Serviette

03

ISSUE No.3
FOOD IS PRESERVATION

Food is...

ON THE COVER
"I love when an image is wildly different than the process to get it," says photographer Sarah Wright. "The cover looks clean, precise, and luxurious. But the actual shoot involved a friend lying on the floor with her arm in the air, trying to tweeze a shrimp that was a bit of an escape artist. It fell down on her on more than one occasion—luckily, she isn't allergic to shrimp, just oysters."

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We were utterly lost, high in the Atlas Mountains. Reassuringly, our Berber guide, Abdulrahman, was not worried about finding the main road. He was more concerned about where we were going to get lunch. With no cafés or restaurants for hours, we pulled over at a small roadside stand—just three sheet-metal walls, barely holding it together. Sitting on the counter were two animal skulls, which Abdulrahman immediately identified as belonging to a lamb and a goat. Behind the counter, exposed to the beating sun, hung two carcasses, presumably once attached to the skulls. We decided on goat.

Unsure what we would do with a shopping bag full of warm, raw goat meat, we drove higher into the mountains, before finding ourselves in a small village. The air was crisp and getting thin. As we piled out of the car, roadside goat in hand, a few locals approached. Abdulrahman embraced each one. This was Berber country, so he was among family. Without hesitation, we were ushered in to a stranger's home. His cold, earthen front room was soon brought to life by a small charcoal grill over which we cooked the goat and prepared mint tea.

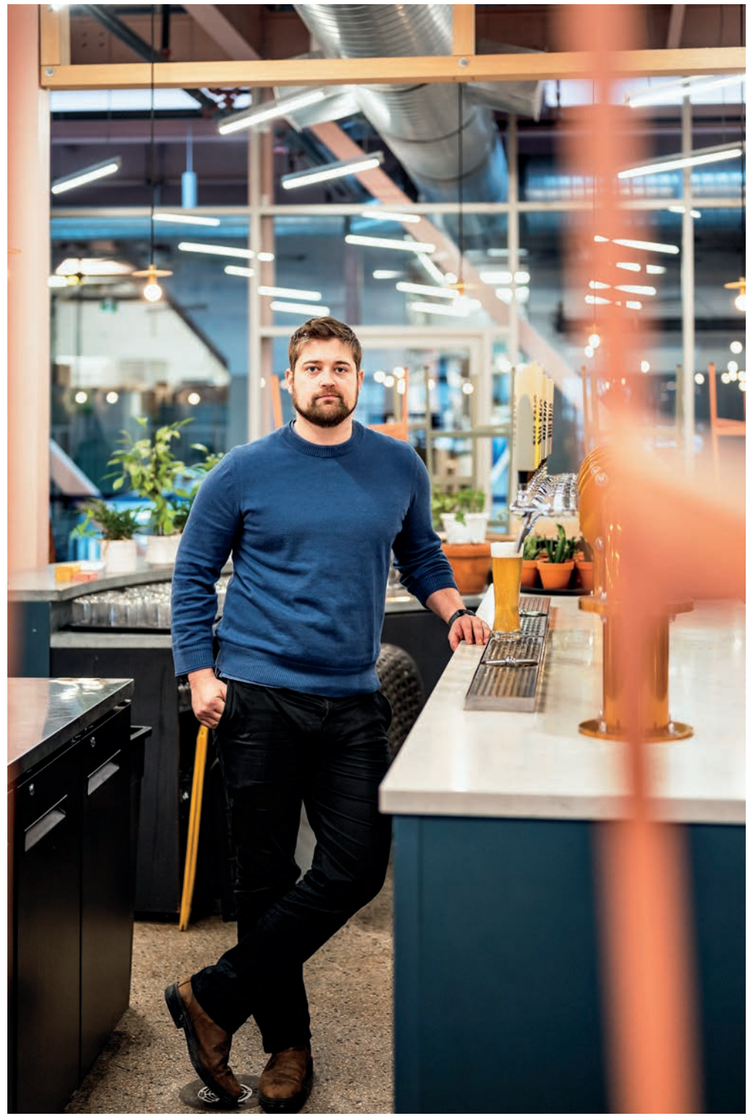
The goat was exquisite: rich, gamey, even slightly sweet. But like with milk straight from a cow, I just didn't have the stomach for it—I spent the better part of the next 48 hours managing a wicked case of food poisoning. (Our bemused guide was obviously unaffected.) Miraculously, I've managed to keep my taste for goat. The same can't be said of tequila, which, after one particularly unhinged night, years ago, is best left to the recesses of my past.

One of the most confounding elements of food for me is its power to create and preserve within us deep reservoirs of disgust (read more about that in "The Yuck Factor," page 18) but also wonder (see Flo Leung's touching essay "The Night Table" on page 44). Smell is said to be the sense most closely tied to our emotions. When combined with an amazing setting, terrific company, and divine flavours, a single meal can become one of our core memories. If we're lucky, as I was on that mountain, we can even have the awareness that we'll remember the moment long into the future, a sensation that writer John Koenig has called *dès vu*.

This is just one of the ways *Serviette* explores the theme of preservation in our third issue. From making traditional stinky tofu at home in Taipei (page 28) to holding onto flavour in outer space (page 10), food can, as Koenig points out, turn us into time travellers. By preserving traces of our past for the present, and our current joy for the future, the magic of food is inexhaustible.

Max Meighen

FOUNDER & PUBLISHER, SERVIETTE



Lawrence, 98 years old, Toronto, Canada

Miso in Space

Dinner can be a bit of a drag in microgravity. Is fermentation the secret for packing flavour on a mission to Mars?

Written by
Danielle Groen

Illustrations by
Agnes Jonas

The soybeans went up as the world locked down.

On Friday, March 6, 2020—five days before the WHO declared COVID a pandemic—a small plastic container of doctored legumes, nestled among sensors in a shoebox-sized chamber, hitched a ride on a SpaceX rocket destined for low earth orbit. Early Monday morning, high above Vancouver, the rocket reached the International Space Station, delivering more than 4,000 pounds of supplies and science projects (and a few mice) to the three astronauts on board. For 30 days, as those astronauts floated around the ISS testing specialized suits and tending to cell samples (and feeding the mice), the chamber's sensors and camera diligently recorded changes to the soybeans inside. Then the spacecraft and its cargo headed home, splashing down in the Pacific Ocean just off the coast of Long Beach on April 7.

Life on land had transformed dramatically during that space flight. It took more than a week for the chamber to travel from California to Massachusetts, where Maggie Coblentz, one of the project's leads, worked in the Space Exploration Initiative at MIT Media Lab. The contents were meant to arrive at MIT so they could be properly stored and analyzed, but MIT had shut down weeks before. Instead, a bulging cardboard box appeared on the doorstep of Coblentz's apartment in Cambridge, no signature required. "I went to collect it, removed the container, and immediately put it in my own personal freezer with all my Häagen-Dazs," she says. "Then I told my roommates, 'This is not ice cream, no eating this.' So that was weird."

Over its month spent circling the earth at 28,000 kilometres an hour, the soybean mixture inside that plastic container had transformed dramatically, as well: It became miso, thanks to the presence of salt and koji, grains inoculated with the fungus *Aspergillus oryzae*. Coblentz and her collaborator Joshua Evans weren't sure fermentation was even possible in microgravity—this was the first time anyone tried. But whoever packed the cardboard box had shown more confidence, scrawling SPACE MISO in black Sharpie across the top.

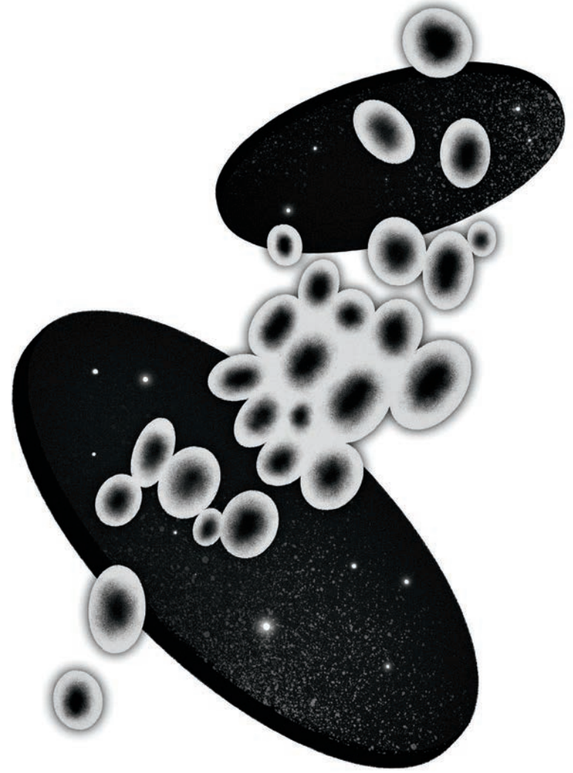
Fermentation has existed across countries and cultures for millennia, used to produce bread and cheese and preserve vegetables and meat, so it's a bit of a surprise that it took so long for the practice to make its way to space. Scientists are starting to better understand the dietary value of this metabolic process, where the enzymes from microorganisms break down and alter the composition of foods. Miso and kimchi and sauerkraut and yogurt all boost the diversity of our microbiome, those trillions of bacteria, viruses, and fungi taking up residence in our intestinal tract. And more microbiome diversity, we're learning, is vital for physical health and longevity, cognitive performance, and overall well-being.

