

# FOOD & WINE

SEPTEMBER 2011

## *the* ART *of* COOKING

21 best late-summer recipes,  
with a photo for each dish

Recipes from the *ultimate*  
neighborhood restaurant

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Thai chicken &  
watermelon salad,  
great with a rosé

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delicious, new wines*



Encantado Resort has an on-site art gallery. BELOW: An ancho chile-spiked sauce tops roast duck and gnocchi at Restaurant Martín.

## Santa Fe Enters a New Age

Chefs and artists are moving past all the bad green-chile sauce and coyotes carved in turquoise to make the city feel compelling again.

BY DOUGLAS ANTHONY COOPER

**S**ANTA FE OSCILLATES between greatness and kitsch. It began with a period of culinary brilliance in 1987, when chef Mark Miller opened the pioneering Coyote Cafe. Southwestern cuisine had arrived, to national acclaim. But before long, that inspiration began to sink in a pool of green-chile sauce.

The dance between the magnificent and the mundane defines the Santa Fe art scene as well. In the '90s, the city established the region's most important exhibition space, SITE Santa Fe, and the first US biennial for international art. The nascent

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*Douglas Anthony Cooper is a novelist who often collaborates with artists. His most recent young adult novel is Milrose Munce and the Plague of Toxic Fungus.*



Santa Fe Biennial incubated curators who rose to steer the mother ship in Italy: the vaunted Venice Biennale. But the energy evaporated, and what was left were coyotes carved in turquoise.

I write about food occasionally, and in 1999 I collaborated with Diller + Scofidio on a multimedia installation for the Biennale. In my food and art circles, I've recently heard rumors of renewed

## THE NEW SANTA FE ART SCENE



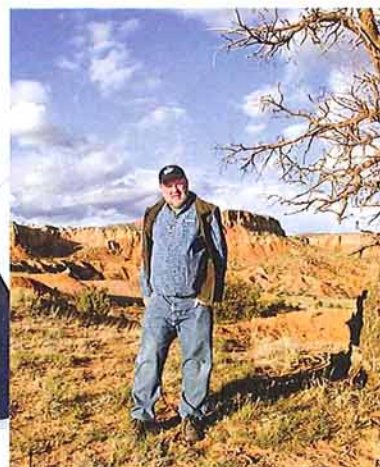
**EIGHT MODERN** Jaquelin Loyd (far left) and Margo Thoma (far right) run this visionary gallery out of a historic 1860s farmhouse. They represent artists such as Roger Shimomura and Jan Adlmann and often premiere works by international artists who have never before exhibited in Santa Fe. 231 Delgado St.; 505-995-0231 or [eightmodern.net](http://eightmodern.net).



**SUSAN YORK** The artist turns pencil lead into installations, from 14-foot solid graphite blocks to an entire room covered in gleaming, polished graphite. Her work is shown at James Kelly Contemporary. 1601 Paseo de Peralta; 505-989-1601.



**TED LARSEN** Larsen creates abstract sculptures from salvaged materials. He constructs two-dimensional pieces from sheets of steel bolted into frames; 3D sculptures are a colorful patchwork of plywood, scrap metal and rubber pieces. Larsen's work is on display at Eight Modern. 231 Delgado St.; 505-995-0231.



**CRAIG VARJABEDIAN** A student of Ansel Adams, he is known for his images of the American West. He spent seven years shooting the landscape near Georgia O'Keeffe's home for his book, *Ghost Ranch and the Faraway Nearby*. His photos are at Gerald Peters Gallery. 1011 Paseo de Peralta; 505-954-5700.

ferment in Santa Fe's galleries and kitchens. Chefs are taking a more global approach to Southwestern cuisine. Many apprenticed in Europe and are using international (and sometimes hypermodern) techniques. They are still interested in what the Southwest has to offer, but their emphasis is on New Mexican ingredients rather than regional recipes. Ideas and flavors have been smuggled in from the Mediterranean and Asia. Artists too have rejoined the international art conversation. Santa Fe is no longer the place that your grandparents go for New Age bliss art (most of it an unwitting parody of Georgia O'Keeffe).

This makes sense. There is no reason for Santa Fe to be even slightly provincial: The city has an absurd concentration of talent and brain power. SAR, the School for Advanced Research, has stood at the forefront of ethnology since 1907. The Santa Fe Opera is revered worldwide for staging audacious new works, and nearby Los Alamos has more PhDs per capita than almost anywhere in America.

I live in Oaxaca, the culinary epicenter of Mexico, and I have a good sense of the flavors and ingredients drawn upon by the American Southwest, and subverted by these new Santa Fe chefs. Chef Charles Dale of Terra, for instance, makes a white chocolate mole. The sauce is witty (almost heretical) but somehow makes perfect sense when Dale serves it with guajillo-chile prawns and red rice.

