

JULIAN

O F T H E S E A S O N S





Ca'del Bosco

CUVÉE PRESTIGE

TRANSPARENTLY SUBLIME





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My Life Uncorked

By Julian Niccolini



EVERYONE KNOWS I LOVE NEW YORK AND MY LIFE HERE. I work in the most beautiful restaurant in the world, and I spend my days stirring up mischief for some of the most extraordinary people you could ever meet.

As much as I love this city, I am equally proud of where I grew up. Yes, many people know that I am from Italy. Others know I am specifically Tuscan. And some believe I am from Lucca.

But the truth is that I am from the tiniest place you could ever imagine, a remote mountain area outside of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana called Cassina Rosa.

As modestly as I grew up in postwar Italy—learning to forage out of necessity, and understanding that at any moment our house could become a restaurant if travelers were able to pay for something to eat—my childhood was rich, culturally and morally.

My father was an extraordinary man. I cannot tell you how lucky I am to be his son. A war hero who led the Tuscan Resistance during World War II, he was very honest, very smart, and, above all, he was very fair.

During the war, he was older than the other men in the Resistance. He was wise. When the

younger men captured a guy that they thought was sympathetic to Mussolini and the evil that was holding Europe hostage, my father told them that they could do nothing until he had a chance to speak with the man. So they tied him to a tree and waited for my father to arrive.

And after questioning him for hours, my father concluded there was no proof that the man was fighting for Mussolini. So he took the guy to our house and waited for the man's family to take him home.

The sister of the man arrived, relieved that her brother was safe, and stayed for dinner. I guess everyone got along well because my father married her, and I was born a few years later.

Although I didn't know it at the time, our house was livelier than most. The entire downstairs was filled with tables and chairs. Locals and travelers always stopped by. Although we did not really have neighbors, people from Garfagnana liked to visit to hear my father speak. Let's just say, he wasn't boring. He often spoke in rhyme and he had a lot to say about politics and current events.

He and my mother would also entertain people who were passing through Tuscany. They would welcome everyone into our tiny house, offer them a seat, a bite to eat, a glass of wine, and

the fun would begin. Although all of this seemed perfectly normal to me at the time, I learned later that other people did not grow up in a house filled with a troop of characters that easily could be the cast of a Fellini film. But maybe not. I am not sure Fellini could have dealt with all the personalities.

Growing up modestly with people who understood what is right and wrong and who were smart enough to value hospitality and fun has shaped my personality more than anything else. I know what it is like to have nothing but what you create for yourself. I know you can be happy and enjoy life with few material comforts. I know that as long as you have something to eat, a table, and a few chairs, all you need are friends who are willing to enjoy the magic that happens when people break bread and enjoy what life has to offer.

This is why I love my life in the Four Seasons, and also why I decided to create this magazine. During my years in the restaurant I have met the most colorful people, traveled to the most extraordinary places, and enjoyed truly spectacular foods and wines. I want to share with you the experiences that have made my life delicious. ○



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travel

The Venice That No Tourist Sees

By Julian Niccolini
Illustration by Max Siebel



I love the spaghetti with clams—it has no sauce, no garlic, just teeny-weeny ridge-shelled clams, olive oil, heaps of parsley, and spectacularly chewy pasta.

I'VE SPENT MY LIFE IN SEARCH OF DELICIOUS FOOD AND SPECTACULAR WINES. With little notice, I'd jump on a plane to taste an extraordinary pinot noir, or hop on a boat to savor fresh Nantucket Bay scallops. What I've discovered is that, while it is possible to get a good meal almost anywhere you go, true greatness is much harder to find.

The most delicious meal I've ever eaten was at Al Mascarón, a small trattoria and wine bar in Venice, Italy. Owned by the gregarious Gigi Vianello and his partner, Momi di Momi, Al Mascarón is nearly impossible to find but well worth the search on foot or by boat. Completely unlike Cipriani, where the tourists go to see and be seen, Al Mascarón is where locals dine on the freshest fish, the tastiest pasta, and the kind of warm welcome only Gigi, the unofficial mayor of Venice, can offer.

Located in the middle of Venice and comprising several tiny dining rooms, Al Mascarón has, at most, 25 heavy wooden tables that look to be about 100 years old. The walls are whitewashed and feature paintings by local artists who barter their work for meals. The tablecloths are paper, and the chairs are hand carved and not particularly comfortable—but once seated there for a few minutes, you will never want to leave.

