

## people

## Fermentation Fervor

Gay author shares revolutionary solutions to globalized food system

by George Winborn

**F**ermentation happens—both in a crock of salted cabbage and within the social order when systems need to change. Beer, wine, cheese, yogurt, miso, mead, bread all are fermented. Food—its origins, its environmental impact, its distribution methods and more—is fermenting, too.

Anthropologists believe fermentation lies at the root of why wandering nomads settled into the fertile crescent. On ancient Etruscan tablets, first mentions of beer always mention bread and vice versa. The action of fermentation lies at the birth of our culture: that rapid proliferation of ideas and traditions, as well as bacteria.

For the past six years, Sandor Katz, food activist, author and resident of a Radical Faerie commune in Short Mountain, Tenn., has fervently followed his bubbling passion across the United States and abroad, teaching others how to re-connect to this 8,000-year-old practice. He soon arrives in the Northwest to lead a series of fermentation workshops. You should catch his effervescent knowledge now; after this year, he'll be taking a hiatus from traveling.

Katz has published two food-related books in recent years, *Wild Fermentation: The Flavor, Nutrition and Craft of Live Culture Foods*, a book of recipes and commentaries for the do-it-yourself fermenting foodie, and *The Revolution Will Not Be Microwaved*, a book describing the underground food networks that he uncovered while traveling and teaching workshops based on *Wild Fermentation*.

Katz's books influence readers by inspiring them to act. *Wild Fermentation* brings folks into the kitchen for simple experiments yielding bountiful results. Did you know that fermentation, while a useful method for preserving food, also increases foods' nutritional value, releasing energy-rich B vitamins and fostering the growth of healthy bacteria? You know the probiotics you see at Whole Foods or health food stores? You ingest them in their whole, natural form when you eat ferments.

As an HIV-positive person, Katz has eaten ferments for years to help boost his immune system. Throughout *Revolution*, he reveals the ways people have begun their own "quiet culinary mutinies" that are easily implemented in our own communities.

Last year Katz led a stimulating workshop at Tryon Life Community Farm in Southwest Portland. He taught the basics of preserving vegetables (chop, mash with salt, press and hold below the brine) and mead (combine honey and water, stir-stir-stir) while elucidating some of the revolutionary actions bubbling beneath our government-regulated and -subsidized food system, like raw milk groups that purchase cow and goat shares to get enzyme-rich, antibiotic-free, farm-fresh milk, or farmers and gardeners maintaining age-old seed-saving practices as a means for food independence.

As Katz said during his 2007 visit: "[We're] living in a time when very few people have a lot of

awareness of [interacting with] the natural forces of the environment. I think that's at the core of our cultures' problems. In the idea that we've moved beyond these mundane thoughts [of growing our own food and building our own shelter], we've lost the heart of the ecosystem."

Rather than despair, as Katz said, "Grassroots action creates hope." At Short Mountain, he and 20 other communards raise goats for milk, grow their own vegetables and live in houses they've built from straw, mud and sand. For Katz, what he describes aren't theories of a better way to live, they're the byproduct of his living them every day.

"The globalized food system is all about reducing everything to a commodity," he continued. "Alternative distribution networks, buying clubs, food co-ops, etc. break out of those markets and remind us that there are other models."

Did you know that a farmer selling to a distribution company gets only 19 cents on the dollar, but at a farmers market the farmer gets the whole thing? That suddenly makes farming a potentially viable occupation.

Katz goes on to point out the folly that "more and more people have nothing but marketing to go on about decisions of what [food] to buy. We won't understand until long after what effects this may have." 

