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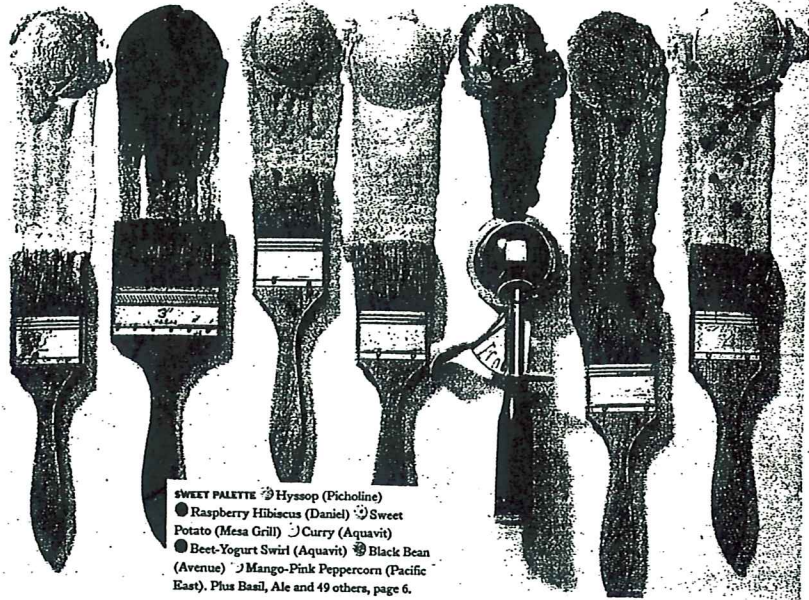
Dining Out

Beyond Primary Colors: Bold New Ice Creams

The 51 Flavors

When it comes to creating ice creams and sorbets, chefs' imaginations know no bounds. Here are 51 flavors being served this summer.

- AQUAVIT**
Balsamic apple
Basil
Beet yogurt swirl
Coconut lemongrass
Curry
- AVENUE**
Black bean
Cucumber
Garden mint
Garlic
Roasted beet
Tahitian vanilla-bourbon
Tomato cumin
White pepper
- BABBO**
Rosemary
- BAYARD**
Celery
Cherry lambic beer
- BOLIVAR**
Bay leaf
Purple corn
- BOLO**
Fig
Honey quince
- BOND STREET**
Wasabi root
- CAFE BARI**
Honey blossom-date
- CENA**
Tarragon
Tisane
- DANIEL**
Mint risotto
Raspberry hibiscus
Verbena
- LA FOURCHETTE**
Crème fraîche
- LOCAL**
Lime rosemary
- MARCO POLO CAFE & CATERERS**
Jamaican sorrel
- MARKT**
Rodenbach ale
- MERCHANT'S**
Lemon geranium
- MESA GRILL**
Fresh corn
Mango Creamsicle
Serrano chili
Sweet potato
- MONKEY BAR**
Sierra Nevada Pale Ale
- PALLADIN**
Margarita
Tomato
- PICHOLINE**
Hyssop
Oatmeal
- SALA**
Sangria
- SOUTHWEST NY**
Cactus pear
Spicy lime-tomato
- PACIFIC EAST (AMAGANSETT)**
Mango with pink peppercorns
- TABLA**
Pink grapefruit mustard seed
- TAPIKA**
Cinnamon
- THE TONIC**
Sichuan peppercorn
- UNION PACIFIC**
Honey riesling
Fromage blanc
- ZOCALO**
Caheta



SWEET PALETTE ● Hyssop (Picholine)
● Raspberry Hibiscus (Daniel) ● Sweet Potato (Mesa Grill) ● Curry (Aquavit)
● Beet-Yogurt Swirl (Aquavit) ● Black Bean (Avenue) ● Mango-Pink Peppercorn (Pacific East). Plus Basil, Ale and 49 others, page 6.

By RICK MARIN

THE heat is making people do weird things to ice cream. Crazy things. Flavors like bay leaf, oatmeal, Serrano chili, Sichuan peppercorn, honey-blossom water with dates.

Curry.
Happens every summer now. Chefs and their pastry pros get an urge to start throwing everything but the busby into their crème anglaise: root vegetables, herbs, Belgian beer. And New York diners keep pushing them further by actually eating the stuff.

This summer, the special ice creams and sorbets at Avenue include that old standby white pepper, along with tomato cumin, roasted beet, cucumber, garden mint, Tahitian vanilla steeped in bourbon and, during the garlic festival in August, garlic.

"I don't like cloyingly sweet things," said Scott Campbell, Avenue's co-owner, chef and resident ice cream maker. No kidding. Mr. Campbell trained as a saucier, and that's how he thinks of his savory-sweet confections. "The interesting thing about ice cream is it's a sauce," he said, "a sauce that's frozen and then served." His garlic ice cream has some sauces in it, too (Tabasco and Worcestershire) and is served with steak tartare, though one customer ordered an entire bowl of the stuff for dessert "and survived," Mr. Campbell said.

More ice cream is consumed in July than in any other month, and most of it is still vanilla, according to the International Ice Cream Association in Washington. In much of the country, that means towering sugar cones dribbling over small hands, pints of Ben & Jerry's devoured in binges of guilt and heartbreak, and more business for the place with the 31 flavors.

