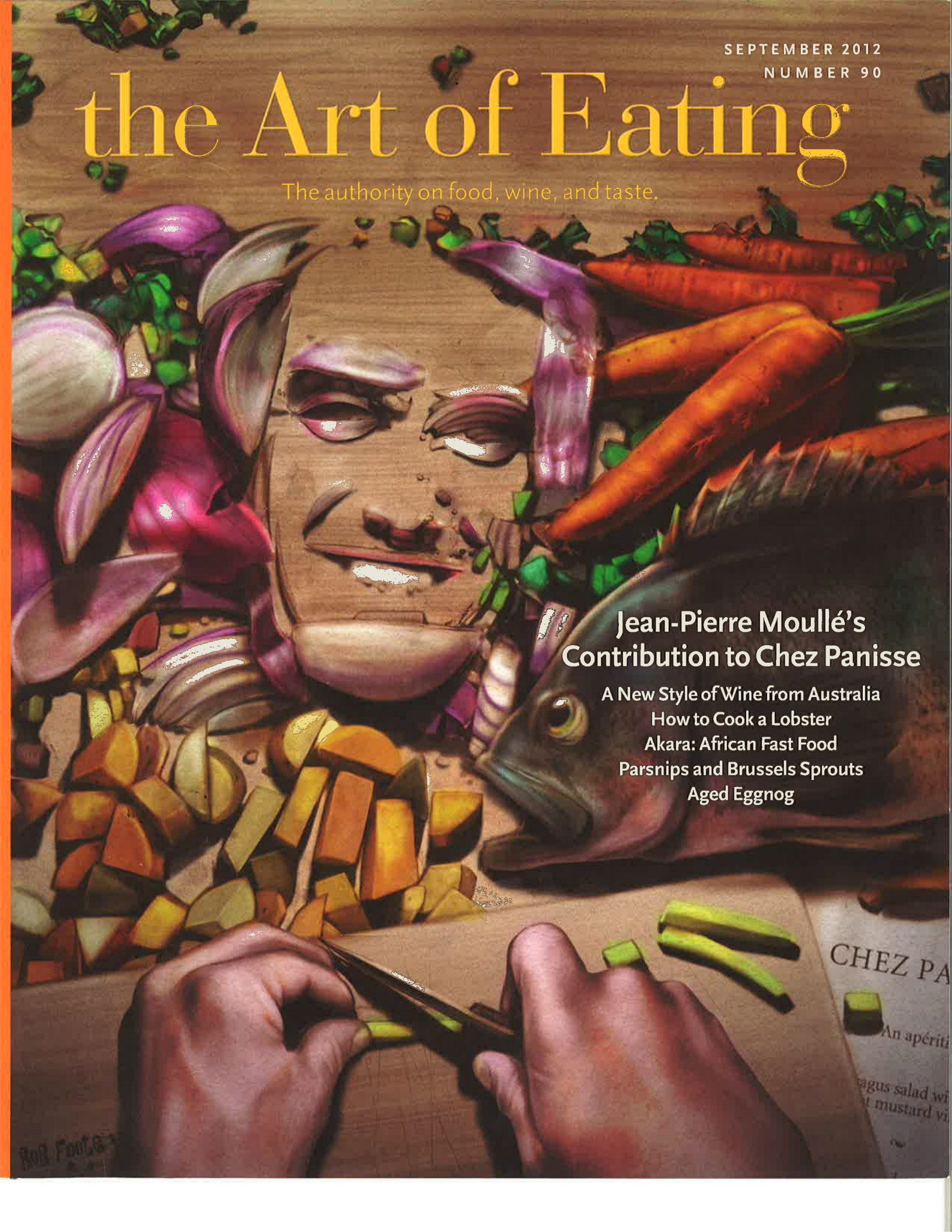


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# the Art of Eating

The authority on food, wine, and taste.



## Jean-Pierre Moullé's Contribution to Chez Panisse

A New Style of Wine from Australia  
How to Cook a Lobster  
Akara: African Fast Food  
Parsnips and Brussels Sprouts  
Aged Eggnog

CHEZ PA

An apéritif

agus salad wi  
t mustard vi

Bob Fouts



problem repeating infusions at precisely 43 or 91 degrees C. A small digital readout tells the actual degrees as the water heats, and the kettle has a useful hold-temperature option. The very original gooseneck-shaped spout supplies a precise, satisfying, and accurate pour that is ideal for filling small vessels. The finished model is due out later this year, and I look forward to sitting down with it for an evening of tasting.

For my money, the Breville 820XL is the most solid and practical work-horse kettle on the market, but enthusiasts with a fetish for testing temperatures and delicate infusion techniques should keep an eye out for the Bonavita Gooseneck.

— Kevin Gascoyne

Breville sells the 820XL kettle and the 800XL automated tea-maker at [www.brevilleusa.com](http://www.brevilleusa.com), and many retailers carry especially the kettle, online and in stores, although few sell it for much less than Breville's price of \$129.99. Bonavita kettles are also widely available.