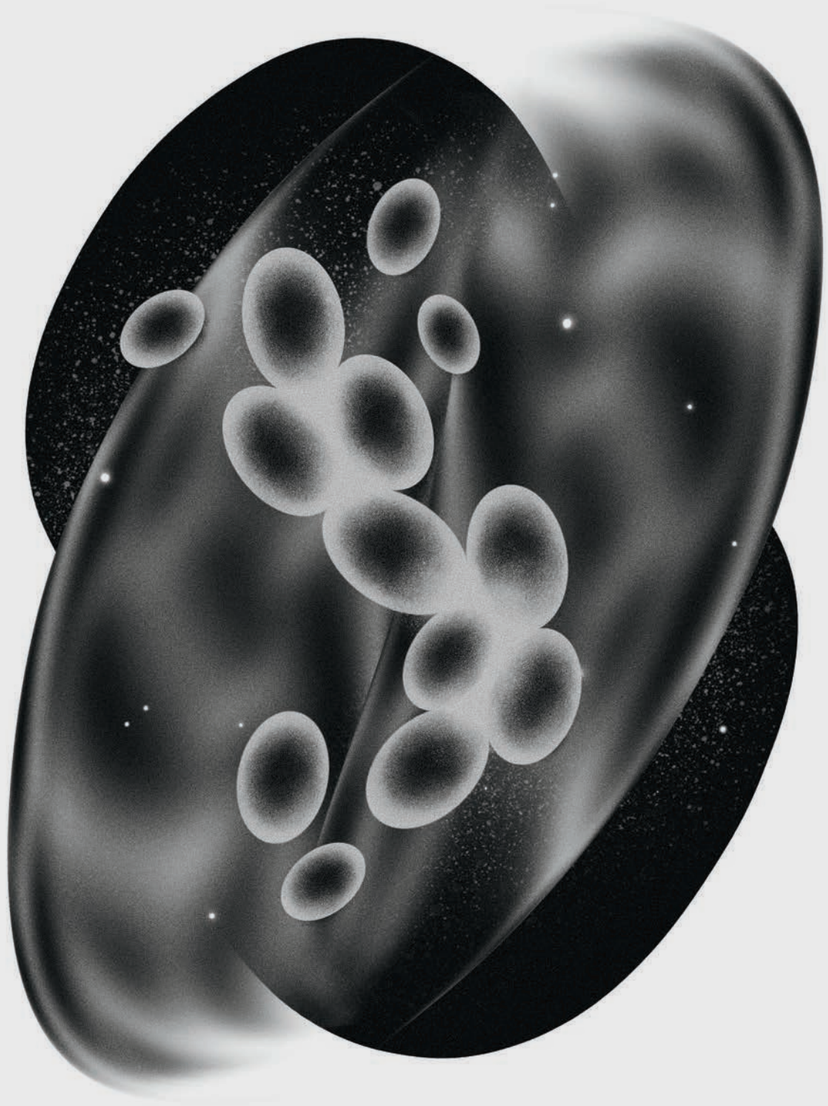
A fermentation-heavy diet could be particularly useful for astronauts, since the limited research available—only 600-odd people have left Earth—suggests they suffer from weakened guts. (A year spent on the ISS rearranged all the genes in Scott Kelly's poop.) Plus, microbes are little flavour factories, generating chemicals that enhance taste and aroma, and pungent foods are far more appealing to people stuck in outer space. Without gravity, fluids don't drain down the body, causing clogged sinuses and a puffy face. You need big flavours to cut through what amounts to a brutal head cold.

But Coblentz and Evans weren't only interested in the impact that miso could have in space—they also wanted to know how space might change miso. Fermentation is hugely affected by conditions: How and where and by whom a ferment is made all determine its taste and texture. "Because microbes spread so easily, they colonize pretty much every environment," says Evans, who founded the Sustainable Food Innovation research group at the Technical University of Denmark. "The Arctic tundra has microbes, the deep sea has microbes, and the ISS has a super fascinating microbiome, because of the astronauts from all over the world going up and down all the time." Far from being some hermetically sealed, sterile construction, the ISS is crawling with bacteria that combine with radiation, temperature, and microgravity to create an environment all its own. That environment, the collaborators reasoned, might shape the flavour and identity of anything fermented there. They called it space terroir.

Growing up in Toronto, Coblentz spent summers leading canoe trips through the provincial wilderness, working out which foods to bring, when to prepare and eat them, how to squeeze everything into her packs. "But beyond that, I just saw at the most basic level how important food is for people who have different levels of experience and comfort, and might come from different backgrounds or contexts," she says. "Food really is the marker of time during the day, and it's when the people I was with would all come together." In grad school, she studied industrial design, investigating the role food plays in extreme places like prisons and combat front lines. Then she began thinking further afield—how people might eat in outer orbit; who would get to make those decisions—which led her to the Space Exploration Initiative in 2018.

As Coblentz explored interplanetary cooking techniques and zero-gravity dinners at MIT, a mutual friend connected her with Evans, then in the middle of his PhD fieldwork and running miso experiments at the Nordic Food Lab in Copenhagen. "Maggie had a slot on the ISS and wanted to design a project to send up there," Evans says. "And it struck me that miso lends itself well to space travel, because it isn't a liquid." NASA needed a little convincing on that matter. They wanted video proof that the sample wouldn't leak, so Coblentz filmed herself sealing a container of miso and dropping it





into a fish tank filled with water, to show nothing came bubbling out. (She'd later have to tell NASA which pen she used to label her space sample—they take flammability very seriously there.)

In mid-January 2020, with NASA signed off, Evans prepared the miso mixture at Empirical, a distillery founded by two Noma alumni he knew from his days at the Nordic Food Lab. Working under a flow hood and with latex gloves to minimize contaminants, he combined equal parts cooked soybeans with rice koji, then added 4 percent salt. "Because we had a 30-day window on the space station, we needed to make a pretty short style of miso that's meant to ferment quickly," he says. (Misos typically ferment for a minimum of three months, though some younger, sweeter varieties can be found in Japan. But Evans wants to emphasize: This was not the finest miso.) Then he split the mixture into three portions. He kept one frozen with him in Copenhagen, and sent the rest to Coblentz in Cambridge, bundled in ice packs and shipped overnight express through DHL. Once the mixtures were out of the freezer, the fermentation would begin in earnest.

"It basically arrived in a sous-vide bag," Coblentz says, which she took to the lab and divided—flow hood, latex gloves—to fill two identical plastic containers. A clear lid with some holes punched through, covered in tape, let air circulate and photos be taken of any changes to the mixture's surface and mold colour. Coblentz placed one of the containers in a custom-built chamber, with a camera on top and a tangle of sensors inside to measure temperature, humidity, pressure, off-gassing, light, and radiation. She sent it to Cape Canaveral, and transferred her second container to another chamber that would stay with her in Cambridge, so she could compare how those chambers might affect the fermenting environment. Over in Copenhagen, Evans, chamber-less, moved his plastic container into a small cupboard in his apartment, manually recording temperature and humidity. The earthbound controls would help reveal the unique microbial communities and flavour compounds of a space miso.

But wait—five days before blast off, Coblentz fielded an urgent call from Ground Control. They were in the final stages of loading the SpaceX rocket, and workers had smelled something funky wafting from the MIT box. "They were really concerned about what was happening," she says. "I had to say it was a sign of the experiment going well, that this is just how miso smells, and they could tell their astronaut friends not to worry." Up the miso went, and by the time it made it through the launch, onto the ISS, around the world (480 times), down into the Pacific, and back to Coblentz's freezer beside the

Without gravity, fluids don't drain down the body, causing clogged sinuses and a puffy face. You need big flavours to cut through what amounts to a brutal head cold.

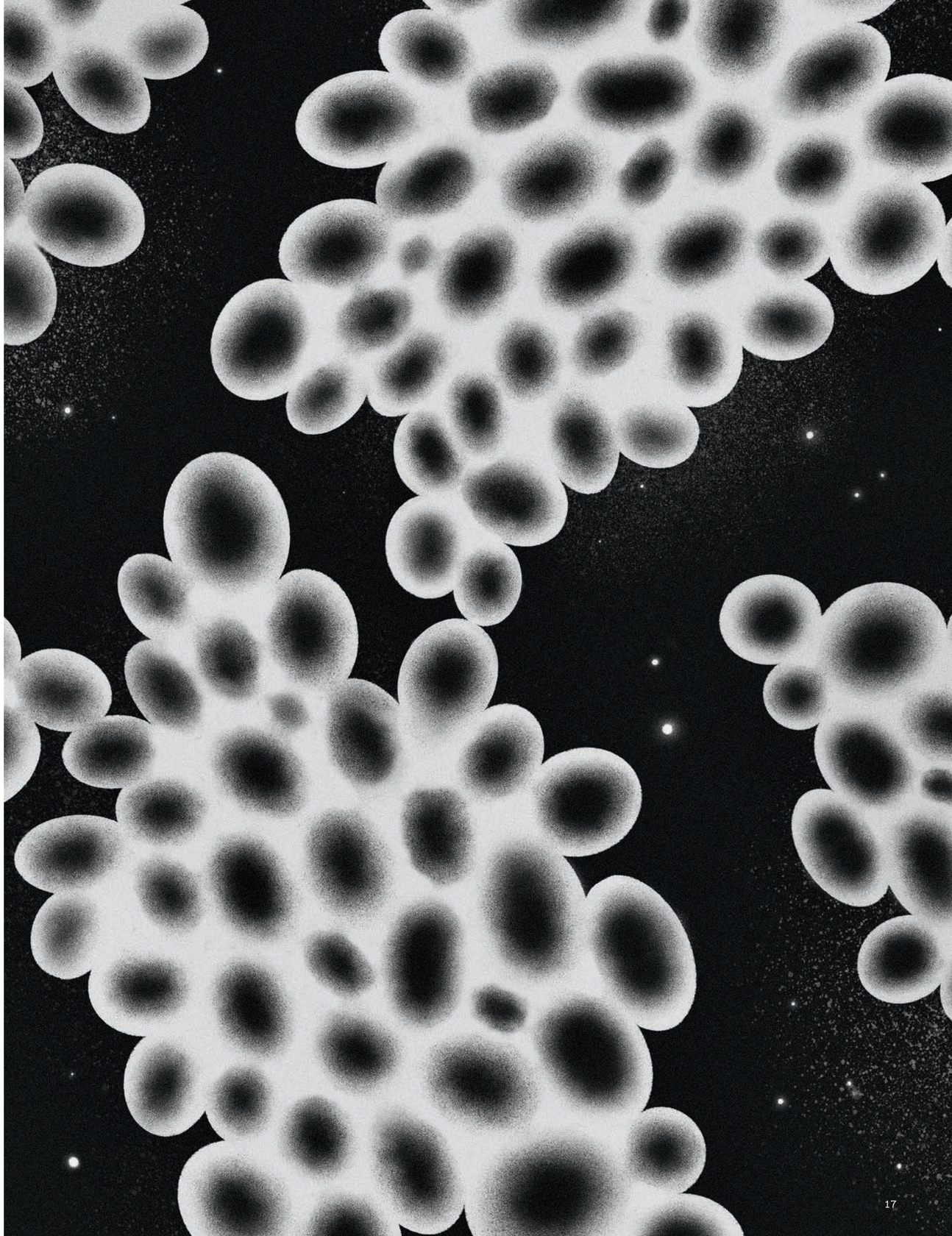
Häagen-Dazs, it had fermented for 58 days. Coblentz brought over the space and Cambridge samples to analyze in Copenhagen at the start of 2021. She had to stash them alongside cold packs in her checked luggage—unlike NASA, the Federal Aviation Administration considers miso a liquid.

On the fifth floor of an apartment building in Østerbro, Copenhagen, in a loft with windows angled up to the sky, Evans lowered himself onto a tatami mat and sipped a broth made from light dashi and space miso. This was the start of the tasting menu that Kim Wejendorp, the R&D chef at Evans' Sustainable Food Innovation group, created for the seven researchers involved in the study: five courses that swung from torched yakimiso to a smoked and rehydrated carrot slaw to a miso-and-strawberry granita. Since the miso came back to earth, those researchers had been busy sequencing the samples' DNA and mapping their microbial composition, aromatic compounds, and amino acids to see how they differed. But miso is more than a science project; it's a food, rich in historical, cultural, and culinary meaning. "We wanted to consider what it means to bring these earthbound processes into an unprecedented environment, and also what it means for those of us tasting the miso down here," Evans says. "Can we experience by proxy the overview effect that astronauts report, that kind of spiritual, cosmic awe?"

