

THE OCCASIONAL VEGETARIAN

100 Delicious Dishes That Put Vegetables at the Center of the Plate



ELAINE LOUIE

Writer, "The Temporary Vegetarian," *The New York Times*

FOREWORD BY PETE WELLS, DINING EDITOR

Elaine Louie

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Dedication

For Anna

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Foreword

by Pete Wells Dining Editor, The New York Times

Vegetarians were once an orthodox group, but in recent years their tribe has become rife with heresies and schisms. Most controversial are the occasional vegetarians, and there are many of them nowadays. Some are convinced that they will live longer if they eat somewhat less meat. Others are reformed carnivores who claim to be trying to give up meat altogether, but still backslide from time to time. Often it is the aroma of frying bacon that leads them astray from the path of righteousness. Then there are the mixed marriages: a devotee of charcuterie who marries a vegan. At home he is chaste; when he is away from his wife and out on the road, lock up your rillettes.

You can condemn these pilgrims adrift in the land of the meatless, or you can forgive them. Either way, you might as well put something on the stove, because they're going to be hungry again come dinnertime. No matter what kind of eater you are, you ought to get a thrill when vegetables are on the table. Elaine Louie is no vegetarian, but she swoons when she comes across a really delicious meatless recipe. Sometimes she swoons so much that she starts to talk about how good the dish would taste with a little ham thrown in. But like most of us, she tries to keep the faith. When food tastes great after all, everybody's a believer.

Introduction

The *Occasional Vegetarian* is an ode to vegetables, to their beauty, their versatility, and their ability not just to delight us, but also to fill and satisfy us. Other writers, especially Michael Pollan, have written about the dilemmas of eating meat or not. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of books that explore the benefits of vegetarianism.

This book is a celebration of vegetarian dishes, of the seasons, and of the Union Square Greenmarket in Manhattan. The dishes come from more than ninety chefs, cookbook authors, and talented home cooks, and all of the recipes are designed for the home cook.

Nearly all of the chefs and cooks buy much of their produce from local purveyors, many of whom are at the Greenmarket. There, throughout the year, the vegetables (and fruits) beckon. In spring, there are asparagus, big, fat, and fleshy, and some that are pencil thin. In July, the corn begins to show up, sweet, tender, and best cooked in no more than three minutes. One of the most popular farmers said, “Three minutes? I cook it in two.” Sometimes, he said, he just eats it raw. As people pick their corn, they usually fall into three different camps: eaters of white, yellow, or bicolor corn. I just ask which is the sweetest that day, and whatever the farmer answers, I buy.

Come August, the tomatoes, bright red ones straight from the fields of New Jersey, and an array of heirloom species make their debut. Each year, the variety of heirloom tomatoes seems to increase: pink ones, green ones, purple ones, orange ones. Windfall Farms sells the tiny, dime-sized, intensely sweet Matt’s Wild Cherry on the vines. Other farms have the deeply flavored, tender, red Brandywine, which should be eaten soon after bringing it home or its skin begins to split.

In the fall, the squashes arrive, the perennially popular curvy, hourglass-figured butternut, whose color gives new meaning to the word *beige*, and the yellow delicata, striped in green. Autumn is also the time of mushrooms, the foraged kind including chanterelles and hen of the woods, and the cultivated ones like cremini, shiitake, and the great ruffly oysters. Potatoes abound: fingerling, Yukons, russets, and the aptly named purple Peruvians, whose skin and flesh are indeed purple. There are brussels sprouts on the stem, and cabbages ranging from pale green to dark green to purple. There are mounds of apples as well. The Honeycrisp, which does not lose its shape and turn into applesauce when cooked, makes its appearance in two vegetable dishes in this book: nestled alongside brussels sprouts in Carmen Quagliata’s recipe for Roasted Brussels Sprouts, Butternut Squash, and Apple with Candied Walnuts or tucked beneath cabbage in Didier Elena’s recipe for Fall Vegetable Cookpot. Braised Red and Green Cabbage.

In this book, vegetables are whipped into flans, baked into tortes, and tucked into crusts. They can fill spring rolls, taco shells, and soft tortillas. They can be crunchy or meltingly soft.

