JUNE 2019

MWM

MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE

the food issue

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CONTENT

MORE FEATURES

IN EVERY ISSUE

Welcome to our Food issue. As if it weren't exciting enough to have Erin French and the Lost Kitchen's all-woman team on the cover, we're also debuting a new look and features this month.

Our creative director, Heidi Kirn, and talented designer, Taylor Roberge, have been working on ways to make the front pages of MWM more user friendly and even more beautiful. Up front, you'll notice a Table of Contents that tells you more about the stories inside, followed by This Month, a new calendar section that allows us to tell you more about some upcoming events (like Portland Wine Week starting June 17) while still tipping you off to don't-miss festivals, productions and shows.

You'll notice that Maine Style looks different this month as well. We asked Amanda Whitegiver to start turning her camera on Maine women to ask them to define their style and tell us what shaped it. In honor of our Food issue, Whitegiver chose health coach Jenn Bravo as her first subject. MWM also has a brand new feature, A Room of Her Own, in which we'll regularly focus on a beloved area of a Maine woman's home. We asked contributor Angie Bryan to visit chef Ilma Lopez in the kitchen of her home in Portland to ask, among other things, what's always in her fridge or pantry shelves. (If you have not yet eaten at either of the two restaurants she and her husband own in Portland, Chaval and Piccolo, book a reservation!) We'll rove the state looking for other possible subjects, including reading nooks, mudrooms, bedrooms, bathrooms—whatever makes a Maine woman feel most at home.

This issue is full of food, whether it be a regional African dish like fufu, Candace Karu's favorite hacks for the kitchen or the cakes and pastries Karen Watterson learned to make when she enrolled in Southern Maine Community College's culinary school. I got to join in the fun, taking a food tour I didn't know I needed, Maine Food for Thought, which involved walking Portland's Old Port, eating and learning about the connection between Maine ingredients and the local economy. I also spent some time exploring one of Maine's most lucrative fisheries with a Brunswick beauty salon owner who has a side gig catching baby eels. Check out The Slithering Side Hustle to learn about the role women play in the elver fishery.

And I still haven't gotten to eat at the Lost Kitchen, although I regularly use French's cookbook *The Lost Kitchen: Recipes and a Good Life Found in Freedom, Maine*. But novelist Kate Christensen's piece on the women who work there made me long to get there even more. Someday. The spring is short but the summer is long.

Mary Pols
Editor
mpols@mainewomenmagazine.com

ON THE COVER

The Lost Kitchen's all-woman team. Top row, from left: server Ashley Savage, chef/owner Erin French (in plaid), prep assistant Nancy Buckley. Middle row, from left: server Lauren Crighton, office manager Meg Teravainen (on stool), server Alex Powell, prep cooks Helen Tirone and Katharine Mason. Front row from left, line cook Krista Yungman, wine shop manager (and French's mother) Deanna MacNeil and server Maia Campoamor. Not pictured: Carey Dube, Victoria Marshall.

Photo by Liz Caron

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MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE

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CANOE CLASS

No experience is necessary to build a canoe in this women-only course

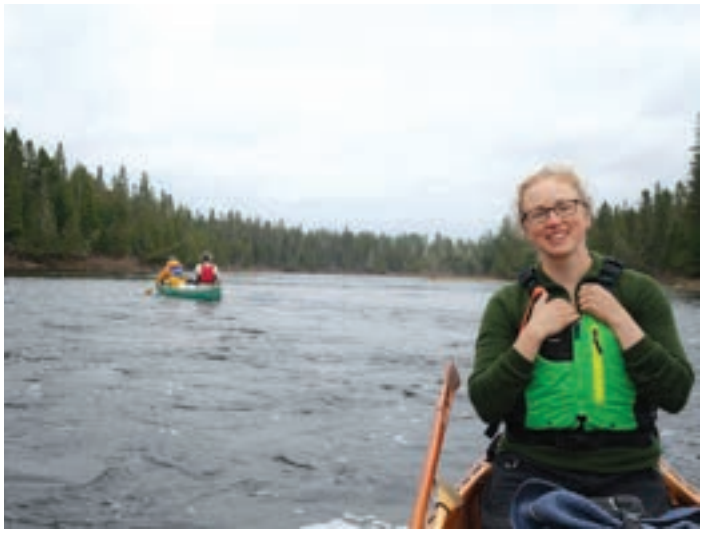
Elisa Schine knows there are women who want to build boats. But in five summers of teaching traditional wood-and-canvas canoe construction at the WoodenBoat School in Brooklin, she's only had two female students. So, this August, Schine is trying something different: a six-day course exclusively for women.

"The idea is to open a door," Schine says. "Previous classes have been so male dominated, I wanted to give women an easy way to sign up. This is a class specifically for you."

She describes the course as a "mad dash" to assemble boats made from the forms (think patterns) favored by Maine guides for more than a century, adapted from indigenous birch bark designs. The idea of steam-bending cedar "ribs," fastening planks, stretching canvas and then trusting it all to float can sound intimidating, Schine says, but she emphasizes that no prior woodworking experience is necessary to enjoy building a canoe. When she started, she was familiar with some of the tools, but had none of the skills to use them. "I remember that very clearly," she says. "It's hard for adults to be beginners. We're not used to it. It takes a lot of patience and managing frustration—but it can also be a lot of fun."

Schine, who grew up in Vermont and spent summers paddling the waters around Grand Lake Stream in Maine, learned from the best; she's a protégé of Rollin Thurlow, a master craftsman who helped write the definitive text for wood-and-canvas canoe building. She has sanded, cut and hammered beside him in his Atkinson workshop for six years.

Schine fondly remembers a married couple who came to Thurlow's workshop a few years ago to learn the art of canoe building. It was the husband who wanted to study canoes, his wife was along for the ride. "She had a car full of knitting," Schine recalls, "but she never touched it."



Elisa Shine putting a canoe to the test. *Photo courtesy of Elisa Schine*

Instead the woman, with no woodworking experience, spent the whole week inside the workshop, absorbed in the process of boat making. The husband was astonished at his wife's accomplishments each day in the shop. "I don't think they had done anything like that together for a long time."

At least two raffle-winning students in the Schine's women-only course will take home almost-completed canoes at the end of the week. "All the boats will need is sanding and paint, sanding and varnish." Considering that a new wood-and-canvas canoe can cost more than $5,000—and it's less than $900 to attend Schine's course—that's a bargain for the lottery winners.

Traditional Wood-and-Canvas Canoe Construction with Elisa Schine will be offered at the WoodenBoat School in Brooklin (3 1/2 hours north of Portland) Aug. 4–10. The school has a scholarship program and a 50% discount for high school and college students. ***Find more information and register at thewoodenboatschool.com.***

—Erica Kaufmann

Left: Maine Yoga Festival. *Photo of courtesy Patricia Cousins.* Right: Battle of the Food Trucks. *Photo courtesy of Stonewall Kitchen*

IT'S FESTIVAL AND FOOD TRUCK SEASON

COMPILED BY AMY PARADYSZ

Battle of the Food Trucks

June 8, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

2 Stonewall Lane, Stonewall Kitchen, York

This 5th annual battle of the food trucks includes music, games and, of course, some of the area's best food trucks, including Mainely Burgers, Clyde's Cupcakes, Mami and Crepe Elizabeth. There is a twist though; each food truck will offer menu items made with Stonewall Kitchen products.

Old Port Festival

June 9, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Last call on the Old Port Festival, which is ending after a 46-year run. The Shoestring Theater puppets lead the final parade at 11 a.m., starting at the Press Hotel and kicking off a six-hour, free street party with live music and entertainment on four stages scattered through the Old Port.

Syrah at sea? Portland Wine Week features sunset sails. *Photo courtesy of Wine Wise Events*

PORTLAND WINE WEEK

Portland's Wine Week (June 17–23) is expanding in its second year, and in a very directed way: toward women. At last year's inaugural event, a panel discussion about women in the wine industry generated so much interest that Erica Archer, the event's founder, opted to open this year's event with a full day of female-focused events, June 17, at the Falmouth Country Club.

There will be an expanded panel this year, including Stella Hernandez, owner and wine director of Lolita; Courtney "Coco" O'Neill, operations manager for Central Provisions and Tipo; and Carolyn Giles, sales representative for distributor Devenish Wines. Then there is a cook-off/pour-off featuring 10 sommeliers and five chefs—all Maine women—squaring off for a "Who Paired It Better?" dinner.

"I think it's the largest showcase of talent in the restaurant scene the state has ever seen," says Archer, a sommelier who also runs Wine Wise, an events company that specializes in wine education. "And there's a little bit of competition, two sommeliers paired off with each chef. Guests will vote on each wine pairing for each course and overall."

Portland Wine Week moves to the peninsula June 18 and continues through June 23 with classes, dinners, brunch, a blind tasting, a wine walk, sunset wine sails on Casco Bay and an excursion to Civil War-era Fort Gorges. Smaller events, especially anything taking place on a boat, will sell out in advance. But some aspects of Portland Wine Week aren't ticketed, such as the Wine Passport. With a downloaded "passport," you can collect stamps at the participating Portland restaurants. Get all the stamps and be entered to win an invitation to an event at next year's Wine Week. If you come up shy on all the stamps, Archer promises you'll at least be tasting something out of the ordinary by the glass at participating restaurants.

"There's a trend in the wine industry that is shifting away from big bulk wine producers to high-quality small lots," Archer says. "What makes Portland special is some restaurants here have relationships with those producers and we're getting those wines here. It's fun, for example, to try a beautiful sparkling wine from some obscure region of Spain."

Other highlights include a dessert, port and Madeira at Gross Confection Bar (June 18), a food and Devenish Wines pairing menu at LB Kitchen (June 19) and daily oysters and sparkling wine specials at Island Creek Oysters' The Shop throughout the week. ***For a full schedule, portlandwineweek.com***

—Amy Paradysz

Maine Initiatives' Changemakers Celebration

June 13, 6–9 p.m.

O'Maine Studios, 54 Danforth St., Portland

Maine Initiatives' 25th anniversary celebration recognizes 30 Changemakers—grassroots, community-based organizations working to advance racial justice and equity in Maine. With hors d'oeuvres and jazz by Viva & the Reinforcements. Honorees include Dawn Neptune Adams, an activist on tribal sovereignty and decolonization, and Doborah Felder, who was the first executive director of Maine Initiatives. *($60; maineinitiatives.org)*

Wicked Good Outdoor Festival

June 15, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Cumberland Fairgrounds, 197 Blanchard Road, Cumberland Center

This one-day festival includes archery and rock climbing, music by Sons of Alfond, food trucks, a craft beer and wine garden, shopping and information about all manner of outdoor stuff. *Free for 12 and under, others $12 at eventbrite.com with proceeds benefiting Girl Scouts of Maine outdoor programs.*

Maine Mega Yard Sale

June 22, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Farmington Fairgrounds, 282 High St., Farmington

This mega indoor-outdoor yard sale includes crafters, food vendors and antique dealers. *Entrance free for kids 6 and under, all others $1; proceeds benefit Franklin County Animal Shelter.*

Maine Yoga Festival

June 28–30

East End Community School, 195 North St., Portland

With more than 50 workshops and 45 teachers, this three-day event serves up yoga every which way—from restorative to aerial to downward dog on a paddleboard. Join the party Friday night with a blend of yoga, music and meditation with instructor Kelly Rich and DJ Taz Rashid. Passes range in price and include a $96 option for three workshops. The kayak-and-yoga excursion to Fort Gorges is sure to fill up. But anyone can drop by for "Yoga for ALL of Us," a free community class taught by Katie Beane, Sunday from 8:30–10 a.m. *Full schedule at maineyogafest.com*

Amy Paradysz, a freelance writer from Scarborough, is obsessed with community events.

FOOD HACKS

10 ways to maximize efficiency, ingredients and the joy in cooking

BY CANDACE KARU

Whether you're making weekday dinner for the family, a casserole for a neighborhood potluck, or dinner à deux for your sweetie, cooking will always present unique and sometimes vexing challenges. This month, I'm here to help with my top 10 all-time-favorite kitchen hacks—tricks that will make you say: "why didn't I think of that?" They may even make your time in the kitchen easier, cheaper and a little more fun.

1. FREEZE HERBS IN OLIVE OIL

It pains me to think of all the beautiful herbs I've wasted over the years, using a few tablespoons and watching the rest of the bunch languish in my vegetable hydrator until they turn black and slimy. It's a sin, I tell you. Thankfully, this quick kitchen hack saves your fresh herbs for weeks in your freezer.

Chop your herbs and fill each section of an ice cube tray two thirds full with them. Cover with extra virgin olive oil or melted butter. Wrap tray lightly with plastic wrap and freeze. Then pop cubes out into a zip lock, labeled with the name of the herb and the date, and toss in the freezer. This method also works on chopped garlic and ginger.

2. PERFECT POACHED EGGS

I have spent many years failing miserably at poaching eggs. Put vinegar in the water, they said. But no, it yielded a gooey, amorphous mess. Use this handy electric poached egg cooker, they said. Another mess, accompanied by a half-hour clean up of the machine. Finally, I picked up the perfect hack from the web and it couldn't be easier.

