

THE BUSINESS OF FOOD, WINE & BEVERAGE

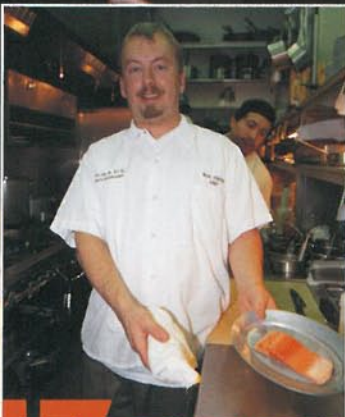
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SPECIAL REPORT:
**Australia & France
battle for Asian palates**

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FOOD

FROM WILDERNESS TO WALL ST
THE RISING STAR OF US SEAFOOD
DMI'S SPECIALTY APPROACH
WHOLEFOODS WANTS 'SUSTAINABLE'

WINE

ON THE LIST AT THE HILTON
IMPRESSING A MANHATTAN BISTRO
PIPERS BROOK'S WINNING WAYS



Sustainability the key for Lucques and A.O.C.

Suzanne Goin is regarded as one of the best chefs in the US. Owner-chef at Lucques and A.O.C. restaurants in Los Angeles, she is one of a growing band of high-end chefs insisting upon sustainably-raised produce.

Visitors to Los Angeles often comment on the kilometres of urban sprawl, stretching into a hazy distance. In this environment, outside Rodeo Drive's flashy night venues and Beverley Hills' mansions, architecture is often spare, drab and functional. Not an easy city to find a building in which to create a French-inspired, high-end restaurant.

"Finding the space for 'Lucques' was difficult," says Suzanne Goin, owner-chef of Lucques and its sister restaurant, A.O.C. "LA has some great old buildings but a lot of them over the years have been torn down."

But Ms Goin and her business partner Caroline Styne eventually found a perfect setting for Lucques: silent film legend Harold Lloyd's former carriage house on Melrose Avenue. Stripped back to its original wood and brick work, the front section of Lucques features a homely fireplace while the back section is an enclosed stucco patio with an ornamental olive tree (*Lucques* is the name of a French olive). When Lucques opened in 1999 the *LA Times* said the city "hasn't seen such a smart and sophisticated restaurant debut in quite a while."

With Ms Goin at the helm, Lucques (and the later established bar/restaurant A.O.C.) was always going to be a restaurant with both style and substance. The LA born and raised Ms Goin had been a chef at top ranking restaurants such as Olives in Boston, Al Forno in Providence, Chez Panisse in California and Arpege in Paris, where she worked under noted French chef Alain Passard whom the *New Yorker* once said many people considered the "best and most poetic in Paris, and probably all France."

But a restaurant, no matter how stylish, would of course be an empty shell without quality cuisine. And Ms Goin is renowned for her passionate commitment to high quality food, a fact that hasn't gone unnoticed by judges and critics. In 1999 she was recognised by *Food and Wine* magazine as one of the top ten new chefs in the US. Last year she was nominated for the US's top culinary prize, a James Beard Award for Best Chef.

"My mission is to make really delicious food from organic and local ingredients and serve them in a place where people feel comfortable and good about themselves – and sort of festive," Ms Goin says. "For me a restaurant is more than the food – it's the atmosphere. They are places you go that are inviting you to have a good time. We wanted to create a restaurant where we [Ms Styne and herself] would want to be."

In person, Ms Goin possesses what would be best described as a steely intensity, infused by a passionate love of her work. She is clear about what she expects from food producers, but at the same time eager to learn. When she found out that the farm-raised Tasmanian

ocean trout on her menu swam in large cages which better developed their muscles, you could see Ms Goin's face light up as she stored the information away for later reference.

"That is really interesting to customers," Ms Goin says. "the stories are important, especially if they are coming from a different environment, like, *what's Tasmania like?* – people want to know . . ."

Tasmanian ocean trout is just one item on a menu that includes Australian barramundi "bagna cauda" with winter vegetables and pinenuts; Guinea hen with house-made boudin, chestnut stuffing and golden raisins; and braised leek and gruyère tart with dijon mustard, radishes and quail eggs. One critic has described Lucques menu as offering the kind of dishes "your grandmother would make – if she was French and an innovative, masterful cook particularly fond of fresh vegetables and creative flavours."

Ms Goin said she became interested about five years ago in sustainable agriculture and aquaculture. Nowadays she insists that all the products she uses are organic and/or from sustainable environments.

"I have a great purveyor, 'Ocean Jewels' [run by Julee Harman]; I've been working with her for seven years and we discovered the sustainable thing together," Ms Goin says. "She and I started researching it together and we checked what was okay to serve and what was not okay to serve . . ."