While Al Mascarón accepts only cash, the food is insanely inexpensive. The atmosphere is casual, crowded, and too much fun, and the menus are handwritten in nearly indecipherable Italian. Start

with a bottle of Prosecco. There's no written wine list, but ask Gigi for something special and he will produce a great bottle that has no label but will serve as the perfect start to the Al Mascarón seduction.

Here is where you'll find the best seafood you've ever tasted, the fish caught in Venice's legendary lagoon. My favorites include live shrimp bathed in spectacular olive oil and a pinch of sea salt; delicious sardines; tiny, sweet razor clams; miniature baby octopus; the tiniest soft-shell crabs you've ever seen, dusted in flour and expertly fried to tender perfection; and small clams, sautéed in olive oil and garlic and served with just a hint of ginger.

Gigi, who struts through the dining room, also creates the kind of pasta and risotto you will never forget. I love the spaghetti with clams—it has no sauce, no garlic, just teeny-weeny ridge-shelled clams, olive oil, heaps of parsley, and spectacularly chewy pasta. Together, the ingredients combine to create the single most delicious pasta dish I have ever tasted. I also love the risotto with black ink. Amazing.

Once I enter Al Mascarón, I never want to leave, so I linger there as long as possible and enjoy the end of a great lunch over a traditional plate of cookies and a glass of dessert wine. The way I figure, if you stay there for hours drinking in the scene of Venice's backstage, where tourists are few and local gondoliers take a break from transporting visitors through the city's canals, you'll be right on time for dinner. ○

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vino

Committed to Brunello

By Pamela Jouan



PERCHED HIGH ON THE SUNNY SLOPES OF THE HILLSIDE VILLAGE OF CASTELNUOVO DELL'ABATE, on the southeastern tip of Montalcino, sits the Mastrojanni Estate, established in 1975. In front of it, the extinct volcano Mount Amiata protects the vines from extreme elements, while next to it the Orcia River mists over the tender fruit lovingly. The result: wines, largely produced from the Sangiovese Grosso grape, that are admired for their rich, terroir-driven character and long life.

A former secretary general of the Italian Parliament and lawyer, Mr. Mastrojanni purchased the land when he retired. When he died in 2006, his children, who were not as vested in the family holding company as others can be, decided to sell. Enter Francesco Illy, a longtime admirer of Mastrojanni wines and, incidentally, a neighbor of the estate. (He had purchased a local shepherd's old house and land and turned it into a vineyard.) Over time, he struck up a friendship with the general manager at Mastrojanni, Andrea Machetti, which served him well when the Mastrojanni family picked Gruppo illy (the family company Francesco's brother, Riccardo, runs) to carry on their legacy of producing exceptional quality wines.

Illycaffè was founded in Trieste, Italy, in 1933 by Riccardo's grandfather, Francesco, who, besides coffee, produced chocolate on a family farm. The farm was eventually annexed by Yugoslavia after World War II. Francesco lost everything but started over, going the coffee route solely. Although Riccardo's father, Ernesto, introduced tea into the business in the 1960s, the company eventually went back to concentrating on coffee, which today brings in revenue of about 300 million euros each year. Starting with the foundation of Gruppo illy in 2004, the family diversified and started acquiring new purchases that have included Agrimontana, a leader in marron glacés and jams; Domori, a high-quality chocolate producer; Dammann Frères, a French tea producer; and, in 2008, Mastrojanni, the brunello wine producer.

On its 90 hectares of land, vineyards are grown on 25 hectares, of which more than half is classified as brunello, an iconic Italian wine that can age 10 to 20 years or more. Riccardo Illy appreciates the longevity of Mastrojanni wines. He views winemaking as a long-term commitment, the kind that will allow the next Illy generation to concentrate on wine, if he is successful at developing the business now. And he's definitely serious about making that happen, traveling around the globe to implement a new

marketing plan that will broaden distribution and brand recognition of the wines.

But perhaps it is his own passion for wine—much like his brother's—that will ensure Mastrojanni's success. To begin with, Gruppo illy has done little to alter the overall philosophy of the business, keeping Mastrojanni's vineyard manager, Andrea Machetti, and oenologist Maurizio Castelli on board throughout and after the sale. Any changes, besides the purchase of a triage table and new barrels, have been guided exclusively by nature. Case in point: the expanded wine cellar designed with wood, bricks, and stone and built into a hillside. The harvest continues to be conducted exclusively by hand, and they rely on Mr. Machetti's God-given gift of intuition to guide the timing of each harvest that can vary greatly due to unpredictable weather.

