

Creating Unique Food Experiences and Learning about Human Design with Natalie Niksa from La Saison

SPEAKERS

Emily Merrell, Natalie Niksa

Emily Merrell

Welcome to The Sixth Degree podcast, the podcast where we grill our guests about the things that make them tick and find out how human connection plays a role in their life. I'm your host, Emily Merrell. Hello, and welcome back to The Sixth Degree with Emily Merrell, the podcast where we grill our guests about the things that make them tick, and find out how human connection plays a role in their life. I'm your host, Emily. And today, I am so beyond excited to start off the year talking to my dear friend, Natalie Niksa, founder of La Saison, Natalie, welcome to the show.

Natalie Niksa

Thank you, Emily, it's such an honor to be here with you and all of your guests listening.

Emily Merrell

I am so excited because I feel like having you here, it's the beginning of 2021. It's so serendipitous, because our story goes back to 2018. It goes back to like a moment in time. And the moment I met Natalie, I knew that she was a forever friend, and someone that was going to be a very important person in my life and play it for a very particular role. So Natalie, I think we should tell everyone how we met and that that fateful day, do you want to tell it from your perspective? And I'll I'll chime in?

Natalie Niksa

Sure. And I think that even just to connect the listeners, like, I feel like we all probably have those memories, those people those moments that are so defining, or where we get a glimpse of like, have I met you before. And you know, I think that throughout this podcast, maybe we can talk about like that mystery of what that is of, you know, not necessarily ever going to have an answer to it. But the possibility that maybe at one other time, we crossed paths, and we tend to find the right tribe and the right threads all woven at the divine moments that it's meant to be, you clearly taught me so much more as our story develops than what I knew initially. But the long story short is that I was presented with an opportunity to align with a company take time to toast Daniel Gibson events, who is just an extraordinary woman, leader, and creative who was looking for food to provide to a bunch of incredible women, that you were one of the guest speakers for the for the actual event. And I thought that there

was nothing more than I wanted to be aligned with than to provide nourishing food to a group of women that would receive it. And I was so struck by your presence, as I'm sure many people are, who have the opportunity to actually hear you speak, speaking publicly is something that has not always been easy for me, I've worked at it in terms of just really looking at the shadow what my first trauma experience was with, you know, public speaking. But when I watched you, it was one of those expander moments where I was like, Wow, she is so magnetic. So in her words, so powerful. And I looked up to you. And so when you came to my table, which is, you know, a table that I am able to show my creativity with where I have all this, like all these, like little food bites everywhere. You came up to me, and you were just so human. And you were like, Wow, this is so beautiful. And I was like, You are so beautiful. And you know, it's like those cosmic connections of like, No, you no, you.

Emily Merrell

Well, and I want to jump into so I was, well, thank you first, I was on a stage with by our friend Jody Davis, who we've interviewed on the podcast earlier in the year. And Jody was doing a live podcast actually on the stage to 150 plus women. And one of the questions she had asked and had just gotten engaged was, you know, what's one wish that you would want fulfilled by this audience? And I'm in a room full of all these wedding vendors and planners and individuals who have so much more expertise in the field than I have any idea. And I said, I just want to be I think I said, I want my my wedding built by community, and by women entrepreneurs, and I walk outside and I've like stumble into Natalie's delicious bites, like the most perfectly, you know, magazine, perfect food that tastes better than you can imagine. And she was she you offered me You're like, I want to cater your wedding. And I lit up like a Christmas tree. Because first and foremost, you're like, I'm from Connecticut. I'm like, I'm from Connecticut, and we had all these things in common. And then I told of the wedding, which was like, I want to style look at these long tables and whatnot. And she's like, I don't do weddings, but I'm gonna do your wedding. Which brings us to poor Natalie doing my wedding.