Crucially, this new guard of chefs avoids what Southwestern cuisine has come to mean in recent years: heavy, fiery food. "Santa Fe cuisine is evolving and becoming lighter and simpler," says Dale. His regionally influenced dishes range from a sweet corn soup topped with huitlacoche tempura to mezcal-steamed mussels and clams with red chile flakes. Dale's food conveys a sense of place, but it's also subtly grounded in the history of Santa Fe. His signature dish, for instance, is seared diver scallops and pork belly in an edamame-green chile puree and soy vinaigrette.

*“Terra chef Charles Dale's signature dish—seared diver scallops and pork belly in an edamame and green chile puree—speaks to the region without being too obvious.”*

"It speaks to the region, without being too obvious," he says. Specifically, it addresses a forgotten event: the internment of 4,555 Japanese men in Santa Fe during World War II. This unhappy civic memory has been all but erased, but it finds its way into the dish.

Dale's Terra restaurant is at the Encantado Resort, where I am staying. My luxurious casita has a brace of HDTVs, wild hares on the lawn and an actual tumbleweed on the doorstep; should I wish to drive into town, I have a Mercedes-Benz at my disposal.

The resort recently launched a new program: bespoke vacations with an emphasis on art. Excellent. Sign me up. I want to meet these rigorous contemporary artists, the ones said to have vanquished cowpokes cast in bronze. Encantado enlists the elegant Jaquelin Loyd, who presides over the important gallery Eight Modern, to be my guide.

Our first studio visit is to Susan York, who teaches at Santa Fe University of Art and Design. York is hardly the first artist to work with pencil, but she is without doubt the first to shape massive blocks from pencil matter: A huge beam

## TRAVEL

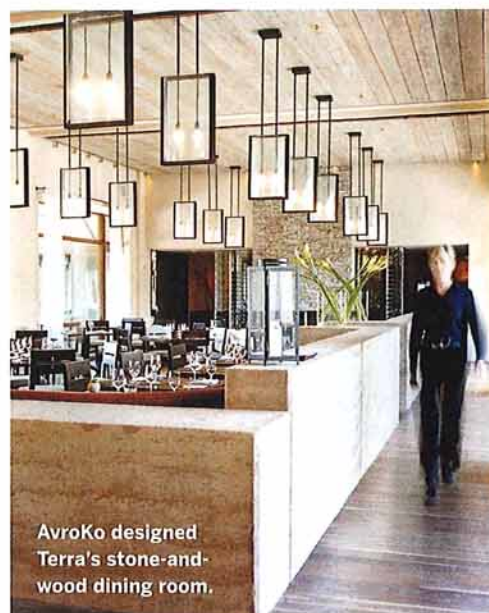
of solid graphite hangs from the ceiling like a pendulum. A sculpture? I think of it as the world's heaviest drawing.

**A**SK YORK WHETHER she was influenced by Donald Judd, the minimalist whose ghost haunts the Southwest. No, she says. Much more important to her are Suprematism and De Stijl. It's an odd constant in this most American of landscapes, which has been the backdrop to reams of Hollywood Westerns: Nearly all of the Santa Fe artists and chefs I talk to emphasize that their intellectual roots are in Europe.

Chef Martín Rios, for instance, is from Guadalajara, Mexico, and has helmed various exalted kitchens in Santa Fe, but he also put in significant time at Georges Blanc's three-star restaurant in Vonnas, France. Restaurant Martín, his newest undertaking, celebrates this: The flavors are Southwestern, but the technique is French. Twenty years ago, "everything was very rich and thick and spicy," Rios says, whereas now things are more restrained, more refined. The native New Mexican red chile, for instance, is employed not for its heat but its flavor: The chile essence, extracted, provides nuttiness and smokiness for his sauces.

Rios realizes that customers expect certain Southwestern dishes. "We don't want to scare people," he says. "But we want them to try a more modern take on these foods." Traditional New Mexican cooks make green chile stew with a cheap cut of meat, like the shoulder, but Rios roasts the trimmings from beef tenderloin and adds them to his version to deliver greater flavor. The point is to challenge and expand the idea of what Southwest cuisine can be.

Similarly, doors are being kicked open in Santa Fe's long-established art scene, and room is



AvroKo designed Terra's stone-and-wood dining room.

## WHERE TO EAT & SLEEP IN SANTA FE

*The city's foodscape has changed radically over the last few years. Here, the best new places to eat, drink and sleep.*

**AMAVI** Chef Megan Tucker puts a Mediterranean twist on local ingredients. 221 Shelby St.; 505-988-2355 or [amavirestaurant.com](http://amavirestaurant.com).

**ANTIGUA INN** A new five-bedroom bed-and-breakfast near the city's historic plaza. Doubles from \$229; 622 Castillo Pl.; 505-954-1231 or [antiguainn.com](http://antiguainn.com).

