

Digging in

Tasty morsels about Chicago's food scene

ABOUT THE BLOG

A new blog for the fattest of days

JANET RAUSA FULLER



Sun-Times Food editor Janet Rausa Fuller is always thinking about her next meal.

LISA DONOVAN



For almost 20 years now, reporter Lisa Donovan has been hitting Chicago's neighborhood markets and restaurants not only for the best grub at the best prices but also as a way to understand the city's melting pot.

JAMES SCALZITTI



As Rhoda Morgenstern would say, food is the first thing Sun-Times Wire Service reporter James Scalzitti remembers liking that liked him back...

CATEGORIES

- [Apples \(1\)](#)
- [Appliances \(2\)](#)
- [Arab \(1\)](#)
- [At Home \(20\)](#)
- [At Work \(1\)](#)
- [Bacon \(5\)](#)
- [Bakeries \(10\)](#)
- [Bar food \(1\)](#)
- [Barbecue \(4\)](#)
- [Bars \(1\)](#)
- [Beer \(1\)](#)
- [Blogs \(1\)](#)
- [Burgers \(5\)](#)
- [Candy \(8\)](#)
- [Celebrities \(8\)](#)
- [Charitable \(4\)](#)
- [Chefs \(77\)](#)
- [Chicken \(1\)](#)
- [Cigars \(1\)](#)
- [City Hall \(1\)](#)
- [Coffee \(4\)](#)
- [Cookbooks \(12\)](#)
- [Cookies \(2\)](#)
- [Cooking \(11\)](#)
- [Cupcakes \(3\)](#)
- [Dessert \(1\)](#)
- [Diet \(2\)](#)
- [Doughnuts \(3\)](#)
- [Farmers \(4\)](#)
- [Farmers markets \(12\)](#)
- [Fast food \(2\)](#)
- [Festivals \(5\)](#)
- [Fish \(1\)](#)
- [Foie gras \(1\)](#)
- [Food Detective](#)
- [Food Network \(3\)](#)
- [Froel \(1\)](#)
- [Fruil \(1\)](#)
- [Garden \(3\)](#)
- [Green City Marker \(2\)](#)
- [Ham \(1\)](#)
- [Health Inspections \(3\)](#)
- [High Tech \(1\)](#)
- [Hot Dogs \(2\)](#)
- [Ice Cream \(1\)](#)
- [Israeli \(1\)](#)
- [James Beard Awards \(8\)](#)
- [Kids \(1\)](#)
- [Kitchen \(1\)](#)
- [Korean \(2\)](#)
- [Local food \(9\)](#)
- [Lunch \(1\)](#)
- [Magazines \(5\)](#)
- [Mayonnaise \(1\)](#)
- [Mexican \(1\)](#)
- [Mineral Water \(1\)](#)
- [Mixologists \(2\)](#)
- [Museums \(1\)](#)
- [Mushrooms](#)
- [Music \(1\)](#)
- [New Orleans \(4\)](#)
- [New York \(1\)](#)
- [Noodles \(1\)](#)
- [Nutrition \(1\)](#)
- [Obama \(5\)](#)
- [Olive Oil](#)
- [Olive oil \(1\)](#)
- [Organic \(1\)](#)
- [Pastry chefs \(1\)](#)
- [Peeps \(2\)](#)
- [Pies \(4\)](#)
- [Pizza \(3\)](#)
- [Pork \(3\)](#)
- [Recipes \(9\)](#)
- [Restaurants \(27\)](#)
- [Reviews \(1\)](#)
- [Schools \(1\)](#)
- [Seafood \(1\)](#)
- [Snacks \(1\)](#)
- [Sommeliers \(3\)](#)
- [Steakhouses \(1\)](#)
- [Supermarkets \(2\)](#)
- [Taste of Chicago \(1\)](#)
- [Tea \(1\)](#)
- [Technology \(2\)](#)
- [Television \(19\)](#)
- [Theater \(1\)](#)
- [Tomatoes \(1\)](#)
- [Top Chef \(13\)](#)
- [Trade shows \(9\)](#)
- [Travel \(1\)](#)
- [USDA \(1\)](#)
- [Vegetarian](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Web sites \(3\)](#)
- [White House \(1\)](#)
- [Wine \(6\)](#)

TAG CLOUD

top chef chefs masters restaurant food market chef awards bavless wine chicago local recipe show twitter dinner farmers magazine bakery best

In the Beard House kitchen with Sunda's Rodelio Aglibot

By Janet Fuller on November 9, 2009 2:04 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

By guest blogger and New York writer Seanan Forbes



On Friday, Rodelio Aglibot abandoned [Sunda](#), 110 W. Illinois Street (leaving it in the hands of a more than able crew) and took over the kitchen of the James Beard House, 167 W. 12th in New York City.

Aglibot's fantastic, the [menu](#) looked phenomenal, and I wanted in - not in the dining room, but the kitchen.

