



the
general
review

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We didn't set out to start the Review. We set out to start a bakery. The General was founded in 2009 with an exchange which went something like this:

Jess: We should open a bakery.

Megan: We should totally open a bakery!

Opening a bakery, turns out, is really fucking hard to do. We started The General Review instead: a blog of food, ideas, and stories. It's the best of what comes out of a kitchen full of friends. We share a far-reaching curiosity, which inspired the name: General. The Review started as a printed zine: one food-related noun, explored through memories, recipes, drawings, and lists.

This volume is a collection of our first random issues, our experiment out loud, and a promise to bring you more.

Thanks for reading.

JD & MW



Place

I was heartbroken when the Howard Johnson's in Times Square closed. That was my place that mattered in a part of town I hated.

Prime is midtown east, which is why I've never been there. I didn't go to the east side above Union Square when I lived in NY. Prime is remarkably similar to three different diners I can remember, only not by name, just by look and memory and taste.

Now I want a tuna melt.

We can't give The General a history that spans centuries but if there's one thing that LA has taught me it's that you don't need to have a long history to have an important history. All it takes is the type of respect that indicates you intend to be around in a century.



If I'm looking for sushi, barbecue pork buns, or just a bowl of noodles, I have a hundred choices here in Vancouver, and they could all be good. Mexican, however, is a different story.

When I got back from Los Angeles, I asked friends if they knew a good taco place. I had fallen hard for the tacos there, the fish taco, in particular. So different from what we know up north, with the hard shells, the ground meat, the cheddar cheese; a real Mexican taco is a small bite with so much flavour.

I had to find La Taqueria on my own. A tiny place, in not the best neighbourhood, but it's colourful inside, even on a Vancouver rainy day. I always want the pescado and carnitas, and this time, I tried the pollo con mole and al pastor. I even loved the pink pickled onions on top, and I don't love pickled things or onions.

Small bites, small plates, small place. Big flavour. That's what I love.



It's never too late for a fresh start. Just be sure you get a good breakfast. Maybe somewhere new? Rather, somewhere very old.

I kept meaning to go to the Ovaltine Café. You've seen it before, the place with the sweet potato pie in Jose Chung's From Outer Space. It's still there, on Hastings, in the worst neighbourhood in Vancouver, in Canada, probably. Since 1943, the Ovaltine Café has been there, still with the neon, still with the lunch counter, still with the diner classics.

I finally made it, just before Christmas, while I was in Chinatown buying presents. The place is just up the street. Follow the neon. The customers have changed, more mismatched second-and-thirdhand clothes than men in hats and ladies in gloves.

But the waitresses treat everyone the same. Everyone needs a good breakfast. Everyone deserves a fresh start.





Stone Fruit

I was a picky eater as a kid. I'm still picky, but now I eat sushi, and I didn't then. I eat Brussels sprouts and dill pickles and other green things I used to be weird about. But I'll never like shrimp, so don't even try.

I thought I didn't like cherries. Because I didn't like red Lifesavers or cherry Kool-Aid or those little red bits in fruit cake. Actually, I didn't like any of the bits in fruit cake. But maraschino cherries. Neon red and sticky sweet, they were made for garnish, the last ingredient to top a sundae, and the first to be eaten. I passed my cherries off to someone else at the table. The someone who didn't get the dill pickle on top of my hamburger.

Everyone who packed a lunch to school remembers the days their mom sent a fruit cup. Mine came in little cans with the peel top lid. I ate the pears, the pineapple, the grapes, the peaches. I left the cherries behind.

I didn't bother the cherries; the cherries

didn't bother me. Until a few summers ago, when my mom brought home a bag of Ranier cherries from the market. Bigger than maraschinos, lighter. Some are nearly white, with just a blush of red. They're crispy and juicy. I didn't know cherries could taste like this.

I even love the pits. Grapes with seeds are awful, a hassle, not worth the effort for a bit of fruit and pieces stuck in your teeth. A bag of cherries between two friends on a picnic blanket is a project, something to keep your hands busy when the conversation falls quiet, summer falls dark, and the fireworks crack overhead.