Set a pot of water to boil, about four or five inches will do. When it comes to a rolling boil, turn heat down to medium. Take a small cup and line it with a generous square of high quality plastic cling wrap, which withstands temperatures up to 250 degrees. Spray the plastic wrap with cooking oil. Crack an egg into it, gather the excess wrap and tie a knot close to the egg. Repeat until you have as many eggs as you want to poach.

Gently drop each egg into the boiling water and set a timer for between 5 to 7 minutes, depending on how you like your poached eggs. Remove from the pot, unwrap and enjoy!

3. SURROUND YOUR EGGS WITH TASTE AND COLOR

Cooking fried eggs for a crowd can be a little messy. Here's a quick and colorful hack that works every time. Slice bell peppers into rings about a quarter-inch thick. Drizzle olive oil in a skillet over medium heat and cook the peppers until they are just softened a bit. Crack an egg into the circle of the pepper and cook to desired doneness. The individual whites don't merge into each other, the eggs are easy to plate, and these colorful, sunny-side up beauties look as good as they taste. If you're not a fan of bell peppers, circles of sweet Vidalia onions work too.

4. STRAWS FOR STRAWBERRIES

Here's a quick, fun way to hull strawberries. Take a clean straw and, starting from the bottom, push the straw up toward the stem, pushing the stem and the white pith out. It couldn't be easier and it's a great way to get kids involved in helping prepare strawberries for a snack or a load of strawberries for jams and jellies. (Always be kind to Mother Nature and use paper or reusable metal straws only.)

5. SEALED WITH A STRAW

Want to reduce freezer burn and keep frozen foods viable for a longer time? This helpful trick will work almost as well as one of those fancy food vacuum sealers. Place whatever food you're going to freeze in a ziplock bag. Push as much air as possible from the bag and seal. Then unseal just enough to push the straw into the bag. Pinch the opening on either side of the straw and suck the air out. Remove straw and seal tight.

6. SPOONING THE GINGER

I have a set of four grapefruit spoons–the kind with serrated edges–that, until recently, sat abandoned in my junk drawer. Lately, I've been using them to peel ginger. Prior to discovering this brilliant kitchen hack, I'd been using a regular spoon to scrape the skin from my ginger, but it turns out my lonely little grapefruit spoon does the job faster and better.

7. METAL MAGIC

I use this tip a chef friend gave me almost every week. Did you know that frozen food will defrost significantly faster when placed on a metal surface, like an aluminum baking tray or a stainless steel counter? It works because of the heat conducting properties of metal. Try it the next time you thaw chicken wings or burgers for dinner.

8. CAKE & ICE CREAM CONFIDENTIAL

I'd never figured out how to serve cake or pie and ice cream to a crowd without making a lot of people wait. Well-mannered friends sat and watched the ice cream melt into a soggy mess while I was still frantically scooping

A friend's Pinterest board, appropriately called Party Favorites, yielded this clever hack. Well before party time, I make perfect single-serving scoops of ice cream and drop them into a paper muffin cups set into a muffin tin. I cover the tin with plastic wrap and pop it into the freezer until party time. As the strains of "Happy Birthday" subside, I've got cake and ice cream ready for a crowd. You can also use a serrated bread knife to cut ice cream into serving sized circles or rectangles, depending on the shape of the container. Just cut through the paper container and peel it off the slice. Stack the slices, separated by a piece of wax or parchment paper and freeze in a ziplock bag or plastic container.

9. "ROASTED" GARLIC

Roasting garlic in the oven takes time but you can make a quick "roast garlic" in the microwave in a fraction of the time. Cut off the top of the garlic head and set aside. Put the head of garlic into a small, microwaveable bowl and add two teaspoons of water. Drizzle a bit of olive oil and sprinkle some salt on top of the garlic. Cover the garlic head with its top and microwave at 50% for 7-10 minutes until the garlic is soft.

10. SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

This may be the most helpful hack for any home cook. Read through any new recipe twice. Cook like a chef. Have everything ready beforehand. Mise en place is the French term for having all your ingredients prepped—cut, measured, and assembled, along with necessary pans, mixing bowls and kitchen tools—before you begin cooking. You won't believe how smoothly everything comes together with proper prep work.

Candace Karu makes her living writing about food, fitness and travel. Follow her on Instagram: @candacekaru or at candacekaru.com

STRAWBERRY SEASON

It's time to drink your fresh, local fruit.

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY JESSIE LACEY

A true daiquiri, the classic, not the slushy version, is an extremely simple recipe that requires just three common ingredients. It one of the freshest drinks you can make and an essential rum cocktail everyone should know and taste, because it is just about guaranteed to transfer you to a summer state of mind. You'll find that a well-made daiquiri—they all start with a good white rum—offers a perfect balance of sweet and sour in your glass and can be easily adjusted to personal taste.

The daiquiri has also developed—much like the martini and margarita—into a sort of sub-family of drinks. There are many variations, including the frozen, blended version, and yet, they're all inspired by this basic recipe of rum, lime juice, and sugar.

With strawberry festivals happening all over Maine later this month, including in South Berwick, Cornish and Cape Elizabeth, let's celebrate the arrival of Maine summer with strawberries.

Jessie Lacey resides at the heart of downtown Portland with her border collie puppy Josie, making cocktails and trouble.

MAINE STRAWBERRY FEST DAIQUIRI

1 1/2 ounces rum (light)
3/4 ounce lime juice (fresh)
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
2 strawberries
basil leaves

Add 1 tablespoon granulated sugar and basil leaves to shaking tin and lightly muddle. Add strawberries and muddle again.
Pour in white rum, lime juice and if needed, simple syrup. Shake with ice. Strain contents into a chilled glass and garnish with large fresh basil leaf, a slice of strawberry and wedge of lime.

TIPS

If your drink is a bit too tart, add simple syrup. (Make your own by heating equal parts water and sugar until the sugar dissolves, then cool. Store in your fridge). Too sweet? Add more lime.

THE HOME KITCHEN

Chef Ilma Lopez has kitchens at her restaurants Piccolo and Chaval, but this nutmeg-colored room in Portland is the one she calls her own.

BY ANGIE BRYAN // PHOTOS BY HEIDI KIRN

Bon Appetit recently called Venezuelan-born chef Ilma Lopez "one of the most talented pastry chefs in town." Twice a semi-finalist for the James Beard Award, Lopez and her husband Damian Sansonetti are chefs and co-owners of Portland's Piccolo and Chaval. Between the two restaurants, they're not often home at dinnertime, but the sunny kitchen in their off-peninsula Portland house is far from a wasteland. Lopez decided early on that her daughter, Isabella, 5, shouldn't be punished for her parents' career choices. Once Isabella wakes up in the morning, no matter how late they worked night before, her parents are in the kitchen preparing the main family meal: breakfast.

The room is painted a warm brown called Nutmeg. "I loved the color," Lopez said, "but the name did it." Throughout the kitchen are figurines of lizards and

1 Lopez names "diablito," or deviled ham, as her top comfort food, and her foodie career has not dissuaded her from always having a can on hand. "My husband hates it, and I'm very particular about what my daughter eats," said Lopez, "but it reminds me of home." Also always present in her kitchen: avocados, pita or potato chips, Nutella, Oreos and Harina P.A.N., the cornmeal used to make traditional Venezuelan arepas.

2 The one (or two) kitchen items Lopez and Sansonetti would rescue in the event of a fire? Their vintage handcrafted cavatelli (the same brand Sansonetti's grandmother used) and pasta machines, both still in their original boxes.

3 Chefs often eschew kitchen gadgets, but Lopez and Samsonetti were unable to resist the "Potato Express," a gift from her grandmother. It steams potatoes (and beets) perfectly in the microwave and is a go-to when they want to whip up a quick potato salad.

4 A large side table holds wine from their favorite Spanish vineyard, Lopez de Heredia, and a piece of a barrel from the winery. Very few wineries in Rioja have their own cooper, noted Sansonetti, but Lopez de Heredia does, so Lopez asked if she could buy a piece of an old barrel. "They said no, but then two minutes later she was walking out with one," Sansonetti laughed. "It's hard to say no to Ilma."

5 Their fridge is never without orange juice (Lopez call it her personal "perfect pairing" for anything from pasta to snacks), champagne, caviar, wine and three different milks: whole for Lopez, almond for Sansonetti and skim for Isabella. Plus a squeeze bottle of sweetened condensed milk. The most common leftovers in her fridge? The lamb Bolognese from Piccolo, a family favorite.

6 Wooden "virgenes" (virgins) hang not only in different rooms of the house, but also near the entrances and exits of both of their restaurants. A Venezuelan tradition, each virgin saint serves a different purpose. Santa Eduvidgis traditionally protects the home, and was a gift from Lopez' mother.

dinosaurs, courtesy of their daughter, as well as pigs, courtesy of the chefs in the family, who have a fondness for all things pig-related (their cast iron Griswold bacon press is often on display and in use for much more than just pressing bacon). There is a selection of Venezuelan rums on a side table—"My family brings a different bottle of Venezuelan rum every time they visit," she says—as well as a spice collection in a wooden box, given to them by a regular customer on Piccolo's fifth anniversary (the "wood" anniversary).

Their big wooden table is covered with crayons and other art supplies—the fridge features a hand-drawn proclamation from their daughter that she loves Sansonetti because he makes good food for her—as well as a giant bottle of maple syrup, a souvenir of their Maine Maple Sunday visit to Merrifield Farm and Sugar Shack in Gorham. On a typical day, Sansonetti might make a green juice and the couple will whip up scrambled eggs with avocado and cheese for themselves and waffles for Isabella, freezing the leftovers. Ollie, the family's 9-year-old French bulldog, won't eat unless the family is with him. "He's super needy," Lopez says, laughing.

"We're so busy, but we're also so in love with our crazy dog and daughter." And that nutmeg kitchen.

Angie Bryan moved to Portland in 2018 when she retired from the diplomatic service. Her writing has also appeared in The Foreign Service Journal and MaineToday. Her own kitchen staples are cherry-flavored Diet Coke and pretty much any variety of cheese.

The Mystery *of the* LOST KITCHEN

What's the secret? To find out, ask the sisterhood staffing Erin French's restaurant.

BY KATE CHRISTENSEN // PHOTOS BY LIZ CARON

On Halloween in 1997, when Erin French was 16, she went to the supermarket and shopped for a four-course birthday dinner for her mother's 42nd birthday. Deanna MacNeil had worked all day, teaching special education to elementary school kids in the Belfast area. "I came home to find carved pumpkins strung up with lights in them," MacNeil remembers. Martha Stewart's roast chicken 101 was in the oven. There was a squash soup cooking. The table was set. "The dining room was all decorated," MacNeil says. "We sat down and had this..." She pauses, looking for the right description. "Beautiful meal."

Her daughter had conceived and executed the entire production herself, in a way that was mysterious even to MacNeil. These days, at 38, self-taught cook Erin French has become *Today* show famous. Her bestselling cookbook was in its second printing within a month of release. Now she's working on a memoir, all while running the Lost Kitchen, arguably the hottest restaurant in Maine. French's stage is bigger, but the self-taught chef is still pulling off the sort of magic act that floored her mother over 20 years ago. The recipes in her cookbook, while beautiful and delicious, are not exactly revolutionary, yet people who eat at the Lost Kitchen tend to stagger out in a gobsmacked swoon. Clearly, there is some alchemy at work here.

"People try to solve the mystery of the Lost Kitchen," says Meg Teravainen, whose job includes handling reservations. She's been at the restaurant four years, but says she's still in awe of it. In 2015, when she came to Freedom to work at the restaurant, she was terrified. "I wanted to rise to the bar that everyone sets, but especially the captain leading the cavalry here."

The captain's cavalry is an all-women team, except for the dishwasher. French didn't set out to assemble such a sisterhood; it evolved organically. But spending a day with them backstage at Lost Kitchen seemed like the best way to solve the mystery of Erin French's magic touch.

Just after 9 a.m. on a crisp morning, the Lost Kitchen's airy dining room is quiet and the only person in here is a woman with short gray hair and glasses, sitting at a sunlit table in the far corner, a white apron over her jeans. The restaurant rambles over several levels in a recently refurbished mill; in this main room, big windows look out over the stream. To outsiders, Freedom must seem like a blip on a rural road, half an hour inland from Belfast, a relative metropolis with its population of 6,752, but for French, this is home, the place where she grew up.

The woman in the corner, Nancy Buckley, is dipping squares of white muslin in rosewater and tying them with twine and lavender. "These are passed out with the sherbet course," she explains. "After the small plates, before the soup. For hand-washing. They're a nice refresher."

The captain of the cavalry is nowhere in sight, but signs of her are everywhere: The dining room is filled with dining tables French built herself. Small dishes of glistening cured olives are arrayed on rows of marble boards that fill the bar top, glossy ebony and deep green jewels set into herbs and oil. A large metal bowl on the counter next to the stove holds dozens of egg yolks. A gigantic pot of potatoes simmers on a burner. On the counter is a stockpot containing a whole chicken, fresh herbs, and vegetables, steeping in an intensely savory-smelling broth.