Early reports suggest: We sure can. Just before the June 2022 dinner, in a meeting room at the Technical University of Denmark, 14 chefs, fermenters, and social scientists convened for a blind tasting of the three misos. They clocked the space traveller straight away; it tasted funkier, roastier, and more sour than its earthly siblings, and notably older than its 58-day age. In part, that's due to the complicated logistics of getting to the ISS and back, which involved trips by plane, boat, and rocketship, as well as at least 3 Gs of liftoff force, all contributing to greater disturbance and oxidization. But data analysis showed there is something about space that accelerates fermentation. Chalk it up to the higher temperature, the lack of gravity, the whackload of radiation: The ISS miso contained much higher concentrations of esters and pyrazines, resulting in a darker colour, a cheesier aroma, and a nuttier taste—though not a more delicious one, Evans concedes, since it remained a young miso made in sterile conditions. "Space is cool, but it isn't magic," he says. Still, for the assembled tasters, "the space miso did have this aura of remarkability, and that definitely influenced how they tasted it." They kept being drawn back for additional bites.

Who can blame them—space is a magnet. NASA's confident that by 2040, Americans could move into the moon's first subdivision, 3D-printed out of layers of lunar concrete built from rocks, mineral fragments, and dust. After that, they're eyeing habitats on Mars. MIT's Space Exploration Initiative believes civilization is bound for the cosmos, which is why we need to plan for that inevitability now, with the widest variety of people and cultures in mind. Coblentz points out that the first all-woman spacewalk didn't take place until October 2019, and even then, history had to be delayed seven months, so NASA could make a second medium-sized suit. "Food, clothing, shelter—they're the things that nourish us and enable us to do this work," she says. "If you limit who can do the work, that's an enormous missed opportunity." Fermentation isn't just an ancient method of food preservation that's wildly useful for very long journeys. It broadens the traditions carried into space.

It carries a part of us up there, too. Fermentation involves an intimate dance of microbes that move to the food from the body, a concept called son-mat in Korean, which translates to hand taste. Wejendorp saw this in the restaurants he worked at: Sometimes, the sourdough bread wasn't a big hit, because the guy who made it, through no fault of his own, didn't have an especially tasty microbiome. But before that, Wejendorp saw it in the mountains of Hokkaido, where Japanese grandmothers taught him to prepare miso with soybeans from their harvest. "I was next to one of the grandmothers, and she said, 'We're making miso from the same thing,'" he recalls. "'But next year,' she said, 'this will be mine, and that one will be yours.'" He likes the idea that we endure in the ferments we have made. "You give yourself to this food, and then a little satellite of you goes off somewhere else." **S**



THE YUCK FACTOR

WHY SOME FOODS KEEP ON GROSSING US OUT

As told to
Jovana Djak

Photography by
Christie Vuong

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Nicole Billark

ABOUT

eight years ago, flavour scientist and author Arielle Johnson ate a very bad oyster. There was the predictable chain reaction: a sneaky, sudden onset of food poisoning; a hasty retreat to the nearest bathroom. It wasn't very pleasant. But spare a moment for the poor hot dog that Johnson had between the oyster and her toilet dash. It did nothing wrong, and yet, for ages, "I couldn't go near a hot dog," she says. "I couldn't even think about it."

That's because flavour isn't fixed—it has as much to do with what's going on in our heads as anything occurring around our tongues. Our taste receptors detect salts, sugars, acids, and glutamates, sending signals to our brains that create the sensations of sour, bitter, salty, umami, and sweet. "But as you're eating, many, many, many different molecules fill the cavity of your mouth, then go up the back of your throat and into your nasal cavity," Johnson explains. That's called retronasal olfaction, and it's a particular kind of smelling that helps make flavour. She adds, "When you experience retronasal olfaction while you're eating, your brain thinks the sensation is happening inside your mouth." It's a trick: Your mouth is only responsible for those five basic tastes. Everything else—the perception of spice, of citrus, of herbaceousness, of smoke, on and on and on—comes from smell.

And that's important, since smells have a much stronger link to memory and emotion than any other sense. "With taste and hearing and touch, those signals all pass through the brainstem and have to go through various levels of gating before they arrive at the higher centres of the brain," Johnson says. But scents are detected by the olfactory bulb, a structure that sits near the front of the brain and has direct routes to the amygdala (which processes emotion) and the hippocampus (which plays a major role in memory). This close physical connection is why, often enough, "we actually experience our emotional memory from a smell or a flavour before we consciously perceive what it is," she says. One whiff of a food—or, say, bottom-shelf tequila—that made you sick 20 years ago can still be enough to send you running for air.

Johnson finally made her peace with the hot dog. Not all of us are so lucky; some foods leave a bad taste early on that stubbornly lingers for the rest of our lives. Writer Jovana Djak canvassed family, friends, and strangers on her travels to see which aversions they've carried with them into adulthood. Come for the aspic, but stick around for the soggy bread.

—THE EDITORS

Aspic

At family celebrations, there was always some kind of aspic on the table. It was made the night before, so it would coagulate in the fridge, but I never understood as a child how they got the pieces of pork or carrots to float in there. The look of it mortified me. But what repulsed me the most was seeing people grab these gelatinous cubes with their hands to eat them. You could always tell who had eaten aspic by the glossy shine on their lips. To this day, I cannot have aspic.

—J.D., Toronto, Ontario

Liver

I have no idea why my cousin loved liver. His favourite dish—if one can even call it that—was liver fried in oil with mayonnaise on the side. My grandmother, wanting to please him, would make liver non-stop. The second the liver hit the frying pan, I would run into the other room. The smell reminded me of offal and of the sanctions we had in Serbia through the 1990s. But it wasn't just the smell, it was the colour, too: bloody and dark brown, then a strange hue of grey as the liver cooked. The second you'd stick your fork into a piece, it was as if you were cutting through playdough, not food. I don't eat much mayo now, but liver I hate with a passion.

—J.T., Belgrade, Serbia

Parsley

At three years old, I was already an overeater, opening kitchen cabinets and trying to get my hands on any food that I could find. I didn't like parsley, though; the green bush looked to me like a scary monster. So my mother would hang bunches of flat-leaf parsley, tied with a rubber band, on the fridge handle and outside the cabinets. Her method of discouraging me worked—almost 40 years later, I can't have anything with parsley, not even as a garnish.

—M.D., Parma, Italy

Pickled beets

My mom had this rule that we had to eat whatever food was in front of us and finish it, too. Her homemade pickled beets smelled like burnt butter and dirty socks and pickle juice. Just the smell made me gag. I would hold my nose and swallow these slimy, chewy beets quickly, but they would stain everything they touched—imagine a child trying to eat them without dripping on their clothes! If I used my fingers, my fingers would be red for days. This was my parents' favourite side dish. We ate it twice a week.

—J.W., Whittier, California

Runner beans

My dad used to grow runner beans—rows and rows and rows of them. I don't know why, because he never seemed to sell them or give them away, so it meant we had a huge freezer full of them. Homegrown produce should be great, but my mum's approach to cooking them was to put the beans in a pan of boiling water and then add...nothing. Salt, pepper, herbs, spices, butter—none of these things were in our kitchen. The best restaurant could serve up the tastiest green beans ever, but I won't try them because all I can think of is the rubbery, squeaky, limp, and tasteless side dish we had for seemingly every meal.

—R.P., Selston, England

Wet bread

I grew up near Žabljak, Montenegro, on popara—a poor man's dish made from stale bread cooked in water or, in the best-case scenario, milk. It's topped with fresh cheese, similar to feta, and adults often make it for children because it's so reminiscent of baby food. My grandmother made it for me, and my grandfather didn't mind eating it, probably because he was old and found this mush easy to swallow. I remember picking out the salty cheese, but I couldn't eat the rest because the slimy, gooey texture was nasty—it's basically wet bread. Now, I hate any kind of wet bread. I can only eat the crust on French toast; the middle is too mushy. Croutons in soup is another big no. Why would anyone want to eat wet bread?

—D.B., Žabljak, Montenegro

Sardines

We'd have sardines at Christmas. They came in a can, packed in oil. They looked just like the minnows that my dad used when he took us ice fishing. I'd rather stare at a hole in the ice for hours, waiting for a fish to bite, than eat a single sardine.

—B.J.S., Whitelaw, Wisconsin

Written by Clarissa Wei
Photographs by An Rong Xu

HIP TO BE SQUARE

Searching for fresh takes on stinky tofu in Taipei

FOR

most Taiwanese people, stinky tofu is just another dish: a comforting bite, a late-night pick-me-up, an indulgent treat. For outsiders, though, it's a polarizing item, often said to have an odour reminiscent of dirty socks or sewage. Locals can lean on that reputation, perpetuated by travel shows and bizarre-food enthusiasts, when they engage with outsiders, trying to provoke a reaction to this question:

"Do you like stinky tofu?"

The first time my husband, who is from Sweden, was asked that in Taiwan, he didn't think much about it. He shrugged, said he liked it, and changed the topic. Then, a few weeks later, he got the same question. And then again, and again. Over the years, it's become a running joke between us—the "stinky tofu icebreaker."

Stinky tofu is among the most misunderstood dishes in the broad canon of Taiwanese cuisine. It's said to have originated in China, where, sometime during the Qing Dynasty, a scholar accidentally dropped some tofu into an earthen jar and then forgot about it. That story doesn't add up, though: The dish isn't some malodorous block of tofu left to rot in a moldy cauldron of meat and miscellaneous vegetables. Instead, it's soaked in a simple lacto-fermented pickling brine. The tofu gets all of its flavour from that brine, which is what transforms it into a lovely parcel of fragrance.

"A good stinky tofu should not be too stinky," Sili Tsai, a self-proclaimed stinky tofu enthusiast in Taipei, tells me. "You should still be able to focus on the tofu." It's meant to be savoured, not forced down for a photo op. And while plain tofu is vegetal—sometimes even bland—a proper stinky tofu is a textural marvel, springy, with a flavour that's reminiscent of a creamy blue cheese.

I spent a year and a half writing a cookbook on Taiwanese cuisine, and stinky tofu was one of the first dishes I wanted to tackle; I've loved eating it since I was a kid. But how it's made has always been a mystery to me, and when I started my research process, I hit a bunch of walls. There aren't a lot of serious resources in English or Chinese. And all the stinky tofu restaurateurs I approached refused to give me their recipe. Restaurants in Taiwan are quite cagey in general about sharing recipes—I might get approximations, but never true measurements—and stinky tofu brines in particular are fiercely guarded secrets. In part, that's because of sanitation concerns (vendors have been fined in the past for unsanitary conditions), and in part it's because many of the recipes are family heirlooms. It's hard to find an exact recipe.

