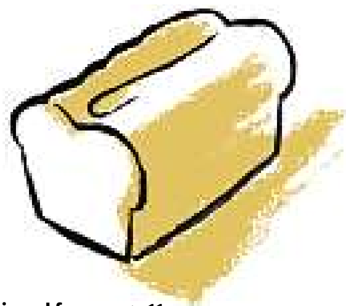
Restaurants Special



continued from page 11
six years ago. For the associate's degree, students are prepped to work in every kitchen position below head chef; for the bachelor's they're schooled in every aspect of the restaurant business, including the back office and boardroom.

TEACHING RESTAURANT Backstage Bistro, 180 N. Wabash, 312-475-6920

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAYS "You have a chef and a restaurant management person running this school, and that's a big positive," says chef Mark Facklam, culinary arts director. "He makes sure all those restaurant-management-type classes like purchasing and cost control and menu management are up to snuff."

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY "The environment is very friendly and it's very open," says Sabre Tyler. "So at any given time you might have one class cooking one thing, and baking and pastry cooking something else, and there's a bartering thing going on in the hallway, so students start exchanging dishes with baking and pastry and food production, and they're all feeding each other."

FAMOUS ALUMS Mario Garcia, sous-chef at Hilton Chicago and named a top local professional under 30 by the *Sun-Times* in 2003; Andrew Johnson, pastry chef at Charlie Trotter's; Marc Kuchenbecker, head chef at the Tasting Room at Randolph Wine Cellars; Michelle Medina, sous-chef at the Peninsula Hotel's Pierrot Gourmet cafe

WHAT'S THE DAMAGE? $37,690 total for the AAS, $70,450 for the BAS; $630 for knives, utensils, and uniforms. Financial aid and scholarships are available.

KENDALL COLLEGE, SCHOOL OF CULINARY ARTS

900 N. North Branch | 866-667-3344 | kendall.edu

DEGREES BA and AAS in culinary arts, with accelerated AAS option; AAS in baking and pastry; certificates in baking and pastry, professional catering/personal chef, and professional cookery

IN BRIEF Founded in 1985, it's the only school in town to offer a BA that combines practical training with course work in management, business, nutrition, English comp, Spanish, and more. (For more see Martha Bayne's story on page 10.)

TEACHING RESTAURANT The Dining Room at Kendall College, 900 N. North Branch, 312-752-2328

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAYS "Here students are sitting in the best facility in the United

KLEINER continued from page 11
Park presents a different kind of challenge. Even Kleiner complains about the retrograde aesthetic sensibilities of Hyde Parkers—"Where they are now there's no real fashion or design." When the U. of C. recruited Kleiner to the Hyde Park property over two years ago, he wasn't taken by it. "It's like, what is this shit! What an ugly effing building!" He's since gutted it, knocking out more than half a wall to put in a series of huge French doors. The renovated space will have a dark hardwood floor, custom-made furniture, silk light fixtures, and a "bookcase of wine" along the back. The menu's described as comfort food with a twist. "My feeling is to create something that has a little bit of flair to it, but not too much," Kleiner says, calling it "a sophisticated approach to nonsophistication."

Shortly after the Hyde Park space unlocks its mahogany doors, Kleiner will open his tenth restaurant, also still unnamed ("I always name everything afterwards," he says), on 21st Street, in a turn-of-the-century power plant a mile south of his other South Loop restaurants. In the renovated banquet space iron columns stretch from floor to ceiling, a 35-foot span. Behind the bar there are 12 shelves ascending to the roof, unreachable bottles of Grey Goose on each. The color scheme is dichromatic, a chessboard of black and white. It looks like a superhero's lair.

Next door the actual restaurant is being worked on. It's scheduled to open in late summer, but Kleiner still hasn't decided on what many restaurateurs settle first: the menu. "As I get closer to it," he says, "I'll figure out the food." ■

The First Family of Fried Chicken

How Harold's Chicken Shack grew from a mom-and-pop stand to a chain 62 strong and still expanding.

By Mike Sula

Harold's Chicken Shack, the ubiquitous south-side and south-suburban fast-food chain identified by a maniacal monarch chasing a chicken with a hatchet, is a confederacy of individual outlets. And many of them offer their own interpretations of the way Harold Pierce, the Fried Chicken King who died nearly two decades ago, meant his birds to be prepared.

