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ERIK S. LESSER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A K A PORK RINDS Chicharrones at Abattoir restaurant in Atlanta.

After Crispy Pig Ears, 10 Trends for 2013

By **JULIA MOSKIN**

IN our newly omnivorous nation, restaurant trends often have the same viral spread and short life span as boy bands — witness 2011's crispy pig ears and sea buckthorn berries. Eating around the country on reporting trips in 2012, I saw food lovers everywhere embracing new interpretations of farm-to-table and nose-to-tail as fast as they came along.

But along with the flashes in the pan, I saw some new developments that seem to have both legs and merit.

In the big picture, Nordic naturalism (with its embrace of ancient, earthy and cold-weather foods) and Spanish modernism (which celebrates intense flavors and technical skills) are surging as American chefs return from internships

abroad at places like Noma, Mugaritz and Arzak.

Closer up, in kitchens and on plates, I noted 10 food trends we will taste more of in 2013. There are tastes for all persuasions, and enough strong runners-up to fill the menu of a Brooklyn pop-up: pine needles, pimentón, horseradish, seaweed, uni, poutine, American cheese, Spanish ham, whey, ashes and fish milt (translation: sperm).

LONG-AGED MEAT In slower times, a 21-day aging process for steak was considered long and luxurious. First the needle moved to 28 days, then 45, and now a full 240. At Carnevino in Las Vegas, I tasted prime beef that had spent eight months in the cooler, where it had dried,

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concentrated and developed a fatty minerality. It was redolent of earth and mold, with a hint of town dump that made it irresistible (think of Gorgonzola). And now chefs outside the steakhouse tradition are getting into old meat. At Blanca, in Brooklyn, Carlo Mirarchi makes fetish objects of 85-day-old beef and lamb cuts. And at Saison, in San Francisco, Joshua Skenes ages ducks for 21 days, until the meat is practically spoon-tender and deeply funky.

SMOKED EVERYTHING Two nights in San Francisco, two different dinner menus, two near-identical crocks of pebble-size smoked potatoes. In leading-edge restaurants like State Bird Provisions and Bar Tartine, smoking isn't just for meat anymore. Smoked cream, ice cream and crème fraîche are the new normal on pastry menus, because cream is easy to smoke in a small kitchen, and rich enough to pick up the flavor well. At Fatty Cue, in the West Village, the phenomenal Fatty Manhattan cocktail is made with smoked Cherry Coke. Also noted: smoked cauliflower at Farmhouse at Bedford Post, in Westchester County; smoked corn at Goose and Gander, in Napa Valley, Calif.; and smoked maple cream at Corton, in TriBeCa.

SUNFLOWER POWER We swam in sunchoke foams, soups and purées last year, perhaps because of the vegetable's taste, which combines potato and artichoke with a hint of water chestnut; or because roasted brussels sprouts finally became boring; or because the sunchoke dovetails with the pursuit of indigenous produce. The sunchoke is the root of a sunflower (*Helianthus tuberosus*) that is native to the eastern United States. At Forage restaurant, a small (and small-plate) outpost of progressive cuisine in Salt Lake City, Viet Pham and Bowman Brown sent out a dessert of brown butter ice cream with sunchoke and walnut crumble. The experimental chef John Shields (now exploring restaurant spaces in Washington) provided a double-sunflower hit by using a crisp sunchoke "skin" as the shell of a cannoli stuffed with ricotta, chocolate and sunflower-seed purée; and at Atera in TriBeCa, Matthew Lightner presented multiple courses with sunchokes, sunflower petals and a toffee made of sunflower seeds.

ARTISANAL SOFT-SERVE Three momentous developments made 2012 the year to buy a soft-serve machine for your otherwise handcrafted restaurant — or, more likely, your fledgling food truck. First, the all-organic Straus Family Creamery, in Marin County, Calif., made its soft-serve mix nationally available; that's what served at places like Zero Zero, in San Francisco, with a choice of sophisticated toppings like cocoa nibs and extra-virgin olive oil (great on vanilla ice cream). New York's Big Gay Ice Cream Truck made national television and opened a second storefront, planting the seed for more groovy soft-serve trucks like the Twirl and Dip, in San Francisco, and the Cow Tipping Creamery, in Austin, Tex. And the Momofuku Milk Bar mini-chain, home of the influential pastry chef Christina Tosi, continued to grow in New York, bringing soft-serve flavors like salted pistachio caramel and guava horchata to the masses.

