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 wood, with hints of twiggy stalks and a dry, crisp finish. A wine that made me think of gongoroles and the earthy, wild flavors of old meat. At Blanca, in Brooklyn, Carlo Mirarchi makes fritto of 60-day-old beef and lamb cuts. And at Salut, in San Francisco, Joshua Stence ages duck 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 croquettes of cymbal-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 handle in a small kitchen, and rich enough to pick up the flavor of another element. At Primitive, in the West Village, the phenomenon: Puffy, manhattan cocktail is made with smoked Cherry Coke. Also noted: smoked cauliflower at Farmhouse at Bedford Post, in Westchester County; smoked corn at Corso and Gardner, in Napa Valley; and smoked chèvre in the TriBeCa.

**SUNFLOWER POWER**

We swam in sunchoke Soupe, soups and purées last year, perhaps because of the vegetable’s taste, which combines potato and artichoke with a hint of winter-lentil; 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-price) outpost of progressive cuisine in Salt Lake City, Utah, with meat and vegetable todays. The experimental chef, Jordan Strong, (ex-restaurant goers in Washington) served a dense sunflower cake by using a crème solence “skin” as the shell of a caramel stuffed with ricotta, chocolate, and sunflower-seed purée; and at Atelier in TriBeCa, Matthew Lightner presented multiple courses with sunchoke, sunflower petals and a toffee of milked sunflower seeds.

**ARTESANAL SOFT-SERVE**

Three momentum developments made 2012 the year to buy a soft-serve machine for your otherwise underhanded restaurant — or, more likely, your flegging food truck. First, all the artisan family creameries, in Marin County, Calif., made its sof-soft’s mix nationally available; that’s what served at places like Zero Zero, in San Francisco, with a choice of sophisticated toppings like coca mis and extra-virgin olive oil (green on va-nilla ice cream). New York’s Big Gay Ice Cream Truck made national television and opened a second storefront, planting the seed for more grocery sof-soft serve trucks like the TriBeCa, in San Francisco, and the Cow Tipping Creamery, in Austin, Tex. And the MoMA Food Lab, mini-chain, home of the influential pastry chef Christina Tosi, continued to grow in New York, bringing soft-soft flavors like salted caramel and guava turronca to the masses.

**CHICHARRONES**

The humble pork rind shaved up in high-end company in 2012, in big-crisp-fried sheets that showed off the extraordinary texture that can be achieved when fat meets fat. At Empellón 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 rinds: Southern-fried chicken skin are a starter at Hunt, in Charlotte, N.C., and crisp fish skin made an amaze-bouché at Fren, in Brooklyn, Chichi-rroses were also spotted at Noble Pig (Austin), Xerarch (Brooklyn), and the disturbingly named Absinth (Atlanta).

**BROILED, BWRD ULT SOUCE**

Hugh Acheson’s Empire State South, in Atlanta, is one of many Southern restaurants that set the national agenda this year. Greens and greens were explored; the potential uses of pimento cheese were mastered (strawberries, puffed rice); country ham was added to every vegetable. Cutting through it all in a new generation of fully-flavored hot sauce was considered advanced artisanship? No, pickling is baby steps; fermentation is where it’s at. (Fermentation, in one method of pickling; it generates liv- ing bacteria.) Your peers are contemplating long-term bacterial activity like yolk-cured ketchup (he draws at Mint Bier in New York’s Koreatown), and consulting with the experts at the Cultured Pickle Shop, in Bостon, on projects like pumpkin fermented with caper-ette peppers and scallions. David Chang has turned a whole chuk of his Momofuku empire in New York over to a fermenting lab, and Nicolas Bals of Bar Tartine in San Francisco, has a jump on the Eastern European tradition; he’s already serving Hungarian-style stuffed red peppers.

**SALUMI 2.0**

The note-to-tail movement went off in two directions this year, providing an astounding range of cured meats. One path was for ad- vanced students of charcuterie and salumi, who mastered panetta and pâté years back. Now they are making more esperanto (at Bar Bocuse, in Chicago), salami (at Cripey, in Charleston, S.C.) and sausages (at Boccalone, in San Francisco). A few mavericks decided that the pig was over, branching out with duck, duck (Bassam Saeed in San Francisco), and duck, duck, goose, a New Orleanian classic of caj, piled meat stew, now revived in that city at ‘P’trevalian.’