Natalie Niksa

So I don't do weddings, for a lot of reasons. I'm just gonna chime in here. And the most beautiful part of what you said about the story was that and I'm sure anyone listening knows your story by now about your wedding. But ultimately, you said community and I, if it weren't for the community, there's no way that your guests would have been fed, or add beverages or anything that happened because it took an entire village to keep everyone safe and mobilized and you know, for everything to happen the way that it did. And there's so many reasons why when I say I don't do weddings, it's it's just, I think that it's important to know what lights you up, right. And I think that for me with you, in that moment, I knew I could offer you something that would also light me up, even though I don't do them in the same platform in the stage of the vendors that we were a part of that day, because everyone was like, you know, a wedding vendor, which I was not. Even though I'm a chef, even though I have a company even though I have a team. I knew synergistically that I wanted to align with you and, and and help you through the process.

Emily Merrell

Oh my god. And I could not have imagined today without Natalie, there were more like, Natalie, we're being evacuated for like, I know, I've already got people packed up, they're already going back to the kitchen. So it was truly and I'm I was the bride. So I can say it was the best day and the best food, but it

was truly the best wedding food I've ever had. And it was served on bamboo plates. And it was just so magical. And it was because Natalie led her team with such grace. Which brings me to providing a little more context. We, you know, we mentioned that you're the founder of this incredible catering company. But where are you based?

Natalie Niksa

Yeah, yeah, for sure. So I feel like thankfully, now I, you know, yes, we started as a catering company. And actually, technically, I started with food products at the farmers market back in 2007. in Napa Valley, so I'm based in Napa Valley, California, which is, you know, a place that's very special to me, for a lot of reasons, I am not, I don't hail from here, obviously, we talked about that, but I grew up on the east coast. And, and I feel that now I'm moving more into really becoming known for as a food brand. So where I'm based, thankfully, is in your home. And we ship everywhere, which is so exciting, because I feel that that's so fitting for my aura and the sense of how many people I want to reach and all of the ways that I don't want it to be not accessible. I want everyone to be touched by what I create.

Emily Merrell

And how did you from Farmington, Connecticut, make it out to Napa? I feel like that could have been a really intimidating place to kind of like start your business and to begin even setting up shop at the farmers market. Can you walk us through that journey a bit more?

Natalie Niksa

Yeah. So I think that there is something to be said about Beginner's luck, number one, and like the naivete that comes from like having a child mind. So those two points, perhaps, you know, keep in mind throughout our conversation, because I think that there's real brilliance and like divinity within those nuggets, if you will. I have connected dots my entire life. And I'm not afraid of when things click, and I think of someone and then they call or where you know, you and I meet up at an event and I say I'm going to do this and you say okay, and I follow through. Those are opportunities that are accessible to all of us if we open our hearts and minds and don't think about them just feel into whether it feels right. So, ultimately, a girl moved to my elementary school in the second grade in Connecticut from the Napa Valley. And I thought she was the coolest person. Her name is Margaret Houston. I always tell her to this day that she's always a part of my story because she comes up so often. She when she said that she was from the Napa Valley I just pictured like one of those fairy tale kind of like magical lands that it was a seed that was planted and my family will attest that I always wanted to move to California. It's just something that was a part of my story. And then in high school, I loved love have loved the community of just being at a table of eating of, you know, being nurtured through food and one of my closest girlfriends, her parents owned a restaurant and an N in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. And I got really involved with cooking. And when we were 18, for New Year's Eve, we decided that we were going to travel to Berkeley, California, and go to shape the nice because that's what 18 year olds do on New Year's Eve. it's hysterical. And so from that trip, when we were 18, we took a road trip from Berkeley up to Napa Valley. And I said to her, and I know exactly the moment it was in specifically where it was in Yountville, California, which is just like the midway point of Napa Valley. I said, I am 100% going to live here one day, like I just knew it was cellular. That's insane. And what a fun 18 year old experience you can't even drink then you can't even go to vineyards, like properly at that time. I've looked the same since I was like about 10 I feel so think that it's all about how you hold yourself. They

were very gracious to us at the restaurant. And I think by after like the third time we asked for a little bit more Chateau de Cam I think that they were like maybe these girls are under age because we were like, Oh my God, this tastes like buttered honey, peaches. It's amazing.

