



SNAPS: Food & Props Stylist CHRISTINE WOLHEIM

I interviewed Christine Wolheim in August of 2010. Her interview holds the honor of most read post of all time on POP. I think this is due in part to her general enthusiasm and many creative talents including cooking (she is a trained chef), painting (she has a degree in painting), food and prop styling. And not only is she a stylist, but she has her own prop shop with shelves filled with vintage and collectible dishes, flatware, platters, custom surfaces and many more fun things. She brought this same enthusiasm to her interview and continues to bring it to current commercial and personal projects.

She recently finished a project shot in collaboration with Dwight Eschliman, that she shared with me for SNAPS. Together, they created an image of everyday items that are made from petroleum products shot on a grid submerged in motor oil. The result is a hauntingly beautiful image that by its very beauty compels us to look and consider carefully what we are being asked to study. It is an interesting personal project for a stylist and a perfect collaborative team given Dwight's iconic overhead shots and his Twinkie project in which he dissected and photographed all "37 or so" ingredients in a Twinkie.

A short SNAPS style Q&A follows along with the image. Big thanks to Christine for sharing with POP!



Petroleum Grid

Styled by Christine Wolheim / Photo by Dwight Eschliman

POP: What was the idea behind this project? Is it part of a series?

Well, yes and no. A photographer I collaborate with often, Maren Caruso and I had been doing series of "dissections" together for several years. What we did together involved vegetables. Then we did clothing. And then we got the idea of doing more "everyday" items, like sugar and wheat and coffee—I could not get the coffee plants back with me from Costa Rica, so we never made that one. But these dissections had morphed into not just what is in the "ingredient" but things that are made from it.

Then someone gave us a bag of coal! We wanted to make a fossil fuel dissection. But you know it just seemed so pedantic. But it got me thinking about petroleum products. Energy is a topic about which I had done some pretty political images with a different photographer Deb Sherman which I think are still timely.

POP: How much research did you do?

I started researching and of course everyone knows that Petroleum is in everything. But I was still stunned! There is no getting away from it. In the end I chose to focus on the most “everyday” items: the ones you don’t even think about because they are so much a part of our landscape. Like toothbrushes. In a way I think this is what we always deal in as stylists: Icons, classics of any given thing.

So, it took me over two years to get this image made! I had researched and shopped and then Maren and I had many dates scheduled and cancellations (when one of us got work), then she was pregnant and felt ill and then large and did not want to be up on a ladder, so she gave me her blessing to do it with someone else.

I had long been an admirer of Dwight’s (Eschliman) work, and then I worked with him for a Real Simple shoot and it hit me that he would be a perfect fit both visually and thematically with his plastic bottles image and Twinkie ingredients image, etc.

I approached him. He loved the idea and brought Dwight intensity to it. Even though I had a vision and I’d already amassed all the items, I wanted to show it all to him and let him have input and see what may come as a collaboration, or if he thought anything was missing. It was actually Dwight’s idea to immerse it in oil. (strangely Maren had said a similar thing way back when) Good minds thinking alike! Dwight was indeed the perfect photographer to shoot it with because he has a mount on his ceiling, which is incredibly high.

Even so we had to edit the items to fit it all in one frame...like I said Petroleum is in everything!

POP: How was this shot? and how long did the shoot take?

I can’t tell you any more about how it was done, cause then I’d have to kill you! No, really we shot this clean first with no oil, and intended to do as a diptych (one clean, one immersed) but the items with the oil were so much more mysterious and intriguing, or so we thought! It is hard when you look at something for so long to see it clearly any more. We worked on it, just shooting, for at least three days. Then there was a lot of post-production involved: I will tell you this: each item had to be in its own oil bath...I really admired Dwight’s dedication to the idea and the integrity of an image that he was willing to commit to so much post work (and his assistants too). It was really a pleasure to collaborate. In fact this is my favorite part about what I do, whether it be for an ad or a book or a personal project, but this collaboration and the blurring of the lines between “Fine” art and “Commercial” art. It doesn’t matter.

POP: There’s an interesting tension in this piece – it is quite beautiful yet it is about a very serious subject.

For me personally, I feel that an image should arrest you, should compel you to want to look at it. To seduce you as it were. Draw you in. Then it can be about anything you want. Personally I aspire to make images that are arresting, beautiful, AND conceptually intelligent, or they make you think, or laugh (there is a lot of irony in my work) or simply present you with something from a different perspective. I don’t always succeed, but this is what I would like to achieve.