CHICHARRONES The humble pork rind showed up in high-end company in 2012, in big crisp-fried sheets that showed off



CHAD ROBERTSON

TASTES FOR ALL Clockwise from above, a farm-to-table array from Bar Tartine in San Francisco; cured meats at Salumè sandwich shop in SoHo; pink lemonade soft-serve at Momofuku Milk Bar on Columbus Avenue; grilled pig's tail at the Spice Table, Los Angeles; sunflower petals at Atera in TriBeCa.



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the extraordinary texture that can be achieved when fat meets fat. At Empelón Cocina, in the East Village, Alex Stupak took the classic Mexican taco filling of chicharrón and salsa verde, eliminated the tortilla and came up with an unforgettable bar snack. And it isn't just pork: shards of Southern-fried chicken skin are a starter at Husk, in Charleston, S.C., and crisp fish skin made an

amuse-bouche at Frej, in Brooklyn. Chicharrones were also spotted at Noble Pig (Austin), Seersucker (Brooklyn) and the disturbingly named Abattoir (Atlanta).

RAW WINTER VEGETABLES Since 2011, when American chefs embarked on our national kale salad experiment, any vegetable, no matter how forbidding or indigestible, has become fair game for

raw eating. No one has done more to promote the Martian-looking kohlrabi than the Chicago chef Stephanie Izard, who has made kohlrabi salad a seasonless standard at Girl & the Goat. Elsewhere, offerings include a course of impaled baby radishes, carrots, turnips and fennel from the gardens at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, in Pocantico Hills, N.Y. In Houston, Justin Yu's minimalist plate of raw turnip and radish was one of the dishes that prompted an Internet uprising against his new restaurant Oxheart.

BARRELAGED HOT SAUCE Hugh Acheson's Empire State South, in Atlanta, is one of many Southern restaurants that set the national agenda this year. Grits and grains were explored; the potential uses of pimento cheese were mastered (straws, puffs, foam); country ham was added to every vegetable. Cutting through it all is a new generation of full-flavored hot sauces; Mr. Acheson's is aged in oak barrels for sweet and fiery complexity. Home-brewed hot sauce is aged in discarded whiskey barrels at Vesta Dipping Grill, in Denver, and at Magnolia Pub and Brewery, in San Francisco, where the hot sauce is part of the larger craft-brew program.

PIG TAILS After the headcheese revival of the aughts and the pig's trotters craze of 2011, only one part of the animal remained to be discovered: the rich, bony and gelatinous tail (except for some deeply interior bits like the pig's vocal cords and cervix, to which entire restaurants are devoted in Japan). At Coppa, in Boston, the coda is spit-roasted and served with pungent fruit mostarda, the perfect contrast; at Alla Spina, in Philadelphia, it's fried and drizzled with fennel agrodolce; and the team at Animal, in Los Angeles, does it Buffalo style.

FERMENTATION Chefs, remember when making a batch of pickle chips for your house burger was considered advanced artisanship? Now, pickling is baby steps; fermentation is where it's at. (Fermentation is one method of pickling; it generates living bacteria.) Your peers are contemplating long-term bacterial activity like year-old kimchi (the draw at Muk Eun Ji in New York's Koreatown),

and consulting with the experts at the Cultured Pickle Shop, in Berkeley, on projects like pumpkin fermented with espelette pepper and scallion. David Chang has turned a whole chunk of his Momofuku empire in New York over to a fermenting lab, and Nicolaus Balla of Bar Tartine, in San Francisco, has a jump on the Eastern European tradition: he is already serving Hungarian-style stuffed red peppers.

SALUMI 2.0 The nose-to-tail movement went off in two directions this year, providing an astounding range of new cured meats. One path was for advanced students of charcuterie and salumi, who mastered pancetta and pâté years back. Now they are making mortadella (at Bar Toma, in Chicago), 'nduja (at Cypress, in Charleston, S.C.) and ciauscolo (at Boccalone, in San Francisco). A few mavericks decided that the pig was over, branching out with octopus salami (Rosemary's, in Greenwich Village), fig salami (a dessert from Charlito's Cocina, a small New York producer) and daube glacé, a New Orleans classic of cool, jellied beef stew, now revived in that city at R'evolution.



SARA KRULWICK/THE NEW YORK TIMES