



Delicious by Design

30 YEARS | 30 RECIPES

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AURAS DESIGN

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When we began to contemplate how we were going to mark the 30th anniversary of AURAS Design, our idea was to produce a book of our past graphic design work. But, really, who wants to look at that more than once? Not that we aren't proud of the work we've done (see the samples on page 74), but we wanted to create something that people would actually enjoy using and refer to now and again.

Then, an obvious idea sprung to mind: let's make a cookbook. After all, cooking is a lot like designing. There's a lot of thought put into the ingredients; it takes technique and tools to produce excellent work; and if everything works just right, the end result is pretty tasty.

Maybe that's why I have enjoyed cooking since I was old enough to hold a spatula. In college, with nothing more than a hot plate and toaster oven, I learned how to prepare meals. AURAS has produced work for hundreds of clients over the last three decades, but now, here's an opportunity to see what we might have created if things had gone just a bit differently.

In fact, the lure of opening a restaurant has always been a siren call for me. I think I have mentioned it so many times that my more sensible other half, Helen Rea, merely goes "Whoop-whoop"—indicating the alarm bells that should be going off in my head. Restaurants, like Broadway shows and

Internet start-ups, are a high-risk long shot. They make running a design studio seem like a sensible business—even these days.

Food has always been an important part of celebration at AURAS. For years, our holiday parties have been renowned for the great food—mostly cooked by us. Our holiday staff retreats were always chosen for the quality of the food, whether it was a limo trip to the Inn at Little Washington or an overnight stay at l'Auberge Provençal. We have always kept ourselves caffeinated and content by stocking the finest foodstuffs for everyone to enjoy.

When our studio was on Kalorama Road, many mornings on the way to work I would stop by Posin's, the late, lamented D.C. Jewish supermarket, and buy donuts, cupcakes and freshly made rye bread for the studio. The bread was too warm to bag and too delicious not to steal the crusty end slices as I headed down 13th Street.

Having a full kitchen has always been an important part of the plan, wherever our studio has been. The long-time people at AURAS warn newcomers about "The AURAS Ten"—the weight that is bound to be put on from the abundance of good stuff around the shop. On summer afternoons at the Kalorama studio, taking a break for former employee Marty Ittner's guacamole was a welcome treat; on snow days, I often make a hearty vegetable soup to entice the crew to brave the elements. And all year

long there is coffee, whether an afternoon cappuccino break or simply a strong, bracing cup of Peet's, freshly ground and shipped directly to the studio. For many new employees, the first challenge of working at AURAS was learning to appreciate that super-strong brew. If nothing else, AURAS was way ahead of the coffee-crazed curve.

So, think of *Delicious by Design* as the restaurant that never was. Within these pages are recipes that have been prepared and tweaked over the years. They are heavy on comfort and powerful in taste. And in the back, we've allowed ourselves a few pages for a history of our studio and some examples of AURAS design work.

Renée Comet was excited to become part of this project and brought Lisa Cherkasky along to prepare and style the food. Together we mapped out a simple strategy: every picture should look so tasty that readers might be inclined to lick the page—that was the extent of the art direction. I have always believed that you should let talented people do what they do best and try to stay out of the way.

We'd like to know what you think of this book—especially how you like the recipes—and give you a chance to see some behind-the-scenes action at the photo shoot—plus a few recipes that didn't make it into the book. Check out www.aurascookbook.com.

Bon appétit! —RS



Not-Macaroni and Cheeses

SERVES 6

- 8 oz** large penne, ziti or similar dried tubular pasta
- 2 Tbs** salt (for pasta water)
- 1 slice** thick-sliced bacon, diced small
- 1 tsp** thyme (or 1 Tbs fresh)
 - 1** large shallot, diced fine
 - 2** garlic cloves, diced fine
- 4 oz** container of crimini (or baby bella) mushrooms, stems removed, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 tsp** salt
- 1/4 cup** white wine
- 4 Tbs** all-purpose flour
- 4 Tbs** butter
- 2 cups** chicken stock (homemade or Swanson low sodium)
- 1 cup** heavy cream
- 1 cup** whole milk
 - 1** bay leaf
- 4 oz** Cabot Extra Sharp Cheddar (1 cup shredded)
- 4 oz** pepper jack cheese (1 cup shredded)
- 1/4 cup** Parmesan, shredded or grated
- 1/4 cup** bread crumbs

In a 10-inch skillet, add bacon over medium heat and cook until fat renders and bacon begins to brown, about 2 minutes. Add thyme, garlic, and shallots and stir until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add mushrooms and salt; toss to combine; cover skillet. Cook over medium heat until mushrooms render liquid and begin to brown, about 8 minutes. When the liquid is evaporated, deglaze the skillet with white wine, scraping any browned bits from the bottom with a wooden spoon. When liquid evaporates, remove from heat. What's left will be very dark brown.

In a 10-quart pot, bring 4 quarts water to a boil, and add salt; wait for the water to boil again, and then add pasta and stir. Do not add oil to the pasta water. Cook pasta just short of *al dente*, about 11 minutes. The pasta will finish cooking in the oven. Drain pasta and reserve. Allow some liquid to stay with the drained pasta.

Heat chicken stock in microwave or on stove until hot. Mix milk and cream, warm in microwave, but do not allow mixture to boil. Shred cheeses using medium holes on a grater or food processor.

In a 4-quart saucepan, melt butter until froth subsides; add flour and cook *roux* until light tan, about 2 minutes. While whisking, slowly add stock until thickened and bubbling, followed by milk and cream mixture. Stir until the *béchamel* thickens. Add bay leaf and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove leaf and add Cheddar and jack cheeses, stirring until smooth.

Combine pasta and mushroom mixture in a 2-quart baking dish, preferably deep rather than wide. Pour cheese sauce over pasta. There will be a lot of sauce in the dish, so gently tap the dish or slowly stir the pasta to evenly distribute the cheese sauce, getting it into the open tubes. Combine Parmesan and bread crumbs in a bowl. Sprinkle crumb mixture on top.

Place in 350° oven and bake until bubbling and brown on top, about 30 minutes. Let cool 10 minutes before serving.

THE SECRET TO THIS MACARONI AND CHEESE IS NOT TO USE MACARONI, but a larger tubular pasta. This is about as far from Kraft as you can get, and the final result has a combination of familiar creamy goodness with layers of complexity from adding savory elements like mushrooms, bacon, and chicken stock. The dish is almost impossible to stop eating, which is why making it in 10-ounce ramekins instead of one large dish might be a good idea.

The basics of a mac and cheese are here—a *béchamel* sauce with cheeses added and tubular pasta—but like anything well-designed, the delight is in the details. First, we replace elbow macaroni with *penne*, *rigatoni*, *ziti* or *mostaccioli*—larger tubes big enough to absorb the sauce on the inside and the outside. Starting with a base of thyme, bacon, shallots, mushrooms, and garlic gives the final dish a distinctive flavor that amplifies the complexity of the two cheeses.

There is plenty of sauce here—1 quart of liquid—but don't be surprised if there is no sauce in the final casserole. The pasta absorbs almost all of it, making each bite that much more delicious.



Super-Slow BBQ Baby-Back Ribs

SERVES 3-4

2 racks baby back ribs	WET SAUCE
1/4 cup AURAS Spice Mix (recipe at right)	1/2 cup ketchup
1/4 cup dark brown sugar	1/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup ketchup	1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
	1 Tbs AURAS Spice Mix

Rinse and pat ribs dry. Remove membrane on bottom side of ribs by pulling up at one corner and pulling across rack at a low angle against the bones. Using a paring knife, cut 1-inch slits between bones. Mix brown sugar and spice mix until well combined and generously cover ribs on meat side and around edges. Let meat rest for 30 minutes. Heat oven to 180°.

Wrap ribs tightly in heavy-duty foil, meat-side up, and place on baking sheet. Place in center of oven to cook for 4 hours. Do not be tempted to check on them. At the end of the 4 hours, remove ribs from oven and carefully open foil. The ribs should be fork-tender, and there should be juices in the foil. Decant juice to a separator, and remove fat.

Raise oven temperature to 400°. Make wet sauce by cooking ketchup, brown sugar, vinegar, spice mix and reserved rib liquid until it reduces to 1/2 cup. Slather on ribs and return to oven uncovered until ribs become dark bronze, about 15 minutes. Apply additional wet sauce as needed but avoid burning. Remove from oven, slice into individual ribs with sharp knife, and serve with any remaining sauce.

AURAS Spice Mix

MAKES 24 OZ
(FITS CONVENIENTLY IN COMMERCIAL BOTTLES)

This all-purpose seasoning works with just about anything. It works with firm-fleshed fish like salmon as well as with beef. With the addition of brown sugar in one-to-one proportions, it also makes a great dry rub on pork.

- 5 oz** table salt, pulsed in spice mill
- 1 oz** pepper
- 4 oz** garlic powder
- 4 oz** onion powder
- 3 oz** paprika
- 3 oz** chile powder
- 2 oz** dried lemon peel
- 1 oz** cumin
- 3 Tbs** allspice
- 3 Tbs** cayenne pepper

Using a coffee grinder to pulverize the table salt into a finer grind will make the mixture more evenly textured, but it isn't necessary. Still, having a dedicated grinder for spices is an inexpensive addition to your kitchen tools.