From twenty-five cuisines around the world, ranging from China to India, Mexico to Brazil, Egypt to Lebanon, and throughout the United States, these recipes have as their commonality savory flavors and a gustatory memory. You remember the dishes, and want to eat some of them again and again.

Some of the dishes are startlingly simple. Lois Freedman, the president of Jean-Georges Management and formerly a cook working with Jean-Georges Vongerichten at the four-star Lafayette, makes a corn pudding that is no more than grating fresh corn into a cast-iron pan, putting it in the oven, and after it thickens and forms a pale golden crust, taking it out of the oven and seasoning with a little salt, pepper, butter, and a squeeze of lime juice. That's it. It is incredibly sweet and fresh.

Eli Zabar, the restaurateur, shares his egg salad recipe, and it, too, has a purity of flavor. He discovered in 1975 that if he halved the amount of egg whites, he could make an egg salad that was rich, creamy, and, he said, "In the good sense of the word, eggy."

Daniel Humm, the executive chef of the four-star Eleven Madison Park, offers grilled circles of watermelon topped by cylinders of red, green, yellow, and orange tomatoes and drizzled with aged, thick, sweet balsamic vinegar.

Other recipes are more complex, like the braised cabbage balls from Didier Elena, the executive chef of Adour Alain Ducasse. The slivered cabbage has to be simmered. Leaves for wrapping have to be blanched. Then the balls are rolled and popped into the oven. The upside of the dish? The braising can be done the day before. The rolling and final cooking can be done the day of, and the presentation is beautiful: Each person gets two little balls, one red, one green, flavored by juniper berries, fleur de sel, pepper, lime zest, and a scant bit of broth. They are tender and aromatic.

Some of these dishes are vegan. Ayinde Howell, a thirty-four-year-old cook who was born to vegan restaurateurs in Tacoma, Washington, proves that through the alchemy of heat, tofu can be fried to look like browned bits of meat, which becomes the filling of a terrific enchilada, enlivened by onion, garlic, cumin, chile, sweet red bell peppers, and tomatoes.

Many of the recipes were inspired by the chef's mother's or grandmother's home cooking. One of John Fraser's favorite dishes is a homey Greek dish of green beans braised with tomatoes. He eats it at home, but won't serve it at his restaurant, Dovetail.

"It's ugly," he explained when I asked him why. Braised green beans are not bright, sparkling green. They turn dull and lose their vividness, shading into a dark olive. But what they lose in luster, they gain in flavor.

Many of the dishes are seasonal. All of them, however, are relatively inexpensive. And some—especially cabbage and potatoes—are the food that often fed the poor, whether in China or in Africa. But the food of the poor does not necessarily taste poor.

Marcus Samuelsson's Ethiopian dish of warmed cabbage and beans in spiced butter is so tasty, so subtly and brilliantly spiced, that after I first ate it with him and his wife, Maya, for breakfast, I ate it the next day with rice, again for breakfast. Then on the following day, I ate it yet again.

In the year and a half of writing this book, I became much more of a temporary vegetarian than I had been. Previously, I, like many of us, probably called myself a temporary vegetarian on the days I ate only a salad for lunch or a plate of pesto for dinner. At the same time, I was primarily a happy carnivore who ate meat once a day, if only a ham and cheese croissant. Now I'm a very satisfied temporary vegetarian who can skip meat for an entire day and often part of the following day.

By the end of the second day, however, I may want to eat a bowl of wonton or a half dozen steamed juicy buns, filled with minced pork. But I no longer crave a steak, rarely even a hamburger. I can go by on about two ounces of meat a day. As I was testing the recipes, I gave vegetarian dinner parties and loved them.

Why have I become much more of a temporary vegetarian?

Because I discovered as I cooked and ate my way through these recipes, I could be replete on a vegetarian diet, with all my taste buds and even the urge to chomp—to bite into something firm—

deeply satisfied.

The ninety people who contributed recipes are not vegetarians, except for the aforementioned veg chef. But all of the cooks understand robust flavors and the need for many textures—in other words something crunchy or chewy. When a vegetarian dish lacks something crisp, these cooks add it. It takes the form of chopped nuts; raw, julienned vegetables; or a sprinkle of toasted black mustard seeds or toasted sesame seeds. There are croutons made of tofu for one dish, and a lacy cracker made of melted Argentine Reggianito cheese for another.