The Mastrojanni wines include a rosso, a super-Tuscan, a brunello, and a single-vineyard brunello, plus a grappa and a *passito*, or dessert wine. Their star is inarguably the Sangiovese Grosso grape that, when aligned with the right terroir, produces an incomparably intense brunello. Add to that alignment the Illy family, and perhaps now Mastrojanni wines will not only continue to shine but also do so in so many more places. ○

design

An Interview with Architect John Manley

By Aaron McDonald

Philip Johnson Photo by Todd Eberle Interior Photography by Jennifer Calais Smith



John Manley worked as an architect in Philip Johnson's office for more than 50 years, arguably becoming Johnson's closest collaborator. Manley cut his teeth as a draftsman on the Four Seasons Restaurant and shared his experience with Aaron McDonald and Debby Green, Johnson's personal assistant during the 1990s. Aaron had the pleasure of working with Philip Johnson and John Manley during the 1990s.

March 8, 2011

Aaron McDonald: *What is your favorite aspect of the design of the Four Seasons?*

John Manley: The things I liked working on most were the bar and the sculpture that hangs above it. I like the revolving cylinders in the middle of the bar.

AM: *Revolving cylinders . . .*

JM: Well, because they were extremely difficult to do. They are mounted to a central spindle, and each one of the shelves revolves independently from the others, so that when the bartender puts a bottle some place he always knows where it is. But what made this particularly difficult was that in between the spindle and the revolving shelves was a luminous sheath with vertical fluorescent tubes within to make everything glow.

And let's see what else. The wine cellar that you see as you go through the lobby—it was my idea to place a mirror on the back wall so that it looks twice as big as it is, until you look carefully and see yourself in there and realize it's a mirror.

I also liked detailing the pool. The problem was, that much concrete and marble and water was tremendously heavy. To support the weight, there are two WF300s—which were the biggest steel beams you could get at the time—spanning across the floor. But in order to get the load of the pool onto those two beams, the pool was built with a cantilever. There is one support in the middle of the pool, the rest of the pool cantilevers pinned from this point.

AM: *It's held up by its center? Visually, when you look at it, it's stable, monolithic—and what you're saying is it's actually in a balanced state? Amazing.*

JM: Yes. It's balanced on one point.

AM: *What's your favorite room?*

JM: The grill room. One thing that I think is interesting about the grill room—although it didn't exist for more than a couple of years—but when the place first opened, they had a patterned electrical grid under the carpet so that they could call any waiter on the floor by lapel button back to the kitchen.

Debby Green: *Very James Bond . . .*

JM: Yes! For whatever reason, they didn't use it for very long. There were also phone stations at every table. Well, there were plugs at every table. Before anyone had cell phones, a phone could be brought in, if need be.

I don't know if this is true: it was rumored that there are panels that open out in all the rooms. Some are for adjusting lighting; some were for calling for cigarettes. There were all kinds of functions that could be requested by these stations. We were told that two of them were for call girls.

AM: *No, that's probably not publishable.*

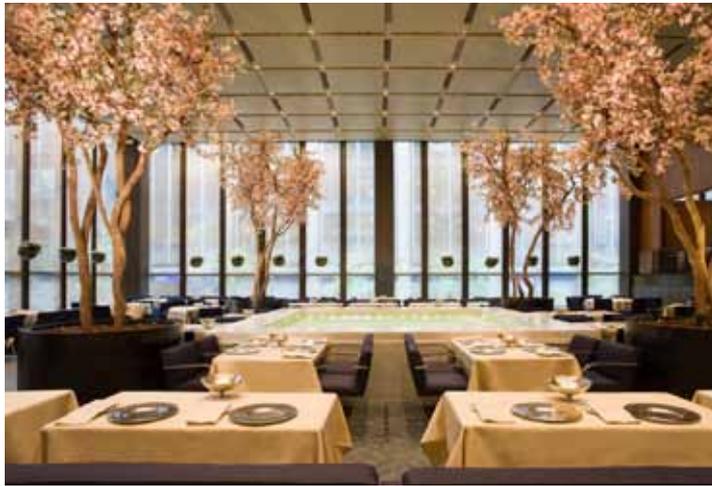
JM: Well, I don't know that it's true.