Back in 1950, five years before Ray Kroc opened his first McDonald's and two years before the Colonel began franchising his secret recipe, Pierce was sitting in the barbershop at 69th and South Park with some buddies, playing checkers and talking chicken. He and his wife, Hilda, ran a restaurant on 39th called the H & H, and they specialized in chicken feet with dumplings, a recipe he thought could be adapted for fried chicken. Gene Rosen, who owned a poultry shop down the street, offered him a few birds to fry up for the guys, and they liked the results so much that Pierce opened a take-out joint at 47th and Greenwood, with Rosen supplying the chickens. That was the original Harold's Chicken Shack.

Pierce, who grew up in Midway, Alabama, never dreamed the joint would spawn an empire that reached as far as Atlanta, much less the north side—No. 36 is supposed to open in Wicker Park later this month. The next few stores were trademark agreements with family and friends. He put $50 in their registers, told them to get their chickens from Rosen, and expected them to pay him a 42-cent royalty per bird.

His daughter Kristen, now CEO of Harold's Chicken Shack Inc., says he kept his accounts in his head and knew exactly who owed what when. "He would call you and tell you to come in and bring his money," she says. "He had a one-on-one relationship with everybody, and everybody respected him."

And most knew not to try to get anything over on him. His son J.R. Pierce, who now handles training and development for the chain, remembers his father once caught his cousin "bootlegging"—buying chickens from a different supplier and not reporting the sales. "My dad actually knocked two of his teeth out," he says. But afterward "they just went back to being cousins and working."

Pierce did well, but he didn't trust

JOE WIGDAHL (LEFT COLUMN), MIKE SULA (RIGHT COLUMN)

Clockwise from top left: the new Wicker Park Harold's, the traditional chicken-on-fries-on-bread preparation at Harold's No. 65, neon sign at Harold's No. 59, mural at Harold's No. 56, and Mark Smith and Glodean McGee at Harold's No. 1

Storefront of Harold's No. 4

banks. "At one time he had an apartment in the Shoreland Hotel, and there was a cedar closet where he kept all his money," says J.R. "Whenever he would go to pick up money at the stores he would put it in chicken bags—just like he was walking out with chicken. He was close to his 60s before he ever got a credit card."

Early on people began calling Pierce the Fried Chicken King, so he designed the logo of the hatchet-wielding sovereign, who later on became a chef. He also designed the chain's distinctive faux-redbrick walls and white painted archways. On the wall of every shack hung a framed photograph of His Majesty, smiling benignly, his chin supported by a hand bearing a gold pinkie ring, the wrist wrapped in a diamond-studded Bulova.

Once a new shack was up and running Pierce was hands-off, and many franchises began deviating from the standards he'd set. He'd developed a 14- to 15-minute cooking process, and since chickens were fried to order, everyone expected to wait. But over time some operators began taking shortcuts, using different hot sauces or barbecue sauces, or tinkering with the seasoning. That's why one particular shack could be inferior to another even though they were only a few blocks apart.

By 1975 Pierce had 20 shacks around the city. In a *Reader* profile that year he attributed his success to having "sand in my craw," meaning the grit barnyard fowl eat to help them digest their food. He didn't want to expand to other cities, and he didn't think he could risk opening in white neighborhoods. "They'd kick my ass out," he said. In the early 80s he retired to a piece of land he'd bought downstate near Beaverville. He'd always loved to fish and hunt, so he built a lake on the property and named it Harold's Bear Lake for the grizzly he'd bagged on a trip to Alaska. "He'd spend thousands of dollars on hunting dogs—$2,000 for a beagle was nothing for him," says J.R. "That was what he loved to do." He charged people a few bucks to fish and hunt on his land and eventually built a house with a bar upstairs and fryers in the basement so they could cook their catch.

Harold Pierce died of prostate cancer in March 1988, when he was 71. By then, says J.R., there were around 30 or 40 shacks in Chicago. Harold's second wife, Willa, took over the business and expanded it out of the city. When she died three years ago Kristen and J.R. kept it growing. Today the siblings rule the kingdom from a small office suite in Hazel Crest. A giant gilt-framed photograph of their father hangs over a leather sofa in the waiting room.

Over the years J.R. ran a couple different shacks, which helps explain the chain's disordered numbering system. No. 11, his first shack, closed in the mid-90s, but its number was never reassigned; No. 56, his second shack, now operates under a different owner but its original number. As other stores opened and closed over the decades, some were renumbered and some weren't. The original No. 1, Harold's first shack, is long gone; the current No. 1, at 7139 S. State, used to be No. 6—though it appears to have closed last week. No. 92 is in Milwaukee, No. 94 is in Minneapolis, but there's no longer a No. 93. For that matter there's no longer a 16, 42, 43, 44, 45, or 78, though there could be again someday.

