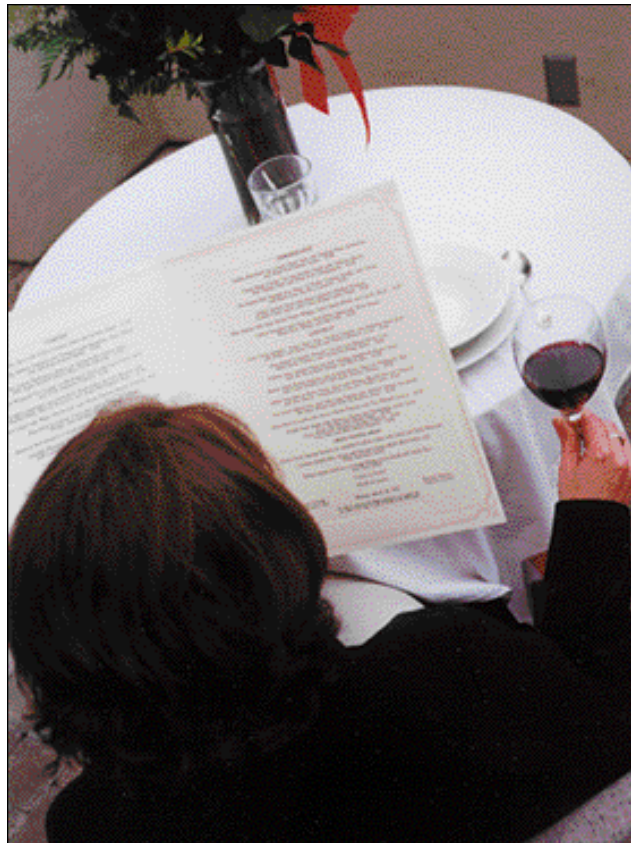


Each issue of La Toque profiles a member of our Chefs' Council and describes how his or her training and experience combine to form a resource rich with creative ideas for our clients.

P R O F I L E

Robin Davis

Food Writer



Here's to Robin!

Why are we showing the back of Robin Davis's head? As a restaurant critic for The San Francisco Chronicle, it is important to stay anonymous. Robin Davis packs a lot of

determination and food experience on her small frame. (She's out five to seven nights a week). "Going out to eat is still my number one favorite thing to do, even after years on the job!" she says. How does she stay slim? "I just taste things. I don't think I ever finish a meal. I work out. But the key is that I do not eat everything. I don't like dessert so it's easy to say no. It's harder to say no to foie gras, cheese, or bread. Those are necessary and SO good here." At the Chronicle since 1996, Robin won the prestigious James Beard Award for Journalism for her feature article, "Sushi American Style," published on Dec. 1, 1999.

The Joy of Convenience Food

"I grew up in the Midwest in a steak-and-potatoes kind of family. My mother, having grown up on a farm, was an excellent country cook, but it was a chore for her. She loved all the shortcuts the new convenience foods gave her. By the age of about five, my mother was teaching me her style of cooking but it was the social side of cooking that I really liked."

Go West Young Woman

"In 1989, NCR (National Cash Register) sent me to San Diego to do advertising and promotions for one of their product lines. Since I didn't know anyone, on weekends I would go to the farmer's market.

I loved the idea of cooking even if I wasn't always very successful. And here were all these things I'd never seen before. Kumquats, which I tried to peel. Swiss chard that I used for a salad green. So it was disaster, disaster, disaster. But I had a lot of fun doing it."

Love What You Do

"The creative people around me loved what they did. That was a revelation. I knew I loved to cook, was not especially good at it, but wanted to learn. So in 1992, I moved to San Francisco to attend the California Culinary Academy, graduating in '93.

I dug in, working for free, working banquets, working at restaurants. I'd be given terrible things to do such as

chop 50 pounds of shallots. Or deal with whole live lobsters. But I learned a lot that way. My friends and I would go to the farmer's market and each choose one thing and then cook dinner together.