DG: *What about the beaded curtain?*

JM: Oh, I never can remember her name—it was a fabric consultant who suggested it. I think the suggestion that it be made of chain links was hers, but the problem was who could make it. She was a fabric designer. Not only the idea, but she found out a source for who could make it: a button factory in New Jersey. Because the problem was you had a certain length of chain all the way up—it goes up 19 feet 10 inches—and at a certain point toward the top, you want one less link in the chain until it's tightened to very

straight at the very top. There's no gap at the top. This is why it was so difficult to fabricate, to align the beads in sequence and then do this 30 times for each window of the room.

Another thing that I thought was a lot of fun was the sparkle blanket. That was Edison Price's idea. Edison Price made all the metal ceilings, which are quite complex in and of themselves. He had the idea of wrapping carpets over the metal ceiling panels in the private dining rooms and punching



through in a random pattern with flashlight-like lights. So the whole ceiling is lots of little lights in carpeting.

DG: When did they add the crackle glass to the bar?

JM: In the '80s. Before that, it was some planters. The crackle glass is mainly for acoustics. The bar gets loud next to the tables.

I also like the hanging plants in the Pool Room. I thought they were the idea of Ada Louise [Huxtable], but I remember sitting at dinner with her and complimenting her on the Pool Room hanging plants and she said, "Oh, I didn't do those."

AM: That leads me to another question: in this project, much more than is ordinary, you are mentioning countless people coming up with ideas. This is quite unusual.

JM: Well the main reason was Joe Baum. He was the one in charge of big new things for Restaurant Associates. When Restaurant Associates came into the Four Seasons—he also chose the name Four Seasons—Baum was dragging in people for ideas from all directions with the tacit understanding, I think—at least it worked that way—that Philip Johnson had a veto over anyone's suggestions. Johnson picked and chose. After all, he never had done a restaurant before.

DG: And Mies [van der Rohe] had nothing to do with this?

JM: No, nothing directly.

AM: What did Mies think of the restaurant?

JM: I don't know. I've heard rumors. I don't know what he would dislike. It looks like an extension of his vision, although he was never that elegant.

AM: Wow! The quote of the evening. I will boldface that.



JM: Mies's elegance was in his structure. Crown Hall, for example, is a very elegant looking building. Until you see it with its lights on.

When the Seagram Building first started, and he and Philip Johnson discovered that they couldn't get along working together because they had entirely different methods of working, Mies told Johnson, "Why don't you do the lighting?" And Johnson and Kelly used this as a means to explore the design, and they created the building's all-luminous ceiling, which had never been done before. I mention this to point out that Mies did this only because he hardly cared about the lighting.

Originally when we did the Seagram Building, nobody had any idea—or, rather, everyone had all kinds of ideas—as to what the back space would be. They talked about making it a bank, which Johnson hated; car dealership too. Mies suggested a museum to liquor for the Seagram company. But at some point, Sam Bronfman considered the fact that there was no place to have lunch around there. And at the time, there wasn't. The request or demand for a restaurant came from him. After all, he was paying for it.

Before Mies was taken off the job . . .

AM: What? Sorry to interrupt, but he was taken off the job?

JM: Well, he was invited to leave by New York State. Originally there was another architect for the Seagram: Kahn and Jacobs, with a design architect named Lester Teeshy. It was published in 1954. It was pretty awful; it looked literally like a jukebox. At the same time, its internal rooms were done up like French Renaissance. In any case, they were taken off the job [and replaced by Mies]. But after about a year, New York State decided that they wouldn't give Mies a New York

license. The real reason, of course, is that the head of the New York State Department of Education that issues architectural licenses was buddy-buddy with Lester Teeshy.

This stopped Mies temporarily, but for a very significant gap. Mies got his license, but this took a year. In the meantime, Johnson had the Seagram Building dumped in his lap—he was, for a crucial year, the design architect.

During this time, a lot of mail came very confused about the name of the office: Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, but there would be all kinds of versions of that. But the one we liked best at the office just said "Miss Johnson."