The chain now has 62 outlets, including franchises in Detroit and Atlanta. More will open later this year in Wrigleyville, Indianapolis, and Saint Louis.

Many of the older stores look decidedly less than regal: they're dark and dingy, the neon flickers, the staff take money from behind bulletproof glass. The two siblings are trying to modernize the shacks and eliminate the inconsistencies from one to the next. They're also pushing changes in the basic product. Contending that customers no longer have the patience to wait 15 minutes, J.R. has developed an eight-minute frying process, in which the chicken is fried for five minutes, left hanging in the basket until an order comes in, and then dropped back into the grease.

Unlike their father, J.R. and Kristen are hands-on—J.R. has even started doing surprise evaluations. But like Harold, they're sticklers about money, issuing a written complaint for the first violation and a $250 fine for the second. J.R. says that after a third he'll call his lawyer, though he hasn't had to go that far yet. They've also upped their cut of the chain's sales—Harold's Chicken Shack Inc. now gets 6 percent of everything the franchisees sell, not just the chickens.

Harold never cared about that kind of consistency. He just wanted his money. "He never was one to just run around," says J.R. "Basically everybody ran their stores, and they just paid him the royalties. He never expected it to get where it got. He just cruised. He'd just have fun." ■

Harold's by the Numbers

It ain't KFC—every Harold's is different. So we developed a mathematical system for finding the best one.

By Mike Sula

MIKE SULA

Last August the Department of Health shut down Harold's Chicken Shack No. 2, and a sign went up indicating it would reopen under a new owner. This was upsetting—the dingy little storefront on the 3100 block of South Cottage Grove was my first and favorite Harold's. It remained one of my favorites even after I'd eaten chicken at 34 other Harold's this past year.

The ordering area was grubby and dark, but fried yardbird did not get more decadent than a half regular with hot sauce at No. 2. A peppery lightly battered leg, thigh, breast, and wing were bedded on a nest of crispy shoestring fries atop two slices of white bread. The bird was drenched in a vinegary, bright orange sauce and boxed in cardboard, whereupon a unique series of reactions occurred: The hot sauce soaked into the crunchy batter, then slowly dripped from the chicken and mingled with the hot grease. This solution then seeped into the underbelly of potatoes and bread, and as the chicken was consumed, bits of cracklings fell into the net of fries, creating a miraculous open-faced sandwich worthy of peer review in *Alchemy Today*. But it's not the same at every shack, and it's near impossible to predict which ones fry good chicken. Counterintuitively, a few of the brightest, cleanest, and busiest sling the most manky, discouraging poultry outside of a crab trap. Most fall in a middle ground.

While training to be the poster boy for acid reflux, I attempted to mathematically evaluate each shack within the city limits, excluding suburban stores and the handful operating out of state. I developed a list of 14 criteria to be judged on a scale of 1 to 10. These included grease, a controversial category given that a low score due to too much grease might result in a higher score in the next category, the fries-bread-grease ratio. Next was size. Some shacks pushed scrawny birds, others served brawny brutes. The juiciness factor was determined primarily by how moist the breast was. The flavor score was enhanced by chicken that stood up to the competing flavors of grease, batter, and seasoning. Oil—did the frying medium taste old or rancid?

The freshness category was an important one. Was the chicken fried to order, or had it been sitting around all day? The service category was an easy way for a shack to bump up its score—if a chicken slinger displayed a shred of personality or friendliness he received a high mark.

Many, many shacks lowered their overall score with the fries. It's

continued on page 14

States right now," says president Howard Tullman. "And I don't say that only because we built it—I say that because of the way time works. The newest facility is always the one that can take advantage of the newest technology and equipment."

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY "It's probably one of the hardest things I've ever done," says Alvin Go, a 28-year-old former chemistry major who's attending classes while working on the line at Lula Cafe. He praises Kendall's accessible faculty and extracurricular options. "I see the postings at the school and I'm, like, 'Wow—this chef is coming here?'" It's a great foundation for a career, he says, though he admits he's probably picked up as much practical knowledge in his five months at Lula.

FAMOUS ALUMS Shawn McClain (Spring, Green Zebra, Custom House), "Hot Doug" Sohn, Mindy Segal (Hot Chocolate), Eric Aubriot (Aubriot, Tournesol, Narra), and John Manion (Mas)

WHAT'S THE DAMAGE $21,000 a year; financial aid is available.