Savory Spice Blend

MAKES 8 OZ

Create your own blends by grinding spices together. An inexpensive coffee mill like one from Krups works perfectly as a spice grinder. The following is a savory blend that's tasty on homemade crostini or sprinkled on eggs, roasted meats, or even savory nuts. Add all of this to the grinder and pulse fine; store in an empty 12-ounce spice bottle.

- 3 oz** dry rosemary
- 3 oz** fennel seeds
- 1 oz** celery seed
- 2 oz** dried thyme
- 1 oz** dried oregano
- 2 oz** McCormick Montreal Seasoning

AUTHENTIC BBQ RIBS often nestle in hickory embers for an entire day. This recipe can't match that experience, but comes close. It delivers wonderfully flavorful, tender meat by starting with a dry rub, then long slow cooking, and finishes by building a nice "bark"—the crusty, chewy exterior—with a wet sauce that caramelizes in a hot oven.

The effect can be multiplied by using the same recipe in a smoker. Using some hickory or applewood chips gives the meat an extra layer of flavor and complexity that the oven can't match. Even without a smoker, finishing the ribs on a grill over indirect heat with a handful of soaked hickory chips does a pretty good job of reaching BBQ heaven.

THIS IS AN EASY, ALMOST FOOL-PROOF WAY TO ROAST A CHICKEN, with many of the benefits of butterflying or spatchcock but almost none of the work. The skin protects the delicate flesh from the high temperature, and the bones on the bottom keep the meat from drying out. This technique is a joy for people who love the skin, which is entirely exposed and crisps perfectly. It is nearly impossible to overcook the bird in this manner, but if the skin becomes too dark, place some foil loosely over the bird.

BEFORE FLATTENING, DRY-SALT FOR AN HOUR by spreading a generous amount of salt on and in the bird. This helps the meat stay moist and doesn't lend much saltiness. The herb butter also helps the flesh stay moist, so it's important to get it under the skin of the breast and work it around.

Serving the roasted chicken family style allows people to pick at the carcass to find the small morsels of meat in the back of the bird that are usually missed, a messy experience that adds to the tasty fun of serving this flattened chicken.

Flat-Roast Chicken

SERVES 3-4

4 lbs kosher or free-range roasting chicken such as Bell & Evans

4 Tbs kosher salt

3 Tbs butter

1 Tbs herbes de Provence

to taste AURAS Spice Mix (page 9)

Prepare chicken by removing any packed organs, rinsing thoroughly, and patting dry. Generously sprinkle kosher salt on bird, rubbing into cavity and skin. Refrigerate for 1 hour.

After bird has rested, rinse away the salt mixture and pat dry. Position the chicken with the cavity facing you and use a pair of kitchen shears to cut horizontally through the rib bones below the breasts, from the cavity toward the front on both sides. Do not cut all the way through; the breasts should still be attached by cartilage and skin at the front. Swing the entire breast section up from the rear to the front, like opening the hood of a car, exposing the ribcage and backbone of the bird. Sprinkle generously with kosher salt and pepper, or use spice mix. Flip the bird over and flatten with the heel of your hand at the top of the breasts. The meat and skin will now all be on the top, and the bird will be flattened. Tuck wings under body.

Combine the herbes de Provence and the butter to make an herb-butter mixture. Using your fingers to work the skin loose from the meat, spread half the butter under the skin of the breast. Work the rest into the skin of the bird, then apply spice mix generously over the entire skin.

Preheat oven to 400°, or prepare a Weber grill for indirect heat (bank coals to one side of grill). If roasting, place flattened chicken on a rack in a rimmed baking sheet lined with heavy-duty foil curled at the edges to contain juices. If grilling, form foil into a container shape or use an aluminum tray placed under the grill rack beside banked coals to catch the drippings. Place chicken on rack above foil.

Cook until temperature at the thigh reads 170° and juices are clear, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Let bird rest for 10 minutes. Serve on large platter, pouring accumulated juices over bird.





Ultimate Meatloaf

SERVES 8

- 4 lbs** freshly ground chuck
- 2 Tbs** olive oil
 - 1** large onion, diced fine
 - 1** stalk celery, diced fine
 - 4** garlic cloves, minced
- 1 Tbs** tomato paste
- 1/2 Tbs** smoked paprika
- 2 Tbs** Worcestershire sauce
- 2 Tbs** soy sauce
- 1/2 cup** tomato juice
 - 10** saltine crackers, crushed
 - 1/2** pack unflavored gelatin
- 1/2 cup** chicken stock
 - 1** egg
- 2 Tbs** salt
- 1/2 Tbs** mustard
- GLAZE**
- 1/2 cup** ketchup
- 1/2 cup** brown sugar
- 1/2 cup** apple juice
- 2 Tbs** balsamic vinegar

Preheat oven to 375°. In a 10-inch skillet heat oil until shimmering. Add onion and celery, and sauté until onions begin to brown. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add tomato paste, paprika, Worcestershire sauce, and soy sauce to mixture; stir until liquid evaporates. Stir in tomato juice, scraping any browned bits from pan, and cook until liquid is nearly gone. Take off heat and cool.

Whisk together chicken stock and egg. Sprinkle gelatin over mixture and fold in. Let sit 5 minutes.

In a large mixing bowl, break up meat into pieces. Pour cooled vegetable mixture into bowl and combine. Sprinkle crushed saltines over meat mixture. Add stock-egg mixture, salt, and mustard. Knead until all the elements are thoroughly combined. The meatloaf will be sticky.

Using a baking sheet that has a fitted rack, cover both sheet and rack with foil. Puncture foil on rack multiple times to let liquids pass through. Form meat mixture into three loaves, each about 8 inches long and 4 inches wide. Press a groove down the top center of each, allowing loaf to flatten slightly. Place in oven and cook for 1 hour or until thermometer reads 150°.

While meatloaf cooks, prepare glaze. Add all ingredients to a small saucepan and cook over medium heat until glaze reduces to 3/4 cup and thickens, about 15 minutes.

When meatloaf reaches 150°, change oven from bake to broil. Coat loaves with glaze and broil until bubbling, then add a second coating. Watch carefully that glaze doesn't burn. When coating caramelizes, remove from oven. Let loaves rest for 10 minutes and serve.

THIS IS THE ULTIMATE MEATLOAF RECIPE because it combines the tenderness of a traditional three-meat loaf with the beefiness of only using chuck. The secret is adding a mixture of egg, gelatin, and chicken stock to allow the meatloaf mixture to retain moisture.

The process of making the loaf seems like it has a lot of steps, but really, it has four components, each of which is separate and simple. The final stage of mixing it all together is best accomplished with your hands. If you are squeamish about diving in bare-handed, a supply of inexpensive plastic gloves will give you the protection you need to, well, knead.

This is one meatloaf that is as good cold as it is hot, and it slices nicely for sandwiches.

THIS MEATLOAF RECIPE CAN ALSO MAKE GREAT MEATBALLS WITH A FEW SMALL CHANGES. Add 2 teaspoons of Italian seasoning to the mixture and reduce the stock to 1/4 cup and the gelatin to 1/4 packet. You don't need to make a glaze.

Roll meat into 2-inch balls and place on foil-covered rack and cook for 20 minutes at 400°. Use the Simple Marinara sauce on page 13 over some spaghetti and meatballs, or put meatballs in a hoagie roll, cover with sauce and mozzarella, and toast in oven broiler until cheese melts.



Pan-Roasted Salmon with Hash

SERVES 6

FISH

- 2 lbs** salmon, skinned, with any pin bones removed
- 1** large shallot, diced fine
- 2 Tbs** soy sauce
- 2 Tbs** fish sauce
- 1/8 tsp** sugar
- 1/2 tsp** cornstarch
- 3 Tbs** olive oil
- 2 Tbs** lemon juice
- 1/4 cup** white wine

HASH

- 1 Tbs** olive oil
- 2 Tbs** butter
- 1 Tbs** fresh thyme
- 1 Tbs** fresh tarragon
- 1 Tbs** salt
- 2 slices** thick-cut bacon, cut into 1/4-inch dice
- 1 cup** Brussels sprouts, cut into quarters
- 1 cup** cauliflower and/or broccoli, broken into small florets
 - 1** Spanish or sweet onion, cut pole-to-pole into 1/2-inch pieces
 - 3** carrots, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
 - 1** large zucchini, cut to 1/2-inch dice
- 1/2** fennel bulb, cut like onion
- 6** garlic cloves, sliced coarsely

Preheat oven to 400°. Start with a salmon fillet cut from the front of the fish. Cut into 6 thick pieces. Combine shallot, soy sauce, and fish sauce into a medium bowl with salmon. Marinate for 1/2 hour, turning fish once.

While the fish is marinating, prepare the hash. Heat a 12-inch oven-safe skillet over medium-high flame. Add chopped bacon and cook until browned, about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove bacon with a slotted spoon and reserve. Add oil and butter to the pan. Add spices and allow to bloom for 30 seconds. When foaming subsides, add garlic and onion and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add remaining vegetables. They will fill up the pan. Lower flame to medium heat; add salt and cook for 10 minutes, turning over the contents until vegetables show some browning. Transfer the vegetables to a rimmed baking sheet and arrange close together in one layer. Add reserved bacon. Cook in oven for 15 minutes.