Johnson was at a bit of a loss himself. He'd never done anything like this. Kahn and Jacobs tried to take advantage of his unfamiliarity with the problem and tried to do schemes on their own, and showed them to the client without us knowing about it. Their ideas were, of course, horrible. For example, they wanted to make a semicircular driveway on the Seagram plaza to drive people up to the front door. They tried to change the design, and they got to the point where we went to the client and threatened to quit if they weren't put back in charge. And that took care of that. ○

A wide-angle photograph of a lush green tea plantation. The tea bushes are arranged in neat, terraced rows across rolling hills. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is vibrant and scenic.

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PURVEYORS OF FINE TEA

the local poet

Rafael Diaz

by Fabiana Santana
 Photographed by Sari Goodfriend

LONG LIVE BARACK OBAMA

BY RAFAEL DIAZ

1.
 Who is that tall, slim, handsome man,
 So well educated from history and law,
 That wants a change,
 And he cares for all Americans
 That makes equality and justice for all
 And says, "Yes, you can! Yes, you can!"
 Fighting for a better U.S. A., land,
 Standing sought, paid and tall

2. (Chorus)
 He is Mr. Barack Obama, yes my friend,
 The 44th President of America, hey,
 The first Afro-American President,
 From the good, old, U.S. A.
 Hip, hip, hurray! Hip, hip, hurray!
 Long live Barack Obama
 The pride of the United States and Africa.
 I say, long live Barack Obama all the way.
 Hip, hip, hurray! Hip, hip, hurray!

3.
 Obama, Obama, Obama
 Hes the man who unites gods,
 A man you can trust and be your friend.
 Hes a man of action!
 Hes a man of compassion!
 The man of the 21st century,
 Making a change, leaving history! (Chorus)

4.
 Mr. Barack Obama, a man of class,
 A family man of four lovely kids,
 Little Sasha and Big Malia, indeed,
 That with his smart and lovely wife,
 The lady Michelle Robinson, she conceived,
 Yes, he is Obama, a man of pride and dignity!
 Long live Barack Obama
 The 44th President of America
 The pride of the United States and Africa!

The Poet from NY and The 4 Seasons Restaurant
 Poet of Feelings of A Poet published by XLibris, 2005
 Rafael Diaz
 Manager
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Spring Is Here

MARCH 13, 2011 (Sun.) BY RAFAEL DIAZ

Spring weather has,
 During late March,
 April, May, and early June.

Spring is here! oui, oui!
 And most people might say with me,
 "What a relief!"
 The cold is gone, indeed,
 That was affecting my knees,
 Walking in the cold, yes, since,
 They weren't so happy,
 My poor feet.

Bon chance! Buona fortuna,
 Four Seasons Restaurant & people,
 With these months business!

Truly,
 For Regina, *Rafael Diaz*
 La Queena Poet of NY
 And the 4 Seasons

WHILE THE MAGIC THAT HAPPENS OUT IN THE FOUR SEASONS DINING ROOM MIGHT BE WELL KNOWN, what occurs behind the scenes is just as entertaining—thanks to the artistic inclinations of Rafael Diaz, a poet, actor, singer, and family member of the Four Seasons Restaurant for nearly 15 years.

When Rafael first came to America with his family from the Dominican Republic in 1966, he lived on Mulberry Street. There, his father ran a restaurant in the neighborhood and later opened a bodega on Prince Street. Growing up in Little Italy in the late 1960s wasn't easy for Rafael, but he was determined to do right by his family and make them proud. Taking refuge in acting and writing kept him out of trouble. "I was able to express myself with my emotions, and that kept me safe," he says. His first job was as an usher at the Henry Street Playhouse, where he got a chance to not only see the shows but also perform in them.

In 1984, his brother-in-law, who works at the Four Seasons, got him an interview with Alex von Bidder, who hired Rafael to work in receiving.

Though he left to work at the American Festival, he returned to the restaurant 12 years later and has since taken on a variety of duties, from receiving, to serving as a porter at night, to most recently working the line and sending up trays. But perhaps his most important position is as the Four Seasons' in-house troubadour. "I am the entertainer," says Rafael. "I give guidance and advice when people are feeling down. I write poems for the staff and about our events, and I share them and their meanings."

Rafael achieves true happiness when he can combine his art and work. He has written poems about everyone from the bartenders and chefs to chiefs of state and presidents, including Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. Julian has even asked him to write a poem for a children's luncheon held at the restaurant. And there isn't a night that passes in which Rafael hasn't serenaded his coworkers with an Elvis number.