ROBERT MORRIS COLLEGE INSTITUTE OF CULINARY ARTS
401 S. State | 800-762-6819 | robertmorris.com/culinary

DEGREES AAS in culinary arts; graduates can proceed to a bachelor's in business administration with a concentration in hospitality management or a baking and pastry program

IN BRIEF The newest culinary program in the area has grown exponentially since it opened in 2003 at Robert Morris College's Aurora campus, setting up shop downtown in 2004 and in Orland Park last year. Students learn how to work the front and back of the house, with an emphasis on business and technology. A study-abroad program in Italy is also available.

TEACHING RESTAURANT None

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAYS "Everybody knows that nine out of ten restaurants close within a year, and the reason they do is because they're poorly managed, not necessarily because the food is bad," says Nancy Rotunno, executive director of the culinary program. "Since we have such a strong business background—that's our main focus—we were able to take the resources and the stuff that we have always done for our business and technical programs and incorporate them into culinary."

continued on page 14

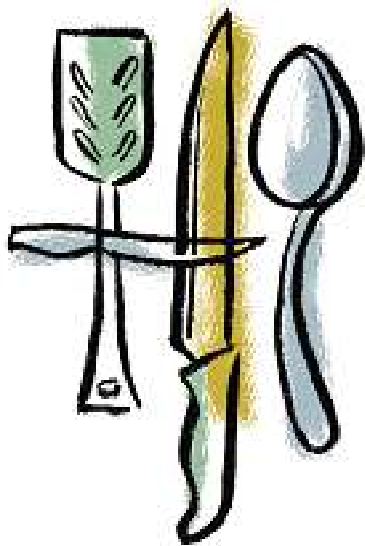
Restaurants Special

continued from page 13

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY "It's hands-on learning," says Caitlyn Derrico. "There are a lot of events that we go and help with outside of school, and you meet a lot of chefs and get your name out there."

FAMOUS ALUMS None yet. Students from the first graduating classes are working at Tru and Heaven on Seven and in R & D at McDonald's corporate headquarters.

WHAT'S THE DAMAGE? $5,300 per quarter; the AAS program is six quarters, the bachelor's twelve. The school gives scholarships of its own and assists in locating outside aid.



WASHBURNE CULINARY INSTITUTE

7059 S. South Shore Dr. | 773-602-5487 | kennedyking.ccc.edu/washburne

DEGREES AAS in culinary arts and baking and pastry; certificates in the same

IN BRIEF Washburne, part of Kennedy-King College, relocated last year and will soon move again, to a 150,000-square-foot facility on 63rd and Halsted that's scheduled to open in September 2007. The new digs will allow the school to triple the number of students it admits yearly (currently 100).

TEACHING RESTAURANT The Parrot Cage, 7059 S. South Shore Dr. 773-602-5333

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAYS "It's been around since 1937, which makes it by far the oldest cooking school [in the U.S.] with the most experience," says provost William Reynolds. "And being part of the city college system, it gives you quite a big break on the tuition."

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY "A lot of people I had known were graduating from Washburne," says Eioleta Morales. "I was thinking, 'What should I choose, a school with higher prestige or Washburne?' I decided I'm going to Washburne because all the people I met there are somebody now—they own their own business. They're teachers, but they're chefs."

FAMOUS ALUMS Larry Raymond, creator and co-owner of Sweet Baby Ray's barbecue sauce; John Meyer (BJ's Market and Bakery); Jimmy Bannos (chef and owner of Heaven on Seven); Mary Beth Liccioni, co-owner and manager of Les Nomades

WHAT'S THE DAMAGE? $11,163 for the culinary arts AAS, plus $2,037 for the baking and pastry degree; 95 percent of current students get financial aid. ■

HAROLD'S continued from page 13

amazing how rare well-cooked fries are. Packaging counted: was the meal carefully wrapped or tossed in the bag? Cleanliness—were there dead flies trapped between the neon lights and the window? Did the air smell of sour mop water? In decor the shacks that scored highest remained true to Harold's Pierce's original restaurant design. Points were awarded for neon and prominent display of the original logo, original artwork, and a framed portrait of Harold Pierce.

I quickly recognized the primary flaw in my evaluative process. Since I only had the guts to visit each of these shacks once, how could I be sure a low-scoring shack wasn't just having a bad day? For this reason I have determined my system to have a high margin of error; when you've eaten at 35 Harold's Chicken Shacks, you can quibble.