Of the chefs who contributed recipes, most of them said that ten years ago, perhaps 1 percent of the customers were vegetarian. Now, they suspect that about 5 to 7 percent are vegetarian. To make the vegetarians happy, the chefs offer a vegetarian entrée or at least make vegetarian appetizers and side dishes so tasty that you can build a meal from them. Steamed green beans and steamed asparagus are the side dishes of the past.

The recipes in this book are zesty and satisfying.

These recipes fill us up, much like meat, especially when served with rice or bread. I am Chinese, so Ma Po Tofu over rice is a perfect breakfast. It is silky, spicy, and has tiny bits of preserved Sichuan vegetable for crunch.

I read Michael Pollan's book *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. It is a chilling book when it focuses on industrially raised animals. Pigs have their tails chopped off, so each, in its confined space, will gnaw the tail off the pig in front of it. Cows wallow around lagoons of manure. Such horrors have changed my mind, and the minds of many others, about how we want to cook and eat.

Now, when I am looking for the occasional chicken to roast for Thanksgiving, or for a sausage, I want the meat to come from a happy, free-ranging chicken or pig. However, finding that animal requires some serious shopping. And although there is excellent meat to be had at the Union Square Greenmarket, I am most enchanted by the vegetables, the fruit, and the flowers.

I live two blocks from the Greenmarket, and shop there at least once, if not twice, a week. I am seduced by the vegetables, and during the summer, when tomatoes are at their most fulsome, I keep a bowl of tomatoes on the kitchen counter with such boring regularity that a friend of my daughter once asked in early October, "Are those the same five tomatoes your mother has kept since August?"

I search for peaches, guided by tips from people like Nick Fox, the deputy editor of the Dining Section at the *New York Times*. "Peaches?" he said one Saturday morning at the Greenmarket when we bumped into each other. "Go over to Ted Blew's on the north side. Look for the peaches with the bees buzzing around." Those peaches were the sweetest. The bees knew.

Eating vegetarian dishes is a newer delight for me, and an older one for many others.

From A to Z, then, the vegetables.

Asparagus signifies spring to most chefs, and the two recipes that feature it call for the large, fleshy variety. The vignarola, asparagus and artichokes in white wine, is a delicate dish, a sampling of the season's first vegetables. The bubbling asparagus gratin topped with a salad of endive and radicchio combines hot with cold, richness with tartness.

B includes beans, green ones and white ones, fresh ones and dried ones. There are braised green beans from both India and Greece. Julie Sahni starts with a sauté of onions, garlic, cumin, coriander, paprika, and chile flakes, then adds the beans and coconut milk. John Fraser makes his Greek bean soup. The beans in both dishes turn out dully colored and vividly flavored. Looks aren't everything.

In Europe, white beans, cooked until they are almost creamy, partner merrily with bitter greens. Gabriel Kreuther makes a soup of cranberry beans and kale that he ate growing up in Alsace. Jonnata Leiva is Portuguese on his mother's side, and he makes a stew of white beans and radicchio.

Anita Lo creates a broccoli panzanella, where she roasts the broccoli first to bring out its sweetness and then adds a walnut sauce and plump croutons. Jonathan Benno introduces one of his current favorite vegetables: Broccoli Spigarello, a peppery yet just faintly sweet broccoli sold at the Greenmarket. For Tien Ho's hearty, zesty three-bean salad, he tops it with big, golden crisp croutons made from deep-fried tofu, in a moment of clever fusion cooking.

C is partly for cabbage and cauliflower, homely vegetables that some chefs believe are underused because they are considered poor people's food. That neglect is being amended in this book. Kurt Gutenbrunner makes a red cabbage salad in five minutes, enlivens it with walnut oil and lingonberry preserves, and suggests how to make it a complete meal: Add a sour brown bread like rye, and a cheese such as a Cheddar or a soft blue.

When cooked, cabbage can become very sweet and tender. Marcus Samuelsson and Didier Elnerly both use napa cabbage for their two dishes, because of its tenderness. Cabbage shows up in a multitude of cuisines, from Korea's kimchi pancakes to Floyd Cardoz's Indian Braised Cabbage to Hungary's cabbage strudel.

