

SAVEUR

The 2008 SAVEUR 100

Our favorite foods, restaurants, drinks, people, places, and things.

DECEMBER 21, 2007

0 Comments

Our tenth annual 100 list offers a vivid snapshot of the wide—very, very wide—world of food, zipping from the Ramadan markets of Kuala Lumpur to the kitchens of Montreal's vanguard chefs and a rustic Galician tavern that serves some of the finest octopus we've ever tasted. And yet, this year's 100 is also about celebrating the fresh and wild bounty—edible weeds, anyone?—found right in our own backyards. So, join us. The feast is about to begin. —The Editors

1 Most Beloved National Pastime

The frenzied grilling, the enormous barrel smokers, the piles of tender ribs—is it any wonder that **COMPETITION BARBECUE** is our favorite sport? Pluck, hubris, and good humor are on display in equal measure at these open-to-the-public, juried events, as backyard hobbyists, branding team names like Partners in Swine and Dr. Porkenstein, vie for glory against barbecue-circuit legends like Paul Kirk, of Manhattan's RUB restaurant. We're not alone in our predilections: over the past five years, the number of official barbecue contests around the country has grown from about 200 to more than 600, says Carolyn Wells, cofounder of the Kansas City Barbeque Society, competitive barbecue's main governing body, which sets contest guidelines and trains and accredits judges (there are now more than 8,000 of them). The best part about the sport: the fans are as generously compensated as the players. Attendees get to eat to their hearts' content and bond with fellow 'cue fanatics amid a haze of fragrant wood smoke.

2 Lovely Legumes

"Beans shouldn't need to be cooked with a ham hock to taste good," says Steve Sando, the founder of **RANCHO GORDO**, a California company that sells a wide range of heirloom beans indigenous to the Americas. We couldn't agree more. The dizzying array of colorful, and colorfully named, legumes that Sando's company offers have distinctive flavors and rich textures that make the beans stars in their own right. Rancho Gordo's mantequilla beans, for instance, are beefy and buttery; its big, fat good mother stallards taste smoky and slightly piquant; and its vallartas, a variety on the verge of extinction before Sando rediscovered it, possess a luxuriously smooth texture. It's no surprise that savvy cooks are clamoring for Sando's beans. The in-house chefs at the California headquarters of Google, Rancho Gordo's biggest customer, order hundreds of pounds of them a week. Now you know what they know: being full of beans is a wonderful thing.

3 Wild at Heart

That many people remember **EUPELL GIBBONS** as the Grape-Nuts guy—the craggy-faced outdoorsman who appeared in television commercials for that cereal in the 1970s—has always struck us as ironic, considering that Gibbons had devoted much of his life to championing all things edible that do not come in a box. America's preeminent forager, the Texas native, who died in 1975, anticipated by many years Americans' now burgeoning interest in foods that grow wild near their homes. A former farmer and teacher, among other things, Gibbons completed his first book, *Stalking the Wild Asparagus* (David McKay Company), in 1962. Part field guide, part memoir, the pioneering tome helped demystify wild food—berries, barks, grasses, flowers, roots, and more—offering botanical illustrations and numerous recipes. "He is apparently not trying to prove anything at all," the essayist John McPhee wrote of Gibbons in a 1968 *New Yorker* profile, "except that there is a marvelous variety of good food in the world and that only a modest part of the whole can be found in even the most super of supermarkets." Three decades after Gibbons's death, that sentiment strikes us as more visionary than ever.

5 Pocket Power

Whether we're opening a can of beets or a bottle of brouilly, the **SWISS ARMY KNIFE**—designed in 1891 by the Victorinox company of Ibach, Switzerland, and still carried by members of the Swiss armed forces—is the trustiest companion we know of when it comes to eating on the go. Sturdy and sleek, the tool (even the relatively slim model, right) delivers a kitchen's worth of functionality in a beautifully compact package.

8 He Shoots from the Belly

For four decades, **LES BLANK**'s lyrical, freewheeling documentaries have used food as a window on life, taking us into the kitchens of Creole cooks (*Yum, Yum, Yum!*, 1990) and of his friend Alice Waters (*Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*, 1979), chronicling the devotees of the stinking rose (*Garlic Is as Good as Ten Mothers*, 1980), and observing life on a chicken farm (*Chicken Real*, 1970). Last year, he released his first new film in over a decade, *All in This Tea*, which follows a tea connoisseur on his travels through China. In ways both gustatory and stylistic, few filmmakers have so passionately and indefatigably followed their own tastes.

