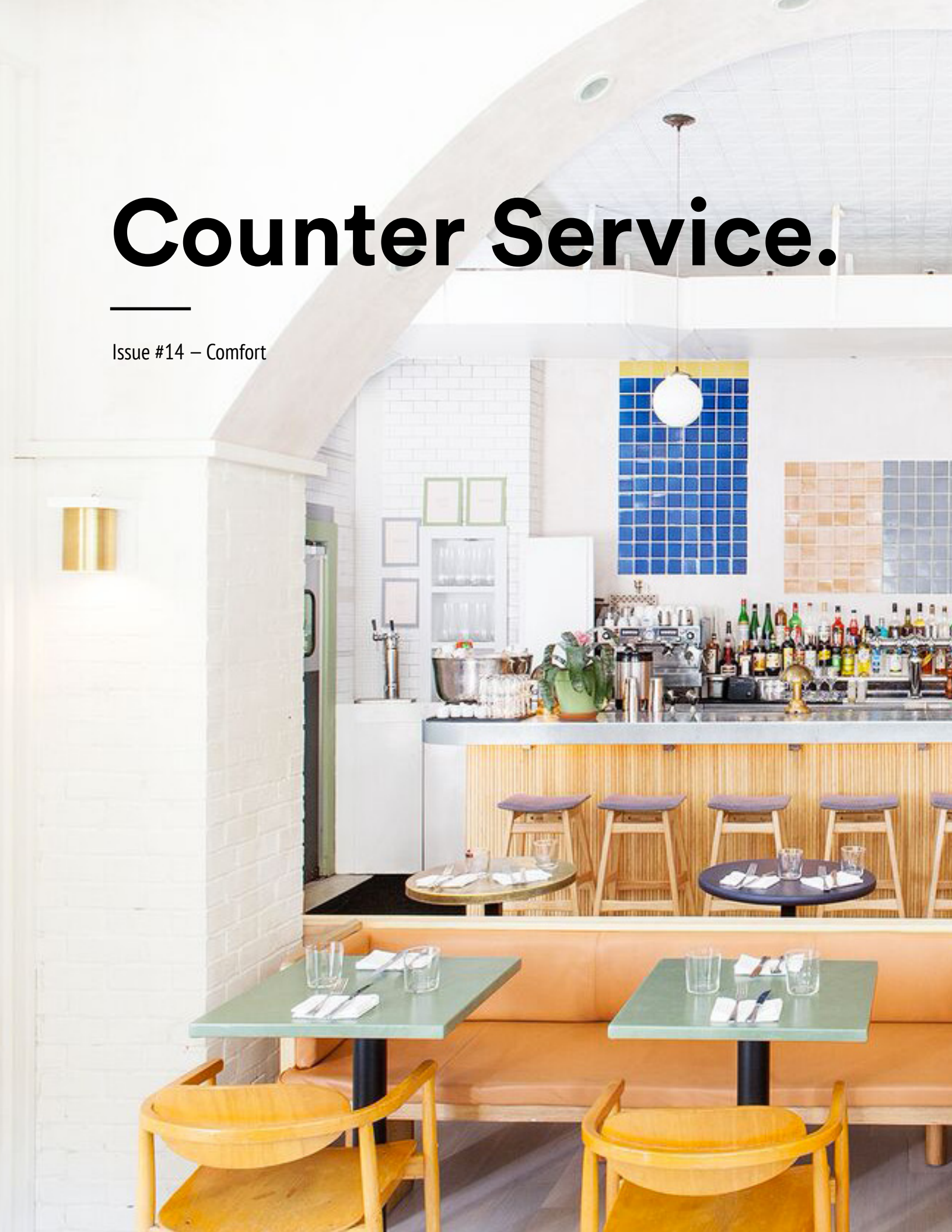


Counter Service.

Issue #14 – Comfort





Letter from the Editor

I have always been interested by the concept of comfort. I don't know if two people have the same idea of what "comfort" is – mashed potatoes or fish soup // camping or cabana // silence or blasting music // crocs or chelsea boots.

I even went so far as to tattoo that word on me. Well... close enough. I have the word "uncomfortable" tattooed on my forearm and it's the tattoo that I probably skip over explaining the most. "This tattoo is for my family, this is to remind me that there is beauty in the things you do every day, this one? On that one's a mistake and that? Uncomfortable? Well, anyways."

Short answer is: I got the word uncomfortable tattooed on me to remind myself that **there is no growth in comfort.**

And that's a bit of what this issue is exploring: what is comfort; what

is it to be comfortable around food, around cooking, around our routines? What is it to take comfort in the uncomfortable? Can the idea of comfort food change or must it be that casserole or plate of fried something that your grandparents used to cook (for me, string beans and angel food cake...).

The idea of comfort is a tricky one; we simultaneously all crave that sense of comfort and also push ourselves, sometimes, to uncomfortable lengths to achieve it.

I can say that I am SO proud of each author, illustrator, and plain ol' artist that came together for this issue. I've screamed "THAT'S EXACTLY CORRECT" several times reading over everything, so please PLEASE please take some time with this issue. It means the words to us.

—JH

Counter Service.

Issue 14 – Comfort

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We take submissions of any kind, really. Counter Service is a platform where we like to talk about what happens around the table and the edges of the food world. That doesn't mean you have to talk about food, but most likely it will come up in your submission at some point. We look for fiction, nonfiction, personal essays, poetry, playlists, photography, graphic design, vignettes, obsession pieces, illustration, and profiles of people/places/things/ingredients/etc.

Each issue does revolve around a central theme, but largely this theme is a guideline and not a rubric. If you feel so inspired to write/photograph/design something and it doesn't fit our theme, let us take a look anyways and we'll make it work some way or another. For examples, peep us on our website for the latest issue.

hello@counterservicemag.com

Contents	↘
Letter from the Editor	3
Unforbidden Fruit	6
Meditations in Comfort: East to West	11
Fictional Feasts	16
Making Space	18
Banana Bread	31
Trail Mix and Tea	40
Morning Routines	45
An Ajjuma & Her Banchan	50
By the Wind	58
Grey Spaces: The (Dis)Comfort of Complacency	61
Arroz Caldo	66

Unforbidden Fruit

by Lexie Roth

Comfort food is colloquial.

It has no home, just the home associated with each human being. Passed on generation after generation, steeped in history and family. Changing like a game of telephone. Embellished by our own individual experiences, tastes, adventures. My comfort food growing up was a conglomerate rooted in spaghetti Aglio E Olio and breaded Parmesan-parsley chicken from my mother Deborah, matzoh ball soup from my grandmother Silvia, and potatoes au gratin and pytt I panna from my Swedish godmother Annie who lived with my dad and I for several years after my mom and sister passed.

In my adult years I no longer feel as comforted by the heavy rich foods of my upbringing. I find healing and comfort in tropical environments where my skin is crispy and the food is light and healthy. Where I can swim until my mind is quiet. Where I can have experiences I've never had in my 30 years on this earth. I'm in Hawaii right now, visiting my dear friend who now lives out here. Beyond the love of swimming with dolphins, whales, sea turtles, and many many fish I've never seen before, I've had a true love affair with the incredible fruit of these Hawaiian islands.

Comfort depends on your company.

When I see someone I trust jumping into the unknown waters of durian or literally the unknown waters of sea life, I follow.

I follow bravely, excitedly and with a deep slow heartbeat.



CACAO

Each seed is coated with this smooth, creamy gelatin like flesh you suck off of each small morsel- some chocolately notes come through. It’s hard to deny the desire to bite down and eat the whole thing.

LILIKOI

Also known as passion fruit. Orange pulp surrounded by seeds that are delicious and edible. I love scraping the inner walls to release all that goodness then slurp it down.

RHAMBUTAN

Soft red exterior that gives me “koosh ball” sensations triggering childhood comfort inside a gift a crisp, fresh, opaque, pristine sphere of joy.

SOURSOP

My favorite of all. Tangy, white flesh inside a spiky queen exterior. It looks like if an avocado transformed into an indestructible being morphed into a bulbous fruit who’s appearance screams “don’t touch me”. But oh am I glad I did. Almost the entire inside can be eaten, it is incredible how much flesh is inside. One soursop could feed a small army, or one hungry me.