"Just read the articles on the wall," said one of the waitresses at Dai's Family House of Unique Stink, a vegetarian stinky tofu specialist in Taipei, when I arrived one day for an interview. Dai's has been around since 1989 and the owner—a former artist—picked up the trade from her parents, who had been making the dish for more than six decades. Earlier that week, over the phone, I was told I could talk to her in person. She never showed up. Instead, I was left with the restaurant staff, who either didn't know much about the brining process or weren't at liberty to disclose. The elusive tofu—stored in paint-can-sized buckets of greenish-brown liquid—sat in the corner of the

Chef and fermenter Sean Chen builds his pickling brine.

Amaranth, a leafy green found all over the world, gives stinky tofu its signature flavour.

Dried fish, shrimp, and garlic cloves lend Chen's brine a bit more oomph.

This bean curd has been soaked for at least three months.

Chen readies his stinky tofu to dry out in the sun.

kitchen. I watched, hungry for information, as the staff scooped up individual servings of tofu, patted them dry, and dropped them in vats of oil. I asked if I could have a sample of the liquid to take home. They said no.

And so I just sat there, awkwardly staring at the wall, which is adorned with newspaper clippings and framed plaques about the store and its mysterious tofu. One of the plaques has a long list of ingredients that go into the brine, including amaranth, bamboo shoots, mustard greens, orange peels, peppercorns, cabbage. I jotted it all down in my notebook and left soon after, disappointed.

"The most important ingredient is amaranth," Sean Chen, a Taiwanese fine-dining chef and skilled fermenter, tells me over the phone. Chen is a sous chef at Embers Restaurant in Taipei, but over on his Instagram feed, @seanchen_, he dabbles in ethereal homemade concoctions like bright, colourful vinegars, hairy piles of koji, and bubbling jars of homemade fish paste.

Amaranth, he emphasizes, is what gives most stinky tofu its signature flavour. A leafy green that can be found all over the world, it is a summer vegetable in Taiwan and often grows as a weed along sidewalks. When it's soaked in a 1 to 2 percent salt water solution over the course of a couple of months, it will begin to break down and take on a sharp but earthy aroma with nutty and pungent undertones. The more ingredients that are added to the brine—like cabbage, bamboo shoots, or mustard greens—the more complex its flavour gets.

When I was developing my recipe, I kept it simple with just amaranth and water spinach. I soaked the veggies in a 1.5 percent salt brine and let them sit in a cool, dark cupboard for two months until they became so fragrant that the aroma penetrated my entire apartment. (Hot tip: Always open your brine jar outside.) Then I filtered out the solids and marinated a chunk of medium-firm tofu in the brine for three days in the refrigerator. Take out the tofu, pat dry, then deep-fry it. It did the trick—maybe not quite as complex as a stinky tofu I'd buy at the night market, but funky enough that I had to open up all the windows to air out the smell.

> The process of making stinky tofu isn't so much a science as it is an art.

Of course, there are myriad ways to make brine. "It's difficult to get amaranth here, so I just used radish tops," says Pao-Yu Liu, a Taiwan-born fermenter who runs pickling workshops in London, UK. "I was pretty happy with it." Chen uses only the stems of amaranth, which he says give his brine a more robust flavour, and adds bamboo shells, dried chili peppers, a little bit of garlic, star anise, and cassia bark for extra depth.

While I opted for a medium-firm tofu, Chen prefers an extra-firm, very compact tofu. "I'll soak the bean curd in the brine for three months in the fridge. The pores of the tofu become much more coarse that way," he says. The enzymes of the pickling brine gently break down the tofu, rendering it squishy and porous, like a sponge. Chen is also working on dehydrating stinky tofu into a jerky form that can be grated onto dishes like parmesan cheese. He hopes that people will come to see stinky tofu as a unique and potent source of umami.

Over the years, I've realized that the process of making stinky tofu isn't so much a science as an art. Yet at restaurants across Taiwan, stinky tofu is really only served two ways, steamed or fried, and almost always with the base flavour of lacto-fermented amaranth. Its fearsome reputation as a putrid chunk of soy keeps people from wanting to experiment with it, while gatekeeping from the stinky tofu old guard means recipes remain hidden and stagnant.

If more people understood that the dish was simply tofu soaked in a pickling brine, maybe it wouldn't seem so repellent—maybe there'd be more exploration by young chefs and recipe developers, more resources on how to make it, and far more varieties available. I hope stinky tofu will soon inspire all sorts of innovation, transforming into new colours, flavours, and recipes. And I hope that when people are asked, "Do you like stinky tofu?" they'll clap back with, "What type?" **S**

Wu Hsu Pi-ying, centre, has run Dai's House of Unique Stink in Taipei for more than 35 years.

WHERE TO TRY IT

戴記獨臭之家
Dai's House of Unique Stink

Tofu, of course, is always made without meat, but because a lot of commercial brines include ingredients like shrimp oil or shrimp shells, Dai's makes a point of using exclusively vegetarian ingredients in theirs. Most stinky tofu is either deep-fried or steamed, but Dai's serves up a unique cold stinky tofu appetizer drizzled in soy paste and topped with crunchy, crispy bits of seaweed-based batter.

No. 2, Alley 3, Lane 120, Yongji Rd, Xinyi District, Taipei City, Taiwan 110

The cold stinky tofu at Dai's House of Unique Stink is showered in flakes of seaweed batter.

Baxian is a beloved rechao, Taiwan's version of an izakaya bar.

八仙炭烤熱炒
Baxian Grill

Baxian isn't a stinky tofu operation. They're a dinner-only restaurant that specializes in hot stir-fries, but their rendition of steamed stinky tofu is so excellent it's worth making a trip for that dish alone. Nestled on top of spicy and tongue-numbing broth, the tofu arrives inside a tray made of aluminum foil, served piping hot with a light sprinkling of cilantro for garnish. Spoon some of the tofu over rice and chase it with an ice-cold Taiwanese lager.

No. 28, Section 2, Xinsheng S Rd, Da'an District, Taipei City, Taiwan 106

好味道臭豆腐
Hao Wei Stinky Tofu

Hao Wei is a tiny, narrow, and barely air-conditioned brick-and-mortar with only a handful of tables, yet it often commands a multi-hour line of people waiting to get their hands on the platters of deep-fried stinky tofu. While fried stinky tofu can be found in nearly every neighbourhood across the island, Hao Wei's tofu is beloved for its texture, which is spongy on the inside and crisp on the outside. It's a great place for first-timers as well; the brine is mild and very well-rounded.

No. 41, Section 1, Shipai Rd, Beitou District, Taipei City, Taiwan 112

Hao Wei's mild brine makes for a terrific gateway to stinky tofu.

We have a long chat as Felisa roams her garden.

Felisa, 94 years old, Los Angeles, U.S.A.

THE NIGHT TABLE

A lengthy education in the century egg

Written and illustrated by Flo Leung

When I was six-ish, I became obsessed with Saturday morning Hasbro cartoons and Indiana Jones. While I imprinted on the fabulous mullets and sweet leggy dance moves of Jem and the Holograms, my dad affectionately gave me the more accurate, though far less glamorous, nickname of Short Round. It grew on me; *Temple of Doom*'s Shorty was, after all, brave and scrappy and had no problem calling out cheaters in a card game. Besides, like my adventurous namesake, I was about to make an important discovery of my own—that my parents were holding top secret snack meetings, after hours, in our very own kitchen.

One restless night, I woke to animated whispers and the surprising *tchhk-hiss* of a can opening. I followed the sounds down the dark hallway and watched as my mom and dad clinked glasses across our creaky kitchen table, then leaned over the small plate that sat between them, chopsticks in hand. I stepped into the room, imagining perhaps some hot potstickers or even—wildly—salty french fries might be the source of all that secret excitement.

This is what I saw instead: wedges of cold, inky century egg with its molten grey-green centre, dotted with toasted sesame oil, a messy rosette of sliced pickled ginger on the side. My dad offered me a single bite, a dark jellied sliver, just to taste. I edged closer and was taken aback; the smell was too ripe, too complicated and concentrated to easily enjoy. My mom, who I'd never seen drink anything other than room-temperature water or tea, poured a splash of frosty cream soda from a bright pink can into a Chinese teacup and nudged it towards me, a sort of last-minute place setting at this strange night table.

I could tell from my parents' expressions that this dish was meant to be something special, but I couldn't quite translate what was in front of me into what I could understand as being delicious. For now, this moment remained private, their own secret chord. I sipped my cold soda and watched as they polished off the plate.

As I slipped back into bed, I thought about how seeing this side of my parents was both thrilling and confusing, like the dream when you suddenly realize there's been an undiscovered room in the house the whole time.

My parents emigrated from Hong Kong to Toronto's North York in the mid-'70s, the first of their families to work as artists and live overseas. They were frugal and mostly practical. They also didn't seem to believe in minimalism. Mom was constantly rearranging souvenirs and trinkets, jade carvings, miniature clay teapots, decorative silk coasters, aesthetically pleasing fruit from that week's grocery shop, into ever-changing still life arrangements all over our tiny suburban bungalow. Dad doted on his tank of ornamental goldfish, fawning over their luxurious butterfly tails as if they were miniature racehorses.

They embraced their Canadianness, even as they found ways to remain in touch with a more familiar, faraway home. In the evenings, we would click over from Must See TV to the Fairchild channel for Hong Kong news. Mom would watch her Chinese soap operas about empresses and warriors, and the occasional Cantopop concert featuring Andy Lau and Anita Mui. After dinner, Dad could usually be found in his armchair with a can of Labatt 50, working his way through a well-thumbed Tom Clancy novel (first *The Hunt for Red October*, then *Patriot Games*) with his orange-and-yellow English–Chinese dictionary perched on the armrest.

In the years that followed, as I could stay up ever later, there were more not-so-secret snacks to be shared—fluffy barbeque pork buns, crispy fried turnip cakes, fragrant soy sauce noodles. Somehow in our Don Mills kitchen, my parents had created their own version of Hong Kong's late-night *siu yeh* tradition, a kind of culinary code switch that eased their occasional pangs of homesickness.

To me, those midnight dances to and from our oversized Harvest Gold fridge briefly transported my parents, like some wardrobe gateway to a shared Narnia of younger, hungrier, more carefree versions of themselves. I might have tried harder to follow them through. Instead of a portal, I saw a crisper drawer of unknowable, if occasionally delicious, things: Ziploc bags filled with dried oysters and black sea moss, newspaper-wrapped salted duck eggs, herbal-soup-bound sticks and twigs, all precious little packages taped with notes in script I couldn't read.

For a long time, that first unforgiving century egg was the mark of an invisible divide. It told me that while I might pull up a chair and eat at our special night table, I didn't, and perhaps couldn't, know everything about my parents after all.

A decade and a half passes; I somehow earn a degree and get the hang of living in a new city on my own. Post-student life in Montreal is a dream, but it isn't quite home. I start to worry about how to be useful, and think about the type of work that can bring people together. I return to Toronto, find roommates, a decent spot in the west end; I decide that cooking school might be a good place to start.

