

Culinary Trends Report 2010



Culinary Revolutions: The 2010 StarChefs.com Trends Report

by Emily Bell with Antoinette Bruno and Will Blunt
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Many of last year's major trends were responses to the big bad economic wolf. It was a year of comfort food; DIY; mobile restaurant concepts (how better to flee angry investors?); tech-savvy, in-house PR; and marquee star mixology programs—the profit margin lifesaver of struggling operations. And we've seen growth within those trends. Social media outlets continue to diversify communication between chef, purveyor, and diner; the Asian concept restaurants of 2009 are evolving, with hopeful franchises like *Sensebowl* and concept-driven spots like Bill Kim's communal *urbanbelly*; and house-made, hands-on, bare-knuckle prep (e.g., 2009's ubiquitous canning and pickling) has transitioned from the professional kitchen to consumer shelves, courtesy of gourmet retail.

Strong as those veins of ingenuity are, this year in food was not a reaction to the recession. It was an elaboration of what the industry has learned about itself through the lens of necessity—from ingredients and service to the fundamentals and fantastical. We've seen locavore and DIY values progress toward high-concept naturalism, with a strong emphasis on terroir. We've watched as comfort food, culinary darling of the recession, morphed into a more distinctive, ambitious expression of soul and local character. We've seen mixologists marry doggedly authentic cocktail puritanism with sleek, next generation technologies, shedding the skins (and costumes) of hospitality-historicism for a more idiosyncratic bar menu. And we've witnessed the sphere of industry influence expand, from the cuisine on the plate to the welfare of a school, an environment, and even a nation.

2010 was a year of rededicated focus and renewed freedoms. And it wasn't because of any magically resuscitated financial health. It was because the industry learned to trust itself, its strengths, and its special influence in the (ever-so-slightly tattered) fabric of modern culture. Here's a recap of the outstanding trends of 2010.

And be sure to check out the [Top Ten U.S.](#) and [International Dishes](#), the [Top Ten Pastries](#), and the [Top Five Cocktails](#) we've tasted this year.



1. UPPING THE ANTE: Food Megaplexes

If the recession was the arch-villain of last year's trends report, bullying chefs into food trucks, pop-up restaurants, and the universal application of comfort food and DIY, we're seeing some hope-inspiring ambition this year. Not only are chefs going stubbornly immobile with brick and mortar spaces, they're putting their names on ambitious multi-purpose food megaplexes. In June, Todd English's *Plaza Food Hall*—and its six restaurants—began fiscal CPR on the drab retail center below the once grand hotel. This September, Josh Ozersky went "[pork DJ](#)," on some of the meatier options at Jeffrey Chodorow's slick *Food Parc*. And Batali-Bastianich brainchild *Eataly* recently unfurled its Italian mega-market bounty upon the Flatiron district, combining limbs of retail, butchery, and restaurant options with high-gloss production value. And next Spring will bring Thomas McNaughton's forthcoming *Central Kitchen* (SF), where a deli-salumeria, restaurant, catering operation, and even *Humphrey Slocombe's* fantastical frozen treats (double scoop of foie gras ice cream anyone?) will engorge a city block.

Eataly in December – New York, NY
Photo by Shannon Stergis



2. UPPING THE ANTE: AIRPORT CUISINE

Airports are getting in on serious food options, too, finally bridging the gastronomical divide between first class service and the anemic food court options of the *Blimpie's* ilk. JFK's Terminal 5 boasts Mark Ladner's rustic Italian menu at *Aeronuova*, the sushi stylings of former *Buddakan* Chef Michael Schulson at *Deep Blue*, tapas at *Piquillo* by Alexandra Raji (NYC's *Tia Pol*), and French fare at *Brasserie La Vie* (lovechild of *Pastis* and *Balthazar* chefs). And it's not just the East Coast that's eating right between flights. You can get a Baguette Burger at *Boudin Bakery* at Terminal 3 at SFO or a Martha Stewart Dog (really) at *Pink's* outpost at LAX. (Longtime chef duo Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Fenniger have plans to bring their modern-Mex *Border Grill* stylings to a Cali airport sometime soon.) Tired of navigating the interminable ATL airport? Drop into *One Flew South* for sushi. And if your plans next year find you airborne in a westerly direction, stop in at SFO's upcoming Terminal 2 for authentically San Franciscan (local, seasonal) cuisine. Or else just drink in the 10,000 square feet of its *Cat Cora Cocktail Lounge*.