Emily Merrell

Way to get drunk for that one of the first times.

Natalie Niksa

Yeah, but we had no idea what the cost implications were gonna be. So then, at what point did you know that you know you loved community loves connecting people? At what point did you recognize like, I want to go into the world of serving people and creating food and experience for other humans. I think the beautiful reality that brings in the shadow of the story is that just like a lot of women, I really battled with my relationship with food for a very long time. So I chose culinary arts, not only because I loved the community aspect of it, but I knew I needed to heal and get to the other side of the the pain and the healthy relationship I was having with food.

Emily Merrell

Yeah, that makes sense. And I feel like that's something that I love the fact that you became a chef to battle like your demon, and you make the most delicious, decadent, stupid, delicious cookies that are like, I don't even know how many calories. So I love that extreme there.

Natalie Niksa

I really do have a theory though with calories that in food in general, because I and I'm sure we'll get into this, there's a magnificent aspect of us, which is the energetics of being here. And when we are enjoying something truly enjoying it and not thinking about any of the ramifications in terms of like the toxicity or the calories or X, Y and Z. Energetically we digest things very differently when we're in calm states of receiving versus like, you know, this is gonna add this to my waistline x, you know, those kinds of thoughts

Emily Merrell

like a power bar on the go or something that you're just shoving into your mouth. So speaking of energetics in the past, I think the very first event you came to of mine was on our Aveda, which is still pronounced poorly, probably. And I remember you were curious, and you were exploring that side of yourself. But since that workshop, you have also led a workshop for us on Human Design. Have you gave me the most incredible gift of it was a Human Design meeting mixed with an astrology reading, which I reference quite frequently. So for those of you for our listeners that aren't quite familiar with human design, can you give a little background on what human design is and how you even came into your life and was a path that you decided to meander down?

Natalie Niksa

Yes. So there's a lot there, right. I think that we are living in a time of course with like over information. So I think that sometimes it can also be a bit bullish in the sense that if you don't fully understand something, you almost put up this shield because it's intimidating. And Human Design and astrology are really sacred, and it's a language and it's really beneficial to anyone who wants to understand their

purpose, their true or higher essence of why they're here to be willing and open to people pausing not necessarily for the financial, you know, ramifications because I know that sometimes readings can be cost prohibitive. And that's where I do consider this work to be sacred. Not that I can give, you know, all of my readings complimentary, but I do work with people regularly because money should not be what's getting involved with you learning about your blueprint. So we call the Human Design body graph a blueprint, because it's literally taking into effect, the neutrinos, which are subatomic particles, they're energies that were in existence, the moment you took your first breath. And what's fascinating with the Human Design body graph is that it's taking into account three months prior to when you arrived, as well as the moment you first took your breath. And why that's significant is that it bridges where we're coming from spiritual beings, which is our destiny to when we become fated beings as humans. And the journey of being human is a journey of recognizing that it requires conditioning, and then a moment of consciousness that the deconditioning process starts, so that we can start remembering why we actually came back here to begin with,

Emily Merrell

this sounds a lot like the movie Soul, I don't know if you've had a chance to. But I feel like you just explained the entire plot of Soul.

