

Adman about town

New York

Preface

Quick-witted adman George Lois shares his philosophy on advertising, creative sustenance and the perfect last meal.

Writer

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“At lunch this place usually has five or six billionaires. This room [Grill Room] is where the ‘power lunch’ happens. I coined that phrase while working with Joe Baum. Restaurant Associates was a network of restaurants that Jo opened in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He was leading a personal crusade to elevate eating in America to a spectacular, theatrical experience. He hired me in 1960 to do the advertising for The Four Seasons but I immediately realised he was creating restaurants so I became creative director. I did that for The Four Seasons from 1960 to 2000. I’ve had lunch here about 8,000 times over 40 years. This place has special meaning.

Thirty or so years ago, I was sitting here with [graphic designer] Jean-Paul Goude and Andy Warhol came in. He had just gotten a Polaroid camera and he said, ‘Oh, you’re both so good looking, my first shot’s going to be of you’. He took the shot, signed it with a ‘W’ and gave it to me. I shot him drowning in a can of Campbell’s Tomato Soup for an *Esquire* cover. Till the day he died he called me up and tried to get the original art. He said, ‘I’ll give you a dozen Brillo Boxes.’ I said, ‘Andy, I can go to A&P and there’s Brillo boxes out in the street.’ Today his Brillo Box costs about \$100,000.

I worked on Bobby Kennedy’s senate campaign in New York in 1964. I was known as this advertising guy who had a famous ad agency [Papert, Koenig, Lois] and I was an art director. Back then there was no such thing. And everyone knew I was a left-winger. So Bobby and Steve Smith, his brother-in-law, were saying, ‘Jesus Christ, this guy looks like something.’ They called up and said, ‘Would you like to do Bobby’s ad campaign?’



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We got to be great friends. Every time he came into the The Four Seasons we’d send notes to each other. I sent him one that said, ‘Bobby, small fork: salad. Big fork: meat.’ We were always busting each others’ chops.

My mother was the most incredible cook. Her recipes are all written in Greek, based on recipes she learned as a child. Every meal was fully fledged. She could go through a whole cookbook.

My father was a florist and I delivered flowers. You always got a dime tip. Boy, I was rich. With 10 cents you could buy a black-and-white ice cream soda with two lumps of ice cream in it. I’d go into a place across the street called Luhrs. I’d sit down in the middle of delivering and Mr Luhrs would say, ‘George, good tips today, huh?’ At 19 I got drafted for the Korean War. I was trying to stay



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Profile

Celebrated adman George Lois created some of the 20th century’s most iconic advertisements. The lifelong New Yorker produced cutting-edge campaigns that went on to define the golden age of advertising. Lois was also controversial; many of his more than 90 *Esquire* covers critiqued the contentious issues of the 1960s, including civil rights, feminism and the Vietnam War.

Venue

The Four Seasons

Opened in 1959, New York’s only landmarked restaurant is housed in the city’s sole Mies van der Rohe-designed building. Award-winning and locally sourced American Nouveau cuisine is crafted by executive chef Pecko Zantilaveevan.

Menu

To eat:

Risotto with white truffle shavings.
Sautéed Dover sole topped with parsley and key lime sauce.
Chocolate velvet cake.

To drink:

Chassagne Montrachet, Marquis de Laguiche, 2009.



- 01 Lois did campaigns for The Four Seasons
- 02 Grill Room, Four Seasons, New York
- 03 Mies van der Rohe-designed building
- 04 Logo that's also on the restaurant's plates
- 05 Sous chef preparing nigiri sushi
- 06 Assistant manager Ivan Matteoni
- 07 Dover sole with key lime sauce
- 08 Risotto with white truffles
- 09 Lois with stage curtain painted by Picasso



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The dish

Risotto with white truffles

(Serves 4)

- 7-8 cups chicken stock
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 large shallots, diced small
- 1.5-2 cups Arborio rice
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 85g truffle butter
- 55g Parmesan cheese
- Salt and white pepper
- Shaved white truffles

The method

01 In a stock pot over high heat, bring the chicken stock to a boil and turn down to a low simmer. In another pan over medium high heat, sauté shallots in 1 tbsp of olive oil for approximately 2 minutes until they are translucent. Add the rice and lightly toast for another minute.

02 Add chicken stock, a little at a time, sampling the rice along the way to determine it is cooked and the texture is al dente.

03 Once the risotto is cooked, finish with chicken stock, heavy cream, Parmesan cheese, truffle butter and salt and white pepper to taste. The risotto's texture should be velvety, creamy and slightly runny.

04 Place risotto on a serving plate and add thinly shaved fresh white truffle on top. Serve at once.

alive and killing people in between. We lost as many men in three years as they lost in Vietnam in six years. When we came home, nobody even knew. 'Where you been?' they asked. When I went to Korea I weighed 84 kilos [and I'm] 6ft 2in. When I came home I weighed 65 kilos. I almost starved to death in Korea in the US Army. When my wife – she's an amazing cook – saw me she started cooking. I picked up the 18 kilos within two months.

Hunger has many facets. I hungered to create work that challenged you to think. In 1964, Harold Hayes, editor of *Esquire*, asked me to do a cover. I had never done a cover in my life. They had a terrific photograph of Floyd Patterson, heavy-weight champion of the world, and Sonny Liston. They had an upcoming fight. Patterson was like an eight-to-one favourite but I knew he was going to get shattered. So for the next cover I photograph a guy who's built like Patterson laying face down in the ring. He gets beaten and he's left for dead. A metaphor for boxing and life: if you lose, you're through.

Only problem was I didn't know what colour trunks Patterson would wear. So we flipped a coin. Heads it's black, tails it's white. Heads. Black. We do the cover. Everybody in America said this is going to kill *Esquire*, which was deep in the red. Few days later I was watching the fight. Liston gets in the ring. He's wearing white [and Patterson did wear black]. Sometimes things like that happen and you say maybe there is a God. Liston destroyed Patterson. *Esquire's* circulation went from 400,000 to two million.

All my career I left the house at 05:30 every morning. My wife would wake up with me and bake a dozen corn muffins. I would bring them, piping hot, to the agency. I had the most incredible kitchen there. When clients would come we served them food. I would walk around keeping the coffee cups full. To me, that was an important part of hospitality.

I'd like my last meal to be a big supper with my family and all my pals. Many of my best friends are those I play basketball with. We'd get in a game afterwards. Make a lot of noise. Yell and scream. That's the way to go out: in action." — (M)