DURIAN

My friend from work would always bring up durian any time he smelled something foul. Describing the fruit as the most disgusting, heinous fruit with the worst lingering smell. Since then I’ve been terrified to try it. Celia and I went to the botanical gardens and the incredibly kind grounds keeper found us on the trail and asked if we were interested in durian. We were excited to have him grab one from way up high on the tree- he came back eager, hands bleeding from the spikes. There are 30 recognized Durio species at least nine of which produce edible fruit and over 300 named varieties In Thailand, 102 in Indonesia and 100 in Malaysia. He hands me a split open quarter of thorn covered rind that immediately punctured my hands. Celia scooped out a section of rich custard for us to try. The fragrance can evoke reactions from deep appreciation to intense disgust.

Some say, “rotten onions, turpentine, and raw sewage”. The persistence of its odor which lingers for several days has lead to its banishment from certain hotels and public transportation in southeast asia. But according to the nineteenth century British naturalist, Alfred Russell Wallace, who clearly has durians back said, it was “a rich custard highly flavored with almonds”. Celia kept the seeds, washed them off to plant her own trees, the seeds can also be eaten when cooked. Who knew?



A person is silhouetted against a bright, low sun over the ocean. The person stands on a sandy beach, looking out at the water. The sun is a large, bright yellow orb, and its light reflects on the water's surface. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. In the distance, a small structure is visible on the left side of the horizon.

Meditations in Comfort: East to West

by Jasmine Senaveratna

It's winter here in Carmel Valley. I make myself coffee, step out into the light, listen to the birds and watch a tiny lizard peek from under a pot. I carefully tip toe around some new spider webs. My new concern for their homes simultaneously baffles me and makes sense.

We're all being blown around by the wind while trying to create a home -- a place where we can comfortably exist.

That it has some of the most beautiful coastline the U.S. has to offer. The coveted, multimillion-dollar waterfront homes. The proximity to wine country, rolling hills, ranches, olive trees. For my partner, Claire, however, it is a place of childhood memories with a dear uncle. One who passed away, and whose memory we preserve by caring for the home he built with hard work and love for nature.

“By the end, the wine dinners, the late night crawls, the extra pours became mind-numbingly routine.”

Flash back to New Year's Eve, 2016. A night of high-volume, never-ending dinner service. A no square-inch to move, champagne flutes everywhere, barely walking out at 5am kind of service. Not an unusual way to end the night as a restaurant manager in NYC. The type of night you come to expect, in which you won't kiss your love at midnight, but hell, a lot of money was made.

I didn't want to do it anymore. I didn't want to drag my bones home at twilight. I didn't want to fold myself into an Uber in the empty, dark night, to an empty, dark matchbox. I didn't want to miss out on celebrations with people I loved sharing life with. And so by fall 2017, after a glorious 14-year rollercoaster ride in the big city, I moved. I moved as far west as I could.

Carmel, California. A place I find many know and no one knows about. Some know Clint Eastwood was the mayor.

At first, the escapism I attained and focus on housework pleasantly numbed what I missed about New York. My friends were far, yes, but a healthy obsession (not) with Instagram allows me to “be with” them. A virtual trickery that I allow to fool me, making me feel as though I am hanging with Russell or Laura on the town, watching Sarah make new ceramics, or witnessing Tomer's restaurant grow step-by-step. With them in my back pocket, I search for jobs, offer my writing to those who graciously accept to help me make a living, pull weeds, hang pictures, and start a new life.

The comfort I seek and find—the ease and freedom from the pains I allowed New York and restaurant life to afflict upon me—come with some adjustments.

Living in the retirement Garden of Eden, I find myself active and socializing before sunset. Supermarkets, restaurants and

bars here cater to the demand of daytime life, and so I accept. But I am a nocturnal creature. This started at a young age, forcing myself to stay awake until my dad, a chef, came home from work, so I could nibble on sardines with him and watch CNN (his downtime, my dad time). Now I'm driving (!) to Trader Joe's before noon and occasionally treating myself to a midday cocktail in town.

A conversation is often struck with locals at the bar, mostly retirees who lived here before it was pricey and cool, some who worked on ranches, or lived full lives decades ago and worked hard to live here. Some who have lost husbands and wives, dear friends, and still circle back to their haunts. Holding onto cherished routines and memories. Compared to the post-shift, late night soirees I was used to, where conversations go these days put much into perspective.

I see comfort as a symbiotic relationship between physical surroundings and mental state. And my comfort has evolved. In my twenties, the whiplash of restaurant life and blur of late night satiated my need to move in all directions, to use all parts of my mind and bounce around in social circles between Manhattan and Brooklyn. To funnel all that curiosity about human nature and attempt to understand the nonsensical machine behind restaurants in cavernous urbanity—the burrowed tunnels tucked around and deep in the beehive that is the city.

By the end, the wine dinners, the late night crawls, the extra pours became mind-numbingly routine.

The comforts and privilege I initially yearned for and worked toward became a twisted test of endurance; I was looping around a racetrack that had no finish. What I wanted, and didn't know quite yet, was to tap the breaks and be present without worrying about a missed opportunity. To take a job and learn to love it fully, to cultivate myself in it before wondering what other hotspot would lead me to better networks. To sip on a glass of wine where I am and not chug it because I have to check out that new spot downtown.

I've planted a seed of hope here, in green hills and by blue ocean. When the memories of old comforts come back, I walk out into the yard, sit and absorb the sun. We drive 10 minutes to the beach, walk the shoreline, and let the salty fresh air penetrate our lungs and release inner doubts about the future.

At the beach, I secretly anticipate watching the ducks. The currents come in from the horizon and they ride the waves with enviable nonchalance. I imagine they have no fear of what's to come because they're so in the moment, so aware of the pattern. I imagine we both sit there, looking out and seeking answers.

Watching plants faithfully grow their fruit, the ocean ebb and flow, the sun cross the sky, I see everything has a purpose. One that is, when observed, beautifully simple and complex. And then I realize I am, too, both simple and complex. And that realization is a wonderful relief. Nature is present, confident in its patterns, giving me an ease and freedom in myself. I know that I am not finding myself here, but growing new layers of my identity. These new comforts, in nature and no longer in city life, are new circles in a personal evolution.

Adjustment and discovery have gifted plenty pleasures. The lack of nightlife allows me to cook and make cocktails at home. The idea of driving home on winding dark roads after dinner and drinks is not inviting, so I make our martinis and plan nice meals. Claire and I make a list, meeting halfway between her herbivore and my carnivore. Some dish we had or tired but true favorite often inspires me. Grilled vegetables with sea salt. T-bone au poivre in a cast iron skillet. Red curry and coconut soup, reeking with lemongrass when I miss Thai food.

The steps toward daily-prepared dinners become meditation. I zone in when making a list, prepping, and plating. I engage in a series of pleasing actions that I bring to completion. Picking up vegetables, cutting them, arranging them; the smell of

sautéed onion and garlic, the sounds of coconut milk softly bubbling in my wok; seeing Claire's eyes widen when surprising her with buttery scallops.

When the looming reality of landing a job and finances set back in, I repeat and am rewarded by the following exercises: walking in the green expanse of the yard, walking the beach, listening to and squinting for insects and birds. Until I focus, until I am calm.

The active earth and moving water around me give answers and provoke a catharsis. I try to keep up with the hummingbird, who doesn't fret, but keeps moving until she finds the nectar she needs. The succulents in our garden unwaveringly steer toward the sun. The snail in her shell, who when exposed, knows the wave will cover her with sand again.

They are present, and the answers to their needs come to them in it. They find comfort in the presence of their small, big worlds. And so I, as a being focused on my own experience, but also a smaller part of a living, breathing world, mimic their actions. I release and find comfort just being here, in my mind, on this chair, on this soil. Growing as the horizon bears answers.