Remove salmon from marinade and pat dry. Reserve marinade. Combine cornstarch and sugar and sprinkle lightly over salmon to cover. Add olive oil to the skillet you cooked the hash in, and heat until shimmering. Add salmon pieces to pan. Cook until well-browned on one side, about 4 minutes. Turn salmon over, cook for 1 minute more, and take off heat. Put skillet in oven and cook for 4 minutes or until fish is just opaque in the center.

Remove hash and salmon from oven, taking care not to burn yourself on the skillet handle. Reserve salmon on a plate. Add marinade to skillet and cook on stovetop 1 minute, scraping any brown bits from bottom. Add wine to pan and cook another minute. Toss hash in skillet to coat with marinade-wine mixture.

Serve hash in large, shallow bowl or high-sided plate, arranging salmon on top and spooning a teaspoon of lemon juice over each piece of fish.

PAN ROASTING FISH IS EASIER THAN IT SOUNDS. Quickly seared fish is finished in the oven at high heat. To ensure a good browning, cornstarch and sugar (not enough to taste sweet) lightly coat the salmon.

A single skillet does most of the work here—first to sauté the hash; then to cook the salmon; and finally, using the marinade plus a little white wine to make a sauce for tossing the hash in before serving.

THE HASH CAN BE THE CENTER OF ANOTHER MEAL WITHOUT THE SALMON. Cut a spaghetti squash in half lengthwise, scrape out seeds, and boil in salted water for 15 minutes. Scrape flesh with a fork to form the distinctive strands, combine with hash and 2 cups of the Simple Marinara sauce on page 13, plus 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese. Put the mixture back into the squash halves and cover with a slice of fresh mozzarella cheese. Put into oven and cook for 15 minutes until cheese is bubbling and starting to brown on top. Generously serves two.



Shrimp and Grits

SERVES 6

- 9 Tbs** Quaker grits (NOT quick or instant varieties)
- 1 tsp** salt
- 3½ cups** 2% milk (or 1½ cup whole milk and 2 cups water)
- 3 Tbs** butter
- 1/4 cup** whole milk or half-and-half
- 1/2 cup** Parmesan, grated
- 2 lbs** extra-large shrimp (about 24), peeled and deveined, tail-on
- 2** slices thick bacon, diced
- 1** red bell pepper, diced
- 1** medium onion, diced
- 6** garlic cloves, minced
- 2 Tbs** Worcestershire sauce
- 1 Tbs** balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 tsp** paprika
- 1/2 tsp** chile powder
- 1/2 tsp** salt
- 6** spring onions, cut into 1/2-inch pieces, discarding tips
- 12 oz** tomato juice
- 1 tsp** hot sauce (or to taste)
- 12** eggs, poached (optional)

Grits

Add grits, salt and milk to a deep 3-quart microwavable ceramic bowl and stir to combine. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and place bowl on top of a paper towel in microwave. Cook on medium high (“8” in a 1500-watt unit) for 12 minutes, checking occasionally. The grits should be soft, cooked to the consistency of cream of wheat.

The bowl will be very hot. The grits should be done. If not, add more water as needed and continue for another 4 minutes, stirring and replacing plastic wrap. When done, add butter, 1 tablespoon at a time. Add whole milk or half-and-half to thin the grits as needed until they are thick but stir easily. Add cheese and stir to combine. Cover and set aside. Add more milk if the mixture becomes too thick—it should be thick but not set.

Poach eggs, if using, and reserve in warm water.

Shrimp

Place diced bacon in a 12-inch nonstick skillet at medium heat. Cook bacon until crisp and fat is rendered. Remove bacon and set aside. Turn heat to high. Add shrimp and sauté quickly until just cooked through, about 2 minutes. Remove and set aside.

Lower heat to medium. Add pepper and onion and sauté until softened. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add balsamic vinegar and Worcestershire sauce. Sprinkle in paprika, chile powder and salt. Stir and cook until liquid just evaporates. Add spring onion pieces and cook until they wilt, about 30 seconds. Add tomato juice, stirring to deglaze pan. Add hot sauce to taste; return bacon and shrimp to pan and combine. Cook for 1–2 minutes more.

Place a heaping serving of grits in the center of a large, shallow bowl or rimmed plate, pressing down to make two depressions. Add poached eggs to depressions; then add shrimp and sauce around grits and serve.

HERE IS A DISH THAT IS JUST AS GOOD AT DINNER AS IT IS AT BREAKFAST. The creamy cheese grits are a great contrast to the garlicky, spicy sauce the shrimp are tossed in.

It’s easy to make **Quaker** grits in the microwave, but for an extra special treat, use **Anson Mills Quick Grits**. These require longer cooking than **Quaker** grits. They’re made with heirloom corn in artisanal batches and taste surprisingly of fresh corn, but the more widely available **Bob’s Red Mill Corn Grits** are also very nice.

THESE GRITS COOK BETTER ON THE STOVETOP. Once the grits start bubbling, turn the heat as low as you can. The grits need more stirring and have to be watched carefully—a small lapse of attention, and they can easily burn. They usually take twice as long as **Quaker** grits, too because they are ground into bigger pieces—but they are well worth the extra time and attention.

SOMETIMES THE SIDES CAN MAKE A MEAL. The ones on the next two spreads are easy to prepare, require very little effort to cook, and taste surprisingly complex.

The Brussels sprouts recipe will convert people who think they don't like the vegetable. The orange juice reduces to a sweet syrup, and the pistachios add crunch. It's also amazing what OJ and maple syrup can do for sweet potatoes—but it's the balsamic that makes the difference in both recipes.

Slow roasting can turn onions and tomatoes into wondrously tasty things, as the starches are converted to sugars and the outsides caramelize.

The rice is actually a pilaf—and not *that* super buttery, but calling it that did convince my kids to eat it. The corn sauté looks awesome if you use bi-color corn or mix white and yellow sweet corn. The secret is to cook it as little as possible, especially if it's summer and the corn is local.

And what dinner wouldn't be enhanced by some great bread? These breadsticks were a highlight at Four & Twenty Blackbirds, a restaurant in Flint Hill, Virginia. They are easy to make and freeze really well, so make a double batch.

Brussels Sprouts for Haters

SERVES 6

- 2 cups** Brussels sprouts, cut into 1/4-inch slices, vertically
- 2 Tbs** olive oil
- 3** garlic cloves, sliced thin
- 2** shallots, diced fine
- 3/4 cup** orange juice
- 1 Tbs** Champagne vinegar
- 1/4 cup** shelled pistachio nuts

Add olive oil to 10-inch sauté pan over high heat until shimmering. Add shallots and cook until soft, about 2 minutes. Add garlic, stir together and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Lower heat to medium, add Brussels sprouts; and cook until sprouts begin to brown, about 5 minutes. Add orange juice and vinegar; stir with wooden spoon to deglaze pan. Cover and cook until sprouts are tender and juice has reduced to a syrup, around 8 minutes. Add pistachios and stir to combine.

Simplest Sweet Potatoes

SERVES 6

- 4** sweet potatoes
- 3 Tbs** butter
- 3 Tbs** maple syrup
- 1/2 cup** orange juice
- 1/4 tsp** ground ginger
- 1/4 tsp** salt
- 1 Tbs** balsamic vinegar

Preheat oven to 400°. Place sweet potatoes on baking sheet and roast 45 minutes or until very soft. Remove from oven and allow to cool 10 minutes. Remove skins and place flesh in a large bowl. Add all the other ingredients and whip with a fork until well combined and fluffy.

Roasted Sweet Onions

SERVES 6

- 3** large Vidalia or Texas Sweet onions
- 2 Tbs** olive oil
- 1 cup** chicken stock
- 2 tsp** fresh rosemary, chopped
- 3 Tbs** bread crumbs
- 1/4 tsp** kosher salt

Preheat oven to 400°. Peel outer skin from onions, and carefully trim top and root, leaving as much as possible. Cut onion into quarters lengthwise, leaving part of the dense section near the roots on each piece.

Place onions close together in a 2-quart baking dish, rounded outsides down and squared-off cuts pointing up. Pour stock over onions and then drizzle with oil. Sprinkle onions with rosemary and salt and place in oven. Roast for 40 minutes, basting occasionally. When the onion segments begin to separate and brown, sprinkle bread crumbs over them. Continue baking another 15 minutes until crumbs are brown. Remove from oven and allow to rest for 10 minutes before serving.



ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS WEIRD TO WRAP SOMETHING IN PLASTIC AND PUT IT IN THE OVEN, professional chefs like to use a vacuum-packed, food-in-water-bath technique called *sous vide* to super-slow-cook meats and fish at really low temperatures. This technique is similar. These turkey breasts are stacked with an herb mixture between them, rolled securely in plastic wrap into a roll, covered with foil and then roasted in very low heat for several hours, ensuring they will stay moist.

This is really a lot easier than tying with string, and has a much better presentation in the end. Don't worry, the plastic wrap won't melt, and when the turkey emerges from its foil-and-plastic cocoon, it will have magically formed into a beautiful roll, which will have a pretty stripe of green herbs in the center when cut. All that remains is crisping the skin in a hot oven while making a gravy with the liquid that has collected during the slow roast.

