

# Fessin' Up To the 'F' Word

## Proud confessions of a foodie

By Heather Irwin

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LET'S GET one thing incredibly straight here: anyone who talks about food for a paycheck is a foodie. I'm a foodie. Yep, I just admitted that. And while it seems that food writers from Calvin Trillin to the North Bay's own Michele Anna Jordan (whom I love but must disagree with on this point) have distanced themselves from the F-word in a very public way, I'm here to expose the exodus as a whole lot of roughage.

See, the term "foodie" has fallen out of favor, like gourmet clubs and aspic gelatin. Coined during the mid-1980s in *The Official Foodie Handbook*, the term was a cousin to such popular labels of the day as yuppie, buppie and dinky. The authors' definition was: "A person who is very, very, very interested in food. ...They don't think they are being trivial—foodies consider food to be an art on a level with painting or drama. It's actually their favorite art form."

OK, not exactly complimentary but a fairly accurate description of many of us. Over the years, "foodie" has morphed into a less pointed reference to someone who really loves food and has been reclaimed by many young epicures, gourmets and gastronomes who found other labels a little, well, pretentious. I mean, really, what's more annoying, calling oneself a gastronome or gently terming oneself a foodie?

Here's a definition from Foodie.com that I've come to associate with the true neofoodie: "The foodie lives to eat, and eating to live is definitive boredom. A true foodie clings to all things culinary. ...To find the perfect cheese or the best macaroon recipe is life's work."

Life's work. Seriously. So, while a lot of people seeking world peace or a cure to cancer might find my eternal quest for the perfect buffalo mozzarella (Fratelli Ravioli in Park Slope, N.Y.) a bit pointless, it's my quest as a food fanatic. Hey, food fanatic. Maybe I should call myself a "foofan?" A "foofie?"

I've always found the term "foodie" to be an accessible descriptor for someone who loves to eat. It's approachable and fun and doesn't require a French dictionary. Sure, a few bad apples ruin the barrel by self-identifying at dinner parties and droning about artisan cheddar while the rest of us nod politely and consider chewing our arms off to escape. But annoying people exist everywhere; it just seems like there are a lot more of them talking about food lately. Blame it on the Food Network and the slow food movement. But believe me when I tell you that these are the same people who eight years ago were blathering endlessly on about their dotcom startups or their new BMWs. They'll move on.

Foodies of the true calling, dear friends, are forever. They are not groupies. They are true eaters who have a passion for food. Identified by their clean plates and round bellies, they tend to carry around mental lists of the best places to find not just foie gras but also pork skins, Spanish cheese and tikka masala. They know where to find fish roe at 8am. They tend to congregate and talk a lot about food—yes, maybe sometimes to a fault.

Yet the foodie clearly appreciates the wonders of a fresh peach just as much as a dinner at Manresa. The catch: they'll probably want to tell you at which food stand they got it (if you promise not to tell anyone else!) and why it's better than the stand they used to frequent. So indulge them a little.

Being a foodie is about a passion for wonderful food in any sort of package and for those who care passionately about their craft. Making a pilgrimage to the French Laundry is maybe for some a vanity, but for the initiated, it is about being in the presence of food that is prepared with such perfection and grace that it may as well be Mecca. That same mysticism is just as present when one is presented with a perfect piece of sushi or pan of polenta. Sure, it's also about trying it at home yourself with a mound of cookbooks, but like the Trillins of the world, not all of us have the talent for cooking. Sometimes food fanaticism extends merely to appreciation.

So with all this talk about labels, maybe the point is that the true foodies need not label themselves at all. Maybe they should just sit quietly and appreciate food.

Yeah, right. Obviously, you've never met me. Can I tell you about these amazing kiwi fruit I found last week?

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