Michael Anthony's roasted Cauliflower with Almonds, Capers, and Raisins is one part of his arsenal of culinary tools that he used to court his wife, who, prior to this dish, did not like cauliflower. The cauliflower is cut thick, so that it is toothsome. Sprinkled with sliced almonds, capers, and raisins, it has crispy, sour, and sweet elements. It is finished off with a topping of toasted bread crumbs. In cooking vegetarian dishes, chefs learn that to add texture to vegetables, toasted bread crumbs and toasted nuts are excellent garnishes. Adam Weisell makes *Cauliflower Sformato*, a time-consuming but so savory, delicate cauliflower flan. Although it takes two hours to make, it keeps in the refrigerator for three days.

Swiss chard, made into an Italian torta, and studded with raisins, olives, and cherry tomatoes, is a rich, festive dish that makes a great centerpiece. On the other hand, Heather Carlucci-Rodriguez's *Chana Punjabi*, Indian chickpea stew, is comfort food. It is gently spicy, and, when served over rice, is a soothing, complete meal. So, too, Thai Green Curry Vegetables, made with eggplant, red bell pepper, zucchini, sweet potatoes, and green beans, in the familiar sauce of green curry paste and coconut milk, is a panoply of vegetables, each distinct, but bound by a winning sauce.

The joy of fresh, sweet corn is celebrated in a light, American corn chowder, in an Indonesian dish of corn fritters, and in Lois Freedman's delicious Corn Pudding, a recipe she created in 1994.

E is for eggs and endive. Eli Zabar's minimalist and rich Egg Salad Sandwich is here, as is Joby Fraser's Greek Egg Lemon Soup, bolstered by orzo. There is a Chinese version of steamed eggs, a dish that the Japanese also do with great finesse. The secret: Add cool broth to the beaten eggs and allow the froth of the beaten eggs to subside before steaming them, so that the surface is glassy smooth.

Endive can be eaten raw in a salad, or cooked until caramelized and yielding. Roland Caracosta makes a rich and beautiful Endive Cheese Tart inspired by a French woman he met on a train. Jordan Frosolone looked to Italy for his Braised Endives with Blood Oranges, Sicilian Pistachios, and Ricotta Salata.

G has a single, summery entry, a white grape gazpacho that Anthony Sasso brought back from Palafolls, in Catalonia, Spain.

H stands for the herbs that Persians love. In Iran, the people often have a platter of fresh herbs—mint, basil, dill, parsley—at the table to accompany the other dishes. In this dish, the greens—parsley

cilantro, scallions, lettuce—go into the frittata, and are mixed with ruby red barberries and crunchy chopped walnuts.

L includes leeks as a topping for a Provençal tart, and lentils in a savory, soothing soup from Kalustyan's, the famous spice shop in Manhattan's Little India.

M zeroes in on the mushroom, the vegetarian's faux meat. When chefs work with mushrooms, they almost always choose a trio of them, for the variety of flavors and textures. From China, they are braised until glistening and savory, and served on top of baby bok choy. Lettuce wraps are also stuffed with minced mushrooms, celery, carrots, scallions, tofu, and toasted pine nuts. Mushrooms and daikon make a delicate soup, while mushrooms and leeks make a comforting pot pie. Jean-Georges Vongerichten shares his Fragrant Mushroom Spring Rolls, Wrapped in Lettuce Cups, a recipe inspired by a food hawker in Singapore. There are also Mexican Mushroom Quesadillas and Roasted Mushrooms with Goat Cheese and Grits.

N is the catchall section for noodle and pasta dishes, whose origins are worldwide: Italy, China, America, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam. Most of the noodle dishes are served hot, like Mushroom and Chive Panfried Noodles, Pad Thai, or Orzotto with Zucchini and Pesto. Some, however, are served cold, like noodles with peanut sauce, and Michael Huynh's Vietnamese Noodle Salad.

O reveals the secret ingredient of John Schenk's vegetarian French onion soup. Instead of using beef stock, he adds miso.