9 Got Cake?

Start with the classic Latin American dessert known as pastel de tres leches (a moist, sweet, spongy sheet cake that's been drenched in a bath of heavy cream, sweetened condensed milk, and evaporated milk), then add a coating of dulce de leche, the rich caramel sauce made of slow-cooked, caramelized milk and sugar. The result: **PASTEL DE CUATRO LECHEs**, a confection named for its four milky components. We think its parts add up to a splendid whole.

10 Why Good

We're suckers for swine, but there's one variety that really has us in its thrall: **WHEY-FED PORK**. The rich flavor and tender texture of meat from hogs whose diets are supplemented with whey—a nutritious, liquid byproduct of the cheese-making process—may seem like the latest trend in boutique meats (chefs like Dan Barber of New York's Blue Hill restaurants and John Besh of Restaurant August in New Orleans serve it), but the practice of feeding pigs whey has long been prevalent in areas where pork and cheese are produced in close proximity. The animals enjoy the taste, and whey's slightly acidic, lactic base gives their flesh a nutty, velvety quality. For down-home dishes cooked with whey-fed pork, we visit

the Route 7 Grill, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, which cures, smokes, spit-roasts, and grills pork from pigs that have been fed whey from the nearby Berkshire Cheese Makers.

11 Sweet Dream With its honeylike consistency and complex, haunting flavor, **KECAP MANIS** (pronounced KEH-chop MAH-neese), an Indonesian ingredient made of soy sauce that's been sweetened with palm sugar, is our dream condiment. Since we discovered it, we've dipped our french fries and satay into it, drizzled our omelettes with it, and even added a drop to vinaigrettes, where its delicate sweetness tames assertive vinegars. Is there no end to our obsession?

15 Octopus Apotheosis

Thousands of the faithful each year make the pilgrimage to the city of Santiago de Compostela, in the Spanish region of Galicia, to pay their respects to Saint James at the city's Romanesque cathedral. We go there to visit **BODEGÓN OS CONCHEIROS**, a tavern that specializes in polbo a feira, simmered octopus drenched with Andalusian extra-virgin olive oil and sprinkled with hot pimenton (smoked paprika) and coarse sea salt. It's one of the most unpretentious preparations of that seafood we know of—and one of the most delicious.

18 Finest Filling Stations

When you're driving across America's wide-open spaces, your worst enemies are an empty tank and an empty belly. Although a car may not be picky about the brand of gas you put into it, a body cannot run on beef jerky alone. That's why we're crazy about **NEW MEXICO ROAD FOOD**. Perhaps it's the harmonious convergence of Mexican, American Indian, and Western-frontier cooking traditions found there, or maybe it's the daunting distances between population centers, but we know of no other state in the Union where you can so consistently find such tasty cooking along the asphalt byways, often only steps from the gas pump.

Twenty miles north of Albuquerque, off Interstate 25, the San Felipe Pueblo Restaurant is a gastronomic jewel set amid a dozen fuel pumps, a casino, and a motor speedway. This gleaming diner with vinyl booths and views of dramatic mesas turns out superlative New Mexican and American Indian fare, such as stuffed sopaipillas (savory fried pastries, similar to American Indian fry bread, filled with ground beef or chicken, beans, and red and green chiles), huevos rancheros, and formidable combo plates: try the one featuring fresh flour tortillas, blue cornmeal mush, pork pozole (a hominy-studded stew), and a medley of corn, roasted green chiles, and yellow squash.

If you're heading south from Albuquerque on I-25 toward Las Cruces, stop for a sugar fix at the San Antonio General Store, attached to a gas station, where owner Anne Lund's homemade pecan fudge is a siren song to truckers and day-trippers alike. When Lund bought the station, three years ago, the previous owners' top-secret recipe was included in the deal. Lund says it took nearly six months of trial and error to get the luxurious, creamy consistency just right.

