

[dryheat]



Monika Reti (left) and her sister, Andi Reti

Woman Of Power

The Hip Cook, Monika Reti

Written by Jaclyn Emerick

Monika Reti began cooking as soon as she could drag her chair to the kitchen counter and stand on it. She would grow up to become the chef extraordinaire of her brainchild, the Los Angeles-based, off-the-beaten-path cooking school called Hipcooks, where she teaches loads of trendy Angelinos how to cook a meal without the weight of a recipe, making for a completely stress-free and levelheaded cook in the kitchen.

With two Hipcooks locations in Los Angeles, she's now living on the fast-track, opening new Hipcooks schools early next year in Portland, and then Seattle and Austin. Monika's also got five Hipcooks cookbooks in the works to further spread the art of cooking with an open mind and a big smile. When she's not dancing in front of steaming pots and pans she's riding her motorcycle, playing tennis or hiking with her sister, Andi Reti, a glass artist who inspires Hipcooks' most incredible creations.

944: Tell us a little about Hipcooks.

MONIKA RETI: I founded Hipcooks when my friends goaded me into giving them cooking lessons. I was always the one throwing dinner parties and they said they wanted to learn how to cook like me — never stressing or breaking a sweat in the kitchen, always inventing new things. Hipcooks has evolved a lot from the days when six of us would crack a bottle of wine in my kitchen and prepare a meal together.

But that premise of never stressing and never using measuring implements, that has endured. [But] now, I teach a whole lot less, because I wear most of the hats at Hipcooks: teacher, manager, new business developer, Web designer. I am only learning now about the whole concept of delegating. Revolutionary.

What's your favorite part about teaching the art of cooking?

MONIKA: You know when someone takes a bite of something new and has to do a little dance because it tastes so wonderful? That is my favorite! One

menu item at a Hipcooks class is a sauce that we make with garlic, lemon zest, lemon juice, rosemary, olive oil and about 10 anchovy filets. The anchovy-fearers always squirm while we make it, and then they fight to lick the spoon! I love those I-told-you-it-would-be-delicious moments. The other thing that just tickles me is de-mystifying recipes that people always thought were difficult, like soufflés. In one class we make the most heavenly pumpkin soufflé with cognac cream in about 5 minutes. While it is baking, we open and slam the oven door [and] it always comes out just perfect. Even when people make it at home.

Who do you look up to in the kitchen? Any role models?

MONIKA: When I was little, my mom made me a sandbox in the backyard and I used to pretend I was Julia Child. I had pots of goulash made from sand, I would roll dolmas with oak tree leaves and I would imitate her voice while I "cooked." I had a ball. I still love her, and she is my hero. Remember when she dropped the turkey for dinner? She didn't miss a beat — she rinsed it off, a flash in the pan and back to the table!

Your sister, Andi, is a big part of your life. Tell me about how she factors into Hipcooks.

MONIKA: Andi is the world's most fabulous glass

artist. Her work looks like candy. Her palette is bright and fresh. We have the same sensibilities as far as raw ingredients are concerned. We help each other out in a bunch of ways: moral support, business advice. Also, her work adorns my walls at Hipcooks. She gets wall space, I get adornment. I throw gallery openings to launch her new lines. Her work inspires my food — I cater the event and we both invite our e-mail lists. Turns into a fabulous party every time.

Andi, what does it mean to you, to be a glass artist?

ANDI RETI: It's like any other creative endeavor. I'm addicted to the process and love losing myself in the physicality of making something tangible. It's very satisfying to churn something out that I made and love. The times when the result is less than satisfying can be very frustrating but are more than made up for by the happy accidents — the many times where something unexpected and delightful is learned.

How did you get into making art from glass?

ANDI: My dad's a metallurgist. He's also a stickler for the rules. He would sit me down in the basement workshop and teach me the fundamentals of metalworking. He'd give me a little demonstration and set me down with a scrap of metal and let me at it while he tinkered fixing the latest household causality. When I grew up I continued with college level metal classes. Eventually I burnt out on the limited color palette and figured that with all my blowtorches and kilns I was pretty set up to melt the wine bottle in the corner. I haven't looked back.

What do food and glass have to do with each other?

ANDI: Both beckon me. A pile of raw ingredients transforms and combines into the most sublime, eyelid fluttering taste. Lethal glass shards melt and yield into a perfect, smooth pool of color. Both mediums are equally seductive, e both visually and tactilely. Also I tend take a lot of inspiration from the experience of eating. The colors and flavors are vivid bursts that sear my memory. I strive to match that with my glass.

Do you find food to be an art form as well?

ANDI: Definitely. For me, food can be transcending. When I taste something that clicks it sends me on another plane — nothing else exists but that one heavenly taste, that experience. It's an art that really does speak to the masses. I think everyone can relate.

Find less stress in the kitchen at www.hipcooks.com