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+ A DAY IN
THE LIFE OF
KENDALL AND
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FOOD

TRASH TO TABLE

How chefs worldwide are turning unloved and waste ingredients into gourmet meals, from bull's balls to kitchen scraps



Jenny Rustemeyer and Grant Baldwin of the documentary *Just Eat It: A Food Waste Story*

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EATING WELL: It starts with trash. Not the fun junk food kind, but the scraps left over, the ones that would eventually fill a dustbin—until now. Because chefs worldwide are using them as star ingredients for standout dishes in a thriving movement that aims to end food waste with a side of novelty.

The first step? To change the definition of garbage, at least in gastronomy. "Some of the most iconic dishes in the world are based on waste. Take coq au vin, a dish that was originally made with a male rooster. It's a very tough bird—dog food in America—but braise it in wine very gently and it becomes an iconic French dish," says chef Dan Barber, who, last year, turned his famed Manhattan restaurant Blue Hill into a popup called wastED, where guest chefs—the likes of Daniel Humm and Dominique Ansel—served a dumpster dive vegetable salad with bruised leaves and whisked chickpea water, burgers made of pulp from cold-pressed juices on a bun made with stale rye bread, and crackers from desiccated beef trimmings (that burger, by the way, made it to the permanent menu, too).

Trash cooking became real back in 2013, when the culinary godfather, Rene Redzepi of Noma, wrote a piece on his experiments with preparing

(Opposite page, from top) A cocktail served at the Royal Dinette's Ugly Duckling Dinner Series; salmon belly; a dish served at Ante's 12-course set dinner; rabbit porchetta at Love & Salt, which uses the entire animal; mousse preparation at Royal Dinette; chefs at the Bror kitchen.

IMAGE COURTESY PURE SOULS MEDIA

a cod's head and why nothing gets thrown away in his kitchen. Since then, it's been a busy playground for the world's most renowned chefs. At Amass in Copenhagen, former Noma alumnus Michael Orlando uses wet coffee grounds, leftover coffee, and fermented potato bread to make crisps; Michael Cimarusti of Michelin-starred Providence doesn't throw away any part of seafood, whether it's lobster shells, tile fish head, or halibut bones; Kevin Meehan, who has previously worked at spots like Bastide, repurposes the whey by-product from homemade ricotta at his new LA restaurant, Kali; and in her upcoming cookbook *A Girl And Her Greens*, April Bloomfield of the Michelin-starred The Spotted Pig, celebrates whole vegetables, from stalk to skin. Plus there's Mario Batali who, in October, created a beer with food waste (key ingredients included rotten grapefruit and stale bread).

There's more to these initiatives than creating the next culinary buzzword. What's the point of a raw diet if it results in tonnes of waste fruit and vegetable pulp? How does it matter if meat is farm-raised and local if most of it is unused? Can organic vegetables justify throwing away half their parts? Chefs insist that cooking with waste is not just a passing fad—it's here to stay. Given that a third of all food produced for human consumption is wasted every year, causing not only greenhouse emissions but also \$750 million in economic losses (a 2013 United Nations report), it's a valid concern. One that led to the award-winning 2014 documentary *Just Eat It: A Food Waste Story*, which looks at food waste from farm to fridge, and convinced its filmmakers to shun grocery shopping altogether.

"Farmers, fishermen, and ranchers dedicate their whole lives to bringing us these foods. So much has to happen before the food comes to our back door. Seeing food go in the garbage is like seeing someone's hard work and passion be disregarded," says chef Michael Fiorelli of Love & Salt, California, whose aim is to take garbage cans out of the equation. Which is why he serves wilted arugula pesto, crisp chicken skins, and sauces made with bruised or damaged leaves.

Barber adds that this isn't just an ethical or economic issue, but gastronomic too—learning to unlock great flavour. A difficult task, given that these ingredients aren't exactly mainstream. "They are new, even to us, so it takes a lot of testing and trial and error before we are happy with a dish," says Victor Wågman, head chef and co-owner of Copenhagen hotspots Bror and Ante. Their signature dishes? A lamb's head served four ways: Brain with reindeer moss, the tongue, the eye, and the cheek for a make-your-own-taco course. And bull's balls, poached, sliced, breaded, and fried, with a side of tartar sauce.

Taste aside, the biggest challenge is to convince diners that the food is safe, not yucky, and that sometimes spoilage just means aesthetic imperfections. That there's really no reason to throw away a bruised peach—just turn it into sorbet! One way around these perceptions is to integrate this style of cooking with what's trending now. "Supper clubs and pop-ups are a constant fixture, with people wanting to have novel food experiences that they can share with friends and family, on social media, that they can't have at any corner restaurant," says New York City-based Josh Treuhart, who hosts Salvage Supperclub events across the United States. The venues range from the streets to art galleries to corporate holiday parties for over 300 guests—the common thread is a menu in which every item incorporates ingredients that would have gone to waste. Think blackened bananas and stale cookies for banana custard tarts, wobbly carrot hummus, and leftover coffee for a coffee butter served with bread made using stale rice from a Chinese restaurant.

"People can find these ingredients unapproachable, which is fair, but they need to open their eyes," says Jack Chen, head chef at Vancouver's Royal Dinette, which introduced regular Ugly Duckling Dinner Series in October. The aim? To transform the so-called 'ugly ducklings' of the culinary world into beautiful dishes that smash the stereotypes of food waste. The result is a tasting menu with wine and cocktail pairings featuring dishes like kale stem risotto and caramelised whey, and sake kasu sorbet, rice water mousse, shiso stem granite, and preserved citrus skin. The future of fine dining is clearly in the garbage. ■

Chefs insist that cooking with waste ingredients is not just a passing fad—it is the future of food



By Esha Mahajan
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