This turkey roll makes an excellent cold entrée at a party, as it will slice paper thin once it has been refrigerated.

De-Boned Herbed Turkey Breast

SERVES 8

6–7 lb fresh whole turkey breast
1/4 cup table salt
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup fresh parsley, chopped
1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped
2 Tbs fresh thyme
1/4 cup olive oil
1 Tbs paprika
2 Tbs butter

Rinse turkey breast and pat dry. Carefully remove the skin, starting at the thick folds in the back, loosening with your fingers. Pull the skin back from the breast toward the small end, keeping it in one piece as much as possible. Reserve skin.

Using a sharp boning knife, take breasts off the bone by inserting knife several inches at top of breast, feeling for the breastbone. Following along the bone, cut toward the small end. When the top part of the breast is cut away, follow down the side of the breast to the bottom and remove the entire breast from the bone. Repeat process on the other side. Place breasts on foil, side by side, with one thin end next to one thick end, and underside of breasts facing up. Mix salt and sugar together and apply liberally to breasts. Let sit for 30 minutes; then rinse off mixture and pat dry, returning breasts to the same position on foil.

In a blender or food processor, pulse together the parsley, basil, thyme, and olive oil to form a paste. Spread half the paste on the underside of the breasts, and liberally spread the rest on the exposed top parts as they rest on the foil.

Place one breast on top of the other so the thin and thick ends are opposite, forming a more uniform shape. Take the reserved skin, and, as best as possible, drape over the combined breasts and wrap around them, removing any small pieces and fatty parts. Make sure the seam between the breasts is completely covered.

Spread a 2-foot-long piece of plastic wrap on a clean surface. Move turkey so it sits horizontally at one end of plastic, and tightly wrap turkey in plastic so it forms a tight roll. Take a second sheet of plastic and wrap in the perpendicular direction, so turkey is completely sealed in plastic and is a compact cylindrical shape.

Using a fresh piece of heavy-duty foil, wrap plastic-wrapped turkey in foil and seal ends. Place turkey on rimmed baking sheet in a 180° (yes, 180°) oven. Use instant-read thermometer to test meat after 2 hours (carefully insert probe through foil and plastic at top) and continue to monitor until temperature reaches 140°—another hour or so, depending on the size of the breast and the actual oven temperature.

Remove from oven and increase temperature to 400°. Carefully unwrap turkey from foil and plastic and reserve liquid. Brush butter all over skin; sprinkle with paprika and return to oven, with any exposed meat on the bottom. Continue to roast until skin is golden and crisp and meat temperature is 160°, about 20 minutes. Remove from oven, cover loosely with foil and let sit for 15 minutes. Use reserved liquid to make a quick gravy and serve turkey sliced, with gravy.





Crab Cakes with Coleslaw

SERVES 4

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 lb lump bluefin crabmeat | 2 Tbs mayonnaise |
| 8 Tbs butter (1 stick) | 1 tsp dry mustard |
| 1 tsp salt | 1/2 tsp celery salt |
| 1 Tbs Worcestershire sauce | 1 egg, lightly beaten |
| 1 Tbs lemon juice | 2 Tbs heavy cream |
| 1/4 cup onion, finely diced | 1 cup panko bread crumbs + 2 Tbs |
| 1/4 cup Italian parsley, chopped | 1 cup vegetable oil |

Carefully pick through crabmeat and discard any cartilage. Break up the lumps into smaller pieces with a fork, leaving some lumps whole. Melt butter in a 10-inch skillet. When foaming subsides, add crabmeat and salt and toss to combine. Allow to cool. In a mixing bowl, combine Worcestershire sauce, lemon, onion, parsley, mayonnaise, mustard, celery salt, egg, cream, and 2 tablespoons of bread crumbs; fold to combine. Add cooled crabmeat mixture and combine well.

Put 1 cup bread crumbs in a shallow bowl. Divide crabmeat mixture into 8 balls. Roll in bread crumbs to lightly coat, and press into disks using a 3½-inch ring mold or by hand. Place in refrigerator for at least 1 hour.

Heat oil in a 10-inch skillet to 360°. Fry crabcakes 4 at a time, placing them gently in the pan and leaving alone until golden on underside, about 4 minutes, then turn gently using spatula and spoon. The cakes will be fragile but the crust should hold them together. Cook on second side another 3 minutes. Place cooked crab cakes on paper towel to drain and repeat with remaining cakes. Keep warm in a 200° oven if necessary. Serve with cocktail sauce and coleslaw.

Quick Coleslaw

SERVES 4

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 2 cups | green cabbage with some purple for color, shredded |
| 1/4 cup | carrot, shredded |
| 1/3 cup | mayonnaise |
| 1/4 cup | lemon juice (2 small lemons) |
| 2 Tbs | sugar |
| 1 tsp | celery seed |

Toss to combine cabbage and carrot in mixing bowl. Add remaining ingredients and thoroughly integrate into cabbage mixture. Pack tightly into container and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Cocktail Sauce

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1/2 cup | ketchup |
| 1/4 cup | grated horseradish |
| 2 Tbs | lemon juice |

Combine all ingredients and mix thoroughly. Refrigerate for 1 hour to allow flavors to bloom. For less spicy sauce, add more ketchup. For a really spicy sauce, add wasabi powder.

MARYLAND-STYLE CRAB CAKES GET A BAD RAP FROM OVERZEALOUS USE OF OLD BAY SEASONING AND TOO MUCH FILLER. These crab cakes have none of the former and only a bit of the latter. They are bound mostly by butter and a custard. Cooling formed cakes in the refrigerator until the butter solidifies again is crucial to getting the taste right when they are fried. The resulting cakes will be crisp on the outside and creamy on the inside. Using panko bread crumbs will give the crab cakes an extra hit of crunchiness. Don't worry if they get a bit soggy from their stay in the fridge; they will crunch right up in the hot oil.

NOT ALL CRABMEAT IS THE SAME. The blue crab that is the gold standard for most Maryland-style crab dishes is found along the Atlantic coast and the Gulf. Much of the crabmeat sold in big-box stores comes from Thailand, from a similar but not as tasty crab. The lumps may look luxurious, but the taste isn't the same.



Simplest Tomato Soup

SERVES 4

- 4** large ripe tomatoes, halved and crosshatched on bottom and top
- 4 Tbs** butter
- 1 cup** cream
- 1 cup** milk
- 1/4 tsp** Italian seasoning
- 1/2 tsp** salt
- 1 Tbs** Parmesan

In a 12-inch skillet, add butter and heat over medium heat until foaming subsides. Add tomatoes, cut side down, and cook for 5 minutes until tomatoes begin to caramelize on the bottom and render juices. Turn over and continue cooking another 3 minutes or until tomatoes soften and begin to disintegrate. Add remaining ingredients and continue cooking. Using the side of a spatula or spoon, break up pieces of tomato until all the elements have combined. Soup should be a light red color with chunks of tomato. Serve immediately.

IF YOU LOVE TOMATOES AT THE PEAK OF THE SEASON, this is the most satisfying soup you will ever eat. Served with a salad, it makes a fabulous light meal and is the perfect *al fresco* menu for a summer evening. And it goes without saying that it is the perfect accompaniment for the Ultimate Grilled Cheese.

Ultimate Grilled Cheese

SERVES 1

- 2 slices** brioche or challah, cut thick
- 3 Tbs** unsalted butter, softened
- 1 oz** sharp Cheddar, sliced into thin strips
- 1 oz** Brie, softened at room temperature
- 1 oz** Gruyère, shredded
- 1 slice** thin-cut bacon, cut into 2 pieces

In a 10-inch nonstick skillet, cook bacon until crisp over medium heat. Clean pan.

On one slice of bread, distribute the Brie in small pieces, and top with the bacon. Next, place shredded Gruyère over the bacon. Finally, add thin pieces of Cheddar evenly over the rest. Position the second slice of bread to complete the sandwich. Spread half of the butter thickly on the top piece of bread.

Heat skillet to medium-low. Melt remaining butter in pan and place sandwich, buttered side up, on top of melted butter, moving bread around pan to coat crusts. Cook slowly, 5–6 minutes, until bottom crust is golden, butter is absorbed, and cheese has begun to melt. Carefully flip sandwich. Cook second side until golden and cheese has completely melted, another 4 minutes or so. Avoid pressing down on sandwich.

Cut sandwich diagonally and serve with Simplest Tomato Soup.

EACH OF THE THREE CHEESES ADDS ITS SPECIAL NOTE TO THIS SANDWICH. The trick is preparing them so they all melt evenly. Cooking the sandwich over a medium-low heat allows the bread to absorb the butter and turn golden while the cheeses melt. The bacon, especially if it is one of the three brands described on page 49, adds the complete savory experience.

Or, just use any kind of bread and three slices of American cheese, because when it comes to a grilled cheese sandwich, nothing is as satisfying as this gooey memory of childhood.

Pan-Fried Chicken

SERVES 6

THIS MARYLAND-STYLE FRIED CHICKEN IS COATED IN A FLOUR MIXTURE, NOT BREADING. The salty, sour buttermilk brines the chicken and provides a base for the flour to stick to. Double coating makes a thick crust that encases the meat; if you like a thinner crust, just dip and coat once. But be careful to cover the entire piece. Breaches in the coating will allow oil to seep into the chicken, making it greasy, not juicy. Resting the chicken for at least 30 minutes before frying is the secret to getting the most perfect combination of crisp crust and moist meat.

