

# TimesOC

## CULINARY COUPLES

BY LORI BASHEDA

Is there anything hotter than a culinary power couple? Orange County has a bunch, but to mark Valentine's Day, we decided to ask three about their romance and what it's like when your work partner is also your home partner.

We talked with Amelia and Florent Marneau, who own Marche, the award-winning French restaurant in Newport, Brian and Robin Christenson, who own the distillery/kitchen Blinking Owl in Santa Ana, and Candace and Allan Tea, who founded Hello Kitty Cafe and Cali Dumpling Delivery in Irvine.



Love & You Studios

Candace and Allan Tea



Photo by Dylan + Jeni

Amelia and Florent Marneau



K. Gennaro Photography

Brian and Robin Christenson

### Candace and Allan Tea

Hello Kitty Cafe at Irvine Spectrum, Cali Dumpling Delivery

#### Relationship status?

**Allan:** We met in 2015 on a blind date. We got married March 14, 2020, on her birthday. A big Chinese wedding. I think we were the last non-COVID wedding of the year.

#### Did COVID spike the honeymoon?

**Allan:** Yeah. We were supposed to do a little trip. After about two weeks of staying home and not working, we started a little side hustle, delivering restaurant-quality dumplings to your house. In the beginning, in addition to employing our staff, we donated all the profits. We've transitioned to a business but we still donate 300 dumpling meals a month.

#### Favorite date spot?

**Candace:** We really like going to the Langham Huntington Hotel in Pasadena. They used to have live music on the weekends.

**Allan:** It's a late-night date spot to get drinks and dance.

#### Best part of working together?

**Allan:** I would say we're complete opposites so everything I'm really bad at she's really good at. **Candace:** It definitely helps

to work with someone you're a partner with in life. You have the same goals.

#### Is there a worst part of working together? [Both laugh].

**Allan:** You're literally in each other's face 24/7.

#### How have you weathered the past year?

**Allan:** It's definitely been rough. We just got married and we're gonna start our lives together and then boom — we had to close down. We closed three times.

**Candace:** It's like being on a yo-yo. But we pivoted. We got creative.

#### What do Hello Kitty fans have to look forward to now that you're back open?

**Candace:** We just started our afternoon tea back up. And for Valentine's, we're doing cute tea boxes for people who still don't feel comfortable going out. It has a bottle of our signature rose, fingerling sandwiches, tea of your choice and bite-size goodies.

#### What are you doing for Valentine's Day?

**Allan:** I'm making dinner, some type of seafood. I have to start thinking about that.

### Amelia and Florent Marneau

Marche Moderne on Newport Coast

#### How did you meet?

**Amelia:** He was the chef at Aubergine [in Newport Beach]. He interviewed me to be the pastry chef. I had just come back from Paris [where she studied at Cordon Bleu]. I was very interested in French men. I'd look into his beautiful eyes, and I was very taken. He was very driven and that was very attractive.

#### Favorite date spot?

**Florent:** We take our camper to San Diego for the day and stop at the little towns along the coast. We try and make it feel like a vacation. We take our bathing suits. We bring cheese and bread and start at the Rancho Santa Fe Farmers Market for veg and fruit. It's a beautiful day.

#### Best part of working together?

**Amelia:** We work as a team. We trust each other's advice. **Florent:** We don't bring our personal life to work.

#### Worst part of working together?

**Amelia:** We do not know how to turn it off at home. We have tried for years.

#### Do you spend time together at home?

**Amelia:** Every morning (at 6:30 a.m.) we make a drip coffee, a French roast. Over coffee (3 to 4 cups each) we talk for about an hour.

**Florent:** We talk about everything; we dream.

#### Is there anything you fight about?

**Amelia:** Plates! He steals my plates.

#### Who cooks at home?

**Florent:** She makes amazing dinners. She cooks the really good countryside French food that my mom makes.

**Amelia:** I love to do the Sundays. I make fresh bread. I just want my house to smell like that.

#### Did you lean on each other more this past year?

**Amelia:** The first nine months were a challenge, but we like a challenge. It made us creative. We did takeout for the first time. It became a game — like how good can we become at this?

#### What's your favorite dish made by each other?

**Amelia:** That's like asking who your favorite child is. I love his sole. And his pommes Dauphine. Those are my favorites.

**Florent:** I love her Paris Brest (a cream puff).

#### Any regrets?

**Amelia:** No, it's a beautiful life. It's exciting. It's for people who enjoy energy. It's a crazy life.

### Brian and Robin Christenson

Blinking Owl Distillery tasting room in Santa Ana

#### How long have you been

3 Valentine's Day pairs share their successes and challenges serving food and drink to O.C.

together?  
**Robin:** We got married 20 years ago, so together 21.

#### How did you meet?

**Robin:** On a blind date. We went to dinner at a cute little place in Salt Lake City. He said if he didn't make it in art he'd be perfectly happy living on a beach in Mexico and drinking beer and I was like, "We are not cut from the same cloth." That's not a good life goal for me. But after dinner I ordered a porter.

**Brian:** We started talking beer and we just hit it off.

#### Favorite date spot?

**Robin:** Camping. Being out in nature somewhere and opening a bottle of wine. We tricked out an old Range Rover with a rooftop tent and a kitchen in the back.

#### Best part of working together?

**Brian:** You get to see your best friend all day long.

**Robin:** Seeing him get creative, seeing him rise up — it's really really fun to watch him thrive.

#### Worst part of working together?

**Brian:** You never go home. **Robin:** You take every employee and all their hard stuff and you bring it into your marriage.

#### Who's the boss?

**Robin:** Brian's the CEO, but I'm the boss.

#### How did you guys weather 2020?

**Brian:** We're on the same team. It's us against all the outside forces, not fighting each other. **Robin:** All the hardship has brought us so close. This is our whole life.

#### What's on the horizon?

**Brian:** We're opening our own kitchen next month. It's London tea meets the bar. High-low gourmet snack bar food. Caviar hotdogs.

**LORI BASHEDA** is a contributor to TimesOC.