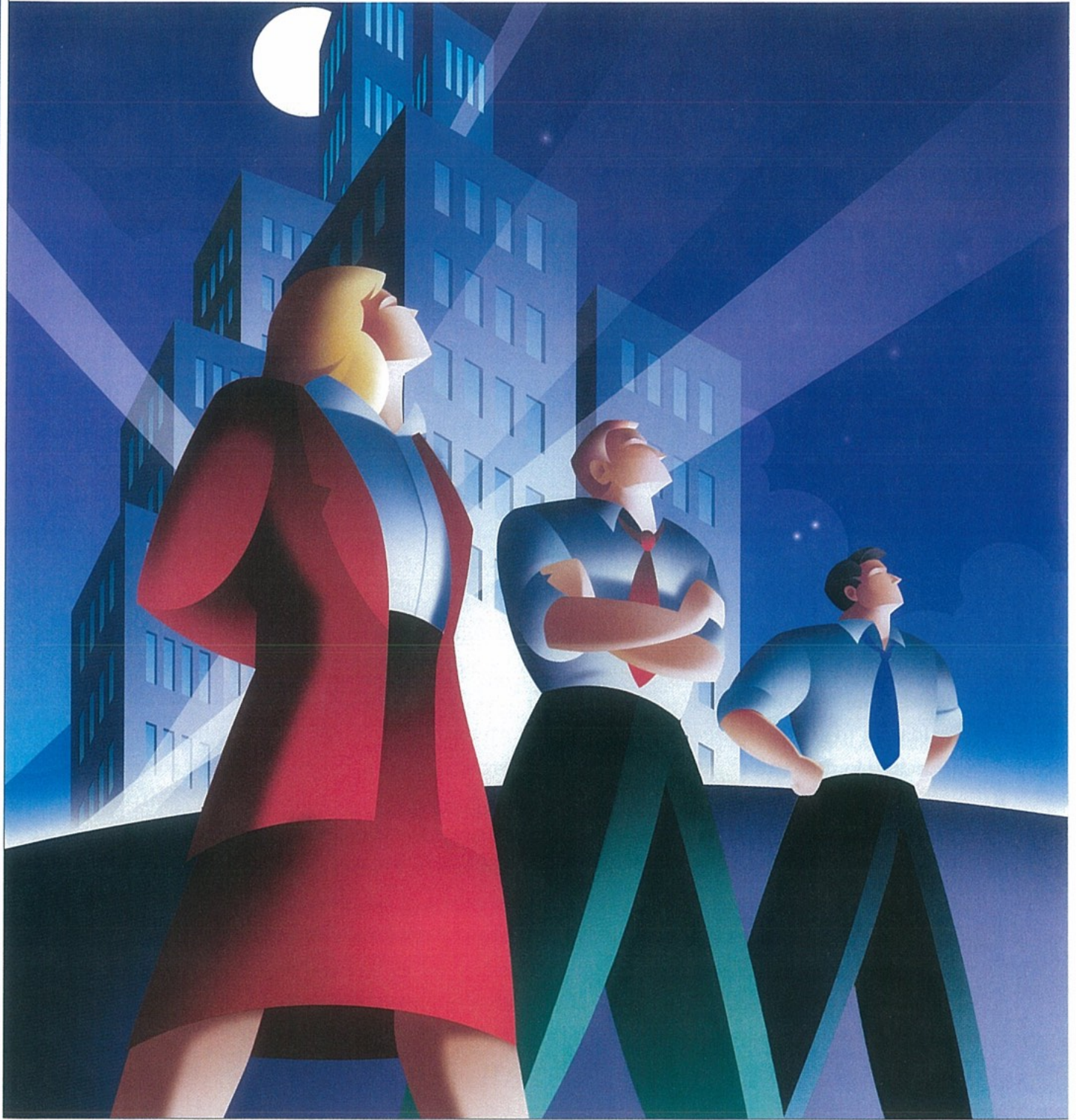


 A Bill Publication

Restaurant

B U S I N E S S



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Perfect Vision

RB honors six leaders whose wisdom, dedication and spirit go above and beyond.

