

Spring 2018



# PANACHE

Quarterly Newsletter, Les Dames D'Escoffier Chicago

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## Konnichiwa: Embracing the food and culture of Japan

By Jean True 🍷

For years, I've been all about France. I am still engaged with French cuisine and culture, but it was time to expand my horizons and venture to a country I never thought I'd visit. Japan! Friends of mine, Mike and Takako Sterr invited me to join them for several weeks while they were in Kyoto (Takako's home town), for several months. How could I refuse?

I arrived in Tokyo on Halloween. Even the Japanese celebrate this festive day. Our first dinner in Tokyo was at a lively pub. Beer...yes! Hamburgers...no! Takako ordered tempura, and dashi broth with vegetables. The cartoon character, Doraemon, was the main attraction, leading us in playing Heads and Tails. Who knew? Such fun!

The next two days were spent sightseeing Tokyo. We strolled the beautiful East Garden of the Imperial Palace, took numerous pictures of adorable children, the sacred temple, Senso-ji, in Asakusa and market, and Japanese girls in kimonos, taking selfies. Our lunch was at a neighborhood restaurant for a traditional

meal of soba noodles with dashi dipping sauce, vegetables, and tea. Must admit, the art of eating with chopsticks was challenging. Using chopsticks, you must maneuver the soba, udon, or matcha noodles from the plate into the bowl of dipping sauce, pick them up to suck and slurp the noodles to your mouth. After several tries, success!

The next day was an awe-inspiring visit to the famous Tsukiji wholesale market. We walked many aisles of traditional Japanese foods, watched people eating skewered omelets, grilled oysters, rice crackers, and cones of black sesame or matcha tea ice cream. It is the largest fish market in the world we were told. Most of the seafood is exported to restaurants world wide, including those in Chicago. What I found inviting were the temples bordering the market. People will stop their work momentarily to reflect at these sacred places. Carrying bags of nori, ocha (Japanese tea) and dried bonito flakes, we were off to the Shinkansen (the bullet train) station to travel to Kyoto.

My hosts' mission was for me to have a trip of a lifetime. And, that they fulfilled! The next 12 days were filled with visiting temples, taking day trips, and dining at a neighborhood French restaurant, Pazapa. Another favorite restaurant was a 16-seat Japanese bistro, Ohiro, where the chef/owner cooked, served, and tended bar. We dined there twice to savor his creative dishes. Plus the chilled sake was the best! Sake is produced in Fushimi, where the water is the purist.

One of the highlights was a five-hour Kyoto walking tour with 87-year-old, Samurai Joe Okada, an experience not to be missed! Other adventures included: Hiroshima; Uji, where matcha tea is grown; the acclaimed national treasure, the Himeji Castle; Miyajima, where deer roam freely; and a charming village, Kurashiki.

Yes, the trip was magical. To experience a culture new to me has so enriched my soul. I also brought back a favorite motto of the Japanese: "make tomorrow better than today."

| The Golden Pavilion, a Buddhist hall.



| Jean True learns to handle a sword from Samurai Joe.



| Sushi, dumplings, and a white radish hurricane at Ohiro restaurant, Kyoto.



| Typical lunch fare is udon noodle soup with vegetables.





## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Chicago Dames,

Spring greetings to all!

The New Year began with a bang for Les Dames of Chicago! We started with a spectacular celebration in January at the party-perfect home of

Stacey Ballis and husband Bill Thurmond.

Stacey recruited an all-star team, including Dames Judith Hines, Shannon Kinsella and yours truly, to make sure the evening was fun, delicious, and memorable. Jolene Worthington of Eli's Cheesecake graciously donated delicious cheesecake for dessert, and Melissa Yen's peach Melba syrup was the perfect surprise in the evening's favor bag. (Read more about Stacey's experience working with Melissa to produce the syrup in this issue.)

A group of Dames also gathered at Chicago Hot Glass in January for a fascinating demonstration of blown sugar by Jacquy Pfeiffer of The French Pastry School, followed by a hands-on glass-blowing session. Thanks to Program Chair Carla Williams, and Patty Erd and Julie Ratowitz for a hot time on a cold winter's night!