THE CHICKEN IS PAN-FRIED IN 2 CUPS OF OIL, INSTEAD OF THE USUAL 6 TO 8 CUPS in a Dutch oven, and then finished in the oven, which sheds excess oil and crisps the crust. You can fry the chicken in the conventional manner, and cook submerged for 15–20 minutes until done, or you can avoid the frying altogether and cook the chicken for 30–40 minutes in the oven, but the final result will be dryer chicken and less crunchy skin.

Health-conscious people might want to tear off the breading and skin, and they will find juicy moist chicken. For traditionalists, the combination of crust, skin and meat is worth the extra calories. This chicken is also great served cold the next day.

- 4** breasts, bone-in and skin-on
- 4** thighs, bone-in and skin-on
- 8** legs, bone-in and skin-on
- 4 cups** buttermilk
- 1/4 cup** table salt
- 1 cup** flour
- 1/4 cup** AURAS Spice Mix (page 9)
- 1/2 tsp** cayenne pepper
- 2 Tbs** sugar
- 2 Tbs** cornstarch
- 2 cups** vegetable oil

Add salt to the buttermilk and stir to combine. Rinse chicken parts; trim any straggly ends; soak in buttermilk for at least 1 hour, preferably 3 hours. Mix flour, spice mix, cayenne, sugar and cornstarch together in deep mixing bowl. Take chicken from buttermilk; shake off excess; and dredge chicken, 1 piece at a time, through flour mixture by placing in center of deep bowl and vigorously swirling the bowl to coat the chicken. Re-dip the chicken in the buttermilk and dredge again to make a thick coating. Place on piece of aluminum foil to dry. Repeat with remaining pieces. Let chicken rest for 30 minutes before frying to allow coating to dry.

Preheat oven to 375°. Prepare a baking pan with rack by covering the pan under the rack with foil.

Over high heat, bring oil in a 12-inch cast iron sauté pan to 360°. Using tongs, place 3 or 4 pieces of chicken in oil to cook, being careful not to crowd the pan. Fry without moving for 2 minutes, then check that chicken is not sticking to bottom. If it is, use edge of tongs to gently dislodge. After another minute or so, when chicken is lightly golden, flip to other side. Cook another 3 minutes until coating has turned a light brown on both sides. Move chicken to rack and repeat with remaining pieces.

After all the meat is fried, transfer tray to center of oven and cook for 15 minutes or until instant-read thermometer in thigh reads 170°. Serve immediately or keep warm in 200° oven.



A Personal History of AURAS Design

BY ROBERT SUGAR/FOUNDER & CREATIVE DIRECTOR

IT'S HARD TO SEPARATE the story of AURAS from my own history. I have always wanted to be a graphic designer. I remember drawing Chevrolet chevrons in kindergarten. Throughout my school years, if there was any assignment that could be augmented with drawings or comic strips, that's what I'd do.

In high school, I took print shop instead of calculus—a move that landed me a session with the principal, who wanted to know why I was hanging with the trade-school kids instead of the ivy-league-bound SAT stars.



The author in 1988—already going gray.

But print shop proved to be very useful. I learned about prepress and typesetting (which in those days actually involved putting metal type into a chase) and began to produce design projects.

I have always tried to make AURAS a place where I would want to work and to be the kind of generous creative director who would teach and inspire rather than micromanage. I learned a lot from the bosses and workplaces of my early experiences in the field.

MY FIRST “REAL” JOB, working at a print shop called Colortone Press, began with a humbling event. The owner, Al Hackle, was too cheap to have reset entire lines of type for the old mechanicals he wanted updated. Instead, he would have a hot-type vendor set small numbers and codes to be mortised into the old paste-ups—a tedious and exacting job that was really too meticulous for my nascent paste-up skills. Nevertheless, I knew the basics, and with great bravado, fed the type through the sheet waxer, only to realize

I'd run it upside down. A goof, sure, but I knew a little solvent would take the wax right off. However, I'd only encountered phototype sheets, not hot-type copy made by inking the hot metal typeset lines on a proof press. The solvent dissolved the wax and also, to my horror, smeared the type beyond use. The production manager, an easy-going guy named Bill Meadows, gave me a huge amount of static—wondering who was going to pay to have it all reset—until he produced another proof sheet from the typesetter. Of course, little did I know that they sent multiple sets of copy for just such occurrences. I learned a valuable lesson—never claim to know how to do something when you just *think* you know how to do it.

Al Hackle loved printing and encouraged me to go through the plant and learn all I could. From camera room to stripping, platemaking to press, folding to binding, each part of producing a printed product had its own set of tools, skills and language. Most designers didn't have a clue how their creations were printed, but it became clear to me that if you didn't understand the total process, you weren't as likely to get a good final piece.

Printers preferred to let designers believe they knew how to paste up their own boards. After receiving the mechanicals (original art shot for the negatives that would become part of the print process) from the designer, a printer would often completely redo them before shooting the film but let the designer take credit for making beautiful paste-ups. Just like high school print shop, the world of design and printing was a class-stratified system where design people and production people did their jobs and hardly interacted. When they did, the pecking order was clear: the designers were clients (thus always right) and the printers were vendors.

After Colortone, I spent most of my

college years working at the American Chemical Society in its in-house design and production department. Working freelance (but nearly full-time) at ACS was a great way to learn the ins and outs of producing magazines. At the time—in the late 1970s—ACS produced five titles. I worked on them all—sometimes just creating charts and graphs, but sometimes getting to design.

One of the best perks about working at ACS was being allowed to work on other freelance jobs during off hours and get feedback from the other designers.

The department was run by Leroy Corcoran. He taught me a lot about managing a studio. He gave people opportunities to grow and accepted mistakes as part of the job, not failures of character. He fostered a sense of camaraderie among his employees and was always willing to pitch in when things needed to get done. To me, working at ACS was an extension of my college education. I was going to American University and majoring in communications and design, but often it seemed I learned a lot more outside the classroom.

To this day, I appreciate the way Leroy managed his department. He protected his people from the politics and hassles in the rest of the organization, and he stood up for them when they faced unreasonable demands from other departments. He had designers work directly with the “clients” in other departments, allowing them to take ownership of their work, build relationships, and improve communication skills.

All these experiences informed my sense of what a design studio should be. I thought that, when the time came, I could have a place where creative people enjoyed coming to work and were challenged by dealing directly with clients.

MY FIRST PAYING MAGAZINE

CLIENT was the result of an exasperated designer who wanted to get rid of a

client—a novice publisher who bristled at paying the outrageous sum of *six dollars a page* for layout and design. The designer, Judy Mays, had hired me to help paste up technical books and figured that, as a newly minted designer still in college, I would be happy with whatever work I could get. That is how I started working for Hershel Shanks and his Biblical Archaeology Society.

In the beginning, I may have been only a few steps ahead of Hershel's knowledge about magazine design, but they were crucial steps. When I proved that an 8½×11 magazine with a color picture on the cover could be printed for the same price as his current 7×10 book, he allowed me to do my first redesign. Ultimately, his little project grew to four magazines, and BAS remains a client after 30 years. Every business needs a pivotal client, and Hershel was mine. He can be abrupt and stubborn, with a ready-fire-aim problem-solving technique (once he decreed that letters were never ever supposed to “touch” in headlines). But he has always been loyal and supportive of me and my studio. At this point, ours is far beyond the usual business relationship.

In the early days, Hershel was constantly looking for better deals in producing his magazine, and changed printers and typesetters with upsetting frequency. However, after a small typesetting firm—one that didn't waste money on things like backup punch tapes—produced an entire issue's worth of typesetting that slowly began to fade a day after it was delivered, he finally agreed to deal with a more reputable typesetting firm. BAS used Harwood Type for four years, and I spent many hours at Harwood's watching Harry Woodell and Tom Nevins set type on their Quaddex system. Along the way, I learned a lot about typesetting.

This all started while I was still in

college, and I found ways of using my emerging design skills on campus. The biggest challenge I undertook was becoming yearbook editor. It wasn't hard to become editor; it was a position with no other takers. While it was a ridiculous amount of work to add to my schedule, it was a chance to create a book! As both editor and designer, I had my first opportunity to hold creative control over both the look and content of a big printed piece. It is an addicting experience, and it confirmed something that I have always believed: design serves content, and the perfect solution to any design problem is, at core, finding a better way of telling a story or explaining an idea.

I graduated from AU in 1978 and kept freelancing at ACS. After a while, the “non-ACS” work was getting to be too much of an imposition on the generosity of Leroy, who only very gently complained. I knew I had to start my own studio and stop using ACS as a crutch. In 1981 I started AURAS Design in a corner of my apartment. The name comes from Latin and, loosely translated, means “you are gold,” but it also kind of sounds like my initials, and at the time it was trendy to have obscure single-word studio names. AURAS seemed a perfect choice.

