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Angie Yazzie

Naranjo at Singular Couture

the Women of Niman Fine Art

The Native Table

Feel Good AND Modern GENERAL

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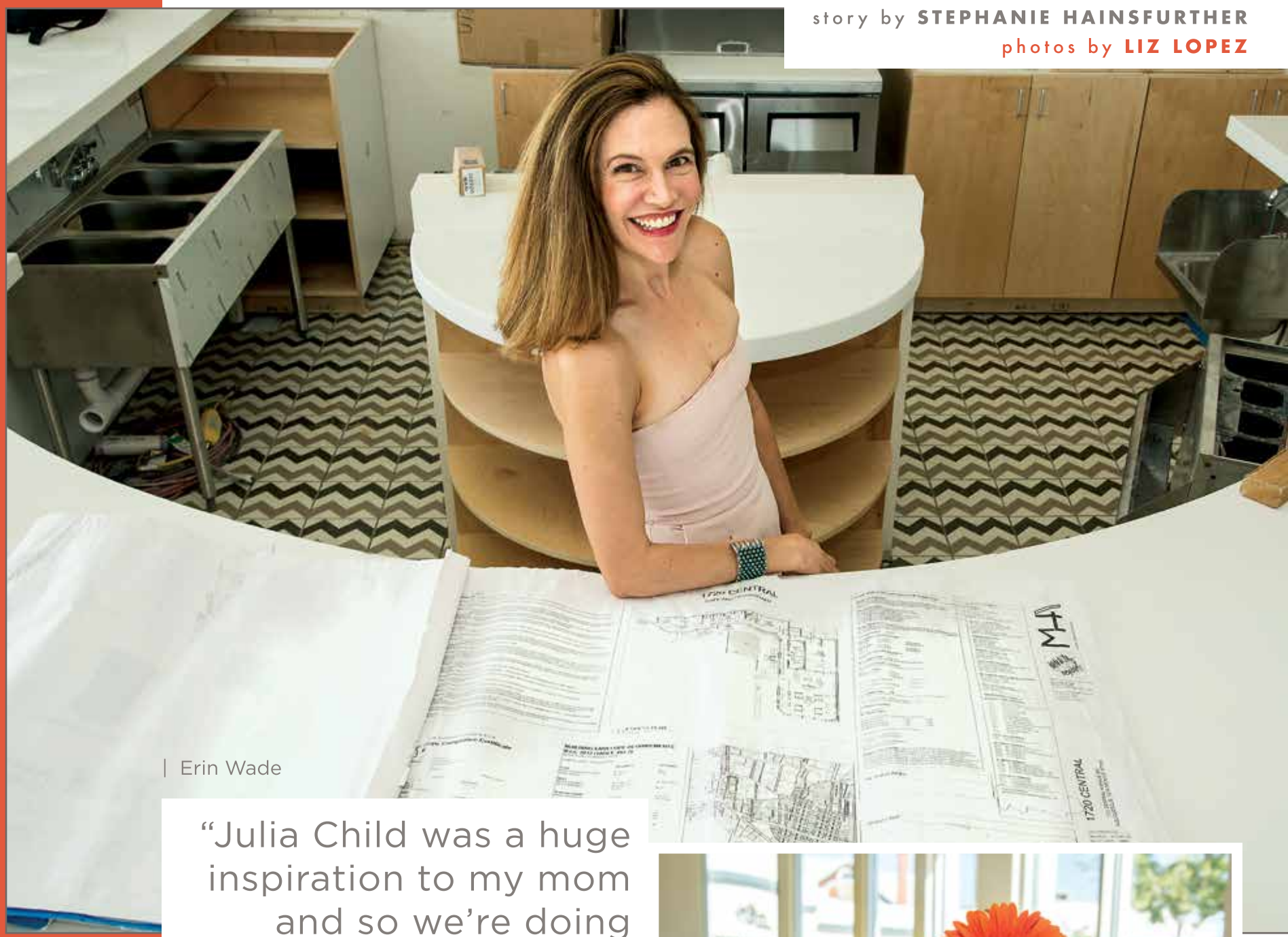

| Erin Wade

"Julia Child was a huge inspiration to my mom and so we're doing a French-inflected housewife cuisine. It's all about an emotional experience. ..."

Tradition and innovation sound like opposites, and we've learned to expect one or the other when dining out, never both. Erin Wade is out to raise those expectations. The enthusiastic entrepreneur who brought Vinaigrette to Albuquerque isn't finished reinventing Old Town's culinary landscape. Her new restaurant, The Feel Good, is set to open slightly east of Vinaigrette on Aug. 12; and when it does, you can expect all the feels and all the tastes, too.