That first semester, we wear our starched white jackets and learn to tie our neckerchiefs for our daily uniform checks. We are told that each of the one hundred crisp folds in our paper toques represents a technique to cook an egg. This is where we begin, making hollandaise, attempting omelets, and whipping sabayons. We are marked on how well we scramble and temper and poach. We go to demos with declarative names like The Fundamentals: Mother Sauces 101. Our lessons are technical and informative, and yet there are days I feel like I'm running through the rooms of a museum, getting quizzed about someone else's past. I take the final exams, thinking that I'll figure it out when I return in the fall. I pass every class and I don't go back.

Instead, I start working in a kitchen downtown. For 12 hours a day, six days a week, I am surrounded by stainless steel and terrifically talented weirdos. I am reintroduced to salted black beans and ceramic jars of preserved mustard greens, no longer stashed in the crisper drawer of a suburban fridge. It is the early 2000s, so this restaurant's tasting menu features courses of Braised Abalone and Pig's Ear with Julienned Black Truffle Salad, followed by Tuna Carpaccio with Black Bean Sauce, Ginger Flower, and Lemongrass Tomato Water.

In my first week, from my junior spot pitting cherries and picking herbs, I watch the saucier at work. There is a too-quick-to-catch series of movements—a hot oiled pan, the flicked addition of finely minced aromatics, followed by a firework crackle of curry leaves. There is more butter, then

“I could tell from my parents’ expressions that this dish was meant to be something special, but I couldn’t quite translate what was in front of me into what I could understand as being delicious. For now, this moment remained private, their own secret chord.”

crumbled, salted duck-egg yolks that froth and foam into rich golden lava. At the right moment, the fish cook plates a delicate portion of Alaskan king crab, and the salted egg sauce is painted over top. As servers line up along the pass, there’s a flurry of garnishes to finish the dish before it is swept through the swinging door into a room of linen and crystal. Here, I think, is a good place to learn for a while. This time, I stay.

~

Fall and winter come and go. I learn to make dainty quenelles of calamansi sorbet for the intermezzo course. Spring and summer are a blur; there are mountains of stone fruit to turn into preserves and vinegars, and I am entrusted with my station’s salad dressing recipe. Another winter passes, another spring.

There is a phone call for me on the restaurant line one day, just before service. Not long after, I find myself back in Don Mills. The house feels smaller since Mom has been on her own. A surgery date is scheduled. I take notes about her new medication, correct dosages, dates of follow-up appointments. I keep her company during her beloved soap operas as she recovers; I am embarrassed that my Cantonese remains so childish that I can’t fully understand what the characters say. There are thoughtful food drop-offs. I take up rearranging the most aesthetically pleasing fruit. We spend a lot of time sitting and sipping tea.

In the kitchen, the giant mustard fridge is long gone, though its shiny, energy-efficient replacement has all the ingredients for a comfort meal of simple steamed eggs, with Mom’s favourite additions. She lists off the measurements by heart: three large chicken eggs, an equal portion of warm water, one salted duck egg, one century egg, a pinch each of chicken bouillon powder (or “yellow chicken powder,” due to its brightly coloured can) and white pepper. I prepare the eggs under her direction; I dice and scatter the salted yolks, along with the sliced century egg, evenly around the shallow blue-and-white ceramic dish. I whisk the seasoned chicken eggs and water, then strain (“double strain for the smoothest texture!”) over everything. I set up the steamer and let it gently cook away. We sit at the still-creaky kitchen table and eat the dish, soft and soothing, a barely-there finish of light soy and toasted sesame oil, with plenty of plain white rice.

In the time since that memorable first encounter, I have learned more about the chemical process behind the century egg. Traditionally, a duck egg (though a chicken or quail egg may be used) is covered in an alkaline clay mixture made of wood ash, salt, and calcium oxide. This increases the pH and sodium content of the egg, effectively curing it and making it safe for consumption weeks, even months, later, buried under its protective layer of soot and husks. I admit that this spooky goth alchemy remains no less mysterious in a real-life run-in: A once-yellow yolk is now a dark, muddy slate-green, the rest of the egg a gelatinous smoky amber. It’s comparable to the funk and complexity of a good blue cheese, and just as beloved by its believers.

I think about how many ways I’ve learned to cook an egg, and how far I still am from the one hundred crisp folds that once creased my paper toque. I think about how private an egg can be, and how learning to welcome that mystery may well be its own lesson.

I wonder if perhaps I’ve misread the century egg, believing its nature to be a defiant battle cry, a punk-inspired rail against convention. If this egg did have a lesson, it might, instead, teach me something about perspective. It is stubborn, but not because it is unchanging or unyielding. Its power lies in its gentle, protective warding—against the fickle outside world, against decay, and even, for a short spell, against time itself. Like memories of late-night fridge dances, the century egg patiently endures, transforming otherwise fleeting moments into something precious, something worth holding onto.

I am still with my mom in Don Mills, making our afternoon tea, when we receive another phone call. The tests look good. **$**

Photography by
Sarah Wright

Styling by
Carly Schwartz

The Museum of Vanishing Delights

Tastes are changing. Temperatures are rising. Prices are going up, too. Some of our favourite foods might start to seem a little unsavoury—or might not be found at all. Catch these beauties while you can before they're gone for good.

At times, translucence is rather a nuisance.

—OGDEN NASH, “THE SHRIMP”

CULTURE CLUB

It once took ants, plants, and rainwater to make yogurt in Bulgaria. One group of researchers is working to bring those traditions back.

Written by
Veronica Sinotte,
Sevgi Mutlu Sirakova,
and David Zilber

Photography by
David Zilber

A batch of just-warmed cow's milk cools back down to room temperature on the kitchen floor.

Winding roads snaked through old-growth woodlands that scraped the sky on all sides around us. Mountains split the horizon and bouldered rivers criss-crossed our path. We were packed into a hatchback heading south from the Bulgarian capital of Sofia, venturing not just to a specific location—Nova Mahala, an ethnically Turkish village of about 2,000—but to a specific time. May is Hıdırellez season, a festival held throughout the Balkans and the Middle East to celebrate the renewal of life each spring.

In Nova Mahala during Hıdırellez, the villagers observe customs unique to their town: They sport small bunches of foraged flowers as crowns, adorn their barns with budding branches, trek communally to the town's highest peak, and pay special attention to that staple of the Bulgarian table, yogurt. It was yogurt that had brought us here—we came to investigate the re-creation of recipes lost to time, those fermentations of milk once initiated by ants, scented by nettle roots, and fed with spring rains.

To make yogurt, milk must be inoculated with a consortium of bacteria that can consume the milk's sugars quickly enough to produce sufficient lactic acid to keep pathogens at bay. All that's required is a container, some milk, culture, warmth, and time. This ancient technique represents an early form of microbial domestication, which would have coincided with the beginnings of the agricultural revolution.

But that's too clinical an explanation. To the people of Nova Mahala, yogurt is not so much a product as an ongoing creation—of a life-sustaining food, but also of familial and cultural identity. Cows, which, just a generation ago, used to rival the count of human residents, still populate the village in substantial numbers. They're often housed in two-story barns at the back of properties, and they're seen—and spoken to—as essential members of the family.

The three of us each came to Bulgaria with our own way of understanding the world. Veronica, a scientist uncovering the ecology of little things like bugs and bacteria, initiated the trip through her work and conversations with researcher Rob Dunn, thanks to whom we all share a connection. David, a chef, fermenter, and food scientist, tagged along out of curiosity, moonlighting as the trip's documentarian. Sevgi, an ethnographer who traces traditional foodways and old forms of fermentation, led the expedition. Her family, and our hosts, maintain deep ancestral ties to Nova Mahala. It was in her well-travelled Ford Focus that we were carefully navigating the last stretch of gravel road, up the driveway to a modest brick bungalow built in the '60s and extended bit by bit every decade since.

ALL THAT'S REQUIRED TO MAKE YOGURT IS A CONTAINER, SOME MILK, CULTURE, WARMTH, AND TIME.

Sevgi's family waited outside. Mehemet, her great uncle, is a former herder who carries with him intimate knowledge of the land and livestock. A man pushing 80, he has the spirit and stamina of a 20-year-old. Musherrem, his wife, is a master of hospitality who fed us the most incredible Balkan specialities: moussaka, and tarhana soup, and sarma, these juicy stuffed packets of rice and meat, rolled tight like dolma in her own fermented cabbage. Fatma, their daughter, had her mother's knack for cooking, yeasting dough for cheese-filled bread in the morning before setting off to work as a deft seamstress at the local textile factory. They have called Nova Mahala home their entire lives, with a family heritage and Turkish roots that run back hundreds of years in the region.

Two centuries ago, herders spent extensive time away from their homes, constantly moving with their livestock to fresh highland pastures. They relied on yogurt to preserve the milk of those animals on the go, using wild sources of microbial life like ants, nettles, and rain water to start the transformation. In fermentation, it's impossible to disentangle culture from cultures, and these wild sources continue to hold deep significance during Hıdırellez. Locals hang nettles off their belt loops to bless the spring. Pine needles from the mounds of wood ant colonies are collected to bring bounty to the animals, plants, and community during the growing season. Spring water that flows from tributaries in the surrounding mountains is channeled to memorials in lieu of gravestones, where villagers can remember their loved ones each time they fetch water.

But nowhere can truly be in two *whens* at once. Modernity has Nova Mahala in its grips, and its ancestral practices of fermentation are falling, well, out of practice. What we had to resolve—at both a microbiological and an ethnographic level—was the past itself. Mehmet and Musherrem, like others in the village, had only heard stories of making

Jars of milk destined for the middle of an ant hill.

yogurt with ants or nettles; they'd never done it themselves. That's where our investigation became a collaboration. We worked with them to tease out the history of their home.

On our first morning, at 7 am, we stumbled out of our rooms and met at the barn out back to find Mehmet, his cow, and her calf already wide awake. Mehmet's hands encouraged a thin stream of milk to flow from the teats into several cups, which he passed to us. The opaque liquid that hit our lips was categorically different from anything available in a grocery store: rich, warm, foamy, sweet, and slightly sticky. It tasted of the earth and the crisp air and, importantly, of an animal, one that was craning her neck to observe, with deep intent, the interlopers parked at the barn door. Mehmet filled a 10 litre bucket in about a minute's time—easy work for a "retired" herder who once tended 250 sheep. From there, the milk was handed off to Musherrem to live by the hearth in the kitchen, fed by the heat of firewood harvested from the dense forests nearby.

Ordinarily, Musherrem would kickstart fermentation by mixing a few spoonfuls of a prior batch of yogurt into the milk. We wanted to replace that starter with insects, not only adding ants to milk but also burying a jar of milk *within* an ant colony overnight. Ants are prized in cuisines from the Amazon to Australia for their fruity and piquant formic acid, which they employ as a defence mechanism. While the acid of a few ants is hardly enough to curdle a jar of milk, they, like all organisms, carry microbes on and in their bodies. Rumours stretch throughout the Balkans of ants being used as inoculum and their hills as incubators.

