

# quench

## LOOK OUTSIDE

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you can feel the French sun on your face



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## A FEAST FOR THE EYES

**CARE FOR SOME LUNG AND LOIN BOURGUIGNON?** A roast loin of pork or tandoori liver, perhaps? On the NBC thriller *Hannibal*, Mads Mikkelsen's Dr Hannibal Lecter slices, dices and skewers meat to perfection, rendering the most exquisite gourmet meals to ever grace prime-time television. But his haute cuisine is not what it seems. Pork, veal and other familiar meats are routinely absent from Dr Lecter's table. Rather, the forensic psychiatrist's game of choice is ... human. Ghastly, isn't it? But, there's an art to making the limbs of the gruesomely departed look both ghoulish and appetizing. While Mikkelsen does a fine job as the good doctor-cum-cannibal, the real artist behind all those delectably macabre meals is Janice Poon, a Toronto-based food stylist who has built a reputation as the go-to gal for unusual requests.

"While I was struggling with a rewrite of my current novel, I got a phone call from the *Hannibal* production, which was just starting up," says Poon. "They knew I wasn't food styling anymore but had heard I was the only person in town who could do the job and would I please consider it. I said, 'Why not. It would be a nice break from staring at a blank page.' I had no idea *Hannibal* would be so absorbing."

Since its debut in April 2013, the show has gained critical acclaim while Poon's food styling, the trials and tribulations of which she documents with humour on her blog, aptly titled *Feeding Hannibal*, has an ardent following of its own. Self-proclaimed "Fannibals" devour Poon's unadulterated musings complete with illustrations, which she follows up with a recipe adapted from the human dish *du jour*.

"Food, when prepared for photography, is treated like a supermodel. It needs to be propped up, oiled, sprayed and

otherwise manipulated to stand up under the hot lights for the time it takes the photographer and the client to agree on the perfect shot," says Poon.

The inspiration to become a food stylist came during an advertising shoot Poon art-directed during her ad agency days — though the artist began food styling when a photographer, on the advice of the gourmet shop owners next door, entered her interior design shop in Yorkville and asked if she could make a Chinese-carved winter melon soup for a shoot. Since then, she has styled food for various clients, including CBC, Sony Pictures, General Foods, Prince Luitpold of Bavaria and *Epicure Magazine*, where she served as art director in the late 1980s. "My background as an advertising art director gave me an understanding of photography and I had been cooking since childhood, so it was very familiar territory for me," says Poon.

While she picked up the tools and tricks of the trade along the way — "to photograph ice cream, use a substitute such as shortening mixed with icing sugar. Real ice cream melts too fast," is one — Poon insists food styling is "mostly about observation and problem-solving," which, what with having to find the perfect animal substitutes for human offal, *Hannibal* offers plenty of chances to exercise. "I don't take food styling jobs unless they promise to be challenging," says Poon. "Otherwise it's just shopping and loading the car, which is not particularly rewarding."

From styling on *Hannibal*, whose third season premieres in the spring, to writing the *Feeding Hannibal* cookbook, slated for release later this year, food is ever-present in Poon's day-to-day, except for maybe on her own dining table: "I wish I had more time to actually eat it." \*