

WHAT'S NEW ON THE MENUS OF TOP TOOQUES

Laurann Claridge checks out what chefs worldwide were chattering about at the Starchefs.com International Chefs Congress, and learns more about America's next course.

GENTLEMAN FARMER

One man who's working hard to influence agricultural appreciation at the table is chef **Dan Barber**. Three years ago, Barber received a \$30 million grant from David Rockefeller to launch **The Stone Barns Center** in Westchester County, New York — a sprawling farm with 6 acres of gardens, a 23,000-square-foot greenhouse and pastures where lambs, pigs, chickens, laying hens, ducks, rabbits and cows roam; honeybees pollinate; and diners flock to his down-to-earth fine-dining room, **Blue Hill**. Barber and his protégés supply the restaurant, its sister property in New York City and well-heeled neighbors who migrate to reap what the farmers sow at the seasonal weekly farmer's market. Reviving the art of animal husbandry, they're breeding flavor-some fat back into the lean oinkers formerly known as pigs and raising a variety of lambs that enjoy a 100 percent grass-feed diet. Farmers also cultivate 35 varieties of greens, including cassava broccoli, the heirloom granddaddy of the modern broccoli stalk. Dark green and misshapen, its like rabé with 10 times more flavor than ordinary broccoli. "The challenge is to grow the most flavorful food and ingredients possible," Barber says.

TOP DRAWER COCKTAILS

I was never a gin-and-tonic girl until I sipped one concocted by **Todd Thrasher** of Alexandria, Virginia's **Restaurant Eve**. The gin was top shelf, sure, but what astonished me was the tonic — made from scratch with filtered water, cane sugar, honey, citric acid, yuzu juice and quinine, a South American dried tree bark that's ground into powder and a part of any authentic tonic. Thrasher, a presenter at the Starchefs.com International Chefs Congress, is among a growing contingent of mixologists taking back the bar to prepare high-end drinks with the same care with which chefs cook their fare. Thrasher's couture cocktails are crafted with fresh-squeezed juices, fruit and vegetable purées and waters, house-made simple-syrup infusions, colas, sodas and the aforementioned tonic, as well as ingredients such as complex bitters flavored with lemon, orange, mint, fig, cherry, kumquat and peach, each of which he bottles himself during a 21-day process. Thrasher's "I'd go out of my way for them" drinks hopefully signify a growing trend nationwide.

OLD WAYS NEWS AGAIN

Some things, like the little black dress, never go out of style. The culinary world's equivalent: cow's-milk Parmigiano-Reggiano, aged two years and recognizable by the pin-dot logo on its rind, and prosciutto di Parma (Parma ham), produced in Parma, Italy, with only the hind legs of specially bred pigs, sea salt and the air that flows around them. Discerning chefs, spurred by the Slow Food movement and aiming to protect food artisans and safeguard their traditional preparations, have trained their focus on just such ingredient-driven cuisine. For instance, **Fabio Trabocchi**, chef/owner of **Fiamma** in New York, looks to his Italian heritage for inspiration but tricks it up making a subtle parmesan ice cream topped by a Parma ham and hazelnut crunch crumble, a savory riff on cookies and ice cream, while **Josh DeChellis** with the Greenwich Village Japanese tempura house **BarFry** sandwiches raw kampachi fish with mirin and yuzu juice between paper-thin slices of prosciutto di Parma and lets the flavors marry for eight hours before serving.

MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY

SCIENCE ON A SILVER PLATTER

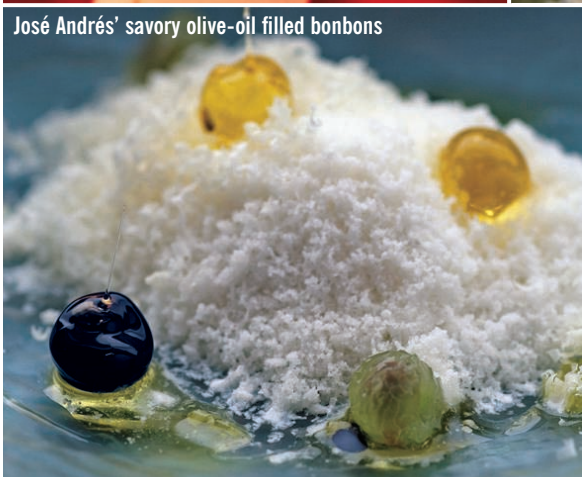
Depending on your point of view, you can credit or blame brothers **Ferran** and **Albert Adrià** of **El Bulli** in Spain for inspiring a rash of mad scientists in white chef coats — some, disciples of the most influential brethren of food today, others merely ardent admirers. Open six months a year (the remainder is devoted to experimental work), El Bulli has diners clamoring for months to secure a reservation. This three-Michelin-star, fine-dining spot has plated up ethereal foams and airs, and given the world "spherification" (the ability to jellify a liquid, producing sphere-shaped food in an array of sizes). Now El Bulli wholesales the know-how to its cohorts in a line of emulsifiers and jellifiers called **Texturas** (texturas elbulli.com). ... Spain is also home to pastry chef **Oriol Balaguer**, and his eponymous chocolate shop in Barcelona. This protégé of the Adrià brothers makes sweets to order, including chocolates filled with an innocent-looking ganache that, moments after indulging, fill your mouth with explosive Pop Rock-like sensation. Another Adrià acolyte, **Andoni Luis Aduriz** of **Mugaritz**, rigged his own kitchen contraption (along with experts at Spain's Azti Technical Center for Food and Marine Research) to create edible cocoa bubbles that, moments before serving, burst playfully over his decadent desserts. Fourth-generation chef **Elena Arzak**, at the helm of her family's **Restaurante Arzak**, which was built in San Sebastian in 1897, has played with liquid nitrogen and dehydrators in the past. Now she obsesses on the process of lyophilization (freeze-drying) to dry out, for example, a piece of squid, grind it to dust, then coat a fresh piece of squid with the powder to intensify its flavor ... Stateside, Spanish chef **José Andrés** of **Café Atlantico** in Washington, D.C., is another graduate of the Adrià academy. His savory olive oil bonbon simply astonishes. Made with isomalt (a natural-beet sugar substitute ideal for making candies), each olive oil-filled, caramelized sphere is dipped in a bracing vinegar powder and Maldon sea salt and bursts with a fruity, extra-virgin Spanish olive oil when nipped. In New York at **WD-50**, chef/owner **Wylie Dufresne** is tinkering with hydrocolloids (used by American snack-food manufacturers to stabilize and alter the texture of food). Using konjac flour, he serves soft tromp l'oeil pebbles with the tastes like grilled corn, brown butter bananas and pizza.



Todd Thrasher's well-crafted cocktail



Dan Barber's Stone Barn Center



José Andrés' savory olive-oil filled bonbons



Wylie Dufresne's edible pebbles

EQUIP YOURSELF

A decade ago, home cooks looked askance at chefs who whipped out

a welder's blowtorch to caramelize sugar atop a crème brûlée. Now Williams-Sonoma sells miniature torches to the masses. What's next? Here are the tools our inventive friends behind the swinging doors are tinkering with today.

SILK SCREENS

Channeling Andy Warhol, chef Seiji Yamamoto of RyuGin in Tokyo uses a silk screen to literally paint his eatery's logo with a thin layer of chocolate sauce onto each serving plate. He's even created a detailed copy of a recent review atop his china. Best yet, every letter is edible.

PAINT SPRAYERS

Once the domain of professional house painters, paint sprayers do double duty with pastry chefs, who use the noisy electric tools to spray a thin layer of tempered chocolate onto sweets.

BRITA WATER FILTERS

If those handy pitchers can clear nasty sediment from tap water, imagine how they can clarify a consommé of teeny particles that might cloud the effect.

SOUS VIDE

You know it's a full-fledged trend when superstar chef Joël Robuchon gets on board. Devoted to sous vide — a method of vacuum-sealing and parcooking meat, fish, vegetable, even sweets — Robuchon swears he won't feed a banquet any other way.

GEM SCALE

With science-minded chefs conferring with Dow Chemicals' tech support to learn about ingredients, more rely on razor-sharp gem scales to calculate minute measurements to the 1/1000th of a gram.

HOMOGENIZER

It's your trusty retro Waring blender on speed. In the hands of a kitchen pro, a homogenizer originally used to manufacture toothpaste can whip raw veggies to a mayonnaise consistency with vivid flavor.

PACO JET

Splurge on this \$3,450 machine, and you can freeze sorbet and ice cream in mere minutes.



Parmigiano-Reggiano ice cream and a prosciutto di Parma crisp

SALT MINES

Chef David Burke of New York's DavidBurke & Donatella is the inspired creator of Flavor Sprays, a line of zero-calorie tastes such as smoked bacon and peanut brittle that, with one squirt, can boost the taste of a dish without adding fat. His next goal: to create a spray that would impart the flavor of a fine, dry-aged filet onto any piece of meat. When the lab analyzed the 300-plus components that make up the complex flavor of the meat aged at Burke's restaurant, they discovered that the dominant taste was ... cardboard. Realizing no one wants to consume paper products, Burke pared his walk-in refrigerator down to the mere essentials: prime beef atop metal racks, black lights and proper ventilation in a cooler lined with tiles made of pink Himalayan rock salt. Yes, pink salt. By creating a "pure" environment, Burke allows the top-grade beef to age up to 80 days without sacrificing texture or flavor, slowly permeating the meat with a subtle salt seasoning.



Presenting José Andrés' olive-oil filled bonbons