Fictional Feasts

by Rae Robey

I discovered my favorite food writer at nine years old, around the same time I began reading in earnest. Roald Dahl's absurd worlds were always described with the same strain of invented language, painting vivid pictures of meals that—though I never ate them—became fragments of a childhood nostalgia that would endure through adulthood. I doubt there's ever been a young reader who hasn't jealously followed along as Bruce Bogtrotter made his way through that huge chocolate fudge cake, who hasn't envied the splendor of Fantastic Mr. Fox's stolen feast, who hasn't salivated over the thought of a giant summer-ripened peach. Unlike contemporary food writing, whose primary objective is rendering as realistic a portrait of texture and flavors as possible, Dahl's whimsical writing privileges emotion and imagination. Without fail, each book consistently imparts a sense of wonder that both comforts and transports:

"What a marvelous smell! Answered grandpa joe, taking a long deep sniff. All the most wonderful smells in the world seemed to be mixed up in the air around them — the smell of roasting coffee and burnt sugar and melting chocolate and mint and violets and crushed hazelnuts and apple blossom and caramel and lemon peel."

– Roald dahl, charlie and the chocolate factory

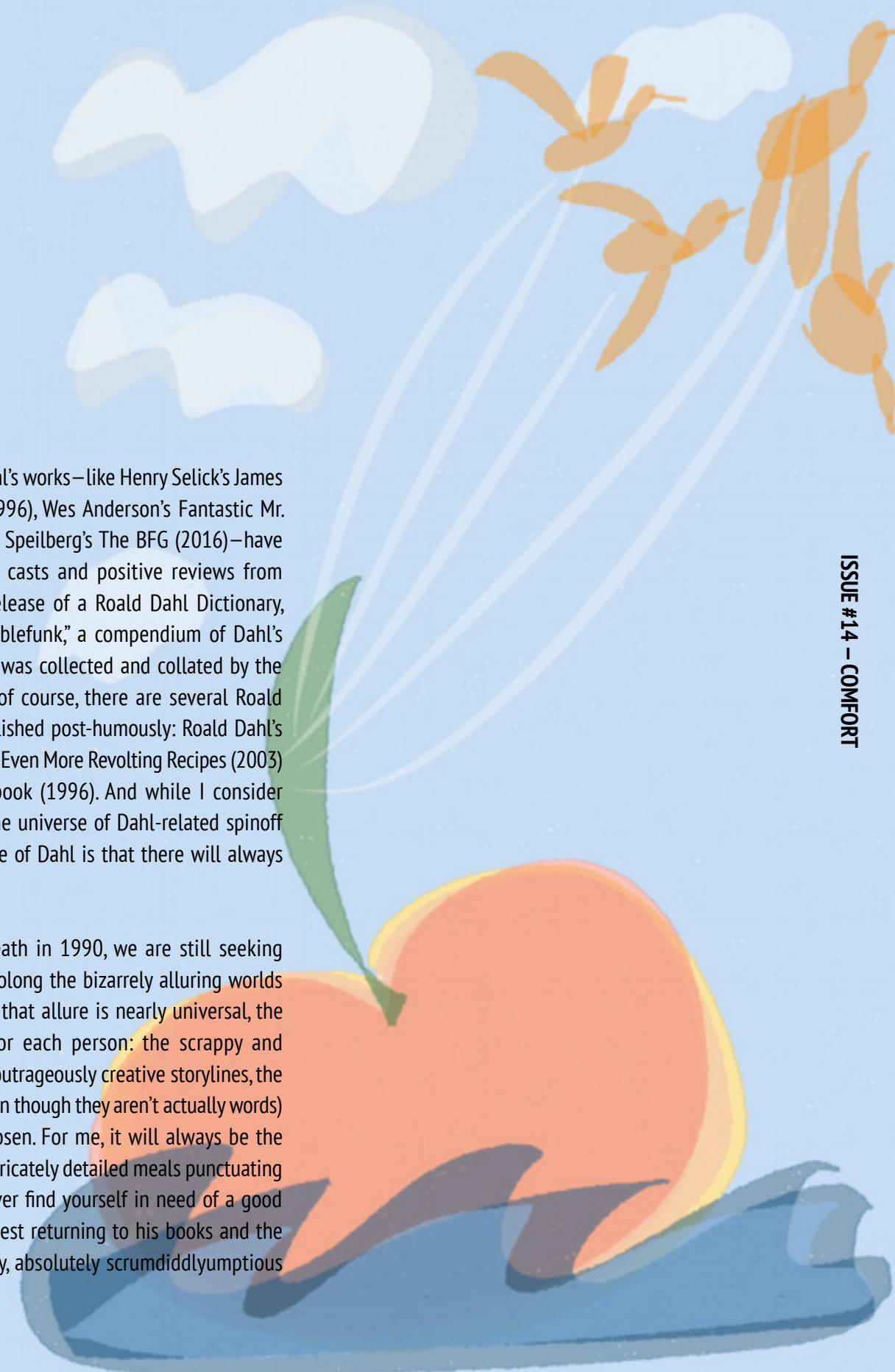
Roald Dahl begs the reader to momentarily suspend reality and imagine an alternative world where young protagonists

drink fizzing frobscottle cocktails, and where snozzcumbers are integral to the diet of big, friendly giants. As in *The BFG*, the majority of Dahl's novels cheekily chronicle the lives of precocious children who are intelligent and selfless in equal measure. In each book, passages describing the meals eaten by willful child-heroes serve as points of resolution so emotionally charged that one can't help but resonate with each book's protagonist. The stories become inseparable from that nostalgia produced in the reader, so full of pathos is the writing.

I'm not the only devotee. Paramount Picture's 1971 version of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (also known as "the one with Gene Wilder") is beloved for its timeless appeal and iconic soundtrack. 2005's rendition with Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter is similarly well-integrated into popular culture, though it represents a slightly more ominous and arresting interpretation of the original text—one which can only be expected of director Tim Burton. I am particularly drawn to the film version of *Matilda* (1996), directed by a pre-It's Always Sunny in Danny DeVito. The film's casting is unparalleled: Rhea Perlman and DeVito perfectly embody the self-absorption and egotism displayed by Matilda's parents in Dahl's book, and Mara Wilson's Matilda perfectly balances the titular character's dual innocence and intelligent defiance. More importantly, though, Pam Ferris as Ms. Trunchbull is the reason I'm still scared of "The Chokey."

Other adaptations of Dahl's works—like Henry Selick's *James and the Giant Peach* (1996), Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009) and Stephen Spielberg's *The BFG* (2016)—have similarly drawn all-star casts and positive reviews from critics. 2016 saw the release of a Roald Dahl Dictionary, with 288 pages of "gobblefunk," a compendium of Dahl's invented language that was collected and collated by the Oxford Dictionary. And, of course, there are several Roald Dahl cookbooks, all published post-humously: *Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes* (1997), *Even More Revolting Recipes* (2003) and *Roald Dahl's Cookbook* (1996). And while I consider myself well-versed in the universe of Dahl-related spinoff paraphernalia, the nature of Dahl is that there will always be another to uncover.

Decades after Dahl's death in 1990, we are still seeking ways to reinvent and prolong the bizarrely alluring worlds he imagined. And while that allure is nearly universal, the rationale is different for each person: the scrappy and unexpected heroes, the outrageously creative storylines, the gibberish words that (even though they aren't actually words) are always perfectly chosen. For me, it will always be the those elaborately and intricately detailed meals punctuating each page. And if you ever find yourself in need of a good dose of escapism, I suggest returning to his books and the flavory-savory, lickswishy, absolutely scrumdiddlyumptious feasts inside them.



Making Space

by Josh Hamlet



First and foremost, Anna and Amy are the people you want at your next party. (Dinner, dance, or cocktail).

Somehow they have this electric energy that makes you want to learn, laugh, eat, drink, and get to know everyone in the room. Oh, and they also run a James Beard Nominated design house called The MP Shift.

They. Do. It. All. As I was chatting with these two powerhouses, they mentioned this as a “wholistic” approach. I call it the “they do everything” approach. From concepts to visual identities, interior design to launch strategies (and not to mention Program Curation aka they throw a good event) -- Anna and Amy have become to go-to designers in New York and are now expanding to other cities (such as Paris). Most likely you’ve seen their work around New York’s finest new openings -- i.e. de Maria, Lalito, Otway, Golda, VHH Foods, Ferris....

