



Belly up to good eats at Philadelphia's Barbuzzo; Chef Jamie Bissonnette (inset) is a partner at Boston's Coppa.

Beyond the boundaries

By ANDY WANG and ERIN FRANZMAN

Philly & Boston chefs freestyle their way into eatery empires

PHILADELPHIA and Boston aren't exactly better food cities than New York, but their chefs could teach ours a few things about diversity and taking on projects that might seem out of your comfort zone.

Andrew Carmellini has become one of New York's most buzzed-about chefs after going from French food at Café Boulud to Italian at A Voce and Locanda Verde and now to American at the Dutch. For the most part, though, we know what to expect from our top chefs: Scott Conant and Michael White cook Italian, David Chang and Zak Pelaccio riff on Asian flavors, April Bloomfield elevates pub grub.

But in Philadelphia, 2011 James Beard Award winner Michael Solomonov has an

Israeli restaurant (Zahav), a Mexican restaurant (Xochitl) and a Texas barbecue restaurant (Percy Street Barbecue). And he's about to unveil Federal Donuts, serving Korean fried chicken alongside its donuts. (At a recent tasting, our favorite donut had a cardamom-orange glaze with crushed pistachios.)

Zahav, as we've noted before, is a revelation, with salads redolent of striking spices like fenugreek and harissa — and delicately salty smoked sablefish piled on buttery toasted challah bread with an unctuous fried egg. So it's a surprise to visit Percy Street Barbecue and find smoky pork ribs and hot links that wouldn't be laughed out of Austin. And shocker, the pork rinds and tortilla soup at Xochitl wouldn't be laughed out of Austin, either.

Also in Philadelphia, chef Marcie Turney is queen of her own section of 13th Street. She's got a Mexican restaurant (Lolita), an Indian restaurant (Bindi), a gourmet food shop/catering service (Grocery), a housewares store (Open House) and an accessories shop (Verde) where she sells artisanal chocolates. Her latest spot is Barbuzzo, a Mediterranean hot spot that really does put Italian and Spanish food together in a coherent way while also offering farm-to-table flourishes like heirloom pork and a chalkboard listing the serious collection of daily vegetables.

One good way to attack the menu: Start with local greens and then go whole hog — house-cured chorizo, stuffed pork and short-rib meatballs, paccheri with a smoky pork ragu and maybe even a

locally sourced pig special. And get a seasonal dessert: A cherry-prosecco sorbet we recently tried was as summery as fruit pie.

In Boston, Ken Oringer's empire includes a French-American fine dining spot (Clio), an adjacent sashimi bar (Uni), a Mexican restaurant right by Fenway Park that serves until 2 a.m. on weekends (La Verdad), a steakhouse (KO Prime), a Spanish restaurant (Toro) and an Italian restaurant (Coppa). Oringer is an accomplished veteran (Gourmet magazine named Clio "Best Newcomer" in 2007) who's adjusted with the times and capitalized on different markets.

He sells late-night burritos to drunks outside a baseball stadium and also runs an inventive sashimi bar that combines sea urchin with Peruvian hot peppers and serves yellowtail marinated in a three-month-old tamari sauce with slivers of lily bulb.

At Toro (a tapas spot with unexpected delights like a pressed sea urchin sandwich) and Coppa, he's teamed up with Jamie Bissonnette, the offal-loving fella recently voted Food & Wine magazine's 2011 People's Best New Chef.

Coppa is charcuterie central, and Bissonnette takes nose-to-tail quite literally. There's a pig's head terrine



The lamb ragu at Coppa.

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That's now part of a family of restaurants that includes two popular Italian eateries (Via Matta and Alta Strada). And earlier this year, Schlow opened Tico, "American at its core" with Spanish, Mexican and South American influences.

Tico is Boston's version of Carmellini's the Dutch, with Schlow applying broad strokes to the kind of fun comfort food you wouldn't mind eating every day. Fried chicken tacos with buttermilk dressing? Yes, please. Chorizo risotto with parmesan cheese? Why didn't somebody think of this earlier? Like Tuco on "Breaking Bad" might say, Tico is tight.

We met Schlow recently at a Gilt City pop-up dinner at Fenway Park. Schlow moved to Boston in 1995 and, he says, only intended to be there a few years and then head back to New York. There's still time, chef. We could use a few more chefs like you.

on the Coppa dinner menu, and one of our favorite dishes at a recent Coppa brunch was the roasted pig tail with mostarda glaze. But our top tip: Cavatelli with chicken sausage and slow-cooked broccoli sounds boring, but it's actually a hearty ragu and one of the best pasta dishes we've eaten in America.

Like Oringer, Michael Schlow is a longtime Boston chef who's kept himself vital. The former New Yorker opened Radius, his American fine dining spot, to widespread accolades in 1999.