

By Michele Moore

After 10 years and 1,800 dinner shows, the show could not go on with “just Bob” or “just Lenore” -this is the Bob *and* Lenore show.

Tonight’s dinner show at EVOO Cannon Beach Cooking School, about 90 miles west of Portland, begins with a pan fried red-rock fish, paired with a Foundry Vineyards 2011 Columbia Valley White on White.

Removing the rock fish from a marinade of garlic, lemon juice, and olive oil, Bob sautés it in grape seed oil on high heat on one side only, finishing it off in a 400 degree oven. This is the first of many ‘Bobisms’ that we’ll witness tonight—juxtaposing textures by applying different cooking methods to either side of the rock fish.

Bob hands a spatula to Lenore. A blend of Italian and Jewish heritage, Bob requires both hands to “talk” about our next course. Chef Bob Neroni has the quick wit and enthusiasm of Food Network star Guy Fieri, combined with the intensity and skill set of renowned French Laundry chef-owner Thomas Keller. Bob’s wife, Lenore Emery, exudes the warmth of the Food Network’s Ina Garten and possesses the culinary curiosity of the late Julia Childs. With quips like “Don’t you think that’s enough coriander, Bob?” the mood at the dinner shows remains light and fun, even though the food is exquisitely prepared and plated.

“The dinner show concept was accidental,” Lenore tells me the next morning over breakfast at Firehouse Grill in Seaside. “Our plan was to offer hands-on cooking classes, primarily inspired by the seasonality and quality of the ingredients, for visitors to Cannon Beach,” says Lenore. Although professional chefs themselves, Bob and Lenore hired John Sarich, Culinary Director of Chateau Ste. Michelle, to teach at the school’s grand opening in August, 2004.

John, unfortunately, was not prepared to teach a hands-on class in pasta-making, so Lenore quickly sat the students around a communal prep table and Bob made pasta dough, sauces, and somehow plated three courses. John poured lots of wine that night. “I never thought it would be possible to cook for twenty people and talk at the same time,” says Bob during breakfast, “but we knew right away we were onto something with the *eatertainment* concept we stumbled upon that very first night.”

I met Bob and Lenore at a dinner show shortly after their grand opening in 2004. Back then, they promoted eating locally and growing foods sustainably –concepts new to most of us ten years ago. Almost all food prepared at EVOO is fresh and sourced from Oregon. I do not consider myself a foodie, and I’ll always choose a craft beer over a glass of fine wine. But I make it a point to consume Bob and Lenore’s enthusiasm for everything related to food as often as I can. We’ve met in Portland for dinner and a show. The show? *I Love to Eat*, a play celebrating the life of Portland native James Beard. I’ve participated in EVOO’s hands-on, multi-day culinary basics classes. If time is too limited to stay in Cannon Beach, it is well worth the eight hour round trip drive from Seattle just to attend a dinner show at EVOO.

The couple is aware that most small businesses on the Oregon coast don’t make it ten years. Yummy Restaurant, House of Potter, and the Waves of Grain Bakery next door to EVOO are the latest casualties.

The limited tourist season in Cannon Beach makes it difficult for a business to be sustainable and business owners often pursue opportunities elsewhere in the off-season months. Currently, Lenore and Bob are working on a partnership with Chef JJ Johnson of O’o Farms in upcountry Maui. Originally from Seattle, Chef JJ plans to spend this summer in Cannon Beach training under Bob and Lenore. The trio plans to bring farm to table eatertainment to the Valley Isle with the opening of EVOO-Maui in 2015.

The couple also leads guided tours to Italy every fall. On visits to Tuscany, participants harvest olives by hand at their villa and transport the olives to the Pruneti brothers' family farm in San Polo, Chianti for pressing. On tours through southern Italy, travelers visit family agriturismos in Sorrento that make mozzarella cheese from very rare breeds of cattle and small family-owned factories on the Amalfi coast that have produced limonchello and processed anchovies using the same techniques for generations.

Bob and Lenore are making a product of their own that hasn't been made locally since the days of Lewis and Clark. Sustainable salt-making on the Oregon coast is Bob and Lenore's latest venture. Bob designed and constructed a hoop house for dehydrating 2,000 gallons of water from the Pacific. By agitating the top layer of water to encourage evaporation, water is released and used as potable secondary water and the residual is fleur de sel, flower of salt. Sea salt is more flavorful than refined table salt because of the trace mineral content.

As we finish breakfast, I ask the couple about the latest trends in the food world. Without hesitation, Bob tells me, "Americans are demanding food products that not only taste good, but are healthy as well. Now even Triscuits are available with brown rice and sweet potatoes. Keebler's Simply Made Cookies contain all natural ingredients." We discuss how the big chains like Chipotle make tasty food and as an added benefit let their customers know that the pigs are naturally raised, never given antibiotics, and fed a vegetarian diet.

Bob and Lenore employ the same strategies at EVOO.

Back at class, we've finished the rock fish and Bob is telling us the story about sourcing it from a local fisherman this morning while prepping ingredients for our next course, a grilled center cut grass fed filet of beef. He throws in a few more Bobisms as he sprinkles their own Blue Sky sea salt on the filets. "You always want to balance sweet, salty, sour and bitter" and one I've heard many times, "If it grows together, it goes together."

While the steaks sear for three minutes each side on the grill pan, we enjoy some fresh sourdough bread made from a biga starter that Bob has fed daily since the school opened. Once heated to 125°, the filets are plated with a pepita-corn humita and a mushroom crudo.

Over dessert, cannoli cheesecake with a freshly made marsala pizzelle cookie and homemade pistachio brittle, Bob tells us he started his career in the pastry kitchen. There he learned the art of adding "crunch" to his desserts. Nut brittle has become almost a staple for all of EVOO's desserts. Lenore shares, "This is made using the senses and no thermometer and yet it works each night."

Like the local farmers and fishermen that they source from in Oregon, as well the small family farmers they meet on their travels to Italy, Bob and Lenore take great pleasure in the beauty, smell, taste and feel of the ingredients in their dishes.

"We're never going to be rich doing this," Bob says, "but we are never going to be happier doing anything else."