Stone fruit is the master of self-promotion. They start their campaign early with springtime buds, flirting their way into your gaze and leaving behind a desire for a juicy, ripe mouthful of sun-warmed fruit. Stone fruit is as sexy as fruit can get because it makes you want it long before you can have it.

I didn't have opinions on stone fruit until I moved to Los Angeles. Grouping stone fruit into a category, a category of fruit I should have opinions on, just never occurred to me. Citrus fruit is the star of fruit categories, catalogues devoted to its splendor, but stone fruit is different. If you live somewhere where the only stone fruit you can purchase is trucked in there's no reason to have opinion on stone fruit, as your options are likely limited to peaches, apricots, and cherries.

But in Los Angeles? In Southern California? Stone fruit opinions are plentiful, so you either develop your own or absorb others'. Sure,

everyone knows about SoCal's citrusy history. You can pluck lemons and grapefruits and oranges off neighborhood trees if not your own. But the secret treasure of SoCal is the pluot, the unlikely but delightful hybrid of plum and apricot that has a short, defined, and delicious season in which it should be consumed. Once you understand the pluot, the mysteries of the world of stone fruit unlock.

In SoCal, the pluot is the gateway drug to seeing stone fruit with fresh eyes. To caring about the storage conditions of your fruit haul. To understanding ripeness and seasons and the long wait for the right time of year, the mellow success of the correct season, and the desperate scramble to get the last of the good stuff before your final impressions run the risk of being of mealy, too-late harvested.

Once you've discovered the pluot you discover the intricacies and delicacies of other stone fruit, the differences between peaches



and white peaches, the joys of the nectarine, the secret stealth of the cherry--thought of as a berry but truthfully the jewel of the stone fruit realm. Technically, olives and dates are stone fruit, meaning there's a three course meal concept based around stone fruit out there just waiting to happen.

But, really, it comes back to the pluot. Pluots are as varied as heirloom tomatoes, some with similar color patterns, and prompt similar speculation as to the creation and production of different strains. How many generations removed from an apricot or a plum is this delicious mouthful? A good pluot make me want another immediately after, all while begging me to ponder its heritage.





Oysters

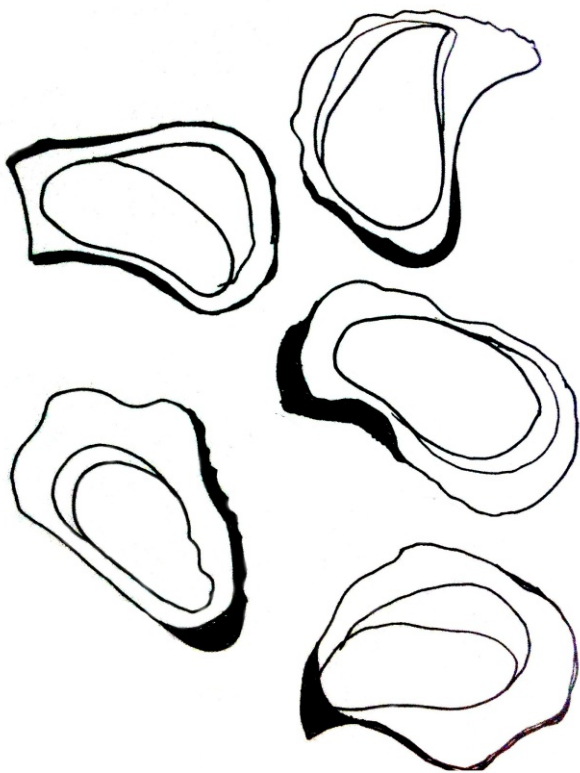
Colorado is a landlocked state. Growing up landlocked means you internalize a loose hierarchy when it comes to seafood, one based around someone else's willingness to bring seafood to you and the transportation they're willing to use. The jewels of the sea consumed in landlocked states depend largely on market forces and holidays. "Surf and Turf" meals give lobster an unparalleled power, with a boost in emphasis near Valentine's Day.

Mussels, clams, and scallops have Italian and French history to rely on. Shrimp, as over-processed and ubiquitous as they've become, seem to barely count as seafood in landlocked menus. Some type of heated preparation is expected if not preferred for the above, sushi being a premium indulgence far away from the sea. Oysters are consumed while they're as alive as they get. You don't want to fuck around with oysters in a mountain town, with the ocean at least a thousand miles away.