P opens with a winsome miniature Brazilian tartlet filled with hearts of palm, segues to a sweet potato crostini, and on to roasted pepper tacos. But it is mostly devoted to the ever adaptable, mutable potato. The potato lends itself to a hotcake topped with a salad, or thinly sliced and mixed with Swiss chard for a rich, hearty gratin. From Lebanon comes *Batata Harra*, spicy, twice-fried potato cubes, which are then drizzled with a perky green sauce of cilantro, parsley, garlic, olive oil, and Aleppo pepper. Spain has the famous, ubiquitous tortilla, which is thinly sliced potato poached in a king's ransom of olive oil, drained, and then mixed with beaten eggs and cooked again in olive oil. It is served piping hot, and with each bite, you taste the subtle, fruity flavor of the olive oil. The Spanish eat it hot and straight out of the refrigerator, ice cold with a dollop of mayonnaise, with equal joy.

R is devoted to rice, including an austere but appealing Japanese fifteen-grain rice pot topped with mushrooms, julienned carrots, edamame, and toasted sesame seeds. Korea is the home of *Bibimbab*, the rice casserole topped with zucchini, mushrooms, bean sprouts, spinach, radish, and carrot. What gives *bibimbab* its wonderful mix of textures and flavors is that each vegetable is blanched or sautéed and seasoned separately. From India comes the classic Lemon Rice with an extravagant toss of roasted peanuts. The *Arroz de Verduras*, or Vegetable Rice, from Portugal, is rice cooked in a sofrito—garlic, onions, sweet paprika, tomato, and saffron. Then George Mendes adds corn, edamame, peas, and olives, and bakes it until the top is golden and the bottom is crusty.

S leads to another Persian or Iranian dish, soybeans cooked with garlic and dill. In Tehran, Maryam Zomorodi made it with fresh fava beans. Since I am allergic to the work involved with favas, I substituted edamame instead. I tried frozen favas; they turned into mush. However, the edamame works. The Indian classic, spinach saag, becomes even tastier when topped with fried potato balls.

T is partly for tofu, which in Tyler Kord's hands is not boring. In his General Tso's Tofu Sub, the tofu is dipped in panko, fried until golden, and layered with edamame puree, pickled cucumbers, and a piquant sauce. Susur Lee makes a perfect rendition of the classic Ma Po Tofu, silken tofu made spicy.

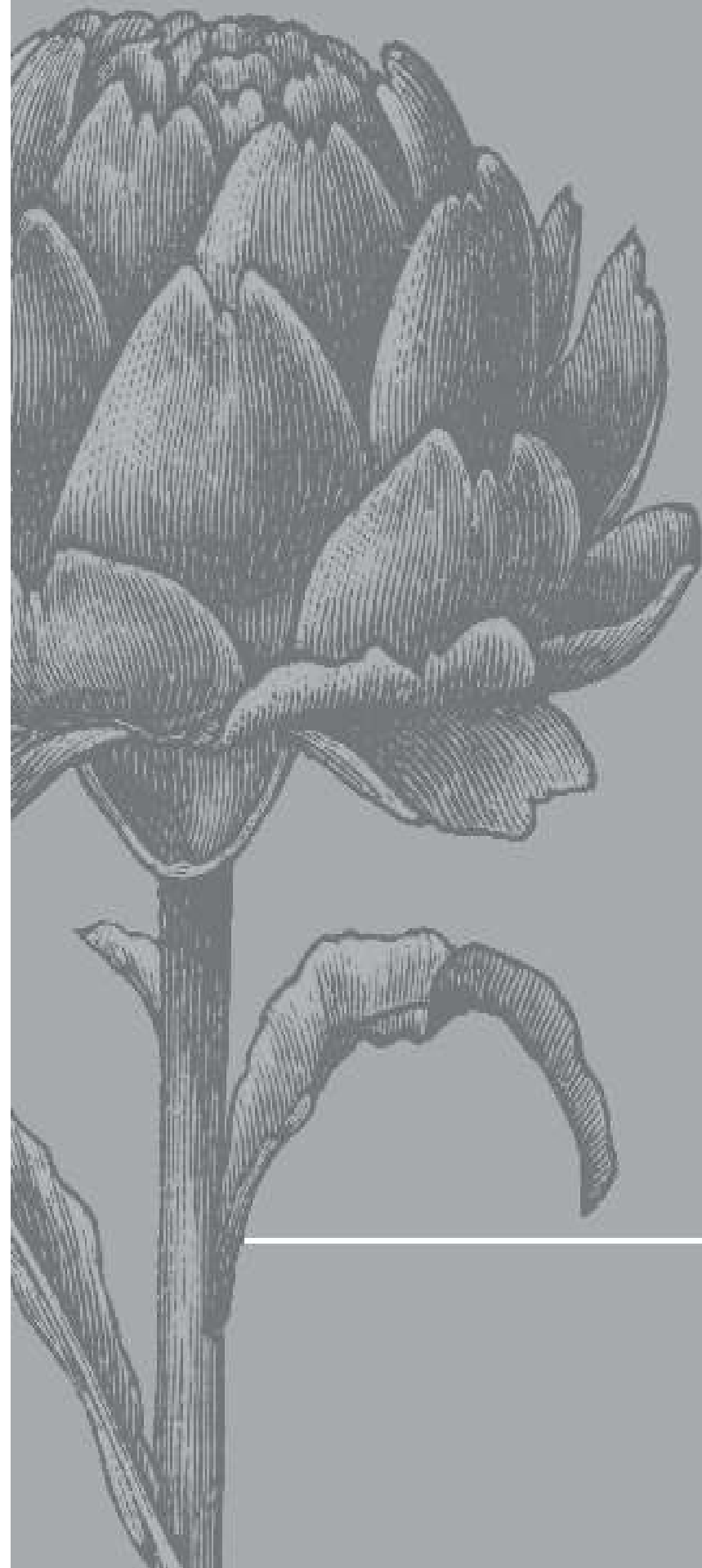
Tomatoes are shown off in many forms. There is a Moroccan stuffed tomato, filled with zucchini, cilantro, and pistachios. A Mediterranean-inspired tartine has roasted tomatoes, grilled eggplant,