"I have really found richness here," he explains. "I am blessed. My father had a restaurant, and I am happy knowing one day I will retire in a restaurant. It is a beautiful thing for me." ○

in the kitchen

Chef de Cuisine Pecko Zantilaveevan

by Fabiana Santana
Photographed by Sari Goodfriend



PECKO ZANTILAVEEVAN HAS EARNED HIS CHOPS AND THE RIGHT TO CALL HIMSELF A CHEF. Of course, he has the technical experience gained through working in some of the city's best kitchens. But it is his innate appreciation and personal enjoyment of flavor that makes his dishes so memorable. "I like to eat, and I like to experiment with flavors," explains the Four Seasons' chef de cuisine. "I have a customer's palate: when I eat out, I taste the food the same way our guests do. So when I create something, it's with my customer's point of view in mind."

Pecko was born in Bangkok, Thailand. Like a lot of people whose family businesses predetermine their own career paths, he was expected to become an engineer. However, after moving to San Francisco as a high school exchange student in the mid 1980s, those plans quickly changed, leading him to a totally unexpected career in the kitchen. When friends persuaded him to move to New York, he started working at Petrossian, more out of necessity than out of a passion for food—but there he fell in love with cooking. Pecko went on to work at Le Cirque with Daniel Boulud, then Ed Brown's Restaurant Associates,

where he opened Tropica and ran the kitchen at the Sea Grill. Finally, in 1996, he joined the Four Seasons as a sous-chef, and he has called it home ever since.

Ask Pecko to talk about himself and he becomes humble and painfully silent; but ask him about food, and his eyes light up as he answers with conviction. Just the mention of his mother's roast pork shoulder nearly brings him to tears of joy. "It's my favorite dish in the world, and no one else can make it as well," he says. "I am a chef, and I don't even attempt it!"

Growing up in Thailand provided Pecko with many fond food memories, so in his home kitchen you will always find the basic ingredients of a good Thai pantry: garlic, fish sauce, chili sauce, Thai basil, and onions. Pecko becomes excited when he reflects on the carts that dish out what he explains are curries that have been lovingly cooked for hours in the street vendors' homes.

But as a student in San Francisco, Pecko quickly discovered the joys of American fast food—hamburgers, in particular, that remain his most

cherished guilty pleasure. He obviously learned to enjoy the finer dishes, and when asked about his favorite restaurant, he answers "Le Bernardin" without hesitation. Such extreme food tastes might seem at odds with one another, but its Pecko's combined appreciation for American fast food and haute cuisine that ultimately landed him the chef de cuisine position at the Four Seasons.

"I like the unexpected," he says of his cooking style. Pecko's idea for his now famous foie gras and white truffle pizza came after a mix-and-match idea session with leftover items from the kitchen, when a humble pizza pie met unabashed gourmet toppings. After one bite, Four Seasons owner Julian Niccolini was hooked and started passing out slices to guests in the Pool Room!

For Pecko, cooking is learning: "When I see an ingredient, I start thinking." With that in mind, he set his sights on becoming the best chef he could possibly be. "It's my personality. I have to do the best I can in everything."



CRISP FARMHOUSE DUCK

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

6 lb whole Long Island duck
2 oranges
1 oz (about 1 inch) fresh ginger
zest of half an orange
2 garlic bulbs, halved
2 tbsp honey
1 cup soy sauce
1 1/2 tsp black peppercorns

PROCEDURE

1. Rinse duck well under cold water. Pat dry with a paper towel. Remove giblets from cavity and reserve for duck sauce. Using a chef's knife, cut off wing and ankle joint and set aside for sauce. Remove excess fat from tail cavity and discard. Cut off excess skin from neck and discard. Using a paring knife, make small 1/4-inch incisions on the back of the duck (this will allow for the fat to render during cooking).

2. Hang the duck (or place on top of a wire rack set over a baking sheet in the refrigerator) until dry, for three days.

3. On the second day, cut the skin and pith away from the oranges using a chef's knife. With a paring knife, carefully cut sections from the oranges. Set aside for garnish. Peel ginger and cut into thin rounds. Cut zest into long, thin strips. Combine ginger, zest, garlic, honey, soy sauce, and peppercorns in a large bowl. Let stand overnight and strain. Using a wooden spoon, press solids to remove all of the liquid.