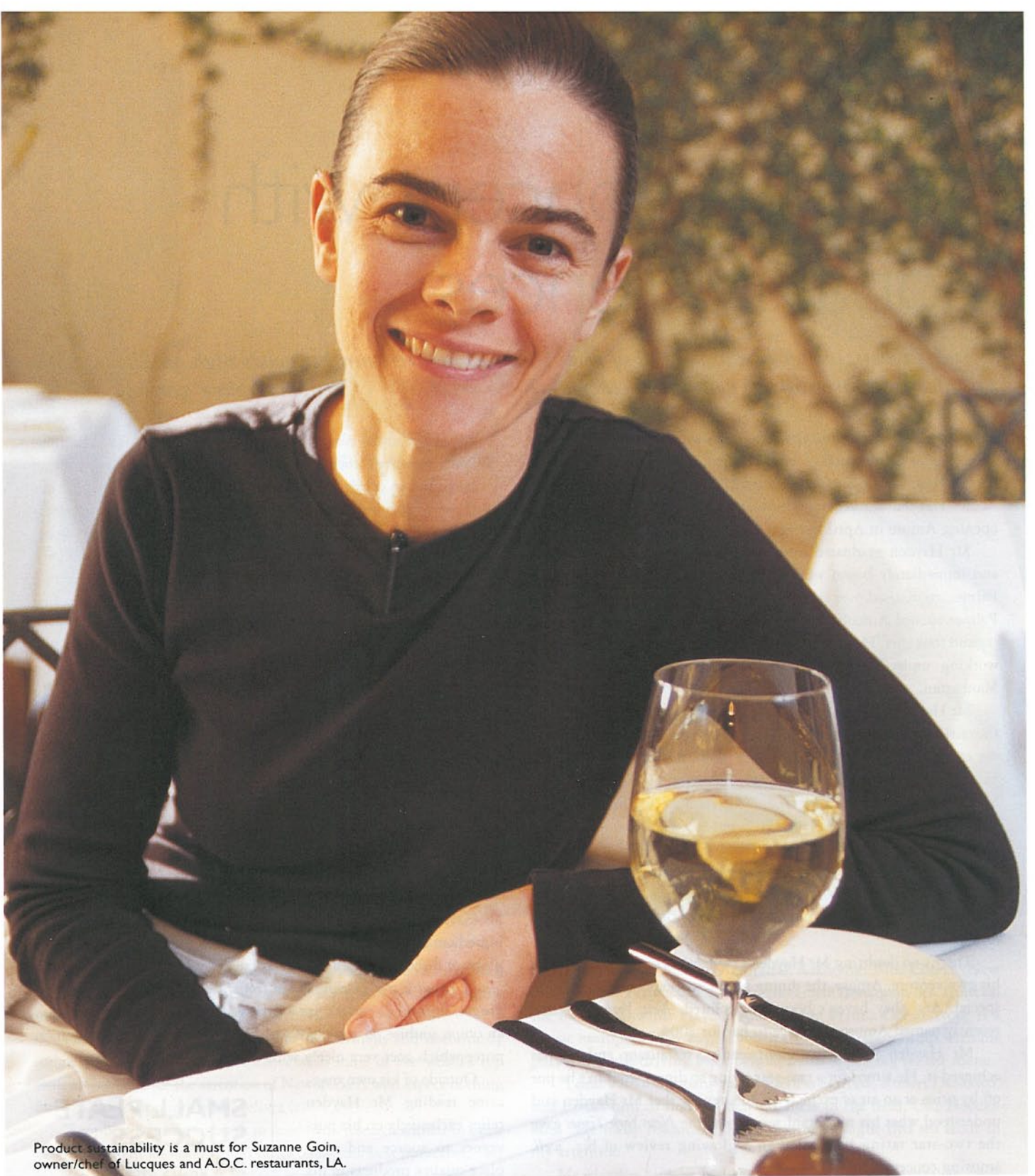
As part of her commitment, Ms Goin is a member of the Chef's Cooperative, an organisation that aims to promote sustainable agriculture and aquaculture. She says that sustainable food is not yet a market-driven reality in the restaurant world, but she says it is definitely beginning to enter customers' minds.

Taste is, of course, paramount for Ms Goin in her choice of ingredients. She adds, however, that if a product tastes great but isn't sustainably raised she won't use it. And along with sustainability she says a product must have character.

"The stories are what sell things," she said. "A lot of people in the restaurant business don't get that. People want to know where things come from, if there is a story behind it. People love a story. Like with the King Island Dairy [A.O.C. has King Island cheese on the menu]. People want to know how the dairy got started, why did they do it? What does it look like? That

TIPS FOR EXPORTERS

- Only wants sustainable produce
- Organic products a plus
- Product stories are important
- Provide solid product information



Product sustainability is a must for Suzanne Goin, owner/chef of Lucques and A.O.C. restaurants, LA.

kind of information makes me feel like I can see it, and that's better than, *Oh, here's this fish and I think it's called barramundi.*" She said when it came to King Island cheese, initially customers were sceptical that a quality cheese could come from Australia.

"But when they taste it, it's all over," she smiles. "It's maybe our best selling cheese; people go wild for it."

When it comes to food the more information the better as far as Suzanne Goin is concerned. And she seeks – and trusts absolutely – her information from her purveyor, Julee Harman, who in turn

knows intimately Ms Goin's requirements. In the case of Petuna Ocean Trout from Tasmania, Ms Goin said she was looking for a unique fish, sustainably raised. Ms Goin said chefs like herself in the high-end market want products that can't be found on just any menu and Tasmanian ocean trout also fitted that bill.

"Julee rings me up and says 'you've got to try this Australian fish', and I say, 'Great, tell me about it, send me a piece'. She sends it, we cook it and it's like, 'okay, it's going on the menu'. . ."