3. HYPER LOCAVORE

Even with the lumbering ambition of food megaplexes, chefs are still answering the call of the wild, heading into the deep brush of local culinary potential. It's been decades since the industry started its slow crawl back into the limited consumption-radius of our club-thumping ancestors, known in the vernacular of ethical cuisine as "locavore." But this year we've seen evidence of a kind of hyper-locavorism—the kind that finds basket-and-gun-toting chefs in the backwoods of the American pantry in search of their next ingredient. And while locavore logic may always bear the healthy glow of social responsibility, this year's hands-on approach had a serious culinary rationale.

Roasted Foie Gras with the First Flowers of Spring and Walnut by Chef David Kinch and Chef de Cuisine John Paul Carmona of *Manresa* - Los Gatos, CA
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



4. HYPER LOCAVORE: Foraging

In the lush, forage-friendly environs of San Francisco, chefs like Daniel Patterson and David Kinch of *Coi* and *Manresa* respectively are heading into the wild in search of sorrel, seaweed, mushrooms, herbs, fraises de bois, and edible flowers. For his Roasted Foie Gras, the First Flowers of Spring with Walnuts, "all the herbs and flowers on the dish were picked by myself foraging this morning, or from the farm," says Kinch.

Elsewhere in Northern Cali, next generation chefs like Louis Maldonado of *Aziza* pick fresh nasturtium petals and herbs, and Adam Timney of *Starbelly* serves foraged mushrooms in his Wild Mushrooms with Garlic and Sunnyside Duck Egg.

Savory Wild Mushroom Porridge, Brown Butter, Garlic Confit, Wood Sorrel by Chef Daniel Patterson of *Coi* - San Francisco, CA
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



5. HYPER LOCAVORE: Chefs Take Arms

Chefs aren't just carrying baskets in the woods. Some of them are actually packing heat. The ultra-DIY chef of 2010 is hunting for sport, education, and even menu development—though rarely for professional use, given strict USDA regulations on hunted game. Beyond the adrenaline rush, which many chefs just plain chemically require, hunting brings gravitas back to the handling of proteins—a gravitas often lost in the context of massive deliveries. And chefs like **Thomas McNaughton** of *flour + water* are capitalizing on this reaction, using hunting as a professional and ethical education for kitchen staff. Patrick Morrow of *Bluegrass Tavern* (MD) hunts exclusively for private parties, although many of the flavor profiles and improvisations of the day's catch (venison tartare, anyone?) find their way onto his **menu**. And chefs internationally are banding together in groups like **Cook it Raw**, whose excursions include hunting, camping, and cooking in the extreme territories of the world.

Mixed Roast of Wild Boar with Sunchoke Puree, Apple Currant Mustard Compote, and Tardivo by Chef Thomas McNaughton of flour + water – San Francisco, CA
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



6. HYPER LOCAVORE: Game

Carnivorousness was all about variety this year (did we mention we have a feeling goat might be next year's pork belly?). We shamelessly dined on a host of Bambi's forest friends, from Anna Bautista's symphony in rabbit, Grilled Rabbit Loin, Rabbit Mortadella, and Braised Rabbit Leg, at *Madera* (SF), to the House-Made Charcuterie Plate at *Bluegrass Tavern* that nestles elk pâté and duck speck alongside the usual suspects, to Bambi himself in the form of Seared Venison Carpaccio by Marco Eduardes at *Te Whau Vineyards Restaurant* (NZ) and Venison Filet with Hot Wine Jelly and Autumnal Vegetables and Fruits from Chef Pierre Daret of *Le Burgundy* in Paris, France.

And though it's not exactly hunting or game, educational programs like **Farm Camp** in upstate New York are giving chefs the chance to step up to the slaughter. It's good timing, too, as super-hands-on (and variously bloodthirsty) civilians have already begun taking slaughtering into their **own hands**.

Selection of Housemade Charcuterie by Chef Patrick Morrow of Bluegrass Tavern – Baltimore, MD
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



7. HYPER LOCAVORE: Terroir

With so much emphasis on local flavors, be they hunted, plucked, or picked, we've seen the development of a kind of terroir-circularity within a dish (a culinary revision of "the cat ate the mouse, the mouse ate the cheese," only here they're all served on the same plate.) "The important thing is that [the dish] exhibits a sense of place," says David Kinch. And his local Monterey Bay Abalone is accordingly served with the same kind of seaweed consumed by the abalone on the plate. For *Coi's* Winter, Pastoral: Young Carrots Roasted in Hay, Radish Powder, Shaved Pecorino, the pecorino comes from sheep who grazed on the charred hay which gives the sweet carrots their smoky undertone. Back at *flour + water*, McNaughton serves wild boar with the same herbs it grazed on in its lifetime, the very same herbs the chef crouched in during the hunt. Macabre? Maybe. But it's also an intimate expression of place and time, a snapshot of nature translated through the lens of reverent, sophisticated cuisine.