But here in New York, we'll be comparing notes on the corn ice cream at Mesa Grill versus Bolivar's purple corn. Which, discerning palates want to know, tastes less like a can of Niblets?

Wayne Harley Brachman, the pastry chef at Mesa Grill and Bolo, is an exuberant defender of his Southwestern inventions. "Corn in half the world is used as a dessert," he said. Serrano chili and jalapeño also have what Mr. Brachman calls a "historical background." The Aztecs put hot peppers in chocolate, he said. He puts them in ice cream — a startling marriage with a potent aftertaste you either love or want to rename Brachman's Revenge.

"I like to combine gooey and creamy and crunchy and creamy," he said, employing the technical terminology of his trade. He's doing cactus pear at Mesa Grill and, at its Spanish-inspired sister restaurant, Bolo, he's got a fig and a honey quince ice made with a quince paste called membrillo often taken at breakfast in Spain.

Cross-branding is the buzzword in the retail ice cream world: mixtures involving Breyer's ice cream plus Oreo cookies or Chips Ahoy. Similarly catchy hybrids seem to be cropping up, at a more rarefied level, in New York restaurants, except they call them "infusions."

Vegetables are big in the new infusions, and so are herbs like basil and spices like bay leaf. The beet sorbet at Aquavit is swirled with vanilla yogurt and served with a chocolate

mix," said Kristen Murray, the restaurant's former pastry chef. Ms. Murray was also responsible for a balsamic apple concoction, as well as a curry zabaglione and curry apple sorbet.

"We just thought it would be fun to try a curry," Ms. Murray said. "It's very fragrant." That isn't all. It tastes like, well, curry. As if that weren't enough on its own, it shares the plate with a poached peach tart in almond cream, pistachio pesto, lemon coconut sorbet and grenadine tapioca. "It's a very intense dish," she said. "You kind of stand back and go, My Lord!"

Shock value does play a part in the mania for bizarrely flavored ice creams. These weird frozen experiments are another way for pastry chefs, many of whom now crave recognition as much as their bosses, to get noticed. At the Local, you might be offered a lime and rosemary creation, modestly presented on an artist's palette.

Daniel offers a mint risotto, a raspberry hibiscus and a verbena, but they are as far as Thomas Haas, the pastry chef, is willing to go. "I'm not superconservative, but I strongly believe in classics," Mr. Haas said. "You can twist them a little, but don't overtwist them." He distances himself from the relentless quest for novelty at other restaurants.

"Some people want to make themselves a little more interesting through this," he said. "They want to make a name for themselves. But it's like with the fusion cooking, it often turns into confusion cooking."

But something about ice cream makes even otherwise sane pastry chefs go a little nutty. Part of it is what the customers will tolerate. As Mr. Brachman observed, "People won't go that far out on a weird cake, but if it's ice cream they'll try anything."

Debra Racicot said when she started making oatmeal ice cream at Aquavit, "A lot of people were a little bit weirded out by it at first, but it flew." When Ms. Racicot moved to Picholine as pastry chef last month, she took her oatmeal recipe with her.

The other reason chefs go wild on ice cream is that they can. Ms. Murray, who replaced Ms. Racicot at Aquavit, pointed out that "because the base is so simple, you can do so many infusions that are visually appealing and flavorful."

Even easier — and possibly cheaper — they can be ordered up as custom flavors from a specialty maker like Ciao Bella. F. W. Pearce, one of Ciao Bella's co-owners, said his company used to get one special request a week from New York chefs. Now, he said, there are as many as 10 a week, often multiple requests from single restaurants. Bond Street wants its wasabi root, Cafe Bari its honey-blossom water with dates. Beer-based demands have been pouring in from Heartland, Belgo and Markt.

Beer is big: even places that aren't Belgian or brew pubs are flavoring ice cream with a boozy kick. Monkey Bar has a Sierra Nevada Pale Ale ice cream, Bayard a cherry lambic sorbet.

Ciao Bella charges restaurants \$30 to \$5 more for a five-gallon tub of custom ice cream or sorbet. A tub of one of the company's 100 existing flavors goes for \$24 to \$27, sorbets \$24 to \$34. "We're able to get a premium because the restaurants have so much room in their pricing," Mr. Pearce said. Room is a polite way of saying they can charge \$5 to \$10 for a scoop when it's only costing them 50 cents to \$1, with minimal labor.

A sweet racket, the ice cream trade. Its history is a little vague. No inventor or specific date of origin is known, though Alexander the Great is said to have enjoyed snow and ice flavored with honey and nectar and Catherine de' Medici introduced a kind of proto-gelato to the French court when she married Henry II. Long before Howard Johnson's 28 flavors, Baskin-Robbins's 31 and Ben & Jerry's Chubby Hubby, the 19th-century New York restaurant Delmonico's served its society clientele novelty ice creams: asparagus and pumpernickel rye.

H. L. Mencken once denounced ice cream for "leading the younger generation from the straight and narrow path of spinach." But Mencken could not have anticipated Avenue's garden mint flavor, which gets its green color from an ingredient not mentioned on the menu.

Spinach.
"Some things," said Avenue's Mr. Campbell, "are better not known."