melted goat cheese, and olive tapenade on crusty, coarse toast.

V is for a *mélange* of vegetables in a saffron broth.

W includes Daniel Humm's simple grilled watermelon topped by four batons of heirloom tomatoes, preferably one red, one orange, one yellow, and one green.

Z celebrates the zucchini, whether it's in Louise Beylerian's Zucchini and Cheese Pie, a dish she first ate in Cairo, where she grew up, or in Julian Medina's Zucchini and Squash Tacos, or in Ayteki Yar's Turkish Zucchini Pancakes.



A

Asparagus and Artichokes in White Wine (Vignarola)

Adapted from Matteo Bergamini, Executive Chef, SD26

At Tony May's restaurant, SD26, which is the Madison Square Park incarnation of his previous place, San Domenico on Central Park South, the menu lists a dish called Vignarola. It's a sprightly, fresh seasonal mix of fava beans, baby artichokes, asparagus, and peas in a light, white wine sauce. Paper-thin shavings of Pecorino Romano garnish the top, resting lightly on the vegetables.

To Tony May and Matteo Bergamini, the executive chef, an essential ingredient is the seasonal fava bean, which needs to be first shelled, then peeled. The adaptation here is intended for the home cook and avoids the troublesome—though tasty—fava bean.

TIME: 35 minutes

YIELD: 2 servings

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup dry white wine, plus 1 to 2 tablespoons Chenin Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc (optional)

½ cup finely chopped onion

4 baby artichokes, outer green leaves discarded and stems trimmed, cut lengthwise into quarters or sixths

7 large asparagus, peeled, ends trimmed, cut diagonally into ½-inch slices

¼ cup fresh or frozen English peas

3 scallions, trimmed and discarded, cut diagonally into ½-inch slices

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Large, thin shavings of Pecorino Romano, for garnish

1.

In a medium saucepan, combine the olive oil and ½ cup white wine. Place over medium-low heat and bring to a simmer. Add the onion and artichokes, and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Add the asparagus, and simmer for 3 to 4

minutes.

2.

Add the peas, and simmer for 2 more minutes. Add the scallions, and simmer for 1 more minute. Season with salt and pepper to taste. The sauce should be the consistency of heavy cream; if necessary, add 1 or 2 tablespoons of wine and cook for 2 minutes more.

3.

Divide the vegetables in the oil and wine sauce between two serving bowls. Garnish with shavings of Pecorino Romano and a twist of black pepper.

Kenmare's Asparagus Gratin

Adapted from Joey Campanaro, Executive Chef, Kenmare

“Every March, I think about asparagus,” said Joey Campanaro, the executive chef of Kenmare SoHo, who loves the vegetable for its versatility. “I make purees with it, I tempura it, I grill it.”

