling appliances or new products, like the cake mix, they were drafted into food styling simply because there was no one else to do it. They worked in uncharted waters. Even if they did manage to make something look nice for the camera, the photographer probably had no idea how to light it. See for yourself: go to any used book store and look at the photos in books and magazines from the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Photos of food looked the way they did mostly because the food looked that way. Printing methods of the time didn't help either, as they didn't accurately represent the colors of the food, and props were used with little or no logic (one of our favorite old photos shows a roast beef on a platter sitting on fake grass with a duck decoy next to it). Also, in the '30s and '40s, molded foods were popular: lots of domed salads, and meat recipes with thick, shiny sauces. It was often impossible to tell what the food had started its life as. Cultural changes influence food, so, after WWII household kitchen equipment began improving and becoming more readily available. Household help in America was disappearing, and Mom became the cook. She needed recipes; they came with pictures. Grocery stores sprung up, making every kind of food easier to purchase, prepare, and store. Those '50s coffin-like freezers made once-a-week shopping the norm and changed how America ate and looked at food. Together with prosperity and an economic boom, eating out became more common, and increasing numbers of diners were being exposed to artfully presented food. Julia Child and James Beard began educating the public about great food, and as a society we became more interested in food and cooking. Photography and printing improved, as did the presentations.

Slowly, food images started to change. Food photography started getting better, the lighting, framing, and propping improved, and the food began looking truly edible in the 1980s.

We styled a series of award-winning photos for an International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) photo styling contest in 2003. The theme of the contest was to reproduce the styling techniques and photography used during different decades. The title of our series is "My Life in Cheese," and it chronicles the decades of food presentation and styling that I have lived through.

The incongruous use and over-use of props was a constant theme from the '50s all the way through the '80s. The '60s and '70s tended to show food in the context of entertaining. (That fondue pot in the '70s shot was a wedding gift the first time I got married. I got it in the divorce settlement, thus proving my point that if you keep something long enough, you'll be able to use it as a prop.)

Beginning in the eighties the emphasis was on lavish entertaining. People started paying more attention to food, especially gourmet food. An empty wineglass on its side was a frequent prop; we still don't know why.

In the late '80s and early '90s there was an emphasis on busy, tiny garnishes and lots (and lots) of height. Why? You'd have to ask Charlie Trotter. As a leader in the '90s food scene, Charlie's food presentations became legendary and were copied. The late '90s brought towering food to the plate, dwarfing the food from the '80s. Food became architectural in scale. The closer the camera got to the food, the fewer props were needed. Although the food often looked fussy and silly, this change, along with better photography and printing, meant that you could actually see the food close up, making the profession of food styling an ever more necessary one.

In the nineties people started showing food in provocative ways. *Intercourses: An Aphrodisiac Cookbook*, by Martha Hopkins and Randall Lockridge, took food photography into a whole new realm.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FOOD STYLING BY DENISE VIVALDO



Photo credit: Ed Ouellette



Photo credit: Jon Edwards

When looking at decades of food photography we ask ourselves: Does life imitate art or does art imitate life? We think it's a little of both.

The nineties also brought healthy foods to the forefront. Later in the decade the simple, clean, and well-lit food photos became very popular through magazines and books from Donna Hay and Martha Stewart. From the late nineties and continuing to today, beautiful realism is the popular look. Food bloggers who are also talented amateur or working photographers are reaching millions of people around the world, influencing the industry in ways yet to be seen.

When looking at decades of food photography we ask ourselves: Does life imitate art or does art imitate life? We think it's a little of both. Food is trendy and its changes are reflected everywhere in our society – magazines, restaurants, and television.

Denise Vivaldo has been a food stylist in Los Angeles for thirty years. Originally a professionally trained chef catering in Hollywood, Vivaldo was discovered by Aaron Spelling and put to work on his television shows building food presentations for the camera. Her company, The Denise Vivaldo Group, styles food for cookbooks, packaging, television and film. Vivaldo won the 2010 IACP Award of Excellence for food styling. Learn more about her work at: <https://denisevivaldogroup.com>



On the night of November 8, 2016, more than 71 million Americans were glued to their television screens.¹ As the worst fears of more than half of the country began to become reality, fast food establishments across the nation saw their cash registers go into overdrive. In lockstep with the Electoral College upset that was to make Donald Trump the forty-fifth president of the United States, online food delivery companies such as GrubHub, DoorDash, Postmates, and Caviar were also seeing orders spike, with high-carb, fatty foods being the most popular. Caviar, which is popular in New York, Seattle, Dallas, and Philadelphia, among other major cities, reported an increase of 115 percent in tacos and related dishes, and DoorDash, which delivers in many metropolitan areas including Atlanta, Nashville, and Minneapolis, saw a 79 percent increase in cupcakes and a 46 percent increase in pizza orders on election night. Alcohol sales also went through the roof, with a 90 percent increase in liquor store orders reported on November 8.²

Olivia Kenwell, a bartender at a popular bar on New York's Upper West Side who worked election night and the day after, told *MarketWatch* that when people called to order food during these shifts they specifically said that they "wanted comfort food today." Meredith Doyle, a graduate student at Purdue University in Indiana, who was interviewed

