

BIZBASH

New York

\$4.95 JULY/AUGUST 2007 BIZBASH.COM



Chef David Myers of Sona in Los Angeles created a chilled gazpacho from tomato water, cucumber gelée, aloe vera, arugula flower, and pickled tomato, as well as squid ink risotto balls with tomato jam, aioli, and kale flower. On the spoon: beet foam with goat cheese fondant and marinated beets.



DAVID MYERS

At Los Angeles's Sona restaurant, Myers retools French cuisine with an infusion of global ingredients. He worked for chefs Charlie Trotter and Daniel Boulud before his move to L.A. to work at Patina. This summer he delves into the straight-up traditional French brasserie concept with the opening of Comme Ça in West Hollywood.

“Everyone is like, What the hell is this?”

Which ingredients are you exploring?

There are so many products in Japan, you just can't even imagine. And I'm just learning about them, like kelp that is dry but when you put it on your tongue, it liquefies. In Thailand, different types of chilies and herbs I haven't used.

How have you adapted your improvisational style to the private events you've cooked for while still retaining an edge?

It's an entirely different ball game. We're able to have a little bit of improv style by adding one or two elements that aren't listed on the menu. But the core ingredients, such as whether it's a beef or a fish with some sort of a starch, those things are set. Maybe we add an additional sauce on there that we didn't list.

What was the biggest event you've cooked for?

Eight hundred people in Switzerland. It was a cocktail party, and we did 30 different dishes. It was an event for a company celebrating its 10-year anniversary. The founder had flown out his entire team, all 800 people. It was a blast. But it was definitely very intense. I slept four hours in four days.

What was the last meal you had at an event?

They had canapés, and they had a buffet, and it was prime rib with fresh ramps and green peppercorn and then line-caught cod and various cheeses and prosciuttos. It was out-of-this-world amazing. It was a friend of mine who was getting married in New York and the food was just insane, absolutely awesome—shockingly so.

What are your expectations when you go to an event?

I don't have any. I have very rarely had a great experience at one of those things. It's almost like a given sometimes that people don't want to make it great.

Any advice for doing it right?

Some clients don't want [inventive food]. So it really comes down to the right clients, as well as the right people executing it. I say it's time to make a change.



Sona's rum-poached pineapple with coconut milk soup, aloe vera, and macadamia nut
Mara des Bois sorbet.

EATING ON THE EDGE

Is a steak just a steak when it's been

glazed with beef fat that's been clarified in a centrifuge machine? Is cake still dessert when it's made with pancetta? These days, when you order at certain new restaurants, what arrives on your plate doesn't necessarily look (or taste) like what you expected. And that feeling of surprise and discovery is exactly what the chefs devising these dishes want you to experience.

Sometimes that impulse stems from the risk involved in serving a meal that can shock—or repulse—diners. Sometimes it's about taking a fresh approach to a classic dish or ingredient. But whatever the end result, this moment in the food world is all about experimentation and pushing boundaries.

So how does this translate to events? In some cases—when executing a recipe seems to require an advanced chemistry degree—the concept may not work in mass quantities. And considering the event-world maxim that party guests want to eat things they recognize, hosts and caterers typically avoid the confusion that comes from encountering a tray of puzzling canapés.

But—of course—event food can still be innovative. And guests who thrill to surprising restaurant experiences can still find new forms and flavors at parties. A bowl of soup becomes a lollipop, fish gets cooked and presented in a plastic bag, a piece of chocolate looks more like jewelry than dessert. So here's a look at the chefs, ingredients, concepts, and techniques on the cutting edge of food.

Edited by Lisa Cericola & Mark Mavrigian