Monterey Bay Abalone and Pumpkin Roasted with Seaweed and Cocoa by David Kinch and John Paul Carmona of Manresa – San Francisco, CA
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



8. HIGH-CONCEPT NATURALISM

Emphatic expression of nature and location doesn't stop with ingredients. This year we've seen conceptually natural platings from Portland to Korea—distinct and sometimes earnestly poetic visual odes to terroir. *Royal Mail's Dan Hunter*—a star among the Australian avant-garde—crafts an elegant bird's nest with his Egg Yolk, Toasted Rye, Legumes, and Yeast; his Lamb, Eggplant in White Miso, Pine Nut, and Chlorophyll is like a verdant, moss-covered forest floor. Chef Young Hee Rook of *Poom Seoul* (South Korea) serves Songi Boesoet pine mushrooms with graceful minimalism, simply prepared and snow white on a bed of pine needles. At *L'Air du Temps* (Belgium), Sang Hoon Degeimbre's Nature drapes long, thick ribbons of snow-white daikon over a stone-like hazelnut sponge, with meandering curls of carrot and mounds of dark olive soil strewn with flowers and herbs. At *Henri* (CHI) Dirk Flanigan's Consommé of Game with Stones, Leaves, and Autumn Flavors (inspired by a walk with his daughter) resembles a mountaintop tidal pool. And at *Castagna* (OR), Matt Lightner's Morels with **Foraged Vegetables** are served on a simple wooden plank—a common feature of naturalist plating—a gorgeous tumble of morels with lush green lettuces hiding a surprise of duck egg.

Egg Yolk, Toasted Rye, Legumes, and Yeast by Chef Dan Hunter of Royal Mail – Dunkeld, Australia
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



9. CULTIVATED: Focus on Vegetables

Part and parcel with the focus on foraged, local, and natural, 2010 saw a continuation of the **Vegetable Renaissance of 2009**. This year, the trend pervaded the omnivore's kitchen (this is the age of the vegetable butcher at Italian mega-market *Eataly*, after all), with protein-slinging chefs giving meticulous attention and serious time to vegetables. For some chefs like Masato Nishihara, it's part of a larger culture. His Shojin vegetarian cuisine at *Kajitsu* comes from a centuries' **old tradition** dating back to the tea ceremonies of Zen monks. But it's a timely resurgence for Shojin; Nishihara's Warm Spring Vegetables with Bagna Cauda exemplifies the kind of careful, venerating attention modern chefs are applying to produce.

Gomadofu with Green Peas; Treasure Pouch of Fried Bean Curd, Glass Noodles, Burdock, Carrot, Shiitake, Lotus Roots, and Sesame; Plum Fu Blossom by Chef Masato Nishihara of Kajitsu – New York, NY
Photo by Vicky Wasik



10. CULTIVATED: Focus on Vegetables II

Ben Shewry's Selection of Heirloom Carrots at *Attica* (Australia) is a tri-color composition of red, white, and yellow carrots, its primal simplicity echoed by the brawny tang of goat cheese. Also Down Under, Matthew Wilkinson's aptly named Vegetables at *Circa the Princeis* a beautiful assortment of Australia's local bounty, done up with a tease of molecular gastronomy (e.g., Potato Glass and Dehydrated Beet Powder). For an even more molecular take on high-class, veggie-centric cuisine, look no further than whiz kid DC Rising Star **Ruben Garcia**. His Tumbleweed Beets with Citrus Coriander Flower applies a Tim Burton-esque aesthetic and hyper-focus to the typically supporting-role root vegetable. Tony Conte's Roasted Baby Beets at *The Oval Room* (DC) has a similarly playful (though more circus-like) visual fanfare to it, with a row of gem-like teardrop baby beets studded with cubes of passion fruit, sprinkled with nasturtium petals, horseradish, and clover.