Buckley sold gooseberries and blueberries to French a few years ago, which she raised on her self-sustaining homestead. When her neighbor, Helen Tirone, who works in the prep kitchen, said the restaurant needed some extra help, Buckley stepped into prepping and doing linens. "I've been here this whole past year plus half the year before." She grinned. "So an overflow of berries led me to the Lost Kitchen."

French appears, gliding up the stairs with a tray of almonds, her blonde hair tied neatly in a short ponytail, wearing a gray T-shirt and white apron. She slides the tray into the oven and vanishes back downstairs. The kitchen itself is small and efficient—those potatoes simmer on one of just four burners. Rather than a gleaming industrial kitchen, it's more like a big sister to the tiny kitchen in the Airstream where French cooked pop-up dinners as her first marriage was breaking up.

Buckley continues. "When I came, it was midsummer, someone had a total meltdown, just burned out, and Helen was prepping alone. She said to Erin, 'Just call Nancy, she lives right down the street, you know her.' My interview was five minutes, then Erin said, 'When can you start?' I said 'Right now,' and here I still am." She laughs. "I had no qualifications. I'm an artist and a sign-maker."

By 11 a.m., downstairs in the compact, brightly lit prep room, two women stand at their stations chopping their way through raw leeks and fennel. Katharine Mason is in her mid-20s, wearing bright, patterned tights and a stretchy miniskirt under her apron. Helen Tirone, willowy and tall, white-gray hair in a ponytail, is in a long-sleeved white shirt and jeans. The boom box is playing the Beatles' "Don't Let Me Down." There are two sinks nearby, a dishwasher and gleaming stainless steel

French at the stove. Never trained as a chef, she serves as chef, procurer, pastry chef and team leader for Lost Kitchen.

Left: In late spring, the all-woman team (except for the dishwasher!) poses on the bridge that leads to the restaurant. Guests walk across it every evening when the seasonal restaurant is open, sometimes until New Year's Eve.

Right: French mixes up a salad. The ingredients for her menus tend to come from farms very close by, including a few run by staff members. Because of that, the menu changes daily.

work counter. The scrawl on the chalkboard indicates French has been busy: *Fennel. Leeks and Brussels. Napa/lettuce. Candy cookies. Mayo. Crab. Custard.* At this point, seven hours before service, these are just ingredients and ideas, the full menu still a secret.

The produce is all local, much of it grown by women and most of it organic-certified by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. French orders what she wants, but they drop off surprises, too, when something is particularly good. Some farmers deliver as they're arriving for their shifts at the restaurant, including servers Victoria Marshall and Krista Yungman.

Tirone first sold tomatoes to Erin when the Lost Kitchen was in Belfast. It started as a supper club in her apartment, then moved into a storefront. Infamously, French's ex-husband cast her out of that original restaurant, locking her out of it in 2013. "Then it moved to my backyard, and now I work here," Tirone says. She is cutting black radishes, which, she points out, have a sparkle to them, like minerals. Mason begins shaping cookie dough with dried cherries, lemon zest, almond candy, and almonds. The dishwasher rumbles. The boiled potatoes sit on the counter.

Buckley, passing through the prep room with a stack of linens, overhears the conversation about about the Lost Kitchen's allure and chimes in. "It's the people. It really is. It's crazy." At the foot of the stairs she looks back again. "People come into the orbit of the Lost Kitchen."

Tirone moved to Maine from Philadelphia at two and a half. Her dad was part of a family that summered on Mount Desert Island, then in 1972 he moved to Maine to be a boat-builder. Mason left Maine to go to college—Syracuse, then the University of Colorado at Boulder—where she studied creative writing and geography, and then she came right back home. She's still serious about poetry; she's headed to the Haystack School for the weekend to take a poetry workshop.

Mason moves on to slicing turnips that look like elongated radishes. She's a fourth generation Mainer who grew up on the 87-acre family farm in Morrill, where her parents still live. "I didn't like it here, growing up. Then I studied in Milan in an exchange program my senior year of high school and came home with a newfound appreciation for the place. Living in a city was not what I wanted." After graduating in 2009, she came back and stayed.

She and her husband recently built an off-the-grid house on what had been her great-grandparents' land, next to her parents' house. As she slices, she talks about her plans to revitalize the old farm to make it self-sustaining, to truly live off the land there. "Working here was a dream of mine for a couple of years,"

she adds. She'd been working at a high end restaurant the summer before. "It was so stressful—there was no way I wanted to be in that kitchen, waitressing, with no formal experience—it was the wrong environment." While she was working at a Belfast boutique called Coyote Moon, the owner occasionally brought the all-woman staff to dinner at the Lost Kitchen. Mason was inspired to send French her resume, and "a bunch of postcards." Her timing was off though. French had just instituted a new reservation system for 2018, a mail-in lottery system each spring. The tiny post office in Freedom was inundated with 20,000 postcards from people who wanted to eat at the Lost Kitchen (this spring, postcards came from 49 states). "I had sent in my postcard at the same time as the 20,000 people looking for reservations." But Mason persisted, got an interview, and French hired her last May.

Tirone landed her job after her neighbors, farmers who had also worked at the Lost Kitchen, decided to move to North Carolina, creating an opening. "One day they brought me and my daughter Stella in. I had no restaurant background. I only knew cooking for a family."

"Everyone here brings something different to the table," said Mason. "We're all women, so it's a sincere atmosphere. Everyone supports everyone in a different way."

French enters the prep room, carrying a large stainless steel bowl. "When I started this place, there was some doubt that I could pull it off," she says. She was a single mother, and a college dropout, with a marriage behind her (French recently remarried, to Michael Dutton). "The people who supported me were my girlfriends, the local women who knew me and believed in me. It just happened organically and naturally."

"We're all just making it up," says Tirone, beginning to pound almond brittle made by French, breaking it into fine pieces to sprinkle over custard, tonight's dessert.

The walk-in is full of fresh food—wheels of cheese, buckets of colorful edible flowers, wooden crates full of produce, handmade butter. "There's no middle ground," says Buckley, "no 'well, this'll do.' If it's not fresh, it's not going into anything but the compost. Everything gets recycled, too. A gal picks up the used fry oil for her vehicle. Village Farm composts our stuff. Helen's pigs, too—the compost is pretty much up for grabs."

At 12:30, Buckley is back at her table upstairs, ironing napkins and aprons for service. The sunny, quiet room gleams. On the stove, chopped leeks sweat in a large skillet. French stands in front of another large skillet sautéing Brussels sprout greens.

"I call this press My Bitch," Buckley says with a laugh. When she first came to the Lost Kitchen, she didn't know how to iron, she learned by doing, although ironing is in her blood. (Her grandfather was a dry cleaner with the only glove-cleaning machine in town.) "I told Erin, 'I'm your girl, I'll do whatever you need.' After ironing, I go downstairs and help with whatever is left on the list, the end-of-the-day jobs—dishes, chopping, readying the cookies to be baked, scrubbing oysters."

She presses another napkin, then another, the rhythm soothing and pleasant.

"Everyone who ends up here belongs here," Buckley says after a while. "Everyone's so different, but there's no one you dread seeing, who has too much drama in her life. Everybody accepts each other for who they are. We truly are sisters. It's a spirit of family."

The Lost Kitchen serves dinner four nights a week all summer. On this October day, they're down to three nights a week as the end of the season approaches. "In the winters, people get creative. Katharine is a jeweler, Helen is our poet laureate, Ashley makes soap—people pick up side jobs. Helen gardens, Lauren is a jeweler—lots of dabbling."

By 1 p.m., Meg Teravainen is in her front office at her desk, in the middle of her workday. She takes a delivery from the UPS guy ("That's Rand, he's a fixture here, we all love him"). Then she deals with a couple of "Lookie-loos" peering in the window—kindly but firmly managing both to satisfy their evident curiosity and to shepherd them away. The phone rings: a diner calling about her reservation. Teravainen is warm and accommodating, gathering and dispensing information with economical ease. It will be chilly, so bring layers. She recommends pre-paying (the per person prix fixe is $125, pre-tip, without wine) since there is only one credit card machine and this way, "you can blissfully leave at your leisure." She reminds them that their reservation is for 6, but that the wine cellar opens at 5:30 p.m.

This is part of the routine. Diners park in the main parking lot across the pond and take the footbridge across the water, rounding the corner for their first stop, the wine cellar. The Lost Kitchen can't serve wine due to local liquor laws, so the team opened their own wine shop, where diners can shop for wine (or beer or cider) to drink with their meal. The first thing diners see is the menu with suggested wine pairings. Then they go up to the dining room, where their server will seat them. Dinner lasts for three hours, with just one seating a night. And a lot of food.

"Come hungry," Teravainen says as she signs off.

Her typical workday starts at 8:30 or 9. She comes in, makes coffee, checks the messages and logs them, She handles reservations, cancellations and questions. She fills orders for Erin's cookbook, *The Lost Kitchen: Recipes and a Good Life Found in Freedom, Maine*. She helps out wherever she's needed, pressing napkins, stocking the wine cellar.

Teravainen was a New Yorker for years, working in restaurants in every position except being on the line: floor manager, hosting,

The restaurant is an old mill that was recently refurbished. In the wine store/cellar downstairs, you can see signs of the days when it was an active mill.

The dining area seats just under 50 people, including guests who share a larger table. Even when the table is set for a staff meal, as it is here, it is a creative endeavor.

bartending. A girlfriend moved up to Maine and urged her to come, too. She promised to hook her up with the Lost Kitchen, which she'd heard was in need of a reservationist. That was four years ago. "Nothing compares to this experience. You form such strong bonds here. The women here are tight-knit, with high levels of respect. It feels like a family, personal as well as professional. The energy here is really fun."

Back in the prep room, the swing of work is in high gear, everyone focused, no one missing a beat. It feels like a beehive, organized, buzzing. Mason is cutting Napa cabbage into rounds and Tirone is washing dishes. The sweated leeks and sautéed Brussels sprouts greens have been pushed through a strainer with the fresh chicken stock for the soup, which is a foamy, intense green.

"WE'RE ALL WOMEN, SO IT'S A SINCERE ATMOSPHERE. EVERYONE SUPPORTS EVERYONE IN A DIFFERENT WAY."

Upstairs at the counter, French is going through the cards for that night's service, all 47 of the expected guests. Tonight, they're mostly Mainers from Belfast, Albion and Portland. But some are coming from as far away as Salt Lake City and Washington State.

By 2 p.m., four hours before service, Tirone is shaping the crab cakes and arranging them in rows on a tray and Mason is washing dishes. At the stove upstairs, French sautés hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, foraged by a "local guy." Heads of garlic roast in the oven. As Buckley leaves for the day, carrying flattened boxes and egg cartons, Teravainen calls out, "Bye-bye baby, see you tomorrow!"

Deanna MacNeil is in the wine store, dusting bottles with a feather duster. She has been with the Lost Kitchen since the beginning, when it was still in its Belfast incarnation. She was the hostess to start. Now she chooses and orders the wines, overseeing this store, all stone and mortar walls, with a low, beamed ceiling. It's like a cave, but a cozy one.

There are glimpses of her daughter in the elegant planes of MacNeil's face, her clear eyes. The grounded calm also seems hereditary. She and her now ex-husband owned and ran the first restaurant French ever worked in, the Ridge Top Diner. It still sits on the bare, windswept highlands on a ridge above Freedom. The Lost Kitchen is nestled in the river valley down below.

MacNeil's ex-husband used to put in 16 hour days at the diner. She was teaching then, but helped out whenever she could. Their daughter ran the grill. The rest of the staff were all high school girls; the Ridge Top had a reputation for being staffed by pretty girls, most of them teenagers.

"That's why the older men would go there," MacNeil says. "It was a

completely different culture from here. My husband was gruff. He yelled. He was impatient with the young girls—and there was plenty of sexual harassment. A guy came and sat at the counter and said crude things to the 16-year-old girls. I found it offensive and told my husband so. He said, 'Oh, get over it.' He'd throw spatulas when he was mad."

She pauses, looked down. "It's making me anxious to talk about it," she added.

Her daughter's restaurant is a complete contrast. The workers listen to each other without judgment. They offer each other advice. The spatulas stay in the hand. "The camaraderie is like nothing I've ever seen," MacNeil said. "People are shocked by how pleasant it is. Someone filled in for me when I was sick and told me, 'I would come here for no pay just to hang out with these women.' There is a lot of joy even though people have their own hardships."

The servers, Victoria Marshall and Ashley Savage, arrive for their shift just as Mason and Tirone prepare to leave for the day, and the line cooks, Carey Dube and Krista Yungman, take over the prep room. Yungman, who grows the edible flowers for the restaurant, begins prepping the night's entrée garnishes: mustards, baby kale and mizuna, a kind of mustard. Dube shucks the Johns River oysters onto chilled platters lined with moss. "Carey and I work every single night we're open, so we're basically on autopilot by now," Yungman says.

Upstairs, Marshall and Savage mop the floors and shine the wine glasses with clean cloths. The atmosphere in the mill has shifted from the dreamy, peaceful calm of the morning into a higher gear, a nervous excitement running through everything, like backstage at a theater when the actors arrive in their dressing rooms.