Even so, there was no clear winner. Most shacks scored in the six-to-seven-point range, with a few on the lower end of the scale. The highest score, 8.2143, was for Harold's No. 55, at 100 E. 87th, one of the newer shacks in the city. Owned by Percy and Carolyn Billings, who run a few others, the bird here was explosively juicy, obviously fried to order in clean, fresh oil. The second-lowest-scoring shack, at 5.1429, was perhaps the busiest, No. 62 at 636 S. Wabash, one of three downtown stores. The chicken here was large, but so gamy and soggy I felt guilty giving it to a panhandler. The shacks with the lowest (No. 40, 4.9231) and second-highest (No. 4B, 8.000) scores are both owned by the same man, Lavern Burnett, who used to deliver chickens for Harold Pierce. With 14 city franchises to his name, he owns more than anyone else.

Then in November, Number 2 reopened under new owners: CBN Inc. I was ambivalent about the news—CBN owns No. 53, which received a very respectable score (7.4286) but also No. 65 (5.5714). Inside the new No. 2 looked just as hopeless as before, though the menu had expanded. Hanging on the wall were about a dozen paper plates markered with sides that departed from Harold's usual fare: mac 'n' cheese, mustard and turnip greens, hush puppies, sweet potato pie, okra, string beans and potatoes, corn bread dressing, baby lima beans. It was hard to see how the single harried guy behind the glass could handle the home-style eats. He was sweating down what sounded like a confounding order over the phone and took a full ten minutes to get to me, apologizing that his helper was out on a delivery. Because of this my chicken took close to 15 minutes to fry. I'm not complaining—it got a 9 for freshness, and the guy threw in an extra wing for my trouble, earning him a 10+ on the service score. But the chicken itself was puny, the breast was dry, and the fries-grease-bread ratio didn't even approach that of the magical old No. 2, which brought the new store's score down to a respectable but hardly laudable 6.7143. ■

The Weirdware Connection

Those cork presenters and anti-plates and bacon-holding bows have to come from somewhere.

By Heather Kenny

The innovative cuisine at Alinea, Grant Achatz's forward-looking "food lab," is meant to appeal to all five senses. Each element of the restaurant, down to the block it's located on, has been handpicked for its contribution to the total dining experience. So Achatz wasn't going to be content loading up on salad bowls and silverware at a local restaurant supply store. Instead he turned to designer Martin Kastner and his studio, Crucial Detail, to create a unique line of innovative serviceware with a simple purpose—the enjoyment of delicious food.

ROB WARNER (PORTRAIT, ANTI-PLATE)

Martin Kastner of Crucial Detail with his cork presenter for Alinea; also pictured: the anti-plate, a row of pedestals, and the bow

Achatz and Kastner have been working together since 2003, when Achatz was the head chef at Trio in Evanston. Kastner, who started Crucial Detail in San Diego in 1998, was one of 30 designers who received an e-mail from Achatz looking for a collaborator. Though Kastner had limited experience making serving pieces—his background is jewelry and furnishings—he responded. According to Achatz, he was the only designer that did. Their first project was a tripod that would hold a ball of frozen hibiscus tea. "He wanted to serve it so it could be eaten like a lollipop," Kastner says. Other creations followed, and when Achatz left Trio to start up Alinea in 2004, he convinced Kastner to move to Chicago and work with him full-time.

"I don't really understand food," Kastner says, but he and Achatz think that's an asset—his designs aren't constrained by tradition. Usually they begin with a specific dish, but other times Kastner will come up with something just because it seems useful. The antenna, for example, is a long steel skewer that runs through a circular base; guests are meant to eat directly off the end. "It bothered me, using a knife and fork with a skewer—it's really clumsy," he says. "This is a logical solution to a problem." The bow, a thin U-shaped implement strung with a wire across the top, is used to suspend a slice of fish or strip of bacon in the air. The designs may look space-age, but Kastner isn't just going for the *ooh* factor. He says the implements allow the chef to "control how food hits the palate." Because the dish can only be eaten in a specific way, the flavor is maximized. "You could never have this type of control with normal silverware," he says.

Kastner will manufacture anywhere from 30 to 120 copies of each piece, depending on how quickly Alinea will need to turn them over in a night. They're built using resilient materials like stainless steel and porcelain, and each batch takes several days to a couple weeks to complete. The majority of the work is done in his Wicker Park studio, a former livery stable, and though he'll occasionally contract some parts out, he always handles the finishing and final assembly himself.