As most who have worked out of their home might agree, after a while it feels like you'll go insane if you do it one day longer. I'd find excuses to head to ACS to visit with the crew there, or walk around the nearby National Zoo. One thing I realized—you never want to make your home a place you dread. I needed to find a real office space. Eventually, one of my new clients, a PR firm called Sobus & Lane, invited me to share space and be its in-house design partner. They seemed like smart people, so I agreed. We found space on Cathedral Avenue in an apartment building that backed up to the zoo. In the summer, when the wind blew just so, you knew you were near the animals.

After we—AURAS (just me) and four of them—moved into a two-bedroom

apartment, things started to get weird. To my admittedly naive sense of business conduct, they all seemed a little too friendly, but as it turned out, it was much weirder—they were all deep into EST. Erhard Seminar Training might be lost to time today, but back then it had gained a following. It was sort of a cross between Scientology and Mary Kay Cosmetics.

They seemed certain that by using their EST training, they would become a highly successful firm. In reality, all they did was annoy and alienate their clients, and after a few months I had the apartment on Cathedral Avenue to myself. By the end of 1981 EST was history, too.

Over the next few years, I had a variety of office mates; the best was Lauren Wadsworth, a new age-y masseuse who set up her practice in the other bedroom “office.” One of the side benefits of the arrangement was getting a weekly massage.

My first attempt at hiring an employee was a disaster—a woman who, as it turned out, had not been honest about her portfolio or her skill set. My first “real” employee, Mariann Seriff, proved to me that it was indeed possible to find a good designer who knew how to design. Soon we added a few new clients and a few more designers; business was starting to take off.

ONE DAY I RECEIVED A NOTICE from the D.C. government that my business was going to be audited. I was completely unprepared for the event and had made a major mistake: I hadn't realized that a design firm had to charge sales tax on its work. The auditor presented an initial estimate that I owed the District of Columbia over \$40,000 in back sales tax. I had to show that my clients were exempt because they were either nonprofits or not based in D.C.

The biggest help fixing the situation came from a modern dancer I had met while photographing a group called the Dance Exchange. Helen Rea wasn't just a dancer. She was in training to practice The Alexander Technique—and was also a

bookkeeper. She helped me plow through my records and ultimately we proved that all but \$6,000 was tax-exempt. The District sent a confirmation of our very detailed report and indicated a bill would follow. In fact, no bill came, and I never heard from them again.

We decided to incorporate AURAS Design, and start our books fresh, paying proper attention to tax billing. I had found a friend and partner in Helen, and became one of her “guinea pig” clients in her Alexander training. After a few sessions, she helped relieve a back problem that I had endured for years. Soon we grew into a real couple, and her contributions to making AURAS successful throughout the years are beyond measure.

I ALWAYS FELT THAT AURAS SHOULD be a place where the resources were used for creative purposes. We are probably the only design studio in the country that ever created and produced a modern dance concert. I was very involved in the modern dance community and had created promotional materials and shot stills for many dance companies. When I decided to produce a concert, I had lots of chits to call in. The concert was a series of dance parodies and tongue-in-cheek performance art. It was a great opportunity to use our design skills creating short videos as well as the promotion and branding for a show. “See This Concert and Keep the Flashlight FREE” featured many well-known local dancers and was performed at The Dance Place, so it was no wonder it sold out and even got pretty decent reviews. *The Washington Post* said it was an event “that should be held every year.”

THE FIRST MACINTOSH was introduced in 1984 and brought the world MacWrite and MacPaint. The Mac was a fun toy, but hardly a serious design tool. That changed in 1987, when Apple introduced the Mac II and—more important—the Laserwriter. The Laserwriter drew text using Postscript page-description

language and was capable of producing type that rivaled the quality of typesetting machines—although most typesetters didn't want to believe it. Unlike every system that preceded it, Postscript type was based on vectors, not bitmaps, so it could be any size—from a small footnote to a huge headline—and still be razor sharp, or at least as sharp as its 300 dpi resolution would allow.

Mariann was positive that AURAS was way behind the curve adopting computers. So on the day before Christmas in 1987, I ordered our first Mac II and a ridiculously expensive Ikegami monitor—4,000 bucks and it mostly sucked. (I regretted not spending six *grand* on a Sony Trinitron for years afterward). But I was so sure the Mac II wouldn't be a useful tool that I didn't even bother buying a printer. The day after Christmas, I came to the studio to find a stack of boxes.

I had absolutely no experience setting up or using computers of any sort, so I was astounded that after attaching all the plugs and cables and turning the thing on, I heard the now-familiar chime.

Our “powerful” computer ran a copy of Aldus PageMaker 1.2 and FreeHand 1.0, and the Mac came with fonts that would print on a Laserwriter. It only took an hour or so using PageMaker for my experiences at Colortone Press and Harwood Type to tell me this wasn't just a design tool, it was a production tool—and one that would change everything about the way we worked. Learning to use the Mac was a challenge, but our initial idea of using it experimentally didn't last long.

I ordered a printer almost immediately, and, to my delight, it arrived the very next day—another new experience that was going to become a part of our everyday lives.

We produced our first live job on the computer two weeks after we got the equipment. True, it was a small brochure, and a few years later, when we looked at the file to revise it, we found it was made pretty badly, but WYSIWYG (“What You See Is What You Get”) worked—it looked

and printed just fine. I sent a comp of the design to the client, who promptly called me to complain that the copy wasn't finished yet, and I shouldn't have sent it to the typesetter. She needed some extra reassurance that what I had sent over was, in fact, a mere comp. That was a pretty convincing conversation about the potential of using the Mac.

Of course, Mariann was totally wrong about one thing: it didn't take long for us to realize that almost no other design firm had Macs, or knew their potential. That gave AURAS an advantage that we leveraged for many years.

AURAS HAD GROWN TO FOUR PEOPLE by the late 1980s, and we knew that the time had come to find real office space instead of squatting in a residential apartment building.

By then I was living in the Adams Morgan section of Washington, D.C., and I noticed a house for sale on Kalorama Road that I knew was zoned commercial—although it was offered as a residence.

Helen and I, carrying our new baby, Rebecca (we got married somewhere in there), wandered over for a look. The row house was a badly neglected property that had seen years of transient renters, and the current group had carved out four apartments in the small building, including the unfinished basement. The house, built in 1902, still had original gas fixtures that were installed along with electric wiring, because back then a lot of people thought that electricity might be just a passing fad. The rear of the building sagged by almost a foot, giving the floor a slant that a ball would roll down. While the structure was once a nice example of middle-class housing, with 10-foot ceilings, plaster-and-lath walls, tiled entryways and mahogany trim, it had become a sad mess.

Walking away, I said, "This place is perfect," and, simultaneously, Helen said, "This place is a disaster." In reality it was neither; it was a shell waiting for renovation at a price that was affordable and in a great

location. I'd always wanted a townhouse studio that felt as comfortable as being at home. It was also a block away from where we lived. Nice commute.

Even with the cost of renovating, the monthly payment was only about \$850—\$300 less than the Cathedral Avenue space. It always seemed to me that money spent on rent was a lost asset that owning a building could remedy. And while we didn't need the huge 2,100 square feet of space yet, we could rent out the basement and grow into the building over time.

We hired a small firm to do the renovation, and, as layers of poor amateur additions were stripped away, it became apparent that the job was going to be a lot bigger than it looked. The building sagged because it was supported in the basement by two ancient railroad ties perched on brick tiers. As the ties had slowly disintegrated, the entire structure had sagged with them. The solution was to raise the entire house on jacks, replace the old wooden ties with steel, and straighten every floor joist with a new cement base.

We restored pocket doors and a fireplace mantle, and saved the floors, but ultimately, everything else in the small building was replaced. The original front door was recreated at a woodworking shop just up the street. New HVAC, plumbing and wiring were added. Drywall replaced the rotting plaster and lath. New appliances, tile and fixtures were put in the bathrooms. We added a skylight in the stairwell and replaced all the windows. In the back, we planned a large sliding glass door set among windows that spanned the entire rear wall leading to a deck.

The day the sliding door was being installed, the job foreman met me as I arrived at the building, blocking the entrance and asking: "Would you like the good news or the bad news?" That's always a troubling way to start a conversation. I chose the former, the answer to which was, "Well, no one was hurt." And the bad news? While they were adjusting the sliding doors, the entire rear wall—from the

basement to the eaves—had collapsed in a cloud of dust.

For AURAS, it was actually a good thing, because the construction firm had to rebrick the entire back of the building at its own expense. Unfortunately for them, the job—one of their first—was also their last. It was only the integrity of the foreman, who came to do the punch list even though the company had gone kaput, that got the job finished.



WE MOVED INTO THE OFFICE at 1746 Kalorama Road in June 1988. During the past year we had used our computer more and more for production, but large projects were still

difficult because of the lack of style sheets that could "tag" word-processing files with information that changed their font, size and leading. That changed with the release of PageMaker 2.1, installed shortly before our move. At this point we had about a dozen clients, mostly associations, and their big projects revolved around annual meetings. One client in particular, the National Association of Social Workers, had us produce a huge catalog of courses for its meeting, a project that had cost nearly \$14,000 in typesetting fees the previous year.