But in Clearwater, Florida, the oysters are local, delicious, and tied into the community's understanding of food options you serve to guests on a casual Thursday evening. Which is how I found myself with an oyster in one gloved hand and an oyster knife in the other, learning how to shuck like it was a life skill. And perhaps it is, but let's hope I never end up in a place where I have to shuck oysters to stay alive because those bastards can be tricky.

A clean outer shell is important, since properly opened oysters deserve to be slurped straight from the shell. Imperfect oysters or those mangled in the opening make perfect fodder for oyster shooters. Luckily, ours were well cleaned by the time they made it to us, thanks to my hookup's friendship with the fishmonger.

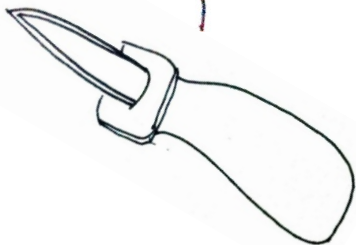
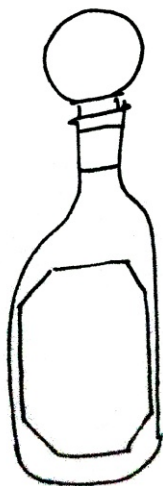
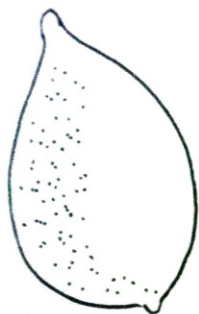
An easy and quick recipe for Oyster Shooters: place an oyster at the bottom of a shot glass. Add a hot sauce of your choice



and/or a squeeze of lemon, and fill the rest of the glass with a chilled alcohol of your choice. Tequila and vodka are traditional but I want to experiment with an aromatic gin and a squeeze of lime, a dash of bitters and a pinch of horseradish.

The gist of shucking an oyster is: clean it, find the knuckle, get the tip of your oyster knife into the join, apply enough pressure to get the knife firmly wedged in there, then twist until it pops open. After, you have but to loosen the oyster from one side of the shell and gently separate the other from its moorings. Take your first fresh oyster without garnish.

Inside of magnificently ugly shells, oysters are briny, delicate, and a little disturbing on first glance. You can have an oyster or two dozen in your life and appreciate them, sure, but loving them takes hands-on experience--and perhaps downing a few dozen local oysters with friends in one go with a full fleet of condiments



standing by.

An easy and quick recipe for Cocktail Sauce: figure out your personal preference for the intersection of ketchup, hot sauce (also up to personal preference; I can't stand Tabasco but love Cholula and Tapatio), horseradish, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar and/or vinegar, salt, and pepper.

My preference runs to a sprinkle of horseradish and a squeeze of lemon, and I've loved discussing my newfound love for oysters with people and learning their opinions and what informed them. The fun of food is the same as in life: experimenting, learning one's tastes, and making new friends.





Brunch

Brunch is worthless if it doesn't involve eggs. I'm not talking one egg somewhere in a batter, I'm talking eggs, prominent eggs, featured on a plate with a some type of starch playing second fiddle off to the side.

Simple is fine, with sunny side up, over easy, and scrambled all having an easy, day-to-day appeal, with a crusty piece of toast to support and sop or ready to finish the meal as you walk out to the car. Or shove 'em all in a tortilla with some salsa or cheese and eat breakfast in the car. But that's a weekday, that's standard eggs.