Supporting French, the star of the show, are these two teams, the servers upstairs, the line cooks downstairs, all dressed in black leggings or dresses with beige linen aprons. The mood is focused, but also fun and light, everyone bantering, connected, talking about their lives, joking. Teravainen wanders in for a meeting with the servers to go over the night's guests, from their dietary preferences to the groupings.

In the midst of it all, French works quietly at the stove, serene as a Buddhist monk, stirring a big pot with a whisk while two skillets go full tilt, the soup pot covered. She checks her computer, her phone, looking at notes, recipes, completely intent on everything she's doing.

As Teravainen leaves for the day, the music cranks up and the mood shifts again. It feels like being in a cool loft before a party with a bunch of chill, efficient, expert friends who are setting up, hanging out, kibitzing and laughing, and everyone knowing exactly what she's doing.

At 5:30, diners began lining up outside the wine cellar to read the night's menu, posted on a stand. Inside, MacNeil greets them and suggests pairings. People carry their bottles upstairs, wrapped beautifully (albeit briefly) in brown paper and twine. They take their seats at the long table in the middle of the dining room or one of the smaller tables by the windows on two sides.

Then the show begins. The starter boards go around, loaded with bread and an array of palate-wakeners. Every detail feels right, cohesive, from the mismatched vintage dishes to the bright, unfussy flowers to the warmly intimate lighting. The evening flows, unhurried, generous, an intricate, unerring dance. French brings plates to diners as unobtrusively as if she were one of the servers; people seem to have no idea the chef herself is waiting on them.

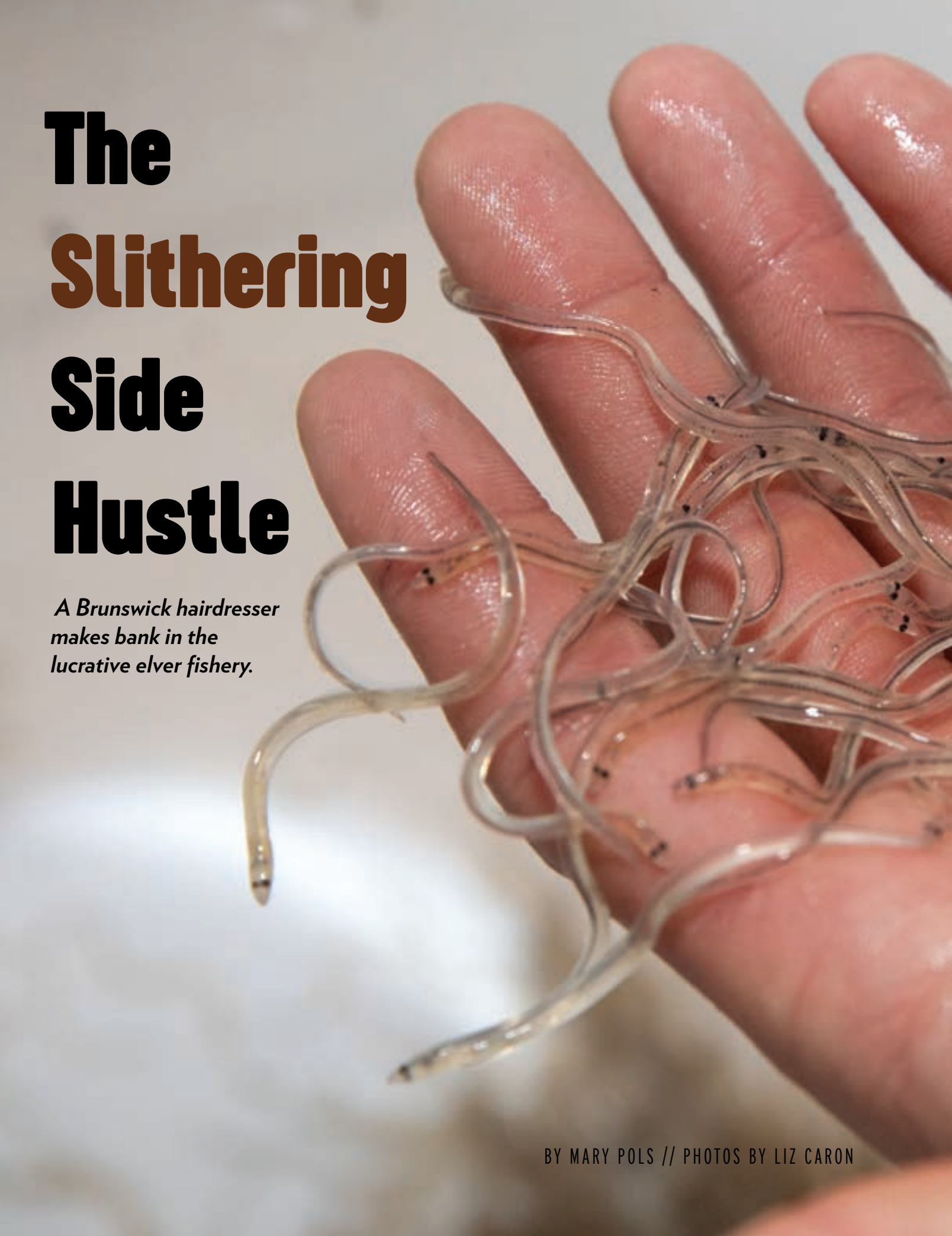
When French gives her nightly welcoming speech to everyone, after the starters and oysters, her face is alight, her voice ebullient, as she thanks the diners who have come so far to be here. Her lack of ego and sincere gratitude seem unusual in the restaurant world, which is so often dominated by needy megalomaniac chefs, power plays and psychodrama. French comes across as someone who's doing the thing she loves and was born to do and yet who can't believe her luck.

But of course it isn't luck. Through very hard work and a clear vision of what she wanted to achieve, Erin French has enabled a radical new kind of business model, in which women run the entire show, learning as they go, coming into the restaurant's orbit seemingly by serendipity, or the gravitational pull of French herself. It's an interconnected synthesis of elements: the warm camaraderie of the women who work here; their collective attention to every homey, beautiful detail; the sublimely fresh and varied local food; the welcoming, bucolic setting; and, of course, French's intuitive, Zenlike approach to cooking, giving every ingredient its chance to shine. The Lost Kitchen is a peaceable queendom. Its success isn't mysterious at all.

Kate Christensen is a PEN/Faulkner award winning novelist, whose most recent book is* The Last Cruise. *In addition to seven novels, she has also has written two food-centric memoirs, including* How to Cook a Moose. *Her first visit to Lost Kitchen was in 2015 when she wrote about it for Food & Wine magazine.

The Slithering Side Hustle

A Brunswick hairdresser makes bank in the lucrative elver fishery.



BY MARY POLS // PHOTOS BY LIZ CARON

Laine Laliberte brings her eels to sell at the Maine Eel Trade & Aquaculture buying station in Portland.

Left: Tiny, nearly transparent and bound for Maine's inland lakes and rivers to grow to adulthood, these baby eels have traveled all the way from the Sargasso Sea. No one knows quite how they choose their entry point on the Maine coast.

On late winter 2013, Laine Laliberte sat at her computer, helping her boyfriend register for a Department of Marine Resources lottery. There were four spots open in the Maine elver fishery and he wanted one. So did a lot of people. The baby eels, mostly sold to Asian markets to be farmed to full size, had topped out at an almost unbelievable price of $2,600 a pound the previous season. Maine is one of only two states with an elver fishery so competition for those four spots would be fierce.

"He says, 'Oh, put your name in too,'" Laliberte remembers, making herself a cup of coffee at her hair salon she owns in Brunswick, Anew Studio. Her boyfriend said if she won the lottery, he'd help her figure out how to do it. It only cost $28 to submit her name. What were the chances? She put her name in. "Knowing nothing," Laliberte says. "Except that you needed a net. How hard could that be?"

She landed one of what turned out to be 25 permits that year (the state expanded the licensing). "Most people know what they are signing up for," she says. "I totally did not."

This lucrative Maine fishery is not a walk in the park. Poaching remains a problem, despite policing efforts. In April, four Maine residents were arrested in Massachusetts, charged with having both heroin and illegally obtained baby eels in their car. With all the cash that changes hands, there is always the possibility of being robbed. A newly licensed person who parks themselves at a hot spot an old timer considers "theirs" might well encounter some intimidation. Laliberte plunged in anyway.

That first season she didn't do all that well. The price was lower, under $1,000 a pound. She scouted in Harpswell with the boyfriend and his friend, both of whom were convinced they could help her find a fresh spot on their own. "Because he wasn't listening to someone who could help us," Laliberte says. Her voice drops to a confiding whisper, the trademark of a good hairdresser.

"You know men," she says.

The boyfriend is long gone, but the elver license lives on. Women are still in the minority in the fishery, but not by much. Nearly 1,200 elver licenses were issued or renewed in 2019, according to data from the Maine Department of Marine Resources, 39 percent of them to women, up about a half a percent from 2018. Laliberte has gotten steadily better at it as the years go by. She's determined and persistent. It helps that she's a longtime outdoorswoman. She grew up in North Dakota but went to Girl Scout camp in Minnesota as a child and never wanted to leave. Her family fished lakes together every summer, often for walleye.

On a chilly Saturday afternoon in March, Laliberte and her friend Meredith Perry, who also won the license lottery in 2013, are surveying a steep embankment that leads down to a salt marsh and a cove. The potential fishing spot is a stream on the other side of the inlet. It's low tide, easy to get across now if you don't mind getting a little muddy, but by the next high tide, around midnight, the inlet will be filled and it would be a scramble to the fishing spot.

They've driven down a long dirt road to get to this spot, extracting promises not to reveal the name of the town it's in. Suffice it to say, it's Midcoast, and one of those places that probably comes to life in the

Laliberte fished for four nights—eight hour shifts each time—and sold her catch for $8,961.63. She'll use it to travel, to Canada this month and California in the fall.

summer, but that you'd never just stumble across. Laliberte learned about it from Cory Hawkes, the eel dealer she usually sells to in either Waldoboro or Portland. She's already sussed out this spot's potential the weekend before but she's careful, methodical and worried about how they'd get out of the spot with a bucket or two filled with baby eels. She wants Perry's input. Perry's arms are folded. "It's steep," she says.

Perry is a nurse. She's petite and dressed for the cold but both women look more like they're going on a hike than fishing. Once they get down the hill, they have to make their way across marsh and muck to get to the mouth of the stream that the elvers are said to favor. As they pick their way across the mud to that spot, they come upon an abandoned fyke net from previous seasons. A fyke net gets stretched across part of a stream bed—the rules are strict about what proportion can be blocked—and collects the baby eels. The tiny, transparent creatures are about 6 inches long, like a good-sized garden worm, but much smaller in diameter; the mesh on the nets has to be very fine. Perry and Laliberte don't use fyke nets, mostly because they have small quotas, the amount they can catch, a determination based on what they caught that first year they fished. They use dip nets instead.

In 2018, Laliberte, who is also a licensed cosmetologist and esthetician, spent 14 nights fishing before she hit her quota. Most of the time she was up in Bristol, but that area is favored by Maine's Native American tribes, and the competition for the right place to stand was so fierce that this season, Laliberte was determined to find a more private spot. She'd actually been here once before, that first year, but the boyfriend and his friend took a look and poo-pooed it.

"It's a nice little spot," Hawkes says. "There is actually some poundage that goes up it annual. For her and Meredith with their small quotas, it's seems like a perfect spot. They can go there and be by themselves. They don't have to deal with the hustle and bustle of some of the big rivers. Just got to work a little harder to get there."

And back. Assuming the elvers show up, how do you get across this inlet and back to the path up the steep hill when the cold water rises to the rocks, in the dark of night? Laliberte proposes a canoe transport. "I don't want to get in a canoe," Perry says. Laliberte would consider it. Her first job as a teenager was working on a conservation crew on Lake Superior National Forest. She knows the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness well. But winter has been holding on tenaciously this year, and going over the side in this kind of cold could be a death sentence.

The two women walk up the stream bed, talking strategies. They debate where else they could go that night on the high tide. Laliberte knew a good spot at Sebasco Estates in Phippsburg, but she also knew the guy that typically parks himself in it. One of the complicating factors about elver fishing is that you can't stand in the water, you have to stand on ground near it. In other words, wading into the middle of a stream and dropping your net is not allowed. Nor is reaching into the middle third of a stream from the banks; the idea is to fish the margins, giving the greatest proportion of the baby eels the chance to make it up the stream and into the rivers. That's about sustaining a fishery that, given the financial enticements, could very well collapse if it weren't carefully regulated. Laliberte is careful to obey

all the rules, including the one that says no one without a license can carry your bucket out for you. The very first time she fished with Chuck, she says a game warden materialized out of seemingly nowhere to check that they were following the regulations.

But ultimately, the two women decided to make an attempt at this new spot. It felt like it could be theirs. They returned at 10 p.m., traveling light with just buckets, nets and only headlamps to guide them back to the spot. Perry took an unplanned tumble into the water but got right back up. They were warmer than they expected, dipping and moving those nets as they fished for three hours straight. They stayed 90 minutes after the high tide, cleaning their wriggling catch using a small aquarium style net that made it easier to pick sand fleas out the catch and

"I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN ON 'SURVIVOR.'"

deciding ultimately to risk carrying the eels out in just a net. "I couldn't carry four gallons of water up that hill," Laliberte explains. They hugged the shore of the inlet and got back to the other side without a problem. The grand total for both women that night? $1,850 worth of baby eels. "I feel like I've been on 'Survivor,'" Laliberte texted the next morning. Was this spot worth the trouble? "Yes hell yes," she answered.

