

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Les Dames d Escoffier

[Les Dames d Escoffier International](#) is a prestigious organization founded by Grande Dame, preeminent food journalist and visionary, Carol Brock in 1976, as a professional organization of women in food and wine.

The name is a nod to the legendary chef Auguste Escoffier (1846 - 1935), who in addition to being a preeminent chef was also an advocate for women in the culinary industry. This in itself was a welcome breakthrough, since although the saying may have been "women belong in the kitchen" they must have been referring to the home kitchen, as women were not making much headway in the professional culinary field.

Today, there are 1200 members of professional women in the food and beverage, and hospitality industries. Members include chefs, restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, journalists, authors, historians, educators, management executives and publicists, with 25 chapters in the United States and Canada.

On September 25, 2006, I attended an interesting panel discussion entitled "Dames Who Dared, Dames Who Did It" at The Union League Club, moderated by Rozanne Gold, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Les Dames d Escoffier. The title was certainly catchy, and the "Dames Who Dared; Dames Who Did It," included such notables as Donatella Arpaia, Ariane Daugin, Florence Fabricant, Alexandra Guarnaschelli, Dorothy Cann Hamilton, Louisa Thomas Hargrave, and Abigail Kirsch, who shared their stories and their vision, as they overcame obstacles in the industry.



Although all of these women now work in the food and beverage or hospitality industry, not all of them began their careers in the industry. Donatella Arpaia studied law and became a corporate attorney before deciding to throw caution to the wind, and against her family's better judgment, opened up her first restaurant, Bellini, in 1997. The daughter of Italian immigrant parents, her father told her she could do anything, except open a restaurant, but she would fill-in for her brother at his restaurant, and fell in love with the business. In 2003, she and Chef David Burke created the award-winning restaurant davidburke & donatella, her latest venture is Dona, and she has a food product line. "You have to be passionate about food to be in this business." She is a Dame Who Dared to achieve her dreams.

Ariane Dagun, CEO and Co-founder of D'Artagnan, and a recipient of the French Légion d'Honneur, grew up in the culinary business; her father was a famous chef who taught her expert techniques such as de-boning a duck, which she could do before she was 10 years old. Instead of taking her talents to the

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culinary world though, she went to graduate school at Columbia University. She described herself as the luckiest girl in the world. Her father wanted her brother to be a chef, and she was determined to show him that she could do it. She said that she was lucky because she did not have enough money to pay tuition at Columbia University and had to work while going to school. However, the culinary world is very enticing, and in 1985, after working for a New York foie gras producer during her Columbia days, she and fellow graduate student George Faison created D'Artagnan. Today the company is a \$40 million business, and Ariane is now the sole owner. "If you have the right circumstances, you can succeed."

Louisa Thomas Hargrave always loved food and wine. She never gardened, never farmed, killed houseplants, yet despite this inauspicious beginning, was the Co-founder of The Long Island Wine industry in 1973. Louisa is another Dame Who Dared, who began the Long Island Wine movement when she planted the first wine grapes in 1973 on the North Fork. "Fundamentally, I wanted to create something tangible that I could grow, eat, and taste." Not everything comes easily though, and it took ten years before the company Hargrave Vineyard made a profit, and a very meager one at that, a mere \$91. While most people would have thrown in the towel, this intrepid Dame kept going, and in 1999, she sold the landmark vineyard. She remains true to her wine roots, and is a wine consultant, writer, columnist, speaker, and wine judge.

Alexandra Guarnaschelli is the Executive Chef at Butter in New York, and her partial list of impressive credentials include working at the three-star Michelin restaurant Guy Savoy in Paris, and at Daniel Boulud's restaurant, Daniel in New York. Alexandra grew up in the culinary industry; her mother was a cookbook editor, and she said that she "learned to eat with whatever cookbook her mother was working on at the time." She is a Dame Who Dared, who at 5:00 pm on the day she graduated in 1991 decided to become a chef. Her first day working in a restaurant, she dropped eggs on her boss' feet. He looked up and said, okay, welcome. As a young American woman, she went to work in Paris at Guy Savoy where she had 10 young male chefs working for her. Suffice it say that this spunky chef quickly learned during her four-year tenure there how to adapt in the predominantly male kitchen, or more to the point, how the men learned to adapt to Alexandra. In addition to working at Butter, she teaches at the Institute of Culinary Education, and dreams of someday having her own restaurant. She wants to "dare to do more in the future."

Chef/Author/Consultant, Rozanne Gold wears many hats. This Dame Who Dared is an award-winning cookbook author who has won three awards from the prestigious James Beard Foundation Cookbook, at age 24 was the chef to New York City Mayor Edward I. Koch, and was a former co-owner of The Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center and Windows on the World. She continues to inspire and motivate with her distinct style, and describes Les Dames d'Escoffier as a way for women to mentor each other.

Rozanne Gold described Florence Fabricant as "The Food Expert's Expert." Florence, a highly respected food writer has been a writer since 1972, and a food writer since 1977, when as a wife and mother of two she was between jobs and looking for something that she could do. She always loved to cook, and went to the East Hampton Star Editor for a job. Her first assignment was 400 words and it took her three weeks to write it. In a very daring move, she called Craig Claiborne to get advice as a mentor. "I asked him if I should go to journalism school. No, he replied. I asked about going to cooking school, and again her replied, no, and there I had a career." This Dame Who Dared is an award-winning James Beard Foundation author of eight cookbooks, and a food columnist for The New York Times.

Dorothy Cann Hamilton founded The French Culinary Institute in 1984, which is now the International Culinary Center, and includes the FCI and The Italian Culinary Academy, and is another Dame Who Dared and has excelled in the culinary world. She is a progressive role model, who has received many prestigious honors including the Chevalier du Merit  (a designation second to the L gion d'Honneur). She does not describe herself as a darer, but rather as a dreamer. "If someone tells me no, I become more determined."

Abigail Kirsch was a mother of four children, (ages 3 - 8 years), had nothing to do, was living a bit of a bland life, and decided to create a cooking school in her home. She went to culinary school at the Cordon Bleu, became a chef, and founded Abigail Kirsch Culinary Productions in 1975, a highly respected catering company. She is a cookbook author, a freelance writer, editor, Trustee Emeritus CIA, Grand Dame 2003, and Past President LDEI and LDNY.

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Grande Dame Carol Brock, along with each of these women, dared to achieve their dreams and helped to pave the way for other women in the industry. Together with Les Dames d'Escoffier New York President Emily Snyder, Director of Sales and Marketing, Mandarin Oriental New York, these women are making a difference in the food and beverage and hospitality industries.

Happy 30th anniversary Les Dames d'Escoffier and thank you Carol Brock for creating this interesting society for professional women.

To learn more about [Les Dames d'Escoffier International](http://www.LdEI.org), please visit www.LdEI.org.

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