

ALICE WATERS IS THE OWNER OF CHEZ PANISSE in Berkeley, which is to new American cuisine what the Vatican is to Catholicism. There is something surprising and disarming about Alice when you meet her. She doesn't seem like a famous person who caused a revolution, like Lenin or Le Corbusier. She is friendly and gentle—a pretty, vulnerable-looking woman. It is only after you know her a bit that you see under the soft manner the qualities people look for in a head of state or a middle linebacker: fearlessness, force of will, a degree of grandiosity, a determination that is almost, but not quite, demented.

Alice

I saw Alice recently at a party. I didn't know any of the guests except her, and she was in the kitchen madly washing champagne glasses, because it needed doing. We chatted while she washed and got slightly swacked on champagne laced with something like Cassis but much tastier and more alcoholic. She told me about her current project, a big project and a big source of frustration for her. She had been asked by the directors of the Louvre, no less, to create a restaurant as part of the museum. Imagine that—an American woman, from Berkeley, asked to create the restaurant for the Louvre, in Paris. For this modest-appearing woman washing the champagne glasses, this was an opportunity, the opportunity, to do something much more ambitious and important than just create the restaurant at the Louvre. For her, it was the chance for the cultural establishment of France to stand up against the agricultural policies of the government and some powerful sections of the European Union. In her view, the culinary traditions of France are absolutely linked to agriculture and the culture of the countryside. She believes—passionately believes—that French cuisine, and particularly Parisian cuisine, will be irreparably damaged by the current generation of agricultural politics and policies. The food of Paris depends on lots of little specialty crops grown right near the city, where they can be transported fresh. Pan-European macro agri-biz with its rationalized system of subsidies, does not have much tolerance for this sort of thing.

What Alice proposed for the Louvre was both a restaurant and a polemical exhibition that would put the relationships between food and the organization of agriculture distribution systems and economic policy right on people's palates and thus directly in their heads. The world would surely be better to live in if there were more city planners more architects, more politicians and more citizens who see the relationships between public policy and the quality of daily experience that Alice sees, and she was not willing to settle for anything less than the full realization of her vision.

The experience of visitors to this polemical restaurant/museum would be like that of my Berkeley graduate students on the night that I invited two of Alice's cohorts to a seminar. They were Patricia Untermann, San Francisco restaurant owner and food writer, and Sibella Kraus, execu-

tive director of a nonprofit called Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE). The seminar for architecture and planning students was entitled “Regionalism” and the occasion of the invitation was a fascinating article that Patricia Untermann had written on Basque separatism—the revival of Basque cuisine, and the concurrent rediscovery of local vernacular building traditions in the Basque country.

The guests arrived at class with bags of groceries and distributed to each student two string beans, two cherry tomatoes, two peppers, two plums, two apricots, and two little bunches of table grapes. One of each pair of items came from the supermarket; the other, from the group of farmers and purveyors that Sibella Kraus had helped organize to supply Chez Panisse, some other Bay Area restaurants, and the San Francisco Farmer’s Market. The differences in the taste, colors, and aromas between each of the pairs of items were absolutely stunning.

Sibella, who seems to know more about this sort of thing than anyone else on earth, then proceeded to describe in detail the land ownership, farming methods, biochemistry, land use policies, distribution networks, storage methods, marketing strategies, and economics of each piece of produce. The students (and the teacher) were spellbound, and years later, many in that class remember the experience as a major epiphany. What was demonstrated so memorably was the relationship between how things are organized and what life is like, and how very different the diminished experience of the supermarket is from what one might think of as the real thing.

Alice Waters and her colleagues like Patricia Untermann and Sibella Kraus are one of the major forces that have transformed American food. Another is Julia Child, but Alice Waters and Julia Child are very different from each other. Alice believes that cooking begins with agriculture and with forage, and she is quite willing to challenge the whole organization of everything to insure that our food supply supports a cuisine that has integrity from beginning to end. Like Alice, Julia Child is a missionary, but her mission, in part, is to bring civilization to normal people through means that include the normal stuff from the supermarket. That is what she thinks is important, and it is significant that her chosen medium is television. Her TV recipes are usually made from ingredients anyone can buy most anywhere, and she made herself into such a TV personality that a twenty-second caricature of her voice is instantly recognizable to the audience of *Saturday Night Live* or *Prairie Home Companion*.

Alice Waters and Julia Child are two kinds of polemicists. One is willing to propose the fundamental reorganization of the world; the other does not see that as a practical proposition but thinks that the survival of civilization depends upon our ability to function within institutions and processes we can’t control. Julia Child also worries more about what food costs than Alice Waters does.

But it is not as if Alice is a head-in-the-sand ideologue, like those architectural polemicists who insist that the twentieth century was just a big mistake that never should have happened and now should be ignored or repealed. Leon Krier, Christopher Alexander, Prince Charles, and

Quinlan Terry all, at various times, have inhabited this camp. Alice and her half dozen hard-core cadres are tough and pragmatic politicians whose impact on the world is largely the product of hard-won victories over formidable opposition.

Think what it took to make their Edible Schoolyard for the Berkeley Public Schools a reality. The Edible Schoolyard is a curriculum through which students prepare meals from organic produce raised on school grounds by their own labor. Think how many public agencies, how many funders, and how many neighborhood organizations had to be persuaded before San Francisco would allow a fabulous Saturday farmer's market right in the middle of town featuring the best organic everything from all over Northern California.

Julia Child would probably not take on these battles, but her impact on the American table is also huge and is the result of an extraordinary energy and a totally original way of being. The tension between Alice Waters's culinary politics and Julia Child's, and the importance of both, is a theme that recurs throughout this book. Both of these remarkable women have done good in the world. Both are models for what architects and town builders need to do. Reforming town building is such a complex and formidable undertaking that there are times when it is good to be Alice and times when it is absolutely necessary to be Julia. This distinction between these two modes of strategic behavior—remaking the world, and civilizing an unalterable world—will reappear later.