As with dishes on the menu, Achatz eventually retires serving pieces to make room for new concepts. Once they're taken out of circulation the pieces are put in storage at the restaurant, though they're occasionally dusted off for special guests. Achatz has sold a few of the retired pieces when customers have asked, and Kastner has plans to make his creations available to the general public by the end of the year. They're currently only available wholesale, at prices ranging from $6 to $35 per unit. "The interest has been huge, beyond any expectation," he says. The most popular item so far is the cork presenter, a set of prongs used to hold a wine cork for inspection. Kastner admits that he feels "kind of bummed" whenever a piece is retired. "Of course there are my personal preferences. I think they all enhance the experience," he says. "But I understand it. Once they're out of my hands, they're just tools." ■

Beyond Morton

Stefana Williams is bringing the sea salt.

By Scott Eden

STEPHEN J. SERIO

Hawaiian sea salt, Stefana Williams of Lot's Wyfe

On a recent Saturday afternoon at the House of Glunz, Stefana Williams hosted a salt tasting. It was the first time the Old Town wine shop had accommodated such a thing in its 118-year history; Williams, the proprietor of a sea-salt company called Lot's Wyfe and a self-described "salt evangelist," was eager for an audience, and she'd successfully convinced the shop that its clientele and her salts would be a perfect match. A Southern California native and former actress with bright blue eyes and a spiky blond hairdo, she stood behind a display case at the rear of the shop, waiting for potential customers. "Let me give you my spiel," she said whenever anyone approached.

A middle-aged woman stopped in front of Williams's spread. There were plates of cut-up beets, cucumbers, apples, pineapples, chocolate truffles, and jicama roots—vehicles for the delivery of salt. Williams had placed toothpicks by tins and petri dishes filled with crystals of varying coarseness.

"Do you know anything about sea salt?" Williams asked the woman.

"No, not at all."

"Perfect," Williams said. "Lot's Wyfe is the name of our company." She paused for a moment. "You know, the gal from the Bible who turns into a pillar of salt? In fact, one of our slogans is: 'Sprinkle. Often. Never look back.'" She noted the organic methods used to harvest her salts and introduced the five varieties she'd brought along: a light pink one from Australia, a pale white one from Sicily, and a reddish-brown one from Hawaii. There were also two that Williams called "experiments," cinnamon-colored salts from San Francisco Bay that she had flavored with essences of chipotle and mole.

"Interesting," the woman said. "Can I try one?"

"Try them all."

The woman dipped a slice of cucumber into the tin of the Sicilian and put it in her mouth. She chewed deliberately for a moment. She nodded.

"Salty!" she said.

As part of the promotional literature for Lot's Wyfe, Williams, 49, wrote a short essay titled "Confessions of a Salt Fiend." In it, she says that when she's gone without salt for a few hours she feels herself "getting twitchy for another hit." "I think it's because I have low blood pressure," she says. Her mother's experimental bent in the kitchen during her childhood is another reason for her affection for the stuff. "She would use us as guinea pigs, and we'd invariably want to mask, you know, the curried eggs on white bread. She made some really scary stuff, and if you could mask her food with salt it was a beautiful thing," she says.

Until recently, though, Williams only knew mass-produced table salt. In 2002 a friend gave her a jar of Mediterranean sea salt packaged by a north Italian winery, Vignalta. "It was so pure and so good—it just rocked my world," she says. "The difference between Morton's and the Vignalta was light-years."

The career path that led Williams to make salt her business is a circuitous one. In her 20s she tried to make a go of acting in LA, armed with an MFA from a joint program at DePaul and the Goodman Theatre. The closest she got to a break, though, was intermittent work on *The Young & the Restless*. "I did all the voice-overs," she says. "So, you know, when you'd hear, 'Would Dr. Smith please come to the ER,' that was me." She also did work in public relations, cofounding her own firm in Portland in 1989, and part of her duties included writing press releases for small companies that had launched a new product.

Her fiance, Henry Bishop, a former sommelier at Spiaggia, is currently researching a book about wine. Williams often joins him on the road, ready to sell her salts at the wineries they visit.

After her epiphany with the Vignalta salt, she decided to launch one of her own. She found an importer and wholesaler and began selling Lot's Wyfe salts in 2003, the same year she moved to Chicago from Pacific Grove, California, to join her fiance, Henry Bishop, then the sommelier at Spiaggia. He's currently researching a book about wine, and Williams often joins him on the road, ready to sell her salts at the wineries they visit. Williams packages them by hand, in flat tin cylinders with clear lids, filling about 200 tins a week on the Ping-Pong table in her Bucktown loft. Her connections in PR and the restaurant business have

SALT continued on page 16