4. Remove the duck from the refrigerator and place it breast-side up in a large shallow pan. Brush the duck with half the marinade. Let rest for 20 minutes. Rub the duck with remaining marinade, covering completely. Transfer duck to refrigerator and let stand overnight.

5. Heat oven to 375°F. Fill a roasting pan with a 1/4 inch of water and place on the lowest oven rack. (This will create steam and catch fat as it is released from the duck during cooking.) Arrange on center oven rack in center of oven. Place duck directly on rack and roast until dark brown and slightly puffed, about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Remove from oven. Let rest for about 20 minutes, carve, and serve with sauces and sautéed vegetables. Garnish with orange sections.

learning for love

At The Four Seasons

by Mark D. Higgins

Photographed by Sari Goodfriend



IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN OBJECTIVE REVIEW OF THE FOUR SEASONS' COOKING CLASS, this isn't the article for you. This is a love story.

The Four Seasons is more than a place to dine on New York's finest cuisine. It's where the young and the young at heart mingle with ease, a place where deals are made. For example, this attorney presented his first convincing case not in a courtroom but in the Pool Room, where the beautiful Jill Gaspar accepted my marriage proposal. We closed our deal in the grill room and, to celebrate, our witnesses dined on 50 ducks. (One duck, I have come to learn from Four Seasons Sous-Chef Frank Lanza, serves two.)

So now that we've established why I'm so biased in favor of the Four Seasons, let me take you back to that Saturday morning, just as if you were occupying the fourth seat at the Pool Room table I shared with classmates Nick Lester Taylor and his wife, Laura.

In fashionable New York, a strange thing happened that morning: everyone was wearing the same label—a chef jacket embroidered with the instantly recognizably Four Seasons tree, a name, and the ego-boosting if somewhat delusional appellation *Guest Chef*. The jacket is a springboard for conversation: How did you get yours? I received mine as a Christmas present and, as it turns out, so did Nick.

The King of Cool (sorry, Steve McQueen fans, but no one has ever owned the floor of a restaurant like Brioni-suited Julian Niccolini) begins the class with a brief introduction, including a reminder that his labor of love is available for events from weddings (check) to fashion shows, but doesn't

serve breakfast—notwithstanding the “quick coffee” we were served: delightfully fresh cream and even fresher berries, scones, mini croissants, and Illy coffee.

Chef de Cuisine Larry Finn relays the schedule for the day: we will prepare striped bass and scallop ceviche, the former wild-caught from Virginia's Chesapeake and the latter from someplace near Nantucket. At this point, you'd be right to question my failed memory, but I have an excuse. Julian, at roughly 9:30 a.m., poured us Moët & Chandon Brut Impérial Rosé Champagne. The libation continued throughout, with some imbibing more than others (and you know who you are . . .).

While one half of the class is preparing the ceviche under the watchful eye of Larry and his colleague Jesus “Albino” Chauca, Chef de Cuisine Pecko Zantilaveevan and Frank Lanza tutor the other half on how to prepare and roast duck.

Duck, I have come to learn, isn't made on a whim. It takes three days to prepare (hang dry for two days, marinate, let rest for another day). After we switch, we gather for instruction on soufflé making by Pastry Chef Chris Broberg. Ever the artist, Chef Broberg's lecture had its own unique recipe: equal parts history lesson, food safety course, and chemistry class, with, of course, a garnish of fun.

By their words and actions, Julian, Larry, Pecko, Chris, Frank, and Albino let the class in on the Four Seasons' secret ingredient: love. These professionals love what they do, and they inspired the class to love what they do—in the kitchen and beyond. That, my friends, is why this is a love story.

seasonal bounty
In Living Color



Radish
Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art
1996 watercolor on paper
41x30 inches

Abby Leigh lives and works in New York City. She has been exhibiting since the early 1980s in the United States and in Europe. Her work is in many public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; the Guggenheim Museum, New York City; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City; the Fogg Museum, Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Leigh is represented by Betty Cunningham Gallery in New York City.



Artichoke
Private collection
1997 watercolor on paper
41x30 inches

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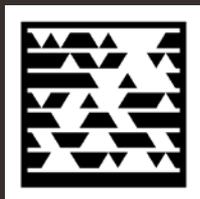
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Saturday's event, **Epicurean Fields**, will feature several unforgettable culinary and wine experiences.



Photos courtesy of Bocuse d'Or USA and Natirar

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BEGINS WITH WHAT'S ON THE PLATE



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