Vegetables: Raw, Pickled, and Cooked Heirloom Carrots, Beets, String Beans, Radish, Nasturtiums, Beet Root Stems, Potato Glass, Dehydrated Beet Powder, and Herb Salt by Chef Matthew Wilkinson of Circa, the Prince - Melbourne, Australia
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



11. COMFORT FOOD REVAMPED: Southern Comfort

This year we've seen the growth of distinct perspectives within the broad shouldered heft of comfort food: Southern and high-concept. We think of rocking chairs and lard-fried proteins when we think of the South; and it's no mistake—some folks just know how to do comfort. And this year chefs above and below the Mason-Dixon Line are dipping into the Southern pantry to incorporate a soupcon (or hearty ladle) of country savor into their menus. Virginia chef and DC Rising Star **Jason Alley** did his home state proud with meaty pork cheeks in a soft bed of stone ground grits at Richmond, Virginia restaurant *Comfort*. But it's not just local boys at the Southern burner. *Blackbird* (CHI) pastry chef Patrick Fahy gave a Kentucky bourbon kick to the cream in his panna cotta and *The Southern's* (CHI) Cary Taylor went appropriately whole-hog with his Shrimp 'n' Grits, topping the classic with aged cheddar and Frank's Red Hot. Even in LA, where nouvelle cuisine became a calorie-counters buzzword, chefs like Joseph Mahon at *Bastide* are coaxing the locals out of Pilates classes with temptations like Frisée, Bacon, Poached Egg, Crispy Chicken Thighs, and Buttermilk Dressing.

Southern Relish Tray: Deviled Eggs, Crudités, Pimento Cheese, Housemade Pickles, and Housemade Crackers by Chef Jason Alley of *Comfort* - Richmond, VA
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



12. SOUTHERN COMFORT: New York City

Move over, Popeyes. Southern-style restaurants are popping up in places as decidedly un-southern as New York City, with as much claim to authenticity as their greasy bucket step-cousins. Brooklyn plays happy host to *Pies n' Thighs*, where fried chicken, butter-drenched biscuits, and hot sauce satisfy hoards of hipsters; while *Hill Country Chicken* lets Manhattanites count themselves among the finger lickin' satisfied. We hear the borough is also unlikely venue of an unofficial mac n' cheese war between *Mac Bar* and *S'Mac*. For an the upscale—and up-town—rendition of southern-inflected comfort, there's Marcus Samuelsson's newest venture, *Red Rooster*, where soul food classics like collard greens and fried chicken will represent the South among the Harlem restaurant's multi-ethnic New American mix.

Chef Marcus Samuelsson's new restaurant Red Rooster Harlem.
Photo by Shannon Sturgis



13. HAUTE COMFORT

Last year saw its share of deconstructed comfort and nostalgia classics (we're thinking of Rising Star **Michael Voltaggio's** deconstructed Pigeon Pastrami Sandwich with a Swiss Cheese Puff and Sauerkraut Jelly at his old haunt, *The Dining Room* at the Langham). And 2010 continued that trend, with playful, reconstructed takes on traditional comfort foods. Brother, former Top Chefestant, and Rising Star **Bryan Voltaggio** of *VOLT*(MD) combines the Southern and haute trends with an uptown take on pork and beans, Pork Belly, Calypso Beans, Mostarda, Sorrel, and BBQ Sauce. And he does a similar turn on the timeless bagel and lox combo with his Arctic Char Everything Bagel, Pickled Mustard Seed, Bagel Crumb, Char Mousse, Meyer Lemon Pudding, Garlic Scapes, and Red Onion.

Pork Belly, Calypso Beans, Mostarda, Sorrel, and BBQ Sauce by Chef Bryan Voltaggio of *VOLT* - Frederick, MD
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



14. JUNK COMFORT

Comfort foods of the junkier variety also are going under the culinary knife. New York is already littered with high-concept hot dogs: there's rustic refinement—we're talking house made sauerkraut at *Bark*; baguette-cradled, locally sourced franks at *Dogmatic*; and edgy speakeasy meat-aperitifs at *PDT* front *Crif Dog's*. And more cities are beginning to seriously relish gourmet dogs. Order a Belly Dog at *Belly Shack* (CHI) for fusion fast food with kimchi salsa and egg noodles. For an upscale wiener, try the Hot Dog at *Jack's Bistro* (MD), where Ted Stelzenmuller pays homage to the eponymous Chicago gourmet hot dog haven with a Pretty Woman-worthy makeover, featuring duck and fig sausage, black truffle aioli, foie gras mousse, and fleur de sel. If you want to catch a show, head to one of the monthly "Dawg Competitions" at *Franks n' Dawgs* (CHI) for a **gourmet dog fight** between two chefs (this month Michael Fiorello's pork sausage and sherry-braised pork belly combo battled Jared Van Camp's "triple ducker" with duck confit, pickled shiitakes, and shaved foie gras). Not fiending for a frank? **Adam Fleischman's Umami Burger** in LA is still topping the savory-charts with glutamate-rich ingredients like beer-infused cheese. Or try David Schneider's Duck Gyro at *Taxim* (CHI), where house-made mint yogurt and pomegranate reduction are tucked in with spit-roasted, farm raised, pastourma-spiced duck.