But I learned pretty early that I was not fast enough for a professional kitchen. And what I love about cooking, the social interaction—watching people's reactions to the food—does not happen in a restaurant kitchen."

Finding Your Passion

"Then I had an opportunity to do my California Culinary Academy Internship with Michael Bauer, Food Editor of The San Francisco Chronicle. Writing was my first love. It was something I had always done and was looking for something to write about. Then I found food.

Michael would take me along on restaurant review dinners. I was sort of intimidated, but going to dinner with him was easy because he didn't spend the whole time talking about food. But he would always say—'What do you think of it?' The first place we went we ordered a Caesar Salad. I said I thought it needed salt and he gave me a questioning look. But then he took a bite and reached for the salt shaker."

Learning the Craft

"Shortly after I graduated, Bon Appétit Magazine posted a job, called a 'recipe stylist' at the Academy. At the end of a full day of interviews, I interviewed with the test kitchen staff. They were cooking and suggested I sit at the table. Instead, I asked if I could help. So I picked parsley and I'm sure that by helping them cook instead of sitting there is what got me the job.

I stayed three years, two as a recipe stylist and one as an assistant editor. As a recipe tester, I would cook for either the 11 a.m. or the 2 p.m. tasting. We'd do about four recipes and six editors would sit down, taste, and make comments. Then it would be opened up for everyone to taste. So my palate developed, I learned a lot about what things should taste like and what my own preferences were while I was learning a lot more about how to cook."

Returning to the Chronicle

"In 1996, Michael Bauer offered me a part-time editorial assistant job. He thought I could freelance to fill in so I called people, such as Marc Halperin at CCD, who had promised work if I were in San Francisco. I called him and said, 'If I came up there in two weeks, would you use me for your Chefs' Council?' When things started to pick up at the Chronicle, Michael offered me the critic's job. That was a really easy 'Yes!'

The job is very consuming and a constant deadline. Reviews take about half my time. I shop for and write up the Taste Test each week plus we are always working on a lead story. For example, we just finished Bargain Dining (a pull out section of the Sunday paper)."

Testing the Supermarket

"For the Taste Test column, I target the person who goes to the supermarket looking for a can of baked beans not knowing which brand to buy. The supermarket tells me what and how people are cooking at home. For example, we recently did a tasting of cooking sprays on supermarket Caesar salads.

We try to vary the column so, for instance, once we did salt: sea salt, Morton salt, organic salt, kosher salt. Chefs thought the article was fabulous but some readers called to say, 'Who cares? It's just salt.'"

The Power of Feedback

"I am always appreciative of feedback. We get a great deal of information from readers. If readers disagree with a

"Menus are becoming very specific to a region. It's Vietnamese street food, or the food of Hanoi, or Saigon. You see menus featuring the dishes of Istria and the Amalfi coast."

restaurant review, I might ask where they do like to eat. That's how I find out where people are eating. I know only what I see, what my friends see, and press releases.

We believe reviews are a consumer service. We go to



places three times and report our experiences. We tell you what the food was like and what the atmosphere was like so that readers can know just what to expect and decide whether or not they want to go.

We don't review every place we go. But if there's a name chef, or someone who does a lot of advertising or a PR push, then we will go."

From Restaurants to the Kitchen Table

"Often, you see things in restaurants and then see them show up in supermarkets. I strongly believe that people are exposed to new things in restaurants. Take 'microgreens.' Many restaurants use them. And people ask what the little red leaf is that they are eating. Then they will ask for it at the farmer's market and tell their friends in the Midwest.

It happens not just with produce but with the way things are cooked. There was the trend of high-end restaurants cooking home-style food—roast chicken, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese. Then you started seeing it on magazine pages.

More and more new restaurants are only serving small plates, each to be shared—the grazing concept. They do not serve entrée-sized portions. That talks about how people are eating now."

