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Of Food and Philanthropy *Love Where You Live...and Give Back*

By Jennifer Vishnevsky

When Audrey Claire Taichman was studying political science in college, she got her first taste of the culinary world as a waitress. At the time, she was afraid to admit that she wanted to pursue the culinary business, but as soon as she admitted it, she went for it. Nearly twenty years later, she is a successful Philadelphia restaurateur and the head of two community-oriented cultural strongholds.

“I fell in love with the business,” says Taichman. “I am very social, so it was a perfect mix. I loved culinary arts. I graduated and continued waiting tables and figuring out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.”

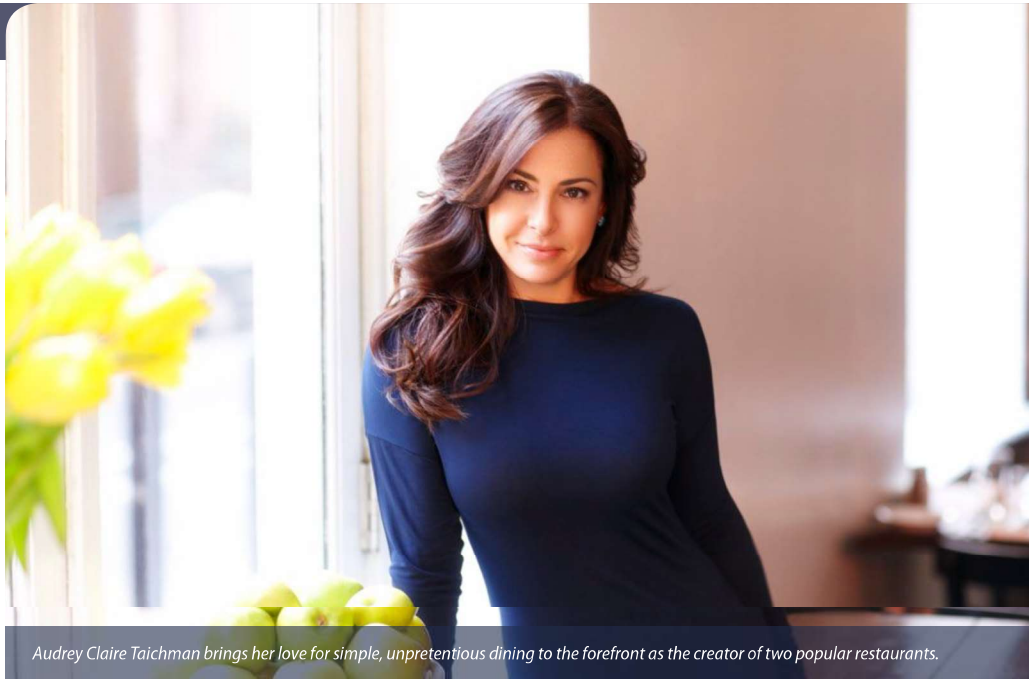
In an effort to share her passion with others, Taichman started a cooking program (COOK), which puts on an annual fundraiser to benefit the arts. Now, ingrained in the city’s fiber and constantly seeking out ways to stay involved with the community, Taichman must be glad she pursued her art.

A taste for boldness

Though Taichman admits that she was very naïve when she first started out, she believes that her naiveté actually helped her succeed.

“When you have nothing, you’ve got nothing to lose,” she says. “I think the drive was the most important and most impressive thing. People are willing to help you if they know you’re driven.”

Her Philadelphia restaurant, Audrey Claire (which takes its name, of course, from its creator), has now been open for about 17 years. Taichman knew that she wanted a restaurant. Renaissance restaurants hadn’t happened yet in the area, so Taichman



Audrey Claire Taichman brings her love for simple, unpretentious dining to the forefront as the creator of two popular restaurants.

knew there was nothing of the sort in the neighborhood.

“I was really lucky because the timing was perfect,” she says. “I wanted a simple little restaurant that people could eat in three to four times a week without expecting high glamour.”

There was a corner in Philadelphia that Taichman had her heart set on because it had open windows. (“Back then, nobody had that,” she says.) The cuisine is Mediterranean, inspired by Taichman’s experiences living in Israel and Italy. She says she truly believes in simple food, relying on key ingredients like olive oil, garlic, and lemon.

Don’t be afraid to improvise

Taichman opened the restaurant without a liquor license, figuring she would focus on the food at first and then get a license. The long lines for her establishment eventually convinced her, however, that a BYOB

business was in high demand. Thus, she never got the license.

Four years later, Taichman saw a rare opportunity when the restaurant across the street was secretly for sale.