Natalie Niksa

That's awesome. So what's what's fascinating with human design is that it was just, it was just presented to us, really around the time that you were born in 1987. So this is very new information, and it combines astrology. So when I look at, I don't ever do astrology, without doing Human Design first. So if someone comes to me for a reading, they can do either or, or they can do it combined. But if you want to do Human Design, with astrology, you have to have your human design reading first, because otherwise, it's too much. It's a lot of information, I always say that we need like a sleep over. It's just a lot to download for anyone. But what is fascinating is that most people know their sun sign, for example. So for you, Emily, you're a Gemini, that's what that's where the sun was when you were born. And your sun sign is about 70% of your astrological chart in the sense that that's how you, you know, literally show up in the world. That's how your energy and light you know is magnified in its in its most radiant way, which is through communication, which is so fitting for you know, this moment right now. And then to mirror that on the human design chart is that your energy type, which is mirroring the sun sign is that you are a projector. And as the projector, it's more about really getting in touch with the projection field of who lights you up and the people that you want to attract into your projection field. So that you become almost an energetic billboard, of what it is that you're attracting to you so that you can moderate your energy properly, and not become exhausted. It's all about energetics and maintaining our levels of energy so that we're being fulfilled, and ultimately helping one another all turn on each other's lights, because there's an incredible abundance. And so there's no shortage and we are here to help all each other find our magic and how it is.

Emily Merrell

So I'm a projector for those that aren't familiar with human design, how many different avatars are there within human design?

Natalie Niksa

So there's five energy types. Yeah, and and when we're talking about human design, every single person is a puzzle piece. So if we were to imagine that the whole globe is a giant, 8 billion piece jigsaw puzzle, can you imagine how important it is for everyone to keep up with maintaining their edges and their corners and their puzzle piece? Because without each other's puzzle pieces, we will never heal and reach the magnificence of what we are here to do.

Emily Merrell

I love that I just did 1000 piece puzzle piece now that was challenging. So 8 million, 3 billion. Seems like that seems like a big mess of puzzles to fit together. So Natalie I love the fact that you've got this, this food passion and this like, you know nourishment side of you. And then you also have this spiritual side of you with human design and astrology and many other learnings. You're a student of life. I know you're learning every single day. So how in this past year, you know, we had a pandemic, which a lot of businesses have, sadly had to close, their doors are wiped out completely, it seems like you're flourishing, how was 2020 for you, and what were your biggest learnings from the past year?

Natalie Niksa

So in 2020, I allowed myself a lot of time to learn. And I have always been a student of life. And I think that when we allow our self quiet time, we tap into hearing a voice and a guidance that is not of our own. And so often, we're going so quickly that we don't allow this to come into play. And so I was guided in nothing but divine way to really recognize that we are digesting everything in life. So I was able to beautifully bridge my culinary background with my studies. Obviously, it's going to continue to develop, I think that this will be an I know that this will be my life's work of how it will develop with some things that I'm even going to be introducing this year. One of them is a nourishing soup kit, I was thinking particularly with postpartum women. But then I thought, you know, so many people would benefit from nourishing soups with breads and dips, and all of these yummy foods that are really restaurant quality that can be shipped to your doorstep. So I think that for me, I'm just allowing myself to blossom, right to allow all of the lessons of my life to combine into the symphony that they're kind of creating on their own. I'm not forcing anything. My strategy and Human Design is to respond. So I always say life is happening for you, it's not happening to you. So when things are, you know, coming onto your path, you can respond to what's working and what feels good. I think following the compass of what feels good, is the best compass to follow. It will always lead you in the right direction of what feels good for you. And so for me, nourishing people, while also being able to guide offers a sense of maternity, and spirituality and a creative element, which is at my core, what I want to radiate.

Emily Merrell

Oh, I love that. And I mean, I think we were talking about this before we started recording. The other cool thing about this art seems with the pandemic is I feel like you've touched on this was rather than you just serving locally and in Napa Valley, the most delicious dinners and brunches and everything he went to like the cheapest wineries, you'll find it paired with a with Natalie's cooking, but the fact that I can now have access to you in my local Whole Foods. Like I literally walked into Whole Foods, and there is a sign that says like local product from last season. I'm like, Are you kidding me? My friend Natalie is in my whole foods. And that was a really cool moment, just to see the the development of it being I've had the pleasure of trying your beautiful almond salt, you know, spiced nuts before limited to just our interactions together. But to be able to expand it beyond and see it locally in San Francisco and

hopefully beyond is is such a cool element. So is that something that's going to progress in the new year?

