

HOMES

At Home With the Tastemakers

These food and beverage entrepreneurs are behind culinary brands both iconic and emerging. Home means something very different to each of them

By Katy McLaughlin

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This eclectic group of gastronomes—Barbara Lynch, Kaveh Zamanian and Koel Thomae—are in various stages of their entrepreneurial journey: Ms. Lynch built and still reigns over a longstanding restaurant empire, Mr. Zamanian recently launched an artisanal whiskey brand that is poised to go international, and Ms. Thomae built, and sold, a gourmet yogurt juggernaut.

For each, home played a different, but central, role in the journey. Ms. Lynch's new Gloucester, Mass., Tudor with acreage sets the stage for a new phase of her life. Ms. Thomae's Boulder, Colo., ranch house represents one constant in a life marked by absorbing work and change. Mr. Zamanian restored his historic Louisville, Ky., home, then used it as the launchpad to reinvent himself. Here's a peek inside the homes of these culinary pioneers.

A New Castle in a Restaurant Empire

Barbara Lynch, founder of Barbara Lynch Collective

Two years ago, Boston chef and restaurateur Barbara Lynch, 55, published an autobiography, titled "Out of Line: A Life of Playing With Fire." Few chef memoirs detonate with the brutal honesty of Ms. Lynch's life story. In blunt, South Boston-inflected prose, she described growing up in a Southie housing project where she survived a gruesome childhood rape. Her teenager years were devoted to petty crime. She conned her way into her first chef job and went on to build a collection of seven Boston restaurants, including No. 9 Park and Menton. Along the way, she married, had a daughter, and discovered, in her late 40s, that she is a lesbian.

"When I handed the memoir in, I felt like, 'here is my past life, and I want to change it now,'" said Ms. Lynch. So she went house shopping.

Ms. Lynch had long divided her time between a city apartment and a house in the suburb of Winchester which she shared with her husband, from whom she is separated, she said. But her epiphany drew her to Gloucester, a coastal community about 45 minutes northeast of Boston,

The Celebrity Chef at Home

Chef Barbara Lynch bought her Gloucester, Mass., home at a turning point in her busy life running a restaurant empire.



Boston chef and restaurateur Barbara Lynch in the kitchen of her home in Gloucester, Mass. JARED KUZIA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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where she instantly fell for a 3,300-square-foot white Tudor on 5 acres with a carriage house. In 2016, she bought it for \$1.65 million, according to public record.

Though she said “it seems like I spend all my time in the kitchen,” she also dwells in her vegetable garden, redolent of peppers, tomatoes, and

eggplant, and a sun porch with a stone fireplace that she uses as her painting studio. Cooking has been her form of creative expression since she was a teenager, but seven years ago, Ms. Lynch discovered painting. Her artwork is displayed throughout the house. Her home gives her “downtime,” she said, to reflect on her journey from poverty to celebrity. Her memoir has been optioned by television chef Giada De Laurentiis, who co-owns a production company. Ms. De



The living and dining areas in Barbara Lynch's Gloucester, Mass., home. PHOTO: JARED KUZIA FOR THE WALL STREET

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It started with the leap of faith when Ms. Lynch opened her first restaurant, No. 9 Park, in 1998.

“It was crazy for me to open No. 9, when I had no financial background. Everyone thought I was going to fail.” Instead, it has reigned as one of Boston’s highest-rated fine dining spots for 21 years. In 2014, the James Beard Foundation awarded Ms. Lynch its Outstanding Restaurateur award. Her company, Barbara Lynch Collective, has about \$20 million in annual revenue and 230 employees.

“Sometimes I ask myself, ‘how the hell did I get here?’” Ms. Lynch says. “It’s really amazing.”

The House That Yogurt Built

Koel Thomae, founder of Noosa Yoghurt

Koel Thomae, the 46-year-old entrepreneur who launched the Noosa Yoghurt brand, sat in the kitchen of her central Boulder home and described the ways in which her life has changed since 2006. From a mere idea for a product, she found partners, launched a dairy company, grew it into a national brand, took on investors, hit \$220 million in annual sales, and last year, when the company sold, left. She also married, had a daughter, and became something of a rock star in specialty food circles. The one thing that hasn’t changed in that time frame: Her home.