As is his way, Aglibot did the unexpected: He said yes.

That was Wednesday. This is three o'clock on Friday afternoon, and I find myself in a compact kitchen with an impressive array of chefs: Aglibot; James Gottwald, executive chef of [Rockit Bar & Grill](#) and corporate chef of Rockit Ranch Productions; Jesse Deguzman, Sunda's sushi chef, and chef Frank Fronda (below, right). Volunteers from the French Culinary Institute are putting in hours, as well.



Gottwald and Deguzman look like undergraduate students, but the kitchen buzzes with professionalism - and camaraderie. Aglibot, Gottwald and Deguzman are a three-man Chicago team. Fronda and Aglibot travelled around Asia together, and they co-own [Baba's Pasta](#), an artisanal pasta company.

This isn't a tight-knit group; it's a strong, effective sailor's knot - one flexible enough to add a writer to its curves.

In a kitchen this small, order is a necessity. Plates are stacked in neat readiness, a numbered piece of paper atop each pile indicating which course it will bear. In other areas, food seethes, awaits chopping, chills, or is divided into portions. Aglibot's in and out, giving directions, streamlining production, nudging, tasting, keeping people working and making them laugh.

Aglibot talks about the importance of love in food, but laughter is a key ingredient in his kitchen. It makes sense. A miserable crew isn't going to prepare happy dishes.

Guests enter through the kitchen, stopping to gawp happily, admire what they're going to eat and take photographs of Aglibot. Gottwald's wife pauses to flirt with her husband. They were married only six days ago. They joke about this being their honeymoon and thank Aglibot for the lunch he spotted them at the [Four Seasons](#) on East 52nd.

Each person has a specific task: plate this, drizzle that, garnish the other thing. Hands fly in speedy coordination. Silence falls, save for the occasional, "Add more of this," or, "Keep the plates moving."

The hors d'ouvres are served with a choice of Sunda's pear sake of Champagne Krug Grand Cuvée NV - not that this matters in the kitchen, where temperatures and speed are rising.

Bluefin tuna belly with pan-seared sushi rice, scallions and wasabi tobiko is a wealth of contrasts: cool fish, warmly crisp-topped rice, and a blend of freshly grated wasabi and flying fish roe. Poached shrimp in a Sunda's addictive egg sauce blister brightly as Gottwald takes a torch to them. Beef curls around lemongrass to form savory lollipops.

Once they're out, a bottle of Champagne is produced, and Aglibot toasts his team. He tells them to remember that nobody does this alone, that they should always appreciate their crews.

A few minutes later, the Champagne glasses are gone and the fires are high again. I barely get a glimpse of the roasted duck hash on daikon cakes. Served with crispy duck skin and egg yolk tartare, they are whisked away almost as fast as they're compiled. The counters are wiped down and plates neatly arranged on the clean space. They slide along the counter: grilled pork belly meets seared big-eye tuna, garlic vinaigrette, pickled radishes and sweet chile sauce, and servers' hands claim them.

Sushi is prettily laid out: escolar nigiri with potato chips and shaved truffles, miso-marinated black cod nigiri with pickled ginger and lobster maki with Wagyu beef tataki and truffled foie gras aioli. Its elegant array belies the organized chaos that saw it prepped and plated. I have tasted this chaos, and I'm buzzing, every bit as much as the chefs and culinary students.

Somewhere in the sweep, Deguzman had reminded me that I wanted to be put to work, and he'd handed me a bottle and instructions: drizzle this over that. I don't know what time it is, but I do know I'm not going to sleep tonight.

