MORE LEADING LADIES IN WHITE

BY JO ABBIE

NAME: HANNA PHAM

RESTAURANT: 19 MARKET
19 N. Market St., San Jose
(408) 280-6111 www.19market.com

Culinary Training

I'm self-taught. My culinary expertise was born in the kitchen of my mom as a child growing up in Vietnam. I've been very fortunate to have been able to travel to many distant and exotic places. I've learned to combine the different flavors and authentic spices grounded by the smell of my mother's cooking. This is how 19 Market was born.

Years in the Kitchen

19 Market is about to go into its third year, and before that I ran Clay Pot with my then husband in the same location, from 2002. Clay Pot served very traditional Vietnamese food, and I realized that the Downtown audience was more mainstream and young, so when I changed from Clay Pot to 19 Market, I closed the restaurant down for a few months. We totally remodeled the place, gave it a more hip décor and an atmosphere more suited to the clientele of that area.

Signature Dish

My shaking beef. I use filet mignon, and I cut it cube style – that's how my family has done it for generations. Then we marinate the beef in a little garlic and oil, and then it's wok tossed. It's cooked really fast in a really hot wok, so it's kind of burned on the outside, but juicy on the inside, so it just seems to melt in your mouth.

Favorite South Bay Restaurant

I've always loved Emile's Restaurant in San Jose. I started going there back in college. I've tried other French food, but somehow Emile's just has a place in my heart. And I love the new iTapas wine bar in Palo Alto; I love the concept of the small dishes.

Favorite Cooking Show

Iron Chef in Japan.

Dish to wow friends

Roasted Crab cooked the traditional Vietnamese way. We start out with live crabs; we won't use frozen. We steam it first with beer, then we take off the shell, clean everything up, and then flash-fry it to seal all the juices. Then we put it in a wok and add butter and garlic and a little bit of fish sauce – that's the secret. And then we sauté it with green onions and hot peppers. We use jalapeño instead of the traditional hot, hot Vietnamese peppers, as people here like the milder flavor.

One thing you'll never put on the menu

Anything that is not fresh.

Dish you will always have on the menu

Classic fresh spring rolls.

Advice for aspiring female chefs

It's all about balance. My Asian culture tells me that although there is chaos in my lifestyle of being a single mom and a chef/owner, I have to strike a balance with all the challenges I face. With hard work and total belief in yourself, you CAN do it!

NAME: JESSE COOL

RESTAURANT: FLEA ST. CAFÉ
3607 Alameda de las Pulgas, Menlo Park
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Culinary Training

I've been cooking all my life, watching the grandmothers and mothers of my Jewish-Italian family. My father owned a grocery store, too, and he used to cook for his staff. And my uncle had a slaughterhouse, and my dad also had an organic garden. So I learned about food and cooking and the pleasure of it. I really learned in that way, but I was also on the line for nine years, and I feel like I learned what most people do in school from watching other people. When you watch someone break a sauce or make a mistake, you also watch what he or she does to fix it.

Years in the Kitchen

1974 Good Earth Restaurant, Palo Alto/Head Waitress
1976-89 Late for the Train Restaurant, Menlo Park, Owner/Creator/Chef
1982-Present Flea St. Café, Owner/Creator/Chef
1997-99 Two Fools Café and Restaurant Owner/Creator/Chef
1999-Present jZcool eatery, Owner/Creator/Chef
2000-Present The Cool Cafe at The Stanford University Cantor Art Center
2004 Organic To Go, Founding Chef

Signature Dish

I love to braise, I love to use cuts of meat that are slow-cooked. It changes seasonally and it always has – it's very much driven by what's in the garden, what I can get at the market. My favorite dishes are plant-life driven, although I love to eat meat and drink. [Presently], I would be using organic braised short ribs on a parsnip, potato with grilled asparagus, and garlic and green onions, as they are coming up in the garden right now.

