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## Color Me Hungry

### From William Blake to Alice Waters and back again

By Clark Wolf



*Splitting his time between Guerneville and Manhattan, acclaimed consultant Clark Wolf graces these pages with the occasional diatribe from the periodic local.*

I live from my kitchen window. It's over a big sink and piled high with colorful plates and bowls filled with fruits and vegetables and surrounded by flowers. Just coming into my cabin up in the woods and seeing my own personal groaning board makes me smile.

This time of year, some of the stars of my favorite still life are garden roses and hydrangea. It took me several years to realize that all of those amazing colors were familiar: those purple torpedo onions, that rainbow of heirloom tomatoes, the lusty, local crane melon, the heartbreaking strawberries—even the occasional avocado or random lemon cucumber. So fresh and inviting, they are clearly echoes of the spray of flowers all around them.

Turns out there is, as William Blake so colorfully wrote and drew, fearful symmetry in nature. And it all makes good sense—which is clearly something we need to develop when it comes to good, wholesome, nourishing and delicious food. If that construct of visible, physical, olfactory and palate-driven sensibilities is strong and clear, we have a better chance at a healthy life and a healthy world.

After World War II, the technology that created C-Rations to feed our troops added to a whole new manufactured food industry. In less than a quarter-century, we were eating Tater Tots and drinking Tang. We'd gone from delicious Victory Gardens to industrial dross, and nearly lost all flavor and culture. One result is that today way too many new "products," particularly in what they call the health drink category, come in weirdly shaped, plastic containers that often look more like they should be holding tennis or golf balls than antioxidant-rich juice drinks. Industrial manufacturers are messing with our sense and sensibilities and disengaging us from the natural connection we have with food, all the better to be able to influence our choices in ways that lead to higher profits for them and, it seems, worse health for us.

One of the more powerful ideas and activities to arise recently is the Edible Schoolyard. Based on an East Bay program championed by chef Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, it's an idea and a fledgling program being tested across the country. It's fairly budget-cut-proof—although you'd be surprised at how complicated school systems can make the simple act of planting and growing—and often associated with nutrition studies, which is fine, but it's only a small, if valuable, result of the bigger picture.

Not yet widely available to the public, Waters will soon offer a general release of a new book that tells the story and shares the snapshots of a school garden gone right. *Edible Schoolyard* will be published by Chronicle Books next spring, and is a delightful, easy-to-read and moving story of how bringing simple, good food to kids right at their school can have a hugely positive impact on our daily lives. The photographs run from lush black-and-white to vivid color so rich that at first I thought it was Photoshopped. Then I realized that gardens really are that diverse and colorful, vivid and delicious. Just like my kitchen window.

*Clark Wolf is the president of the Clark Wolf Company, specializing in food, restaurant and hospitality consulting.*

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