

A multi-sensory journey beyond the plate to discover the passion, the inspiration, the environment, the philosophy and the lifestyle that drive some of the world's most pioneering chefs.

## **50 CHEFS**

Who they are.

What drives their passion

The real stories beyond their plates

## **50 STORIES**

Their early beginnings

The middle

The now

## **50 QUESTIONS**

The questions they are never asked

The answers they have never shared.

The events that made them who they are

## **50 RECIPES**

50 signature dish recipes.

One from each chef.



# BEYOND THE PLATE

“inside every dish we cook is the story of who we are”

orianna fielding

#1

## TRAVIS LETT

Chef

Gjelina's

Santa Monica, California



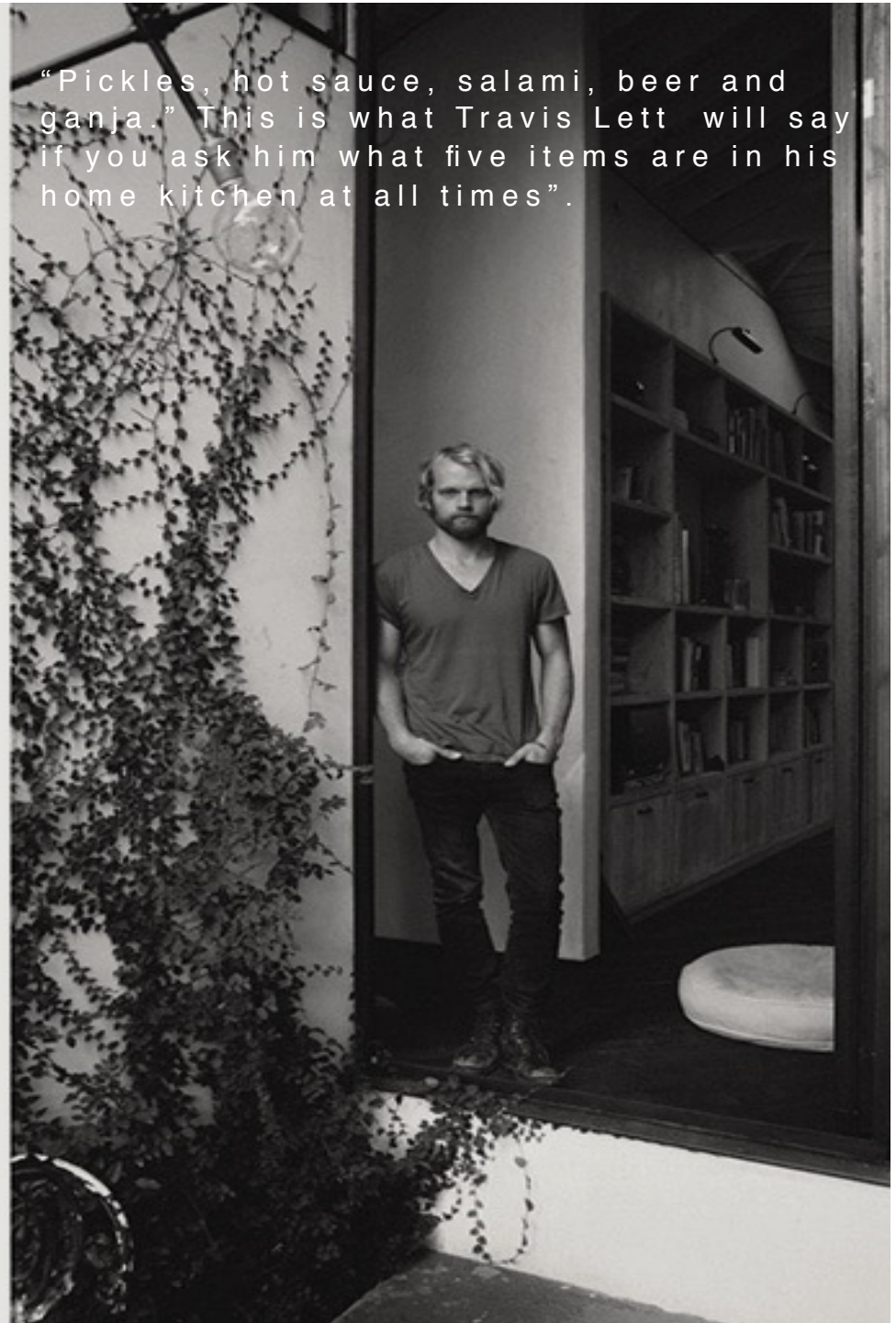
“We buy everything at the farmers market for Gjelinas. I'm trying to go the next step and grow our own vegetables. Lately, I'm more inspired by a piece of cauliflower than a lobe of foie gras or pile of truffles”





Clearly a man who knows how to have a good time, Travis Lett, the 34-year-old chef behind wildly popular restaurant Gjelina is enjoying his role as one of California's top culinary shape-shifters.