Now, we had them tag their text and send us the entire file, instead of sending it to our typesetter. We prototyped a page, set up style sheets to match the tag names, and hit <command-D> to place the text onto the first blank page. And...nothing happened. But it was a large file, more than 120 pages of print-out. We went to lunch, and I came back early to check on the machine. To my utter amazement, there on the screen was the entire document, typeset perfectly, laid out into 80 pages. It only took a single keystroke to create a document that had previously involved 30 hours of paste-up and a huge typesetting fee.

If I wasn't already convinced that the

computer was the way of the future, I was now. We used a service bureau to output perfectly laid-out pages; our total cost was \$640. We billed NASW 15% less than the previous year, which made them pretty happy. Our total fee was enough to buy a second Mac system and put a down payment on our own imagesetter.

The next year we were told that NASW had been offered the same job for half our rate. Soon it was impossible to charge for typesetting, and most of the type shops in the area disappeared.

In 1990, we bought our first imagesetter, freeing us from sending files out to a service bureau. In the following decade, we bought two more generations of imagesetters. But nothing matches the thrill of your first. It took the technician



1746 Kalorama Road. The townhouse was the studio for AURAS from 1988 to 1998.

an hour to build the printer stand and 15 minutes to set it up on our network. We produced our first page of real repro a half-hour later.

Printing high-rez pages on photo paper replaced paste-up, but print shops still had to shoot halftones and strip in color separations. Our imagesetter could run film as well, and soon we were producing CMYK negatives. Unfortunately, the film would misalign as it was exposed, causing such poor registration that we'd print each page's set of negs twice and take the best four pieces of film out of eight—but it worked. The process was so new that the imagesetter's rep came to see us do it, because he was certain it was impossible to make 133-line separations on our machine. Difficult, yes, but not impossible.

In 1990, we had our turn designing and producing the Art Directors Club of Metropolitan Washington's magazine, *Full Bleed*. We decided, as a challenge, to produce an entire issue digitally. It was an alphabetical primer, each page produced by a different designer. Considering the state of the art, it's a miracle it was produced at all; today it looks primitive. But it proved to the design community that change had already arrived.

Convincing our magazine clients to switch to the Mac also took some persuasion. Our approach was to guarantee that if they weren't satisfied with the quality of the product, we would pay the typesetter the difference between our rates and theirs, usually double our fee. Not one magazine looked back after their first digitally produced issue. By the mid-1990s, we had moved entirely to digital production, and everyone had a workstation.

Eventually, nine people occupied the Kalorama studio, filling all three floors. The senior designer was—and still is—Sharri Wolfgang. She joined AURAS in 1987 after working at American Chemical Society for seven years. Sharri and I knew each other from high school. I had tried to get her to join the studio for a few years, but she wasn't quite ready to jump from the security of a big association to a small design



The second floor of Kalorama in the early '90s. We may all have gotten workstations, but they're perched on our original art tables.

firm until I had a few more steady clients.

Sharri has always tackled tough jobs. Although brought kicking and screaming into the computer age, she has mastered every new version of every new program we have ever used. As we expanded, we needed more people who knew how to design on computers, which were fast becoming the dominant tool in the burgeoning desktop publishing revolution.

Because Sharri is so great, I had no problem leaving her in charge while I spent an entire summer away at the beach with my family—Helen, Rebecca, 8, and Steven, 5—something I'd always wanted to do. It was three hours from home, but I was still going to be involved. With a laptop, a modem and a printer, I thought I could work from the beach and communicate with people over dial-up modems using a program called Timbuktu.

It sort of worked. I could receive and edit files, and I could text-message people at work and even send files to the work printers. We racked up \$2,200 in long-distance charges. You pay for being an early adopter.

IT CONSTANTLY AMAZED ME

how people who claimed to be experts using a Mac had only mediocre skills, the result of being mostly self-taught. One of our designers managed to avoid using the photo-cropping tool for a year because she didn't know what it was for.

It became clear to me that we needed to train people how to use their computers better. I'd been teaching publication design at American University and knew I had a knack for it.

Our first AURAS training session was held in 1993 at the Four Seasons in Georgetown. It was a two-day session introducing designers and publishers to digital design and production. We gave live demonstrations and a notebook with informative booklets and programs and fonts that we had developed at AURAS. We still see those fonts pop up online every so often. The sessions went well, but the best attendee comment was that "it was the best food I'd ever had at a training session."

Because of my connection with the Art Directors Club and American University, I was asked to substitute for a speaker at a Folio:Show conference in 1992. That began a relationship with the show that lasted for 15 years (under three different owners, no less). At that time the Folio:Show, held every fall in New York, was the largest publishing conference in the country, and so popular that they added smaller annual shows in Los Angeles, D.C. and Chicago, and a second show in New York.

When I spoke in D.C., the conference director approached me and said my ideas made so much sense that Folio: ought to employ me to do its show marketing. Over the next seven years, AURAS produced Folio: materials as well as new branding and marketing programs for four other conferences, and I spoke at its conferences for eight years after that.

BY THE END OF THE DECADE, our Kalorama townhouse was getting cramped. We started looking for space in Silver Spring, both because it was near my current home, and—having grown up in Silver Spring and watched its decline during the 1980s—I wanted to do something to help revive the downtown. Plus, the real estate prices were a bargain compared to Northwest D.C.

One of the most interesting buildings in Silver Spring happened to be for sale. It was built as a Masonic Temple in 1927. The building underwent a cheap renovation in the early 1980s, and now the windows were boarded and the paint was peeling. At 12,000 square feet, it was much larger than we needed. But despite the roof leaks and dead pigeon in the top floor space, it just took one look at the views through the wrap-around windows to convince me we should be in this space.

After I called the listing agent to express interest, I immediately received three phone calls from different county and state agencies, all offering to help make the deal work. Montgomery County was anxious to get something going in downtown Silver Spring and wanted to help.

Even though a real estate agent warned it would be a tough sell at our asking price, we sold the Kalorama townhouse to the first people who looked at it, furniture and all. What sold the place to them was the modern renovation, proving that smart design has a strong return on investment. Because of the quick sale, we had to move out before our new space was finished.

In February 1998, we left our studio of nine years and rented temporary space next door to the Masons Hall. One thing that had delayed the build-out was our discovery that, hidden by the poor 1980s renovation, the original Greek Revival details of the third-floor ceremonial hall were still intact.

Our initial plan, working with architects Howard Goldstein and Jill Shick, had been a hip loft with exposed pipes and HVAC ducts, but now we decided to restore the

third floor to an approximation of its initial design, with modern updates. Our builders hired a specialty firm—one that regularly worked on the U.S. Capitol—to restore the egg-and-dart molding, rosettes and the Masonic symbol itself, a three-foot plaster relief in the center of the ceiling.

We moved into 8435 Georgia Avenue, rechristened the AURAS Building, in July 1998. It was the first new building project in downtown Silver Spring in seven years. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by county and state movers-and-shakers, I said that I hoped one day soon our little building would be the least interesting thing on the intersection. That has largely become true, and I couldn't be happier.

Soon after we moved in, the Silver Spring Regional Center—the county agency tasked with reviving the downtown—brought Discovery Channel's President and CEO over to see our new space. We don't really know if it made a difference, but a week later Discovery announced it would build a new headquarters right across the street from us.

From our perch at one end of the downtown business district, we've watched a remarkable renaissance occur in an inner-suburb town center that had almost become a giant indoor mall.

We had restored the building but originally built out only the third floor

The AURAS Building in Silver Spring, Md.



for our space. Proving the old axiom that real estate is “location, location, location,” Montgomery County leased the first two floors for the Silver Spring Regional Center and Urban District, which became another AURAS client.

Our routine was to have a production meeting every Tuesday morning, going over project schedules and reviewing work. That is where we were on September 11, 2001, when we heard about the terrorist attacks. Like millions of others, we spent the rest of the morning huddled together watching the tragedy unfold. We didn't know what was going to happen next, but with all of the speculation on the news and the uncertainty, we were honestly glad to be away from the center of the city.

THE EARLY 2000s were halcyon years for AURAS. We had a brand-new studio, we were producing 17 magazines, outputting film for most of them, and we were getting rent from the County on the other two floors. Maybe it was because we were doing so well that we became a little too complacent. When the Internet became a place where clients could place content, we missed the rich opportunities of being a pioneer in the emerging field of web design. Of course we eventually developed the skills to build web sites and produce media content for our clients, but the phenomenal advantage that early adopters caught by focusing on the web, echoing our own good

fortune a decade earlier with personal computers, was a golden opportunity we should have exploited.

In our defense, no one knew in 2000 the far-reaching consequences that ever-expanding bandwidth would have on the graphic design business and the general cultural landscape. But one thing was clear—designing solely for print was going to be less profitable.

Another major revolution occurred at the same time. Print shops, which had been creating printing plates using negative film, discovered a new technology that would eliminate nearly all their time-consuming, labor-intensive prepress operations. Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF), introduced in 1998, was intended to create files that would retain original formatting of documents so they could be read on a computer by anyone using its free reader software. But another use for the format was to encapsulate all the prepress information that had formerly been sent to imagesetters producing negative film for stripping. Data from PDF files could be directly scanned onto plates, eliminating film entirely.

Of course, most designers had no clue how to properly format their documents to trap ink correctly, or how to use spot colors or overprint, or how to correct color images. But we did. We'd done it for years.

