

[Issue: August 2006](#)

Fall/Winter Menu Preview

Baby, it's cold outside (or it will be soon). Six chefs reveal their plans for the seasons of robust eating ahead.

Judiaann Woo reports.

Randy Rucker

Laidback Manor

Houston

"We definitely have some shock value with our food, but the reception by both other chefs and the local community has been great since day one. We wanted to remove the pretentiousness of fine dining, but it's still nice, and we take our food seriously. Me, my sous chef—in fact our entire kitchen staff—are all under the age of 30. It's a groovy little joint."

Appetizer Smoked yogurt custard with salmon roe, red beet caramel & poached egg yolk. "Hang the yogurt in cheesecloth for several hours to drain the excess moisture before smoking overnight in a covered box with applewood smoke sticks. The smoke penetrates, similar to incense, without having to apply heat. Add the smoked yogurt to a custard base and bake gently in individual lipped bowls, then cool. The egg yolk is poached in the shell for one hour, using an immersion circulator to keep the water temperature at exactly 63 degrees Celsius [145° F]. When cool, the shell and white are removed to reveal a perfect sphere of yolk that holds its shape but is still quite soft inside. The effect is almost like a natural custard. Place the yolk on top of the custard with a small quenelle of salmon roe and a four-inch-long pipette filled with a glossy red beet caramel made from reduced beet juice flavored with bay leaf, thyme, peppercorns, cloves, and Isomalt. Garnish with micro bull's blood. The pipette, from a laboratory equipment supplier, allows the diner to decide how much beet caramel to dispense."

Entrées Crispy scallop "croutons" with arugula goat cheese puree, dried chorizo & its juice. "To make the dried chorizo and juice, puree Mexican chorizo cooked in a mirepoix with white wine, shellfish stock, and a sachet of fresh herbs that includes saffron before passing

through a chinois to separate the solids from the liquid. Reserve the liquid for plating and spread the solids on parchment paper to dehydrate before pulverizing in a spice grinder. For the scallop 'croutons,' puree fresh sea scallops with egg, cream, and shallot confit to make a mousse; pass through a tamis before piping into four-by-one-inch rectangular flexi-molds; bake in a water bath until just set; cool before slicing into three equal squares. Flash fry parsley, basil, arugula, and chives until crispy, then blend with panko bread crumbs until green in color. Dredge the scallop squares in flour, egg yolks, and the herbed panko before deep frying. Serve three scallop croutons on a puree of arugula and goat cheese flavored with Banyuls wine, salt, and pepper. At service, add soy lecithin to the warmed chorizo juice and froth to create a foam. Spoon some chorizo foam over each scallop and garnish with the chorizo powder and micro arugula."

Texas sika venison with chestnut puree, Asian pear poached in mint & tonka bean reduction. "Sika deer, originally from Japan, are now raised locally at Broken Arrow Ranch in the Texas Hill Country. They have a wonderful flavor that tends to be less gamy than other varieties of venison. Cook the venison loin sous-vide in a vacuum bag with some cinnamon infused grapeseed oil, bay leaf, and thyme before seasoning and searing in a hot pan for color. To serve, smear the chestnut puree across the plate, using an offset palette knife, and lay the medallions of venison on top. Spoon some of the diced Asian pear, cooked in simple syrup with mint and peppercorns, on top. Add a quick line of the tonka bean reduction on the plate with some shavings of roasted chestnuts over the top. The reduction consists of caramelized shallots, vermouth, and venison stock, with a shaving of tonka bean at the very end. The Food and Drug Administration prohibits tonka beans from being used in foods because they can thin blood when ingested in large enough amounts. However, we use a minimal amount. The flavor, reminiscent of vanilla or maple, is very concentrated, and a little goes a long way."

pastry chef Ryan Savoie

Dessert Texas pecan financier with pumpkin pie ice cream, "burnt" crème fraîche à la LN2. "Combine crème fraîche, buttermilk, and heavy cream; hang in cheesecloth to get rid of the excess liquid before cold smoking. Lay smoke sticks directly on the surface for a more intense 'burnt' flavor. Puree and pass through a tamis before transferring to squeeze bottles for service. For the ice cream, mix pumpkin puree into a standard ice cream base flavored with cookie spices such as cinnamon, clove, allspice, and nutmeg. Instead of cooking the base on the stove, poach sous-vide style and spin the ice cream to order, using a PacoJet. Serve a quenelle of the pumpkin ice cream in a very shallow bowl anchored by some shaved toasted pecans next to a warm pecan *financier*. Pour some liquid nitrogen into a metal bowl and squeeze drops of the crème fraîche mixture to freeze instantaneously. Use a slotted spoon to remove the flash-frozen balls and sprinkle over the ice cream."