"Pickles, hot sauce, salami, beer and ganja." This is what Travis Lett will say if you ask him what five items are in his home kitchen at all times".





“Working with the community of farmers I have gotten to know over the years has shifted the way I look at food, the way it’s cultivated, and how it should be cooked and served,” he explains. In addition to celebrating the roots of naturally flavourful foods and the farmers who raise them, Lett’s own past is a key source of inspiration for both his cooking practices and visual projects. “Growing up in New Jersey, I ate at a lot of pizzerias and sub shops,” he reveals. “Working-class Italian food was a big part of my early influences in food.” Gjelina’s crispy, thin crust pizzas honor that time in his life, and are infused with a dose of bold, modern ingredients that exercise innovation.

“It’s been a subtractive process, so the longer I cook, the more I think what can we take away?”

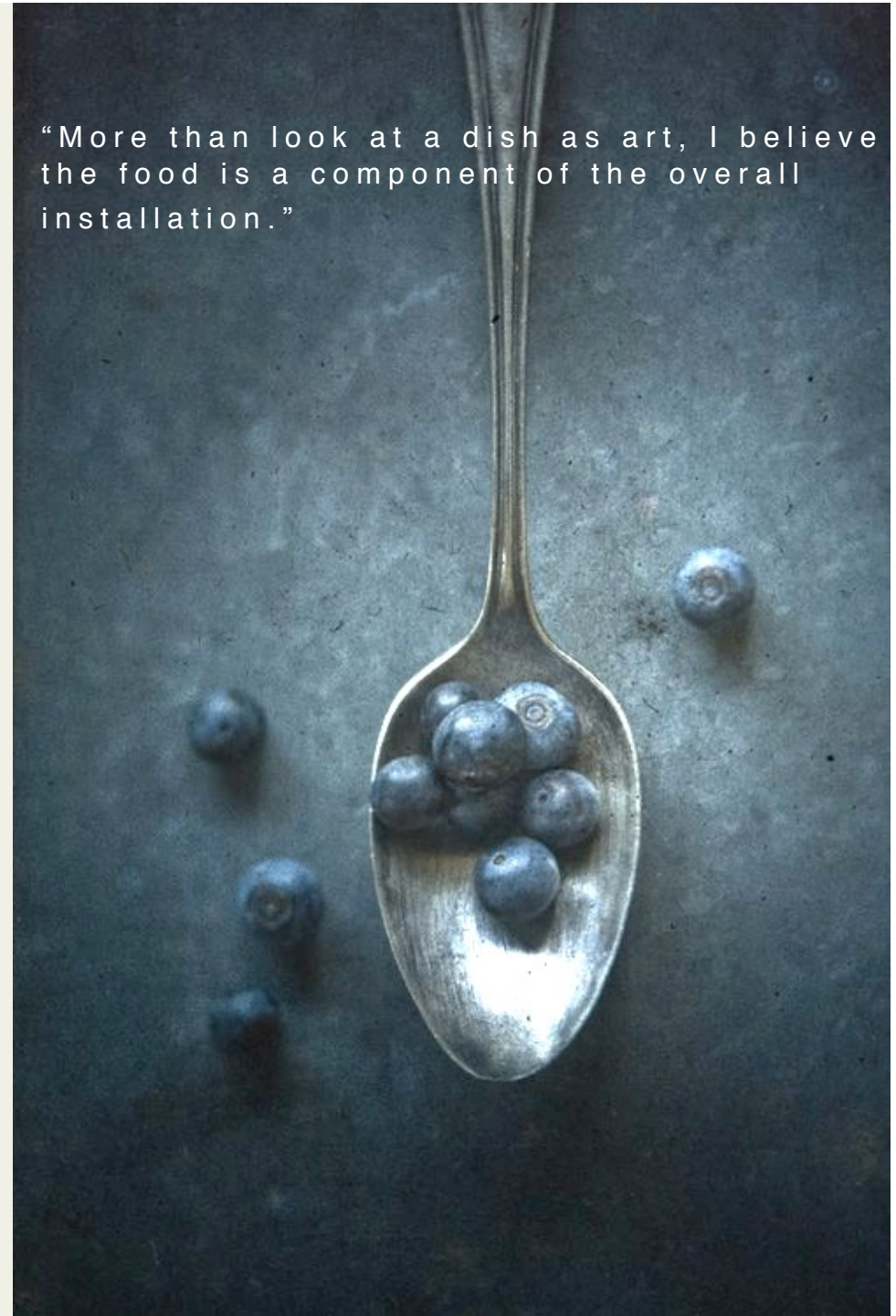







“The more chefs become interested in farm-to-table sourcing with both meats and produce, the more it will incentivize growers and ranchers to participate in localized food systems and grow with more intention and increased awareness on their overall impact,” he adds. “This movement is here to stay.” On the flipside, one flashy food development he can do without includes the oh-so-trendy efforts of molecular gastronomy. “I could easily never see a foam or culinary ‘dirt’ again and it would be too soon,” Lett quips. “Leave the liquid nitrogen alone, guys!”