WHAT IS COMFORT FOOD AND WHY DO WE CRAVE IT WHEN WE'RE STRESSED OR UPSET?

for the same article, said she was so stressed on election night that she ordered a double cheeseburger from a Wendy's drive-through even though she doesn't usually eat beef. The trend continued into Wednesday. According to GrubHub, the nation's leading online food ordering service, on November 9



orders for Greek fries—fries tossed in olive oil, lemon, oregano, and feta cheese—were up 425 percent in New York City, mac and cheese orders were up 302 percent in Chicago, and in Los Angeles fried chicken orders were up 243 percent.³ Why

were these kinds of foods the choice of millions of Americans in misery? What is comfort food and why do we crave it when we're stressed or upset?

"Comfort food" first entered the American vernacular in the magazine section of the *Washington Post* on December 25, 1977. It appeared in a paragraph on Southern food with the following sentence: "Along with grits, one of the comfort foods of the South is black-eyed peas."⁴ Various dictionaries define comfort food rather redundantly as "food that comforts or affords solace." The *Oxford English Dictionary* continues this definition with "any food that is associated with childhood or with home cooking." And the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* gives "food prepared in a traditional style having a usually nostalgic or sentimental appeal." These descriptions reveal two central qualities of comfort foods: 1) they are foods from childhood, and 2) they are associated with home, nostalgia, and family. This steers us to the critical point and the reason why dictionaries struggle to be creative in their definitions: food becomes comfort food because it is associated with being comforted.

The *OED* identifies another important aspect of comfort foods: they frequently have a high sugar or carbohydrate content. Confirming this assertion, a survey of over 400 North American men and women ranging in age from nineteen to over fifty-five found that carbohydrates featured in nearly all of them. Sixty percent of respondents identified



and casseroles.⁵ So, to figure out what makes comfort food so comforting let's start with the ingredients.

Carbohydrates increase the brain's production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that is involved in regulating sleep and mood, which is why we often feel sleepy after a heavy meal but also why eating carbohydrate-rich foods can make us feel good. Indeed, the connection between carbohydrates, serotonin, and a happy, relaxed state led to psychological theories first publicized in the 1980s that explained both the craving for and excess eating of pastries and pasta that occurs in some forms of depression as being a form of self-medication.⁶ That is, eating cupcakes and cannelloni releases serotonin, which soothes our sadness, and over time we learn the connection between carbs and comfort so that when we feel sad we crave these foods in order to feel better. This theory held strong for several decades, but new research suggests that consuming refined carbohydrates such as cupcakes and pasta may actually increase depression, not medicate the blues away.

A retrospective analysis of nearly 70,000 women between the ages of fifty and seventy-nine who participated in the Women's Health Initiative found that the more refined carbs in a woman's diet when she entered the study the higher her likelihood of having depression three years later. This study, which was published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, also found that women whose diets were rich in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains when they were first tested had a lower than average risk of developing depression over the next three years.⁷ The conclusion was that eating a diet high in refined carbohydrates can put postmenopausal women at risk of developing depression, while a diet centered on fruits, vegetables, and unprocessed grains lowers the likelihood of future depression. It should be mentioned that these findings were correlational and do not illustrate a cause and effect between donuts and depression, or apples and good emotional health. Nonetheless, the notion that self-medicating with donuts is a faulty way to chase the blues away is supported by other recent findings.

Research has shown that eating lots of refined starches and sugars increases inflammation and cardiovascular disease, which have both been independently linked to depression. Additionally, metabolic syndrome—the cluster of conditions connected to insulin resistance—is associated with overeating, especially of carbohydrates, and metabolic syndrome raises the risk of depression. Most critically, however, is that in order for carbohydrates to really increase the brain's production of serotonin no protein can be eaten at the same time—and foods such as ice cream, milk chocolate, pasta, cakes, and pastries contain enough protein to block the effect. Therefore, the serotonin-carb self-medication theory has several critical holes. Nevertheless, you may still believe that a cupcake or mac and cheese does the trick to make you feel better when you've had a bad day, and you would be right.

sweet and savory snacks high in carbohydrates as their preferred comfort foods—potato chips topped the charts, followed by ice cream, cookies, candy, and chocolate—while the remaining 40 percent named carbohydrate meal-type foods, especially pasta, pizza,

and casseroles.⁵ So, to figure out what makes comfort food so comforting let's start with the ingredients.

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3. Maria Lamagna, "Here Are the Comfort Foods America Binged on as the Election Unfolded," *MarketWatch*, November 16, 2016, <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/this-is-what-americans-ate-on-election-day-and-after-2016-11-11>.

4. A. Pearlman, *Smart Casual: The Transformation of Gourmet Restaurant Style in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 182.

5. B. Wansink, M. M. Cheney, and N. Chan, "Exploring comfort food preferences across age and gender," *Physiology and Behavior* 79 (2003):739–47.

