



# ELLA BRENNAN

Conversations with

**Ella Brennan was a high school student when her oldest brother, Owen, bought a restaurant in the French Quarter. The Vieux Carré, it was called, and its food wasn't much more imaginative than its name.**

The more she griped about it, she remembers, the more her brother challenged her: "I was complaining so much that Owen finally asked me: Why don't you come do something about it, smarty?"

So she did. And by the time she was 18, she was running the place.

In the 71 years since then, Brennan has never stopped working. She has become the matriarch of a New Orleans family that operates a dozen restaurants, including Commander's Palace, the one that most clearly bears her imprimatur. She is mostly retired now but she lives next door to the restaurant with her sister, Dottie, and still shows up there two or three times a week.

She still studies the restaurant business avidly, still stays on the lookout for new dishes, new wines, new moves, new ways of making a better restaurant. She is still the superb teacher she has always been. And she is still a superb student.

Over her career as a restaurateur, Brennan has made her mark with a series of fresh and innovative concepts: She pioneered the notion of nouvelle Creole cuisine. She elevated the profile of Louisiana cooking throughout the world. She forged a level of service that was the match of any anywhere. And she used her kitchen at Commander's Palace as a kind of de facto New Orleans culinary academy, turning out dozens of the city's finest chefs and thereby enlivening the local food scene beyond measure.



Ella Brennan – mentor, entrepreneur, culinary pioneer



Mike Siegel, Corporate Realty



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## *“Some people say her secret is her relentless striving, her refusal ever to say it’s good enough.”*



Some people say her achievement owes to her insistence on serving handmade, complex, imaginative dishes in a large restaurant that seats several hundred people (the exact number is a family secret) rather than something simpler that can be churned out in high volume.

Some people say her secret is her relentless striving, her refusal ever to say it's good enough.

Some say it's her openness to new ideas – like the jazz brunch. Her brother Dick came up with the concept one Sunday morning. He called her from the restaurant and told her the place was empty. They needed a fresh marketing strategy, he said, and he had an inspiration: breakfast with roving jazz musicians, serious food and a lighthearted feel.

Others say it's her studiousness. She reads widely, deeply and constantly. She is famous for sending clips around to her family and friends and staff, people she thinks might be sparked by a new idea.

“Mom and I are weird chicks: We like to sit around and read the Harvard Business Review and then talk about it,” says Ti, who now operates Commander’s Palace with her cousin Lally Brennan.

And still others say it's her gift for combining a spirit of fun with a grand restaurant.

She's not traveling as much as she once did; her sense of balance isn't what it used to be. But as for a life spent in the culinary world, that's one thing she's not complaining about.

**“If you have to work for a living,” she says,  
“it’s a nice way to do it.”**

(Excerpted from an article by Elizabeth Mullener,  
April 1, 2014, Times Picayune)



*“Some girls went to finishing school. I went to Lafitte’s.”*

— ELLA BRENNAN

**Dear Friend —**

Business lessons, and life lessons, can sometimes be learned from unexpected sources. When we were thinking about our 2015 marketing mailers, we once again wanted to focus on food (as always) and on a person or a restaurant in New Orleans that we felt exemplified the commitment to excellence that we strive for every day in our business. We immediately knew that Ella Brennan and Commander's Palace were the ideal fit. Ella personifies excellence. She is the quintessential restaurateur and New Orleanian, and she has been a civic leader for over 50 years. What we did not know is that Ella would have so many business lessons for us: her focus on teamwork, her non-stop desire to innovate, and the importance she places on family and community at all times in each restaurant. Ella Brennan is more than one of the great restaurateurs of our generation. She is a business and community leader who, at 89 years young, still has the drive, the intellect, and the passion to teach us all about business and about life.

At Corporate Realty, we continually strive for excellence and innovation, to provide great customer service, and to give back to the communities in which we live and work. While the nuts and bolts of what we do is help people and companies with their commercial real estate needs, our larger role, and one which we take seriously, is to be productive and giving members of society.

With this in mind, we hope you will enjoy this year's monthly mailers. We will continue to send you an overview of our transactions and new assignments every month along with observations from Ella Brennan and interviews and recipes from several of the world-class chefs who have come through the Ella Brennan/Commander's Palace kitchen.

We hope you enjoy these monthly mailers, and hope you and your family have a safe, happy, and food-filled 2015.



Michael J. Siegel,  
President

*Commander's Palace*



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[www.corp-realty.com](http://www.corp-realty.com)

201 Saint Charles Avenue, Suite 4411  
New Orleans, LA 70170  
(504) 581-5005