



Alison Becker Hurt at Alison in Bridgehampton

ALISON BECKER HURT

Bridging the Gap in Cuisine

By Karen Amster-Young

On a recent Tuesday morning, I had the opportunity to talk with Alison Becker Hurt, owner of Alison, her newest restaurant on School Street in Bridgehampton. She most recently operated Alison by the Beach in Sagaponack, and ran the popular Alison on Dominick in New York City, from 1989-2001. Unlike Alison by the Beach that was known for its playful, country food, her newest venture is dedicated to Basque Country-inspired cuisine. She is also an accomplished author whose first cookbook, *Kitchen Suppers: Good Food to Share with Good Friends*, made its successful debut in 1999, featuring 75 recipes and hundreds of tips from her own kitchen.

"I want to write another cookbook," Hurt emphasizes, "but I can't find the time because I am adamant about trying all the recipes myself. I won't just use another person to put it together for me." The only reason she had the time for the

first one, she explains, was because there were some terribly cold, snowy winters at the time and it forced her to stay inside and cook. Now, with the new restaurant she doesn't see a window of opportunity for another book in the near future, but I would not be surprised if she fit it in somehow. It didn't take me long to figure out that Hurt, when she puts her mind to things, finds a way to get it all done.

Executive Chef, Jeffrey Hart collaborated with Hurt to create a menu that features Basque specialties. He recently returned from the Basque Country or Euskal Herria, (as the three million Basque-speaking residents call their nation), splitting his culinary time between Spain and Italy. The French-inspired decor completes the dining experience.

I was curious about what Hurt looks for when she chooses to dine at a restaurant and takes a break from running her own show. "I look for comfort," she states "I want to be



taken care of when I go out. 'She almost sounded as if she was ready for this break right now, not surprising, considering her hectic schedule these past few months. "Younger people don't always understand how important it is to go somewhere and be served. I am continuously telling my staff that this is a priority for me at Alison."

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"I really like it when I don't have a schedule," Hurt laughs in response to the concept of leisure time. "When I do have some time, I like reading, sailing, kayaking, walking and cooking," she says almost wistfully. "I love road trips with no specific destination; discovering new restaurants and great places."

Although, Gotham Bar & Grill owner, Jerry Kretchmer and renowned cookbook author Sheila Lukins (of *Silver Palette* fame) continue to inspire Hurt professionally, if she was not a restaurateur, the court might have been her calling. "I would probably be a judge," she proclaims, "I love that a judge has to be fair and understand both sides of a situation. I think it is because I like to understand why people think and act the way they do," she adds. Hurt reveals that she is constantly trying to flex this muscle in her own environment, with her staff.

They say that the most successful people love what they do for a living and Hurt is no exception. Aside from spending precious time with her favorite people, "Mom and Dad", and six year old son, Harrison, her preferred pastime is cooking, particularly for her friends and family. She is also drawn to the world of wine, vineyards and farmland, "the whole outdoor culinary experience."

Additional research revealed that traditional Basque cuisine is not elite, complex or elaborate, but rather it is a relatively simple food that enjoys a surprisingly strong root among the common people. It is capable, however, of reaching similar heights of exquisiteness in the finest restaurants, gastronomic societies, or in the most humble of hearths. It consistently finds its strength in the quality of produce that does not require sophisticated disguising. Its strength also lies in the steady-fast concept of cooking "el punto"; that is to say, to the point of preparation when the food is "just right". Precisely what Alison Becker Hurt is about—doing things "just right."

■HJM

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