

coverstory

Young & Talented

Ten artsy adults who bring harmony
and color to our world

What is it that makes a person creative? Is it something that can be inherited, like eye color? A gene passed down through generations? Can it be caused by the environment? A specific circumstance, a twist of fate?

Children are endlessly creative. But many of us seem to lose that ability as we move on through the years. Picasso said he had spent his life trying to get back to that place, the lost world of childhood, where creativity flowed so freely.

That makes it sound as though creativity was nothing but fun, like children's play. Of course, anyone who knows is aware that the truly creative — artists, musicians, writers — work extremely hard. Someone once called genius "an infinite capacity for taking pains."

The 10 young people profiled here have almost nothing in common. Their backgrounds vary so widely there are no conclusions to be drawn as to what makes creativity thrive. A musician is born to musicians — this we can understand. But an artist spends years in a military career? A writer is stirred into life after experiencing the hard discipline of total silence?

There are no rules here. The child of scientists becomes an artist; an Orthodox young woman is born with the cool eye of a photojournalist.

The creative urge can grow slowly, evolve naturally, or burst out all of a sudden in a blaze of glory.

No hard and fast rules. And only one basic similarity.

Each of these 10, in his or her own way, is involved in bringing something new to the world.

Judy Oppenheimer Kirsten Beckerman

Jay Cohen

chef

You talk creative fields, you're talking Jews. Visual arts, drama, music, literature, comedy, you name it — Jews are all over the place. It's hard to take a step without stumbling over one of us. With one exception.

The world of food. Jewish chefs are extremely rare.

Which is odd, in a way, food being such an important part of the culture. Why else would so many secular types describe themselves as culinary Jews? We have, you might say, a special interest, honed from birth, at our mother's, or grandmother's, table.

And that may be the point. Chefs are usually men. Sexist or not, few of us cherish memories of Dad's brisket, *Zayde's* blintzes. So maybe it's not surprising so few have gone into the field.

Jay Cohen is the exception, and he knows it. "I don't look for it, but I hear chef's names all the time, and I don't think any of them are Jews. I think I'm a rarity of sorts."

A lifelong Baltimorean, Mr. Cohen, 42, "always had an interest in good food." A stint as a purchasing agent at the then newly opened Harbor Court Hotel some years ago sparked it more. He trained at Baltimore International College, worked at a number of restaurants in the area (Harriman House, Lynwood's, D.C.'s Filomena's), honing his craft — and last fall, opened his own restaurant, Mia Carolina, in Glyndon (4844 Butler Road).

He had a few qualms, initially. "I had to sort through it. A Jew boy from Owings Mills buying an Italian restaurant in Glynmont? How's that going to play out?" He discussed it with an older friend in the business. "He was very level-headed. He said, Jay — no one in Baltimore does authentic Italian anyway. Don't worry about it. Do what you do and do it well and you'll be fine."

"It immediately put me at ease."

For Mr. Cohen, it's all about flavor — "I'm always looking for a way to create flavor." He and his top chef collaborate, coming up with new ideas. Black oil, for instance ... an intense concentration of balsamic vinegar. A new use of port wine. Or sage.

There was an Italian restaurant on the site already, serving "good, pedestrian food." Mr. Cohen remodeled the interior, revamped the menu, and, as he says, has "given it a good kick. Jazzed it, freshened it up."

The menu is always evolving. A baker has been hired, so next to come is a homemade dessert menu — "which I think is crucial."

The restaurant is named for his 5-year-old daughter, whose picture is featured throughout. Doesn't 3-year-old Teddy feel a little miffed? "You're only the 100th person to ask me that," Mr. Cohen said. A charcoal sketch of both children hangs in the entrance, which hopefully will console Teddy for a while.

He grew up eating well, and still appreciates Jewish food, even if that's not what he's serving up these days.

"I can make a brisket. Of course, it's not like my mother's brisket," he admitted.