I stole a few minutes of their time the other day to chat about comfort because, as I’ve probably said before, I think restaurants are inherently uncomfortable. You’re walking into a space that is not yours, trying to suss out every new sense (what does it look like, smell like, feel like, taste like, sound like). You don’t know where the bathroom is, or where to get a drink. You don’t know if you need to whisper or shout to have a conversation, and lord knows what you might be eating that meal.

But the MP Shift has this ability to make restaurants feel lived in, homey, recognizable yet unique and distinct. So, how the hell do they do that? I wanted to know.

Counter Service: So! Thank you for taking the time out to chat with me. To start things off, would you mind telling me how you both got into The MP Shift?

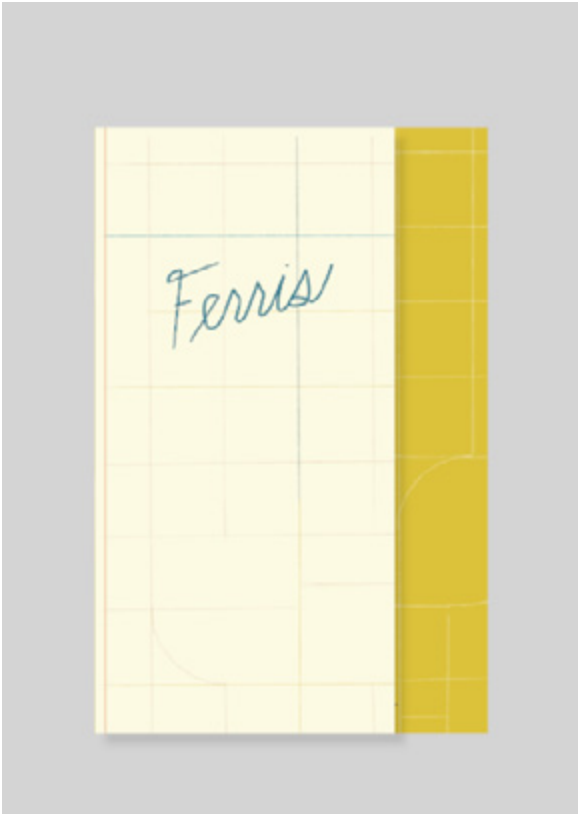
Anna Polonsky: Amy and I have always had one foot in marketing strategy and one foot in creative direction. We have mixed backgrounds, combining marketing-thinking and creative-thinking. When we transitioned away from our old jobs, we both knew we wanted to focus on more creative projects and decided to partner.

There weren’t many chefs thinking holistically when building a restaurant. We bring the rational strategy to the creative direction and work with the entire team to build a strong brand.

Amy Morris: You can be a lot more creative if you have the strategy nailed down. If you don’t have a foundation to drive all decision, you’re grabbing at ideas from everywhere, following what inspired you most recently. Anna and I have a catalogue of creative images, ideas, inspirations; it’s like a never ending movie reel of inspiration collected and stored in our heads. If we have a direction, we know which inspiration to pull from. When we don’t know the foundation, it’s hard to give the restaurant’s brand a form because everyone is working from their own individual ideas, not the collectively built foundation.

When we started designing, we would go to our clients and say “What is your brand? Who are you.” And none of them had answers. We can’t build an authentic space without knowing the brand. It won’t ever represent the client if you don’t know who they are. All would be lost along the way.





This page, clockwise: Provided by The MP Shift, (formerly) Tilda All Day (currently) Otway // Photograph by Josh Dickinson.
Previous page: de Maria // Photograph by Heidi Bridge



CS: What do you start thinking about when it comes to designing the space?

AM: By starting with a brand Q&A, we are able to understand when someone says “minimal” what “minimal” means to them. We need to understand their verbal language and need to understand their visual language. Colorful to one person is adding one object of color and to another it’s adding color to every wall and table. Once we understand both of those we can start build their a mission statement and a mood board to match it.

For example we have a client that wants to be the neighborhood gathering spot, the challenge is that they leased a space that is broken into four rooms. It was important to keep the space vibrant and buzzing and make every room desirable. We did this by giving each room a personality that ties back to the brand, now each space feels special and patrons will want to experience them all.

CS: “It almost sounds like you are moving to a region, let’s say, that produces really good zucchini, you’re not going to make them start producing eggplant. This room tells me this is supposed to be a welcoming room, so, we’re going to make it just that...”

AM: You’re Hired

CS: What do you think sets you apart from other designers?

AP: We think it’s both because of that wholistic approach and we don’t have a signature style, we aim to draw out our clients vision and articulate it in the best way. We have no interest in being recognized by our style like other branded firms.

We also always work with our client’s brand. To give you an example, with De Maria, we worked with colored leather on the table because Chef Camille [Becerra] – an instagram star – really wanted a table with a non-reflective surface. So that’s how we came up with that idea. Every idea is very much connected to the owner. I would say Golda and de Maria are a bit similar because they are both all-day cafes, but with Golda the colors are a little more Turkish. Our designs always represent something personal about the owner, menu or chef.

We don’t want to create sets. We feel that a lot of the restaurant designers in the past 20 years have created movie sets, and it works, but we always feel more at home when it’s imperfect. At your house, you would never create a crazy ceiling installation, with a contemporary artist for a reason: you want it to be timeless; you want it to be like a house. And then in your house you would never just have symmetrical two-tops in your living room; you would have a sofa area and a dining area.

We always have layouts that divide the space into many different atmospheres, always include imperfect details.
We feel like it makes the space feel a bit more cozy, and special.

And that is when it hit me: in designing the imperfect, it makes it more recognizable, less intimidating, and more comfortable.



by Nancy Pappas



Right before Nancy hopped on a plane to Vietnam, we caught up in a coffee shop on Fulton Street in Brooklyn. We chatted about new cities, street food, and her amazing illustrations.

I got way too excited about what she might draw when on her trip and how we could work together for this issue. She then, by a stroke of genius, Nancy turned to me and said: **“I find comfort**

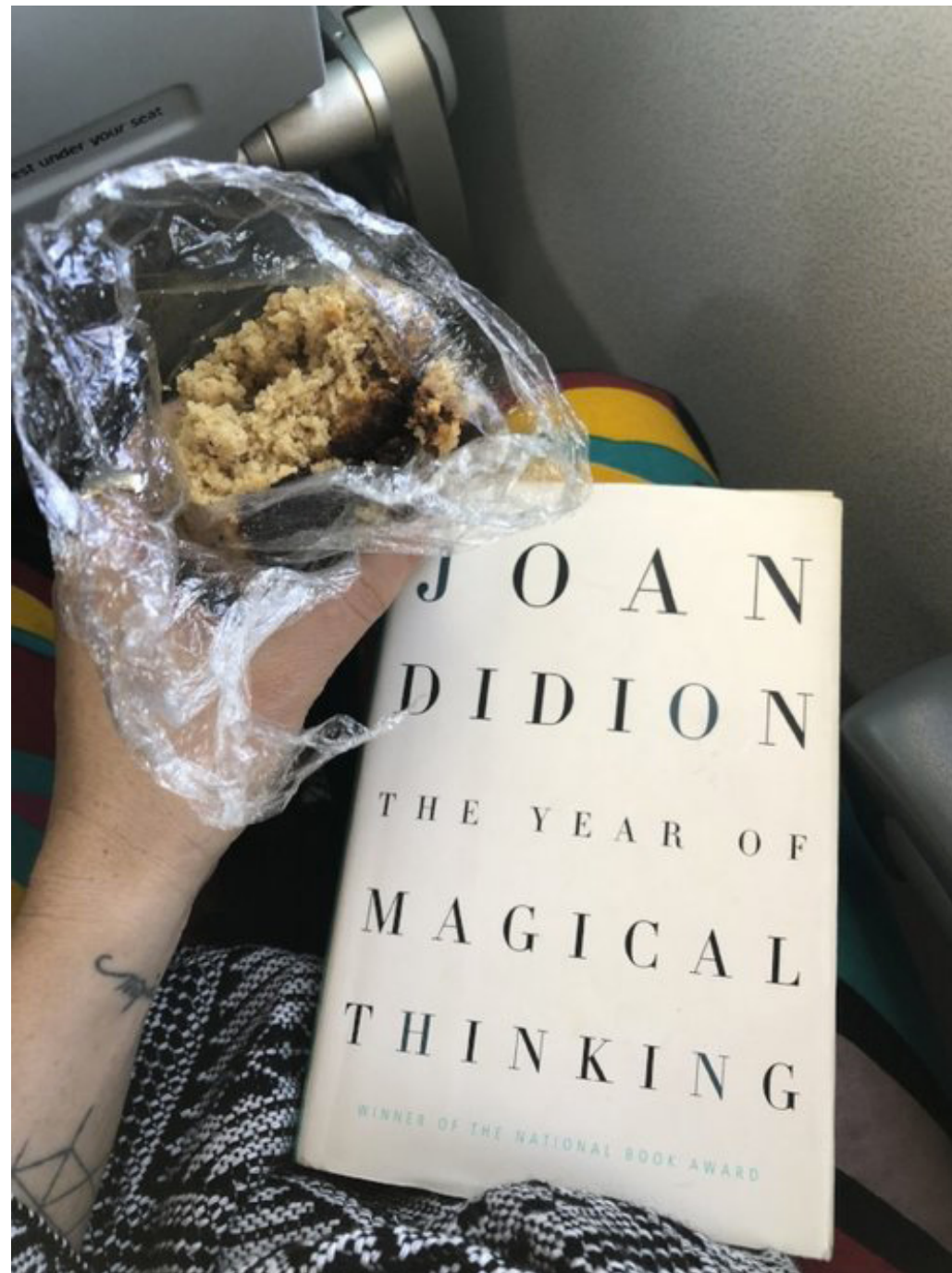
in the unknown. New food, new places, people, and experiences. Exploring new cultures eases me.”