In 2002 we produced 12,000 sheets of film, but in 2003 only 1,600. Printers—a

Our current space is an entire open floor surrounded by windows on all four sides.

notoriously conservative bunch—had adopted a PDF workflow amazingly quickly, and our days of “printing money” were over.

The first big project that we sent to the printer entirely as a digital file was a commemorative magazine for the American Chemical Society. The printer was in Florida, and we used our ISDN connection to send the 200-meg file to them in four hours. Two days later, a proof was delivered to us via FedEx. Even when we had provided negatives, it would still take a local printer four days to make proofs. These had come in a day. And they looked fabulous. It was pretty clear what the future of printing was going to be like. The critical issue from now on was how well your source file was made, because the printer wouldn't be responsible for printing mistakes caused by badly constructed files.

WE BOUGHT OUR FIRST SERIOUS transparency scanner in 1995, but it only scanned 35mm transparencies; the rest we sent to a service bureau with a big Scitex scanner. But in 1999 we bought a new, much more expensive scanner from a company called FlexTight. It could scan transparencies up to 8 x 10 at resolutions of 4000 ppi, more than enough for any image we encountered. More critical, the quality rivaled what we were getting from our

outside vendor. AURAS became capable of producing every part of a print product at high quality completely in-house.

It was such a great scanner, we paid it off in six months and ultimately bought another. But scanning transparencies was soon ending, too, as serious digital cameras began replacing film. By the mid-2000s we began seeing more and more digital files and had far fewer transparencies to scan.

EVERY BUSINESS HAS ITS UPS AND DOWNS, but AURAS had always done better year by year. In 2006, we were 25 years old, and felt pretty impervious to the economy. Revenue sources came and went. We made money outputting film and scanning transparencies, but even when technologies changed, we were still producing magazines, marketing materials and identity programs, and working on our most ambitious product ever—producing our own magazine, which launched in 2007.

So it came as a complete surprise that when the economy tanked in late 2007, it took many of our clients down, too. By 2009, we were producing half the magazines we had in 2005. For the first time in our history, I reluctantly had to let people go.

So maybe 2007 was a bad time to introduce *FPO*—*For Publications Only*. It was an extension of the newsletters we had been producing since 2004 and the classes we had been teaching for nearly as long.



The author at his usual post, hand on trackball, at his typically messy desk.

Magazine design, editing and production was something we knew a lot about, and we knew a lot of people who could use a magazine about it.

The business plan was pretty realistic; we needed at least 2,500 subscriptions to start, and we figured that it should be a breeze to find them. Since *Print* had 30,000 subscribers and *HOW* had 24,000, we should be able to get 5 percent of them interested in another magazine. That was the theory, anyway.

To be generous, let's call *FPO* a cult favorite. Readers liked the magazine and got a lot from it, but as the recession deepened, we ran out of money to promote the magazine. We had been hoping the magazine would get some Internet viral boost to help it grow, but that wasn't happening. And boy, the *schadenfreude* that comes with producing a magazine in your own field is kind of awesome. Everyone thinks they know more than you do, and no one is slow to point out your mistakes. We have produced seven issues to date and hope to do more occasionally.

WHERE ARE WE NOW that we have reached our 30th year? The magazine business is in turmoil, faced with new delivery methods, new technologies and huge competition from media platforms that were not even imagined three decades ago. Whether it's remaking print publications for an iPad or developing Web sites using HTML5 or Flash to deliver a graphic experience that can rival print design (but with the added capability of motion, sound and interactivity)—someone *still* has to design these things.

As the years have gone by, we've become more interested in advancing the editorial message no matter what the ultimate platform, and often the best solution is a combination of print, web and social media. We have adapted by learning new skills and finding new markets. It's still fun to come to work every day, and I think the feeling is shared by Sharri Wolfgang (25 years),

David Fox (16 years) and Melissa Kelly (11 years), who have come to appreciate the AURAS way of working—if not necessarily the strong coffee. Past long-term employees like Jason Clarke (10 years), Mark Colliton (8 years) and Ted Bonar (9 years) helped make the studio successful in recent years, and, more importantly, a place to enjoy work with a minimum of drama. To some degree, we have become spoiled, expecting people to like AURAS and want to stay.

Both the design of the space and the culture of the business have always been important to me. Most people are lucky to be able to create a place that represents their ideal environment; I have been

fortunate to have created *two* spaces.

I have always loved the moment when a newly printed piece has been delivered. Seeing your work finally produced is always exciting. For me, it's not just visual, but tactile and even sensual. I confess to still burying my nose in a brand new publication to get a whiff of the inks and varnishes and smells of the pressroom I remember so well from my earliest experiences at Colortone. Somehow, sniffing a monitor or digital tablet just isn't the same.

ROBERT SUGAR
OCTOBER 2011
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Over the years, AURAS has produced a variety of creative promotions and products: an actual modern dance concert; a funky rubber stamp set designed by Marty Ittner; and note cards that celebrate the seasons designed by Sharri Wolfgang. But our most ambitious project has been *FPO Magazine*. We have poured everything we know and love about publication design into its issues.



AURAS Employees

(In roughly reverse chronological order. People with five or more years at AURAS are highlighted in red.)

Robert Sugar	Stuart Greenwell
Helen Rea	Scott Crawford
Sharri Wolfgang	Catherine Garcia
David Fox	Kay Irannejad
Melissa Kelly	Robin Cather
Andrew Chapman	Sharon Eppler
Jason Clarke	Terry Cohen
Jinna Hagerty	Dan Banks
Nancy McKeithen	JoAnne DiGeorgio
Tanya Nuchols	Philip Gerlach
Jeff Roberts	Stacy Dadonna
Chris Komisar	Ted Smith
Ted Bonar	Marty Ittner
Dan Stump	Debbie Bates
Daryl Wakeley	Ellen Baker Smyth
Vivian Moritz	Valerie Weiner
Maureen Gregory	Malcolm McGaughy
Mark Colliton	Evelyn Powers
Elyse Greer	Karol Keane
Cynthia Eyring	Sylvie Abecassis
Elizabeth McNulty	Jane Winter
Ron Melé	John Hannafan
Jake Watling	Kyong Cho
Jessie Despard	Mariann Seriff

Biographies

ROBERT SUGAR

IS FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF AURAS DESIGN,

a design studio that brings editorial-oriented solutions to clients' design problems.

He started AURAS Design while still enrolled at American University, where he was editor of the school yearbook and literary magazine. The studio's official start date in 1981 marked the first separate studio space for the company.

Rob taught at American University for nine years as an adjunct faculty member in the Art and Communications departments of the School of Communication.

As a pioneer in the adoption of desktop publishing tools for professional design and production of print materials, he was responsible for helping other studios and printers adopt new workflows using the technologies.

Rob has taught sessions at Folio:Show for 20 years, as well as at many other industry events, and serves as a consultant for publishers.

In 2008 he started *FPO Magazine*, a publication for editorial designers. His most ambitious work to date, however, has been his collaboration with his wife, Helen Rea, in the production of their children, Rebecca and Steven.

RENÉE COMET

IS A NOTED ADVERTISING

PHOTOGRAPHER specializing in food and still-life photography. Whatever the subject, her visual treatment can best be described as uncomplicated, fluid, and elegant.

Great food should be shot big and needs a thousand and one details to be perfect. It needs to completely overtake your gaze, mesmerize you until you're hungry.

For over a quarter century, Renee's been exploring and succeeding in coercing those details into the best food photography for her clients. Each assignment is an opportunity to interpret, reinterpret, and reinvent the image to produce stunning results for her clients and collaborators. Whether it's spices for McCormick Spice or spices as healing herbs for *AARP Magazine*, or spices as ingredients for one of the thousands of recipes in the many cookbooks she's illustrated, each is an opportunity to see anew.

How each specific recipe looks best is Renee's singular goal. She focuses on conveying that decisive image: the steam, the water droplets, the light touch of sauce on the end of the fork, the moist food, the glare on the food in exactly the right place.

You can see more of Renée Comet's work, and reach her, at www.cometphoto.com.

LISA CHERKASKY

IS THE D.C. AREA'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER FOOD STYLIST.

She brings a rare skill, creativity, and flair to all her work. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Lisa has been working in the world of food for more than 35 years—cooking in restaurants as both a chef and pastry chef, writing, catering, teaching, styling, and eating.

She has been independently employed for more than 25 years and counts among her clients McCormick Spice, *The Washington Post*, Marble Slab Ice Cream, Mount Vernon, Monticello, the Smithsonian, Zatarain's, Meat and Livestock Australia, and National Geographic.

You can find Lisa on her website, www.LisaCherkasky.com, and also writing and riffing on sandwiches at www.TheLunchEncounter.com.



Delicious by Design

30 YEARS | 30 RECIPES

Some cookbooks have lots of recipes, but you only like a few. *Delicious by Design* may only have 30 great main dishes (and another 15 sides) but we guarantee that you will love all of them, or your money back. These aren't just any recipes, but represent 30 years of adventurous home cooking. There are no fussy techniques, no foams, no obscure ingredients, no fancy tools. There is honest flavor here; each dish designed to surprise and comfort and remind you of why the best cooking is just like great design—it inspires the artist in all of us to wonder, "Why didn't I think of that?"



AURAS DESIGN

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