Farther north, the high-desert farming town of Velarde is home to Michael's Mini Mart, an unprepossessing pit stop along State Highway 68. There, take a seat at one of three small tables and, for less than you'd spend on a couple of gallons of unleaded, order from the 48-item menu featuring co-owner Alice Romero's justly famous smothered red chile burritos, pork tacos with pico de gallo, and chicharron burritos, packed with pork rinds, refried beans, cheddar cheese, and chiles.

About 25 miles from Velarde, at the quiet crossroads where Highways 64 and 285 intersect, you'll find a low-slung gas station and a chrome diner anchoring the hamlet of Tres Piedras. The latter houses a half-century-old establishment known simply as The Diner. On offer is American comfort food of the highest order: airy buttermilk pancakes, crisp home fries, and Frito pie (that delicious Southwestern classic consisting of Fritos corn chips, pinto beans, and red chile sauce) piled with fresh green chiles, an ingredient for which seemingly every New Mexican has an abiding love.

In the north-central town of Abiquiu, once home to the painter Georgia O'Keeffe, a colorful collection of locals converges at the cafe attached to the 88-year-old Bode's general store, off Highway 84. The highlight of 29-year-old cook Sonny Garza's menu, which also proffers enchiladas and tamales, is the half-pound green chile cheeseburger—a dish satisfying enough for the mightiest road warriors.

21 The Way the Cookie Crumbles

We're not sure who first had the idea to crush up the brittle, crepelike Breton cookies known as gavottes and call the resulting crackly, sweet shards **FEUILLETINE**, but we're immensely happy that someone did. They're magnifique sprinkled over cakes, ice cream, and custards—or just eaten from the palm of your hand.

22 A Faith That Nourishes

Dressed in saffron saris and sporting their signature ponytails, Hare Krishna devotees—who subscribe to a spiritual system, based on Hindu practices, that was imported to the United States from India in the 1960s—strike many Americans as relics of our country's counterculture past. The truth is, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, as the religious group is officially known, is still going strong, operating more than 400 temples worldwide. Here's another little-known fact: Hare Krishna adherents run one of the best restaurant chains in the world. Called Govinda's, these Hare Krishna **TEMPLE DINING HALLS** serve inexpensive, freshly prepared Indian-style vegetarian food to believers and nonbelievers alike. Whether we're in Dallas or Dublin, Brooklyn or Budapest, we always seek out the nearest one for a satisfying, meatless meal. Sundays are the best time to go; the buffet-style meal on that day, still referred to by some old-timers as the Sunday love feast, is free. From potato-stuffed samosas and paneer subji (soft cheese with peas and potatoes) to spiced cabbage with peas and tofu, the Hare Krishna brand of Westernized Indian food renews our spirits every time.

23 Little Fish, Big Flavor

Marinated white anchovies may be all the rage, but we couldn't live without the more emphatically flavored **SALT-CURED ANCHOVIES** that give everything from caesar salad to bagna cauda their savory depth. Saute them with olive oil and garlic for a quick pasta sauce, mash them into mayo, or sneak them into deviled eggs. We're especially partial to the Agostina Recca brand from Sicily.

31 Kiwi Treat

Made in New Zealand and immensely popular in that country, **RJ'S NATURAL LICORICE** comes in tender, cylinder-shaped pieces that surrender at first bite, giving way to a sweet mouthful of anise-tinged, exceptionally well-balanced flavor. You can keep your Twizzlers, Junior; this licorice is for grown-ups.

37 Reaching New Heights

Although wines from Chile and Argentina are often consigned to the value-priced bin in wine shops, we find that **CABERNETS FROM THE ANDES**, the mountain range shared by those two countries, rank with the best made anywhere. Whether fashioning blends or stand-alone cabernets, contemporary Chilean vintners are making truly brilliant wines—Vina Almaviva, Concha y Toro's Don Melchor, Viñedo Chadwick, and Errazuriz's Don Maximiano being standouts. In Argentina, malbec often steals the spotlight, but some of that country's primarily cabernet-based

wines, including Cheval des Andes and Nicolas Catena Zapata, display considerably more nuanced complexity. For cabernet lovers, the future looks brighter than ever.

41 Sweetest Sign of Autumn

Nothing quickens our pulse like the arrival of ripe, juicy **CONCORD GRAPES** in farmers' markets and grocery stores each fall. For just a few short weeks in September and October, this supersweet fruit—which takes its name from the Massachusetts town where it was first cultivated—makes us swoon with its concentrated flavor and deep purple color, both of which we channel into jams, sorbets, and mouthwatering grape pies.