Before April was over, they'd met their quotas. Four nights, worth $8,961.63 for Laliberte. She'll use it to travel, to Canada this month and California in the fall. Each fishing shift took a solid eight hours, overnight shifts since the eels are easiest to catch at night. Laliberte is not complaining, but she does still marvel at the twist of fate that landed her this side hustle. "If somebody would have said, 'Laine when you are 50 you are going to be fishing for eels off the coast of Maine in the middle of the night' I would have said, 'I don't think so.'"

Mary Pols is the editor of Maine Women Magazine. She first wrote about the elver fishery in Maine in 2014 for the Portland Press Herald's Source section.

Pour people

INSIDE THE BARISTA BUSINESS

Greater Portland's plethora of independent coffee shops, from local chains like Coffee by Design, Arabica and CIA to the true one-offs like Quill Books & Beverage in Westbrook, provide a cozy change of pace from the big guys like Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts. Part of their charm is in their varied decors and menus and, of course, their friendly non-uniformed baristas.

We sat down with a few of those baristas in between pulls to ask the questions that run through our heads while we're in line, including how they pay skyrocketing rents on a coffee shop salary, and whether this is a temporary gig while they wait to get into law school? And what kind of coffee do they drink?

BY HANNAH JOHNSTON // PHOTOS BY BONNIE DURHAM

KAIT SILVA

Age: 26
Works at: CIA South Portland
Favorite thing on the menu: The bistro BLT and a menu-hack Almond Joy latte.

Kait Silva gets up at 4 a.m. to make coffee for other people, so it's no wonder she cites the free coffee she gets at CIA (coffee, ice cream, art) as a major perk. "My regulars make me want to come into work," she says. Their rapport makes CIA more than just a coffee shop. "It makes me want to go above and beyond." As the manager, Silva supervises about eight employees, most of whom are also young women in their 20s. "We're family-oriented," Silva explained, "Callie, she's pregnant, ...and we threw her a baby shower because her family lives in Iowa. We all make sure everyone's OK."

Silva grew up in the Bath/Brunswick area, and after several years living in Portland, paying $1,600 a month for a 500-square-foot apartment (one bedroom, two big dogs), she's headed back home. She'll be paying $1,700 in Brunswick for a three-bedroom house with utilities included. "It's a big difference," Silva said.

Her six years in the Navy inspired her to pursue a degree in psychiatric nursing. "Vets need a lot of help," she says. "I definitely needed a lot of help when I got out of the service." Civilian doctors tended not to understand those needs, she says, and she hopes she'll do better. While she studies to do that, she'll be pouring coffee.

MADISON MASI

Age: 23
Works at: Coffee By Design, Portland
Favorite thing on the menu: A french toast latte.

Madison Masi has two associates degrees from Southern Maine Community College—one in horticulture and one in liberal studies—and someday wants get her bachelor's degree. But she's happy working at a coffee shop. "I love the connections that I make with my customers," Masi says. "It's kind of like being a daytime bartender." Masi started as a barista about a year ago and is a shift leader now.

It's not easy to rely on tips. Sometimes, it's awkward. "I can tell that sometimes the tip screen makes customers feel pressured to tip, especially if I'm standing right there," she says. But she's developing some financial stability, as well as budgeting skills. "It took a learning curve of how to budget, how to save money, and also still feel like I'm treating myself," Masi says. "I'm definitely not living lavishly, but I am comfortable."

She's a renter, sharing a $1,200 a month two-bedroom apartment, but has started to imagine becoming a property owner. "I think it'd be cool to be a landlord. It'd kind of be like working on your house on HGTV but somebody else reaps the benefits," she said. Masi is happy about the way Portland is booming, but worries that young people are going to be driven out of the area as rents continue to rise.

For the near-term, she and her two quirky cats Molly (toothless) and Mustache (seven-toed) will stick around and she'll continue her work as a barista. She has trouble paying for non-necessities, often finds herself drained after a shift, and sometimes lacks the energy to get things done or visit with friends, but her regulars at CBD help offset the drawbacks. "I actually also really love the art of coffee," she says. "I thought I knew coffee, and then I came here and I realized how large the coffee world is. It's just as complex as that of wine or whiskey."

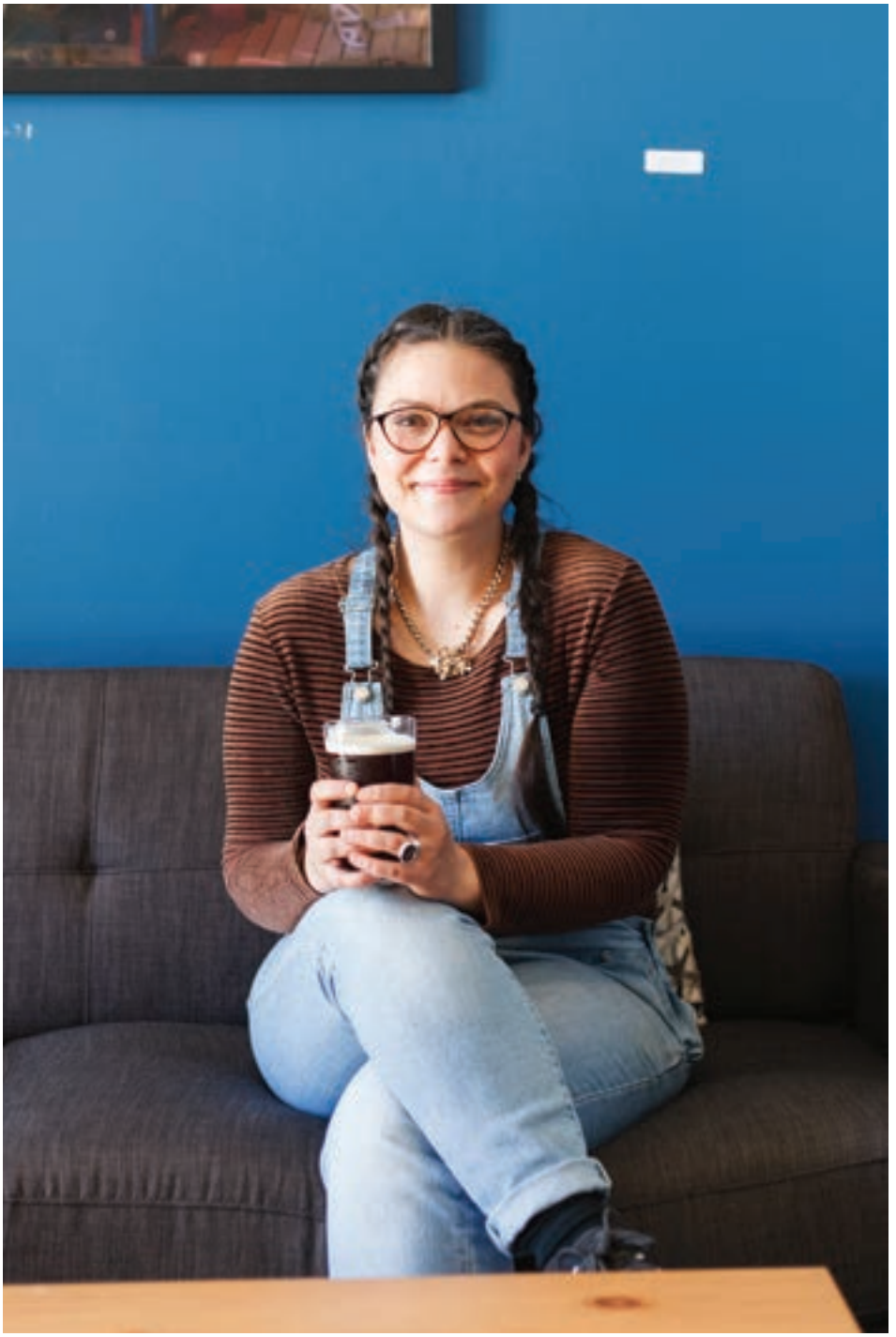
LILLY VAN DER STEENHOVEN

Age: 31
Works at: Quill Books & Beverage, Westbrook
Favorite thing on the menu: Vegan banh mi and a maple latte

Lilly Van Der Steenhoven was recently promoted to manager at Quill. With tips, she makes roughly $450 a week. She's the first to admit that doesn't make for financial stability, but being a barista is fulfilling in other, more important ways. She used to have desk jobs, and the flexibility of the coffee shop gives her more time to pursue her goal of opening her own consignment and second-hand clothing shop. Mostly, though, she loves the atmosphere in the bookstore/coffee shop. "This space really cultivates a community feeling and brings in a lot of interesting people to meet; people feel safe in this space and that's really special."

She recently bought a split-level two bedroom house in Westbrook with her husband, and their monthly mortgage payment is $1,200. When she lived in Portland, they spent the same amount of money per month on a one-bedroom apartment. It's a relief to live more affordably.

She advises other young people attempting to thrive in Portland not to underestimate the value of community. "In my experience, some of the best jobs, apartments, etc., come from word of mouth, friends, friends of friends," Van Der Steenhoven says.



CAROLINE HOMER

Age: 22
Works at: Omi's Coffee Shop, South Portland
Favorite thing on the menu: Coconut cold brew

Homer grew up on Mount Desert Island and studied opera at SUNY Purchase. She hopes to make a living as a professional singer but in the meantime, she loves working with the women owners of Omi's. "They're really fair and they care about the people that work for them."

She describes herself as an introvert, but finds she really likes being outgoing on the job. "I love seeing the same customers everyday," she says, "it makes me feel like I'm a part of the community." She's also getting more and more into coffee. "I've really started thinking about it more as a hobby and less like a job." She shares an apartment in Portland with her boyfriend. The rent is $1,000 a month. "I'm not going to lie and say that I'm not stressed about money," she says. "I feel like anybody [my] age is."

She views working at Omi as a welcome relief after the hustle and stress of college life. "I loved [school], but I was giving 200% all the time and there was no way I could keep doing that, it wasn't sustainable." In college stress is treated almost like a badge of honor and stepping away from that didn't come naturally. "Taking a break has actually been really challenging, if that makes sense," Homer says, adding, "it's an interesting paradox."

Hannah Johnston graduated from Connecticut College in 2018 after finishing an honors thesis in creative writing. She is a freelance writer who lives in South Portland.

Among the skills Karen Watterson picked up during her baking basics class? How to make these cinnamon puff pastry twists flaky and crisp. *Photo courtesy of Watterson*

PUTTING ON THE TOQUE

An empty nester and avid home baker goes back to school to learn the basics from a professional perspective

BY KAREN WATTERSON

With the impending departure to college of our third and last child, I knew I had to get out of the house. There were volunteer opportunities or retail jobs, but there was also an idea that had been brewing in my brain for the past couple of years, studying culinary arts at Southern Maine Community College.

Food, especially baking, has been my passion since I passed the childhood picky-eater phase. I have a sweet tooth that doesn't quit, and I'm known as the baker in my circle of friends. If there's a potluck, sign me up for dessert. I've experimented with everything from a pumpkin spice roll for Thanksgiving to Linzer heart cookies for Valentine's Day. I can temper chocolate, whip up a pavlova, bake a Bundt cake. In 2013, I even won the People's Choice Award from the *Portland Press Herald* for their Holiday Cookie Contest. I've taken a cooking class here and there and can read any recipe and give it a go, but I never learned the basics. What I wanted was a foundation that would give me the confidence to stray from the instructions and put my own spin on a recipe.

Maine restaurants are stocked with employees who graduated from the Culinary Arts program at SMCC and some Portland chefs, like David Turin, are enthusiastic supporters of the school. Chef Bo Byrne of The Harraseeket Inn has come full circle, returning to teach in the program he finished in 2004.

On the SMCC website, I navigated to the Culinary Arts page and discovered Basic Baking was offered four days a week, almost three hours each day. I didn't have some of the prerequisites, including college level math, but Culinary Arts Department Chair Maureen LaSalle waived the requirement, as I would not be pursuing a degree. "For many non-traditional students, culinary classes are on their bucket list," she says. "We have considerations for students not going into the field."

On the first day of class, I headed to the Culinary Arts building, which has three kitchen labs. I arrived in black leggings, Frye boots and oversized sweater, new notebook in hand. The white chef's coat (monogrammed!) and checked pants I had purchased the week before were still folded neatly at home. I had assumed the first day would be an overview of the class. That was true but the four other students were dressed in their chef whites, complete with puffy white toques. Being the only 58-year-old in the class, I knew I wasn't really going to fit in, but did I have to make it that obvious?

Our lab dedicated to baking was a well-cared for playground of gleaming stainless tables, mixers of all sizes, tall stacks of cake pans, pastry brushes, measuring tools and sifters. A lineup of rolling bins held several kinds of flour, sugar, corn meal and cocoa powder, and there were inviting shelves of extracts, nuts, chocolate, dried fruits and other ingredients. The wide, three-bay sink looks out on an expansive view of Casco Bay.