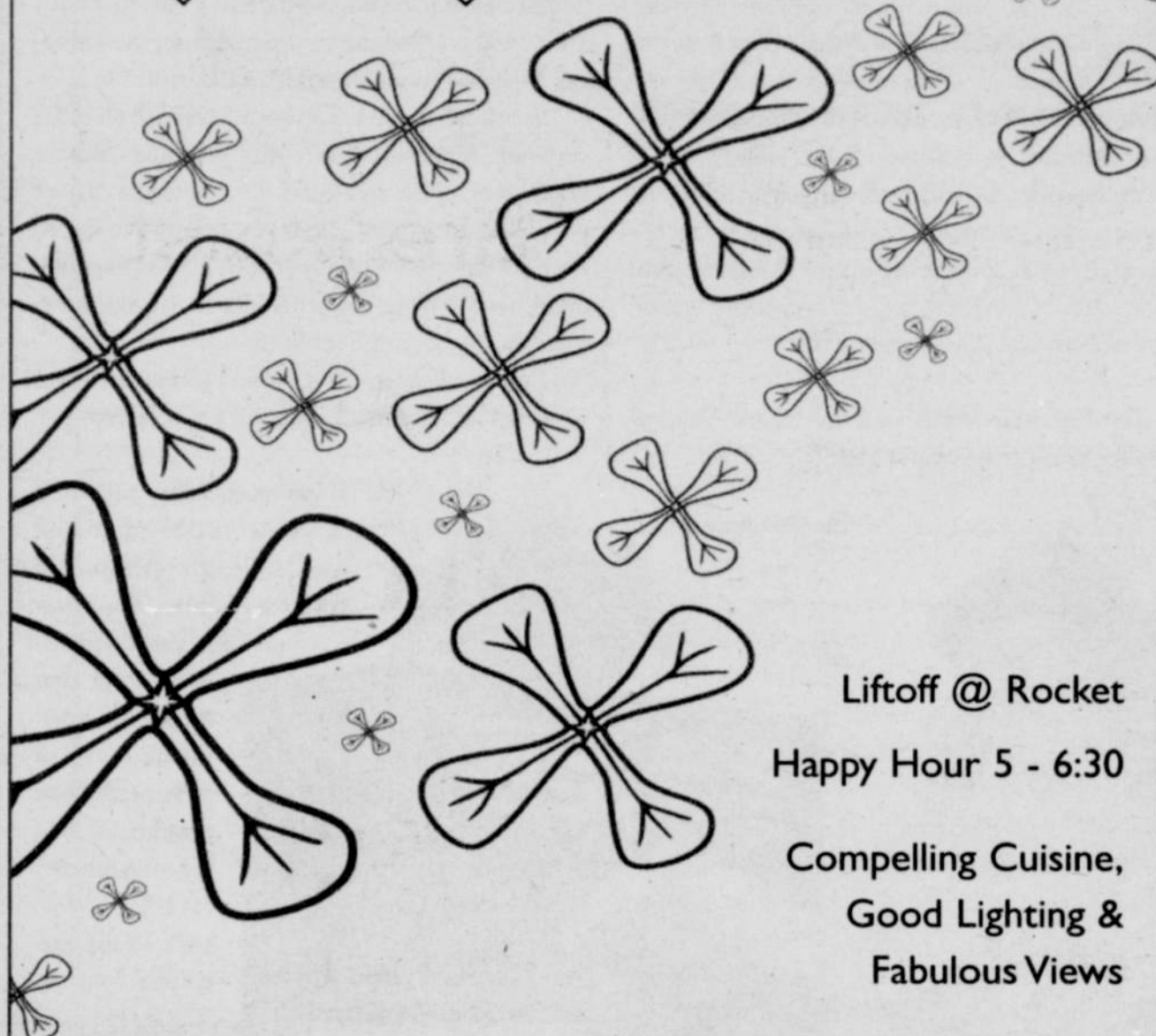
SANDOR KATZ presents fermentation workshops 11 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. May 31 during the Bastyr University Herb Faire in Seattle. For a list of other Northwest appearances, visit [www.wildfermentation.com](http://www.wildfermentation.com).

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Sandor Katz promotes fermentation, a useful method for preserving food that also increases its nutritional value.

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