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ALL IN THE FAMILY

ON THE EVE OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LEGENDARY CANLIS RESTAURANT, REBEKAH DENN GAINS ACCESS TO THE VENERABLE FAMILY'S WEEKLY LUNCH, WHERE THE CASUAL MIX OF SHOP TALK, PARTY PLANS AND OCCASIONAL RIBBING REVEALS A SIDE OF THE FAMILY—AND THE RESTAURANT—MOST OF US NEVER SEE.

CHRIS CANLIS IS BACK IN THE KITCHEN, WEARING JEANS—you read that right, jeans!—and putting together a killer guacamole. But this isn't at the august restaurant that bears his name—the one with the dress code and \$70 lobster entrée. It's at his son Brian's Belltown apartment for "family lunch," a weekly tradition the Canlis family has upheld for several years, drawing together the members involved in the family-owned fine-dining restaurant—at a location other than the restaurant. On this day, as they prepare to celebrate the legendary restaurant's 60th

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CANLIS RESTAURANT CEO CHRIS CANLIS PRESIDES OVER THE FAMOUS CANLIS SALAD, PERFECTED BY HIS FATHER, PETER CANLIS; THE FAMILY DISCUSSES PLANS FOR THE RESTAURANT'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION; EVERY SPEAKER HAS A TIME LIMIT; CHRIS AND ALICE CANLIS HOLD HANDS DURING A READING OF PSALM 133

anniversary (officially December 11), they make room at the table for *Seattle* magazine. ¶ Some people put on a good game face for the media, but we don't think anyone could fake the warmth, openness and honest debate we observed. By our measure, the Canlis family is as hospitable and kind outside the restaurant as inside. ¶ Their weekly lunch is a chance for parents Alice and Chris to break bread with sons Mark,

36, and Brian, 33, third-generation Canlises who now head day-to-day operations. The brothers mean it when they say they're equals. One or the other is on the floor almost every night, and they annually alternate the titles of president and vice president, with Brian tending to handle the numbers side and Mark, more of the marketing end. At the weekly lunch, parents, kids and often spouses catch up on each other's lives, marking time with an egg timer so that everyone gets five minutes to contribute. Then they talk business, in frank exchanges that follow a formal agenda. >>>>>>

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HAYLEY YOUNG



Mark, tapping on his MacBook, says he has anniversary assignments for every family member. Ever old school, his father, at his side, pulls out a pencil and a daily planner, ready to go.

>> All those Canlis mission buzzwords about personal growth, community involvement and being “other-centered”? That’s the way the family really talks and thinks, on a level that’s realistic about dollars and cents, but also concerned about bigger things, such as values. It’s lovely to see the changing of the guard between generations; how, as Alice put it, she and Chris have gone “from being the parents to being the grandparents” of the Seattle institution that was founded by Chris’ father, Peter Canlis.

There’s conflict, sure, but it’s healthy conflict. As Brian’s wife, Rebecca, puts it, “It’s bizarre how well this family works together.” And as they gather hands for a lunchtime blessing, it couldn’t be more fitting. Psalm 133: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

Over Canlis salad and apple tart, Alice and Chris—now chairs of the Canlis board, with Chris as the CEO—update the family on their recent European trip. They dispense gifts. Mark and Brian review employee training sessions, a rede-



BRIAN (LEFT) AND MARK CANLIS ENGAGE IN A LITTLE SWORDPLAY AT THE FAMILY’S WEEKLY GATHERING. ABOVE: THE CANLIS MEN AND THEIR WIVES RELISH THE MOMENT

signed menu, staff updates and financial reports.

While business is good, Mark relates that he's chatted with other local restaurateurs, and it's clear why one part of Canlis' bottom line is lower: Canlis won't fudge the law—such as making servers share tips with cooks—to address the rising costs of kitchen labor.

Brian recounts judging a city mai tai contest, which surprises his mom, who says he barely drinks—and cuts herself off just short of calling him a lightweight. “We have not spent a lot of time together lately,” Brian dryly retorts.

Everyone is eager to get started on the 60th anniversary, a milestone the family wants to celebrate with a focus on philanthropy. Instead of a party for movers and shakers to raise money for nonprofits, this year the idea is to invite the nonprofits to a grand celebration “to honor and celebrate and encourage them” and to figure out how to make Seattle an even more generous city. (The public is part of the party, too, with events like a city treasure hunt for old Canlis menus, redeemable for meals at decades-old prices.) Mark, tapping on his MacBook, says he has assignments for every family member. Ever old school, his father, at his side, pulls out a pencil and a daily planner, ready to go.

Both Alice and Chris lean forward to hear news of employee anniversaries and comings and goings. The sons had decided to treat one employee to dinner at Crush and a night at the Four Seasons to honor his 10th anniversary at the restaurant. Another was sent to the Burning Man festival. They describe the retirement party of Mee-Sook Lee, a server who had been “a rock” for 20 years, teaching new employees “the culture of Canlis.” They admit that Mark started to cry as he began a farewell speech.

“I’m proud of you, son,” says Chris.

Chris also approves of the new “wall of service” the brothers have introduced. Not unlike a family’s growth chart for children, it’s where staff members chisel a line to mark completion of another year at Canlis.

“I like it,” says Chris. “What a great tradition.” ❸

Five things you didn't know about Canlis

You know that it's a good idea to wear a suit or sport coat. You know valets will magically pull up with your car as you open the front door. But here are a few things we bet you didn't know about Canlis Restaurant:

1.) You can still order Dungeness crab legs: If you—or your grandparents—are craving specialties from decades past, there's a good chance the kitchen will still make them for you. (Twenty-four hours notice is appreciated.) All kitchen staff is trained to prepare nine or so super-popular oldies, such as liver and onions and steak Pierre.

2.) The kitchen has held a wealth of hidden talents: Canlis doesn't run on star power, but regardless, it has seen plenty of high-wattage names. Rob Bigelow, former director of wine at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, was Canlis' first master sommelier. Randy Garutti, a big man in New York restaurateur Danny Meyer's empire, was a Canlis director of operations. Andrew Meltzer, cofounder of Columbia City Bakery, was until recently the Canlis baker, and Autumn Martin, former chocolatier of Theo Chocolate, was a Canlis pastry chef. Of course, Greg Atkinson, a founding father of Pacific Northwest cuisine, was one of the five executive chefs in Canlis history. Current chef Jason Franey is a star from New York's Eleven Madison Park.

3.) You can dine on a budget: Want a taste of Canlis without breaking the bank? Take a seat in the lounge, where you can affordably

luxuriate on cocktails and on small plates such as Peter Canlis prawns (\$10) or truffle fries (\$8). On Saturday nights, you can't miss the delightful presence of Betty LeBid, the 80-something patron who's been dining at Canlis for decades without fail. Stick around as long as she has and you might get your own personal engraved champagne glass, too.

4.) Chemistry cooks in the kitchen: Yeah, yeah—the menu features salmon and steak tartare and twice-baked potatoes. But there are updated flavors behind those familiar names, even if diners don't realize that sous vide water immersion baths and Robot Coupe food processors had anything to do with dinner. When you remember that chef Franey helped write New York City's laws on sous vide cooking, it's not surprising to hear they're talking about fiddling with a Clover coffee press to see what it can do with tomato purée.

5.) There's yet another brother: What other restaurant has a personal Scotch whisky consultant who also happens to be its chief chaplain? Eldest brother Matt, a pastor in a small town in Scotland, sends fabulous bottles of single malt back to the restaurant and still serves on the Canlis board. He's an intermediary with a perspective brought from outside the restaurant world.