Or something like that. In this illustration series, Nancy explores this whole new country, culture, and people in vibrant colors all through the food-lens.

Did we mention how much we adore her, her passion, and talents?







Banana Bread

by Lauren Gerrie

For me, this banana bread has everything I want; moist (yes I said moist) dense yet light as air, rich flavor without an overpowering spice profile, no nuts, no bullshit.

I served it for brunch with a Greek yogurt that i mixed with coffee & tahini.... I ate it for dessert with a schmear of nutella and maldon salt... I finished it off for a snack two days later where I cut it in half and grilled it in a cast iron then drizzled black tahini and topped with crispy bacon and arugula.

That last one might sound crazy, but I guarantee you it was delicious. When it comes to the scent of nostalgia you can rewrite the story, but there is always a hint of simple truth deep down inside.

deep disappointment was sinking in
 anticipation spanning two months suddenly awash
 a next chapter
 a trip
 a getaway
 i found myself returning home after just 24 hours

with time to kill before my departure i wandered
 a small city
 an even smaller airport
 a singular terminal
 two gift shops
 no bar
 no restaurant
 one "snack shack"

i love snacks

more importantly
 snacks in the form of baked goods
 an ageless woman was running the show
 her two teenage sons with her
 all devouring a local fare lunch out of Styrofoam containers
 behind her sat a cup of coffee and one of her homemade
 delicacies
 both eagerly awaiting her attention and consumption
 if i've learned anything, eat what the cook is eating
 so it was settled
 my snack
 my effort to comfort myself
 my desperation for something special
 banana bread





a window seat for an aisle seat loyalist
this journey felt like it was going no where
however
with each unveiling gesture i escaped
deeper and deeper
to a place with no name
a space so near yet so far
then it hit me
the scent of nostalgia

overly ripened fruit
almost rotten to perfection
nature's sugars caramelized
once yellow and taught
now brown and freckled
cinnamon
a punch to the face of nutmeg
perhaps a mistake?
or maybe a family secret?

three bites in i surrendered
my snobbish palette bored
distracted by dreams of superiority
a recipe
ingredients
techniques
uplifting in nature
my new beginning
my next journey
my perfect banana bread

WET

3 ripe bananas *
3/4 c dark brown sugar

1/3 c browned butter (you can easily make this or you can be lazy and buy [Black and Bolyard](#) which is owned by friends and they are awesome so either way you're golden)!

1 tbsp olive oil
zest of 1 lime
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla extract
2 tsp almond extract
4 tsp strong coffee

i used Ninth Street Espresso which is the best in NYC, you can also use basic bitch coffee

DRY

1 C all purpose flour
1/2 C Semolina flour
1 tsp baking soda
1.5 tsp kosher salt

BANANA BREAD

best way to harness the most concentrated flavor of banana is to peel it and freeze it until it's as dark and mushy as your worst nightmare of a banana could be. Then and only then will you achieve the most perfect banana bread

the key to baking is thinking: think logically and be patient.

BREAD

BANANA

heat oven to **350°** and rub a generous amount of **butter** inside a large scale muffin tin, *by large scale I mean bigger than average.*

in a large bowl smash up the ripe **bananas** with the **brown sugar** using a fork then incorporate the **melted brown butter, olive oil, lime zest, egg, extracts, and coffee**

in another small bowl whisk together the **flours, baking soda, and salt**

-fold the dry ingredients into the wet making sure there are no lumps.

Also don't go crazy with stirring and mixing because you don't want a gummy batter

divide the banana bread batter into the pan
bake for **25 minutes, give or take.**
If you are using a smaller muffin tin or mold then you bake for less. If you are using a loaf pan or square pan it might take a bit longer.

remove from the oven and allow to cool in the pan before popping out and devouring



Trail Mix and Tea

by Josh Hamlet

The first time I really thought about food, it was because it made me uncomfortable.

All through my early childhood, I remember going to school, playing with friends, pillow fights, and taking over the jukebox at this pool hall my moms would go to. I remember sledding and jumping in the hot tub afterwards. I remember driving up to my dad’s house listening to Pearl Jam and talking about what we would do if we won the lottery. I never remember a lot of the food moment in my life, let alone think about food.

But then as I got a little older, probably around early high school, food starts to be a part of my thought process. I started to take note of family dinners. Chicken and Dumplings. Pumpkin Pie. Pork Chops. Spaghetti and homemade meatballs. When I drove up to my dad’s house, I knew we would eat a Steak on Saturday night, and cinnamon rolls on Sunday morning. All of these comforting foods that I’m sure people drool over. For me, though, they all started to come with a huge sense of anxiety and discomfort. I now started to have to rationalize why I would eat

a steak on Saturday night after only watching a movie. Why would I eat a slice of pumpkin pie on a Wednesday? It’s not a holiday, or birthday, or really anything. It’s Wednesday.

While I started to become more aware of the foods themselves, as they sat in front of me, I also started to work in restaurants, and picked up baking (quick breads and cookies and scones). I became obsessed, you might say; I went from never thinking about food to always always thinking about food. I asked in the morning what we were having for dinner as I ate a light yogurt, knowing there were 110 calories per cup. I ran cross country after school, before going to my restaurant job. And when I got home at night I started to bake something that I would ultimately give away at school the next day.

That’s the kicker: I never hated food. I actually LOVED food. Most of my waking moments were spent thinking about food, just in different ways. I loved giving food away, more than anything. I would bake for people. I would serve people and tell them “oh that’s my FAVORITE dish, you just have to get it. I don’t know how I do it but

I always finish that and the coconut sticky rice for dessert.” I worked at a Thai Restaurant and I lied a lot.

And the obsession grew.

I obsessed over what other people ate – or didn’t eat. I watched at restaurants as people took down whole fish by themselves with a cup of rice. I wondered if I could do it. At school, one woman consistently just had chicken broth for lunch. I talked about it constantly in a gossipy way for two reasons: one was to get a temperature as to how everyone else felt about it and the other was to talk about someone else’s misguided understanding of nutrition, and not my own. The others at my lunch table put away burgers and fries and cheesecake on a regular basis, didn’t work out, or play sports – how were they immune to the discomfort of food when I sat here calculating how many calories that meal was (if I was estimating, probably around 1,300). I would slip in jokes like “oh my god I can’t even finish a bagel anymore! How can anyone eat a full bagel?” to see what people might say, how they might react. In the morning, I would have a large latte, comparing it in volume to a regular meal.

I was always comparing. I was always wondering what other people thought of food, and how they thought about food. There was no way everyone else was okay with eating a breakfast, lunch, and dinner like they did in the sitcoms, novels, or at holidays. No way.