In advance of our arrival, Mehmet, Musherrem, and Fatma all undertook reconnaissance missions to find a few suitable wood ant colonies around

Nearly 80 and resisting retirement, Mehmet carries a tub of ants down a mountain, after burying would-be yogurt in their colony.

THE RAINWATER YOGURT SMELLED LIKE FRESHLY WHIPPED CREAM WITH A HINT OF GREEN ALMOND.

The experimental yogurt made with the help of wood ants tasted mild and sweet, with a note of grass-fed fat.

town. Our best bet was a massive ant mound two-thirds of the way up one of the village's mountains. Before trekking to meet it, we prepared the morning milk. Musherrem heated a couple litres on the hearth until it was, as she advised in Turkish, "warm enough to bite your pinky finger." Veronica dropped a few live ants she'd gathered from the colony the day before into three milk-filled jars. Mehmet then fastened cheesecloth over the jars, securing their necks with chicken wire and placing them in an insulated bag to keep warm.

After 40 minutes of hiking, we encountered the ant colony on the edge of a pine forest. Mehmet rolled up his sleeves and plunged his bare hands into the heart of the mound. As he slowly made a hole, ants crawled up his hands and arms, spitting their fragrant formic acid at us, enraged at the intrusion. Mehmet brushed off the ants and placed the jars in the hole. The ants began to furiously investigate their colony's new furnishings, spreading their microbes all over the cheesecloth in the process. We then replaced the pine needles over the jars and made our way back down.

After lunch, we began our second experiment, nettle yogurt, which mixes mashed nettle roots with milk. While the enzymes in nettle leaves are known to work as a vegetarian coagulant in cheese-making, villagers told us it was the roots we were after. Here, microbes from the soil and plant are thought to play an important role. Mehmet plucked a medium-sized nettle from the outer edge of his garden, then muddled the root on a cutting board with the blunt end of a piece of firewood. We divided a tablespoon of the roots between a couple jars of milk, lidding and setting them on the hearth's mantle.

The final practice, rainwater yogurt, was the one most deeply connected to Hıdırellez. It involved collecting rain leading up to the holiday, from the new moon to the full moon. According to grandmotherly lore, an existing yogurt culture should be mixed with spring rainwater to refresh it—sounds superstitious, but recent studies show that rainwater actually has its own seasonal microbiome. Conceptually, this seemed like the most sure-fire experiment. The yogurt, made like any other batch in Musherrem's kitchen, might have new notes added to its choir without sacrificing its own, natural song.

The following day, we marched back up the mountain to retrieve our yogurt from the ant colony. As we peeled back the brown pine to extract our jars, it became clear that what once was milk had congealed into yogurt. We left some pieces of bread on top of the mound, feeding the colony as it was feeding us, and headed for the house, where we sampled the joint efforts of this unlikely coterie of locals: the cow, the ants, their microbes, Musherrem and Mehmet. Within the jars, loose curds, pleasant and neutral, were suspended in sweet milk, mingling with the pronounced taste of grass-fed fat.

The nettle yogurt was slightly more acidic and had the consistency of a fresh cheese. Whatever microbes had jumped from the root to the milk had definitely gone to work. Although some of the flavours were slightly off-putting, a bit bitter, David pointed out that the yogurt could make a delicious cheese if the process was a little less wild and the fermentation slightly warmer and shorter. Fatma said it was not uncommon to give new life to a less-than-perfect batch of yogurt this way, heating it to further curdle the proteins before hanging to separate it from the whey.

Finally, we tried the rainwater yogurt. After a day and a half of fermentation, it smelled like freshly whipped cream with a hint of green almond. Its taste was milkily delicious: sour, lactic, crisp, clean, and ever so slightly nutty. It was a fantastic yogurt, and while we might have been slightly biased, it absolutely tasted renewed.

On the final day of Hıdırellez, we milked the family's dairy cow in the evening, and practiced the rituals of yogurt-making one last time, before packing up our notepads and Petri dishes for the journey home. Our visit taught us that these once-forgotten recipes could only be created by the collective wisdom of our own unlikely coterie: Mehmet's knowledge of the mountains and cows, Musherrem's knowledge of yogurt, Sevgi's knowledge of Bulgarian culture, Veronica's knowledge of ants and their microbes, David's knowledge of the science of fermentation. Still, this wisdom, now brought together, will continue to live within us, wherever we find ourselves. Before leaving, Veronica and David filled a couple plastic test tubes with the rainwater yogurt as souvenirs in order to ferment their own yogurt at home. What better way to celebrate Nova Mahala than by bringing it back to life for breakfast, over and over again. **S**

Samples of rainwater yogurt collected in a polystyrene test tube to bring home for future batches of yogurt.

Joy Saunders, 99 years old, Lunenburg, Canada

In the Weeds

She brought coastal Chilean cuisine to some of New York's finest establishments—until the pandemic forced her last two restaurants to close. Now Victoria Blamey is ready for her next act.

Written by
Zaina Arafat

Illustrations by
Melinda Josie

In April of 2023,

Chilean chef Victoria Blamey travelled from her home in New York to Topocalma, a coastal town two hours outside Santiago, to spend time with wild seaweed harvesters. She'd been invited by Fundación Rompientes, an organization that works to protect the shoreline and the livelihoods of the harvesters. They'd asked if she would create a recipe that would boost harvesters' income, something they could sell at a deli or a supermarket, like a salsa, chutney, or dip. (Blamey opted for a kelp-heavy gremolata.) The Fundación had heard about Blamey's work with seaweed in Michelin-starred spots around the world, including her debut restaurant, Mena, which served what *The New Yorker*'s Hannah Goldfield described as some of the best seafood she'd ever had.

The process of harvesting kelp, a type of seaweed that grows in cool, shallow saltwater along rocky coastlines, involves carefully hand-cutting brown tubes that look like giant squid tentacles and can run 50 feet in length. Leaving the main stem intact preserves productive kelp beds—some have been there for 150 years—and ensures the seaweed will grow back and continue to nourish sea life. The kelp is matted into knots, waterlogged and heavy, which makes harvesting it extremely labour-intensive. It's mostly women managing the harvest, many of whom have done so for decades.

"Seeing the process up close, you realize that wild harvesting is a craft. It's artisanal," Blamey tells me when we meet at a café in Brooklyn on a disconcertingly hot day in early September. She was moved by the Fundación's efforts to protect the area and designate it a sanctuary. Because of this work, developers are forbidden from building resorts or hotels along the coastline, which now essentially belongs to the seaweed harvesters and makes room for future generations to continue their craft.

Chile is the largest wild seaweed harvester in the world. Chilean kelp, known as cochayuyo, is an age-old, nutrient-rich staple of the diet—archeologists found the plant's remains in 14,000-year-old hearths in Monte Verde, a paleolithic site near the country's southern tip. The briny taste and slippery texture weren't an immediate hit with a young Blamey: "No one is thinking, I'm going to feed my child wild seaweed and expect them to like it." But then she tried a stew called charquicán, which had swapped out the traditional beef for seaweed, and changed her mind. "Once I started liking it, I loved it."

Part of Blamey's ambition as a chef is to present "humble" ingredients that have been with us forever in new and original ways. At Mena, alongside those show-stopping seafood dishes like torched Boston mackerel and snow crab–spiked Andean stew, she highlighted everyday foods such as potatoes, foamed or boiled or whipped into an airy purée, and cabbage, charred and folded around winter greens. She feels beans, squash, and legumes should all get more credit on a fine-dining menu. As it happens, much of Chilean cooking relies on these simple ingredients, which she connects to nearly 300 years under Spanish colonial rule. It can give a melancholic quality to the cuisine. Still, "I think there's a lot more poetry there than in a variety of exotic ingredients," she says. "Chile doesn't have a very expensive repertoire of food, but that doesn't mean it isn't rich."

Blamey's great aunt, a towering figure in her life who first turned her onto cooking, brought an improvisational flair to food. "She had this finesse in her hands and her palate was incredible," Blamey remembers. "She was always making these wonderful dishes with no recipes whatsoever." Blamey's methods are more precise: "I approach cooking with a historian's mindset." She comes by it naturally, having first studied history at university in Santiago. A vegetarian at the time, she relished working around the constraints of her diet in a meat-centric country. "I loved the research I had to do. It meant going to quirky little shops and finding out how to make my own garam masala." Soon, she broached the subject of switching to culinary school with her mother. "I want you to find what you like," her mother replied, with one caveat: "This is the last time you switch."

After three years of school, Blamey went to the U.K. for a series of externships, which led to a job in 2004 at a two-Michelin-starred restaurant in North Devon. Two-and-a-half years later, another opportunity took her to Melbourne, then another to San Sebastián. A relationship brought her, finally, to New York. "It was almost like starting from zero here," Blamey says, "which was painful after seven years."

She worked her way up the line in the kitchens of New York establishments, before becoming executive chef in 2016 at Chumley's, an old-timey West Village bar and former artists' hangout, with framed pictures of its famous patrons decorating the walls. Blamey had done her research, coming across old photos and menus from the sixties. "You always have to read the room," she tells me. "It's not a place that came from nothing." Recognizing this, Blamey held on to the standard Chumley's fare, though she added a fatty layer of bone marrow to the burger and accompanied the steak tartare with crunchy beef tendon. She also snuck a few originals onto the handwritten menu, like chupe pot pie, a twist on a Chilean shrimp stew that she served with Dungeness crab, sweet chili peppers known as ají dulce, and Chartreuse.

Blamey left Chumley's after two years and landed at yet another iconic NYC institution, Gotham Bar and Grill, in the spring of 2019. She inherited a menu of goat-cheese ravioli and architectural tartares (she kept telling the owners, "I think you missed a generation") and a kitchen that had been run by the same male chef for nearly 35 years. Blamey's job at Gotham, as she saw it, was to infuse the place with fresh creative energy and ignore the tremendous weight of expectations. "I wanted to have a broader curriculum of vegetables," she says. "Foie gras was a big hit over there, so I included seaweed with foie gras." But she also introduced her own "repertoire of songs," highlighting traditional Chilean stews like chupe and locro. She even revamped the decor, removing tablecloths from the bar tables and replacing white plates with colourful ceramics. Her goal was to draw a clientele that better reflected the demographics of the city: younger and much more diverse.

The critical response was largely rapturous, but her tenure was short-lived: In March 2020, as COVID closed in on New York City, Gotham announced it would shutter its doors. (The last service, a raucous event where diners of all ages swigged Champagne—and milk—straight from the bottles, took place just 48 hours before then-Governor Andrew Cuomo implemented a total tri-state restaurant shutdown.) The chaos gave her time to reflect, and Blamey suspected she had work to do finding her own voice outside the constraints of fine-dining establishments. "When chefs aren't flexible enough to understand that things are changing," she says, "we become dinosaurs much faster than we want."

