

# Montage

Art, books, diverse creations



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## Sweet Science

*Dedicated to the mission of eating dessert first*  
by CRAIG LAMBERT

**Joanne Chang, and the process and products of Flour Bakery + Café**

When Flay deployed a procedure that Chang tactfully called “different,” according to the *Crimson*, one student in

the audience yelled, “That’s how they do it at Yale.”) Flay made a variant sticky bun with an orange glaze and cinnamon, but the tasters voted for Chang’s traditional caramel glaze with roasted pecans.

Though her sticky buns may be the stuff of legend, Chang’s shops offer a wide array of foods, including scones, brioches, banana bread, and tarts, along with pizzas, quiches, and sandwiches that incorporate ingredients like curried tuna, brie, caramelized onions, and cranberry chutney. In her newer shop, in the Fort Point Channel district near South Station, a hip, urban/industrial aesthetic reigns: high ceilings, tall windows, exposed pipes,

**A**T THE LEVERETT HOUSE Grill in the late 1980s, Joanne Chang ’91 first turned pro as a baker, selling four freshly baked chocolate chip cookies for a dollar. Now she owns and operates Boston’s two Flour Bakery + Café pastry shops, which have won awards for best bakery, coffee shop, cakes, cookie, doughnut, and takeout. *Boston Magazine* even referred to Chang’s “masterpieces” in the field of gourmet sandwiches.

And her sweets have now gone na-

tional. Last summer, the Food Network’s *Throwdown with Bobby Flay* program focused on Chang’s acclaimed sticky buns. For each “throwdown,” television chef Flay surprises a professional cook with a challenge: he tries to outdo them at their own specialties. The show decoyed Chang into making her recipe before an audience for a fictional series on desserts. Flay appeared and challenged her to a bake-off. Chang, unfazed, said, “Bring it.” (The partisan audience, which included many Harvard students, backed their heroine.

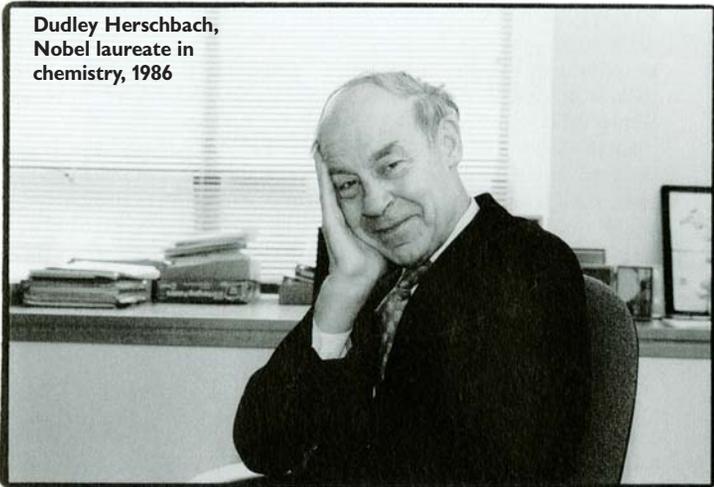
# Off the Shelf

Recent books with Harvard connections

**How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now** (Free Press, \$35), by James L. Kugel, formerly Starr professor of Hebrew literature (see “Final Architect,” January-February 2004, page 36). *Not CliffsNotes*; 689 pages of text on reading the Good Book, by the maestro of the Core course “The Bible and Its Interpreters.”

**Body Drama**, by Nancy Amanda Redd '03 (Gotham, \$20, paper). The 2004 Miss America contestant, with an assist from the director of Mount Sinai's Adolescent Health Center, writes a frank—and frankly illustrated, with photographs—tour of growing girls' concerns from acne and breast development to weight, pregnancy, and genital warts.

Dudley Herschbach,  
Nobel laureate in  
chemistry, 1986



**Nobel Faces: A Gallery of Nobel Prize Winners**, by Peter Badge (Wiley-Blackwell, \$95). Badge's eloquent black-and-white portraits of some 270 laureates, with accompanying brief narratives by Chris Richmond; poet Seamus Heaney, biologist Walter Gilbert, chemists Elias J. Corey and Dudley R. Herschbach, and diplomat Henry A. Kissinger are among the Harvardians depicted.