45 Little Giants

In a mystery that carries more than a whiff of the apocalyptic, billions of **HONEYBEES** in this country and in western Europe have gone missing. Colony collapse disorder, as scientists have dubbed the phenomenon, has affected the livelihood of not just makers of honey but also the farmers who depend on bees to pollinate their crops. The bees' plight has made us newly respectful of the subtle but substantial role these creatures play in our daily lives.

48 Best Supporting Player

Leave it to the Scandinavians to have come up with a flatbread that delivers an elegantly understated texture and flavor that can still stand up to that region's rich, boldly flavored appetizers. Earthy-tasting **KNÄCKEBRÖD**, a kind of ultracrisp flatbread eaten by Swedish farmers for centuries, epitomizes that country's practical, honest fare and brings out the best in cured salmon, pickled herring, or a hunk of sharp vasterbotten cheese. The crunch is the loudest thing about it.

49 Praising Far-Flung Fruit

Sure, we at SAVEUR are ardent supporters of the locavore movement; after all, do any foods taste quite as nice as those raised a stone's throw from home? Well, yes, as a matter of fact, at least when it comes to the exotic **ASIAN FRUITS** now showing up with increasing frequency on our shores. We're crazy for sweet rambutans, native to Malaysia; tangy longans, from southern China; dragon fruits, popular in Vietnam; and delightfully funky-smelling durians, originally from Indonesia. With their otherworldly looks and wonderfully complex flavors, these are foods from afar that we're happy to sink our teeth into.

52 Dried and True

If you know yogurt only in its creamy state, then you're getting just half the picture. In its dehydrated form, yogurt becomes a remarkable vehicle for texture and flavor. In southern India, small green chiles are steeped in salted yogurt and sun-dried to make dahi chiles, a crunchy, spicy condiment. In Greece, **DRIED YOGURT** is the key ingredient in *trahana*, a pastalike food that is used in that country's soups. And throughout the Middle East, sheep's, goats', or cows' milk yogurt is salted, formed into baseball-size orbs or pyramids, and dried to make an ingredient called *jameed*, which is crumbled and added to dishes such as *mansaf*, a lavish casserole of bread, lamb, and rice. Once you try dry, you may never go back.

53 Brain Food

Part high-brow food 'zine, part scholarly journal, the quarterly publication **GASTRONOMICA** has been at the top of our bedside reading pile since its inception, in 2001. Rarefied but unpretentious, each issue is an artfully curated collection of essays, poems, art, and journalistic reportage. Whether it's an article titled "Labor, Migration, and Social Justice in the Age of the Grape Boycott" or a tribute to the artist Vik Muniz's portraits of children rendered in sugar, *Gastronomica's* fare never fails to nourish us.

54 Chairman of the Boards

In an age when "lifetime guarantee" usually means anything but, we cherish kitchen implements that last. In that category, traditional **CHINESE IRONWOOD CUTTING BOARDS** are beyond compare. The best ones, made from superthick cross sections of Chinese ironwood trees, hold up after years of heavy-duty prepping without splitting or cracking.

57 An Oily Epiphany

There's nothing quite like the **PUMPKIN SEED OIL** made in the Austrian state of Styria from freshly roasted and pressed pumpkin seeds: it imparts a nutty richness to any food it touches. Traditionally tossed into potato salads, it also shines atop pan-seared fish or roasted squash. We suggest drizzling with abandon.

58 Silk Road Food

For centuries, the central Chinese province of Shaanxi was traversed by the Silk Road, the caravan route that linked Asia and the Middle East, creating a true culinary crossroads. Today, the food markets in the *****MUSLIM QUARTER OF XI'AN**, the capital city, offer everything from bowls of glossy Chinese rice noodles to Middle Eastern-style mutton kebabs and flaky pistachio cookies, making it easy to consume a continent's worth of food in just a few city blocks.

59 A Cut Above

We might sound a little like an infomercial when we talk about the **WÜSTHOF CRUST BUSTER**, but the truth is that this tool is not only perfectly designed for cutting through crusty bread; it also makes a great all-purpose kitchen knife. Because the ten-inch blade's curved shape facilitates a proper down-and-forward motion, it even slices and dices vegetables like nobody's business.

