

An imagination spiced and
seasoned, poignant and perfumed.



Do What You Love: An Illustrated Collaboration

by JAMIE SCHLER and ILVA BERETTA

The idea for creating the collaborative blog *Plated Stories* came about while sitting in the San Francisco airport after the 2013 IACP conference. Ilva Beretta, a food photographer, and myself, a writer, had spent the weekend discovering what other writers, photographers and food stylists were doing not only individually, but also the various projects they were coming together and collaborating on. Working on a project together had been on our minds for a while, but the elements had never quite fallen into place until that moment.

Since we each blog, me, at *Life's a Feast*, and Ilva, at *Lucullian Delights*, we wanted this new platform, Plated Stories, to be something different, unusual, and purely creative. We wanted to be able to explore our individual limits and imaginations while seeing if we could bring those two elements together - texts and photographs - to create complete stories or compositions - the basic tenet of our workshops. We had already been teaching at workshops together and had collaborated on three editorial projects so we knew that we loved working together and that our partnership worked.

The concept of Plated Stories is simple: each week, Ilva and I choose a theme, go our separate ways to follow our own visceral reactions, the memories, emotions, the senses the theme awakens in each of us. The text and the photographs are conceived separately without any creative influence from each other.

As we post every Monday, we meet up each Sunday to draft the post - she uploads the photos, and then I insert the text - not knowing what the other is bringing or if the two will even mesh. Yet week after week, the story, to our constant surprise and delight, falls into place, making what each of us has done stronger and more interesting, the complete story gaining more meaning than the individual parts.

Our collaboration and *Plated Stories* is constant creative stimulation; the exchange of ideas and focus forces me to look at something visually and not only verbally, offering new and unexpected facets of a topic, hopefully making me a better, more well-rounded writer. It also keeps me on a schedule! I now have a responsibility towards Ilva as she does for me. As a writer, working with a photographer allows me the artistic freedom to concentrate on what I know I am good at and what I love best – writing. (Who says we can or have to be good at everything?)

Professionally, a collaboration is mutually beneficial; we pool our knowledge, resources and network thus opening doors to more and more diverse opportunities and this - in my opinion - makes us each more marketable, often giving us the option of proposing ourselves as a team.

A collaboration and the constant interaction and exchange it implies can only be successful if there is true mutual respect between the collaborators, both as people and as artists. It is a matter of being able to understand and accept how the other person functions, thinks, and approaches a topic. One must be able to rely on the other person, trust their judgment while at the same time be able to question, push, and challenge the other (and accept that in return). And one really must esteem and value what the other person does artistically.

Whatever kind of project, whether one article or a blog, the partners must have the same goal and vision as well as agree on the division of tasks and responsibilities, clearly define both expectations and limits, and balance their input. It is also necessary to let go of any impulse to control or desire to make all of the decisions or grab all of the limelight.

As a writer, I love that I am now able to focus purely on writing, having Ilva there when something I am working on requires beautiful photographs. I think and see in words, not visuals and I have been amazed at how much her visual sensibilities have stimulated and inspired me verbally and enriched me creatively as a writer, and also how my work stimulates hers. Our collaboration has made each of us stronger.

For *Plated Stories* to win the IACP Award for Best Photo-Based Blog just one year after its inception proves that our collaboration works. Painter Alexander Gorlizki said that "working in collaboration leads to a richer dialogue yielding unexpected results." Isn't this, after all, what we, as writers, stylists, chefs, and/or photographers, are each trying to achieve?



Jamie Schler is an American freelance writer and speaker specializing in food and culture living in Nantes, France. Besides her diverse [freelance work](#), she blogs at [Life's a Feast](#) and at [Plated Stories](#), her creative collaboration with photographer Ilva Beretta. The first Plated Stories Workshop for food writing & photography will be held in Tuscany, Italy, at the end of May 2014.



Ilva Beretta is a Swedish professional photographer living in Tuscany. As well as creating food and lifestyle photography for leading magazines and food brands, she also teaches workshops on food photography. You can see her work at [Ilva Beretta Photography](#), follow the creative projects she works on with food writer Jamie Schler at [Plated Stories](#), and on Facebook at [Ilva Beretta Photography](#) and Instagram @ilvaberetta