**Please Don't Remain Calm: Provocations and Commentaries**, by Michael Kinsley '72, J.D. '77 (Norton, \$25.95). The writer of opinions (*The New Republic*,

*Slate*, *Los Angeles Times*, etc., and now *Time*) collects samples from the past dozen years. Reflecting on airport security lines in 2002 (“...the major war effort imposed on civilians...”),

he finds a “need to think about it for a few more hours. And I think I know where I'll find the time.”

**What Is Emotion? History, Measures, and Meanings**, by Jerome Kagan (Yale, \$27.50). The Starch professor of psychology emeritus wades into the “empirically lean and theoretically contentious understanding of emotional phenomena” and finds himself “adopt[ing] a skeptical stance toward the existence of a small set of basic emotions.” Kagan writes, “Poets possess the license to use a predicate any way they wish,” but this is very much a scientist's book.

**Straddling Worlds: The Jewish-American Journey of Professor Richard W. Leopold**, by Steven J. Harper, J.D. '79 (Northwestern, \$35). An oral history of historian Leopold, Ph.D. '38. His education included spirited “fist-ball” games (a volleyball variant) with the Law School's Erwin N. Griswold, historian John K. Fairbank, and physicist

Percy Bridgman, a future Nobelist and all-out competitor.

**The Fortune Cookie Chronicles: Adventures in the World of Chinese Food**, by Jennifer 8. Lee '99 (Twelve, \$24.99). The author, formerly a Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow of this magazine, now a *New York Times* metropolitan reporter, probes the ethos of the nearly 40,000 Chinese restaurants in the United States, and beyond, fearlessly addressing “the Kosher Duck Scandal of 1989” and, like Margaret Mead, reporting the tragic fate of the “bean-sprout people.”



beams and bricks, butcher-block tables and desert-yellow walls. In both locations, sweet flavors rule. On the ground and on line ([www.flourbakery.com](http://www.flourbakery.com)), Flour proclaims its mission statement: “Make life sweeter—eat dessert first!”

While growing up in Houston, Denver, and Tulsa, Chang, like many girls, made cupcakes for friends. But her first career path was in management consulting; after concentrating in applied mathematics and economics at Harvard, she spent two years with Monitor Company in Cambridge, where she worked on the college recruiting program. “One icebreaker question we used was, ‘If you won the lottery tomorrow and money was no problem, what would you be doing?’” she recalls. “After asking hundreds of kids that question, I asked it of myself.”

The answer led Chang to enroll in a three-hour adult-education course on starting your own food business, taught by cookbook author Judy Rosenberg, founder of the Rosie's Bakery shops in Boston. That inspired Chang to get a restaurant job; she started at the upscale Biba restaurant as a *garde-manger* cook, making the bar menu, including cold appetizers. But “I wasn't that interested in the savory end of things,” Chang says. “I was always attracted to sweet flavors. They're more interesting. And more enjoyable!”

She moved to Bentonwood Bakery in Newton, then became pastry chef at the Rialto restaurant in Cambridge. She worked in New York for renowned French pastry chef François Payard, formerly of Restaurant Daniel, then returned to Boston at Mistral. Still, “I didn't want to work in restaurants long-term,” Chang explains. “A restaurant menu has a very limited scope for desserts. I wanted to do something that would reach more people, and I had always loved pastry shops.” In 2000 she opened her first Flour Bakery + Café, in the South End. “It was busy pretty much



Visit [harvard-mag.com/extras](http://harvard-mag.com/extras) to get Chang's sticky-bun recipe and see how they're made.



From the Leverett House Grill to a wide array of scones, sandwiches, and more

tweak it to my liking—maybe more zucchini, less chocolate, moister, with a tighter crumb. We try the recipe a few times till we get what we like, then scale it up.”

