

## Faces: Zoe Nathan

### Nathan Talks Shop About Community, The Joys Baking, And Having A Hubby-Cum-Business Partner

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Posted: 05/27/2009 04:06:06 PM PDT



Santa Monica native Zoe Nathan has had her talented hands in just about every part of the restaurant industry doing things like butchering at Lupa in New York, line cooking at Joe's in Venice, and baking at San Francisco's Tartine. But it was during her gig as pastry chef at Rustic Canyon, Santa Monica's seasonal-inspired cuisine powerhouse, where, after meeting her future husband and business partner Josh Loeb, she decided to stir things up and venture out on her own. Now the two have opened up their breakout project just down the street at [Huckleberry Bakery and Café](#), where they dish up Californian comfort food. After our [recent visit](#) to Huckleberry, we talked to Zoe Nathan about the importance of community, the joys baking, and what it's like when your husband is not only your partner at home, but also at work.

#### **LA.com: How did you meet your husband and business partner, Josh Loeb?**

Zoe Nathan: We were set up by our moms, who were in a book club together. Josh was still in another relationship at the time and I had just come out of one, but Josh's mom kept pushing us to meet. When he called me to come meet him at Rustic, I wasn't sure if it was a date, or a job interview, since I knew he was looking for a pastry chef at the time. It was very difficult to pick the right outfit that could work in both cases. Well, I left that day with only a job offer, but we worked together for a few months, and really just loved being around each other. He asked me out on a date one day, and that was that.

#### **LA.com: What are the pros and cons of working with your husband?**

ZN: Honestly, there are no cons. I love it. He's my best friend, he supports me, he does a lot of the stuff that I don't like to do. Plus he tells me I'm beautiful when I've been working for 16 hours straight and my hair is caked in flour. It's great.

#### **LA.com: What made you decide to open Huckleberry?**

ZN: I was frustrated because I never really felt like a pastry chef at heart. I've always felt like a baker. I told Josh that I wanted to cook breakfast stuff because that was my favorite meal, so we decided to do Saturday morning breakfast at Rustic. It turned out to be a big success. At the time we were looking to do a bar project, so we were checking out spaces, but our broker turned us onto Pick Up Stix just down the street. I looked at it, and I knew it was perfect. We walked out of the space and I was so excited that I promised Josh that if he got that space for us I would take care of him forever (which of course I would do anyway).

#### **LA.com: How hard was it to transform the former Pick Up Stix location into Huckleberry?**

ZN: Not as hard as getting up at 3AM every morning! In truth, we had some great people involved so it was pretty easy. Our architects (Montalba Architects) did an amazing job of getting the Pick up Stix out of there and bringing a ton of light in, which I love. We had the best contractor (Ben Lunsky, Sarlan Builders) who got us through inspections three days ahead of schedule, and then my Mom did the finishing touches like art work, flowers and colors to make the place feel warm and comfortable.

**LA.com: How is running Huckleberry different from Rustic Canyon?**

ZN: It's a lot harder, because now I'm the boss. I get scared, stressed out and frustrated. I have to schedule and hire, and manage people and honestly that's my least favorite part of the job. A lot of times I just want to be left alone to bake or cook, but it's also been rewarding as well. I LOVE my team.

**LA.com: Huckleberry serves "seasonal comfort food." What do you mean by that exactly?**

ZN: We serve the kind of food we want to eat. The seasonal aspect is that like Rustic, or any other food thing we will ever do, we believe in only using local produce from local farmers because we think it tastes better. The changes in the market are the main source of inspiration for our menu.

**LA.com: You create a real sense of community with your menu-cheese from Andrew's Cheese Shop, coffees from Café Luxxe, plates from a Venice artist. Why is that important to you?**

ZN: Community is the most important thing for us. We opened Huckleberry so we could have a place where our friends and regulars and family could come in and say hi and get something to eat or drink throughout the day. We like to support and be involved with other businesses that seem to be focused on the same thing.

**LA.com: What are you growing in the garden you started behind the café, and why?**

ZN: The back was pretty ugly when it was Pick Up Stix, and we wanted it to be more attractive. We wanted it to be edible because both Josh and I love edible plants over ornamental stuff, and we grow all kinds of stuff: tomatoes, passion fruit, peppers, tons of herbs, baby greens, blueberries, strawberries. It's really fun to sit out there and take a break, and watching stuff grow, even in small quantities it really inspires us.

**LA.com: We know you don't have a ton of free time, but what are some of your places to eat out in L.A.?**

ZN: Honestly, our favorite place to eat is at Rustic after a long day. We grab a couple of seats in the corner of the bar at 5:30 and eat Evan's delicious food. It helps Josh feel connected to Rustic at a time when Huck is taking so much attention. When we venture out we like to eat at Pizzeria Mozza.. We have sushi at least once a week at Kiriko on Sawtelle, and at Typhoon in the Santa Monica Airport ,which is our comfort food Thai place in our neighborhood. We also pick up Israeli food from this small place called Habayit on Pico which we love as well.