60 Old School, New Blood

Here's the bad news: neighborhood butcher shops are a dying breed. According to the U.S. Department of Labor statistics, nearly two-thirds of America's 122,830 butchers are employed in supermarkets, where meat often arrives already portioned in vacuum-sealed bags. The good news? A vanguard of young, creative **INDEPENDENT BUTCHERS** is determined to reverse that trend. The shops these pioneers are opening around the country are one part small-town America, with old-fashioned counter service, and two parts punk rock: many of these purveyors express disdain for the conventional meat industry, and all of them possess the gumption to figure out how to bring fresh, natural, nose-to-tail offerings to consumers.

Leading the pack is the husband-and-wife team Joshua and Jessica Applestone, who opened a shop called Fleisher's (named for Joshua's grandfather, who was a kosher butcher) in Kingston, in upstate New York, four years ago. (They recently started another, in nearby Rhinebeck.) When Joshua, a former restaurant cook, realized that many farmers don't sell meat to chefs, because the established distribution channels made it too difficult, he and Jessica began buying animals live, transporting them to humane abattoirs, delivering large cuts to chefs, and butchering the rest for their shops, using skills taught to them by old-school butchers the couple recruited to help them.

San Franciscans Tia Harrison, Angela Wilson, and Melanie Eisemen, who are all in their 20s and 30s, didn't know much about handling whole carcasses, either, when they opened their store, Avedano's, last year in an old butcher shop that went out of business in the 1980s. After learning

some of the finer points of the trade from their predecessors, who took the women under their wing, they now butcher beautiful retail cuts and prepare delectable takeaway dishes with meats sold at the shop.

Indeed, because many new-breed butchers are also cooks, they're hard-wired to put every edible morsel to good use. For Taylor Boetticher of Napa's Fatted Calf, that means selling a wide variety of charcuterie (including house-made mortadella) at farmers' markets and at his permanent shop. The same goes for Tanya Cauthen of the year-old Belmont Butchery in Richmond, Virginia; her shop offers made-on-the-premises pancetta and a big selection of stocks.

We're grateful to all these entrepreneurs and artisans for shortening the distance between pasture and plate and, just as important, for reviving such an honorable art.

61 Old Reliables

There are pricier and fancier options, but it's hard to do better than old-fashioned **BLACK STEEL PANS**, those workhorses manufactured for the restaurant trade. They conduct heat evenly, and their flared sides allow moisture to evaporate quickly while foods are sauteed. Once seasoned, they retain a consistently nonstick surface, and the long, angled handle keeps cooks' hands at a safe distance from the heat source. They virtually never wear out, and, like many a veteran chef, they develop a soulful patina with age.

63 Sausages That Really Sizzle

If you happen to find yourself in Serbia, Croatia, or virtually any other Balkan country and there's a flaming grill nearby, chances are someone is cooking **CEVAPCICI**. These super smoky, skinless sausages (pronounced che-VAHP-chi-chi)—usually a combination of minced beef, lamb, or pork seasoned with garlic and pepper—have a vibrant flavor and a juicy texture that make them one of the world's great meat dishes. Known by a variety of names, depending on the country you're in, and typically served with flatbread and condiments like roasted-pepper and eggplant sauce (usually called ajvar) and fermented cream, cevapcici likely owe their culinary origins to the Turks (the food is a cousin of the kebab, from which it derives its name). Whatever their provenance, the sooner they catch on here in the States, the better.

64 The Bread Prophet

Almost 30 years ago, **PETER REINHART**, then an Eastern Orthodox monk, had an epiphany. As he describes it, he was taking a bite of his own freshly baked bread when he realized that baking, and teaching others how to do the same, would give him his life's purpose. It's a mission he's embraced with vigor. Reinhart went on to found a much lauded bakery in Sonoma, California, has written several authoritative books (most recently, the excellent *Whole Grain Breads*, published in 2007 by Ten Speed Press), and mentored thousands of budding bakers at culinary schools across the country. "I'm evolving," Reinhart says. "The loaf is still rising."

66-70 It's a Sweet, Sweet World

you're like us, when you're outside America you probably spend an inordinate amount of time browsing grocery store candy aisles and marveling at the curiously named worldwide candy bars. We decided it was apt to salute a few that we're particularly sweet on.