## Restaurants

### New York City: Red Lite

#### Rouge Tomato

10 East 60th Street, Manhattan  
tel 646.237.8977, [rougetomatenyc.com](http://rougetomatenyc.com)  
open Monday through Saturday, lunch  
and dinner  
main courses \$24 to \$39,  
six-course tasting menu \$89

During the 19 years I've worked at the James Beard Foundation we've never promoted any of the thousands of visiting chefs, who cook dinner at the Beard House, by describing their food as "healthful." Even in the midst of an obesity epidemic and after the advent of spa cuisine, when a chef is known for light sauces or low-cal cooking, no matter his or her pedigree, that almost guarantees a low guest count. Meanwhile, just about every foie gras extravaganza or pork fest we've ever scheduled has been sold out.

This is not to say there is anything inherently unhealthful about duck liver or bacon or any of the food served by the great chefs who come to cook in James Beard's kitchen. Purchasing the freshest ingredients from the highest-quality farmers and purveyors and transforming them into delicious culinary creations with a delicate touch are the hallmarks of good cooking. Everything in moderation. But to sell a relatively expensive, multicourse meal paired with wines to a capacity crowd of 80, it doesn't help to use words like "healthy," "low-fat," "small portions," or "*cuisine minceur*."

So imagine the challenge facing the marketing team behind Rouge Tomato, a sleek, modern restaurant in Midtown Manhattan, where executive chef Jeremy Bearman works side by side with a staff nutritionist to cook up healthful dishes that meet strict criteria of nutrition and sustainability, in order to fulfill the vision of Emmanuel Verstraeten, the Belgian owner of the restaurant. The menu

is long and appealing, but learning that the chef's six-course tasting menu comes in under 1,000 calories, however dense with nutrients, may prompt you to make advance plans for a second dinner later that same night.

And yet diving into Bearman's creative, flavor-packed food, it's easy to forget that what you are eating is designed to be good for you. Using the freshest ingredients — including small amounts of foie gras, butter, and other unexpected indulgences — complex flavor combinations, and beautiful presentations, Bearman delivers a deeply satisfying dining experience without relying on the crutches of fat and salt that can make anything taste good. As a result, you don't feel the need to loosen your belt and lie down when you're done.

My favorite section of the ever-changing menu is raw fish. Bearman's creativity and skill at combining flavors and textures is evident on every plate. His langoustine carpaccio is a contemporary assemblage that resonates with traditional tastes. A thin, translucent bed of sweet, raw langoustine flesh arrives elegantly garnished with poppy seeds, lemon oil, caviar, and chopped chives. The taste is fresh and delicate and yet reminiscent of a bagel and lox. Reading the menu, Bearman's *crudo* combinations always entice. On a recent evening there were Hawaiian walu with avocado, sugar snap peas, radish, and yuzu; sea scallop with kohlrabi, green apple, lime, mustard, and mint; and Arctic char with horseradish yogurt, trout roe, dill, and pumpnickel. The combinations seemed at once daring and natural, in a why-hasn't-anyone-thought-of-that-before kind of way, and they were all delicious.

Made without cream, the rich texture of Bearman's puréed vegetable soups — one night autumn squash,

another time curried carrot — is a bit of a mystery. The flavors are delicate and true, and the garnishes — apple and pumpkin seed for the squash, Maryland crab and pineapple for the carrot — complete the multidimensional sensory experience. A rabbit terrine with pistachio and foie gras was perhaps a little drier than some of the more caloric terrines popular on menus these days, but the flavor and accoutrements were *comme il faut*. Cubes of chickpea falafel, pan-seared in olive oil then baked, presented with cucumber *raita* and onion jam, allude to health-food restaurants of a bygone era, but Bearman's experience working for legendary chefs Joël Robuchon and Daniel Boulud keeps even this vegetarian workhorse fresh.

Main courses of duck breast, guinea hen, halibut, and every other popular protein you see on menus around town are handled in similarly creative and fresh ways. Meat portions are small without being chintzy. Drizzles of flavored oils and juices, yogurts and condiments add complexity without heaviness. A lot is going on in this food — maybe too much at times — but it's clear that every element has been considered from the standpoint of flavor and nutrition, and most likely both.

Kristy Lambrou is the nutritionist who works closely with Bearman in the kitchen. She is a registered dietitian with a master's degree from NYU and holds a diploma as well from the Institute of Culinary Education. Dishes often begin with an ingredient or an idea, and then working together, the chef, his team, and Lambrou add different elements to balance flavors and textures, as cooks do, but they also balance nutrients, which is where I suspect creativity really comes into play. Consider the lobster salad with avocado, pumpkin and sunflower seeds,

sheep's-milk yogurt, tangerine honey, and vanilla, or the candy cane beet carpaccio with blood orange, ricotta, olive brioche, and pickled chard. Both dishes arrive beautifully arranged on the plate. Rather than coat these composed salads with fatty dressings, the components themselves blend to dress the salads and complete the flavors. In the lobster salad, for instance, the avocado and yogurt add body, the latter also contributing a tang that is balanced by the bittersweetness of the honey. The natural sweetness of the beets is mitigated by the brininess of the chard and the bitterness of the black olive brioche. This food makes you think about it as you enjoy it.