There weren't ten minutes that went by when I wasn't thinking about food, and how I could eliminate it from my day. If I ran twice that day, I could have that cliff bar. Or even the opposite -- if I accidentally let myself eat full dinner that night, how many miles would I sneak out at 10pm to run? If I waited another thirty minutes, I would just be two hours from dinner, and could just wait. If I ate slow, I'd fill up more. They say that most of your hunger is just dehydration, so I'll just have another glass of water, or tea. Instead of being overwhelmed with options at the lunch line, I would just always go for a trail mix, because I knew it. I still don't know what that trail mix was, I knew it would get me through the rest of the school day.

My comfort from food came in the form of the light-headed feeling I would get around 4pm, knowing that my body had gone through everything I had given it that day, and I was doing well. It was never comfortable to be full -- that was the most uncomfortable thing I could have done to myself. My comfort came in stepping on the scale and seeing

the numbers drop. My comfort came in wrapping my hands around my waist and only having six, five, four inches difference between my hand's reach and the circumference of my frame. My comfort came in surprising people that I was strong even though I was so small. In running 16 miles a day. My comfort came in me striving to what I perceived as perfection, my perfection.

I became a vegetarian at one point, for two years, to give me yet another reason to think about food. I started to not only think about the production, cooking, and consuming of food, but now on a molecular level: how could I get enough protein not through animal product. It also gave me an excuse to talk about food with other people, but never calling attention to myself. I felt at home saying things like "humans were never meant to consume cow's milk" and "when you eat meat, you're digesting rotting proteins, it's much better to eat beans and tofu." It allowed people to see me as health conscious and not concerning.

My friends let it slide, for the most part. They would insert "Josh we need to get some meat on those bones" every now and then. I laughed and took it as a sign of success. Those veiled thoughts of concern were more comforting than any compliment about my academic abilities. My family would ask why I wouldn't just have another piece of bread, or bowl of pasta. "I'm just so

full." I was confronted by my friends and family in coffee shop parking lots (with a bag full of healthy food to eat) and in dining rooms by friend's family members. Which, if you might guess, was just even more discomfort: now I had to worry about both my thinking of food and other people's watching me around food.

There was a moment, though, when the obsession shifted, when I started to feel comfortable only around food. It was my safe haven -- to be purchasing, preparing, and cooking food gave me a sense of identity.

When I moved to New York, confronted with so many options of what to do, who to be friends with, what job to take up, what coffee shop, diner, restaurant, bar, party to go to, I again retreated into my high school lunch-line routine: do[eat] what you know. I dove --again-- into working in restaurants, searching for the newest, best opening. I did freelance food writing, kept a blog going from my time in Korea, organized a CSA in Fort Greene back in 2011. I became consumed by the food world. That's where I was comfortable.

And, thanks to my perfectionist mind, I wanted to be great in the food industry. I wanted to be a lead captain. I wanted to work at the best restaurants. I wanted to be a manager. I wanted to be a general manager. I wanted to own my own place.

And guess what? I couldn't be great at something unless I knew it, I lived it, I ate it all. And that's where my comfort started to resettle. I needed to be a regular at the bar, eating that endive salad every Thursday night, and finishing it. I had to know what the fried chicken tasted like so I could sell the hell out of it on a Sunday Morning. I tried new recipes for new events I'd be cooking for. I started to be more comfortable when I could articulate a taste, a wine, how a plate was built.

My obsession still lies with food, obviously. But now, it no longer is something I'm trying to stay a safe distance from, but rather something I'm trying to be around constantly. I want to be around good people, gathering around a table or bar sharing an experience. I want to meet people who cook honest food made with integrity.

When I think of food now, it is what gets me excited. "What restaurant should we go to in Bushwick / London / Reykjavik / Berlin / Seoul" gets me riled up and my mind racing, not fearful. Can I answer "What changed" clearly? Apparently not, but it did.

“My comfort came in surprising people that I was strong even though I was small.”



Morning Routines

by Bianca Sanon

Wake up. Brush teeth. Wash face. Start the coffee. Feed the cat. Feed the starter. Cut bread. Eat breakfast.

Morning routines have been my source of comfort in a rather uncomfortable year. A restaurant closed. An apartment was left behind. Several new environments, a few difficult conversations, and various challenging experiences have certainly made this past year one to remember.

I'm now laying roots in a new space – about a thousand miles from a place I had made a comfortable home for just shy of a decade, New York City. Spending 7 years in New York will change you; spending 7 years in New York during what some might consider your formative years will change you absolutely. So I'm now 26 and Miami is now “home”. This space is new, and yet somewhat familiar, which is the only way I can describe a place that I spent the first 18 years of my life.

I grew up in South Florida, in a suburb of Fort Lauderdale, and moved to New York for college, and did my very best to never leave. After spending the better half of 2017 traveling–spending months at a time in the countryside of France and on a mountaintop in North Carolina–I've finally stopped moving. Now I'm being challenged to start over and make this place feel like home, again.

So what do you do when you move to a place that should already feel like home, but doesn't? How do you shed off the discomfort of moving to a place that should already feel relatable, recognizable?



How do you make a place, a home, comfortable?

Comfort food certainly helps from time to time. But I have my particular eggplant in garlic sauce/wonton soup cravings when it comes to comfort food, and Miami doesn't have Seamless.

It is important to mention that Ubereats is. not. the. same.

I don't have my 20-minute quiet commute to myself on the subway. No matter how god awful MTA can be, you'll be shocked to know: you miss it when you leave.

After living intermittently in New York, France, North Carolina, and Miami over the past year, especially when I've been used to being in the same place for years at a time, a lot of movement can throw typical habits throughout my day off kilter, out of whack. Where do I get groceries? Which gas station is the cheapest? What pizza spot is open late? Where is the got damn natural wine shop?

Despite the awkwardness of navigating all the newness, how I choose to start my day is something I can control, something with which I can center myself. It took me a while to realize it, but my morning routines have been the constant that keeps me grounded. Even when you're practically living out of a suitcase, something so simple can make all the traveling less stressful.

For now, as long as I have a place to call home -- and truly what a blessing that is -- what I do in the morning, and the order I do it in, reminds me that while it can be overwhelming, embracing change can be good. As I go through the same steps, the same process to start my day, I can approach new habits and newness in general with a lot less skepticism and discomfort.

Wake up. Brush teeth. Wash face. Start the coffee. Feed the cat. Feed the starter. Cut bread. Eat breakfast.

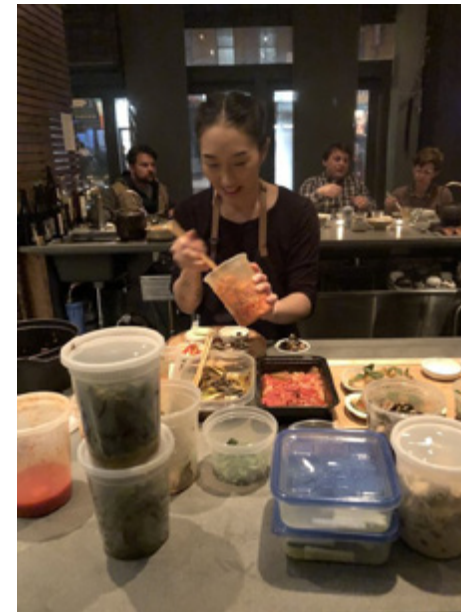


An Ajjuma & Her Banchan

by Sunny Lee, Gabriela Acero, Josh Hamlet







About six months ago, Sunny and I thought about doing a dinner together through Counter Service. About nine months ago, Gabriela and I decided that we would have to work together on an event in some capacity. About a month ago, we realized that the three of us should absolutely team up to put on a cute as hell dinner to span the themes of Issue 13 and 14: Family Style and Comfort. We knew that Sunny Lee's incredible talents with Korean Banchan were being untapped since she slowed down on her Ajjuma Dinners, and we knew that Gabriela needed to buy some magnums of wine and pour one-offs for really special people. About a week ago, we put on two back-to-back nights of Banchan realness.

