



"The Best Of..."

by Cat Lambert

Could the story behind an event, a meal, or a restaurant intrigue and entertain most audiences more than the actual item? Marc Silverstein and Jill Cordes answer this question with an emphatic "Yes!" and base their book, *The Best of The Best Of*, on this premise.

Their deliciously candid interview, shared with myself and *Mid-Atlantic Events Magazine's* publisher Jim Cohn during *The Book and the Cook* this past spring, introduces an entirely new angle to their adventures: the storytellers themselves.



For a taste of the book and the authors' approach, here is a bite of the introduction to the section devoted to us: The Mid-Atlantic.

"What makes this region great is its brash attitude. New Yorkers are blunt; Philadelphians have their own unique swagger; while power-hungry Washingtonians exhibit the best of

Pittsburgh and why a Big Apple chef raises bees on his rooftop."

Going beyond restaurant facades, *The Best of The Best Of* dives into the stories of each region's best food finds. The Book and The Cook (a food, restaurant and cookbook celebration in the Philadelphia region) invites celebrity chefs, TV personalities, and cookbook authors to partici-

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Northern hospitality and Southern efficiency. When it comes to discussing restaurants in the Mid-Atlantic states, the only way to keep everyone happy is to keep them arguing. Fortunately, there's plenty to debate in this chapter... We'll explain how French fries ended up on sandwiches in

pate in 60 culinary restaurant-based events each spring.

The Joseph Ambler Inn graciously welcomed Marc Silverstein and Jill Cordes (hosts of the Food Network's *The Best Of*) to contribute a few recipes from their book and many stories about why the

chosen recipes stand out. Jim Cohn and I had the chance to sit down with Marc Silverstein for about an hour before the event. Within just a few minutes, we understood the importance of good story telling and became fascinated with Marc's ease of language, punctuated by humor, as well as his disarming and honest nature.

Both Jill and Marc worked as broadcast journalists before teaming up with the Food Network. Marc admits, "[Before the show,] I didn't know anything about food... I was lucky to go to McDonald's on the way to a trauma... [The Best Of is] not about food, it's about telling good stories. Go in like a news crew and come away with a story."

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Their food knowledge has only grown with first-hand experiences. While Marc confided that he originally knew nothing of food, he now finds himself hosting food demonstrations. He reveals, "I like to [demonstrate] Brie stuffed French toast that I got from the Valley Green Inn here in Philly, in Fairmount Park. The light kinda went off for me [at the Valley Green Inn], 'Ya know, I could do some of this stuff.' So now I've become sort of a cook and I encourage other people. It's not that hard! You don't have to have a background. You just have to like to eat. Most people like to eat something."

He says that he considers himself lucky that his cooking classes have been alongside some of the country's greatest chefs.

Both Pennsylvania natives, Marc Silverstein and Jill Cordes toured one of the state's best assets on their first show: Pats Steaks in Philadelphia. It was a natural first stop for the show. Marc reflects, "I have a special place in my heart for Pats... [I] spent many nights after events at Pats."

About the book, he enthusiastically says, "It's fun, well at least we [Jill and I] think it's fun! It's fun because it has all these destinations - places we really like - and

85 chefs, whether Mom-and-Pops or Charlie Parkers, to give us recipes."

Produced in Gulph Mills, the show (especially the first episodes) emphasizes the Mid-Atlantic region due to an interesting circumstance. Very openly, Marc divulged that at the time of the show's beginning, his wife's first pregnancy grew more difficult. Due to the "Spencer Phenomenon" (the birth of his son), the Food Network "very nicely" allowed Marc to "hop trains" to regional areas rather than send him across the country. This kept him close to his expectant wife.

After our interview with Marc, Jill joined us for a few minutes before dinner. Jill's energy and enthusiasm reflect how much she enjoys working on the show. The rapport between this great duo shines in person and easily carries into their compilation book of restaurants. *The Best of The Best Of* highlights all of Marc and Jill's favorite stories from the show's episodes.

Divided into regions, the book is an exceptional tool for the meeting planner. Not only does it provide suggestions for restaurants, but it also goes further and gives a story with each location. It's a wonderful gift for your guests and even more meaningful when you dine at one of the restaurants featured in the book.

The story behind your guests' dinner will offer more than simply a meal - it will present a unique experience that they can impart to their family and friends. As a bonus, this gesture will also show your guests their event took creative planning.

Beyond the hospitality angle of great food, *The Best of The Best Of* offers two

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incredible treasures for events: Marc Silverstein and Jill Cordes. Marc and Jill both frequently speak at engagements throughout the country. Their natural conversation and humor make them exceptional candidates for any event. From their experience hosting an event at a Giant Food Store (great story) to Marc's Smithsonian classes at Zola in DC, they both have the ability to make every crowd feel welcomed and to create a unique experience for their audiences.

Also, in the months since our spring interview, I have learned that two new shows are on the horizon! In addition to *The Best Of*, Jill Cordes will host "My First Place" on HGTV this September, while Marc Silverstein is hosting "Go Ahead, Make My Dinner" on the Discovery Channel, which began this summer.

Jill says she is looking forward to her new show, explaining, "We [the show] follow

first time homebuyers... Buying your first home is a bit of a milestone and that is part of the story element to our show."

My First Place shows the homebuyer in their current space (rental property or family home) and follows them through their move-in. One of the show's designers then helps the buyer redecorate a room to make their new place feel more like home. Finally, the show reveals the new home to friends and family.

Marc describes *Go Ahead, Make My Dinner* as, "a very fast-paced, exciting cook-off show." He continues, "The audience learns great cooking techniques from the best chefs." Saying he learned more in a week about cooking on *Go Ahead, Make My Dinner* than during his five years on *The Best Of*, Marc believes the new show has more of an emphasis on learning rather than competition. Catch his show at noon every weekday.

Marc also has a column, "At the Table," in each issue of *DC Style* magazine, where he interviews a local celebrity "foodie." *Philadelphia Style* will soon run a Philly version of Marc's column. Vince Papale (the oldest rookie, walk on player in the NFL) will talk with Marc and give his take on Philadelphia foods.

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For more information about *The Best of The Best Of* book, visit www.bestofbook.com. To reach its hosts, contact Marc: goaheadmarc@aol.com or Jill: jill@bestofbook.com

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