At Kenmare, he introduced asparagus gratin—sliced, peeled asparagus baked until golden and bubbly in a sauce of cream, white wine, and cheese.

Once the asparagus comes out of the oven, he sprinkles it with a mix of toasted panko and toasted ground pecans, and then, in a brilliant flourish, he tops it with a salad—a toss of endive and radicchio lightly dressed with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper.

The dish is cold upon hot. Red and green leaves first flutter above the tender asparagus, which pop up through the sauce. Once the radicchio and endive settle into the sauce and get hot, “they become more tender, and the bitterness, especially in the radicchio, is alleviated,” Mr. Campanaro said. The dish is as pretty as it is tasty.

TIME: 1 hour and 10 minutes

YIELD: 4 servings

1 cup heavy cream

2 shallots, finely chopped

¼ cup dry white wine, such as Chenin Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc

¼ cup pecans

¼ cup panko bread crumbs

1 bunch fresh spring asparagus, peeled and cut diagonally into ½-inch slices, ends discarded

¼ cup grated fontina cheese

¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

2 large endives, trimmed, and cut into diagonal 1-inch-wide slices

½ small head of radicchio, trimmed, and leaves torn into 1-inch pieces

Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed

Fresh lemon juice, as needed

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a medium saucepan, combine the cream, shallots, and wine. Place over medium heat and simmer until reduced by half, 20 to 30 minutes.

2.

Spread the pecans on a baking sheet and bake, stirring once or twice, until toasted, 10 to 15 minutes. Meanwhile, place a skillet over low heat, add the panko, and stir until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool. When the pecans are toasted, remove from the oven and set aside to cool.

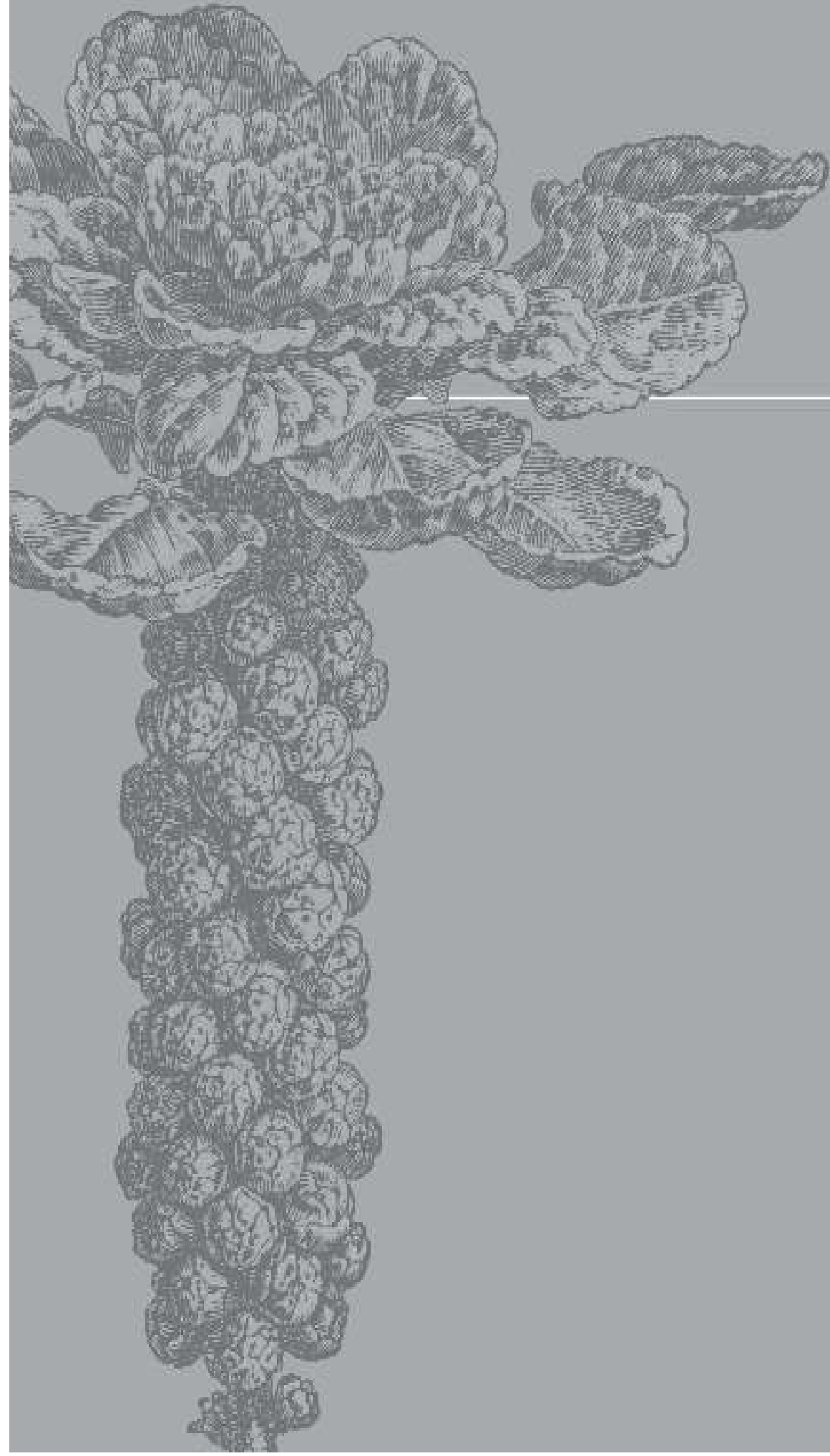
3.

