

GETTING SALTY

Odessa Piper pioneered the morning bun. Now she's brightening up the Boston breakfast scene.

A legendary Midwestern chef opens a market in Roslindale.

By [Kara Baskin](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated July 1, 2025, 10:00 a.m.



Odessa Piper poses at Roslindale Market Kitchen. HANDOUT

Roslindale's Odessa Piper, 72, [first appeared in the Globe](#) decades ago for a feature on regional food. At the time, she was putting Madison, Wis., on the culinary map with L'Etoile, a forerunner of the farm-to-table movement. Piper had hitchhiked to the Midwest after working at a farm commune in rural New

Hampshire, and her star — and the aptly named L’Etoile’s — continued to rise. In 2001, she won a James Beard Best Chef Award.

She relocated to Roslindale 15 years ago, where she loves the walkability and the local market culture. In March, she opened her very own: [Roslindale Market Kitchen](#) (4198 Washington St.) serves local vegetables wrapped in whole grain pita, hand pies, soups, croissants, buns, and scones. (Piper was an early creator of the morning bun.)

In her spare time, you might find her dining at Brookline’s [Taberna de Haro](#) or [Rifrullo](#) or unwinding with the [print edition of the Globe](#) with her husband, wine importer Terry Theise.

Tell me what you’re doing in Roslindale now and how you came to be a food person.

My husband is a retired wine importer and has published some books. He and I were kind of wrapping up. I was finishing 30 years running my beloved farm-to-table restaurant in Wisconsin, and Terry’s son from his earlier marriage was graduating, and we were in a good place to combine our households.

I grew up in Portsmouth, N.H., and I adore New England. A lot of the cadences of New England really speak to me, just at a bone-deep level. And we spent a lot of time in Maine, in a little cabin that my parents built on a little pond — really connecting with nature and a big family, lots of everything revolving around food, at any event.

I actually had managed to successfully transfer my restaurant to my successor, my chef, who continues to run it. Terry needed to be near an international airport. I love New England. I said, “Baby, we’ve got to do this.” So we settled in Roslindale about 15 years ago.

How do you like it?

I continue to do a lot of writing and consulting with all my wonderful farms and friends in Wisconsin. But I’m so happy that we settled in Roslindale, because this is such a community. It’s so amazing. We walk everywhere. We adore it. Roslindale is a market town. There are so many wonderful little small businesses. We have a fantastic farmers’ market.

I was inspired, actually, by a dilemma that the mayor had. I was reading an article in the Globe about downtown; there was a parking problem. The parking spaces had to be given to DoorDash-type drivers at lunchtime to fetch the lunches for office workers and the big labs and the big, important buildings in Boston. And I thought: “This is such a shame. Why not get up from your computer and walk to your favorite lunch place and just take a break and enjoy walking?” That was the inspiration for the Roslindale Market Kitchen. I just wanted to point out that little neighborhood shops are wonderful. That’s our ethos.

We have a comfortable little place in front where people can gather and linger and chat with each other while they wait for their sandwich.

Talk about what you serve, because photos of your food are gorgeous.

I'm super proud of our butter croissant. I made thousands of them in Wisconsin at my restaurant. But the twist on our croissant this time is that it's made with what's called 75 percent extraction whole wheat. There's more fiber in it and more deliciousness. I wanted to celebrate the New England grain economy. I think that's kind of foundational.

And then we came up with a wonderful pastry that I call Spice Girls. Its origin is in the morning bun. The morning bun is experiencing its 50-year anniversary, so I thought it'd be fun to share a little bit about that. Our version simply recognizes the amazing spices that go into it, and also the fact that it's not as sweet. The original was rolled around all this brown sugar. What we do is take the wheat bran and sweeten it with brown sugar, but we make the spiral roll on the inside with a delicious wheat bran. With both my croissant and the Spice Girls, and all our baked goods, I have a theory that [we should work] more fiber, more whole grain into what we eat.

A lot of our jams that we make in-house are not peeled. Our applesauce is made with the apple skin. All of this really aids digestion. Our menu in great part starts with whole, local ingredients and getting them into something that's palatable, delicious, and craveable. We make our own homemade English muffins, and we also make our own homemade pita with whole grain. We're teaching ourselves how to make a gluten-free line of pastries as well.

Why do you love food so much?

My origins in food, of course, was a big family. Everything centered around scratch cooking. I went foraging for mushrooms with my dad in those Maine woods around the pond and stuff like that. But then I dropped out of high school. I couldn't really work academically. But the great start of my career was working in a farm commune around Canaan, N.H., for a year, started by Jake Guest, who went on to become one of the most important organic farmers in New England with Killdeer Farm.

Back then, we didn't have running water or electricity, and we had to grow our own food and literally chop our wood and carry our water, and there was a root cellar underneath the old, drafty house. I learned so much about food that year. I was much younger than the Dartmouth boys who had started this commune.