66 Silver Queen The best-selling candy bar in Indonesia, this chocolate-cashew treat is made with locally grown cacao beans and cashews.

67 Peppermint Crisp This deceptively plain-looking candy bar, popular in Australia and South Africa, packs an unexpected punch, as its milk chocolate exterior conceals an electric blue center of crunchy peppermint crystals.

68 Big Turk Jellylike, rose-scented turkish delight and chocolate may not seem like natural bedfellows, but the combination proves irresistible in this milk chocolate-covered bar from Canada.

69 GooGoo Cluster This hunky American original, invented by the Standard Candy Company of Nashville, Tennessee, in 1912, is made of marshmallow, caramel, and roasted peanuts shaped into a patty and covered in milk chocolate.

70 Daim Introduced in Sweden in the 1950s, this snappy, toffee-centered, milk chocolate-enrobed candy is rich and buttery. It blows other toffee bars, like Heath, out of the water.

72 A Very Good Year

The refined whites of France's Burgundy region have long set a benchmark for chardonnay. With its warm, dry summer, 2005 has been widely hailed as the best year in recent memory for white wines from the area, and bottles of that vintage have fetched accordingly high prices. But we think the **2004 WHITE BURGUNDIES** are better. That year's cool, wet August and mild, sunny September yielded wines possessed of full fruit flavors and a crisp, steely acidity that provides balance and encourages longevity. The best bottlings, especially those from the celebrated Maconnais and Cote d'Or appellations, exhibit all the vibrancy of their 2005 brethren but also the backbone that distinguishes a truly great Burgundian white.

73 Fastest Food Crawl

While we're proponents of the slow food movement, we're thrilled at the prospect of being able to speed across the fabled regions of northeastern France—Champagne, Lorraine, and Alsace—on a gastronomic day trip, thanks to the new **TGV EST HIGH-SPEED RAIL LINE**. Connecting Paris to Strasbourg in a little over two hours and stopping at 20 cities in between, the train makes it possible to have lunch at Les Deux Magots in Paris and dinner at Les Crayeres, chef Didier Elena's acclaimed two-star restaurant in Reims, now a mere 45-minute commute away. Full speed ahead!

74 Disciple of Flavor

It's hard to put a finger on what we respect the most about **JON ROWLEY**. Partly it's his foresight: over three decades as a food-industry consultant and all-around tastemaker, Rowley, who is based in Seattle, was an early champion of such formerly obscure foods as Washington State's Olympia oysters, Alaska's Copper River salmon, and northern California's Frog Hollow Farm peaches. We also like that each of his culinary finds comes with a compelling history, whether it's a "benchmark peach experience" he once had in a train station in Genoa, Italy, or the elation he felt at his first plate of oysters at Le Dome, in Paris. Most of all, we admire the passion that's sustained him in his pursuits, which, in hindsight, more closely resemble a quest than a career.

His exceptional body of knowledge is of the kind that only an autodidact could assemble. Back in the 1960s and '70s, when Rowley was working as a commercial fisherman in the waters off the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, he took to spending his vacations visiting fisheries, oyster beds, and restaurant kitchens around the world. In France, he tasted seafood with an intensity of flavor he'd never encountered in American restaurants. At that time in Seattle, the only oysters to be had came from jars, and "just-caught" fish had languished for days in the holds of massive trawlers by the time it reached the dock. Rowley returned from his travels with hands-on knowledge of superior methods of handling both shellfish and finfish, and a mission to revolutionize the quality of the seafood served in Seattle. Before long, restaurant companies and supermarket chains around the country were hiring him to do the same for their products.

Always, Rowley is acutely curious about what makes a particular food taste good. Environmental factors are crucial, he's discovered, whether it's the unique blend of local algae and minerals that allows the Virginia oysters of Totten Inlet, in Washington's Puget Sound, to grow incomparably plump and sweet, or the precise proportions of water and compost that beget the perfect blackberry.

