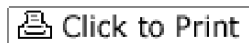


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Faces to watch in 2011

Jan 1, 2011 12:00 PM, By Megan Rowe

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What does it take to stand out from the pack? Here, in no particular order, are 11 (actually 12) who are blazing new trails. We see big things ahead for this year's crop, from success with their innovative concepts to acclaim for bringing their distinctiv

Corey Lee

Chef/owner, Benu, San Francisco

What's watchworthy: *Lee, who has cooked with some of the best, is putting an indelible spin on his first place.*



It was tough for Corey Lee to leave Napa Valley's storied French Laundry after eight years, but the time was right. "I realized that my greatest responsibility there was that, as I continued to develop personally as a chef, I needed to leave it behind. It was about keeping the identity of the French Laundry and Thomas Keller. It wasn't my restaurant; it is Thomas' restaurant," he told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Regardless of whose personality it reflected, Keller's place netted three Michelin stars during Lee's tenure as chef de cuisine.

Initial reactions to Benu, which Lee opened in San Francisco last year, have been enthusiastic. “By the sixth course — a faux sharks' fin soup of intense, meaty consommé, scented with threads of Dungeness crab, cabbage and Jinhua ham, poured over a thin layer of black truffle custard — I was in love,” gushed Patricia Unterman in the *San Francisco Examiner*, referring to Benu's 12-course pan-Asian tasting menu. The restaurant is refined without formality (or tablecloths); service is efficient but not intrusive and the food is like nothing most people have ever eaten.

“It's hard to describe Lee's handiwork,” noted Michael Bauer of the *Chronicle*. “He employs so many components, unfamiliar ingredients and cutting-edge techniques that each dish requires a diner's total concentration.”

“Lee has changed all the rules,” Unterman agreed.

Amanda Cohen

Chef/owner, Dirt Candy, New York

What's watchworthy: *Her novel take on vegetables — as stars of the show— has been turning heads.*



Photo: Stephen Elledge

Cohen, who graduated from the Natural Gourmet Institute Chef's Training Program, toiled in some of New York's better vegetarian restaurants, then fell off the wholesome wagon briefly at DinerBar, a neighborhood diner, where her buffalo wings drew many fans. Next up: she opened Teany, rock star Moby's teahouse, on the Lower East Side. Turning back to the earth, she did stints at Pure Food and Wine and Heirloom, ultimately as chef de cuisine at both. Heirloom won a reader's choice award for best new vegetarian restaurant in the city.

Now she's running the show at her first place, the tiny East Village Dirt Candy. Her menu is adamantly not vegan (although vegans can be easily accommodated). Instead, she's on a mission to win over carnivores and other doubters with imaginatively conceived vegetables, period. Menu choices all start with a vegetable and build from there; one appetizer, for example, called “Carrot,” is

steamed barbecue carrot buns, cucumber & sesame ginger salad. The “Cauliflower” entree is buttermilk battered, with waffles, horseradish and wild arugula.

Cohen shuns the usual vegetarian restaurant model, which creates faux versions of mainstream proteins (e.g., seitan gyros or soy-based mock seafood). She prefers to let the veggies (candy from the earth, thus the name) speak for themselves.

So far, her strategy has worked: *New York Magazine* recently mentioned Dirt Candy on its “Vegetable Movement’s must-visit restaurants” alongside the likes of Per Se, Dovetail and the Spotted Pig.

David Schmidt

Executive Chef, L'Auberge Restaurant on Oak Creek, Sedona, AZ



What's watchworthy: *In the process of reinventing a concept that was past its prime, he's using social media to win newer, younger followers.*

The 33-year-old Schmidt, a Cordon Bleu graduate, cut his teeth at Phoenix-area restaurants including T. Cooks at Royal Palms and Michael's at the Citadel. But he faced a new challenge at Sedona's L'Auberge Restaurant on Oak Creek: How do you make a 25-year-old beloved traditional French restaurant relevant to a younger crowd — without alienating established fans.

Schmidt took a two-pronged approach: Menu and social media. He reconceived the restaurant and steered it toward more contemporary regional American cuisine with Mediterranean influences. And he's reached out on the internet by posting YouTube videos of himself foraging for wild lobster mushrooms and blackberries, and by tweeting with guests to put together custom tasting menus before their visit to the romantic resort.

Kim Alter

Executive Chef, Plate Shop, Sausalito, CA



What's watchworthy: *She's taking the farm-to-table philosophy to a new level by learning to grow stunning produce.*

Alter, with a pedigree that includes time at the likes of Aqua, Restaurant Gary Danko, Manresa and Ubuntu, was recently tapped to head up the kitchen at a new ingredient-driven restaurant across the bay from San Francisco. The menu at Plate Shop is described as “simple handcrafted Californian food and drink,” which translates here into nose-to-tail butchering, an extensive on-site garden, breads baked in house, flavored butters and more.

Alter, who devoted a year to working on a farm after her stints at Manresa and Ubuntu, was patiently tending her 14-bed garden behind Plate Shop in anticipation of its December 2010 opening. Her crops were so good that a number of local chefs bought them; once Plate Shop cuts through the red tape, she plans to showcase her produce throughout the menu and in handcrafted drinks.

Joe Campanale

Co-owner, Dell'anima, L'Artusi and Anfora, New York



What's watchworthy: *Only 26, he's behind launches of two hot restaurants and a wine bar.*

Campanale, a former Babbo sommelier, and his partner Gabe Thompson clearly have good instincts when it comes to new concepts. Dell'anima, which opened in 2007, "has been packed ever since, its appeal attributable in large part to its intimacy, its seating arrangement (many high chairs at tall tables and counters), its wines, and a savory, hip analogue to the make-your-own sundae: the make-your-own bruschetta," wrote Frank Bruni in a *New York Times* review two years later. Bruni was impressed at the breadth and affordability of Campanale's wine choices.

The pair's latest venture, Anfora, is focused squarely on wine. Red, white and sparkling varieties are available by the glass at this wine bar. But so are cocktails including the Anfora Highball (gin, Fernet-Branca, ginger ale and lime) and the Purple Pedro (chamomile-infused tequila, lavender and lime).

"I just put wines on the list that I really love and hope that our guests like them, too," Campanale explains. "Fortunately, they often do."

Seth Caswell

Chef/Owner, Emmer&Rye, Seattle

What's watchworthy: *Caswell, who paid his dues in the kitchens of Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Dan Barber and David Pasternack, headed west six years ago and immersed himself in the Pacific Northwest locavore movement. He opened his first restaurant in 2010.*



Caswell originally intended to wind up as an environmental lawyer after graduating from Vassar College, but a ski-season baking job changed his mind. He followed that up with experience and training at a Vancouver culinary school, then set out for New York, where he worked for top names before eventually taking over as chef de cuisine at Nick & Toni's in East Hampton.

At the venerable Long Island establishment, Caswell introduced seasonal menus and developed a 1.5-acre organic garden to supply his kitchen. His efforts earned Nick & Toni's three stars in the *New York Times* in his second year on board.

Caswell returned to the Pacific Northwest in 2005, then spent three years as executive chef of the Stumbling Goat Bistro in Seattle. While there he cultivated relationships at area fisheries, cheesemakers, farms and markets. Caswell originally wanted to open his own fine dining location, but while he was scouting sites he stumbled on available space in the city's historic Queen Anne

neighborhood that lent itself to a more casual theme — arguably a wise choice, given the current economy.

His menu at Emmer&Rye (two locally grown grains) showcases the best of the region. Guests can go small or large, cheap or splurgy, based on the two-tiered menu.

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