And for some hot coffee on a cold morning, a group of 12 Dames gathered on a frosty, February morning at Halfwit Coffee Roasters, where they tasted a selection of expertly brewed coffees (see story on the next page). The momentum continued when 20 Dames met at Stacey Ballis' home (quickly becoming our unofficial headquarters!) for Dames Who Read. Coordinated by Stacey, Judith Hines, and Shannon Kinsella, guests were treated to presentations by Jill Brockman, from The Mill at Janie's Farm in Central Illinois, and Dame Ellen King of Hewn Bakery. Everyone got to make their own starter to take home. I suspect there is a lot of bread-baking going on right about now!

Also happening now: The Nominating Committee, led by Dame Sharon Olson, is wrapping up its work on board positions; and the New Member Committee, helmed by Dame Elizabeth Donovan, is taking applications for new members. Visit [www.lesdameschicago.org](http://www.lesdameschicago.org) for nomination forms.

With spring within arm's reach, it is also nearly time for our most important event of the year: Culinarium! The date is Monday, April 30, and committees have been busy and resourceful, planning an evening that will put the FUN in fundraising! Email updates go out regularly; if you are not receiving these, please contact me.

There are still opportunities to be involved:

- Buy your tickets now!
- Invite your friends! Send the email invite to all of your friends and contacts!
- Hang a poster or display a stack of postcards in your place of business!
- Buy an extra ticket for an industry influencer — a culinary student or journalist, to suggest a few.

Happy Spring,

*Veronica Hastings*



Les Dames d'Escoffier International

### Executive Board 2017-2018:

President: Veronica Hastings  
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## Steps to a peachy syrup and a Grand Dame (drink, that is!)

By Stacey Ballis 🍷

This year, Chicago Les Dames went back to their roots for their annual post-holiday celebration, bringing in a few Escoffier-themed treats. The highlight was a custom peach Melba syrup, made by Dame Melissa Yen of Jo Snow Syrups, to honor his most famous dessert. I was lucky enough to serve as assistant during the syrup's creation, and it was exciting to peek behind the curtain and witness the process of going from idea to product.

Since peach Melba as a dessert has three simple flavors, the poached peach, the raspberry coulis, and the vanilla ice cream, Melissa had a pretty focused brief. But because two of these flavors, the vanilla and raspberry, can be very intense, balancing the syrup to not lose the peach was going to be the challenge.

We began by cooking down frozen peach slices in sugar syrup for nearly an hour, to extract their flavor. Because the syrup has to be smooth and shelf stable, you are essentially steeping the fruit in the base to get the intensity of flavor that you want. Frozen peaches were necessary (since peaches were out of season), and needed a boost from some commercial organic peach concentrate. Once the peach flavor was where we wanted it, we strained out the peach solids, and began to make small test batches with the other flavorings, measuring in concentrated raspberry juice and Nielsen Massey vanilla paste until the flavor was perfect. Then we adjusted our numbers upward and added those ingredients to the large batch, a bit at a time, tasting after every addition to make sure the flavor was just right! Once the syrup was perfect, we strained it into 5-ounce bottles, tamper sealed the caps, and put on custom labels so that every party attendee could take home a treat.

While the syrup is great for making custom sodas or drizzling over ice cream or yogurt, we also created some cocktail recipes with it. Here was our favorite!

### The Grande Dame

Makes one cocktail

- 1 1/2 ounces Bourbon
- 1/2 ounce Amaro Nonino
- 1/4 ounce Amaretto
- 1/4 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 1 ounce peach Melba syrup
- 1/2 ounce peach balsamic vinegar or apple cider vinegar
- 1 lemon twist

Add all ingredients except lemon twist to a cocktail shaker. Add ice; shake well. Pour over ice in a short glass. Garnish with a lemon twist.



# Sipping and learning with the authors of “Craft Coffee”

By Carol Mighton Haddix 🌿

If you hadn't noticed, coffee is a THING. It has become local, artisanal, and focused on quality. Small roasters have appeared throughout the city, some with small cafes where they feature small-batch roasted coffee, label it with points of origin, and serve it as “pour overs” and “full immersions.” It's a bit complicated, coffee is.

But Jessica Easto can translate the ins and outs of coffee with the best of them. Her new book, “Craft Coffee” (Surrey Books, \$19.95), written with her husband Andreas Willhoff, leads us through all we need to know about brewing the best cup of coffee at home. Easto and Willhoff led a group of Dames and guests through the brewing steps during a February seminar at Halfwit Coffee Roasters on Fullerton.

