

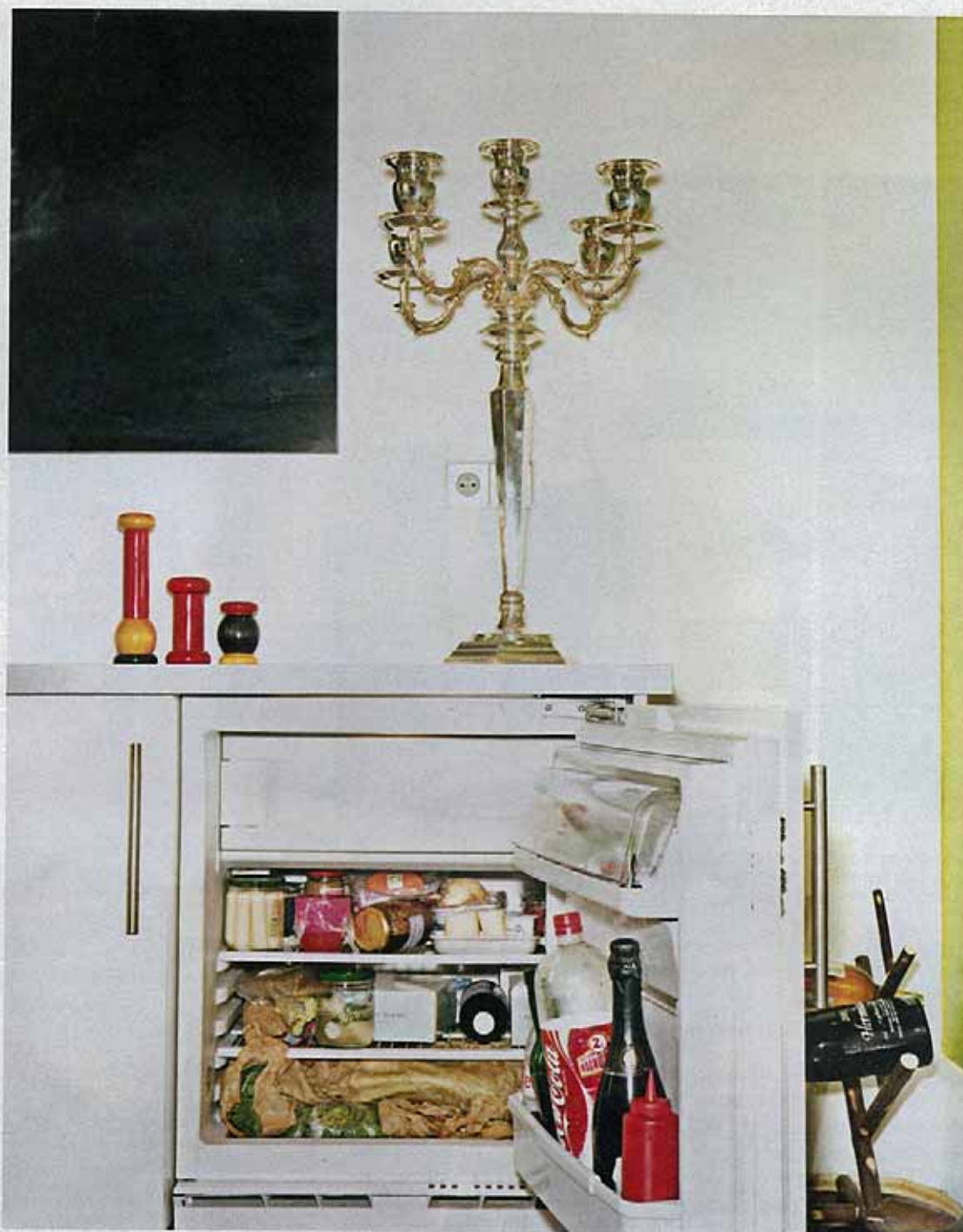
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So Many Fertile Thoughts

The use of donor eggs for in vitro fertilization is growing, and the questions are multiplying: Whose eggs to choose? When to tell the kids? What, in the end, is an authentic motherhood? **By Peggy Orenstein**



The Baker's Ex-Wife

Technicolor cuisine —
and a hostess to match —
in Paris.

Frédéric Grasser-Hermé commits the cardinal dining-room sin before she even leaves the kitchen: she plays with her food. And she's liable to play with yours. She dances around her Paris kitchen humming snatches of French tunes while she whips up a liquid cake, cheese froufrous and chicken in Coca-Cola sauce.

"This," she explains in an attempt at English, "is a Manhattan tributary."

What she means is that she has concocted a constructivist tribute to New York City, with leeks and pretzels rising off a plate to simulate the Manhattan skyline.

Frédéric E. Grasser-Hermé (Fegh to friends) is a gamine 60-something whose boundless enthusiasm has allowed her to produce more than 20 cookbooks, including "La Cuisinière du Cuisinier" with Alain Ducasse. This in spite of the fact that she didn't come to cooking until her foodie friends introduced her to fine cuisine when she was a 30-year-old advertising executive. She has credited a single meal at Alain Chapel's restaurant in Mionnay for her career epiphany.

She slaps a blob of Babybel cheese on a plate, sprinkles it with truffle salt and sticks it into a microwave. Out comes a tasty snack — one of those things you eat and then have a second wave of surprise at how good it is.