A year into the pandemic, Blamey served as the chef in residence at Dan Barber's Blue Hill at Stone Barns, where she had the space to explore more of her identity. "I've spent the same amount of time abroad as I have in Chile," she says. "But that is where I was born, that is where my roots are, so how do I translate that into who I am and my cooking today?" To answer that question, Blamey summoned her inner historian. She tapped a librarian to deliver weekly workshops at Stone Barns on the intersection of food and culture in South America. She flew to Santiago to collect cookbooks with recipes that reached back five centuries. Her menu showcased

In Topocalma, Chile, where wild seaweed can grow 50 feet in length, a pick-up truck is very much needed for transport.

Her great aunt Filomena brought an improvisational flair to food, but Blamey's methods are more precise: She approaches cooking with a historian's mindset.

mussels cooked in a fire pit—a traditional Chilote technique from 6,000 years ago—and seaweed stem paired with rhubarb. "The food was all so exciting that we floated out of there," food critic Ruth Reichl raved.

For Blamey, Chile's cuisine is an unfinished piece of its history. "There are so many ways that the New Americas were so much more innovative about how to cultivate food," she says, including planting by the moon's phases and avoiding monocultures that drained the soil of its nutrients. Many of these practices were overlooked or overthrown under colonialism, but after Chile gained independence in the nineteenth century, Blamey feels its Indigenous and Spanish influences were never really reconciled. "It feels part built and part left," she says. "Sometimes, I wonder how the food would've turned out if there had been more of a collaboration between the two." Straddling cultures and continents is a tricky space to be.

Mena, which opened at the start of 2022, was meant to be the expression of all the ideas brewing through Blamey's 20-year career. Finally, there were no shoes to fill. She could work with farmers she admired and keep seasonality paramount. The restaurant's name was a diminutive of her great aunt's, Filomena. The L-shaped space, designed in the style of the late Chilean-American artist Gordon Matta-Clark, was many-windowed, blue-banquetted, and intimately sized. And the dishes were phenomenal. Some paid direct homage to her heritage, like a seafood locro made of fermented squash, razor clam, oca, and snow crab. Others strayed from it, including a chou farci with scallops, mousse, and, yes, seaweed. "I wanted to show people that seaweed could be tasty even if you don't know where to use it other than in a nigiri," she says.

New York Times critic Pete Wells called Blamey "New York City's leading example of a chef who was better than the restaurants that hired her. Until Mena." There were many nights when the house was packed. So it came as a shock, just five months in, when she learned Mena would shut down. (She won't go into why, beyond saying it was a decision made by the owners, out of her control.) Though she was heartbroken, she wasn't discouraged. "I've always judged myself by how I respond in the face of such stumbling blocks," she says. "Do I let myself be defeated or do I get up and keep going?"

Since Mena's closing, Blamey hasn't hustled to run another restaurant. Instead, she's travelled—kelp-harvesting in Topocalma in the spring; a month in Europe in the summer—and bounced between a residency in Dallas and a pop-up in Abu Dhabi. "I know that whenever a new job comes along, it means I'll need to shut down 50 percent of my life," she says. "It feels like it makes sense, but is it really sustainable?" She's been thinking more about who she is outside of the kitchen—what she wants when it comes to family, a partner, kids—and who she might now be inside it, too. "Initially, I was insecure that, as a woman, I had to act tough, I couldn't cry if I got burned, I had to go out drinking," she says. She's learning to remove gender from the equation. "I no longer feel like I'm supposed to behave like a man to succeed."

There are plenty of laurels to rest on already: Blamey has challenged the stuffy constraints of fine dining and diversified the lexicon of Chilean food, all while championing sustainable sourcing and harvesting. But for her next project—and there will be a next project; she inked a contract on the last day we spoke, though won't divulge details—expect to find Blamey solidly in the driver's seat. The loss of Mena taught her that she can't leave the restaurant's business to somebody else. "I have to take things into my own hands," she says emphatically. "I've learned that if something has my name on it, I better be involved in every single way." **S**

At Mena, Blamey loaded up her much-lauded seafood locro with snow crab, razor clam, and fermented squash.

Written by
Rebecca Gao

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Jackie Dives

CAN WE BUILD A BETTER CARROT?

SCIENTISTS ARE ON THE HUNT FOR A TASTY, CRUNCHY, HYPERLOCAL ROOT THAT MIGHT EVEN WEATHER THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In the beginning, carrots were purple. (Well, some of the carrots were yellow, too.) Their cultivation started in the tenth century, in what's now Afghanistan and Iran, and moved east over the next 600 years. As the carrots spread, they changed: In Japan, the red Kintoki sprouted up. In the Netherlands, orange carrots first appeared—although not, as the Dutch have claimed, bred in tribute to William of Orange, but more likely repurposed by the royal family as a colour-coordinated emblem.

Back then, an informal seed system existed: A farmer known for his bitter but beautiful purple carrots might trade with another farmer for something sweeter, while travellers brought home seeds from faraway places that would take on new traits to adapt to new climates. Carrot diversity flourished, producing unique flavours, colours, and hardiness that worked well for local environment and tastes.

Then Big Seed stepped in.

For their custom carrot, the CANOVI Orange, UBC researchers wanted something sweet, dark orange, and relatively unifom, with a small tapered end. (Nailed it.)

About 150 years ago, industrial farming ramped up as a number of technological advances (fertilizers! pesticides! machinery!) made agriculture terrifically easy and efficient. Transforming farms into factories meant more food could be produced at unprecedented speeds, but it also spelled the end of widespread seed distribution. As consumers became accustomed to fresh veggies available year-round, farmers increasingly leaned on hybrid seeds—varieties that had been cross-bred to guarantee high yield, good taste, and a uniform look. The Bolero carrot, for example, is a hybrid created by French seed company Vilmorin in 1989, and it's what most of us think of when we think *carrot*. The rise of hybrids effectively ended the practice of preserving one year's seeds for the next. Instead, farmers buy them directly from the handful of massive, consolidated companies, like Monsanto, that hold the world's seed stock hostage.

As a result, our modern seeds and seed distribution systems are unsustainable—making our food systems less resilient, secure, and eco-friendly. According to Loren Rieseberg, a botanist at the University of British Columbia who studies population genomics and plant adaptation, conventional agriculture is the "single biggest threat to biodiversity." That's because industrial farming with hybrid seeds requires all sorts of chemical boosts to ensure a crop succeeds in a wide range of locations. These additives alter the surrounding environment, which can have devastating consequences for wild plants and animals. Plus, everyone is growing the same hybrids, squashing diversity. Less diverse farms cause less secure food systems. Unforeseen world events (whether a pandemic, or an unexpectedly wet season, or a ship lodged in the Suez Canal) can hamper the global supply chain, raising prices—if the food even makes it to its final destination. The high cost of producing organic fruits and veggies, which have become more of a specialty crop, also means fewer farmers are incentivized to grow them and fewer consumers able to buy them. Most concerning of all: As environments transform and weather patterns become harder to predict, it's extremely likely that the hybrids of today won't be able to withstand the increased volatility of the growing seasons of tomorrow.

That's where Canadian Organic Vegetable Improvement (CANOVI) comes in. A partnership between the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, CANOVI wants to make seed networks small again. By collaborating on breeding experiments with farmers, and giving them the skills to preserve organic seeds, CANOVI hopes

IT'S EXTREMELY LIKELY THE HYBRID CARROTS OF TODAY WON'T WITHSTAND THE VOLATILE GROWING SEASONS OF TOMORROW.

Rust flies are a growing frustration in the Pacific Northwest, so carrots get covered in mesh to keep those suckers out.

At UBC's organic Fall Fair in September 2023, taste testers tried a variety of CANOVI roots. Meet the RG220: a unique and delicious red carrot that's so far proven a pain to grow.

Real ones know: Nothing streamlines carrot-tasting prep like a mandoline.

to create new varieties, particularly new carrots, that will thrive, taste good, and add much-needed diversity to Canada's food system.

CANOVI started in 2018 as the brainchild of the Bauta Family Initiative, an organization that advocates for organic seed systems and works to ensure Canadian farmers have access to quality seeds. To meet the needs of their large nationwide farmer network, Bauta identifies which organic varieties can be scaled up and also develops all-new varieties. "That development requires technical support," says Bauta director Aabir Dey, and for it, they turn to UBC.

UBC runs experiments, lends field and greenhouse space, and connects with academics who can provide the genomic and scientific knowledge behind vegetable breeding. At the University of Toronto, under the direction of environmental scientist Marney Isaac, scholars perform the ecology research that informs CANOVI's on-the-ground work. Aside from carrots, CANOVI is also in the midst of trialling novel breeds of produce like lettuce and bell peppers.

Easier said than done. Canada is a huge country with diverse ecosystems—a carrot that thrives in the temperate climate of southern B.C. won't do as well in northern Ontario. To solve for these microclimates when creating a new suite of seeds, CANOVI could try the Big Seed approach: try to find varieties that grow well enough in a bunch of locations, diversity be damned. Instead, they've gone hyperlocal: identifying, testing, and even designing varieties that do exceptionally well in a specific set of circumstances, like moisture levels, heat, or length of growing season.

That process starts with some goal-setting. "For our carrot breeding project, we wanted a sweet, dark-orange carrot that's relatively uniform, with a small tapered end, and great early vigour to compete with weeds," says Solveig Hanson, a crop breeding scientist at Cornell University who was one of CANOVI's project leads at UBC. Then it's on to selecting the parent seeds, and for that, the UBC researchers chose four carrot lines created at the University of Wisconsin. (It typically takes at least two years of breeding to know if you've selected a dud, but CANOVI has been lucky with their choices.)

Next up: cross-breeding those parent seeds. CANOVI scientists use a method called open pollination, allowing insects and the wind to spread the pollen between plants in the field or a greenhouse, which helps them adapt, over generations, to their environments, like the carrots that hitched a ride with ancient travellers. Hanson says that for their trials, they've created a four-way cross between parents that have great flavour, dark colour, and immense yield. They pick

IN A HEAD-TO-HEAD BATTLE WITH THE HYBRIDS, CANOVI'S HOMEGROWN CARROTS HAVE FINALLY COME OUT ON TOP.

the progeny that best reflect their initial goals, then cross-breed those winners with each other, continuing to do so for a few generations. Once the goals have been hit and the carrots grown are more or less identical, it's time to pop the champagne: This variety is ready to be released into the world.

So what makes a tasty carrot? According to Rieseberg, a self-proclaimed carrot-lover, they should be "sweet, but not have that medicine-y terpenoid taste. You want them to be crisp, not woody. Or soggy. There's nothing worse than a soggy carrot."

That's the flavour that Big Seed's carrot hybrids have nailed, and it's what new carrots need to measure themselves against. "Bolero kicks ass. It's an amazing carrot in terms of yield and flavour," says David Catzel, who runs the B.C. seed security system for FarmFolksCityFolk, another CANOVI collaborator, and helps connect small-scale growers like himself to the CANOVI project. But, he adds, "Bolero is grown by one company in France. If or when they decide not to grow it anymore, it'll go extinct." Creating carrots that can compete with Bolero on taste—so consumers want them and farmers are incentivized to grow them—is as much of a goal for CANOVI as developing uniquely adapted varieties.