Looking for Value

"People used to think that a huge meal, even if they ate only half, was a 'good value.' Here, we think an entrée price under \$10 is a pretty great value. At a San Francisco 'value' restaurant you have great food on plain white plates. The restaurant might rely on three turns a night and have tricks to move you through without making you feel rushed.

These restaurants may not take reservations which saves on overhead. And they may do take-away business."

Looking Ahead

"One thing I think we'll see more of in restaurants is entertainment value. Foreign Cinema does the movie thing. Asia SF has dancers. Sometimes the entertainment is in the décor or the bar scene.

Menus are becoming very specific to a region. It's Vietnamese street food, or the food of Hanoi, or Saigon. You see menus featuring the dishes of Istria and the Amalfi coast. You see more Greek food and specific island food, or Greek seafood."

Globalization

"The world has become very small and the Internet has made it even smaller. If I lived in Kansas, I would have no problem anymore getting lobster, or a specific cheese, or a fresh white truffle.

People may not know an ingredient's country of origin, they just know that they love it. In California, at least, anything goes. It's not a problem to get exotic ingredients here and now these ingredients are even cultivated here."

Optimism Piques the Appetite

"I am the eternal optimist. Every time I go to a new restaurant, I think, 'Maybe this one is going to be really, really good.' I don't think I have that feeling about any other thing in my life. Well, maybe the first date . . ."

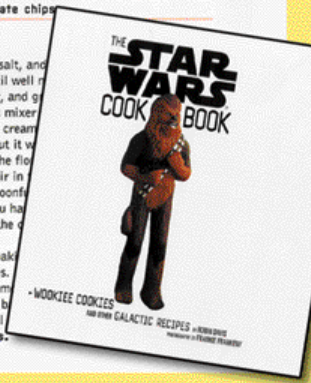
Tapping into what America eats and translating it into mainstream products is the hallmark of The CCD. Using an outside culinary perspective helps our clients to develop delicious, exciting new products. For more information on our unique approach, please contact Kevin Hennessy at 415.693.8900 ext. 103 or khennessy@ccdsf.com.

Wookiee Cookies

INGREDIENTS

- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 cup milk chocolate chips
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

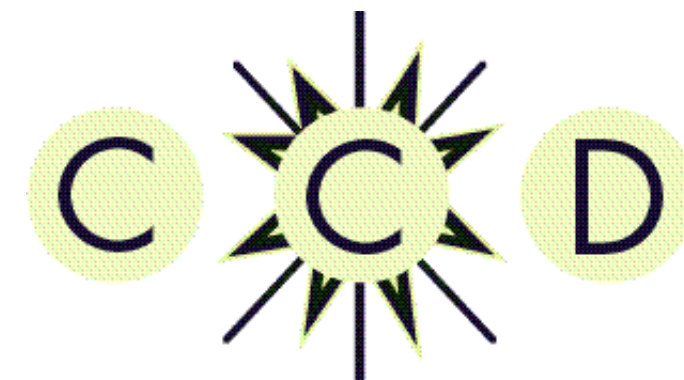
1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
 2. Put the flour, baking soda, salt, and Stir with the wooden spoon until well mixed.
 3. Put the butter, brown sugar, and granulated sugar in a mixing bowl. Using the electric mixer together until well blended and cream do this with a wooden spoon, but it will be easier with a mixer. Add the eggs and vanilla extract. Add the flour and chocolate chips. Stir in the chocolate chips.
 4. Scoop up a rounded tablespoon of dough onto a greased baking sheet. Repeat until you have about 1 inch between the cookies.
 5. Using pot holders, put the baking sheet in the oven. Bake until golden brown, about 10 minutes.
 6. Again, using pot holders, remove the baking sheet from the oven. Lift the cookies from the sheet and place on cooling racks. Let cool.
- Makes about 3 dozen cookies.



Robin Davis's Star Wars inspired cookbook, filled with Inter-Galactic delights.

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For more information contact Kevin Hennessy 415/693-8900 ext.103 or email at khennessy@ccdsf.com
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