A few dishes puzzle me. After ordering Bearman's black truffle risotto several times, I still can't quite figure out what I think of it. The rice arrives ominously black with squid ink and topped with shavings of black truffle. Well cooked and remarkably filling — at only 425 calories, compared to other risottos around town that, according to a *New York Times* article a few years back, can top 1,300 calories per serving — I'm not convinced the bold surf-and-turf combination really works. A section of the menu called "Seasonal Toasts" features bruschetta-like canapés. Delicate and delicious ingredient combinations — such as sunchoke, hazelnut, pear, and duck prosciutto, and spaghetti squash, peekytoe crab, apple, and jalapeño — are poised atop pressed, grilled pieces of bread. The toppings are lovely, but the bread component functions more as a trencher than as an integral part of the composition. And given the carefully considered ratio of nutrients to calories throughout the meal, the toast seems a waste.

Wine is the purview of Pascaline Lepeltier, who has assembled an

impressive list of both affordable and aspirational bottles about which she is enthusiastic and knowledgeable. The wines are complemented by a list of creative and delicious cocktails. Even more exciting, if not intoxicating, are the fresh juice drinks that issue from a dramatic, soundproof glass cube off to one side of the dining room. Somehow the setup and the setting make celery, cucumber, kale, wheatgrass, beet, and other seemingly crunchy-granola juices seem chic.

Like all the other elements of this sophisticated restaurant (except the uninteresting bread — why do they bother?), James Distefano's desserts are fully integrated into the philosophy of the project. They reflect the same sensibility of freshness, seasonality, creativity, and healthfulness as the rest of the menu. And who doesn't want permission to eat a warm apricot clafoutis or passion-fruit pudding?

"Our priority is nutrient density and a focus on the quality of the calories in the meal," Lambrou told me in a conversation about the larger philosophy of the restaurant, which Verstraeten has trademarked as S.P.E. That stands for the Latin *Sanitas Per Escam*, or "health through food," but in practical terms the letters are applied to a kitchen charter that reads,

*Sourcing:* selecting ingredients seasonally, locally, and with a focus on nutritional characteristics.

*Preparation:* using specific cooking techniques that preserve the integrity and nutritional qualities of the ingredients.

*Enhancement:* optimizing nutritional value by the synergy of product combination and menu diversity.

"We look at over 20 different nutrients and aim to balance ones that are

less desirable (i.e., sodium, saturated fat, refined sugar) with ones that are more desirable (i.e., essential vitamins and minerals, healthy fats, complex carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables, etc.)," Lambrou explained further. Verstraeten has turned this charter into another business, a consultancy for food businesses large and small that wish to adopt his healthful and sustainable ways.

There was a time not that long ago when seasonality, sustainability, local production, and balanced nutrition would have been taken for granted in traditional diets or cuisines. But we are past that moment in the U.S. and increasingly everywhere. Nutritionally, it's easy to argue that a balanced meal means very little in the context of an unbalanced diet. But in the recently published *Why Calories Count*, the eminent nutritionists Marion Nestle and Malden Nesheim underscore how impossible it is most of the time to know or even estimate the calories or nutritional content in the food we eat, and they point out how unbelievably caloric even the most innocuous-looking restaurant dish can be (see risotto, above). So it's a relief to know someone is paying close attention to such matters and delivering the results in such an elegant and delicious way. Cancel that reservation for dinner number two. You won't need it.

— Mitchell Davis

## Yunnan, China: City Dai, Country Dai

### Yingjiang Dai Wei Yuan

("Yingjiang-Style Dai Flavor Restaurant")

69 Luofeng Street, near the corner of

Luofeng, Yuantong, and Beimen streets  
Kunming, Yunnan

tel 0871.512.2251

### Hong Dou Yuan Yu Zhuang

("Red Bean Garden Fish Farmstead")

just past the village of Man'e, 2.7 km west

of Menglun on National Road 213

Mengla County, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan

tel 135.7810.0925

To reach Yingjiang-Style Dai Flavor Restaurant, you take a small ramp that runs between a convenience store and a construction site and turn in at a door with a small banner hung over it. The restaurant is a warren of cramped rooms that have been spruced up with romantic photos of the Chinese countryside, wainscoting of woven bamboo, and a little bamboo "roof" over each doorway. A few tables are also spread out along the white tiled walls of a courtyard in the center of the building, which the restaurant shares with a dumpling restaurant, a mahjong parlor, and a couple of pool tables.

Originally, the restaurant was in a much more charming location half a block away. That storefront was faced in the pretty bamboo siding that usually marks Dai restaurants in Kunming, a city of six million that is the capital of Yunnan Province. The location and a few low bamboo tables, curling out along the sidewalk and into a nearby alley, created a lively, friendly atmosphere. That's what first drew me to the restaurant when I moved into an apartment across the street, but the food keeps me coming even in the new spot.

Dai food is often called the Thai food of China, but this describes its origins rather than its flavors. The Dai live in the southern and western parts of Yunnan (China's southwesternmost province) and are the descendents of the Tai, or Bai Yue, a people who lived in western China, Burma, Laos, and parts of eastern India before migrating south to Thailand around the first