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DESIGN MATTERS

FORM AND FUNCTION
FROM OBJECTS TO INTERIORS



CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

A chef and his interior designer wife
create a picture-perfect alfresco dinner
with a relaxed and welcoming vibe

Text by JENNIE NUNN *Photographs by* AMY DICKERSON

Recipes by BRANDON BOUDET



IT'S A WARM AND SUNNY SATURDAY AFTERNOON

at Brandon Boudet and Isabelle Dahlin's Spanish-style cottage in Los Angeles' Echo Park neighborhood. The couple, who married at the house earlier this year, is getting ready to host a dinner party for a handful of close friends—with everything from a curated playlist to a signature cocktail (two parts cava, one part cucumber juice, and one part Ancho Reyes chili liqueur, with grapefruit peel). The dinner table is impeccably arranged with a mix of dishes from a restaurant-supply outfit and Heath Ceramics, atop patterned linens by Pacific & Rose.

Brandon—a Louisiana-born chef and partner of local restaurants Little Dom's, Dominick's, and 101 Coffee Shop—and Isabelle—an interior decorator and owner of design store deKor (dekorla.com)—make entertaining look like second nature. They aren't frantically running around or making a fuss about

Living in Los Angeles—with its pleasant year-round weather—husband and wife Brandon Boudet and Isabelle Dahlin often entertain outside.

every folded napkin. Instead, they have their own laid-back system: he's multi-tasking at the kitchen stove and preparing the fish for grilling later, while she's artfully assembling peonies and tulips in vases on the wooden dining table. They occasionally stop to play with their two Boxers, Bernie and Henry.

According to Brandon, tonight's menu is simple: kale and collard greens with pickled corn, charred Padrón peppers, and homemade ricotta; a main course of grilled branzino with tomato water and mollica (Italian for "breadcrumbs"), served alongside herbed cauliflower "rice"; and, for dessert, chocolate avocado mousse with whipped saffron crème fraîche and spiced pistachios. "We entertain, I guess because no one else will cook for us," laughs Brandon. "We tend to be the ones who are throwing the parties, and we host about 10 of these a year. We always have something for people to snack on, and I like to keep it easy by doing it family style and planning things ahead. I've been working in restaurants and cooking for a long time, like 20 years, so it's important to just be able to hang out and enjoy ourselves."

The setting for this evening's gathering is the front yard, under an arbor adjacent to a small, square pond framed with Spanish-style tile and embellished with floating lily pads and Gerber daisies; Isabelle added the burgundy, yellow, and white flowers earlier in the day. "We're not very uniform in this house—it's sort of a whimsical place," she says of the 1,200-square-foot abode that once belonged to a college professor. The enchanted outdoor dining area's wooden table was hand-built by Brandon and the couple's friend Jeremy Dietz, who lives in the rental unit below the main house. "I



like layering the table with lots of color, candles, mason jars, and rattan chargers, and keeping it kind of casual and rustic with a 'the more the merrier' kind of attitude so no one feels uptight," says Isabelle. "And, lighting is huge. I grew up in Sweden where it's always dark, and I'm like 'Dimmers Anonymous' and think dimmers should go on every light."

She continues: "The house is small, so we wanted to create these little spaces where people could interact." Behind the house, a backyard with a stone fireplace is the perfect spot for a movie screen used post-parties. There's also a chicken coop that Brandon and Jeremy





Brandon and
Isabelle make
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*This page and opposite,
clockwise from top left: An
arbor next to a small pond
makes for an idyllic backdrop.
Brandon takes care of some
prep work. Charred Padrón
peppers. The menu includes a
kale and collard greens salad.
The settings are casually chic.
Isabelle sets the table.*





Clockwise from top left: Dinner guest Kim Rose. Brandon takes a brief break from cooking. Amy Moon and Jeremy Dietz.

constructed, and a Japanese-style bridge that joins the patio and Isabelle's art studio, where she sculpts and makes ceramics.