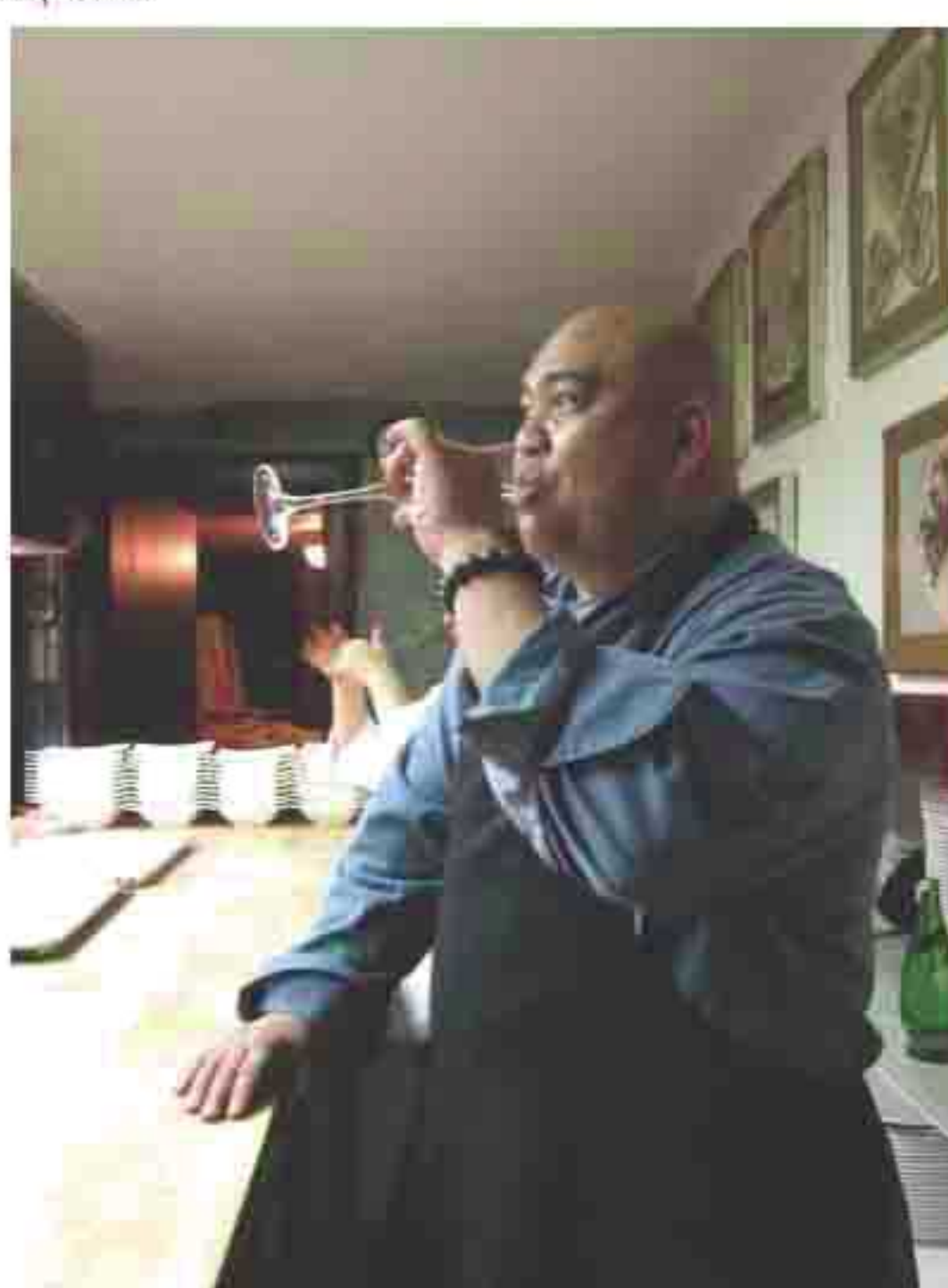
The palate cleanser is pretty: pale green avocado mousse with frozen lychee compote is adorned with perfect raspberries. Aglibot's nature is to think "avocado" and "sweet"; he grew up eating it as a fruit.

A quick clean, and the kitchen's ready for the next course: ginger-braised Midwest long ribs with lobster-scented arroz caldo. I think of arroz caldo as Filipino congee - comfort food. This rich stuff is comfortable luxury.

Finally, we're at the end, back in the Philippines with chocolate rice pudding. Served with preserved coconut, toasted coconut flakes and shards of pork, this is a spin on a traditional Filipino breakfast. It's a long way from a bowl of cornflakes or a poached egg.

As the dishes leave the kitchen, the culinary students and I eye them jealously. Opened bottles of wine appear on a counter. Champagne is poured and Aglibot toasts the evening and his crew. He also says that every leftover should be eaten or taken home by the kitchen and house staff. Food should not go to waste. Nothing does.

It is a sensible ending to a profligate meal and a night of hard work. It's also typical Aglibot: enjoy life to the full, but stay grounded, be both great and grateful and always - always - keep it real.



Categories: [Chefs](#), [James Beard Awards](#), [New York](#), [Restaurants](#)

Tags: [house](#), [james beard](#), [james gottwald](#), [kitchen](#), [new york](#), [rodelio aglibot](#), [sunda](#)

SEARCH

Subscribe to this blog's feed

ARCHIVES

 Select a Month...

RECENT ENTRIES

- [If only everyone were as good as farmers](#)
- [In the Beard House kitchen with Sunda's Rodelio Aglibot](#)
- [It's end in tears](#)
- [Don Roth's Blackhawk to close after four decades](#)
- [Dough! 'Pizza Boy' wins bet to eat pizza for an entire month!](#)

FOOD FINDS

- [Chicagoist](#)
- [Chicago Bites](#)
- [Chicago Gluttons](#)
- [Dining Chicago](#)
- [eGullet](#)
- [Food Chain](#)
- [Food on the Dole](#)
- [Gapers Block, Drive-Thru](#)
- [Hungry Magazine](#)
- [The Local Beat](#)
- [LTHForum](#)
- [Grub Street Chicago](#)
- [The Paupered Chef](#)
- [Real Food Rehab](#)
- [Sky Full of Bacon](#)
- [The Stew](#)
- [Timeout Chicago](#)

RECENT PHOTOS