These days, Rowley can often be seen combing the stalls of West Coast farmers' markets, analyzing all kinds of produce with a gadget called a refractometer, which measures sugar content. "I can't figure out why there isn't one in every household," he says. "It tells you the whole story of the plant, the conditions it grew in, and how it's going to taste." He has also devoted long hours to composting, planting, picking, and packing. His goal: to find the most delectable fruits and vegetables, to pinpoint exactly what the growers are doing right, and, ultimately, to help other producers follow suit. With fruit as with fish, personal attachments always seem to trump professional ambition: Rowley's earliest taste memory is that of the clean tang of perfectly ripe, wild Oregon blackberries, and he's determined to share that pleasure with all of us.

For Rowley, knowing where your food comes from—an imperative for an ever growing number of American eaters—is never anything more or less than a matter of taste.

77 They Stand United

Less than a year after 9/11, Fekkak Mamdouh, a former waiter at Windows on the World, the famed World Trade Center restaurant, and New York City attorney Saru Jayaraman created the **RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTER OF NEW YORK**. Their mission: to help find jobs for the 13,000 restaurant workers of lower Manhattan whose livelihoods were damaged by the disaster. ROC-NY recently opened a cooperative restaurant downtown called COLORS, where workers share profits, and it has expanded its mandate to helping nonunionized restaurant employees resolve labor disputes equitably. We're happy that justice—and good food—is being served.

79 Food Fabulist

The fanciful writings and illustrations of **LUDWIG BEEMLMANS**, the Tyrol-born bon vivant, abound with temperamental chefs, snooty waiters, and destitute gourmands who evoke a bygone world of urbane splendor. Though he's best known for the popular *Madeline* series of children's books, Beehmans is also the author and illustrator of 26 books for grown-ups. His droll narratives—our favorites are *Hotel Splendide* (1941) and *How to Travel Incognito* (1952)—and illustrations, which often began as scribbles on the backs of menus and hotel stationery, bespeak a vivacious curiosity about food and manners that we can't help adoring.

80 On Top of Spaghetti

If you were weaned on Texas-style chili, then a trip to Cincinnati is an eye-opening experience. **CINCINNATI CHILI**—a combo of ground beef sautéed with ground cumin and cinnamon—is more of a meaty topping than a stew. As with any estimable local favorite, the dish comes with its own lingo: you can order it "two-way" (served on spaghetti), "three-way" (with the addition of grated cheddar cheese), "four-way" (with cheese and chopped onions), or "five-way" (with cheese, onions, and stewed kidney beans). An invention of Greek and Slavic immigrants, Cincinnati chili is a distant cousin of Mediterranean pasticcio. In an age when quirky regional specialties are on the wane, this is a hearty food that never fails to warm our hearts—or our bellies.

81 Cups of Comfort

Coffee is well and good, but when we need a pick-me-up, we often grab a cup of **ATOL DE ELOTE**, a thick, restorative drink consisting of milk, sugar, fresh corn, and cinnamon. Maya in origin, the sweet beverage is, for countless Central Americans, part of an indispensable morning and midday ritual. It's considered by some to have curative properties on a par with chicken soup's.

82 Part-Time Toques

We know of only one place where we can learn the fundamentals of French, Brazilian, Turkish, and Thai cuisine; brush up on our pastry-decorating skills; and do a new-world wine tasting—all in a single weekend. Located in New York City and open seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, the **INSTITUTE OF CULINARY EDUCATION** offers the planet's most extensive program of instruction in recreational cooking (each year there are more than 1,500 classes). Founded in 1975 by the late culinary educator Peter Kump, ICE has remained true to its populist mission of teaching epicures of all experience levels.

83 Ancient Fruit

It's no secret to oenophiles that Greece, long associated with quaffable but unsophisticated local specialties like retsina, is now producing world-class wines. The most intriguing among them may be those made from a dark purple grape known as **XINOMAVRO**, which is believed to have evolved from indigenous Greek fruit first vinified thousands of years ago. Winemakers near the town of Naoussa, in the northern Greek region of Macedonia, are using this grape to produce wines with an evocative bouquet that closely resembles that of Italy's barolos. Though bottlings from top producers, such as Boutari, Karydas, and Kir-Yianni, can seem harsh in their youth, they mature with admirable grace.