Outside the kitchen, Chang reviews cookbooks, writes on pastry for *Fine Cooking* magazine, and works on her own cookbook, featuring items from Flour. Her fiancé is Boston restaurateur Christopher Myers, G ’90, a co-owner of Radius, Via Matta, and Great Bay. Despite her high-calorie surroundings, Chang stays trim, partly due to a counterbalancing passion for distance running—she has competed in every Boston Marathon but one since 1991.

from the start,” she says. “We were there at the right time, in the right place.”

In cooking, recipes are more or less guidelines, but in baking, precision rules. “There’s a formula: 500 grams of flour, 300 grams of butter,” Chang says. “Pastries are very meticulous and detail-ori-

ented. Baking powder is chemistry. And once you finish baking a cake, you can’t add a tablespoon more of this or that.” If Chang wants to add a menu item—say, a chocolate-zucchini muffin—she first reviews Flour’s current muffin recipes and those from other cookbooks. “Then I’ll

## Moving Pictures, Hard Questions

*A film cycle from San Francisco’s Tenderloin*

by HOWARD AXELROD

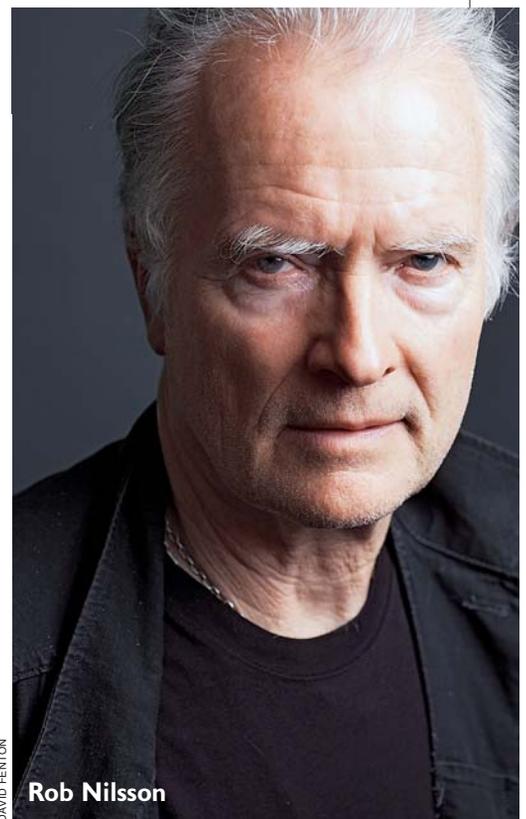
IT WAS A RARE RAINY NIGHT in Los Angeles. Filling up his tank at a local gas station, a man noticed the silhouette of another man, just beyond the gas station’s overhang, getting drenched. The two struck up a conversation. The second said he was a novelist, adding that he always carried his work with him. With that, his hand dripping, he brought out a small metal box from inside his jacket, filled with index cards. The first man began to finger his way through. But every card was the same: blank, except for one letter, the same letter, written in the middle of each card.

This may sound suspiciously like the opening scene from a movie, but it’s an event from the life of award-winning independent filmmaker Rob Nilsson ’61. The “novelist” in the story is Nilsson’s brother, Greg, a homeless man, who had gone missing more than 10 years prior to that rainy night in Los Angeles. The man who found him, a good Samaritan who would take

Greg in, eventually located Rob Nilsson two years later.

At the time, Nilsson, a winner at the Cannes and Sundance Film Festivals, was running an acting workshop for street people and aspiring actors (some of the attendees were both) in a warehouse in San Francisco’s Tenderloin district. The continuing workshop has resulted in nine feature films, comprising the *9@Night* cycle that was presented this past fall at the Harvard Film Archive. Using largely untrained actors and operating on a shoestring budget, Nilsson has burrowed into the shadows of the down and out: *Need* portrays the desperation of workers in the sex trade; *Scheme C6* follows a charismatic homeless man, equipped only with a motorcycle, a toothbrush, and an ill-fated plan. In these films the scenes are unscripted and the dialogue improvised by the actors, though the director himself works from “story scenarios.”

Since his graduation from Harvard, Nilsson’s aspirations have shifted from po-



Rob Nilsson

DAVID FENTON