The Hot Dog: Duck and Fig Sausage, Black Truffle Aioli, Foie Gras Mousse, Fleur de Sel by Chef Ted Stelzenmuller of Jack's Bistro - Baltimore, MD
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



15. PASTRY: Sweet Guys Switching Sides

2009 found us waxing hopeful about pastry chefs rising from the ashes—bravely innovating in the face of an economic storm, even as more and more savory chefs were taking on pastry duties. But this year we're happy to report that pastry chefs are not only enjoying greater job security (after a 13 percent nose dive from 2008 to 2009, pastry chef **salaries are on the rise**), they're playing around with savory options of their own. We've already toured the kitchen of 2010 ICC presenter and Rising Star **Jordan Kahn's Red Medicine** (LA), a Vietnamese concept restaurant where Kahn—high priest of high-concept dessert—will oversee non-traditional savory and **pastry menus**. And Kahn isn't the only pastry chef with savory on the brain. Alex Stupak has plans to leave the laboratory of *WD-50* and open a new taqueria—that's right—next year. Meanwhile, Johnny Iuzzini, New York's own punk rock pastry maven, was caught tinkering seriously behind the bar in his 2010 ICC mixology workshop, and it seems like a habit he's not soon to break (Iuzzini, also in the roster at the recent *Alchemy of Taste*, seems committed to industry cross-pollination).

Mixologists Giuseppe Gonzalez and Richard Boccatto with Pastry Chef Johnny Iuzzini at the 2010 International Chefs Congress Day 1 - New York, NY
Photo by Melissa Hom, Michael Gross, Shannon Sturgis, Carrie Leonard, Vicky Wasik



16. MIXOLOGY: Molecular, High-Tech, and Ethnic

Iuzzini isn't the only culinarian to step up to the mixology plate (although he might have the best hair). A new roster of people, products, and techniques are jumping behind the bar to expand the already vast horizons of modern mixology into molecular territory. Molecular-maven Grant Achatz is the soon-to-be proud papa of forthcoming *Aviary*, a molecular mixology spot—which Achatz calls "neither a bar nor a lounge exactly," adding "perhaps it is a bar without a bar or bartenders"—where a kitchen full of chefs will create deconstructed, re-imagined cocktails along classic (and not so classic) lines. *Aviary* will also rotate some of its menu to keep in step with the adjacent *Next*, where quarterly culinary reinventions will showcase the cuisine of a period in history. A historic *and* futuristic menu of deconstructed cocktails in a non-bar prepped by non-bartenders? Leave it

to Achatz.

Chefs Dave Arnold and Nils Noren's Mixology Workshop at the 2010 International Chefs Congress Day 1 - New York, NY
Photo by Shannon Sturgis



17. HIGH-TECH MIXOLOGY

Even some of the chef's favorite—and most expensive—high-tech equipment is finding a space in the mise en place of modern mixology. Chefs and mixos have bartered and borrowed ideas, techniques, and products for some time now (2009 ICC presenter Scott Beattie plied us with lush elixirs from the farm-to-bar movement). But this year we've seen more evidence that mixology can confidently—if not universally—tread into molecular, high-tech territory. 2010 ICC presenters and former FCI dynamic duo Dave Arnold and Nils Noren (who has since left) brought some of their favorite toys—a RotoVap, Centrifuge, and a handful of iSi whippers, among other things—to demonstrate the role of clarification, carbonation, rotary evaporation, and centrifugation in high-tech modern mixology.

Nils Noren at the Mixology Workshop at the 2010 International Chefs Congress Day 1 – New York, NY
Photo by Melissa Hom, Michael Gross, Shannon Sturgis, Carrie Leonard, Vicky Wasik



18. MOLECULAR MIXOLOGY

Not all of the molecular, tech-happy mixology is dedicated to time-warping deconstruction. For their tiki presentation at ICC 2010, Johnny Iuzzini, Richard Boccatto, and Giuseppe Gonzalez (of *Painkiller*, NYC) demoed agar-clarification, liquid nitrogen, and carbonated infusions as part of a roster of techniques to create the most authentic expressions of time-specific tiki drinks—bridging mixology's love of the old school with modern expedients. In fact, science lands in modern mixology less often with a molecular splash, but rather as a means to an end, in this case the mixologist's dogged pursuit of perfection. Case in point: with the science-savvy help of Harold McGee, Audrey Saunders and Tony Conigliaro delved into the chemistry of the perfect cocktail at this year's Flemish Primitives. Their goal? To grasp the basic chemistry of cocktail perfection.

