

ANTICIPATING ELAINE

We need Elaine.

In anticipation of Elaine we cleared the small wooden frame garage. Its cobwebs and contents were dispersed from the comfort of infrequent disruption. The cracked concrete floors were swept with a worn down straw broom. Bits and pieces of dust and debris remained—Elaine wouldn't mind.

We first encountered Elaine through the window of a closed bar in Switzerland. It was too early in the day for intoxication and few waterholes were open for business. We peeked through the dusted glass and observed the mysterious contents of Elaine's pre-opening routine. Our time with Elaine was brief, though she lingered in our thoughts for days to come. In the weeks, months, and years that followed, we would periodically connect with Elaine. Her informal yet spontaneous nature calmed and excited us.

Elaine rarely indulged in elaborate planning. Rather, her motivations connected with that which was or became available—discarded stems from the local florist, seasonal sales at the buy-low, soon to expire beverages from the government liquor store, and fresh recommendations from the butcher. Her festivities often breach the table's edge, ensuring all unannounced mouths were welcomed with something to savor.

Relaxed in her process, Elaine taps thoughtful intuition with genuine consideration for her guests. Atmosphere and proportion instinctively accumulate. Blackberry bush garland drapes the rafters with punctuations of pastel bread dough sculptures. Exotic fruits occupy the shelves and hand painted prints accompany the wooden walls. A drift of fragrant peonies hangs in the air.

Elaine is here.

In a turn of unexpected drama she summoned the rain. It poured down on the garden the morning of her arrival and slowed to a drizzle as the grill reached its maximum heat. The sound of condensation on the hot coals sizzled along with the cauliflower and garlic. Wafts of roast pork circulate from the barbeque to the brick patio. Cool mint lounges in a bath of yogurt with a floating wooden spoon. Tequila drizzled pineapple exudes a sweet whisper. Mandolin sliced fennel, chopped parsley, and crisp radishes assemble in pools of ice water.

Guests begin to arrive. Elaine effortlessly hosts.

-Jenn Jackson