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AWARD-WINNING CHEF SUZANNE GOIN
ARTFULLY BLENDS LIFE'S INGREDIENTS
TO FIND BALANCE AND INSPIRATION

BY BEKAH WRIGHT PHOTOS BY DAVID YOUNG-WOLFF

As Suzanne Goin settles in on a window ledge of A.O.C. Restaurant during the photo shoot for this article, one can't help but think of a comment she's just made about the growth of the businesses she shares with partner Caroline Styne. "It's right here," she'd said, straining the top of her head against her hand in reference to a ceiling. "We always have a lot of irons in the fire, and this is the year everything happened."

Goin's path in the culinary world has seemed almost destined, following her from her native Los Angeles to Rhode Island, luring her to Berkeley and Paris, then back home again. Growing up with parents she terms "pre-foodie foodies," Goin's palate received a primary education nothing short of adventurous. Weekends and travel were planned around food, resulting in a Michelin Guide with well-turned pages. "In our family, the big treat wasn't visiting Disneyland; it was going out for a meal at a super restaurant."

Jockeying for a position behind the stove, Goin's mother cooked during the week, while her father claimed weekends. Struck by her father's passion for cooking and keen sense of seasoning, Goin gravitated to his elbow. It wasn't long before she'd staked her own spot behind the stove; its vantage point, she'd discovered, ideal for watching both the interactions and reactions of diners.

Though she'd begun working in the restaurant industry during high school at LA's Ma Maison, after graduation, Goin headed to Rhode Island to study history at Brown University. "I'd grown up in a pretty academic family, so it never occurred to me I could cook as a career." Cooking managed to wind its way into her college years with a part-time gig at Providence's Al Forno.

Post graduation, there was no silencing the kitchen's siren call. "I decided to follow my passion and pursue cooking full-time." Thus began another stage of education — becoming a self-taught chef. "I worked for a lot of great chefs: Alice Waters, George Germon and Joanne Killeen, Jody Adams,







Todd English...” says Goin. “Most of them were also self-taught and owned small, independent, unique restaurants.” She credits that “education” with helping forge her personal style and vision.

Paris came calling with a stint at Alain Passard’s L’Arpège. Then back in Los Angeles, she became the executive chef at Campanile. Fast forward a few years and Goin was ready to open her own venue. Lacking was one vital ingredient: a front of the house person. Among myriad recommendations was Caroline Styne — at the time a general manager at Sean MacPherson’s bar/restaurant, Jones Hollywood — whose own professional path had arrived at the same crossroads.

After Goin and Styne’s fateful first meeting, Styne told her husband there was “something there” with Goin. “She and I started ‘dating,’ going to dinners and lunches and talking about our goals and dreams,” says Styne, who describes the partnership as one of “restaurant soul mates.”

The partners lost their hearts to a restaurant space on Melrose Avenue, opening its doors in 1998 as Lucques. As much as Lucques was a place for Goin and Styne as restaurant soul mates, another alignment occurred there. One night at the bar, Goin’s sister, Jessica, chatted up a newly arrived chef in town,

David Lentz, owner of The Hungry Cat restaurants. A date was arranged between him and Goin by evening’s end.

Love struck the two chefs within a week. “We keep work OUT of our relationship,” Goin says of their chemistry. “People ask me if we’re competitive and yes, we both are, but never with each other. Supporting and celebrating each other is naturally easy.”

Goin and Lentz married in 2004, and now have three children and 10 restaurants between them. Such full lives lead to constant prioritizing. “Before the kids, we both worked long, crazy hours, but they were the same long, crazy hours,” she says. “We’d stay up until 4 a.m. drinking wine and talking, then sleep until noon on our days off.” Those days have been happily traded for shuttling the kids to and from school, making family dinners and doing homework.

As her family has grown, so, too, have Goin’s businesses with Styne. In 2002, A.O.C., Goin’s vision of a “full restaurant with the heart and soul of a wine bar,” opened. In her newly released *The A.O.C. Cookbook*, Goin wrote: “There is something in the conversation about what to order, in the boisterous passing of plates, and in the sharing of food that truly adds to the diners’ experience...” recalling her formative days behind the family stove.



IN OUR FAMILY,
THE BIG TREAT
WASN'T VISITING
DISNEYLAND;
IT WAS GOING OUT
FOR A MEAL AT A
SUPER RESTAURANT.