LOOK IN THE DICTIONARY for the definition of “leader” and you won’t find much of an idea. “Something that leads,” say, or “something that ranks first,” or perhaps “a person who has commanding authority or influence.”

But look to the restaurant industry for that definition, and suddenly you find a whole lot more. Like, for example, the executive who changed a company’s culture and brought it back from the stigma of racial discrimination. Or the wife of a celebrity chef who used her innovative sense of style and unassailable work ethic to help build one of the nation’s most prestigious restaurant empires. You’ll also find the self-made CEO who took a simple snackfood and transformed it from a regional favorite into a national cult. They, to us, define what it means to be a leader, to go above and beyond a job description to make it in the toughest business around, and change lives in the process.

For the third year, *Restaurant Business* recognizes six extraordinary entrepreneurs with its High Impact Leadership Awards, which will be officially conferred at the Restaurant Leadership Conference in Phoenix, AZ, March 18-22.

This year’s winners were selected in six segment categories by a panel of *RB* staff members and industry experts. All were chosen for the innovation, guidance and success they have demonstrated thus far. But as you will read in the following pages, this year’s honorees, as true leaders, are already looking far ahead.

E D I T E D B Y V I C T O R W I S H N A

Barbara Lazaroff is a master at building image, but the one she's often saddled with just isn't fair. As Lazaroff and her husband of 20 years, Wolfgang Puck, have built an elaborate restaurant empire from a single Spago, she has become known as much for her flamboyant appearance and personality as for her crafty business acumen and vibrant interior designs. Labeling her "opulent" and "aggressive," the local press often refers to her as the "Queen of Beverly Hills" and never fails to mention the pet llamas she keeps in her backyard.

But those who know her best see Lazaroff as a dynamic leader who fills many roles: savvy

entrepreneur, stylish innovator, valued mentor. "She's probably one of the most misunderstood people around," says Nancy Silverton, who worked under Lazaroff as Spago's pastry chef and now owns the Campanile Restaurant in Los Angeles. "She's an incredibly talented and intelligent woman. Extremely hardworking. And she has the biggest heart."

As for being "aggressive," Lazaroff does what it takes. Growing up poor as the daughter of a supermarket manager in the Bronx, NY, she studied biochemistry and psychology in college before opening her own interior design company in Los Angeles. There she met Puck in a nightclub and soon convinced the then-chef at Ma Maison that he should be his own boss.

Since opening the original Hollywood Spago in 1982, the couple has opened four more around the country and added four other fine-dining concepts, including Postrio in San Francisco and Chinois in Santa Monica and Las Vegas. They also launched the Wolfgang Puck Food Co., which includes retail food lines and 32 Wolfgang Puck Cafes, which Lazaroff all but single-handedly rolled out in shopping malls and non-traditional locations such as airports and amusement parks.

"If she puts herself behind a project, it's going to get done," says New York restaurant and food consultant Clark

Barbara Lazaroff, Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining; Wolfgang Puck Food Co.



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Wolf. "She has an enormous amount of energy."

Still, Lazaroff is known primarily for her restaurant interiors—for example, the colorful tiled decor that distinguishes Spago and the Cafes—and is also thought of as the innovator of several design elements, including the exhibition kitchen.

"She was definitely one of the instigators in creating a total restaurant environment that showcased the food and created a unique experience," Silverton says. "Before that, food was the only thing that mattered."

Along with her husband, Lazaroff is active in philanthropy. The American Food and Wine Festival, which she first organized in the parking lot of Spago 17 years ago, raises \$300,000-\$400,000 annually for L.A. Meals-on-Wheels.

Spago and other concepts have produced numerous offspring who have opened their own successful restaurants, such as Silverton and Anne and David Gingrass of San Francisco's Hawthorne Lane. They credit Lazaroff for her encouragement, saying her compassion and care reveal her to be less queen and more mother.

"She looks at every single employee as one of her children and encourages them to grow," Silverton says. "She's a role model. I've looked to her to see what it means to be a successful restaurateur."

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