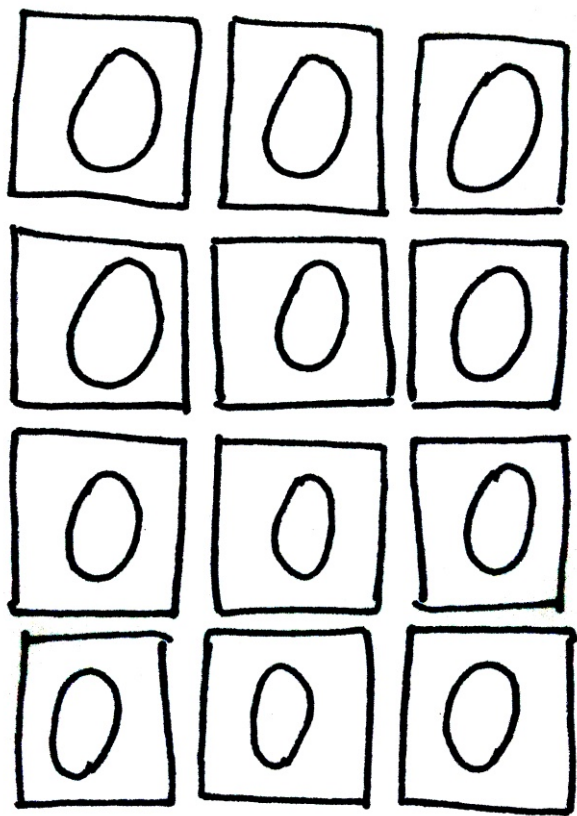
Weekend brunch by its very definition is to be savored--when you're combining two meals the resulting meal should be worth two meals worth of time and calories and flavor, right? So, eggs. Omelets and everything they can be. Savory scrambles that use everything in the bottom drawer and a good heel of cheese. Soft yokes and crusty bread to sponge up the

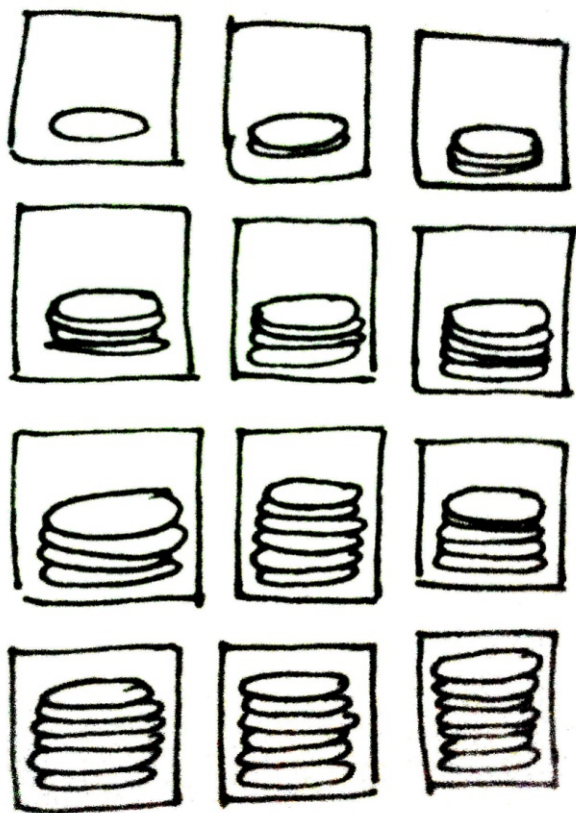
deliciousness, finished with a long pull of coffee, tea, or mimosa. Chilaquiles and migas, huevos rancheros and eggs with tomato products that aren't ketchup. And we haven't even talked about poaching or boiling. Or egg-based sauces! If you like Hollandaise, nothing makes a decadent weekend brunch more than a Benedict.

And even French Toast can qualify--a thick challah soaked in sweetened egg batter and cooked? That's eggs; that belongs to eggs and not pancakes.

Spending time with a cookbook at home and figuring out the best use of the current kitchen content or stealing bites of frittata and french toast off of others' plates sitting in the sun at a long, leisurely weekend gathering: that's eggs.







The pancakes I made last night were banana chocolate chip. I make them a lot. I always have bananas in my house. Half the bunch get eaten when perfectly ripe, sliced into cereal or onto peanut butter toast. The rest sit on top of the fridge while I eat the orchard apples I bought at the farmer's market or the pineapple that was on sale at the grocery store. When my bananas are spotted brown, that's when I make pancakes.

They require no special tools. No special skills. No futzing with yeast and proofing, no kneading and shaping, no worrying about the right order of ingredients. If you add too much flour, add some more liquid. That's OK. If you forget the salt, throw it in last. Your pancakes will be fine.

My recipe changes every day. Even when the same ingredients go in the bowl, they go in different quantities. This is how it goes when I'm making pancakes just for me. Mash one (1)

banana with a fork and mix it with one (1) egg. Keep it chunky or stir it smooth. Pour in a splash of milk or cream or orange juice or water. Add rum, if you like. If you have a tub of yoghurt going bad, throw it in your pancakes. They're the best way to clean out your fridge.