Before each year's trial, CANOVI surveys farmers on what sorts of characteristics (everything from colour, pest resilience, and overall appearance) they want the carrots to have. Then, CANOVI sends participating growers seeds from about five varieties every season to compare—usually a couple hybrids, a few organic open-pollinated ones, and the "CANOVI Orange" carrot, which has been bred and trialled since the start of the project. CANOVI asks farmers to rate each variety on traits like vigour, yield, germination, marketability, and, crucially, flavour, on a scale of 1 (the emphatic "would not eat again") to 5 (a rhapsodic "would seek it out and rave about it!"). At the end of the season, farmers can sell anything they've grown and CANOVI uses their data to inform next year's trial.

Despite all that ranking, Hanson says that farmers and consumers generally "just want a sweet root to crunch on." Sure, in recent snack-ranking showdowns, Bolero has dominated the field, notching a solid 4.0 ("would eat again happily") in the farmer evaluations from 2022. The CANOVI Orange, grown from seeds created at UBC, clocked in that same year at a respectable 3.6. But CANOVI's varieties are doing better and better, and at a tasting held at UBC's organic Fall Fair in September 2023, they all scored exceptionally well, with an average rating above 4—including for the CANOVI Orange. In a head-to-head battle with the kick-ass hybrids, these homegrown organic seeds have finally come out on top.

A two-year-old samples CANOVI's newest line, the Y1246, a sweet and crisp yellow carrot with a long, classic shape and a little green on its shoulder.

As climate change accelerates, so does the need for resilient crops. Rising temperatures introduce all manner of challenges, including bolting—when a veggie prematurely turns to seed and becomes inedible; it comes up often in CANOVI results—as well as turbo-charged pests. B.C.-based growers have been desperate for carrots that are resilient to the pesky rust fly, which is proving increasingly common across the Pacific Northwest.

More diverse crops mean more buffer against catastrophe as growing conditions change. In 2022, CANOVI sent out seeds for Dragon, an organic open-pollinated carrot with an orange interior and a purple exterior. When it was harvested at the UBC farm that fall, it was "the sweetest, most succulent thing," Hanson says. But—twist!—the Dragon carrots grown at U of T were denser and had bitter notes, due in part to Toronto's hotter conditions. That's no great sweat when there are a range of carrots: Even if one (or a few) turn into tasteless, ineffective growers, the overall stock of carrots won't suffer too much when others still manage to thrive.

With climate change in mind, CANOVI's next challenge is to sequence a plant's genome and find out how certain genes fare around the world. (CANOVI hasn't started this work yet, but other researchers have been experimenting with these methods.) Scientists can analyze wild carrots in, for example, hot and dry climates and zero in on their genetic similarities. Then, Rieseberg says, they'll try to infuse their breeding carrots with those precise genes. In theory, he says, and after several generations, "we'd be able to breed more drought-tolerant or heat-tolerant carrots."

It's a more precise and scientific take on the techniques used centuries ago by farmers, who would hand-transfer pollen to breed in desirable traits. It's also a more direct version of the open pollination that CANOVI's growers rely on every season. That knowledge has largely vanished thanks to Big Seed's easy, efficient hybrids, but CANOVI's hope is to preserve it for the next generation of farmers.

"We have a seed diversity crisis in Canada," Aabir Dey says. "Right now, there aren't paths to develop diversity that'll be useful for everyone in the future." But CANOVI's work shows a way forward. Having farmers lead that work is key: They're the ones on the changing ground, who understand exactly what current crops need in order to be resilient. By listening to their feedback, and teaching them how to breed customized varieties and save their seeds for year-to-year growth, CANOVI not only gives farmers new types of carrots to bring to market but also revives those long-lost skills. It's a homegrown movement that's digging up a delicious alternative to Big Seed. **S**

Written by
Katie Underwood

Illustration by
Luis Mazón

The Revivalist

Indigenous chef Nornie Bero keeps raising the profile of the foods that raised her

No one loves a wattle seed quite like Nornie Bero. If you've not yet been introduced to the hazelnutty grain—or to pepperberry, or bush tomatoes—well, that's Bero's job. A two-decade veteran of the hospitality industry, Bero, who grew up on Mer Island on Australia's Torres Strait, opened the tuck shop–and-catering combo Mabu Mabu in 2019. There, in Melbourne's Yarraville suburb, she sells sauces, spices, jams, and teas alongside Mabu Mabu's cookbook, with 70-plus recipes for Indigenous ingredients. An hour away, in Federation Square, Big Esso—"the biggest thank you," in Bero's native dialect of Meriam Mir—serves breads, croquettes, tartares, and cocktails. There's also plenty of seafood, which, not all that long ago, she speared herself in Mer's cerulean reefs. Bero has spent the past five years crafting a business out of the delicacies of her childhood; her challenge now is teaching the rest of us to enjoy them sustainably.

Some of your earliest memories involve hunting and pickling octopus. How do you remember that time now?
My dad gave me my first spear when I was about nine. Early in the morning, I would take a kerosene lamp and go looking for octopi, who were ready to bake on the rocks when the sun came out. I'd catch and pickle them, then eat them the day after. I call it a breakfast of champions. My dad and I belonged to the Church of England—he was a minister—and I used to skip confirmation classes to pick mangoes and tamarinds off the trees. I'd set up all my bottles of pickling solution and be like, "We're in business!"

Where was this pickling happening?
I just set them up at the side of the church. I was like, *Once you know the Lord's Prayer, why do you need to go to class anymore?* During that same era, I also used to collect lizard eggs. I was like, *I want to be the Lizard Queen!* I had an imagination, I guess.

I grew up quite poor, so I was always hunting and gathering things to eat. Catching food for your family is a part of life on the Torres Strait. We make our own ceviche with cream from coconuts, which are the lifeblood of the island. We pickle fish as a snack to eat at the beach or on the boat. Pickling was so natural to me that I later started a condiment business. I have my solutions tattooed on my arm. It'll always be a part of who I am.

Damper bread went from being a survival food of your childhood to keeping your restaurant afloat during COVID, right?
Living on Mer Island, we had to have generators to power our houses. When I was just able to see over the stove, I'd wake up to these amazing orange pumpkin buns and damper my dad had made, just sitting there, proofing. He'd wrap them in banana leaves and I'd deliver them to locals. Later, he got entrepreneurial, put a bamboo wall down the middle of our living room, and made a tuck shop. That's how he got money to run the generator.

When COVID hit, I'd just opened Mabu Mabu. I was like, *What am I going to do to keep the lights on?* So I turned my café into a tuck shop. We also sent out a newsletter to customers and local organizations and said, "Hey, do you want to do a damper workshop?" We had a little fun with the sell: "Why waste your money on sourdough?" We decided to make it really affordable. I grew up with nothing, so I wanted everybody to be able to come to me and get native foods. I did six or seven of those classes a day. I still do them.

You've done a lot of work to elevate Indigenous cuisine, not just in Australia, but globally. How have you seen these ingredients showing up on plates and menus at higher-end establishments?
High-end places always put a big, tokenistic price on dishes that don't chase an ingredient's real flavour. It's great to use native ingredients, but make sure you can taste them. We often talk about food by mileage; we should be saying, "Let's source things sustainably." Restaurants dictate which trends come in and out, and we have a responsibility to the earth.

Do you see chefs who are not Indigenous dusting certain native ingredients on top of their dishes purely for clout?
You have no idea how many people call me up and say, "Hey, we're thinking about doing natives," and I'm like, "Go research if you really want to honour the ingredient." Talk to the local people who understand it. It's like when everyone decided quinoa was fantastic—don't overdo it.

How do you balance wanting everyone to realize the amazingness of Australia's traditional foods and protecting those foods from being co-opted?
Those conversations are happening right now. What you have to realize is that Indigenous people only own 1 percent of Australia's billion-dollar native-food industry. So I talk a lot about generational wealth—specifically, how we can cultivate the foods that people are enjoying while sustaining the communities that produce them. If you visit those communities, they will tell you straight: "This is all you get. There's no more." If they can only give you 4 kilos of produce, enjoy those 4 kilos.

Indigenous cuisine isn't a monolith. Are there any ingredients you didn't grow up with that really intrigue you?
Quandongs. They're like a wild peach, but they cook down like rhubarb. Traditionally, they're thought of as maroon, but up in far-north Queensland, they're fluorescent blue. How many blue foods do you see out there? Every time they're in season, I'm like, *I want to stare at you for a while.* When I get kids to taste them, they're like "Yuck!" I didn't say they were going to taste *good*.

One of your missions is to put native ingredients in the hands of everyday people. Can you recommend a few gateway foods?
In the vegetable world, there's one that's like our own Australian spinach. It's called Warrigal greens, and it grows like wildfire. You can use it in sauces and pasta and it doesn't wilt like baby spinach. It has a good oomph to it. When it comes to spices, everyone should have pepperberry, saltbush, and wattle seeds—my top three. They're so versatile. Wattle sits on the savoury *and* sweet sides. You can make bread and chocolate with it, and when you grind it into a powder, it looks like coffee. I'm allergic to caffeine—I'm naturally pepped—so it's a good alternative. At Big Esso, we use pepperberry. It has a purple tinge to it, and a Szechuan-pepper sort of heat that lingers a bit. Then there's saltbush: The variety we see a lot is "old man's saltbush," which I think is a weird name. I call it "the Indigenous oregano" instead. You can eat it as chips.

How does it feel to have your success rooted in who you are, when, for so long, your culture was erased?
When I first opened my café, a woman came in and said, "I didn't know Indigenous people had cuisine!" I was like, "Well, we gotta eat!" It's always going to be an education. [Before Mabu Mabu], we'd never had a Torres Strait Islander restaurant before in the whole of Australia. Now, people are going to know that we do have cuisine, and it's been around for a very long time. How we take on that representation is up to each of us. At the end of the day, I want to put my part of Australia on the map: our dances, our songs, our language. I want to incorporate it all into the restaurant. My cousins will sometimes ring me up after seeing our dishes and go, "Uh, I don't remember it looking that good." I had to fancy it up a bit.

An old classic, reloaded.
How many times do we learn Italian because of food? I'm putting Meriam Mir on the map through food. I have kids who come into the restaurant and go, "Mabu mabu, mom!" They know it means "help yourself." **$**

Eduard "The Oldest Boy Scout in Prague" Marek
102 years old
Prague, Czech Republic

Pickling brine, aromatics, extra-firm bean curd: Taiwanese chef and fermenter Sean Chen has all the building blocks of a stellar stinky tofu.

“When chefs aren’t flexible enough to understand things are changing, we become dinosaurs much faster than we want.”

-Victoria Blamey

Presenza

2012