I wish we had had it completed before the oil spill. We had shot it before then, but it wasn’t finished. But wow, we could have made it on so many covers during that time.



Covers and sample images from True Blood Books

POP: Stylists don't own copyright even though they are equal contributors at times. Do you see this changing at any point?

Sorry not touching this one! No, my take is this: as in any relationship, you need to negotiate....sometimes I get so excited by an idea that I forget to have that conversation BEFOREHAND. It really depends on what usage we each intend for the image. And if it involves money or not, too. It is disappointing that sometimes stylists don't even get credited! I DO think it's changing. But it's not automatic; you have to ask for it. (from Publishers, etc..) The people I work with have always been good to me! Collaborating involves trust too!

POP: What have you been working on this year?

I just finished a beautiful spread in this month's 7 x 7 that I styled with Nissa Quanstrom (I styled the food and Nissa styled the props), a new (still secret!) packaging for Happy Baby, videos for Verlasso, cookbooks for Aida Mollencamp and Cindy Pawlcyn (props) and an ongoing series of two-page spreads for The LA Times Magazine using ingredients and recipes from famous chefs for which I styled the food and the props.

Coming up I'm working on the True Blood Cookbook(!) for which I'm doing props. I am very excited as I am such a fan, and I imagine they will let us make it really fun!



Happy Baby packaging



Calabrian Bomb

By SARAH TAYLOR
 recipe by MARCO SILVESTRO
 Sometimes even the best of us need a little kick. When primo chef Marco Silvestro is looking for one, he turns to Tanti Calabro Crushed Hot Chili Peppers. The family-owned southern Italian company's bomb-for-pot gets its name from crushed chilies dried with salt, then crushed into a paste—much like making chili oil—with olive oil and a touch of vinegar.
 She calls the condiment her beloved Calabrian Bomb—irresistibly spicy but well rounded, thanks to the tangy ground-on page 80

MAREN CARUSO

OUT PANTRY

Kürbiskernöl

By SARAH TAYLOR / recipe by SANG YOON

Roasting the best of the best is essential when you've built a reputation for exquisite flavors and especially, exceptionally simple preparations. Sang Yoon, chef-owner of the upscale Father's Office in Culver City, is an uncompromising master of top-of-the-line ingredients. So what culinary component leads to his best work, perhaps none at all. You see, the highest quality of the condiment comes from Spain, in southeast Andalus. **Makrebiskernöl**—as it is known in German—is a top-grade olive oil and more deliciously, without a note. "Roasting the oil," meaning a complexity of flavor, "has a consistency as if it is added to water, creating a smooth, an ideal salad oil. The rich oil may also be drizzled as a dressing over pasta, pizza and chicken and as a glaze in dressings and marinades. Since its natural state and after being pressed, it is a nutrient-rich health booster—it is said Makrebiskernöl acts as an anti-inflammatory—it's no surprise that the Spanish strongly refer to pumpkin seed oil as *golden oil*. So, like Father's Office, accept no substitutes—look for 100 percent Spanish pumpkin seed oil. But keep it cool, as it loses its luster when exposed to high heat. *For recipe, see page 80*



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MAREN CARUSO / FOOD STYLING: CHRISTINE WOLHEIM



Piquillo Peppers

By SARAH TAYLOR / recipe by JOSE ANDRES / photography by MAREN CARUSO / styling by CHRISTINE WOLHEIM

The Spanish know how to eat. No more evidence is needed than the invention of tapas, those appetizer-size dishes—think hogueros, patatas bravas, jamón ibérico—that are usually with a glass of wine as a snack or, in quantity, a full meal. The popularity of tapas in this country is growing, thanks in part to José Andrés of the S.P. Q. in the S.C. who for more than a decade has been imaginatively conceiving traditional and avant-garde Spanish cuisine for American palates.
 We asked the 2011 James Beard Award winner for Outstanding Chef to name one indispensable ingredient, and he singled out Spanish piquillo peppers. "These unique peppers are a beautiful red color, and they get sweet and a little smoky when roasted over a wood fire," said Andrés. To showcase the piquillo peppers (named for their shape, which resembles a bird's beak, or *piqui*) "stuff them with cheese, mar them on a plate in oil a while, and you have quick tapas." The preparation may be elemental, but the result is far from ordinary. Take note: The peppers worthy of Andrés' esteem are from Spain, specifically La Mancha in the region of Castilla-La Mancha, he says, and you'll be transported to a bar out at La Bodega. *For recipe, see page 80*



PIQUILLO PEPPERS WITH GOAT CHEESE