Flour next, and less than you think you need. A pancake batter should be loose. Baking powder, and don't forget the salt. Salt makes everything taste better, especially chocolate. Sometimes, I add oatmeal. Now's the time for chocolate chips. Fold it all together with a spatula. Don't overmix. Let it sit, if you're that patient. I'm not. I already have my pan hot and ready to go. I eat the first one with my fingers as soon as it's done. When you make them right, pancakes don't need butter or syrup or even a fork.





Apples

Apple is the quintessential fall flavor of my childhood and adolescence and even my early twenties. Turning leaves and cooling temperatures go hand-in-hand with more time in the kitchen making more complicated dishes, more time with the oven on.

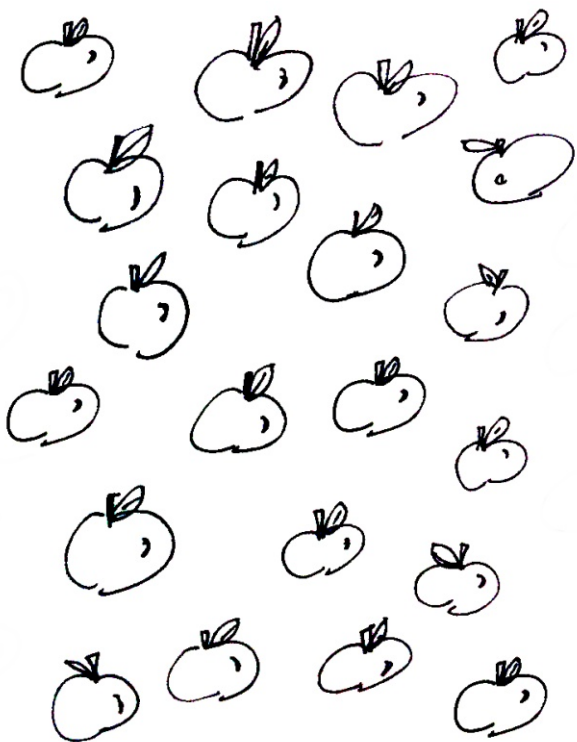
Apples are versatile--naturally sweet yet suited to savory dishes, crunchy and juicy when fresh and crisp, perfect for stewing and baking. You'd be hard pressed to find a way to combine apples, sugar, and butter that doesn't result in happy taste buds.

Which sounds obvious, right? In theory, anything you add to a butter and sugar threesome has to be some kind of good, in a just universe. But apples have a special place because the tart can work with sweet, the crisp with heat, the sweetness with the buttery. Apple crumble and tarte tatin start with the exact same ingredients but end up wildly divergent in taste and texture.

Colorado didn't have many apple orchard but college in NY came with an annual trip to an orchard and an introduction to the stupid number of apple varieties that aren't found in stores. My favorite to this day is the Honeycrisp but that's for the flavor, texture, and sweetness of eating it unadulterated. If there's a farmers market with seasonal apples near you? Go and buy some. Then Google the varieties and remember the ones you like, use 'em, and buy more of 'em.

The best thing about buying apples at a farmers market is the apple-related consumables available fresh on the day. Apple cider, apple donuts, dried apple rings. Cider on the East coast when it's cold and you need a treat to keep your hands warm, donuts on any coast to treat yourself for finishing errands, apples everywhere you go.





Names of apples and also literary villains

Arkansas Black

Ballyfatten

Bloody Ploughman

Calville Blanc d'hiver

Catshead

Esopus Spitzenburg

Gragg

Gravenstein

James Grieve

Jupiter

Lord Derby

Malinda

Northern Spy

Pitmaston Pineapple

Smokehouse

Stark Earliest

Wolf River

Names of apples and also Victorian novels

Ashmead's Kernel

Beauty of Bath

Blenheim Orange

Chelmsford Wonder

Cornish Gilliflower

D'Arcy Spice

Devonshire Quarreden

Flower of Kent

Grenadier

Howgate Wonder

Lane's Prince Albert

Merton Charm

Peasgood's Nonsuch

Tolman Sweet

Twenty Ounce

Westfield Seek-No-Further

Appes

Apples



Canning

Canning is both awesome and completely insane. The same could be said for a number of cooking techniques, I suppose, but I have a particular appreciation for and frustration with canning, since it both reassures me as a home cook and frustrates me from a historical perspective.