Tonight's guest list consists of five of the couple's close friends: Jeremy, who in addition to living on-site previously worked with Brandon at the Hard Rock Cafe in Las Vegas, now works as a manager in the restaurant business, and officiated the couple's wedding (he introduces himself as "the guy who lives under the stairs"); screenwriter and novelist Tom Wheeler, whose work includes *Puss in Boots* and NBC's *The Cape*; his wife Christina Malpero-Wheeler, an interior designer and Isabelle's former

roommate; Amy Moon, a hairstylist at nearby Novak Salon; and Kim Rose, a paralegal and fashion blogger. "It's always a fun time," says Christina of the gatherings that Isabelle and Brandon host. "And it's hard to pass up any excuse to eat Brandon's meals." As the group congregates outside, Isabelle recounts stories about her days living with Christina in what they refer to as "Melrose Place"—the fictional locale of the 1990s TV show that was rife with who's-dating-whom-drama (Tom was their neighbor in the complex, which led to their marriage)—and the 2003 snowboarding trip in Big Bear, California, where Isabelle first met Brandon.



Clockwise from left:
The group settles in
at the table, which
was built by Brandon
and Jeremy. Guest
Christina Malpero-
Wheeler. Her hus-
band Tom Wheeler.



Each guest takes a
turn sharing a story
and REMINISCING.

When dinner is served, each guest takes a turn sharing a story and reminiscing about memories, nights out, and travels with the couple. After the last bite of dessert is eaten, and as the red wine dwindles down to the last drop, Jeremy offers to clear the table: "It's just like the old days where Brandon cooks, and I bus the tables," he jokes. No one appears in a rush to leave anytime soon. "There have been many nights where we have gone to bed with guests still here," says Brandon. Maybe tonight will be one of those nights when the movie screen is rolled down and the sleeping bags are pulled from the closet. •



SALAD WITH GREENS, PICKLED CORN, CHARRED PEPPERS, AND HERBED RICOTTA

Serves 8

SUGAR CANE VINAIGRETTE

2 tbsp whole grain mustard

6 tbsp cane syrup (such as Steen's
Pure Cane Syrup)

½ cup cane vinegar (such as
Steen's Pure Cane Vinegar)

1 shallot, finely chopped

¼ cup lemon juice

1 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp salt

1 tsp black pepper

PICKLED CORN

2 ears of corn, husked

2 tbsp red bell pepper, diced

1 tsp fresh oregano, finely chopped

½ cup water

½ cup white wine vinegar

½ tsp kosher salt

HERBED RICOTTA

3 cups milk

1 ½ cups heavy cream

1 ½ tbsp white wine vinegar

zest of 1 small lemon

juice of 1 small lemon

1 tsp salt

fresh black pepper to taste

¼ tsp fennel pollen

1 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped



1 tsp basil, chopped

1 ½ tbsp extra virgin olive oil

SALAD

12 Padrón peppers, stems removed

2 tbsp olive oil

4 cups loosely packed kale, stems
removed

4 cups loosely packed collard
greens, stems removed

salt to taste

1. *For the vinaigrette:* In a small bowl, mix all ingredients well. Refrigerate until ready to use; can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.

2. *For the corn:* Cut kernels from cobs and, in a medium bowl, mix with bell pepper and oregano. Set aside.

3. In a small saucepan over medium heat, bring water, vinegar, and salt to a boil. Pour over the corn mixture. Let stand until cool, 30 minutes to 1 hour. Refrigerate 24 hours before serving.

4. *For the ricotta:* In a heavy-bottom stainless steel pot over medium heat, bring milk and cream just to a boil. Turn off heat and add vinegar, lemon zest,

lemon juice, and salt. Let stand for 5 minutes. Pour the mixture into a cheese-cloth-lined sieve and allow to drain into a medium bowl for 1 hour. Discard all liquid and place drained ricotta into a bowl, and stir in remaining ingredients. Refrigerate until ready to use.

5. *For the salad:* In a small sauté pan over medium heat, sauté peppers in olive oil until tender and slightly charred, about 5 minutes. Set aside.

6. Coarsely chop kale and collard greens, and combine in a large bowl. Crumble the herbed ricotta over the greens. Add peppers, drained pickled corn, vinaigrette, and salt, and toss well.