If a wine bar and comfort food sound like a big, warm hug at the end of a busy day, that's exactly what Erin is going for. "I'm super excited about this space—it's tiny, intimate, [this restaurant] was such an epiph," she says, in a characteristic rush of chopped-off words. The wine list, she says, is "ridic."

"My grandma's dying words were 'Can I have a glass of wine?'" Erin says. "That's the last thing she said to my mom and then she was on her way out right after that." Grandma Dorothy will be there in spirit, if not *for* the spirits, because Erin is using Mom's and Grandmom's recipes at her new place. Do not expect frippery like foams and infusions. "I'm burned out on so much 'douchebaggery' I call it in the food world," she says. "My grandma had the best no-bullshit approach to food, and she could cook her ass off. So I find I'm asking myself a lot, 'What would Grandma think about that? Would she put in that ingredient that makes it look disgusting?' It sounds cool but doesn't actually taste good. We've gotten away from the slower ways of doing things. So it's going to be all of this soul food, these simple, amazing recipes." The actual menu is under wraps until the opening, but we do know that everything is made from scratch. And that the baked goods will be "awesome."

The Feel Good is going into a Jay Rembe building at 1720 Central Ave. SW at Country Club Plaza, in the space formerly occupied by 35 Degrees North Coffee, which closed about a year ago due to flooding from a burst sewer pipe during construction for the ART transportation project.

Right now, it's the busiest location in Old Town, with tiled flooring going in, furniture stacking up and marble bar tops marching past holes where windows will be. Erin and her fiancé finished the stuccoed walls themselves. The decor is light, blue-and-white, distinctly female but no frills, with tiny booths-for-two and a few tables. Erin's been collecting small antiques with a 1920s-'30s feel, a little bit Parisian.

"My aunt is an artist, so she's doing all of the artwork, as she did at Vinaigrette," Erin says. "Julia Child was a huge inspiration to my mom and so we're doing a French-inflected

Feel Good AND Modern General

housewife cuisine. It's all about emotional experience. We're going to do tableside salad service, a lot of old-school customization and quality. All the things that the really great restaurants should be doing, we're going to do."

The focus, of course, what they're going to do to the menu. Expect family-style entrees like fried chicken and mashed potatoes, or a creamy polenta chicken chasseur. Sandwiches on the signature sourdough bread will include grilled cheese with Comte, Jack and cheddar; and a brie, arugula and prosciutto sandwich. At the wine bar will be classic pairing snacks, like castelvetrano olives, marinated mushrooms and the appropriate meats and cheeses. All told, there's seating for 35. No reservations will be taken at lunch, but please do make them for dinner.

But wait, wasn't Draft Station taproom also in that building? What's going to share that empty space with The Feel Good? Erin's other place. Modern General. I know. It's almost too much feel good, all at once.

"Modern General is much more retail-oriented up there in Santa Fe," Erin says. "Down here, I wanted to really punch up the food side and really play with some of the themes we started getting into, with heritage and heirloom grains, and heritage recipes. So Modern is breakfast oriented, full service, the most aggressive scratch-made menu I've ever done. We do our own sourdough bread; we've cultured and fermented our own yogurt; we're making our own sausages and pasta."

Just as the restaurants share a building, Erin sees them bookending a customer's entire day. "Modern is where you come in the morning and get your coffee so you can feel like you want to kick ass," she says. "And The Feel Good is our little 900-square-foot wine bar where you go when you need a hug and a glass of rosé. They're like yin and yang."

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The Albuquerque Modern General is about 25-percent larger than the one in Santa Fe. At 2,000 square feet, its kitchen is hidden rather than open, and there will be more tables and less retail space. The items for sale will be only the most popular ones, "all the goodies, the best of the best"—especially the sourdough.

"No one in Albuquerque right now is doing a nice, burnished crust, all naturally leavened, all-toothy sourdough, the old-fashioned kind," Erin says. "We'll feature the sandwiches at The Feel Good at lunch and dinner, and we'll sell [the bread] retail as well [at Modern]."

Modern General will not expand its Santa Fe menu: these new items will only be available in Albuquerque. Look forward to Hot Coconut Quinoa (slivered almonds, chai spice, blueberries, maple syrup, coconut oil); Eggs in Purgatory (two eggs poached in a zippy tomato sauce with kale, parsley, capers and feta); and the Fried Egg on Sourdough with chermoula yogurt, a sauce that's a combination of two of Erin's most heavenly homemade ingredients (trust me, I've tasted it).

What Erin calls the "food-truck" kitchen between the two restaurants will also bake the bread for Vinaigrette. At press time, a mural had yet to be painted inside Modern General and a "huge" pegboard wall was going up. Burnished yellow banquettes were installed and piles of tables and chairs awaited positioning. A Sputnik-style chandelier just like the one at the Santa Fe Modern was still in its box. The former Draft Station space had been lightened further by an added clerestory window facing west. "It's literally changing every single day," Erin says.