

If a
RENAISSANCE WOMAN
is one who has a wide range of accomplishments and intellectual interests, then
SHEILA JOHNSON
has certainly earned that label.

AN ACCOMPLISHED VIOLINIST, A SUPPORTER OF THE ARTS, AND A FILM PRODUCER, JOHNSON IS ALSO THE ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN TO OWN OR CO-OWN THREE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS TEAMS: THE WNBA MYSTICS, NHL WASHINGTON CAPITALS, AND NBA WASHINGTON WIZARDS.

SHE GOT HER START in 1979 when she cofounded Black Entertainment Television (BET) with then-husband Robert Johnson. The executive is also a partner in an aviation company and in a bath, body, and home products company. But perhaps the job that best suits her, or showcases some of her best-known traits, is as CEO of a growing portfolio of luxury resorts. Johnson exudes warmth and generosity and loves to cook, so forming Salamander Hospitality in 2005, which oversees her properties, was a natural choice.

Johnson comes by hospitality naturally. “My mother got such enjoyment from entertaining and feeding people. She always wanted guests to visit and loved to cook,” she remembers. When Johnson was in high school, the football team would descend on her house for her mother’s pancakes. Her grandmother on her father’s side was Italian, and Johnson’s favorite foods are Italian. She’s known for her Italian cooking, especially pasta, soups, and pizza.

During the years she was building BET she entertained extensively and loved planning dinners—from deciding on the table decorations, to selecting the china, to bringing in talented chefs and creating memorable menus. “People would tell me, ‘You know, you’re really good at this,’” Johnson recalls.

After selling BET to Viacom, she bought her first property, the Woodlands Inn a five-star and five-diamond hotel and restaurant in Summerville, SC, evocative of a Charleston plantation estate. Her next purchase was the Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club in Innisbrook, Florida, which hosts the PGA Tour’s Transition Championship. Another resort, the Salamander Resort and Spa, is scheduled to open in 2012 in Middleburg, Va., the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, where she lives.

Striking a balance between healthy fare and such food as steak and cheeseburgers, favorites of Innisbrook golfers, is important to Johnson, and she often consults about the menu with Andre Halston, chef at the resort. “He listens to my preferences, and he’s just the greatest chef. He doesn’t get stale, he experiments,” she says. Newscaster Al Roker, who had gastric bypass surgery to lose weight several years ago, has raved about Halston’s gluten-free flaxseed muffins. Halston’s chicken burgers, which he whips up on request, are another healthy treat. But who can resist a scrumptious dessert every now and

then? “When you feeling like indulging, nothing is better than Chef Andre’s Chocolate Bread Pudding. Trust me -- it’s like heaven on a spoon,” Johnson insists.

She also has fun combining food and golfing. Once she had a group of students from a local culinary school visit Innisbrook and surprise golfers with delicacies while wearing full chef regalia. A Japanese golfer loved the Innisbrook cheeseburgers, so the staff surprised him during a tournament by showing up at the 18th hole with a platter of them.

Her philosophy about entertaining reflects her warm and welcoming style. “There’s something about being able to sit down to a meal with friends and spend quality time. You’re not under a time clock, and we have lost that,” she says. Johnson lives on a farm, has her offices there, and grows fruits and vegetables as well. Each year she treats her staff to a harvest meal for which she does all the cooking. “We set up a long table in the barn and string lanterns, and I bring in big pots of stews and soups and cornbread. We have pumpkin tarts, wine and beer. I love this ritual. It’s the one time my staff from the farm, the office, and from Salamander can reconnect and just have fun.”

Johnson talks about the guests at her resorts the same way. The greatest pleasure she gets is welcoming guests, sitting down and getting to know them, and finding out what they like and don’t like. Service is her number one priority, followed by food as a close second. “Everyone says I’ve made both number one, but I don’t take anything for granted,” she avers.

Entrepreneur extraordinaire, philanthropist, filmmaker, hostess...Sheila Johnson is a role model for what can be accomplished with talent, grace, and hard work. However, she is much too modest to agree.



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Innisbrook Bread Pudding

Yield: 1 Medium Baking Dish or 6-8 plates

- 6-8 Large Croissants
- 4-5 Muffins of your choice
- 2 cups Chocolate Chips or Chunks
- 3 cups Peach Pieces
- 3 cups Heavy Cream
- 3 Whole Fresh Eggs
- 1/4 cup Honey
- 2 tablespoons of Vanilla Extract
- 8 ounces Mascarpone Cheese

Preheat oven to 325 Degrees

On a cutting board rough chop the croissants and muffins 1/2 inch pieces. In a bowl add the cream, eggs, honey, vanilla and mascarpone; whisk for 2 minutes. Add the croissant, muffin, chocolate and peach pieces; mix until the liquid is completely absorbed. Apply a light coating of butter spray into each baking dish. Place equal amounts of the croissant mix into each baking dish level with the top of the dish. Place the dishes onto a baking tray and into the oven. Bake for 40-45 minutes – until a golden to nutty brown crust forms on the edges of the croissants or muffins and the liquid should be bubbling in the center. Remove and serve immediately with the crème anglaise sauce

Crème Anglaise Sauce:

- 3 Vanilla Beans
- 1 Quart Whole Milk
- 6 ounces Granulated White Sugar
- 12 Egg Yolks

In a saucepot over medium heat add the milk. Cut the vanilla beans in half lengthwise and add them to the milk; bring the milk to a simmer. In a bowl add the sugar and egg yolks; whisk until all of the sugar is dissolved and the yolks will become a pale yellow. As the milk approaches a simmer, remove the vanilla beans; scrape the inside of the beans to remove the tiny beans and place the tiny beans and whole stems into the warm milk. When the milk has come to a simmer (slight roll) pour half of it into the yolk mix and gently whisk. Add the whisked egg yolk-milk and sugar mix into the pot with the remaining milk. Over medium heat stir and be sure to scrape all of the edges of the pot. Do not let the cream boil. Check the consistency of the sauce by holding the spatula sideways and making a streak along the face of the spatula with your finger. When the streak remains without the sauce running down and obscuring it, the sauce is ready. Immediately remove the sauce from the heat and continue to stir for 2 minutes. Place the bowl over ice; pour the sauce through a strainer into the bowl and stir for 30 seconds every 2 minutes. Serve as needed