Easto explained that the history of coffee has gone through three waves since the 1800s, and we are now in the third wave, which she calls the craft-coffee phase. Coffee professionals today turn to specialty beans, use precise roasting methods, and embrace brewing methods that enhance the flavor of the beans. She offered a tasting of coffees brewed by pour over (think Chemex), French press, and cold brewing. She explained why the grind of the beans is important, depending on brewing method (medium fine for pour overs; coarse for French press). For the most uniform grind (and thus better flavor extraction), purchase a burr grinder, Easto said. Those small coffee bean grinders produce uneven sizes of ground coffee.

Easto's book does not include much info on electric brewing machines. “Very few of them can brew a good cup of coffee,” she said. And those few are all expensive, usually above \$200, she added. She gives a list in her book of nine acceptable machines tested by the Specialty Coffee Association. She also lists other types of coffee equipment, giving the pros and cons of each as well as how to brew coffee with them.

Arabica beans are the best beans for a good quality cup. Easto recommended trying different types of beans to learn your preferences. Then experiment with water ratio, grind, and brewing time to find your ideal cup of joe. And hosting a coffee-tasting party, she said, is a fun way to learn about coffee.



## 4 tips for brewing the perfect cup

Jennifer Easto and Andreas Willhoff suggest the following in their book:

1. Use filtered water, not water from the tap, especially in Chicago which has high chlorine amounts in the water. Do not use distilled water.
2. Rinse the cone paper filter first; this removes the paper taste and creates almost a seal between the paper and the walls of a cone device. Some airflow is needed, though, to regulate the drip time properly.
3. Use a burr grinder to process the coffee beans, from extra fine to extra coarse. Most pour over devices need a medium to medium fine grind.
4. Use a scale to measure water and beans for best results. While you can get a good cup by using 2 tablespoons of ground coffee per 6 ounces of water, a better method is a ratio range of 1 part coffee to 15-17 parts water.

| Jessica Easto signs her book for Toria Emas



| Jessica Easto, at Halfwit Coffee



| 'Craft Coffee' explores the brew in depth.



# Celebrating women with Culinarium '18 gala

By Judy Hevrdejs 🌿

How do you celebrate the women who have shaped — and are shaping — what and how Chicago eats and drinks? You head to Culinarium '18 on April 30 at Venue West, where this year's theme "Powering She-cago's Food Scene" will do just that.

Dames Susan Szymanski, Dana Benigno and Wei Fraser are co-chairs for our chapter's gala fundraiser. They've been working with their committees to create an evening that offers some history, with hors d'oeuvre inspired by seven founding Chicago Dames. And some innovation, with online bidding for silent auction items via an app on guests' phones.

Of course, fabulous feasting is a hallmark of Culinarium. So dinner will be prepared by chefs Amanda Downing of Bistronomic, Dame Suzanne Florek of Salty Fig, Sarah Rinkavage of Marisol, and Laura Soncrant of The Growling Rabbit. A "Dessert Dash" will showcase many of the city's sweets artists. An array of sips, including a cocktail created by Violet Hour's Eden Laurin exclusively for the event, are on the evening's menu. There also will be dancing to the band, Generation.

One ingredient that will guarantee Culinarium '18 is a delicious success: Volunteers. Dames willing to help with setup or lend a hand during the gala are needed, said Szymanski. "It is always great to have extra help."

Wei Fraser (fraser@lakeshorebev.com) is the best contact if you want to help with setup before the event, Szymanski (chefsuzs@gmail.com) said. Dana Benigno (dana@chicagocooks.com) is the contact regarding the menu and live auction.

"We do need help with check in," she said, as well as directing guests around the venue. "And we need help with silent auction in terms of telling people how to set up the silent auction bid on their phone

"We also would also love to have additional silent auction items," said Szymanski. "We are looking for some great experiences, cooking classes, tours, that sort of thing. Every little bit helps." Susan Weller is the contact (susanweller@sbcglobal.net).

And Szymanski added: "We encourage every Dame to bring a guest or encourage a guest to buy a ticket for the event and attend with them."

Culinarium is held every two years. It raises funds for educational and community outreach programs, as well as scholarships to inspire emerging leaders and enrich Chicago's culinary scene. Since its inception in 1982, the Chicago Chapter of Les Dames has given nearly \$1 million to these organizations and individuals.



Culinarium tickets are \$175 per person. Or \$2,500 for a table of 10 with reserve wine pairings. For tickets, go to Brown Paper Tickets:

<https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3320024>

**Have questions about volunteering? Contact the co-chairs.**

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