This was really the perfect segue between the two themes; Banchan, if you're not familiar, are the little side-dishes that come with almost every Korean meal (you order Galbi, and you're getting about 16 other dishes like kimchi and kkadugi and ojingeochoe muchim...) that force you to chat with your neighbors about "what is that" and "can we have more"? So, to us, this meant: getting a new family together to share and experience and really get into what is Korean Comfort foods – foods that make you feel great.

It was amazing to work with these two powerful, talented, intelligent women and I can't wait for the next time our paths cross.



By the Wind

Celia Farrell

Comfort is like the wind and I am a sail.

Steering out of my childhood towards independence, comfort transformed into something harder to obtain.

I danced around the definition and toyed with it from every angle, but I couldn't quite hold on to it.

In the beginning, comfort was found in family. The further I traveled from them, the more uncomfortable I became.

By the time I reached University I had confronted a point of certain discomfort, upon which empirically comfort needed to change.

Here the wind was colder, below freezing, sharp cutting like a knife deep into my lungs.
Here I could not find my mother to wake me with a kiss and warm winter clothes.

It was much harder here on my own, harnessing comfort.
So in the best interest of myself, I did exactly what my family expected me to do.. I earned a Bachelor's Degree.

But that wasn't enough and now I need a career, here I am at a point that I've always feared.

No work, no money, just bills and debts. Stress and regret flowing like honey.

I was comfortable on that day when I received my accolades.

I'm late on my payments, that's a discomfort.
I'm working a job of despair, sorely a discomfort.

All of the sudden it was as if comfort never existed at all. Instead in its place, stability reared its fiery face.

Fiscally speaking stability is money. Metaphysically speaking stability is comfort.

To be comfortable is to be stable. What a vision I had! I need a stronger foundation, I needed it bad.

I tried for a bit to "get a real job", packaged myself into a neat little box. Presented on paper one page single spaced, here's my net worth, my life, my innocent face.

I begged and pleaded through each application, unknowingly revealing an overwhelming frustration.

I was not born out of riches, I was not raised in gold. I did not have a connection to the financial underworld.

So I signed up for hell and gave it my all. Worked for the man, where once I stood tall.

Checks flowing in no time to think twice. New computer, new car, new career, new house. My brain is thriving off all this new information, this must be comfort I've never felt this sensation.

IT WAS MISERABLE.

For many moons I drowned myself into a powerless sleep falling deep into dark dreams, only haunted to wake.

Each day now I rise grateful I turned away from that life. I turned away from the greed and turned towards the path lit with light.

Though the path is unkept and the jungle it crosses is thick, I'd take any risk in this life to avoid falling for a trick.

In case it's still not clear here, what I'm saying is simple. Your heart is the compass and you are the sail. Head in your direction and you simply cannot fail.

The wind is all around you, though there will be lulls and squalls.

Grey Spaces: The (Dis)Comfort of Complacency

by Gabriela Acero

I've been thinking a lot about the ideas of complacency versus resistance in any sort of group setting. From your slightly racist family members, to the chef or manager who makes off-color jokes, to the friends of friends who are “nice guys” but seem to exist in a frat-based reality (that hasn't quite caught up with the major strides in transparency, awareness, and respect that we've made in the past five to ten years). Specifically however, I am thinking about complacency as part of our roles within hospitality. A huge influence and inspiration for me was a piece written for this publication by Bianca Sanon for the Resist issue. Bianca wrote about microaggressions in the workplace, (specifically a Michelin-starred tasting menu spot where we both worked) and the reality and struggle of needing to navigate a fine balance between being a hospitable service professional (literally it is our job to be nice to people and make them feel good) and actively turning a blind eye, or even, I would argue, allowing ourselves to be HURT by being passive in moments of problematic behavior and conversation. Bianca describes a series of interactions she had with guests, or rather, a series of statements that were directed at her, most of which she describes simply walking away from. There was an older white man who asked if she was Jamaican, and starting “dancing” at her; multiple people who “complimented her” by telling her that she looked my

Michelle Obama (she doesn't); and the all-time favorite - a running commentary on her various hair styles (from twists to a fro).

Reading her piece I found myself nodding along, partly because I've witnessed too many of these moments, and partly because I have my own versions of them to add to the pile. We have all heard these stories. We all HAVE these stories. What is a boon for us, is that more and more restaurants are like family, they are places that look out for their own, and have started to do so outwardly and proudly as we evolve past the “customer is always right” era.

When I was new to the New York industry I witnessed something magical at a large, fairly corporate restaurant downtown - the type of place where one might assume that yes, the customer is always right. Our barista was an elderly Bengali man who had worked for the company for years. On a busy evening he was delivering coffee to a large table and accidentally spilled one of the beverages on a guest. He immediately apologized, and notified a manager of the situation, while promptly returning to his station to remake the order as quickly as possible. In short: he did everything as perfectly as he could in light of a mistake that does, unfortunately, sometimes happen. The

manager, a black woman, immediately went to the table to offer a follow-up apology, as well as a card with information to cover any dry-cleaning expenses, however the gentleman in question responded with a comment along the lines of “well that's what you get for hiring people like him...” Naturally she was shocked, but didn't miss a beat, and quietly told him that that sort of language and opinion was not welcome in our establishment, and while she was sorry there had been a spill, it did not excuse his comment. Then she dropped the bill and asked him to leave.

I was so impressed with her quickness and calm in simply squashing something as disgusting as that man's comment. She didn't hesitate. Of course, she was, it seemed to me, a fearless person in all ways - I was not surprised by her reaction. But the reason I find this moment so powerful is that she, and the barista, were supported by the GM (also a woman) and the rest of the team (mostly women of color, and one gay man). Her decision to ask the guest to leave was not questioned, and there was no disciplinary action or retaliation against her. To me, this is the most important part. The GM had intentionally built a team of diverse managers and, more importantly, actually created a work culture where they were trusted and encouraged to make decisions they believed were right and good, and THEN THEY WERE

SUPPORTED. I know it seems like a small thing, but in a world where one bad Yelp review can ruin a business, a culture of strength and support such as this was something special.

I realize that I have been coddled during my time in NYC because this sort of work culture represents the majority of my experiences. The idea that your team is your family, that we are 'ride or die', and that going into service every day there is a feeling of 'us vs. them' (this is a problematic opinion for other reasons, specifically ones related to sincere hospitality, but we don't have to get into that here) is a powerful bonding foundation to build a love and sense of community I rarely see in other industries. The point is, I have witnessed the beauty of many restaurants, places that are ripe for throwing the little guy under the bus, choosing to stand alongside the staff and prioritizing workplace safety and happiness, potentially causing the loss of future business from a problematic guest.

This is all well and good, but it is not necessarily the reality across the board. So what happens when this sense of kinship breaks down? Or what happens when it was never there to begin with? These questions can easily be witnessed in more blatant cases, like those we've been watching unfold in the news, of sexual harassment, or monetary misconduct on the part of owners and managers. But what

about the grey spaces? What about the moments that are more in line with your slightly racist grandma? Or your frat-boy friends from college? What happens when the manager doesn't think there is a problem, or doesn't feel like dealing with it? Or when your coworkers think something just “isn't that big of a deal”? What happens when the issue isn't with a guest, but with another coworker, or with the boss themselves?

What happens when you are here on a work visa, and feel nervous about rocking the boat because you cant lose your job because then you might not get a renewal? What happens if you are the only woman, and so you know that you have a different opinion and reception to the day to day of service than your male counterparts? What happens when you are the only black person and yet your white manager insists on playing rap music and singing along, even dropping the n-word? What happens when you're illegal?

WHAT DO WE DO THEN?

I am a white woman so by default my place in the world is a lot less tenuous than most of the hypotheticals I've been describing. I am lucky enough to have had, and continue to be offered, many and varied job opportunities. I can leave a job and feel secure that

I will get another one. I feel safe speaking my mind. However, by nature of my whiteness, and my education, I have also noticed that often it is assumed that I am of the same mind of the group when I am actually not. People (mostly white men) make comments in front of me that I know they would never utter in front of the POC or a queer person. There is an assumption that I am “same” and thus “safe” to be witness to jokes or opinions of the more privileged groups (meaning men, and white people). In many ways I “pass” and thus am able to participate in groups and work dynamics that (shockingly) would still be, if not formally closed, at least not as accessible to a more diverse workforce. And yet then I find myself struggling with the reality that I too do not actually belong in these spaces, and do not share the prevailing opinions or value systems, and yet I am often scared or overwhelmed with the idea of calling them out.

