

The Most Unusual Restaurants In The World

2006-12-21

Homaro Cantu, executive chef of Chicago's Moto restaurant, isn't afraid to try new things -- and neither are his patrons.

From maple squash cake to a lychee rigatoni fruit plate, Cantu's concoctions are entirely inventive. Like many of his contemporaries--including Wylie Dufresne at New York's WD-50 and Heston Blumenthal at The Fat Duck in Bray, England--Cantu, a self-proclaimed gadgets geek who, in his spare time, reconstructs electrical equipment like combustible engines and remote-controlled cars, pays close attention to the science of cooking to create food that people have to "see to believe."



In Pictures: Most Unusual Restaurants In The World

For example, one dish requires the use of liquid nitrogen to create an illusion of melting cheese out of grated mango. And many of Cantu's courses are prepared with a Class IV Laser, which cooks the food at record speeds. Of course, Cantu's main objective is still superior taste. But why all the hullabaloo for a few savory bites? Are diners more obsessed with presentation than palettes these days?

In a way, yes. Cantu says diners are bored with run-of-the-mill meals. And according to the National Restaurant Association (NRA), he's right.

"There are not only a greater number of restaurants [than previously recorded,] but a greater diversification of the kind of restaurant cuisines as well as specialized concepts," says Hudson Riehle, senior vice president of research and information services. Next year, the NRA is forecasting restaurant industry sales to continue their upward trend and reach \$537 billion nationwide, up 5% from 2006.

With increased competition, chefs are finding that "concept" dining is yet another way to spice things up (pun intended).

At Brussels-based Dinner In The Sky, tables are suspended in midair by a crane.

Forget the off-kilter entrees; Paris' Dans Le Noir leaves its patrons literally in the dark. Run by a primarily blind and visual-impaired staff, founders Edouard de Broglie and Etienne Boissond believe that the act of consuming food becomes more satisfying when you're relying on any other sense than sight--now taste, smell and touch can have their moment in the spotlight. The concept was such a success that Broglie and Boissond recently opened outposts in both London and Moscow.

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Source - Forbes

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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