I hitchhiked with a gal pal after that, out to the Midwest, and landed in Chicago, where my sister was at the University of Chicago. She hooked me up with a little farming community in Wisconsin, where I spent another year sort of semi-off the grid, hand-milking cows and foraging for morels, and learning about the Wisconsin countryside and what you could eat. And we gardened, of course.

I got my first job at the Ovens of Brittany in 1972 in Madison, which was opened by a very visionary woman, Jo Anna Guthrie, who's no longer with us. She was extremely eccentric. There, I worked with Christy Timon of [Clear Flour](#). We invented the morning bun. We had a little bakery affiliated with the Ovens of Brittany. Back then, a lot of industrial agriculture was failing; it was just this massive collapse of small agriculture. We were kind of bucking the trend by looking for local sources and being a small, artisan-based business. I did that from '72 to '76 and struck out on my own and opened L'Etoile with a friend, Jim Casey, and basically continued to pursue making these direct-farm connections.

We evolved over those many decades, with trial and error, into a pretty awesome farm-to-table restaurant. A lot of the great accomplishments of those years were due to amazing, wonderful cooks and chefs and dishwashers and waiters and farmers who came through, and we collectively made really beautiful, regionally reliant cuisine. We became the special occasion restaurant in Madison.

This did not buy me any new cars. Our ethos was to always pay the farmer their asking price. We were really trying to move the dial in every way we could for more local deliciousness.

I realized in those years that I was being exposed to a global pantry. We were being introduced to amazing spices from India and culinary concepts from China. Like many chefs of that era, we would draw from different things. I made a friendship with a farmer in California. Once, he sent me a case of his peaches, and I put them on my menu. I made a sauce for chicken with wild rugosa flower petals and these peaches. And my staff asked me, "Odessa, aren't we supposed to be local?"

And I said, "You know, local is a distance best measured by our hearts." The meaning of local is about the stewardship that we can bring to ingredients: the attention, the respect.

How do you contrast the food scene in the Midwest to here in Boston?

I think New England is very proud. We're proud of our wild blueberries and our maple syrup and our chowder. I kind of like how there's no BS in New England. We're really pretty down-to-earth people. Keep it simple; keep it delicious.

I'm a big fan of great restaurants like Alinea in the Midwest or O Ya here in Boston. And I think that these restaurants, by digging into their locale and their local talent and spirit, actually kind of become universal.

I really encourage people to go to restaurants and understand them. It's like being willing to pay what you might for concert tickets. I'm just a big fan of really good restaurants. I believe in them.

What are your favorite local haunts? Where do you eat?

My husband and I have a very wide range on this. You know, we love Jason Bond. We follow him everywhere. I personally love [Brassica](#). I think it's really exciting and important. And we love Sycamore. And [Midnight Morning](#) is such a neighborhood place. They have a beet and shiso salad, which I just have to order every time I'm there. And the Square Root is a great, great coffee shop. [Taberna de Haro](#) is probably our most frequented — and I don't know if you know [Rifrullo](#) in Brookline. They're my favorite place to go with a friend. The cooking is brilliant and fresh and marvelous.

I'm letting my husband do a lot more of the cooking, which is kind of remarkable. I think he started out with “fat is flavor,” and he would sort of make these rather over-the-top, rich dishes for home meals, but he's really coming around. He's quite creative. Right now, we're eating a lot of wild salmon. A favorite dish is to roast up a good farm chicken, and I'll turn it into a salad. I'll dress the salad with the delicious pan caramel of the chicken, the salty deliciousness. And I'll crisp some croutons. We actually make croutons out of our unsold croissants. And I'll add maybe just a little squeeze of lemon and whatever fresh herb is in season.

Is there any ingredient or food that you just don't like?

In Europe, I once confused a sausage called tripoux; I think I confused it with a wonderful Cajun sausage here in the US. Anyways, tripoux is actually made with things like sheep hoof and gut. I eat a lot of offal, but the tripoux was just a step too far for me. Something about the funkiness of the sheep hoof: I couldn't finish that dish with all the mustard in the world.

What do you listen to in the kitchen? What's your soundtrack?

Oh, gosh, you would ask this. My husband is very wise in the ways of music, and so he makes these wonderful compilations. My current favorite composer is Ólafur Arnalds. It's brilliant, beautiful, and rather soothing and intricate and melodic music. If I'm putting the last turn in the puff pastry or the croissant, I'll listen to that.

With all the delightful people that I work with, everyone seems to have their favorite soundtrack. Our shop seems to attract both very young people as well as a lot of old hippies like me. I had asked my young

staff, “Is that Taylor Swift?” But there’s also the Supremes or the Temptations. Very eclectic.

Interview was edited and condensed.

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