Favorite South Bay Restaurant

Without offending all of the wonderful restaurants in the South Bay (because there are a lot now), my favorite is Kaygetsu. When I eat out, I like to eat food that's very different than mine, but that is also prepared in the right way – and that's Kaygetsu. I just love it! Also, Koma Sushi Restaurant in Menlo Park – I probably eat once a week at this tiny, wonderful restaurant!

Favorite Cooking Show

I really like Mario Batali, because when he cooks his food, I can tell it's delicious! And he's kind of a down-to-earth, real guy.

Dish to wow friends

I would do a really good meatloaf. Right now, I would use ground buffalo or organic Coleman beef, because the reason the meatloaf is so good is because the meat is so delicious. And I put a lot of vegetables in it. I grate carrots and onions and parsnips, and add mushrooms, so it makes it very light. It's not just meat; you get a bit of everything in one bite.

One thing you'll never put on the menu

I would never put foie gras on my menu, or veal, or out-of-season tomatoes, or seafood that was produced with any unsustainable measures. I didn't have shrimp on my menu for seven years, which was the hardest thing in the world for my staff to explain way before the sustainable seafood movement!

Dish you will always have on the menu

There are a couple. One is, we do a local, sustainable seafood on a simple seasonal mash. Right now, it's rutabaga with a little truffle oil and an array of whatever vegetables are in season. We serve it with three different seasonal dipping sauces, so people can really taste the fish and just add the sauce as they like it. And our vegetarian dish – it's a local Harvey Farms goat cheese and mushroom Wellington with a balsamic beet reduction. It's a vegetarian dish that takes time, but it really makes people who don't eat meat find something other than pasta Primavera.

Advice for aspiring female chefs

Stay true to your heart, your soul, and your palate. Be tough, but remain soft. Compete, but be flexible. Always realize that you're an equal. Do not tolerate injustice against anyone. And don't use being a girl as an excuse.

NAME: KERRY DOLAN

RESTAURANT: OAK CITY BAR & GRILL
1029 El Camino Real, Menlo Park
(650) 321-6882 www.oakcitybarandgrill.com

Culinary Training

I went to the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in Hyde Park in upstate New York.

Years in the Kitchen

I started out in high school, since I was 16, doing catering and stuff, and then after CIA, I moved out here. I worked in a few restaurants up in San Francisco, and I've been on the Peninsula since '99, so that's a total of 17 years in the restaurant business.

Signature Dish

That would be our pork porterhouse. It's a Niman Ranch pork porterhouse, and it comes on a bed of buttery leeks, bacon and onions, like a ragout, a little bit of potato puree and some crispy onions right on top of it. Oh, and everybody loves the mac and cheese!

Favorite South Bay Restaurant

Evvia in Palo Alto – that's probably my favorite restaurant to go to. It has great dolmas and all the Greek spreads. It's usually open late on the weekend, so I have the opportunity to go there and I really enjoy it. And if I'm going out for dinner at a normal hour, which is very rare, I love their whole roasted fish.

Favorite Cooking Show

When the show *Top Chef* was on, I really loved that. I loved the drama; it kind of takes away from your own daily drama and you can go, "Oh, at least my life isn't that intense!" And I like Bobby Flay.

Dish to wow friends

Everybody loves my crab cakes – they always ask me, "Are you gonna make the crab cakes." That, and I make this appetizer, I don't find it very fancy, it's just these bacon-wrapped water chestnuts, and everyone's like, "PLEASE MAKE THAT!" And it's the simplest thing. I don't go all "frouffy" and try to impress people. If I have friends over, it's usually very, very casual.

One thing you'll never put on the menu

That would probably be liver and onions. That's very unappetizing to me.

Dish you will always have on the menu

That would be my Maine day boat scallops. They are pan-seared and come with black trumpet mushrooms, asparagus, and leeks, and I do a white truffle butter sauce.

Advice for aspiring female chefs

Don't look at it as male to female in this industry. I think you need to look at it as a cook to a chef. And if you challenge yourself every day and stay on top of your game, you shouldn't have a problem. You should just do what you want to do and shouldn't always worry about what the person next to you is doing, because you're your own person.