“More than look at a dish as art, I believe the food is a component of the overall installation.”





Cooking has always been a practical, visceral thing for him. He received no formal culinary training, learning through doing and paying his way through art school in the kitchens of what he calls “neighborhood-y Italian restaurants.” He credits his mother for inspiring his cooking style, and his interest in the organic movement. “This Gjelina world,” he says, is “pretty much self-taught.”

A close-up photograph of green leafy vegetables, likely kale or collard greens, showing the intricate vein structure of the leaves. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture and color of the foliage.

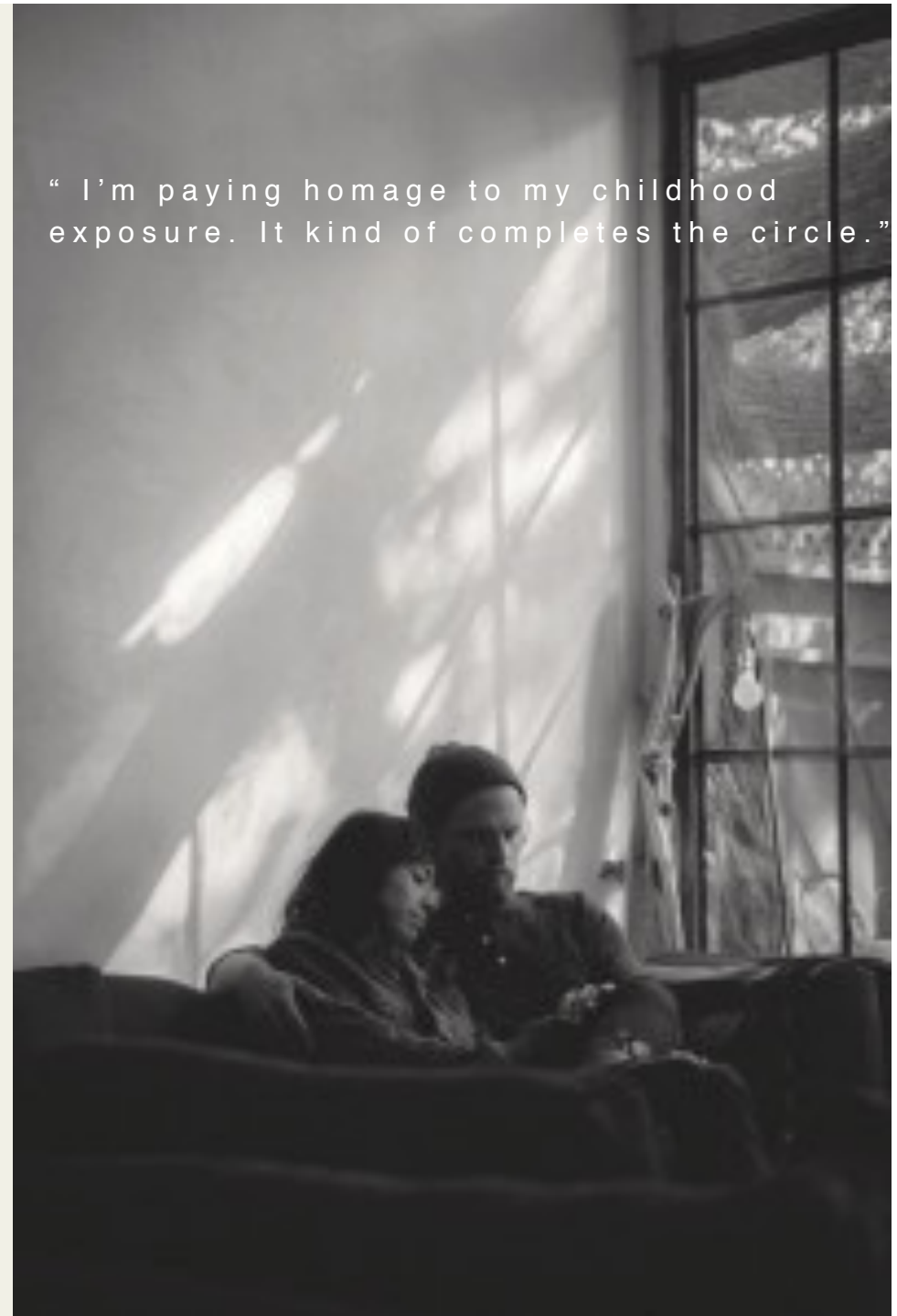
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Lett certainly isn't slowing down. He's been taking frequent trips to Japan—digging up the roots of his parents' Japanese vegan diet. Later this year, Lett will open his next as-yet-unnamed restaurant on Abbot Kinney. "It will have an izakaya feel," he says, "but with a Japanese farm-to-table sensibility that we really don't see in the States too much. Japanese food, as we know it, is sushi primarily. White rice and teriyaki—stuff like that. But there is a seasonality to Japanese food, and my parents ate all that. I'm paying homage to my childhood exposure. It kind of completes the circle."