Instructor Meg Broderick has no-nonsense demeanor, immediately apparent from her instructions. No jewelry allowed except a plain band ring and no nail polish. Be present, in full uniform with clean apron, Sharpie and thermometer secured in pocket. Her stack of hand-outs was an inch thick and included the course syllabus, a calendar of due dates for homework, several take-home quizzes and forms for evaluating our baked goods.

The thought of written homework had not crossed my mind. A sudden flashback to college, decades ago, bubbled up. The same feeling of anxiety arose too, making me wonder if I was up to the task. Yet, my years of home baking gave me a boost of confidence in the classroom and the kitchen. Later, Broderick would tell me, "students don't think it's odd to have an older student in the class any more. It's comforting to them to realize 'I'm not the only one who doesn't know everything.'"

My days fell into a rhythm: an hour at the gym, then head to South Portland where I would treat myself to a late breakfast, often at 158 Pickett Café, right next to campus. Head to the women's locker room to change my clothes. Most of the young women there were similar in age to my own children, but they were also my classmates. As I tried not to compare my middle-aged body to the tattooed twenty-somethings, I listened to daycare struggles, kitchen jobs and boyfriends. We

Left: Determined to show she wasn't a slacker, Watterson dug into cleaning duties. Right: Watterson's freshly baked buttermilk biscuits cool. Bottom: Putting the glass on the perfect puff pastry. *Photos courtesy of Watterson*

"I GOT WHAT WANTED WHEN I NEEDED IT MOST."

complained about the weather and warned each other of instructors' moods. A classmate from Skowhegan, newly out of high school, became my friend, our relationship a pleasing mix of part-substitute mom, part-girlfriend. I gave her a hard time about not eating breakfast, but we exchanged knowing glances when the student she had a crush on appeared in the kitchen.

Biscuits and muffins were the first baked items we worked on. Chef Meg taught us the creaming method, the dump method (putting wet ingredients into dry and mixing) and the ways to know when to move on to the next step. We spent a lot of time on the whys of baking. The week before Thanksgiving, we tackled pies. Because pies are not my thing, I never cared much about mastering pie crust. That changed with pressure from the chef to get it right. Don't overmix, don't add too much or too little water. "Dump it into the compost and start again," she would say when we committed one of those errors. I was shocked at first, reluctant to waste food. But what else could you do with a bad pie crust? It took many tries, but I was finally able to produce a stellar crust for my husband's pumpkin pie.

I feared being judged as someone who wouldn't do their fair share of the work, so I took to cleaning tasks, maybe not with enthusiasm, but with energy. I hefted the large garbage cans onto my shoulder, took apart mixers for thorough cleaning, and sanitized tabletops. As Bread Week rolled into Cake Week we learned to shape bread dough into consistently-sized rolls that would later be served when guests arrived for Friday lunch. We beat 3-pound blocks of butter into precise rectangles to be folded into puff pastry dough. We tasted and compared varieties of vanilla, bars of chocolate and types of butter. We learned to judge doneness by using all our senses instead of a timer. When our items came out of the oven, they were spread on the table, torn apart and tasted to evaluate.

"What is your endgame?" I was asked many times by friends and family. "Are you going to open a bakery?" I'd be lying if I said I never considered it. The idea of quiet pre-dawn mornings with coffee, surrounded by the sweet scent of sugar and yeast is highly appealing. As a class requirement, I had to observe in a working bakery. James Beard Award nominee Krista Kern Desjarlais was kind enough to let me stand by her side as she baked in the cozy kitchen of The Purple House in North Yarmouth. It was a priceless opportunity to view the endless cycle of prepping, baking, selling and prepping again.

The thought of doing it on my own may just be a tempting daydream. I'll need many more skills (and probably a math class) if I ever hope to become a professional baker. But I got what wanted when I needed it most. Baking at home has now become more of an adventure. I can add malted milk powder or sub maple syrup for sugar, feeling confident about the outcome. I was challenged every day, usually by something I thought I already knew. And at middle age, I got a taste of college life again. It was sweet.

Karen Watterson is a food writer and enthusiastic home baker. She is willing to exercise just enough to indulge in croissants and chocolate. Follow @themainefeed on Instagram.

A century of childhood

FROM A WORLD WAR I MILK STATION TO A CONTEMPORARY PRESCHOOL, CATHERINE MORRILL DAY NURSERY CONTINUES TO REFLECT THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

BY AMY PARADYSZ

Sally Hinckley remembers walking to Catherine Morrill Day Nursery before sunrise. Her mother, who was divorced, needed to get to Hayes' Drugstore to bake muffins before the breakfast counter opened.

"Some women had to work and Catherine Morrill was where you took your kids," says Hinckley, who is 82 and lives in South Portland. "I went there until I was 5."

Some of Hinckley's memories—like standing in line for a spoonful of cod liver oil or napping on the fire escape in the summer—stand out because they're vastly different from those of children today. Other recollections, such as children sitting down to lunch family-style or brushing their teeth at diminutive sinks, are likely shared with the 6,000 children who have attended Catherine Morrill Day Nursery since its founding 100 years ago this month.

"We've always been reflective of the needs of the community," says Executive Director Lori Moses, outlining an evolution from "custodial care" in the early days to becoming the state's first licensed childcare facility in 1967 and being one of the first facilities in the state to be accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs in the 1990s. The program prioritizes low-income and at-risk children and currently includes five children who live at McAuley Residence, Maine's only substance abuse recovery community where mothers stay with their children.

The Catherine Morrill Day Nursery story begins during World War I, when women filled jobs vacated by men who left to serve in the armed forces. With women working, there was a need for infant formula. Katherine Quinn, Portland's first trained public health nurse, led a mostly volunteer team at a "milk station" at Portland City Hall in preparing formula for 195 babies in 1917—and twice as many in 1918.

Then, in 1919—the same year women got the right to vote in Maine—20 civic-minded ladies established the Portland Baby Hygiene and Child Welfare Association. They set up a day nursery in the Waynflete School Building where a rotating team of volunteers cared for children of working women. One of the earliest volunteers was 19-year-old Catherine "Kay" Morrill of the Burnham and Morrill—B&M Baked Beans—family.

Morrill loved working at the nursery but her time there was short. She died a year after her start from an infection. "Penicillin had not been discovered yet," said great-niece Catherine "Kay" Morrill Wood, a former member of the nursery's board of directors who volunteered at the center throughout the 1950s.

In 1922, the nursery moved to its current location on Danforth Street, across from Victoria Mansion. The building is part 1830s-era ship captain's home, part 1970s Model Cities construction. In the summer, children line up at the playground fence to catch a glimpse of the Maine Duck Tours boat full of quacking tourists. On Thursdays, everyone gets day-old bread from Standard Baking Company, toddlers asking for a baguette or focaccia by name.

Catherine Morrill, left, with her brother Charles in an undated photo. At 19, she began volunteering at the nursery when it was a day nursery run by the Portland Baby Hygiene and Child Welfare Association. The nursery was named for Morrill after her death the next year. *Photo courtesy of Catherine Morrill Day Nursery*

Kathleen Conley Amrein's memories from her Catherine Morrill days sound like something from Ludwig Bemelmans' *Madeline* children's books, with the little charges being marched down the street in two straight lines. Amrein was born in 1947 and was in the program from infancy to age 5, which enabled her mother to work as an operating room nurse at Maine Medical Center and her father to work shifts as a fireman. "We still hear all this controversy about working mothers versus stay-at-home mothers," Amrein says. "But I don't think every woman is the type who wants to stay with children all day long, and that's okay. I came to that conclusion through my own experience growing up."

Julie Redding, a child therapist from Calais, agrees. She has fond memories of preschool at Catherine Morrill in the late 1980s, including listening to Beach Boys hits while tidying up. Her mother raised her alone, much of her childhood. "She worked two jobs and went back to school, graduated from the University of Southern Maine and became a teacher. My mother had the opportunities that she did because she knew I was safe and cared for and learning, growing and thriving. The kid and the

Left: A couple of unidentified students at the day nursery's hand washing station in 1975. Above: Ring around the rosie, 1970s style at Catherine Morrill Day Nursery. *Photos courtesy of Catherine Morrill Day Nursery*

parent are a unit."

Today, 73% of Maine children—whether they have one parent, two parents or more thanks to blended families—have all parents in the workforce. Child care centers have two clients: the parents who need to work and the children who need to be nurtured.

"My heart's desire was always to be a stay-at-home mom, but we need to be a two wage earner family," says Ruth Price, mother to 5-year-old Ulysses and 3-year-old Ari, who attend Catherine Morrill. "My mind is at ease that my kids are being cared for—and not only their physical needs but their emotional needs, their sensory needs, their intellectual needs. The teachers use play to teach topics like outer space and the planets, giving the kids a general sense of the size and scope of the world."

Nearly all the 80 or so children enrolled are full time; some are there upwards of 60 hours a week. The waiting list is another indicator of the demand: Because the program has fewer spots for infants and toddlers than for preschoolers, expectant mothers get on the waiting list and often don't get a spot for their child for three years. Part of that popularity comes from its reputation for stability. On the plus side: In an industry known for high turnover, Catherine Morrill teachers tend to stick around.

"We're not just teaching letters and colors, we're teaching independence, problem-solving and conflict resolution and engaging curiosity," Moses says. "The teachers are addressing the whole child in terms of all ages of development: social, emotional, physical, language and number literacy, social studies, science, all of it."

"The mission and the philosophy of the school attracts teachers and staff who really care about children and want them to succeed," says Program Director Karen Peters, who has been at the day nursery for 15 years. "Children and families come first."

Some families stick around for a while, too. Roberta Smith, a legal secretary at Unum, has sent six kids through the program. Her youngest, Theodore, will be off to kindergarten in the fall.

"Everyone there has a common goal—to encourage, love on and grow these families, not just the kids but the families," Smith says. "Catherine Morrill is kind of like 'Sesame Street' in Maine."

Amy Paradysz is a freelance writer who muddled through the days of working full time and raising a preschooler as a single mom.

Fufu *for All*

A FOOD COMMON TO MANY PARTS OF AFRICA, BUT ALWAYS A LITTLE DIFFERENT

BY MEG WEBSTER // PHOTOS BY MOLLY HALEY

There are just two main ingredients in fufu, a starchy dish common throughout many Western and Central African countries, flour and water. But there are rules. Not rules of measurements so much as emotion. "When you eat fufu, you must eat it with sentiment, with feeling," Nadine Pembele says. "And with family and friends around," adds Betty Ayoub Kabbashi. "You can never eat fufu alone." They've gathered to cook two different versions of fufu at Kabbashi's house in Portland. Kabbashi is Azande, a native of Juba, South Sudan, and Pembele is from Bandundu, a province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Fufu is generally served alongside meat and vegetable dishes as a soft dough, something to be held in the hand and torn into pieces. It varies slightly from region to region in its viscosity, preparation methods and even its name. Though disparity is customary, there seems to be a "right way" to make whichever variation you've landed on. "You'll never get it the first time," Pembele says. "Not the second either, I swear! Not even the third. Maybe the fifth or sixth…maybe."

When Pembele and her husband left the DRC in 2016 they were fleeing violence, with the expectation that someday they could go home. But it's still not safe to return. Kabbashi has been in Maine longer, since 2011. She was a dentist and maxillofacial surgeon in Sudan. Determined to practice in the U.S., Kabbashi studies for board exams in the evenings after tucking her two children into bed. She works full time as an interpreter at Maine Medical Center. She's a single mother, having recently lost her husband to cancer.

Cassava leaves for the main dish are stewing, the aroma of cooked onion fills the kitchen and Nigerian gospel music plays in the living room. Kabbashi and Pembele steal glances over one another's shoulders as they prepare two stews, *Gadia* and *Fumbwa*. *Gadia* is a creamy cassava leaf stew with hints of onion, peanut butter and palm oil and is a sacred dish used in Azande naming ceremonies. While Kabbashi stirs the *Gadia*, Pembele cleans and descales mackerel in the sink for the *Fumbwa*, a beloved tropical stew named after its main ingredient, the leaves plucked from native tropical evergreens. The leaves grow tall and thin, but are sold finely diced in the markets. *Fumbwa* is also rich with peanut butter and is typically prepared with smoked African catfish, but as that can be pricey, mackerel is sometimes substituted. She slices the fish into large pieces before submerging it into the stew to soak up the flavor.

Both women hum to the music and discuss the traditions and foods they miss. For Kabbashi it is cooking with fresh greens from the jungle. Pembele misses eating food wrapped in palm leaves roasted over fire and munching on an afternoon snack of caterpillar and palm weevils. They long for inexpensive (about 50 cents) boiled cassava stick they could buy from street vendors at home. There is much to miss. Neither of them have found a local restaurant that serves fufu, so they have this

Left: Ingredients for fufu include different flours, depending on who the maker is, and most often cassava and/or maize. Below: Betty Ayoub Kabbashi (left) and Nadine Pembele (right) laugh all the way through the making of fufu. The two women have slightly different spins on this classic starchy dish that's common in many African countries.

