

# Words That Change Our World

Local chef and the book that inspires his creativity in the kitchen

By Lou Fancher



Adam Carpenter  
Photo courtesy Lafayette Park Hotel

Adam Carpenter is fast becoming Lamorinda's carnivore troubadour. The 33-year-old executive chef at *Bistro*, the Lafayette Park Hotel's redesigned restaurant, is a culinary wizard whose poetry with pork increasingly finds its place on the establishment's plates and platters. With deep roots in Contra Costa County kitchens – Taxi's in Walnut Creek, an Alamo Baskin Robbins, Danville's Blackhawk Grill – and caché from San Francisco's now-closed Ponzu and the roaringly popular Jaspers, Carpenter has cracked open more than one cookbook.

What better man might there be, to name a life-changing foodie book?

But, in fact, he's a hard to pin down, when it comes to single selection. "Sure!" is his first response to an

invitation to name *The Book*. Reality quickly follows: Carpenter has an extensive library, including all of Thomas Keller's books. He admits, his devotion shifts according to current interests or the season. And he's fond of non-cookbook, food-related books, like Steve Dublanica's "Waiter Rant," Bill Buford's "Heat" ... and more.

Even so, when cornered by a one-book diet, he selects "Charcuterie," food writer Michael Ruhlman's and chef Brian Polcyn's 320-page narrative on the splendors of all things salted, smoked and cured. Writing ahead of a tidal wave of interest that became a trend, then a food movement by 2005, the writer/chef duo offer not just recipes for meat, but a story. Like all good tales, there's a back story and characters/ingredients following a plot/methodology. Rendered in a casserole of reverent and jubilant tones and graced with Yevgeniy Solovyev's sensitive illustrations, their book even has a clear beginning: duck confit.

"A powerful mania descended on me a decade ago when I first tasted duck confit," Ruhlman writes, in an opening chapter. (Confit, one learns,

involves rubbing a food with spices, submerging it in oil or sugared water for often lengthy cooking, and storing the tender, luscious result in its own fat in a cool, dark place.) From Ruhlman's recollection of his original inspiration on, "Charcuterie" is a delicious waltz of recipes and creation; from salt and smoke to sausage and Cinderella Meat Loaf. Resource listings for meat suppliers and "not optional" sauces and condiments round out the complete literary package.

"I remember reading and testing recipes for hours and weeks; learning and developing recipes to fit a high volume of food for a busy French restaurant," Carpenter recalled. After following the books lengthier processes – some requiring weeks to complete – he got creative. "You start branching off to new ideas and new menu creations," he said.

At *Bistro*, Carpenter brings his "huge butchery background" together with locally-provided meat and produce from his frequent farmer's market sprees. "I have a passion for local and home-grown vegetables," he confided. He also bears a passion for pigs; evidenced by the pig-cut tattoo he bears on one forearm. "The pig

happens to be my favorite animal and the one used more and more in every kitchen across the world. We can all relate to that animal," he said.

*Bistro* has house-made sausages and cured meats "all over the menu," according to Carpenter. Chef's bites, sprightly named "Amuse," are delivered at the beginning of meals. "Often, this will be a sausage, or an air-cured meat, or a tuna cooked confit for hours. Fun items are explored here," he said.

Offering advice, or simply a description of the cookbooks he values, Carpenter said he looks beyond recipes to workable techniques. "Then you can trust them for years to come," he said. Obtainable ingredients – nothing overly exotic – and cookbooks emphasizing the use of locally sourced produce, meat, dairy and grains, also fit his criteria. "When a book has good ideas and amazing pictures, that goes a long way for me," he added, unable to curb his enthusiasm to just three top features.

But perhaps there are certain things – chef's imaginations, family meals, generosity, and especially, a list of favorite books – that should never be put on a diet.

Lou Fancher is a journalist who, over the course of her career interviewing a wide variety of people, has been struck by how often written or spoken words influenced the local life and purpose of her articles' subjects. If you have a book, a play, a famous quote or a film that has been important in your life and are willing to share your story with Lou – it requires only a 15-minute phone interview – please email [storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com) and include "Words" in the subject line.

# Glamour Guaranteed

Oscar party at the Rheem features Academy Award winner Margaret O'Brien

By Sophie Braccini



Last year's Oscar party

The Rheem Theatre will be the place to be for non-stop Oscar entertainment March 2, including dining, dancing, discovering film memorabilia in the only Classic Film Hall of Fame, intertwined with a live Oscar ceremony broadcast on the big screen. Special guest Margaret O'Brien, whose performance as "Tootie" in Vincente Minnelli's "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944) won her an Academy Award as Outstanding Child Actress, will share her story.

"This will be a fun night, Lamorinda!" claims California Independent Film Festival (CAIFF) president and founder Derek Zemrak. "This is only the second time we are having a full blown Oscar party in Lamorinda." Oscar party goers will be treated to drinks, a dinner catered by Orinda restaurant, Shelbys, and the music of local singer Diamond Dave Hosley, as well as Oscar-themed games.

"When people arrive, they will be given a swag bag that will include a commemorative wine glass and a name tag with one of the Oscar nom-

inees, actor or movie," says Zemrak. "If their character wins, they will win a prize, too!" Like last year, people can bet on winners and also win prizes.

"Additionally this year we are opening a special Oscar exhibit in the Classic Film Hall of Fame and will be displaying very interesting and unusual memorabilia linked to the Oscars," says Zemrak, who is a movie director himself, well connected in Hollywood and has been collecting memorabilia for years. Many of the items in the Hall of Fame are from his private collection.

"My wife is happy that I am emptying the private museum that had taken over parts of our home," jokes Zemrak. For the first time, wardrobes of actors who were nominated to the Oscars will be on display. "For example we have Meryl Streep's original costume from the 2002 movie 'Adaptation' and Bradley Cooper's from the 2012 movie 'Silver Linings Playbook,'" says Zemrak. Visitors can view original autographed docu-

ments or explore the old movie poster room as they walk down memory lane. "This museum is unique in this country," says Zemrak. "It should attract people from all over to Lamorinda as a cool place to visit."

"This year, thanks to our sponsors, we've been able to cut the price of admission in half," adds Zemrak. "It does not mean that we don't need to fund raise anymore." The situation is quite the opposite, in fact, because the Rheem suffered a recent setback in its quest to become ADA compliant. The exterior elevator that required plans, structural engineering studies, and Town approval was rejected by the county on the grounds that it discriminated against people with disabilities because it required them to go back outside after purchasing their ticket to reach the theater's second floor.

"We are back with the option of an interior lift attached to the stair ramp," says Zemrak. "It's the same solution that failed us in the past and costs more than an outside elevator."

CAIFF believes that the needed \$12,000 to complete the project will be raised and the new lift should be installed within three months.

The Oscar party will be held from 3 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday, March 2. Tickets, which are \$50 per person and must be purchased before Feb. 16, are available online at [lamorindatheatres.com](http://lamorindatheatres.com) or by calling (925) 388-0762.

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