

# A Tribute to *Gastronomica's* Founding Editor

I AM WRITING TO the converted. You are already a fan of this fine journal. Far from being members of a cult or a narrow coterie, we are a large and diverse group who have in common the love of food, good writing, art, and craft. We are not “foodies” or “gourmets”: our status as thinkers, artists, cooks, writers, and eaters is far broader, more democratic, more experimental, less orthodox, and definitely a whole lot more fun than any single label could intimate. We may grow our own apples or herbs, but most of us just go shopping and not always at the Farmers’ Market. We may participate in anti-GMO protests or pretty happily eat industrial marshmallows. There’s no ideology or dogma framing and binding the readership. Thanks to Darra Goldstein, our gastronomic indulgences are as diverse and unbound as the essays we read within *Gastronomica's* covers.

Under Darra’s vision and guidance, *Gastronomica* became our quirky, unpredictable go-to source for the best contemporary writing on food in the English language. The journal reminds us food writing is a significant literary endeavor, and it gives us a wide range of perspectives on history, politics, culture, aesthetics, and technology—in short, showing us food can be an expression of everything.

Despite the variety, there was a singular voice in *Gastronomica*: Darra’s own. Her imagination and taste raised the bar for food writing. Yes, *Gastronomica* treats current debates about nutrition, environmentalism, globalization, “authenticity,” and genetic modification, but she also embraced controversy. Beneath the fabulous covers, the pages of *Gastronomica* reflect a sort of sensual, edgy humor and even a degree of violence in the writing.

I began my own forays in the world of food when I was a very young caterer, food writer, and restaurant reviewer until I entered graduate school, and then, as advisors indicated I should, I went underground as a food professional. One had to. There wasn’t much respect for the food writer: “You’ll never get a job in academia with cookbooks on your resume” I was told. I waited in the closet (or should I say pantry?) for tenure and the chance to teach and write about food in the new era. Ultimately, my patience was rewarded and that chance came. Food had come of age, at last, as a topic both for serious discussion and for unabashed pleasure. It was Darra who really planted the flag. By founding *Gastronomica*, she proclaimed the ascendancy and legitimacy for food in research and writing.

Working with Darra on several essays for *Gastronomica*, I was always impressed with her sure voice and editorial pen: she was both right and kind. She gave me the honor of being guest editor for the issue devoted to Julia Child’s life and work. Going through the handwritten letters in the Schlesinger Library, I channeled both Julia (my mentor in my catering days) and Darra,

as I plucked letters, photographs, recipes, and grocery lists and engaged others who'd known Julia Child to write their stories. Everyone had adored Julia, and the harmony this produced in our little mutual-admiration society made the work sing.

The current issue offers some of the best and certainly some of the most varied writing that *Gastronomica* has presented. We have here all the disciplines, the widest possible geographical and topical spread, and always a discreet wallow in controversy and sensuality. The old term for such a collection is “omnibus”—to, from, and for all—and on this bus we had the best ride.

Merry I. White