



OUT TO LUNCH

WITH FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

Francis Ford Coppola was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1939 but grew up in Queens, New York. After graduating in theatre arts, he enrolled as a film student in UCLA. A five-time Oscar-winning director, writer and producer, he is best known for his direction of *The Godfather* trilogy and *Apocalypse Now*. He has achieved success as a winemaker at his Rubicon Estate, and has just acquired a new winery in Sonoma. He owns three resorts in Central America: Blancaneaux Lodge and Turtle Inn in Belize, and La Lancha in Guatemala. Francis lives in the Napa Valley with his wife Eleanor.

Julia Eagleton sits down to lunch with the veteran film director, producer and winemaker at his Rubicon Estate in the Napa Valley to discuss the art of food, wine and travel

What are your early food memories?

As a child the happiest times for me were holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas and family get-togethers when all my uncles and aunts and cousins came home. There was laughter and plenty of kids and people were united around the table with these extraordinary Italian dishes and wines. For the kids, apple cider – I liked Thanksgiving so much because of the apple cider. Those occasions remained with me as the way to enjoy life. The Italian tradition of gathering everyone around the table and eating, drinking and having conversation long after the food is gone is too little practised in this fast food, rush-rush world.

Is entertaining important in your work?

As I became a film director, there were collaborations where my fellow artists, writers and actors would come to my home and I would cook – and later serve my own wine. I used meals as a way to bond with the cast, to create sense memories that would carry over to their performance. When I auditioned Marlon Brando [for *The Godfather*], I brought along some Italian food – platters of sausages, olives, that sort of thing – and as he began to get into the character, putting shoeblack in his hair and cotton in his cheeks, he started to nibble at the food.

What's your favourite type of food?

I enjoy things that are not fussy, with too many ingredients. I like Italian, of course, but also sushi, a perfectly cooked steak or beautifully fresh grilled fish. My favourite dishes to cook are chicken under a brick (I flatten it using a curling stone from the Scottish game), Mrs Scorsese's lemon chicken (that's Marty's mother's recipe) and various pastas. I probably make pasta pomodoro most often, but with no garlic. There's a misconception that Italians put garlic in everything, and that's just not true.

Are there similarities in your approach to making films and wine?

Winemaking and filmmaking are two great art forms that are very important in California. They both start with raw ingredients – in the case of wine, the land and the grapes, and in the case of film, the script and the actors' performance. The grapes can be affected by weather, the actors' performance by many factors. The winemaker takes these raw materials and ferments and blends, saying yes to this batch, no to that one, and the film director does the same thing – a series of yesses and nos, from casting to costuming through edits and sound mixes. But in both cases you have to start with top-notch raw materials, whether it's the land or a script. And sometimes you improvise and let nature take its course. >>>

How did you come to purchase the Inglenook Estate, now the Rubicon Estate, in Napa Valley?

A local real estate mentioned that the estate was up for auction and so we drove through it; in those days it was only half the size. We made a bid for it, but didn't get it. Later, when the people who bought it were forced to sell, we bought it and the kids, Gio, Roman and Sofia, went to the local schools here. I had this pretty house and we were surrounded by grapes and everyone wanted to buy the grapes. I began to think, gee, if everyone wants to buy the grapes... I was broke. It was after *Apocalypse Now*. My mother loaned me money, I bought some barrels and we decided to turn the winery around.

What are your hopes for your new winery in Sonoma?

Sonoma is a beautiful place and has great wine. I want people to come with their whole families to enjoy the scenery, have lunch on the patio and explore the countryside. We'll have some truly amazing design to make people feel comfortable. A production designer going way back to *The Godfather* is helping me to design the new winery.

How did the resorts in Belize and Guatemala come about?

I came back from *Apocalypse Now* having found that I could acclimatise to the jungle. I read in the paper that British Honduras was becoming Belize, so I took my eight-year-old son and said let's go and find Belize! We found what is now Blancaneaux Lodge in a very remote area. It looked bad, but I used it for a summer retreat. The kids liked it and in order to keep it, we needed someone to take care of it. It became so successful that we referred a lot of our upscale patrons, and then they wanted a beach place, so we added Turtle Inn. The year after I bought it, we got hit by a hurricane. I built a new resort in one year. I got carried away as usual, but it was a big hit. Then we heard about one near Tikal in Guatemala; I've always liked Central America and I was looking for something a little more rustic. La Lancha is more rustic and all three are now very successful.

How much input do you have with menus for the resorts?

I have a great deal of input. For La Lancha we wanted authentic Guatemalan fare, while at Turtle Inn the menu is based on the sea – we have local fishermen who pull up on our beach with their catch. At Blancaneaux and Turtle Inn we have a wood-burning pizza oven and offer some of my Italian favourites. Some of the cooks we've had over the years at the resorts have come up to Napa and spent part of a summer cooking with me.

What's the first journey you ever remember taking?

I was the first member of my family to visit Europe and specifically Bernalda and Napoli, representing the origins of my father and mother. That was in about 1962 and I was working on a film that took me all over Europe. It was a memorable trip, where I met my wife Eleanor, who was also travelling. We met in Dublin and our romance began in Rouen, a city which I always associate with a romantic moon.

What are your favourite places?

The cities of San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and Paris, to name only a few. But if I had to stay in one place, I would stay in the most beautiful place I know – northern California.

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A LIFE IN FILM

Francis Ford Coppola's career spans five decades and dozens of films, including:

- American Graffiti** (producer, 1973)
- The Godfather** (director/screenplay, 1972)
- The Conversation** (producer/director/writer, 1974)
- The Godfather Part II** (producer/director/screenplay, 1974)
- The Great Gatsby** (screenplay, 1974)
- Apocalypse Now** (producer/director/screenplay, 1979)
- Rumble Fish** (executive producer/director/screenplay, 1983)
- The Cotton Club** (director, 1984)
- Peggy Sue Got Married** (director, 1986)
- The Godfather Part III** (producer/director/writer, 1990)
- Bram Stoker's Dracula** (producer/director, 1992)
- The Secret Garden** (executive producer, 1993)
- Mary Shelley's Frankenstein** (producer, 1994)
- John Grisham's The Rainmaker** (producer/director/screenplay, 1997)
- The Virgin Suicides** (producer, 1999)
- Sleepy Hollow** (executive producer, 1999)
- Lost in Translation** (executive producer, 2003)
- Kinsey** (executive producer, 2004)
- Marie Antoinette** (executive producer, 2006)