“All of the customers who waited for Audrey Claire were there getting a drink,” she says. “So I thought, why don’t I buy [the] place and make money off those people too?”

So was born Twenty Manning Grill, a simple eatery.

“The neighborhood had plenty of places for higher end food, but I wanted somewhere kids could go to get a burger or roasted chicken,” she says.

In retrospect, Taichman admits that she thought the move was a mistake.

“I was so young and naïve,” she says. “I had no idea how to run a bar. I was overwhelmed and used to say that it was the bane of my

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existence. Twenty Manning was a hard venture, but now, obviously years later, I'm happy and it was the right thing to do."

Taichman's restaurants both continue to receive rave reviews in the area. She attributes her success to the restaurants' focus on the neighborhood and appropriate pricing, not to mention her stellar staff

"My staff is absolutely wonderful, and people love to have nice staff. They're not high-end and the food is good," she says.

Giving back

When she isn't running two successful restaurants, Taichman spends her time on philanthropic ventures. COOK is a collaborative kitchen-classroom with demonstrations by Philadelphia's established and aspiring chefs, private events, a bookstore, pantry, and cookware boutique.

Located on the same street as Audrey Claire and Twenty Manning Grill, COOK is a 16-seat demonstration kitchen. She opened a class in 2011 with a strong belief in the culture of the city.

"I live and breathe Philadelphia," she says. "I do business here and I want to live in

a city that's cultured. Working with the arts and community really can help that. People stay in a city that's cultural. I'm finding now that Philly is becoming a great restaurant city and artistic hub."

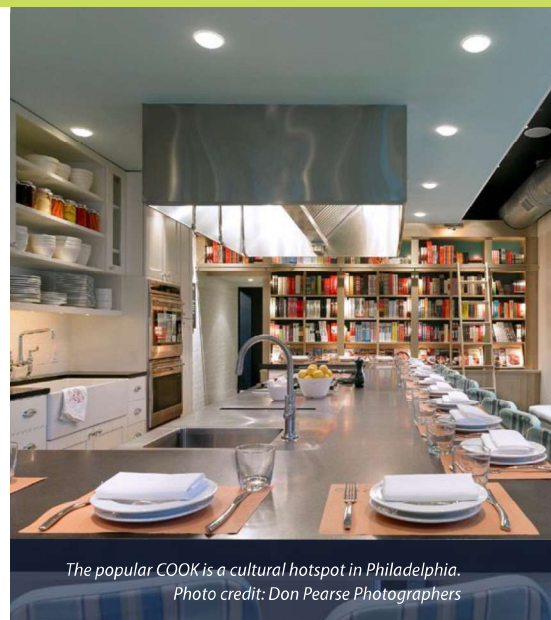
Her civic endeavors don't end there. "With COOK, I have been running an event called FEASTIVAL, which is a fundraiser for Philadelphia FringeArts," she says. In the first year, Taichman asked 50 restaurant colleagues to participate in the event.

"Everybody said yes, they were all willing to do it," she says. "It was so exciting and everybody was so into it."

FEASTIVAL transforms Pier 9 on the Delaware River Waterfront into a party for the hottest movers and shakers in Philadelphia's business, culinary, and social scenes. FEASTIVAL has been hailed as the cultural event of the year.

All in all, Taichman is showing no signs of slowing down.

"Family is next, spending quality time with them," she says. "In our business, we can work 24/7. It's time for me to focus on that. But I never say never. I'd love to do a collaborative, amazing project."



The popular COOK is a cultural hotspot in Philadelphia. Photo credit: Don Pearse Photographers



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Roasted Leek & Portobello Tart with Warm Goat Cheese & Polenta Crust

Recipe courtesy of Lou Boquila, Chef at Audrey Claire

Ingredients:

1 leek

1 portobello

2 oz. goat cheese

**1 1/2 cup water
and heavy cream**

1 cup cornmeal

1/2 cup parmesan cheese

Bring liquid to a boil then slowly whisk in corn meal. Whisk until mixture gets thick and lower heat to a simmer. Cook for an hour whisking occasionally then add cheese. Place on a sheet tray to cool overnight.

Slice leeks and wash three times in cold water making sure all dirt is removed. Drain and place on a tray. Season with extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper. Cook in a 400° F oven for 15 minutes.

Remove portobello stem and remove gills with a spoon. Drizzle with olive oil and cook in 400° F oven for 10 minutes.

To assemble place goat cheese on top of mushroom and heat up until cheese is soft, place on top of polenta and top with leeks.



Photo credit: Yoni Nimrod