

## A TALE OF TWO ELIZABETHS

*A pair of talented women who share the same name are destined to cross paths—one of these days.*

ONE IS AT THE BEGINNING of what looks to be a promising career as an artist; the other is established and highly respected in the hospitality industry.

After circling each other for nearly a decade, you would think Elizabeth Blau would have met Elizabeth Blau. Yet somehow their itineraries are always out of sync.

In 1999, aspiring artist Elizabeth S. Blau, already gaining recognition for a mural she painted inside the Double Down Saloon, first heard of restaurant consultant Elizabeth A. Blau. That Elizabeth, a Cornell University alumna, had just taken a job with Steve Wynn, putting together the culinary talent at Bellagio that helped usher in the Strip's celebrity-chef era. Las Vegas Academy student Elizabeth S. Blau found herself intrigued when her godparents showed her an article about the confident, driven new arrival to her hometown who just happened to share her name.

"Obviously she was everywhere," recalls Blau the artist. "And she should be. She's amazing. I've admired her all these years after reading that article. She is an incredible woman who has obviously worked hard in her field."

That Elizabeth Blau—whose many accomplishments include being the head of Elizabeth Blau and Associates, wife of chef Kim Canteenwalla, partner of Kerry Simon, and judge for *Iron Chef America*—parlayed her education and connections from the Bellagio into Wynn's next hotel-casino and then opened two restaurants with Simon.



Recently Blau formed a new alliance with Canteenwalla and former Light Group partners Sean Christie and Oliver Wharton. Their first venture, Society Café Encore, keeps Blau's plate full. But with the rise of online social networking, she found herself fielding Facebook emails with inquiries about art that were clearly not meant for her. One day she forwarded a letter to the other Elizabeth, and a correspondence was struck up.

Elizabeth S. Blau has yet to try the brunch at Simon at Palms Place. Elizabeth A. Blau did not get to see the haunting, impressionist artwork at "Mentalist & Medium," her namesake's February show at Commerce Street Studios' Fallout Gallery. But Elizabeth Blau is determined to meet the talented woman who shares her name, and when Elizabeth Blau sets her mind on a goal, she invariably achieves it.—MATT KELEMEN

Artist Elizabeth S. Blau at her studio; restaurant consultant Elizabeth A. Blau at Society Café Encore.

photographs by Jana Cruder; hair and makeup by Jamine Call and Sonia Zometta of Encore Salon and Natasha Chamberlin