" I'm paying homage to my childhood exposure. It kind of completes the circle."



# 50

answers looking for questions

## 1 #

Growing up in the 80's living under a rigid Macrobiotic regime at home. At school I was that kid at the lunch table whom nobody wanted to trade with. Most often, all I had was seasonal organic vegetables, Nori rolls, miso soup, and maybe on special occasions a brown-rice cookie baked with arrowroot. Don't get me wrong I loved cheap pizza as much as the next 12-year-old, but at home my parents kept a "severe" macrobiotic vegan diet, I've got something in the Asian genre that I'm working on right now. I grew up in a macrobiotic household, I didn't really love that growing up because it was mandated—but I was very lucky to have some of that philosophy on me at a very young age.

**What is your most vivid food memory as a child?**





# 50

answers looking for questions

## 2 #

I do, actually. You'd be surprised. I have such a big staff that the rhythm of my work has gone from cutting fish and rolling out pasta during the day to working the line at night, I still do some of those things but I'm overseeing a big organization at this point. Sometimes coming home at night and putting together a simple pasta or searing off a piece of fish is a really relaxing thing to do. I still enjoy cooking a meal for my friends.

**Do you cook at home?**



# 50

answers looking for questions

## 3 #

For me it has to be the Lobster truck- they make the best Lobster rolls in Venice. Great portion, fresh lobster, perfectly golden brown roll that's been buttered on both sides. Normally there is a line that covers the parking lot of the Brig where they are usually parked at the weekend, but really worth the wait. I discovered them in one of the 'First Friday' events on Abbot Kinney which take place on the first Friday of the month. Perfect to share a Lobster roll and head down to the beach to watch the sunset in one of the local bars, with a drink. Yep on those rare moments when I'm not in a kitchen....life really is really hard!

**Do you have a favourite local go-to food truck?**





## Wild herbed mushroom toast

signature  
dish

Prep & cook time:

10-15 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients

Cibatta sliced thickly

3 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

1 lb seasonal mushrooms

Washed and sliced

6 cloves garlic minced

Salt & freshly ground black pepper

1¼ cups crème

1 Tbsp chopped flat leaf parsley

½ Tsp fresh thyme leaves

Preparation:

Brush olive oil on both sides of the bread,  
then grill or toast bread

Heat a large frying pan over high heat.

Add the olive oil and, when hot, add the mushrooms

Cook, without stirring, until the mushrooms are  
well browned, about 3 minutes.

Add the garlic to the pan, and season with salt and pepper.

Stir in the crème fraîche. Cook until slightly thickened,

Place the toasted bread on individual plates.

Spoon the mushrooms and pan sauce on top,

dividing it evenly.

Serve hot.





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