Complacency has come to exist for me as both a space of comfort and discomfort. As we all know, it is often easier to 'go with the flow' or follow the path of least resistance, especially in any sort of group dynamic where it is clear that there is a majority consensus. Now, of course, as children we participated in anti-bullying campaigns that taught us to stand up for “what's right” and as our teachers and parents worked to help us create mini moral compasses, the generic

language of the moral imperative became ingrained in our lexicon and psyche. We see it paralleled in the adult world often, with not a huge amount of growth or evolution. For example, have you ridden the subway lately? Were you urged to ‘say something’ if you ‘saw something’?

Somehow the simplistic childhood message is still present in it’s exceedingly generic phrasing. I think the dialogue we’ve created around moral vigilantism is very theoretical and topical when in reality “saying/doing something” is often fraught with tension and personal danger. That might sound extreme, but how often does the kid who stands up to the bully, or tells the teacher, end up getting hit more?

Or, perhaps more relevant to most of us hip adults, is the favorite saying: “snitches get stitches” or “Nobody likes a rat”... Obviously the implication in this phrase is that someone is breaking a rule and will be held accountable to a higher power - perhaps an adult, a parent, or the law - if they are outed. But I think it is equally relevant in the cases where the ‘majority rule’ of a group (be that a group of friends, a family, or a workplace) leans away from one person’s moral intuition. In these cases everything gets a bit muddy because there isn’t necessarily a right and a wrong, and there isn’t a ruling third party to whom each side may lay their

case. So how to we reconcile these two things? How is it that we have created two cultural mantras that are in direct opposition to each other. On the one hand, being encouraged to ‘do the right thing’ but on the other hand, not to be a rat or a goody-two shoes brown-noser?

All of these people are at the mercy of their boss, or manager, or team mates. Especially if those teammates are not minorities. The question becomes, if those teammates, those people in positions of power, do not choose, or care to see, the ways in which their minority coworkers are being compromised - whose job is it to educate them? Does the onus fall on that one person, the minority? Is it fair or right to expect that person to be the HR department, or the whistleblower, or the morality compass for a group of adults who just can’t be bothered to figure it out on their own, or open their eyes to see past their own experiences enough that they can recognize that perhaps the workplace where they feel so comfortable and safe is actual a place of discomfort and danger for others?

When I think back to that “magical moment” at the corporate restaurant all those years ago, what I am struck most by is the fact that it wasn’t magic. It was reality. It was the culture of the restaurant and the team that

had been intentionally crafted and supported by the GM. Moments and realities like this shouldn’t be one-off anecdotes. They shouldn’t be magical moments that we write about in awe. This should be how the world works. I remember having a staff member, a white man, calmly and without malice, suggest I find a different term to use when I called a staff “pow-wow” before service. It took so little energy for him, and yet I don’t know that if the roles had been reversed I would have, or could have, done the same. He used his place in the world, as a white man, and the fact that we had a rapport of respect and open mindedness, to make a positive change, and to educate me. And I thank him every day for that.

And then I think about the times I have done something along those lines, and how often my comments are laughed off, or I am told that I am ‘overreacting’. Our industry, while vibrant and constantly focusing on innovation, is still exceedingly homogenous and status-quo, especially at the top. How are we to edit our community and our work culture when a majority of people, especially in positions of power are unable or unwilling to acknowledge anything needs to change?

And thus we come to my daily struggle. Complacency exists on multiple levels - obviously the easy one to point out is the passivity of

the people in power. However, I find myself often turning a blind eye, and also witnessing coworkers and friends doing the same thing, it’s simple herd mentality. So where does the responsibility for change lie? I don’t have an answer for this, and honestly I don’t think there is a simple one because this is something that causes me an immense amount of personal frustration and pain. Is it actually better, or perhaps more accurately less bad, to keep ones mouth shut, as they say, if the potential harm that would come is greater than the harm that one is passively witnessing? When you might perhaps lose your job, or at the very least alienate yourself from the group of people who you spend the most amount of time with, is it better to keep your head down and hope that the next day will be better? Or the next job?



Arroz Caldo

by Alyssa Kondracki



Preparation

In a large pot, heat vegetable oil over medium heat.

Add onion and finely diced garlic. Sauté until softened.

Add chicken. Brown each piece on all sides.

Add uncooked rice. Stir to well coat the grains.

Add chicken stock, ginger, fish sauce, and saffron.

Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a gentle simmer and cover, stirring occasionally until the rice is very soft and the chicken is thoroughly cooked (about 20-30 minutes). The consistency should be that of a creamy, slightly soupy porridge. If too thick, add more stock.

Add salt and pepper or more fish sauce, to taste.

GARNISH

Meanwhile, prepare the garlic chips for garnish.

In a small pan, add vegetable oil and garlic slivers.

Bring the oil to **medium-high heat** and fry the garlic slivers until golden and crispy. Watch carefully so as not to burn the garlic. When golden, remove garlic immediately from the oil using a slotted spoon and place on a paper towel lined plate to cool.

Before serving the arroz caldo, remove the cooked chicken from the pot and place on a cutting board or large plate. Separate the meat from the bones and skin. Add the meat back to the pot and stir. Discard the skin and bones. If you don't mind the skin and bones you may skip this step all together and serve as is.

To serve, ladle into bowls. Top with the crispy garlic slivers or with other garnishes such as sliced scallions, hard boiled egg, chili oil, and wedges of citrus (lemon, lime or kalamansi).

Ingredients

2 tablespoons **Vegetable Oil**

1 Large **Onion**

4 Finely Diced Cloves of **Garlic**

1½lb bone-in, skin-on **chicken thighs & legs**

1 cup uncooked long grain rice (jasmine)

½ cup short grain rice

6 cups **Chicken Stock** or broth
2 inches peeled and cut **Ginger**
(chunks)
1 tablespoon **Fish Sauce**
Pinch of **Saffron**

Salt and pepper to taste

Ingredients

½ cup vegetable oil

4 thinly slivered cloves of **Garlic**

ARROZ CALDO

69

When I need a home-cooked comfort-meal, there is no other go-to for me than Arroz Caldo.

Similar to congee, and other popular rice-based porridges you find in various cultures across the globe, this Filipino version of rice soup checks all the boxes. I grew up eating this dish so, yes, perhaps I'm bias. But even now, if I shed those nostalgic sentiments and judge entirely on taste and texture, it still satisfies all my "comfort" requirements.

The version from my childhood is one that I love because of its rustic, home-spun characteristics: errant bone-in, skin-on pieces of chicken with rough-cut chunks of ginger hugged by the porridge. During my childhood, it always filled a large pot atop the kitchen stove that we'd help ourselves to during the course of the day for lunch, and then again for dinner.

Back then, I'd navigate around the soft grains of rice with my spoon and cast the ginger to the outer limits of the bowl – the same with the bones and skin. Now that I am old enough to make this dish, and am a huge fan of ginger, I often find myself adding slightly more to the dish to up the zing and restorative qualities. Depending on your mood

and liking, you can cut the ginger into matchsticks, smash a few knobs into the porridge, or toss imperfect chunks into the pot like my mom did. If you don't have saffron on hand, don't worry, the dish will still be delicious! If you do have saffron on hand, you'll get that unmistakable earthy flavor and the swath of pale yellow color given off by the amber threads.

The main ingredients – rice, chicken, broth – are a tried and true classic comfort trifecta. If that combo wasn't enough to get you there, consider the magic that happens when the rice cooks: those grains slowly break down, release their starch, transforming that soup all into a hearty porridge. Next step? Cue the flavorful additions like fresh ginger, fish sauce, and saffron. These key players spike the dish, adding depth while elevating the more basic ingredients (all without being overbearing). What is beautiful to me is that nothing here is difficult. Nothing here is new. There are no surprises and need for reinvention. Without any real fuss, what you hoped for and what you get shows up in a pot on the stove, a bowl in your lap, and at the end of your spoon. And isn't that, after all, what we look for in comfort food? Surely a case can be made for the sheer comfort of simplicity.

Counter Service.
Until next time, you smoke shows, you.