

Place: Los Angeles
Setting: Discotheque
Time: 1979



There was a time when BARBARA LAZAROFF, the storm-in-a-Wonderland-size-teacup restaurant designer, wanted to be a doctor.

“I was a Jewish girl from New York, studying medicine in Los Angeles, working hard and never going out,” she says, readjusting a gargantuan fuchsia bow in her waist-length black hair with a perfectly manicured thumb and forefinger. “Just working, working, working.”

“My friend Francesca was always after me to go to her club. She’d call and say, ‘Come on, come on, go out, go out, go out.’ Finally I said, ‘Okay, okay, I’ll go.’”

“So we went to this discotheque and sat there watching everybody dance—” she says.

“With your halo on, right?” says WOLFGANG PUCK, world-famous and cute to boot Austrian inventor of American cuisine, taking a break from the grill at Eureka, their converted-brewery restaurant collaboration in West Hollywood.

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"No, actually in those days I wore a flower in my hair. A real flower."

"And you had a dress slit up to here," he says, pointing to his hip.

"My birthday dress . . . do you remember the color?"

"Purple . . . no, burgundy, right?"

"Hey, I'm impressed. . . . Anyway, Wolf was sitting near me, but there was this fake painter between us—"

"He was a real painter," Wolf protests, laughing.

"A fake painter . . . he was a real *gigolo* who had decided to become a painter," Barbara continues. "Only his work looked exactly like everyone else's. This guy had too many lines, and I'm aggressive enough as it is. He kept bugging me, so I asked Wolf to dance."

After one dance (Barbara still complains about Wolf's stepping on her feet; he looks . . . sheepish) they sat and talked for the rest of the evening. She was a med student who liked to cook. He was a chef who liked to teach. He asked her to come to his cooking class the next day at Ma Maison.

"I thought she was a Beverly Hills type and probably wouldn't show up," Puck says.

"He was very good-looking and didn't speak enough English to insult me, so why not?" she replies.

However, the following day, she got lost en route to the restaurant and barely made the last five minutes of Wolfgang's class. "He was shy, keeping his eyes lowered as he talked," Barbara says, "but as he scooped a big wad of butter into his hand, he looked up, saw me standing in the back of the room, and dropped the butter—splat—on the floor."

"I blushed . . . turned bright red," Wolf says. "You see, the class was usually filled with little old ladies—"

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“—who were always telling you how adorable you were, hugging you to their ample breasts.”

Afterward he bought her an orange juice and tried to hold her hand.

“She kept pulling her hand away and told me she was involved with someone else. She said she just wanted to be friends. Be friends . . . sure, I’d heard that before.”

“Even though I was dating someone else, I knew I was a goner,” says Barbara.

A week later Wolf went to Europe, and Barbara took care of his Doberman, Bishop.

“The dog was psychotic. Wolf was never home—he’s a workaholic—the dog was nuts, couldn’t relate to human beings, so I’d visit Bishop every day, look into his eyes, massage his neck, and talk to him. I was rehabilitating him.”

“And I was rehabilitating you,” Wolf says, and they both laugh.

After *The Wolfgang Puck Cookbook* was launched and the Barbara Lazaroff design business was under way, after the opening of their restaurants (Spago and Chinois on Main in L.A. and Postrio in San Francisco) and after four years of a stormy relationship, Wolf finally said, “This is ridiculous. How are we going to get married if we don’t get along better?”

“I remember we were in the bedroom,” Barbara says, “and I leaned over, looked him straight in the eye, and said, ‘This is *it*, buster; this *is* as good as it’s gonna get.’ ”

“So I proposed to her . . . and we still don’t get along.”

They were married twice, once in L.A., where they spent their wedding night on the concrete floor of Chinois, which was to open the next day, and once again in the south of France.

“I spent a year preparing for the wedding in Les Baux,” Bar-

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bara says, hand-painting, printing, and rolling wedding invitations in three languages, arranging the horse-drawn carriages for the bridal party, the knights in shining armor, the chocolatiers and jugglers. "My gown was created by Zandra Rhodes, seven yards of printed chiffon cascading from a wimple, white on cream on white; everyone was in medieval costume. . . ."

"Peter Allen played the piano, the food was from L'Ousteau de Beaumanière [one of the few three-star Michelin-rated restaurants in the world, where Wolf apprenticed], and," he adds, sounding a bit weary, "the wedding lasted seventeen hours."

"All the townspeople thought we were royalty," Barbara says. "Little did they know I was just a girl from the Bronx who had always dreamed of a fairy-tale wedding."

Barbara Lazaroff is an interior designer. *Wolfgang Puck* is a chef. They live in Beverly Hills with their young son and an assortment of cats, parrots, and llamas.