



Summer 2009 Issue



SAMPLE

Local A Whole New Way

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Narrow, interwoven streets boast rows of neat houses, century-old apartment buildings and tiny shops tempting passers-by with sculpture and hand-hewn jewelry, café au lait and ice cream, art prints and used books. With a near-constant bustle of street activity and an appreciation for fine art and street art, originals and covers, it's no wonder Buffalo's Allentown neighborhood is home to one of our most adventurous restaurants.

SAMPLE is at once chic and comfortable, conducive to an intimate supper or a slightly wild cocktail

party. The brainchild of Chef Adam Goetz, SAMPLE comes by its name honestly, with most menu items arriving tableside in a portion equaling two or three bites. The experience is similar to ordering sushi where each piece is selected from the menu individually. Saddle up to the bar, choose an inventive cocktail from the list and sail through three or four delightful noshes with room to spare. Or, skip the per-piece offering and take a proper seat. You'll want to go for the Chef's Tasting, where a flight of every bite-sized morsel SAMPLE offers will make its way to your plate in addition to a selection of cheeses to start and a trio of sweets to wrap things up.

Chef Goetz explains that this concept allows diners to encounter a broad array of flavors and preparations in a single visit. Born and raised in Buffalo, Goetz has been cooking since his youth. Perhaps most influential was his time in Manhattan, where he functioned as Chef Saucier in the vast, underground kitchens of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. It was a one-of-a-kind experience--cooking for outlandish galas, private VIP parties, and celebrities with fanciful whims. It turns out that it was also a fantastic place to hone a craft.

"The idea of New York being a melting pot is absolutely true," said Goetz. "At the Waldorf, if I wanted to learn an Italian technique, I was learning it from an Italian. If I wanted to learn something French, I was learning from someone who was from Provence. Every department [of the kitchen] had a huge staff and we were able to work in other areas." While there, Goetz not only acquired skills, he also gained respect for the Waldorf's creed of "The difficult immediately, the impossible may take a few minutes," an attitude he has adopted in his own kitchen.

Goetz's reverence for proper technique and premium ingredients takes up the greater part of our conversation on this sunny day. A supply of fresh ramps act as impetus for the dish he's making. These slender wild leeks grow throughout our region, but are only in season for a few short weeks in spring—a sweet precursor to the bounty that is just waiting to push up through the soil.

Goetz shows me a sketch taped to the wall of SAMPLE's tiny kitchen depicting his take on potato ramp soup. He hasn't seen ramps since he left New York a handful of years ago, and he's inspired by their arrival. While he cooks he tell me of his influences (Escoffier, Pèpin, Child), but he's not so rooted in the old that he can't appreciate the new.



"As kitschy and cute as the food is here at SAMPLE, everything we do is based in solid technique. It's fun to play around, but if you're not grounded in classic technique, you don't know where you are or how you got there by the time you're done."

I've asked him to execute a dish that utilizes some of the hypermodern (or molecular gastronomy) methods that pepper his menu. SAMPLE employs classic dishes with a twist, providing a new, yet relevant food experience for the diner. Take for example Goetz's version of pasta carbonara. In this case, the pancetta has been integrated into the pasta and the traditional heavy egg and cream sauce has been swapped out for parmesan foam dusted with green pea powder.

While Goetz is dredging and frying the freshly cleaned ramps for his dish, I ask him if there is a line where these modern methods transition from being a contemporary, valid preparation into the absurd. "I don't know exactly where the line is. I think that what happens with a lot of young chefs

is that you do things just because you can and it ends up getting convoluted. For example, we would never put this dish on the menu,” he says referring to the soup. “But it’s a great exercise. What’s so good about ramps is that depending on how you prepare them you’re pulling different flavors from them, and this dish shows that.”

It certainly does. Cubes of ramp gelée are dark and smoky; the soup itself is smooth and creamy with a quiet leek undertone. The leaves have been flash fried to a delicate brittleness and the decorative ramp powder is oniony and a touch bitter. Bright green ramp foam makes an appearance; it is earthy and tastes of spring. Finally, ramps coated in buttermilk and flour are fried, resulting in a sweet and crispy snack bearing a lovely garlic finish.

This summer, SAMPLE has signed up to receive weekly deliveries of fruit and produce from local farms as part of their CSA programs. Goetz is looking forward to the challenge of changing the menu based on whatever the farmers supply. Last year’s experience with items from the farmers market resulted in dishes that delighted his customers. “When I serve people a potato—and it’s the best potato—and I can tell them the story about who grew that potato and how long it’s been out of the ground, they love that, and I do too. I’m crazy about using the freshest ingredients and now I’m serving food that is coming from 25 miles away. As a chef, if you’re creative enough, you can use the best product, and that’s whatever’s in season here in New York.”

By mid-June, Goetz’s bevy of local food will begin to appear on SAMPLE’s menu. With plenty of inspiration being trucked in every week and a desire to experiment and innovate, it will be interesting to see how he approaches the season. And don’t be surprised if you see farmers listed on his menu--or sitting in his dining room. “I think the farmers are excited about this and will give me some crazy stuff. I want things that will give me the opportunity to have fun and really show my guests something new. I can’t wait.”

Neither can we.