

The Cooking Ladies A Dynamic Duo

By Sherrie Wilkolaski





Have you ever thought what it would be like to travel the world and see it all from behind the wheel of an RV? It can be done, and done in style. In February 2012, I had the pleasure of being introduced to The Cooking Ladies, Phyllis Hinz and Lamont Mackay, while in Las Vegas, at an International Food, Wine and Travel Writers conference. I was there as a speaker and my presentation was on the subject of independent publishing, and was pleasantly surprised to meet two well-established authors, The Cooking Ladies. They are a dynamic writing and photography duo, who share an appreciation for culture and cuisine, and they do it all from their RV.

They have co-authored nine cookbooks and travelogues. They are freelance writers, food and travel bloggers, in addition to being traditionally published authors. From Canada to the US, they uncover what the world of food and travel has to offer, from behind the wheel of their motorhome. Before they decided to hit the road full-time, they spent 20 years in the restaurant business, as restaurant owners and caterers. With their successful food service experience, they consult for eating establishments, from diners to upscale resorts. Their professionalism and high energy make them popular event speakers, food judges, and guests on radio and television.

Over the last few years, I've gotten to know these two incredible women. Every time we get together, whether in Honolulu, where they were

RV-free, or down south in Montgomery, Alabama, I'm always blown away by what they can do from the road. From writing, radio interviews to working on a video series, they do it with passion and take it all in stride. They are equally zealous about the written word as they are about visual components, and Phyllis says, "We are never without pen, notepad, and camera."

They first discovered their love for travel after graduation. "Many years ago, right out of university, we spent nine months traveling around Europe. The wine, food, people, we were hooked," Lamont tells me. When you have a house on wheels and can literally drive wherever roads can take you, how do they decide where to venture to next? "We choose destinations that we perceive as adventures. Often, these include road trips to find out-of-the-way places. Each bend in the road produces interesting travel stories, photographs, food, and of course, people."

They work incredibly well together, and I was fascinated to learn about their writing process and how they balance the work. "As co-authors, we have developed a Cooking Ladies' voice. One writes, the other edits, and then we edit again, and then we edit some more...until one of us says, 'Enough' and we are happy with the story." When it comes to writing for the luxury market, "Luxury journalism allows us to experience the best of the best. The bonus is, as writers and photographers, being in a position to share our experiences with others, informing readers of lifestyle options."

As food and travel writers, they have experienced so much over the years, and they tend to enjoy current moments versus having any one place that they would call a favorite. Phyllis clarifies, "Our favorite experience is wherever we happen to be. We enjoy meeting people who are passionate about what they do, people whose stories give us goose bumps; capturing the perfect photograph; experiencing local cuisine; seeing a location through someone else's eyes. For example, just below the Arctic Circle, on the desolate, rugged, muddy Dempster Highway in Canada's Yukon Territory, we asked a solitary cyclist, from Spain, why he was there. Without speaking, he spread his arms to encompass the surrounding miles and miles of evergreen trees, distant mountains, and migratory animal trails that still mark the very ground where the last human migration from Asia to North America took place. This is the luxury of travel."

When it comes to food, however, they do both agree on having a favorite chef, Leonardo Maurelli III. Lamont jumps in to tell me more, "Our favorite chef is a passionate chef because his/her food reflects that passion. We're The Cooking Ladies, so we're excited about anything gastronomic. One such passionate chef is Leonardo Maurelli III at Central, in Montgomery, Alabama. He walks the talk by supporting Eat South, a 45-acre farm in the middle of Montgomery, in its efforts to provide healthy food to the community and educate children on healthy eating. In an Eat South greenhouse, we lunched on Chef Leo's rustic salad over warm

flatbread. The experience was the epitome of freshness, as the scent of fertile soil mingled with the aroma of just-picked herbs and greens. In an industry that places chefs on pedestals, Chef Leo is approachable. At Central, at each table, he describes his choice of ingredients to his diners; greens picked that morning; arugula for bitterness; sorrel for a touch of lemon; vinaigrette with elder flowers because they are so fresh. He does this because he wants to share what he loves."

When they are not living their mobile dream, they do have a home base in Erieau, Canada. "Anyone who visits our area along the north shore of Lake Erie will spend time in Erieau, a small fishing village that remains relatively quiet even when cottagers and boaters arrive for the summer. Three restaurants and a new craft brewery specialize in Lake Erie yellow perch. Sunrises and sunsets are spectacular. Migratory birds drop in on their way north or south, depending upon the season. Roadside stands and farmers markets facilitate a healthy farm to table diet."

It is clear they love exactly who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going, "Our lives are pretty exciting, always changing. We have the luxury to do what we do because we can. This would be hard to replace." No hobbies required, they are living their dream.

To learn more about The Cooking Ladies, Phyllis Hinz and Lamont Mackay, go to www.thecookingladies.com.