Natalie Niksa

Yeah, so if you go to our website, I think what's cool is that we're actually pulling away from catering. So it's not as though we don't do catering, but we are really limiting what we do with catering. And we're going to be developing more of what's accessible across the country. So there's an entire line of provisions. And the virtual cheese kit is a really fun, divine idea I had after an opportunity was presented to me to basically ship cheese to 150 you know, recipients and I said She's like, I don't ever just do what's being asked of me like I am. I just think in like a kaleidoscope kind of way always. I'm never really linear at all. I'm always this like peripheral broad, you know, perspective kind of surveyor, if you will of life. So I took that opportunity. And it was like that like moment and rat tattooing where he was, like, you know, pow, pow, all the flavors kept coming together. And all these ideas just came, came in. And by the time I launched it, it was just received so wholeheartedly, and it really taps into my playfulness, of really wanting people to understand that there can be sophistication with flavors, but also the the power that comes back to being reminded of a kid. Because when we get down to it, we all are just kids that are still trying to figure it out, no matter what successes you may have achieved, or whatever you might have. And these cheese kits are a perfect combination that bridges, you know, who if you are used to going out to restaurants every night, to a five year old, you know, matching all the color coordinated components together and, and cutting things open and building the flavors. And so it's really for all ages. And it It allows for us to pause and really use all of our senses to so we're using our eyes, we're using our nose, our hands, and also like the excitement in our stomachs of like, whoo, what are all of these things? And so it's it's really tapping into presence really slowing down and being present with all of what is on our platform right now. And then of course, my my gentle guidance is the the Human Design and astrology component that I always touch on what digestion is most suitable to you, not only from what's nourishing you on the inside, but also what's nourishing you on the outside with your environment.

Emily Merrell

Oh my gosh, I love that. And I'm like, well, we need to do a cheese class together. We'll talk about an event after this call. This is great. Speaking of more of like the kid, like in you or the kid inside of you, I cannot agree with that more. I feel like I'm regressing. I'm back to like 14, maybe nine years old at times. Greg's like you do you need Do you always need attention Do you need do you need to be well, like, are you a dog? I don't I don't know who you are. But I'm like, play with me. Love me. scratch my belly. Who knows? But I have some questions for you, Natalie. Some I love ending our calls with some six fast, rapid fire questions. So we can get to know Natalie that much more. So are you ready?

Natalie Niksa

Sure.

Emily Merrell

Okay, my first one is, can you tell us an unknown fun fact about you?

Natalie Niksa

An unknown fun fact about me. I always wanted to be a model, not from the perspective of a runway but because I always looked towards beautiful women as having an opportunity of power that can cast opportunities for so many other people, not just from like the physicality of it. But just from like, stepping into being an example. Like I just always loved the idea of what a model represented. I know that there's obviously so many skews of how that can be misinterpreted now, but I think that at its essence, all women want to feel seen and want to feel beautiful, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Emily Merrell

Oh, I love that. That was so shocking, very unknown. And yeah, it reminds you of like, trying to think of, I don't know, a model like a Cindy cross.

Natalie Niksa

So I grew up with the with the Taylor sisters. They weren't twins, but it was in the same kind of time period as Cindy Crawford, but Nikki Taylor, she lost her sister Chrissy and it was always something that I don't know, I I'm so empathic. So, you know, it was like around the same time that like Princess Diana died. So Princess Diana, even though she wasn't a model. She's a great example of someone that like really captured like the world in a sense of how she was, you know, just her brilliance of just being right. I always work drawn to that sort of stature of a woman as a model not necessarily a runway but just a model of a woman.

Emily Merrell

I love that yeah model both like figuratively and literally of how they can be. I love that one. Yeah, I googled, I remember Nikki Taylor got a flashback. So, no, in quarantine and pandemic, some of us have turned to Netflix and Hulu, and prime and HBO, I think we have like seven more of those platforms on our television personally. But are you watching? Are you currently watching any shows that you feel like you need to tell the world about?