STRESSED IS DESSERTS SPELLED BACKWARDS

In a study of over 1,000 North Americans it was found that eating ice cream, cookies, and chocolate made women feel guiltier than men, even though these were the foods the women picked as their favorite comfort foods.²⁰ Men were more likely to say that hearty, warm, meal-type foods like pasta and burgers were their preferred comfort foods and not to feel much guilt about eating them. This gender difference is hardly surprising given the emphasis on thinness and disciplined eating that exists among women. More unexpected were the findings that emerged about comfort food and age.

Feelings of self-reproach after indulging in one's favorite comfort food were about equal whether someone was eighteen or sixty, except when it came to letting yourself go with steaks and burgers, about which people in the middle age range, thirty-five to fifty-four, felt the most guilt—probably because this is when doctors start admonishing patients about heart disease and the dangers of red meat. It was also found that as we get older our comfort foods tend toward the hearty, no matter our gender. Respondents over the age of thirty-five were more likely to endorse burgers and casseroles as comfort foods, while people aged eighteen to thirty-four were most likely to pick snack foods such as potato chips and cookies. Interestingly, the older the respondents were, the more soup was chosen as a comfort food. Soup is physically warming and reminds many of us of cozy childhood meals. As we get older and reflect back on our past more often we may be more influenced by nostalgia in our comfort food choices than younger people, who are more influenced by the immediate hedonic pleasures of high fat and sugar.

Considerable research and clinical effort has been applied to deciphering and treating emotional eating. One recurring theme is that certain types of people are especially prone to turning to Doritos and desserts when the going gets tough. Traditionally, these people are more likely to be women, chronic dieters, and people who are predisposed to negative emotions and depression. However, several new studies suggest that everyone is susceptible to emotional eating under the right, wrong circumstances.

FOOD IS WHO WE ARE

Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the famous French culinary connoisseur, practiced law during the French Revolution and then turned to writing about food. His book *The Physiology of Taste*, published two months before his death in December 1825, has been continuously in print ever since. It is a legendary treatise on food and contains a compilation of recipes, witty reflections, and



anecdotes about everything epicurean. Brillat-Savarin is credited with founding the literary genre of gastronomy as well as penning many notable quotes, most famously: "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are."

The cultivation of food and the invention and inventiveness of cooking separates us from other animals. Moreover, eating is fundamental to what and who we each are as human beings. Food is about identity—both cultural and personal. The Japanese eat natto—fermented soybeans—for breakfast and Westerners eat omelets. My favorite foods are not necessarily yours. Food is about personality. Sweet people prefer sweet tastes and tasting sugar briefly makes everyone kinder. Eating alters our thoughts and feelings, and at the same time our body and the food we consume is transformed by what we think. Food elicits specific and special emotions and memories, and our relationship with food is deeply personal and relative. The most delicious, perfect dish I have ever eaten was an unusual variation of spaghetti alla carbonara prepared by the hostess of a pensione in Genoa where I stayed as a teenager. I have never been able to find or re-create that meal again, much as I have tried—but the memory and emotions live on unblemished and unparalleled. When we eat a food we are not merely eating its physical ingredients, we are eating its emotional ingredients—the concepts, ideas, and psychological meaning of the food and who prepared it for us.

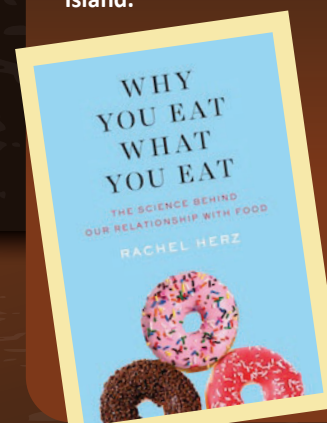


Food nourishes the body and the soul, and knowing how to get the most from our senses and our mind while eating makes it all that it can be. Food is an aesthetic immersion, whether you turn a salad into a Kandinsky painting or not. Food connects us to our past, to other people, to the world, and to ourselves. Food is memory, celebration, identity, conversation, emotion, glory, pleasure, pain, fear, disgust, comfort, and guilt. Food is aromatic, salty, sour, sweet, bitter, savory, tingly, hot, and cold. Food is flavor and savor, art and sight, sound and music, texture and design, words and poetry, divine and decadent. Food is love and food is life. And knowledge of how our mind and body are affected by our food choices, and how our senses and psychology alter our experience of food and the consequences of eating, is power.

Rachel Herz is a neuroscientist specializing in perception and emotion. She teaches at Brown University and Boston College, and is a professional consultant. The author of *The Scent of Desire* and *That's Disgusting*, she lives in Rhode Island.



Photo credit: Kathleen McCann



* Excerpted from *Why You Eat What You Eat: The Science Behind Our Relationship with Food* by Rachel Herz, PhD.

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1. Oriana Schwandt, "Election Night Ratings: More than 71 Million TV Viewers Watched Trump Win." *Variety*, November 9, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/tv/news/election-night-ratings-donald-trump-audience-1201913855/>.

2. Virginia Chamlee, "On Election Night, Americans Self-Medicating With Delivery Food and Booze," *Eater*, November 14, 2016, <http://www.eater.com/2016/11/14/13621652/election-night-food-postmates-grubhub>.