One of my best friends (as Mindy Kaling says, it's a tier, not a person) was an economics major while we were in college together. This meant that at one point we had a conversation about the economic realities of home canning and how it's not actually that efficient to preserve foods on an individual household level. The likelihood that one household could preserve enough food to support itself is low, without significant investment in time and resources. The economic truth is that having other people preserve and can and store foods is the best bet for a reliable, sustainable, and affordable supply chain.

Separately, my college had a display on the history of tinned fish and how their labels transformed very quickly from being baseline informative (this can has this type of fish in it) to being beautiful and/or advertising (this can has the best darned tasting type of this fish you'll ever have! also look at this beautiful art nouveau font). There's something intrinsic to the modern American food system that intertwines processed food and marketed food. Which isn't to say that fishmongers didn't engage in advertising or marketing tactics. People have always hustled, but the game changed as the margins grew wider and the corporations grew more complex.

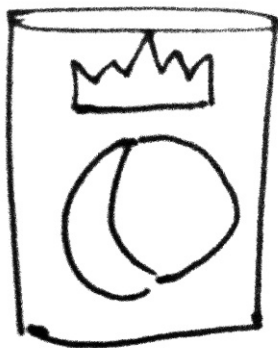
In the history of post-war food in America, canned foods were glorious. You didn't have to eat only local and seasonal foods; you could eat a motherfucking canned peach shipped in from another state anytime you wanted. Canned foods were new possibility, new recipes, and

new delights, and they didn't require refrigerated shipping. Sure, it's easy to mock the Kraft recipe book now, but it represented experimentation and freedom and a whole lot of good things.

Maybe it's that I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, and my mom spent a lot of time with her grandmother, listening to family stories and learning about home kitchen governance, but I find it hard to disrespect the women who embraced the canned food trend and learned to thrive. I like living in a culture interested in local and seasonal produce, turning away from having every fruit and vegetable available anytime of the year. The problems and concerns of my age are very notably different than the problems and concerns of just two generations ago, when supply chains were different and food staples weren't massively subsidized. Food will always be a cultural struggle, but it's a good struggle.

I love taking the apricots in our yard and eating them fresh, as many as I can, then turning the rest into jam. I love making pickles. I love the annual cherry picking trip and the resulting jar or six of preserves. But these are indulgences that I treasure, not a way of life. Every time I make something, it's a reminder of the very lucky circumstances in which I find myself, as a person who cooks for joy, not for sustenance; who cans for pleasure, not for survival.





MOTHER
FUCKING
CANNED
PEACH.

Drive four hours east of Vancouver, along the twisting highway cut through mountains and valleys, and you'll find the Fruit Stand Capital of Canada. They say you can't give yourself a nickname, but this is exactly what the village of Keremeos has done. The rest of the province, those of us in the Lower Mainland who make the full day trip, season after season, for the best peaches, apples, and berries, would agree.

The Okanagan Valley, the region of British Columbia between the coast and the mountains, has long been known for its fruit. Kids in the '60s, especially kids like the writer George Bowering, spent their summers in the Okanagan, picking fruit and making money for the next year of school or the next year of living in the city, trying to write a book.

My grandma has been making the trip for years. She has her favourite stand. She makes note of the price she paid last year and the

year before. She phones her order in before they drive up to insure she gets the best fruit at the best price. My grandma has been making the trip so long, she buys from the son now, his father recently retired.

Once you get those peaches, those berries, that flat of tomatoes home, it's time to start canning. Every year, Grandma says she isn't going to make as much. The shelves in the basement are still full from last year. I have a jar of bread-and-butter pickles, open in my fridge. We finished last year's peaches; still working on last year's blueberries.

It's easy, too easy, to eat what turns up at your grocery store. Strawberries from California and lettuce from Mexico and even the apples from the Okanagan last far into the fall, stretching into the winter.

But a peach at the height of season is a glorious thing. Don't miss it. Eat as many as you can, when you can, and can the rest.





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