Increase the oven temperature to 400°F. When the pecans are cool, place in a blender and chop for a few seconds until coarsely ground. Mix with the panko and set aside.

4.

In a mixing bowl, combine the asparagus, reduced cream, fontina, and Parmigiano-Reggiano. Mix well and place in a gratin dish about 10 inches long and 4 inches wide, or another shallow ovenproof baking dish. Bake until the asparagus is tender, the sauce is bubbling and the top is turning golden, about 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and top with the pecan–bread crumb mixture. In a separate bowl, mix the endives and radicchio with olive oil, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Spread over the top of the asparagus gratin. Serve hot.

B



Bean Confit (Vegan)

Adapted from Bill Telepan, Executive Chef, Telepan

Bill Telepan, the executive chef of Telepan in Manhattan, loves bean confit, which is cooked beans that are then baked in olive oil and scented with oregano, rosemary, and garlic. He likes not just the flavor, but also the adaptability of the beans. “I’ll crush the beans and spread it on toast, and serve with cherry tomatoes, cut in half, and splashed with olive oil, red wine vinegar, and balsamic vinegar,” he said. “I love the sweetness of the balsamic, and the red wine vinegar gives it acidity.”

The beans can also be mixed with brown rice, served warm, and drizzled with lemon juice. Or they can be mixed with farro. When the beans are finished, he suggests using the flavored oil for a vinaigrette.

Mr. Telepan has a few simple rules on cooking beans:

Rule #1. Do not let the pot boil, because the turbulence will cause the bean skins to separate from the beans and float off, and you’ll get unevenly cooked beans.

Rule #2. You cannot salt the beans when they are cooking because they will never get soft.

Rule #3. Resist the urge to stir. Stirring breaks the beans into pieces.

TIME: 2 hours, plus overnight soaking

YIELD: 2 to 3 servings

½ cup dried cranberry beans, Italian white beans, or other white beans, soaked overnight in cold water

1 sprig oregano

1 sprig rosemary

2 garlic cloves, peeled

1½ cups extra-virgin olive oil

Salt

1.

In a heavy ovenproof, flameproof pot, combine the beans and 4 cups cold water. Place over high heat to bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low. Simmer gently, uncovered, until moderately tender, 30 to 45 minutes; do not boil or stir. As

the beans cook, check periodically to be sure they remain covered with water, adding hot water as necessary.

2.

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Drain the beans, then return them to the pot and add the oregano, rosemary, and garlic. Cover with the oil. Transfer to the oven and cook, uncovered, until the beans are completely tender, 30 to 45 minutes. Remove from the heat and season to taste with salt. For best flavor, allow to cool to room temperature, then cover and refrigerate overnight or up to 7 days.

3.

To serve, gently reheat the beans and serve with a slotted spoon, leaving the oil in the pot. Serve warm on top of a salad, or crushed, sprinkled with a few drops of olive oil and spread on top of toast. They can also be served mixed with cooked rice or farro.

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