Ms. Thomae bought the ranch house in 2006 for \$415,000 with Tait Rees, who became her husband. Mr. Rees, 41, then owned a custom woodworking company. He intended to renovate the 1960 relic when they had some money, Ms. Thomae said. In 2015, six months after Noosa sold a majority stake, for an undisclosed sum, to private-equity firm Advent International, they had the money.

- **Burger:** “J.T. Farnhams (in Essex, Mass.). It’s a real burger with extra cheese and the bun is amazing.”
- **Coffee shop:** “Sofra Bakery & Café in Cambridge. The Turkish coffee and pastries are so delicious.”
- **Beer & A Bite:** “The Shamrock Pub & Grille in South Boston, in my old neighborhood. They have great steak tips.”
- **Place for Visitors to Stay:** “I recommend Boston Harbor Hotel. It’s in a great location and you can get to almost every neighborhood in Boston from there.”
- **Must-Do for Tourists:** “I always recommend people visit the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Created from the collection of a Boston Brahmin, the grounds make you feel like you’re in Europe.”

Mr. Rees spearheaded a \$525,000 expansion and renovation. They added a 560-square-foot master bedroom suite, bringing the home’s total to 2,250 square

feet, and tore out walls to make it more open.

Mr. Rees customized a “very minimalist modern” white oak kitchen, Ms. Thomae said, adding a “coffee nook” for his prized La Marzocco espresso maker. They ripped out the lawn and installed low-water plants in the front and a small patch of green plus a vegetable garden in the back. Ms. Thomae said she had almost nothing to do with it.

“I was so busy at the time. I was probably the most uninvolved wife ever on something like this,” said Ms. Thomae.

Born to an American mother and Canadian father in Cairns, Australia, Ms. Thomae spent the first 9 years of her life in a “hippie-type community” trailer park. It was on a visit back home in 2005 when she first tasted a yogurt made by a small, family-owned company and longed to bring it to the U.S. A year later, the beverage company she worked for as an operations coordinator was sold to Pepsi. Ms. Thomae made \$60,000 from her stock options.

The timing was impeccable. With the Australian yogurt makers and a Colorado dairy farmer as partners, Ms. Thomae plowed the only money she had into her dream.

Noosa grew at light speed. By 2017, it hit \$220 million in annual revenue and was sold in 90% of all food stores in the U.S., Ms. Thomae said. In late 2018, the company was fully acquired by private-equity-backed Sovos Brands and Ms. Thomae left the company. Both Berkeley, Calif.-based Sovos and Ms. Thomae declined to disclose the sales price and terms of the deal.

The Dairy Queen

Koel Thomae and Tait Rees bought their home long before Ms. Thomae created Noosa Yoghurt, but the profits from a partial sale of her stake paid for an extensive renovation



Koel Thomae, far right, with her husband Tait Rees and their daughter Matilda in the backyard of their Boulder home. Ms. Thomae founded the Noosa Yoghurt brand. JIMENA PECK FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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Today, Ms. Thomae enjoys some of the trappings of her newfound wealth: She and her husband both stay home with their 6-year-old daughter Matilda. “I’m not going to lie: I fly first class,” internationally, she said. But moving into a fancier house would mean too much change.

“I decided as I was leaving Noosa, I would give myself a few years just to be,” she said.

Whiskey Distilled Here

Kaveh Zamanian, founder of Rabbit Hole

When Kaveh Zamanian, 54, moved from Chicago to his wife Heather Zamanian’s hometown of Louisville, Ky., in 2008, it took just a few years for the Iranian-born clinical psychologist to turn himself into a local.



The renovated kitchen in Koel Thoma's Boulder, Colo., home. PHOTO: NO CREDIT AVAILABLE

He enrolled his three kids in school, cultivated an appreciation for the local whiskey and, in 2011, bought a historic home off Cherokee Park, a 409-acre urban green space designed by landscaping pioneer, Frederick Law Olmsted. The house, for which the couple paid \$832,000

“needed some TLC,” said

Mr.

Zamanian

—about \$350,000 worth.