A.O.C. celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2012 with a move to a “dream home” with a strong restaurant lineage. Tucked away on 8700 West Third Street in West Hollywood, the iconic location has been home to Joe Allen, which transitioned to Orso, then later, Il Covo. It was as if this particular bit of real estate was just waiting for certain life events to unfold for Goin, including publishing her first cookbook, *Sunday Suppers at Lucques*, winning two James Beard Awards in 2006, and garnering five additional nominations.

As the photo shoot takes a break, Goin catches up with her “work wife,” Styne. What’s on their minds? Bread. In 2009, their eateries hit a growth spurt starting with Tavern and The Larder at Tavern in Brentwood, then growing in number to

seven, including the recently opened The Larder at Tavern branch at the New Tom Bradley International Terminal at LAX. A necessary addition has been the Larder Baking Company.

With this multitude of projects having reached fruition, Goin’s days are hectic. She refuels and finds balance through Pilates classes and walks in Runyon Canyon. The place she considers “refuge,” though, is home. A favorite time is “...that hour when David and I both get home from work a little early and hang out drinking wine at the kitchen table and shooting the s**t.” Another hot spot is in front of the television, indulging in Thai food over Bravo marathons.



Goin considers Mondays precious. “It’s our family day. I act like a normal mom: take my kids to school, pick them up, run errands, make dinner, play outside and sing them to bed.” With her own path in mind, what lessons does Goin impart to her children? “I teach them to love each other, be kind to others and to season their food correctly.”

A plea from those who delight in her perfectly seasoned fare...To hell with ceilings. Raise the roof. 🍷

Bekah’s travel and entertainment articles have appeared regularly in publications from Bon Appetit and TV Guide to the Los Angeles Times and her weekly Yahoo! Travel celeb column Five Miles Up With www.bekahwright.com
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TURMERIC-SPICED ROOT VEGETABLES WITH KAFFIR LIME YOGURT & MINT CHUTNEY

by Suzanne Goin

Adapted from *The A.O.C. Cookbook*. Full recipe can be found on findbliss.com

In this dish, the turmeric pairs up with cumin, coriander, and paprika to spice up roasted root vegetables and give them an unexpected and exotic twist.

- 9 small or 3 medium carrots, peeled, stems attached if possible**
- 9 small or 3 medium parsnips, peeled, stems attached if possible**
- 6 small or 2 medium turnips**
- 6 small or 2 medium rutabagas, peeled**
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 tablespoon thyme leaves**
- ½ teaspoon cumin seeds**
- ¼ teaspoon coriander seeds**
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika**
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric**
- 1 cup Greek-style yogurt**
- 1 tablespoon kaffir lime juice, plus ½ teaspoon finely grated zest**
- 2 ounces turnip or mustard greens, cleaned and sliced**
- 1 recipe Mint Chutney** (recipe follows on findbliss.com)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Slice the carrots and parsnips in half lengthwise. If they are on the bigger side, then slice each half lengthwise again, into long quarters.

Clean the turnips and rutabagas, cut off the tails, and trim the stems, leaving ¼ inch of the stems. Cut small turnips and rutabagas in halves or quarters; if they're larger, cut them in half and then into ½-inch wedges.

Toss the vegetables with the olive oil, thyme, 1 teaspoon salt, and some freshly ground pepper. Preheat two heavy-duty baking sheets in the oven for 3 to 4 minutes. Carefully remove the baking sheets from the oven, place the vegetables on them, and roast them, tossing a few times, for about 25 minutes, until they are tender and a little caramelized. While the vegetables are roasting, toast the cumin seeds in a small pan over medium-high heat about 2 minutes, until the seeds release their aroma. Using a mortar and pestle, pound the cumin, and transfer it to a small bowl. Repeat with the coriander, and add it, with the softened butter, paprika, and turmeric, to the bowl. Stir to combine well.

Stir the yogurt, lime juice, lime zest, and a heaping ¼ teaspoon salt together in a small bowl. Taste for seasoning.

When the vegetables are done, combine them in one pan and toss in the turnip greens and the turmeric butter. The heat of the roasted vegetables will melt the butter and wilt the greens. Taste for seasoning. Arrange the vegetables on a platter, and top with the kaffir lime yogurt. Spoon the mint chutney over and around the yogurt and vegetables.

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