HERBED CAULIFLOWER "RICE"

Serves 8

1 large head of cauliflower with
greens removed

1 bunch of green onions, chopped

3 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp cilantro

1 tsp crushed red pepper

3 tbsp water



3 tbsp butter

1 tsp salt

3 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. With a large box grater using medium holes, grate raw cauliflower into a large bowl.
2. In a large sauté pan preheated over medium heat, sauté green onions in olive oil for 3 minutes. Add cauliflower, cilantro, and red pepper, and sauté an additional 3 minutes. Add water, butter, and salt. If your pan is not oven-safe, transfer to a 2-quart baking dish.
3. Bake for 8 minutes, until tender and slightly golden. Remove from oven and fold in Parmesan cheese. Serve warm.

GRILLED WHOLE BRANZINO WITH TOMATO WATER AND MOLLICA

Serves 6

TOMATO WATER

- 2 lbs ripe tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 1 bunch of basil
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed
- 3 green onions, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1 tsp crushed red pepper
- 2 tbsp olive oil

MOLLICA

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup ciabatta bread, roughly chopped with crust removed
- pinch of salt



BRANZINO

6 whole boneless branzino, heads removed

½ cup extra virgin olive oil

salt to taste

crushed red pepper to taste

2 tbsp cilantro flowers

1. *For the tomato water:* Line a sieve with cheesecloth and set over a large bowl. Place all ingredients in sieve. Allow to drain overnight in refrigerator. Gather the ends of the cheesecloth and squeeze a few times during the draining process. Discard mixture in sieve and save liquid. Set aside.

2. *For the mollica:* In a small sauté pan preheated over medium-high heat, add olive oil, ciabatta, and salt. Stir and toss in pan until golden, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

3. *For the branzino:* Heat a charcoal grill with a large cast-iron skillet on top. Skillet is ready when a drop of water sizzles and evaporates in about 1 second. Season branzino, inside and out, with 6 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil, salt, and crushed red pepper. Place fish on skillet, skin-side down and cook for 3 minutes. Then carefully turn over and cook additional 1 minute on other side. Carefully remove from skillet.

4. *To serve:* Pour tomato water into a deep-dish platter. Place branzino on top and garnish with mollica, 2 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil, and cilantro flowers.

CHOCOLATE AVOCADO MOUSSE WITH SAFFRON CRÈME FRAÎCHE AND SPICED PISTACHIOS

Serves 8

SPICED PISTACHIOS

¼ cup water

2 tbsp brown sugar

2 tbsp sugar

¼ tsp cayenne

1 cup raw unsalted pistachios

½ tsp salt

CHOCOLATE AVOCADO MOUSSE

¾ cup semi-sweet chocolate

5 avocados, peeled and pitted

¼ cup agave syrup

¼ cup maple syrup

3 tbsp honey

¾ cup cacao powder

½ cup almond milk

1 vanilla bean, scraped

2 tbsp coconut butter

pinch of salt

SAFFRON CRÈME FRAÎCHE

¼ cup crême fraîche

¼ cup heavy cream

pinch of saffron threads

1. *For the spiced pistachios:* Preheat oven to 300°F. In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine water, sugars, and cayenne. Bring to a boil and stir until sugars dissolve, about 5 minutes. Add pistachios and mix well. Drain excess liquid, then place pistachios onto a baking sheet lined with a silicone mat and bake until golden, about 20 minutes. Toss with salt and allow to cool. Place in airtight container and store up to 1 week. Can be rewarmed in a 300°F oven for 10 minutes to crisp if they become too chewy by the time you serve.

2. *For the mousse:* Bring an inch of water in the bottom of a double boiler to a simmer. Add chocolate to top of double boiler and melt slowly, while stirring occasionally, until completely smooth and melted, about 5 minutes. Cool slightly, then place melted chocolate in Vitamix or food processor. Add remaining ingredients and blend until smooth. Refrigerate for 3-4 hours.

3. *For the crême fraîche:* In a medium bowl, combine crême fraîche, cream, and saffron. Beat with an electric hand mixer until stiff peaks form, about 5 minutes. Refrigerate for 2 hours and lightly fluff with a hand whisk before serving.

4. *To serve:* Spoon mousse into a 1½-quart serving bowl. Top with whipped saffron crême fraîche and spiced pistachios.