



# Singular focus

**Photographer Glenn Olcerst wields the power of images to support the art of food retailing.**

Perhaps you've dined at a quaint French restaurant tucked along Pittsburgh's riverfront, or you're one of the thousands who've flocked to Pennsylvania to tour Giant Eagle's newest upscale format, Market District, which debuted this summer. During either culinary experience, you're sure to have appreciated a masterly demonstration of the art of food.

Displayed throughout these and numerous other food establishments located in and around the Steel City are hundreds of unique old-world images captured by photographer Glenn Olcerst. Best known not as an artist, but as a progressive labor attorney at the Pittsburgh-based law firm Marcus and Shapira, Olcerst represents a variety of clients nationwide, from supermarkets small and large to mammoth steel mills.

His demanding schedule often takes him from coast to coast weekly, navigating the minefields of decades-old union contracts; promoting partnerships among workers, labor unions, and management; or exploring with all three stakeholders the impact that a Wal-Mart Supercenter can have on an ill-prepared family-owned store.

But his travels as an artist take him far beyond those sometimes grueling 2 a.m. negotiations. Equipped with a loaded camera and a handmade kaleidoscope lens, he scours fishing villages scattered across Europe, Italian wineries and family-owned bakeries, corner bistros in France, and bustling farmers' markets in Mexico. Even as readers enjoy this issue of PROGRESSIVE GROCER, Olcerst and his wife, Barbara, are setting up shop to capture hundreds of images from the *souks*, or market-places, of Morocco and Spain.

I first met Olcerst the attorney during the late 1990s, when I was a storeowner. My family and our 700-plus supermarket associates at the time sought his legal expertise to rid ourselves and our customers of informational pickets amid a

10-year, ultimately unsuccessful effort to unionize our stores. It was, however just a couple of years ago that I came to know Olcerst the artist. I had been assigned to cover union-organizing tactics for an upcoming issue of PG and was lucky enough to get an interview with Olcerst.

On a blustery January day I made my way to Pittsburgh from northeast Ohio in about four hours. I wasn't going to let wind and snow mess up my plans to meet with the attorney, especially when he promised no billable hours.

I met Olcerst at a busy café near his office building, where I picked his brain about labor issues for nearly three hours. As the interview drew to a close, I complimented a striking black-and-white photograph hanging near the table that had earlier caught my eye. It was one of his works. So began a new conversation, in which I discovered how a passion for photography has become a labor of love for the lawyer with close to a 100 percent win record.

## A wider lens

Faced with a fast-paced global economy and heightened competition from national chains, numerous conventional supermarkets are striving to differentiate by shifting their merchandising focus. In so doing, they're appealing to an increasingly diverse customer base—Chinese, Indians, other Asians, Latinos, and others who

by their increasing numbers are redefining America's consumer landscape. Accordingly, research indicates that the demand for ethnic foods in the United States is expected to reach nearly \$6 billion this year alone.

As an attorney, Olcerst continues to provide top-notch advice to storeowners on how best to manage and enter

*Geographic* photojournalist Linda Solomon, extends to all of us personally or as business owners an invitation: "Open your walls to the world!" Featured on the site are a number of his visual series, all of which have found broad appeal with individual collectors and commercial clients alike. One of the latter is the Bravo Develop-

ment Corp., which, after a year-long selection process, chose images from Olcerst's *Italy Series* as the decor for its East Coast Brio restaurants.

"Our photographs, which are taken at world-famous markets and capture authentic food images and people with a lifelong passion for food, transform our world and transport the viewer," says Olcerst, explaining the power of such forms of commu-

nications. "Product quality, demos, and how we merchandise and communicate definitely impact enthusiasm and sales within our stores. But it's by creating that real-life atmosphere, in taking international products to market, that we'll inspire more passion for food both in customers and associates."

Perhaps it's the attorney in Olcerst that leads to this quite apt summation: "Food, like art, often reminds people of where they've been in life. And both can help them to feel at home."

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## A world of food



Based on his studies of various cultures and his travels throughout the world, Glenn Olcerst has become convinced that the art sale marketing model offers American supermarkets the best chance of successfully creating international themes or departments within their stores.

"I think we can all agree that food is art, especially in the right hands," says Olcerst. "Human nature is to buy food—or art—that is familiar and makes us feel good. In either case, cus-

tomers are seeking expertise, atmosphere, and passion from the seller. They want the seller to understand the history of the product, where it was cultivated, and how best to use or display the product.

"What makes international bakeries, restaurants, delis, and cafés appealing is their authenticity. We must convince our customers, whether they are in the market for sushi or Cuban-style bread, that they can trust us to secure or produce their favorite items."

into partnerships with a diverse and ever-changing work force. But it's through his creative company, Destination Photographs, that he's helping food entrepreneurs to capitalize on the growing demand for international goods.

At present his photographs, many of which are printed in black and white, are featured in store decor packages, as well as on product labels, menus, and various other marketing materials, to create atmospheres of authenticity and thus enhance sales of international products.

On his Web site, [www.glennolcerst.com](http://www.glennolcerst.com), Olcerst, who has studied with the world-renowned *National*