**COYOTE CAFE** This iconic restaurant's mixologist, Quinn Stephenson, is introducing Santa Fe to serious cocktails. 132 W. Water St.; 505-983-1615 or [coyotecafe.com](http://coyotecafe.com).

**ENCANTADO** This luxe resort offers insider art tours led by top local gallerists. Chef Charles Dale runs its excellent restaurant, Terra. Doubles from \$440;

198 State Rd.; 877-262-4666 or [encantadoresort.com](http://encantadoresort.com).

**MAX'S** The five-course tasting menu shows off chef Mark Connell's sous vide mastery. 403½ S. Guadalupe St.; 505-984-9104 or [maxssantafe.com](http://maxssantafe.com).

**RED SAGE** New chef de cuisine Michael Meisel puts his stamp on Mark Miller's restaurant with dishes like roast lamb with red quinoa and agave-glazed beets. 20 Buffalo Thunder Trail; 505-819-2056 or [buffalothunderresort.com](http://buffalothunderresort.com).

**RESTAURANT MARTÍN** Martín Rios uses Asian flavors and French technique to reinvent the food of the Southwest. 526 Galisteo St.; 505-820-0919 or [restaurantmartin.com](http://restaurantmartin.com).

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF ENCANTADO (TERRA)

being made for a new avant-garde. Loyd has wangled me access to an installation at the Center for Contemporary Arts. Here, Meow Wolf—a progressive collective that involves up to 100 young artists—is building a full-scale wooden ship. Regional references are subtle and go nowhere near Southwestern kitsch: The ship is furnished partially with peculiar Cold War artifacts, salvaged from the lab at Los Alamos. This kind of experiment in social creation is unusual, even by the standards of contemporary art in Santa Fe.

At Loyd's gallery, Eight Modern, I am introduced to Laura Carpenter, who cofounded SITE and started showing and selling modern art in Santa Fe "when nobody wanted it," she says. Carpenter wants to unify the city's collective genius. She is planning to create a cultural foundation that will bring together all of the glorious but isolated local thinkers—the anthropologists and opera singers, the artists and subatomic physicists—in a program that sounds a bit like TED, or DAVOS, and will draw on the best local and international talent.

The city's food evolution also depends on strategic new connections. Megan Tucker, the sensational new chef at Amavi restaurant, promotes farmer-chef relationships on her menu (as many chefs around the country do now). "A pueblo in southern New Mexico grows blue corn and grinds it just for me," says Tucker. And from this comes her blue corn polenta. Don't come to Amavi expecting flautas and burritos: "I use local ingredients in the context of France, Spain and Italy." So for example, her Italian homage to corn, beans and squash—three Native American staples—is a blue corn polenta cake topped with a ragout of local, organic pinto beans, roasted butternut squash, garlic and sage.

Tucker does not so much buy ingredients as curate them. She insists upon organic chickens from Pollo Real, an elite ranch in Socorro, New Mexico, that raises chickens for at least 14 weeks, rather than the typical 12. Tucker is one of the few chefs in the country who has them on her menu (even Alice Waters can't get them). She roasts a half-chicken perfectly, then serves it simply, with house-preserved Moroccan-style lemons, homemade pancetta, garlic and capers.

For Mark Connell, the new chef at Max's, Southwestern cuisine is, again, all about the farms. But instead of giving ingredients a Mediterranean twist, he transforms Santa Fe's best with modern techniques. I've heard that Connell is one of only two chefs in town to have mastered sous vide cooking; he uses it to turn wagyu flank steak buttery soft, topping it with ramps and artichoke puree for his five-course tasting menu.

Not all of Santa Fe requires reinventing—rediscovering will do. As I've intimated, I'm about as New Age as Lady Macbeth. Or Clausewitz. The cantankerous Georgia O'Keeffe, I discover, was even less dippy. Encantado arranges a workshop at Ghost Ranch, O'Keeffe's home in nearby Abiquiú. My teacher, Craig Varjabedian, spent years photographing the mesas around Ghost Ranch. It turns

“There is no reason for Santa Fe to be even slightly provincial. The city has an absurd concentration of brain power: the Santa Fe Opera, the School for Advanced Research, Los Alamos.”

out to be one of those landscapes that makes even a cynic like me briefly religious, and I suspect it did much the same to O'Keeffe. Varjabedian punctuates my lessons in photographic technique with tales about Georgia and Ansel (as in Ansel Adams, with whom he studied), and whether I like it or not, they are both annoyingly interesting. It's easy to forget that these artists—even if they've been sentenced to coffee-table books—were, for their time, profoundly experimental.

The new New Mexico is in many ways, paradoxically, a return to that older, uncompromising impulse. Artists and chefs have looked at what is here, mercilessly purged the tired and the turquoise, and figured out how to make it surprising again. ●