They renovated the kitchen, and upgraded the electric and the nearly 6,000-square-foot home's six bedrooms.

KOEL THOMAE'S BEST OF BOULDER

- **Coffee Shop:** “Boxcar Coffee Roasters. It's riding distance from my house, the coffee is good and the baked goods are also delicious.”
- **Beer & A Bite:** “Avery Brewing Co. Tap Room is a great place for a business lunch or happy hour with friends. I tend to go for their pilsners or a summer seasonal.”
- **Fancy Restaurant:** “Frasca Food & Wine. I love that they collaborate with amazing chefs from across the country to host special dinners.”
- **Close-to-Town Mountain Bike Trail:** “Hall Ranch has a great mix of technical rock gardens and smooth single-track. I've ridden this trail countless times over my 19 years in Boulder, but it still makes me grin ear to ear.”
- **Place for Visitors to Stay:** “St. Julien Hotel & Spa. I often buy my girlfriends gift cards to go and spoil themselves in the spa.”
- **Boulder Specialty Food Product:** “Rowdy Mermaid Kombucha. I've been drinking kombucha since I was a kid when my dad used to brew his own. I was excited to finally find a local brand.”

They also

created a Kentucky-style version of the basement man cave. With “some very old,

beautiful, rustic lumber,” they designed a temperature-controlled whiskey tasting room and cigar cellar, Mr. Zamanian said.

It was all part of Mr. Zamanian's plan to become the ultimate Louisville insider: He dreamed of

Like a Louisville Native

When Kaveh Zamanian moved to Kentucky, he decided to blend in with the locals. He did it by building a whiskey distillery



Kaveh Zamanian, the founder of Rabbit Hole, and his wife Heather Zamanian, a clinical psychologist, in their Louisville, Ky., home. AARON M CONWAY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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opening a distillery and starting a brand based on his own bourbon and rye recipes. In 2012, he launched his vision by “laying down liquid,” or beginning to age whiskey, in a local distillery. In 2018, helped by outside investment, he opened Rabbit Hole Distillery, a \$18 million, 55,000-square-foot facility designed in a Modernist style. This year, the facility will produce 20,000 barrels and offer tours to roughly 30,000 visitors, Mr. Zamanian said.

Mr. Zamanian’s gamble was validated in July, when he signed a deal to partner with Pernod Ricard, the world’s second largest international spirits maker. For an undisclosed sum, Pernod replaced Mr. Zamanian’s original investors—save a couple of family members who also work for the company—while he retained most of his share, according to a Pernod spokesperson. Annual revenue is currently \$15 million, Mr. Zamanian said. Both Mr. Zamanian and the Pernod spokesperson declined to disclose what Pernod paid, but both said the plan is for the spirits company to distribute Rabbit Hole domestically and internationally.



Mr. Zamanian's Rabbit Hole Distillery. PHOTO: AARON M CONWAY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Zamanians host a company Christmas party in their home each year, filling their living room with about 35 staff members. He regularly traipses down to his tasting room with employees, he said.



The tasting room at the distillery. PHOTO: AARON M CONWAY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“There are always folks coming in to taste things I have in the house,” Mr. Zamanian said.

Ms. Zamanian, 47, works as a clinical psychologist. Mr. Zamanian, who holds a doctorate in the field, said his background partly gave him the

grounding for what he’s doing now.

“I’ve always been a risk taker,” he said. “It’s from my psychology days: Life is very short and you never know what day will be your last.”

- **Burger:** “Grind Burger Kitchen. I love when I can order a burger medium-rare and they actually make it that way.”
- **Coffee Shop:** “Quills Coffee in Nulu. I do multiple walks a day with my team to this coffee shop. It’s turned into a ritual at this point.”
- **Beer & A Bite:** “Red Top. They have the best hot dogs and the most amazing pretzel charcuterie platter.”
- **Fancy Restaurant:** “Jack Fry’s. It’s small and intimate with a piano playing in the background. There has never been a time when the food was not fantastic.”
- **Place for Visitors to Stay:** “21c Museum Hotel, combining art, culture and great food in one place.”
- **Must-Do for Tourists:** “Churchill Downs. It’s a must-see for everyone and great place to try your luck on some horses.”