While Pembele watches, Kabbashi positions herself above the fufu to beat the air bubbles of the starchy staple of many African regions.

Clockwise from left: Kabbashi holds her "ngua bakinde" (fufu stick) as she prepares to make the fufu she learned to make growing up in South Sudan; the finished fufu; Pembele washes the *Fumbwa* leaves; Kabbashi and Pembele enjoy their fufu with their native stews.

"YOU'LL NEVER GET IT THE FIRST TIME. NOT THE SECOND EITHER, I SWEAR! NOT EVEN THE THIRD. MAYBE THE FIFTH OR SIXTH...MAYBE."

staple only in their own homes or at parties. With more people immigrating to Maine from various regions of Africa, they are hopeful that soon there will be a restaurant with fufu on the menu.

While the stews simmer, they place their bags of flour on the table to prepare. Kabbashi's eyes grow wide when she sees what Pembele has brought. "Is this real cassava flour?" she exclaims. Pembele nods. She found it at Serey Pheap Market on St. John Street in Portland. Kabbashi beams; in her eight years in Maine, though she frequents multiple markets to satiate her Sudanese palate, including Cambodian markets for fish and vegetables and Arabic and African markets for meats, she's never found real cassava flour. (The kinds of flour used in fufu vary depending on region, but both women favor cassava.) Traditionally they'd extract it themselves by soaking cassava root, drying it in the sun and pounding it using a large wooden pestle and mortar. Pembele cuts her cassava flour with maize to give it a slightly tougher and grainier consistency. Kabbashi prefers her fufu soft and sticky, made with all cassava.

Kabbashi carefully pours flour into boiling water, measuring with only her eyes. It takes about 10 minutes and the last few are the most crucial. The fufu rapidly grows sticky and dense as more flour is added. Stooped over the pot, Kabbashi aggressively beats the fufu with her fufu stick. It is about as long as a Little League bat and thin, with a thick bulbous arrow-like tip. Pembele stands behind, "you see how you can never get it right the first time?!" she shouts through laughter at her friend's dramatic exertions. Kabbashi pounds the fufu against the side of the pan as it bubbles into a soft and gooey mound, mashing the air pellets as quickly as they appear. "See how careful and attentive she is? Concentrating! Wow! My goodness, she's brave!" cries Pembele, confessing she starts her fufu with cold water to evade such combative bubbles. Left unsquashed, the bubbles would turn into pockets of uncooked flour, the kind of disgrace that would "make the village CNN," they joke.

In the final steps, Kabbashi whisks the pot from the stove and places it on the floor between her feet. She continues to beat the mixture, perched above it on a chair using the fufu stick, which she brought with her from Sudan, growing breathless with the effort she's making with the stick, her *Sngua bakinde*. And then, just as suddenly as fufu thickens, it is finished. Kabbashi drops her stick and sits back. "Done." She carefully transfers the fufu onto a serving platter and uses a small plate to round out the edges. Kabbashi sets the table as Pembele begins her fufu. Pembele's fufu cooks up quickly and with less drama, partly because she starts with maize, which quells the bubbles. Her fufu stick is shorter and more stout, "my nzeté à fufu is better for bearing weight," she teases.

Steam rises from the dishes. Pembele pinches off a portly piece from the doughy pile of fufu on her plate, dips it in her *Fumbwa*, and places it in her mouth."Your hands must taste the fufu too," she says. "A dish without Fufu is like sauce without the spaghetti," Pembele says. Kabbashi nods. "When you eat fufu, you feel its heat all the way from your mouth to your stomach." She takes a bite and smiles with eyes closed. "It's just a beautiful taste."

Meg Webster works at UNE's School of Social Work, where she coordinates media and recruitment projects. As a freelance media artist, she's produced a variety of advocacy shorts, exhibited in galleries and writes regularly for Maine publications.

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LESSONS FOR LOCAVORES

Facts blend with flavors on Maine Food for Thought's tour of some of Portland's best restaurants. Sarah Hach runs the year-old company with her husband.

BY MARY POLS // PHOTOS BY HEIDI KIRN

Sarah Kneece Hach leads a pack of hungry people down Commercial Street in Portland. There's a mother-daughter duo from a Chicago suburb, a pair of empty nesters from Providence, Rhode Island, and even a couple of Maine residents, all in pursuit of both their next course of Maine grown, produced or harvested food and an education about where it all came from.

Hach and her husband Bryce are co-founders of Maine Food for Thought, a tour that serves as a crash course in food systems and sustainability, punctuated by small servings of beautifully crafted examples of what local food means on a plate. It's upscale tourism, an amble that on this brisk, overcast day, started at Union in the Press Hotel with a small bowl of Asian-influenced clam chowder and ended three hours later with a dollop of an Italian chocolate pudding at Piccolo. There's no roll meant to fill you up, no overpriced drinks along the way; this is facts blended with flavors.

The couple started giving the tours in the spring of 2018. He is the front man, the one who smoothly delivers short talks on topics ranging from aquaculture to food insecurity to the secrets of the best pesto in the state.

She handles the marketing and logistics behind the tours. And that involves some persuasion. She's the one who goes to restaurants and asks chefs and owners to let a group come in during a time when the staff might typically be folding napkins or otherwise preparing for a meal. In the last year she's convinced Scales, Mami, Blythe & Barrows and others, to serve small plates for a revolving group of people. "Many of these places did have to take a chance on us," Hach says.

But, she said, there is a happy trade-off.

From left, clam chowder from Union, a Middle Eastern spin on Aroostook County potatoes at Evo.

The restaurants get a marketing bonus. The Haches' talks are the kind of education no server has time to deliver, and they get repeat customers in the form of tour attendees who come back for a full meal after the taste and talk.

It's the first time the couple has ever worked together. "We always wanted to carve something out on our own," Hach says. She's poised and unflappable; when you find out she has worked on political campaigns, including John Kerry's run for president in 2004, it makes perfect sense.

The couple met in a statistics class at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Public Policy and Management. Both were getting master's degree in public policy and management. They went on to jobs in the nonprofit sector, working at foundations in economic development and education. They moved for school and they moved for jobs. "We lived in nine different states, combined," she says.

Then they decided to move for a place instead. They were ready to settle somewhere to raise their daughter and picked Maine, which they'd visited on their first anniversary. He took a job at Maine Audubon, while for four years she worked for Focus Maine, a privately-led initiative to boost job growth in the state, which places an emphasis on agriculture and aquaculture among other industries. The more they learned about Maine food systems, the more they wanted to boost public awareness of all that goes into keeping that economy humming along.

In the tours that is spelled out transparently. At Evo, chef Matt Ginn sends out small bowls of spiced potatoes with a Middle Eastern twist while Bryce Hach explains the importance of the potato harvest to Aroostook County. At Solo Italiano, where the tour group samples thick, house-made pasta covered in the lush pesto its chef Paolo Laboa is known for, Hach tells them that the basil in it comes from Olivia's Gardens in New Gloucester. "It's pesticide free," he explains, describing what he saw when he visited Olivia's (before giving the tours, these tour guides go on a lot of tours). "They use 15 different species of predatory insects instead." As the group exclaimed over the pesto, he told them that the basil's journey from farm to table might be as little as two hours.

Solo Italiano doesn't serve lunch, but Sarah Hach worked out a deal to let the group in right around lunch time, several days a week. What she likes about bring groups in during these off hours is that very often, the tour will see farmers stopping off with their goods or say, an eel farmer dropping by with product or meeting with the chef. "We want people to make this connection," she says. "To see that the chefs are supporting the broader economy and ecosystem by the sourcing that they are doing."

The result is an authentic, behind-the-scenes experience. Most who sign for the tour, about 70 percent, are from out-of-state, Hach says. Prices are $79 for two different versions of the tour. One starts in late morning, runs three-hours and includes six restaurants over the course of three hours (it feels like much less) and the other is a little shorter and includes five stops over the course of the afternoon. But this year the Hachs hope to serve more locals. Even a Mainer who considers themselves highly educated on local foods is likely to learn something or at the very least get a new perspective, told broadly but intimately. It's the big picture, painted one dish at a time, chef by chef, but knitted together to represent the story of Maine food. "We thought this was a way to shine a light," Sarah Hach says.

Mary Pols wrote about food systems for five years for the Portland Press Herald. She is the editor of Maine Women Magazine. The pesto at Solo Italiano truly is the best she's ever had.

The tour winds its way through the Old Port and then heads into Solo Italiano for pesto made with Olivia's Gardens basil, grown in New Gloucester.

Maine Cancer Foundation Tri for a Cure®

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!

We need your help at the 12th Annual Tri for a Cure
Saturday, July 13 & Sunday, July 14 at SMCC in South Portland

More than 1,300 women will gather in South Portland to swim, bike, and run to support Maine Cancer Foundation in the fight against cancer. We can't all do the race, but anyone can volunteer to be a part of the event and help us make it happen.

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Jenn Bravo in her Portland kitchen wearing earrings from Amie in Portland, a rib-knit sweater dress she picked up at a thrift store and linen apron gifted to her by a friend.

FOR CHEF AND HEALTH COACH JENN BRAVO, IT'S 'EASYGOING WITH A FEW POPS OF COLOR'

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMANDA WHITEGIVER

How do you define Maine style? If you asked the estimated number of women and girls living in the state that question, you might get 682,586 answers (that's the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 estimate for Maine's female population). We asked Jenn Bravo, Portland food blogger *(bravojenny.com)*, trained chef and certified health coach (she's an expert on intuitive eating and staying healthy at every size), about her style and what it means to her.

STYLE IN ONE SENTENCE:

"Since moving to Maine and becoming a mom, my style has become so much more easygoing: it's basic with natural, soft materials and a few random pops of pattern and color."

HOW IS IT "MAINE"?

"No flannel but I'm a little bit Maine: Jeans and natural materials, like cotton, linen, wools—easy and casual items that reflect nature embody the Maine style to me."

INSPIRATION?

"I appreciate as an adult how my friends and those around me dress, so I think I file things away on what I like. Then Pinterest for specific occasion outfits. Otherwise, just going browsing by myself and the tactile experience—it is so much more about my physical and emotional response to things than a trend."

DEVELOPED A STYLE IN:

"College. For the first time I took ownership of my style, and I loved it. It was my uniform, I called it; I had dark jeans that I loved and a tank top, and I'd change out the scarves and the cardigan."

FAVORITE OUTFIT OF ALL TIME:

"My rehearsal dinner dress. It was understated; beaded, all-black, cocktail length. Something felt really special about it that I loved."

TO THRIFT OR NOT TO THRIFT?

"I love to thrift and repurpose because there can be so much waste in the fashion industry."

FAVORITES:

"Goodwill, Amelia Maine, Found, Portland Flea for All, Forget-Me-Nots."

INTERNATIONAL STYLE ICONS:

"Iris Apfel. I love her use of mixed patterns and bold, funky, chunky accessories. I'm really drawn to people with a bold colorful style. And Diane Keaton, super classic, beautiful and crisp."

PINE TREE STATE STYLE ICONS:

"Portia Clark for the way her eclectic eye meets classic execution (Her jewelry line Portia Clark Pearls and vintage/found barn Portia's Barn are prime examples). Jennifer Connor (merchandising at Home Remedies) for her effortless look mixed with her eye for natural toned and textured vintage jewelry. Amy Redfern Griffith (proprietor of Amelia Maine) for her love of high end, classic designer looks (and upcycling)."

WHAT WON'T YOU WEAR?

"Low rise jeans. I will never wear them again!"

BEST DEAL EVER:

"$12 at a Goodwill in Florida for a pair of Levi's, a neutral tone linen top and a pair of leather mules."

BIGGEST PURCHASE EVER:

"A pair of Manolo Blahniks on sale at Nordstrom Rack; I bought them years ago so I don't remember the price, but they were the most expensive purchase other than my wedding dress."

BEAN BOOTS OR NOT?

"I own two pairs, but I really only wear one pair, so the other pair is about due to be passed on."

ALL AROUND GREAT LOCAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCE?

"Amelia in Boothbay. Body positivity philosophy. Won't let you buy a piece if you don't feel totally amazing in it."

COMFORT CLOTHES:

"Jammies! I take off my makeup, take off my bra and then get into my jammies. I've been really into matching sets and vintage linen nightgowns in the summer."

Amanda Whitegiver is a lifestyle family photographer who adores dark chocolate and singing with her two daughters.

THE DISHWARE DILEMMA

Dishes are made to be broken. Here's how to host without stress. OK, less stress.

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY SARAH HOLMAN

Summer in Maine means lots of out-of-state visitors, neighborhood barbeques and impromptu gatherings. I love the opportunity to host, but I frequently find myself in a dishware dilemma: Bust out the wedding china, use the low-stress melamine, set the everyday dishes? And then what about the serveware? My Asian-inspired crackle-glazed trays don't exactly go with the inherited Williamsburg Potpourri-patterned dishes I use daily. In a perfect world, all the things in my china cabinet would coordinate, or at least play nicely together. For most hosts, though, dinnerware is a collection of sets and individual pieces acquired over years. So how does the continuity-craving party thrower deal with variation? I turned to an expert to find out.