86-89 Native Sons

Sure, we fancy the occasional panini, but our true love lies with great American sandwiches, foods that reflect regional provenance. Consider the **86 REUBEN**, that wonderfully sloppy construction of sauerkraut, russian dressing, swiss cheese, and corned beef on grilled rye. The sandwich has long been deemed the invention of Arnold Reuben, a Manhattan deli owner, and yet convincing evidence suggests that Reuben Kolakofsky, a wholesale grocer in Omaha, Nebraska, in the 1920s may have been the father of the dish. We also love modern renditions of old favorites, like the urbane, creamy-crunchy **87 CHICKEN SALAD SANDWICH** from the New York-based sandwich emporium 'Wichcraft. It includes walnuts, roasted tomatoes, pickled red onions, and frisée served on multigrain bread. By contrast, the **88 BOSTON BAKED BEAN SANDWICH** is nothing if not traditional. The beloved open-face sandwich consists of beans mashed with sweet applesauce, spread on buttered brown bread, and covered with a vegetable relish, cold cuts, and cheese. Our all-time favorite may be the **89 MUFFULETTA**, an Italian-American New Orleans classic: provolone, mortadella, and soppressata layered inside a round loaf of bread on top of an olive-and-marinated-vegetable relish. Man, is it good.

92 Freshest Fresh Start

Sometimes it takes the zeal of a convert to create truly transcendent cuisine. After years of working as a pastry chef in the kitchens of high-end New York City restaurants, **HEATHER CARLUCCI-RODRIGUEZ** decided to devote herself full-time to a new passion: Indian cooking. In 2005, the 37-year-old opened Lassi, a tiny take-out shop in New York's Greenwich Village that specializes in home-style Punjabi-influenced fare. The dishes she serves there—updated versions of classics like mattar paneer (peas and homemade cheese, to which she adds shiitake mushrooms) and the yogurt drink from which her restaurant takes its name—are some of the most vivid and intelligently executed interpretations of Punjabi cuisine we've ever tasted.

95 Italy's Alpine Beauty

To declare **TIEFENBRÜNNER FELDMARSCHALL**, a white wine produced high in the Dolomites of Italy, the world's finest wine made with

mullerthurgau grapes is to damn it with faint praise. It is, simply, one of the most exciting white wines to be found in Italy today. In contrast to the table wines usually produced from that German-born fruit, this impeccably balanced wine exhibits a nuanced floral bouquet, a taut structure, and a long, complex finish that speaks of both the uncompromising dedication of its makers and an utterly distinctive sense of place.

96 Best Online Obsession

A website that exhaustively chronicles the history of American supermarket chains may sound like a yawn, but Groceteria.com has become one of our favorite online destinations. Packed with archival photography, the site offers lively histories of big chains like Safeway and A&P, as well as lesser-known regional ones like Bel Air and CentroMart. With the ardor of a dedicated geek, creator David Gwynn approaches chain grocery stores less as a blight than as reflections of vernacular architecture and good old American hucksterism.

98 Just Right

Somewhere along the line, we Americans became fanatical about having our food served very, very hot or very, very cold. And, yes, when it comes to a winter soup or a sizzling steak, the most direct route from fire to plate is the one to travel; by the same token, a salad of baby lettuces isn't much fun if it isn't served well chilled. But all kinds of dishes, especially those possessing complex, layered flavors, taste the best when they've been allowed to edge their way to room temperature. Many Southeast Asian curries, for example, with their disparate notes of spice and sweet, achieve their ideal state when they have been given time to cool a bit before being eaten. Similarly, the vivid, aromatic flavors of many traditionally cool foods—a mustard-spiked celery root remoulade, for example—are more pronounced when those foods are served in a less than frigid state; whisked straight from the icebox, such delicate dishes can taste one-note. In many cultures, **ROOM-TEMPERATURE FOODS**—think tapas, cheeses, and antipasti—are a delicious holdover from the days before refrigeration. Imagining a world in which such dishes are no longer served in the graceful zone between piping-hot and ice-cold is something we'd rather not do. Reminding ourselves to resist the urge to race from fridge or stovetop to table may take some doing at first, but rewards always come to those who wait.

Latest

Recipes

Videos

At Saveur, we recommend all kinds of products we think you'll love. In some cases, we receive a commission for purchases made through this site, but if a product link shows up in an editorial article, it's there for one reason: We love it. End of story.

Copyright © 2018 SAVEUR. A Bonnier Corporation Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

BONNIER
Corporation