For those with molecular aspirations and none of the material bounty of an Achatz or FCI, Monin recently showcased its line of alginate-spherified syrups—La Perle de Monin—at [SIAL 2010](#), meaning those without the resources or room for in-house tinkering can suspend flavors like Cassis, Caraçao Bleu, and Green Banana in their own concept cocktails.

La Perle de Monin spherified pearls of syrup at SIAL 2010 in Paris, France
Photo by Autumn Stein



21. LIQUID CULTURE: Locavore Wine Lists?

Responsive as the somm world is to industry and outside influences, we're not surprised to see wine lists at least attempting adjustments as the industry moves toward environmental responsibility and aggressive regional expression (see **hyper locavore** movement). When most of your product is sourced from well over a hundred miles away, it's not always an easy—or viable—transition. In late 2009, The New York Times addressed sustainability and wine through the lens of restaurants in the wine-gushing heart of Northern California with locavore pantries, but largely **European wine lists**. Egregious eco-misstep though this may seem, the fact is sommeliers are obliged first to cater to the dish and only second (or third, or fourth) to Mother Nature.

Photo by Vicky Wasik



22. LIQUID CULTURE: Emphasis on Natural

But that doesn't stop passionate sommeliers from championing local (and otherwise sustainable) wines. 2010 New York Rising Star **Pascaline Lepeltier** seeks out as many high-quality, natural bottles as possible for her local, organic-laden, and, according to Lepeltier, "50 percent American" list at Belgian import *Rouge Tomate*. And for Lepeltier it's as much as a factor of taste as responsibility. For somms still in the dark about these under-explored flavor profiles, Lepeltier gave a primer on "natural" (a.k.a. biodynamic, organic, and/or local) wines at this year's ICC. Natural, said Lepeltier, isn't about good or bad; natural wines have "conscience" because they carry, as she puts it, "history, time, and quality." (Not to mention far fewer of the maximum 228 unlisted ingredients your average bottle of wine can legally, and secretly, contain.)

Natural Wine Tasting by Pascaline Lepeltier of Day 1 of the 2010 International Chefs Congress
Photo by Shannon Sturgis



23. LIQUID CULTURE: Pairing Close to Home

Fear of unnamed additives aside, what speaks most to the sommelier's heart is the rationale behind local, natural wines: not only do unadulterated wines have a more aggressive—read vital—expression of terroir, but pairing logic favors wines and foods produced in the same region. So it's no surprise that when *Saison* (SF) Sommelier Mark Bright paired Copain's 2007 "Tous Ensemble" Syrah (68.7 miles from the restaurant) with Chef **Joshua Skenes'** Middle Eastern-Style Whole Roasted Sonoma Lamb, we noted the pairing "a match made in heaven." **Gary Danko's** (SF) Michael Enghelman made a similarly sublime union between Martin Brock's Braised Lamb Shoulder and a Peay Vineyards Syrah from less than 100 miles away. Of course, it's a lot easier to pair locally within a decanter's throw of Napa or the Finger Lakes. But lesser-known wine producing regions are out there, undiscovered gems for the adventurous sommelier. And mature wine-producing regions are increasingly bringing environmental responsibility in-house. So even if stateside wine lists will never evict the Europeans or their New World competition (and we're thankful), local, sustainable, and natural options are likely to increase.

Sommelier Mark Bright of Saison - San Francisco, CA
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



24. SMOKE AND ROT: Exploring Spoilage

Carcinogens, mold, and variously graphic states of decay have always been part of the fine dining experience, but this year, chefs are incorporating these musty, heady, and idiosyncratic flavor profiles as much for their evocative, experiential effects as for their culinary singularity. (Although some chefs are happier with the suggestion—as opposed to the actual application—of rot). Magnus Nilsson, Nordic youngster and hyper-locavore chef of “Rektún (real) food,” pushed the boundaries of rot and spoilage at a Cook it Raw gathering in the **Laplands**. And he’s not alone in his tightrope walk of rot-palatability. At *Azurmendi* in Biscay, Spain, tahoos (a kind of cress redolent of fall decay) gave Chef Eneko Atxa’s earthy, wintry Oxtail Ravioli Wrapped in Bread a mild savor of mold and decay, and another cress variety called atchina lent a teasing whisper of spoilage to Atxa’s apple-composition of compote, gelatin ball, and cider sponge (Moss on the Wall).