"Parlor tricks," sniffs Jeffrey Steingarten, the food writer and longtime friend of Grasser-Hermé. "After

Photographs by Stijn & Marie



From left: An architectural concoction served up in a Bernardaud Marie Antoinette "Breast Bowl"; dressed in her black vinyl apron, Frédéric Grasser-Hermé whips up marrow bone à la Yves Klein; Grasser-Hermé's flamboyant taste extends beyond the cuisine.

you eat the microwaved cheese two or three times, it is not so interesting."

Nevertheless, Steingarten considers her a very good cook. "When she was married" — she and Pierre Hermé, perhaps the world's most highly esteemed pastry chef, were together for 14 years; their divorce was amicable, and they speak often about professional matters — "I would go to their house for dinner, and she would always be the one to cook. She would make classic meals: lamb with apricots, pork bellies — crisp and delicious. And surprisingly, she has a better palate than Pierre, although he has a very good palate. It's just that he eats too fast." (Not long ago, Grasser-Hermé and her ex-husband made a 15-hour pilgrimage by car to Ferran Adrià's El Bulli restaurant in Roses, Spain. They spent 10 hours eating one course after another, and at the end, Pierre was still hungry.)

Steingarten is not the only one who admires Grasser-Hermé's culinary skills. Her fans extend into the art and design worlds, where they value her offbeat concoctions. For a recent reception following the opening of a neo-realist exhibit at Le Grand Palais, she produced a colorful mélange of treats: cobalt blue flying-fish roe mounded on top of a marrow bone and peas and grated carrots suspended in a square of agar-agar. Even her most recent cookbook, "Serial Col-

Ken Gross writes mystery novels.







Grasser-Hermé, off to market, her faux-fur shopping cart in tow.

ors" (L'Épure Editions), was packaged in a pot by the of-the-moment designer Matali Crasset.

Grasser-Hermé always has her fingers in a variety of pots; when she is not writing magazine columns or consulting with hotel and restaurant chefs, she is dreaming up new dishes. (She and Pierre opened the short-lived Korova restaurant, which served her Coca-Cola chicken and other whimsical fare.) Her most recent obsession, apart from a desire to deconstruct pot-au-feu, is the "Technicolor cooking" she explored in "Serial Colors." She calls it "the rainbow of my dreams: a white polar-bear cocktail, a black truffle pizza, a blue lobster roll, violet mashed potatoes with cassis. ...

"We must find in nature the right color so that food reflects the natural," I think she said.

All of these colliding notions emerge from her Crasset-designed apartment off the Champs-Élysées. Dubbed Fegh Shui House, it's more like a Disney Toontown. The appliances are oversize, capable of being operated with Mickey Mouse mittens. The artwork seems to pop off the walls with a kind of three-dimensional zip. Her midnight blue vinyl couch borders on sculpture.

"Wait! Wait!" She wants to make her liquid cake. Twirling and humming, she pours Champagne into a big mixing bowl, then splashes in some vodka and scoops in ice cream, passion-fruit purée and butter cookies. She mixes it all together and pours a slice into a huge martini glass. Is it any surprise that this, too, is a wonderful invention?

Puntarella With Green Anchoïade

1½ pounds puntarella (Italian chicory) or dandelion greens	15 green olives, pitted
16 anchovy fillets in oil, rinsed and patted dry	4 teaspoons Xérès vinegar
2 small cloves garlic	¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
	Sea salt
	Freshly ground black pepper
	4 slices toasted bread

1. Remove the tender inner leaves of the puntarella and cut the larger green leaves in thirds. Using a mandoline, finely slice the remaining core. (If using dandelion greens, remove and discard the stems and cut the leaves into thirds.) Rinse in cold water, drain, wrap in paper towels and refrigerate for 1 hour.
2. Prepare the anchoïade (anchovy sauce) by combining the anchovies, garlic, olives and vinegar in a food processor. With the motor running, pour in the olive oil in a thin, steady stream. Season to taste with salt and pepper and mix again.
3. Place 3 tablespoons of the anchoïade in the bottom of a salad bowl. Add the chilled leaves and mix well. Serve with toasted bread. *Serves 4.*

Hot Dog Chic au King Crab

9 ounces shelled king crab meat	Fleur de sel
1 tablespoon chopped celery leaves	Freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons mayonnaise (preferably Hellmann's)	Red-pepper flakes
1 tablespoon lemon juice	2 to 3 tablespoons butter
	4 hot-dog buns
	1 tablespoon minced chives

1. Squeeze the crab meat between your hands to remove all the moisture and then break into large pieces and place in a large bowl. Add the celery leaves, mayonnaise and lemon juice and mix well. Season to taste with salt, pepper and red-pepper flakes.
2. In a nonstick skillet set over low heat, heat the butter until it begins to foam. Brown the hot-dog buns on both sides and set aside to cool slightly.
3. Spread ¼ of the mixture into each bun and sprinkle with chives. Serve immediately. *Serves 4.*

Liquid Cake

1 passion fruit, skinned and seeded	¼ cup mango sorbet, softened
¼ cup vanilla ice cream, softened	¼ cup vodka
	1 cup brut Champagne
	2 butter cookies, crumbled

1. Halve the passion fruit and, using a wooden spoon or rubber spatula, scrape the pulp through a fine-mesh sieve set over a bowl. Discard the remaining seeds and pulp.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the ice cream and sorbet. Pour in the vodka and whisk lightly. Stir in the passion-fruit purée and then fold in the Champagne.
3. Sprinkle the cookies evenly among 4 martini glasses. Top each with the vodka mixture and serve immediately. *Serves 4. All recipes adapted from Frédéric Grasser-Hermé. ■*