

# 5TH ANNIVERSARY

BY TRACEY RYDER AND CAROLE TOPALIAN

Five years ago, *Edible Ojai* was a sepia-toned newsletter with holes drilled on its left side so that it could be easily stored in a typical 3-ring binder. It was a skinny sixteen-pager filled to the brim with great stories, lovely hand-drawn illustrations, a solid base of advertisers and a handful of photographs to go along with the articles. Its pages also contained some of the more intangible and less obvious qualities that make Ojai what it is: a valley of big-hearted, creative spirits who recognize the value in being part of a *real* community.

I remember the first time the concept of *Edible Ojai* came into being. It was a rainy November morning in 2001. Carole and I had just returned from my father's funeral in Upstate New York and were having one of those conversations where you try and figure out the meaning of life, vow to not waste any more time, and to make changes in your daily life so that the work you do feels rewarding and meaningful. Together, we literally "talked" *Edible Ojai* into existence that rainy morning.

Later on that week we had dinner at the home of our friend and *Edible Ojai* editor, Jane Handel, where we talked about our idea a bit more. Jane and her daughter Ramona, both great writers, promised to become contributors and to help in any way they could (they kept their promise, both have articles in this issue). A few nights later it was onto the Couturié's (and yes, another dinner). Kathy immediately knew she wanted to do a column based on the style of Herb Caen's "three-dot journalism" pieces that ran in the *San Francisco Chronicle* from the late 30s until his death in 1997, so that evening Kathy's very own "Ojai 3-Dot" was born. From there we called Steve Fields and Sims Brannon, who had recently relocated to Ojai. Although we had only met Steve and Sims a couple of times before calling them to ask for help, they immediately agreed to write articles and create recipes (and to feed us some really terrific meals along the way too)! I'm not clear on who joined our group next but I know Kate Hoffman and Mary Ogle came on board early. (Mary is our gifted web and production guru who has never missed a single issue in five years and Kate created our original logo and all of the beautiful illustrations



that have graced our pages since the beginning.) I think Jim Churchill was next. All I remember about Jim becoming a regular contributor is that I ended up on board his tractor, mowing a good chunk of his grove on a warm summer day and believed (and still do) that I got the better end of our working arrangement. Jim encouraged others to join us as well: his wife, Lisa Brenneis, Emily Thacher (now Emily Ayala), Camille Sears, and the ever-valuable copy editing team of Doug Adrianson and Hope Frasier. Eventually, we grew to include Cherie Beers, Alice de Dadelsen Asquith, Anna Thomas, Claud Mann, and countless others.

In addition to our devoted core of writers, designers, copy editors, photographers, and artists, we remain on solid ground today because of the ongoing

support we enjoy from our readers, advertisers and subscribers. In fact, in the five years since we started, we have maintained a 95% renewal rate on subscriptions and continue to fill our pages with ads from local businesses that rarely, if ever, miss an issue—rare occurrences in the world of publishing.

Not only are we grateful to this community for contributing to the success of *Edible Ojai*, we have been overwhelmed with support from several of you who have played an instrumental role in helping us grow Edible Communities—our family of 29 similar publications now reaching 7 million readers nationwide and in Canada each year. In only three years, Edible Communities has become the third largest food publisher in the United States—and it all began right here.

Today, the 3-ring binder holes and sepia tones are gone, each issue is over forty pages long and *Edible Ojai* has become a full-fledged magazine with beautiful full-color photographs on its covers. They say it takes a village to raise a child. We like to say it takes one to grow a magazine too. And with Ojai being Ojai, it didn't grow just one magazine. It grew one that launched close to 30 others (and counting). Thanks Ojai!

Tracey Ryder and Carole Topalian  
Co-founders, *Edible Ojai* and Edible Communities