Moss on the Wall by Chef Eneko Atxa of Azurmendi – Biscay, Spain
Photo by Jessica Dukes



25. SMOKE AND ROT: Playing with Smoke

Health regulations be damned! From Chi-town to Down Under, we’ve seen chefs, pastry chefs, and even mixologists smoking in the restaurant. At *Vue de Monde*, Shannon Bennett uses a glass dome to contain the dried coconut husk smoking his raw Ocean Trout with Wasabi and Baby Beetroot, Smoked at the Table. At *Blackbird*, Patrick Fahy infused cream with charred 16-year-old whisky barrel chips for a panna cotta; char and whisky were evident flavors, tempered, but not muffled, by the rich cream. At *Boka*, Pastry Chef Katy Yon hickory smokes her chocolate gelato in a darkly rich ode to single origin Venezuelan chocolate. Smoking at bars may be an old (and expired) past time, but mixologists are reviving the trend with creative cocktails. A giant smoked-water ice cube engulfs most of the glass in Mixologist Benjamin Schiller’s Scorched Earth tequila-mezcal cocktail at *Boka*. As the ice melts, it increases the natural smokiness of the drink’s mezcal and mingles with the bitterness of Amaro. And in a Second City ode to a classic, *Bristol* Mixologist Debbie Peek smokes Maker’s Mark with cherry wood for her broad-shouldered Smoked Sicilian Manhattan.

Ocean Trout with Wasabi and Baby Beetroot, Smoked at the Table by Chef Shannon Bennett of Vue de Monde - Melbourne, Australia
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



26. THE SIXTH SENSE: Experiential Elements in Cuisine

Even with this crest of rot and smoke and spoilage (oh my), experimentation within the dining experience can hardly be pinned down as 2010. Almost as soon as the mad-hatter imaginations of the likes of Ferran Adrià and Heston Blumenthal first showed up on (or near, or floating above) dinner plates, ambitious experimentalist pockets of the industry have been slowly, carefully following in their footsteps. And so have we arrived at an era where multi-sensory emotional elaboration can be embedded (projected, infused, insinuated) into the dining experience. The realism of Joan Roca's Olive Tree with Faux Olives at El Cellar de Can Roca isn't just about clever presentation or natural accuracy. It provokes an emotional response; it stirs our innate connection to nature. It's all still preciously ensconced in the avant-garde, but as more tastemakers gather to showcase the multi-dimensional horizons of modern cuisine in large-scale forums like the ICC, Gastromonika, The Flemish Primitives, etc., we won't be surprised if this "sixth sense" experience begins to pervade ever larger cross-sections of the industry. ("Welcome to T.G.I. Fridays, please enjoy these complimentary 3D glasses for your second course.")

Olive Tree with Faux Olives: Caramelized Olives Stuffed with Anchovies. Tasting with Chef Joan Roca, Pastry Chef Jordi Roca and Sommelier Josep Roca at El Cellar de Can Roca in Girona, Spain.
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



27. THE SIXTH SENSE: Sound and Spectacle

This year's ICC found Pastry Chef Jordan Kahn applying the concepts of aesthetic surrealism to pastry in his main stage presentation, "La Revolution Surrealiste." His focus? How "the elements of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions, and non sequitur often found in surrealist works can be applied to pastry." (Kahn's entire presentation was set to music, with projections in the background and Kahn himself eerily quiet.) Also on this year's ICC main stage, Pastry Chef (and self-described "shock-olatier") Dominique Persoone partnered with gastro-scientist Bernard Lahousse, using tastes, smells, and visuals in a multi-sensory experience to explore how emotions and memories change the experience of chocolate. At one memorable point, the audience tasted chocolate in a mist of freshly cut grass, with a background video of a lawn mower, you guessed it, cutting grass.

Pastry Chef Jordan Kahn "La Revolution Surrealist" at the 2010 International Chefs Congress Day 2 - New York, NY
Photo by Michael Gross, Shannon Sturgis, Carrie Leonard, Vicky Wasik



28. THE SIXTH SENSE: Electric and Aromatic

The Wylie-Wonka-esque Persoone previously partnered with Pastry Chef James Petrie of *The Fat Duck*, showcasing several whimsical uses of chocolate at this year's Flemish Primitives, which is also where Chef Sergio Herman of *Oud Sluis* (Netherlands) demonstrated how an electronically wired table and plate can draw sauce along a predetermined path, from the rim to the center of the dish, creating spectacle within the typically static display of, well, sauce. At November's **Alchemy of Taste and Smell** (NYC), evocative scents were star players. Daniel Patterson used a tarragon-tinged spray to lend fleeting beachy nostalgia to his Squid Ink Panna Cotta, and Johnny Iuzzini had his audience dab perfumier Mandy Aftel's pleasantly barnyardy "agrusic" perfume on their wrists while eating his Hay Ice Cream. And at the event's Scented Dinner, chefs including Wylie Dufresne, David Chang, George Mendes, and Nils Noren each presented a dish emphasizing, tweaking, or otherwise manipulating the aromatic experience of cuisine, often with Aftel's expertise (and high-cost absolutes).