Christine Burns Rudalevige is a professional food writer and stylist and her husband is a political scientist and professor at Bowdoin College. They have lived all over the world, and Rudalevige has found that entertaining is a great way to meet new people. She hosts a party of at least eight monthly. "Hospitality is key to belonging to a community," she says. "I extend first. I don't wait to be invited."

When Rudalevige buys dishes, she buys white. "I have inherited Wedgwood, but there are only six in the set." She supplemented the classic china with white plates of varying patterns. Rudalevige estimates she has 20 basic dinner plates, each of which she bought for less than $2. She doesn't want to worry about breakage. The same is true for glassware; she doesn't want guests to feel guilty if they drop one.

Mixing glassware sets can further reduce breakage stress. Nikaline Iacono owns Vessel & Vine, a retail beer and wine shop and bar in Brunswick that also sells vintage glassware from the 1920s-1990s. When dealing with older pieces, things don't always come in complete sets, so Iacono often assembles her own. "I put together sets based on themes," Iacono says. She marries color, style of glass and patterns to hold sets together. "It's a fun way to do it," she says, "and if something breaks, it's not the end of the world, because you're not looking for an exact replacement."

Glass and dish cleanup are also on Rudalevige's mind when she hosts a party. She doesn't set out more dishes than fit in her dishwasher, because, "No one wants to be washing dishes until 2 a.m. after a party." Before the meal, Rudalevige usually serves one passed appetizer on a napkin, along with a cocktail. At her table, she uses antique doilies crafted by her grandmother as placemats (no tablecloth) and silver napkin rings. She coordinates napkins with candles and flowers (both low as not to obstruct sightlines and conversation) for a pop of color. She then sets dinner plates and often tops them with wide, shallow bowls, which work for pasta, soups and stews, or meal-sized salads. The dinner plate stays on the table—whether it was used or not—through all the courses, including the post-entrée salad and cheese platter Rudalevige typically serves. Dessert gets a new dish as needed.

When Iacono considers the most important glassware for entertaining, a good wine glass is at the top of her list. Vintage is nice, but vintage wine glasses are harder to find because wine glasses are used a lot and prone to breakage. And, Iacono notes, nowadays we use a much larger glass. "The shape and the aesthetic [of wine glasses] has changed," she says. Instead, she chooses a modern, stemless glass and likes something a bit more delicate than the most inexpensive options. Her favorite brand is Riedel, which can run up to $59 for two glasses, but Iacono swears by the marked-down selection at the off-price retailer TJ Maxx. "The selection is higher quality than I'd find at a restaurant supply store, for much less money."

Rudalevige also shops TJ Maxx for dinnerware, including her serveware, which is also white. She opts for multi-purpose pieces and stays away from anything super-specific, like those long, skinny dishes that are only for serving olives. "They're impossible to get your fingers into!" she jokes. Her only course-specific choice is a wooden salad bowl. "It's usually the only bowl that gets passed, and wood is a bit lighter." She also owns fish forks, because it's something she serves often.

When she's throwing a party and serving a signature cocktail, Iacono loves a punch bowl with accompanying cups. "You can batch out a delicious cocktail without having to worry about mixing during the party." Add a big ice ring and some frozen berries and you have a self-serve option that will last several hours. She mixes and matches beyond the 12 cups that typically come with the bowl to have enough for a big group.

For both dinner and drinks, the resounding message from the pros is clear: Dishes and glasses are made to be used. If you have a piece that is too sacred to imagine losing to breakage, display it. Otherwise, pour, serve and enjoy without worry. There's always another $2 white plate.

Sarah Holman is a writer living in Portland. She is enthusiastic about cheese plates, thrift shop treasures and old houses in need of saving. Find her online at storiesandsidebars.com.

RUDALEVIGE'S GO-TO WHITE SERVING DISHES

- 2 flat round dishes for vegetables and other things that lie flat
- 2 wide, deep square bowls for salads, side dishes and pasta
- 2 large, shallow, rectangle dishes for things like meat and fish, with enough lip that juices don't spill

IACONO'S MUST-HAVE GLASSES

- **Wine:** stemmed or not
- **Collins:** can double as a water glass and is taller and skinnier than a rocks glass
- **Rocks:** a double or single version, shorter and squatter than a Collins glass
- **Coupe:** a wide, shallow glass for straight up cocktails like Manhattans or mixed drinks like margaritas (legends says the coupe was modeled after the shape of Marie Antoinette's breasts)
- **Roly poly (how can you resist the name?):** similar to a stemless wine glass but smaller and made with slightly thicker glass for increased durability. Perfect for outdoor use and Mad Men-esque whiskey neat pours.

Photo by Tim Coburn

Evvie Drake Starts Over by Linda Holmes
Ballantine Books

STARTING OVER

Linda Holmes' has a homerun with debut novel about honesty, second chances and baseball

BY AMY CANFIELD

The title character of *Evvie Drake Starts Over* has been carrying around a heavy secret. She didn't love her husband, a hometown golden boy turned revered hometown doctor, who was killed in a car crash. On the day of the accident, she was finally, clandestinely leaving him. Forced to play the grieving widow at age 33, Evvie can't bring herself to be honest with even those closest to her and it just about paralyzes her.

Dean, a famous New York Yankees pitcher humiliated that he inexplicably has lost his ability to throw—suffering a case of the "yips" in baseball lingo—comes to Evvie's unnamed Midcoast Maine town to lie low and attempt to get his life back.

Author Linda Holmes, co-host of NPR's Pop Culture Happy Hour podcast, endows Evvie and Dean with witty and sharp dialogue that gives them a fine chemistry. But love alone isn't enough for these two heavily-baggaged people to live happily after. Starting over in the face of human hangups (and very recognizable relationship realities) isn't easy.

Holmes, 48, lives in Washington D.C., but spent a few summers as a child on Spruce Head in Penobscot Bay, "got to know" Rockland and then returned as an adult. That's when she started thinking about setting a story here.

"I always like stories that take place somewhere particular, with the jobs and weather and sounds of that place," she says. "In this case, it also gave me an opportunity to explore the idea of what a home is and what feeling at home is."

She ended up writing a lot of the book at the Camden Public Library.

Sharp, smart and real, *Evvie Drake Starts Over* is a definite for your summer reading list. Holmes talked to MWM about the challenges of living in small communities, male-female friendships and the yips as a metaphor.

Q: How did the character of Evvie and her circumstances present herself to you?

A: What came to me first was the idea of complicated grief. I imagined what it would be like to be at someone's funeral when you didn't love them as much as people thought you did, which is an experience I think a lot of people have had. The image of people taking her by the elbow to comfort her existed in every version of the story.

Q: How does the sense of place in *Evvie Drake* add to the novel?

A: Part of what the book is about is a community that's incredibly loving in a way that can be both wonderful and difficult. Evvie is in this place where people know her, where they care about her and have known her all her life. But that makes the weight of keeping secrets from them much heavier.

Q: Evvie says she's on "Evvie Drake, take three" and both she and Dean eventually make new and different lives for themselves. What is your personal experience with "re-doing" yourself?

A: I'm a career-changer. I went to law school, but then I quit my law career when I was 36 to go into writing cultural criticism. A few months before I turned 40, I started a podcast, and that's been a huge part of my life ever since. And now I'm writing fiction. It's a pretty defining characteristic of mine, I think, that I need to be able to do new things regularly. I need that sense that I'm conquering a new challenge.

Q: Evvie's best friend, Andy, is male, and changes in their relationship weigh on Evvie. Were you trying to say anything in particular about male-female friendships?

A: I think male-female friendships among straight people are a weirdly unexplored universe. They exist all over my life and my friends' lives, and yet you still

get people having these silly conversations in popular culture about whether they're possible. Of course they're possible! Most people you know probably have them, if they think about it. Are they precisely like same-sex friendships for heterosexual people? No, they're not precisely the same. But does that mean they're fraught with conflicting sexy feelings? It does not. And I really wanted to write that story. All friendships, I think, have those moments of tension where one friend gets into a new relationship and somebody feels a little left behind. And I think those moments are a little more fraught, because it looks a lot like what romantic jealousy would look like, even though that's not what it is. I really wanted to spend some time with that, as a source of conflict.

Q: You've said your book is about "love, friendship, guilt, grief and baseball." What was it about baseball that made you want to include it?

A: I became totally fascinated by the yips after I saw Mackey Sasser, who used to be a catcher for the Mets, totally lose the ability to make throws back to the pitcher. Just the toss back, after the pitch. He couldn't do it. He would struggle to make himself take the ball out of his glove. It was one of the strangest things I ever saw, and one of the scariest. It was so awful that it was so compelling that it was irresistible to me. I think it's a great metaphor for what to do when all of a sudden, your plans just collapse. Which is a little bit what happened to Evvie, too, so it seemed like they belonged in a story together. I also just love baseball, honestly.

Q: Anything else you'd like your readers to know about the book?

A: I started it in 2012 as a National Novel Writing Month project, and I got about three days into the month and had written maybe 15 pages, and then there was a flood in my apartment. I had to move out, and everything came to a stop. But I had those 15 pages, and after that, I chipped away at it whenever I could, and I probably had about a third of it done when I finally got more focused on it in the fall of 2016. So I really encourage writers: if there's a book that won't leave you alone, don't be afraid to pick it up whenever you feel the urge, even if it seems like you're getting nowhere. Because by definition, as long as you're writing, you're getting somewhere.

Amy Canfield is deputy editor of Maine Women Magazine and managing editor of two weekly newspapers.

FOOD FUN

BY MAGGIE KNOWLES

"Ah! The best eater in my practice! Do you still eat anchovies?"

Up until a couple of years ago, that is how my boy's pediatrician greeted him. Not wanting to take away his opportunity to rejoice in this strange kid who ate stinky fish from the can, I would grimace and hastily change the subject to a made-up rash. Because, while for years this kid did once delight in eating oily, disgusting, tiny fish with his fingers, he'd gone radically unradical.

Along with passing on anchovies, he turned away from any food resembling anything from the natural world. The foods that had helped him grow into a healthy 8-year old were suddenly a huge fat nope.

He had fallen for the commercial trickster methods of sugar-laced, movie-based garbage in colorful packaging.

So at the crossroads of starvation vs. giving in we stood.

Argh. How to get him to eat good food again? You could sneak broccoli in brownies (does any kid really fall for this?), pass off smoothies as milkshakes, bribe, yell or threaten. But I don't believe food should ever be used a punishment or reward. I cringe hearing parents using dessert as a bribe for good behavior or threatening to withhold food if the kids don't do X, Y or Z.

Sidenote: Because we are the best parents before we have kids, I was the first to judge parents who defaulted to pizza, fast-food or snacking from the Target aisles for dinner. I mean, my goodness, how lazy! HA. Moms, I get it now. I apologize for my pre-baby tongue clicks and disapproving eye rolls. To wit: Thursday is now standing pizza night because it is one night I am guaranteed that I don't have to deal. But while it could be a super simple solution to make every night pizza night, it is our duty to expose kids to foods that won't put them on cholesterol meds at 13.

One incredible loophole to picky eaters is to create interactive meals. Go out for Hibachi; after watching the flames and those impressive knife skills your kid will chow down. (Kon Asian Bistro in Westbrook and Hana Asian Cuisine in Windham expanded my kid's horizons.) And I know I just I mentioned cholesterol meds, but my next interactive tip does involve melted cheese. At Alice and Lulu's in the Sugarloaf Village, they have a raclette table where you gather around and grill meats and veggies then pour melted cheeses over everything. It is the best hack ever. I have never seen my kiddo more into trying new things (he willingly ate venison sausage) and he was honing his cooking skills.

I bought one of the grills to use at home and it was just as fun and successful. Kids are more enticed to eat food they get to create, and it doesn't have to involve flame or oozing cheese either. Turn your kitchen counter into a buffet with make your own tacos, burgers or noodle bowls. Bonus, you get to use all those cute little bowls you've accumulated.

Kids also adore eating foods they get to grow. My boy will never touch a tomato from the store, but greedily gobbles the little sweet ones from the vine. Even if you don't have space for a full garden, you can pop petite peppers, fresh herbs, cocktail tomatoes and pickling cukes in pots. The other benefit is, of course, kids get a deeper appreciation for nature and how to nurture living things.

Sadly, we live in a society where food represents much more than just something we eat for energy. As parents, we can gently start shifting the tone around food from something we stuff into our mouth to mask pain, sadness and boredom to something that fuels all of the things we love to do.

Maggie Knowles writes about all things kid. She and her family live in Yarmouth, where she gardens, keeps bees and refuses to get rid of her stilettos.

Maine Women Magazine welcomes reader submitted poems and images. Please send them to verse_view@mainewomenmagazine.com.

Photo by Anne Ireland

True Home

By Kat Farrin, Peaks Island

at 70
i never expected
to consider living in an 8' x 11'
greenhouse shed

yet

at any age
my true home
resides
in
nature

It’s fun to be the boss!

It’s 2019: People aren’t shocked to find a woman behind the sales desk. But that doesn’t make the job any less challenging. That’s okay, because facing challenges and overcoming them is why we’re in charge now. The car business? It’s not a man’s world, it’s our world.

Dawn Maietta
Sales Manager
Lee Credit Express, Auburn

Annemarie Heath
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