

EATING HER WORDS

Ruth Reichl has written cookbooks, memoirs, and thousands of reviews, essays, and articles about food. Now she tackles the next frontier: fiction.

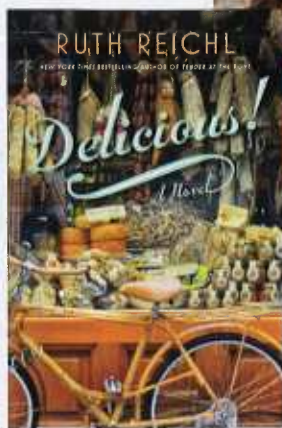
WHEN *GOURMET* FOLDED IN 2009, editor in chief (and former *New York Times* restaurant critic) Ruth Reichl found herself, for the first time in many years, without a day job. After getting over the initial shock, she headed to her cabinlike writing studio in upstate New York to try her hand at fiction. The result is her debut novel, *Delicious!* (Random House, \$27), which takes place in the hallowed halls of an exalted food magazine that gets shuttered. Sound familiar? We sat down with Reichl to get the scoop on her new book.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO WRITE A NOVEL?

I live for fiction. I was very close to M.F.K. Fisher, and she and I used to talk about how the highest calling for a writer is fiction. I've been a journalist for 45 years; it's a natural process at this point. You decide how you're going to approach it and just do it. But in fiction every character is hard-won.

THE MAIN CHARACTER WORKS AT A FOOD MAGAZINE. WERE ANY SCENES INSPIRED BY YOUR TIME AT *GOURMET*?

Everybody writes out of what they know, but nothing that happens in the book actually happened at *Gourmet*. It was just a comfortable place for me to start. I was on a book tour for more than a month after the magazine



STORY TELLER
Reichl in Beverly Hills.

closed, and I came back to an empty office to pack up. When I opened the door to the library I suddenly had this vision: What if I opened the door and it was a fabulous Victorian library? The genesis of the book came from being alone in that office and imagining what if.

MUCH OF THE BOOK TAKES PLACE AT FONTANARI'S, A FAMILY-RUN MEAT AND CHEESE SHOP. IS THERE ONE YOU FREQUENT?

The closest thing I can think of is Di Palo's, in New York City, which I've been going to since I was a little girl. In Great Barrington, Massachusetts, there's a wonderful cheese shop run by young people called Rubiner's. I used to go in there when I was frustrated with writing and wander around and taste cheese and talk about food with smart people.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT BOOK ABOUT?

When my friends signed me up for Twitter, I never thought it would grow into anything. But I found a voice on Twitter that I didn't know I had. I just turned in a memoir with recipes that's a diary of the year after *Gourmet*. It's about how cooking saved my life, with my tweets and the backstory of what was going on. There's a famous quote attributed to Mark Twain: "I would have written short, but I didn't have the time." There's something wonderful about the 140-character limit.

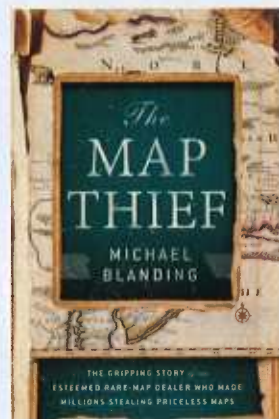
WHAT'S YOUR FOOLPROOF RECIPE FOR UNEXPECTED DINNER GUESTS?

I always have the makings for spaghetti carbonara: good bacon, good Parmesan, pasta, eggs. You can pull it together in a second and it's totally satisfying. **S.W.**

Globe Trotter

The made-for-the-movies tale of a cartographic crook.

E. FORBES SMILEY III, A bespectacled rare maps dealer turned criminal, is the type of character novelists spend their lives trying to dream up. But in this case, truth is much stranger than fiction. In his new book, *The Map Thief* (Gotham, \$28), reporter Michael Blanding tells the tale of this once respected map dealer who was in the habit of cutting valuable maps out of books with an X-Acto knife and slipping them into the pockets of the blazer he wore on even the hottest days.



The breadth of Smiley's haul (at least 97 maps worth more than \$3 million) came to light after he was finally caught at Yale's Beinecke Library. In the end, Harvard's Houghton Library, Chicago's Newberry Library, the British Library in London, and the New York Public Library would all take part in the FBI's investigation, helping to recover a small fortune in maps, including a 1742 Boston city plan that Smiley had sold for \$185,000. In the normally dry world of cartography, Smiley's story makes for a riveting read. **SAM DANGREMOND**



INSPIRATION BOARD

From left: Food writer M.F.K. Fisher; Reichl's last-minute dinner staple; Di Palo's Italian specialty shop in New York City.