Aroma Wheel of Mandy Aftel of Aftelier Perfumes – The Alchemy of Taste and Smell 2010 at the Astor Center in New York City



29. THE SIXTH SENSE: Encapsulating Emotion

Sometimes the Sixth Sense runs in the family. After Pastry Chef and pioneer of scented desserts brother Jordi wowed the crowd of **Seoul Gourmet** with his Aroma-Therapy presentation, Joan Roca, the savory third of the fraternal trio behind *El Celler de Can Roca* (Spain), demoed a multi-sensory creation at Gastronomika. The dessert, brainchild of absent brother Jordi, incorporated visual and auditory elements to conjure the heart-swelling team pride that erupts when Barcelona soccer hero Lionel Messi scores a goal. The composition was a half-soccer ball enclosing a field with a “goal,” in which diners could dunk chocolate or meringues, which Jordi incorporated “para joder”—to mess—with Madrid rival, nicknamed “the Meringues.” Even with all this, the most unusual component was the transistor radio next to the dish, playing the increasingly urgent yelps of the announcer as Messi drove a “gooooooooaaaaa!” home. Pride aside, Roca’s own goal wasn’t sports-founded; he meant to encapsulate an emotion or state of being in one cohesive creation. (It just happened to celebrate his team.)

Chef Jordi Roca of El Celler de Can Roca - Girona, Spain
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



30. THE NEW CHEF: Leaving the Kitchen

Team spirit aside, the territory of a chef’s influence is expanding, even past the television shows, groaning cookbook shelves, and Twitter feeds of their current multi-media omnipresence. This year, chefs got serious about a lot of serious stuff. And apparently book signings and globe-trotting television shows weren’t enough— 2010 was all about grassroots efforts.

You can’t measure the influence or power of *the chef* by one marquee exemplar. But follow a chef like Barton Seaver out of the kitchen (that’s right) and into full time **sustainability advocacy**, and you’re onto something. Seaver has officially de-toqued in search of a wider audience, not for his own celebrity’s sake (although with his boyish good looks to bolster a good cause, we’re confident he’ll earn some of that, too). Seaver wants to fully devote himself to large-scale seafood sustainability outreach. Sure, there are a few projects in the works including Cook Wise with National Geographic, an iPhone app, and maybe a cookbook in Seaver’s immediate future, but the point isn’t profit: it’s to best serve the issue at hand. “What I do is not about me,” he told us this October. “I am repositioning myself behind the message.”

Ex-Chef, Sustainability Advocate Barton Seaver
Photo by Antoinette Bruno



31. THE NEW CHEF: National Nutrition

With the slightly higher-profile guidance of First Lady Michelle Obama and Assistant White House Chef and Food Initiative Policy Advisor Sam Kass, droves of chefs repositioned themselves behind another message: the fight against childhood obesity. As part of Obama’s “Let’s Move” campaign, chefs across the country are signing up for “Chefs Move to Schools,” a program that matches a chef with a school in a kind of **nutritional culinary mentorship**. If chefs were ever in doubt of their importance in the national welfare—which we doubt, considering how many chefs are actively involved in charities with or without promise of **recognition**—the First Lady’s campaign put any lingering insecurities to rest.

Chefs Move to Schools Event at The White House - Washington, D.C.



32. THE NEW CHEF: Redefinitions

The future of the modern chef likely is going to be a complex combo of low- and high-tech influences, nothing we could quantify without a seriously sophisticated flow chart. But whether it happens at Gastronomika, a bloody hunting party, or a more or less official (beer anyone?) **chef club**, we're confident industry creativity will continue to evolve. (We even made a few strides defining creativity at this year's **ICC**.) And as monolith tastemakers like Gourmet Magazine fall by the wayside and hyper-speed outlets of information continue to democratize opinion, we're guessing it'll be industry-driven gatherings—small and large scale—where the future role of the chef and the next year in food will begin.

2010 ICC Keynote Panel with chefs David Kinch, Thomas Keller, and Dan Barber
Photo by Melissa Hom, Michael Gross, Shannon Sturgis, Carrie Leonard, Vicky Wasik