Natalie Niksa

it's funny, so I literally just started The Crown. I feel like I'm very late to the game here. And I love Love, love the history that I'm learning. I mean, I just sobbed recently at a episode about African, which, you know, I'm not gonna get into it. But there's just so much knowledge, right. And I think that I remember making judgments, and we just don't ever know, right, like, you're gonna hear my voice on the other end, and you're gonna have your own interpretations. And we just, the world is asking us to be more compassionate, and to, you know, just continue to learn and continue to trust. So I love The Crown, because it's not only entertaining, it's really educational.

Emily Merrell

It's how history should be delivered to people. Absolutely. Yeah. What about a book you're reading? Are there any books that you are reading or have read this year that you need to tell the world about?

Natalie Niksa

I confess that I have about seven books that I'm reading right now. I feel like I have a book in every single room to be honest with you. So some of them are more like sacred than others. So I don't necessarily know that I would recommend many of the books that I read because they're definitely a

little esoteric. romba was one of them. So if anyone is really like, What is rompa? I thought it was just profound. Let's see. I'm reading the fable of siddhartha right now.

And

Emily Merrell

like high school read in like high school like AP English, deep conversation, reading. I love this.

Natalie Niksa

Yeah, it's like poetry mixed with mysticism and psychology. I do love What was it? I think it was Gabby Bernstein's super attractor. That was a really good one. And it's fun, it's light. Let's see, what was another. There was another one that I chewed through so fast. It was like the easiest, because it was just you know, those books, but I'm not gonna remember it in this moment. So maybe, if I'd be really interested.

Emily Merrell

I think that's good. I think those are those are good books to check out. Okay, what is your favorite emoji that you use the most?

Natalie Niksa

I know people can't see me. But like I have a smile from ear to ear. So I love that emoji where it's like a hug smile. Because I love hugs as well. So I just want to like reach out and like squeeze people.

Emily Merrell

I love it It's funny. We all have her like particular years. What about your favorite meal? Like it's the end of time and you can make only one meal? What is your favorite meal that you would make?

Natalie Niksa

Probably cheesy scrambled eggs.

Emily Merrell

Oh my god. Probably chef cheesy scrambled eggs. The most simple. I love it. They're gonna be delicious, though. I know.

Natalie Niksa

very soft, no color.

Emily Merrell

Yes or no color. Living in Napa Valley. I'm sure you've had the pleasure of feeding so many extraordinary people. Is there like a favorite maybe Napa celebrity sighting that you've had?

Natalie Niksa

I am as empowered, worthy, deserving and important as any other so I don't separate all of that.

Emily Merrell

Okay. And then lastly, if you were to create a movie of your life, what would you call it?

Natalie Niksa

Present.

Emily Merrell

Ooh, well, coming soon to a theater near you. You can see President Sterling Natalie. Natalie, thank you so much for joining us today on the show. For individuals who want to sign up for your cheese, your cheese kits in your soup kits and to learn more about everything that you have, where can I direct them to?

Natalie Niksa

Well, this was so fun. I feel like I've giggled so much. My Instagram is at loss a zone underscore Napa and there's a link tree From there that, you know, directs to all of our platforms, the website is lost a zone Napa valley.com. Thanks for the love. Thanks for being you. Thanks for having me.

Emily Merrell

Thank you for being here. I'm so grateful that you were able to be on the show. And I love the fact that we met while I was talking on a podcast and now I have the pleasure of having my own podcast to have you on it. So the full circle and synchronicity of it is incredible.

Natalie Niksa

Absolutely divine. It's so perfect.

Emily Merrell

So perfect. Well, thank you again and listeners. Thank you so much for tuning in. If you'd liked today's episode, please give us a review below and share with a friend. Have a great day, everyone.