

Serviette

06

ISSUE No.6
FOOD IS DESIGN



ON THE COVER

Ray Eames was no garden-variety designer. Known for producing some of the most iconic midcentury modern furniture in partnership with her husband, Charles, the California creator emphasized functionality, accessibility, and making ordinary materials extraordinary.

Veggie portrait of Ray Eames (cover), La Chaise (page 7) and Plywood Mobile (back cover) by Burp Photography.

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Christie Vuong is a Toronto-based photographer who loves to play with food. Her work has appeared in *Time*, *Chatelaine*, and *The Globe and Mail*.



Food and design often share the spotlight. Both encapsulate conception, technique, materials, textures, drama, and then some. These traits might explain why the two are so intertwined right now: Beauty brands are indulging in food imagery to evoke desire, screenwriters are throwing us into the kitchen and adding “yes, chef!” to our vocabulary, and haute couture is serving up baguette clutches and restaurant concepts.

This interplay was well understood by Ray Eames, our esteemed cover model. She and her husband, Charles, implored us: “take your pleasure seriously.” Lunches at the Eames’ office and home were said to be meticulously constructed, displaying as much artistry as their iconic furniture.

French toast lip tint is fun, but when food and its stories are crafted with care, they awaken more than our appetite. In this issue, Sadiya Ansari investigates the thoughtfulness of London’s new lesbian bars, Sarah Musgrave and Eamon Mac Mahon reveal the ingenuity of an industry-leading, robot-powered mushroom factory, and Sierra Marilyn Riley details the subversiveness of feminist bakers, with lots of frosting included.

From typography lovers to utensil collectors, intrepid fine diners and hosts with the most, we think everyone will find something to sink their teeth into in issue 06. That’s by design.—*Max Meighen*



Created for a Museum of Modern Art competition in 1948, La Chaise lounged its way to the top.

After over a century of chocolate-meets-cherry gooey union, an iconic treat calls it quits, but its reputation will stick, like syrup on fingers.

Forbidden Fruit

The Lowney's factory, established in 1905, operated next to a brewery in Montreal's then-industrial Griffintown. The area's streets allegedly smelled of chocolate and beer. The bittersweet combo came to an end in 1962 when the owner moved operations to Sherbrooke, Quebec, trying to ditch newly unionized employees. But the union followed and so did gentrification. Nowadays, the Lowney name adorns the wall of what has become a condo complex.

Just as one of Canada's most polarizing chocolates, the Cherry Blossom, was celebrating its 135th anniversary, John Batt, who runs the popular Instagram account @canada.gov.ca, was drafting its obituary. He caught wind of it being discontinued and, when posting the announcement, he knew it would stir up debate. "If there's one thing I've learned from running my account," he tells me, "it's that people are very strangely visceral about food." And so Batt readied himself for the comments—over 2,000 ranging from devastation to disgust.

Historically, our sweet tooth has been mostly shaped by outsiders, like the U.K. and U.S. supplying Cadbury and Hershey bars, but the Cherry Blossom was thought-up with Canada in mind. The confection invented by American Walter M. Lowney came in a little yellow box, and featured a thick chocolate-coconut-peanut coating filled with cream and a maraschino cherry. This nutty cordial piqued enough Canadian taste buds for Lowney to cross the border in 1905 and open a factory in Montreal.

After his death in 1921, the company underwent a series of mergers and acquisitions, which moved Cherry Blossom production from Quebec to Ontario, and, eventually, back to the U.S. Despite

the corporate shuffling, Lowney's original hit recipe was preserved and sold exclusively in Canada. The chocolate remained a best-seller through the midcentury, as the confectionery industry boomed. By 1973, nearly 70,000 chocolate products flooded the sweets market. Customers began favouring convenience and novelty, choosing candy and chocolate that was easier to eat on-the-go (enter Twix and Reese's Pieces). Cherry Blossom's yellow boxes started collecting dust near cash registers.

Around the same time, parent company Standard Brands tried to reinvigorate the treat by investing in an ad campaign and newer packaging. From far away, the box had little shelf appeal; it looked like bomb shelter leftovers—things that promised a long shelf life and not much else. Up close, the packaging was an even harder sell because it failed to make the chocolate look appetizing. On a good day, the full-frontal shot of an oozing cherry centre reads as pornographic. On a bad one, it's like confronting a gruesome warning label on a cigarette pack. "I don't know how [the box] has lasted so long because there's something very sexual and strange about it," Batt tells me over the phone. It's partly why he still has yet to try one.

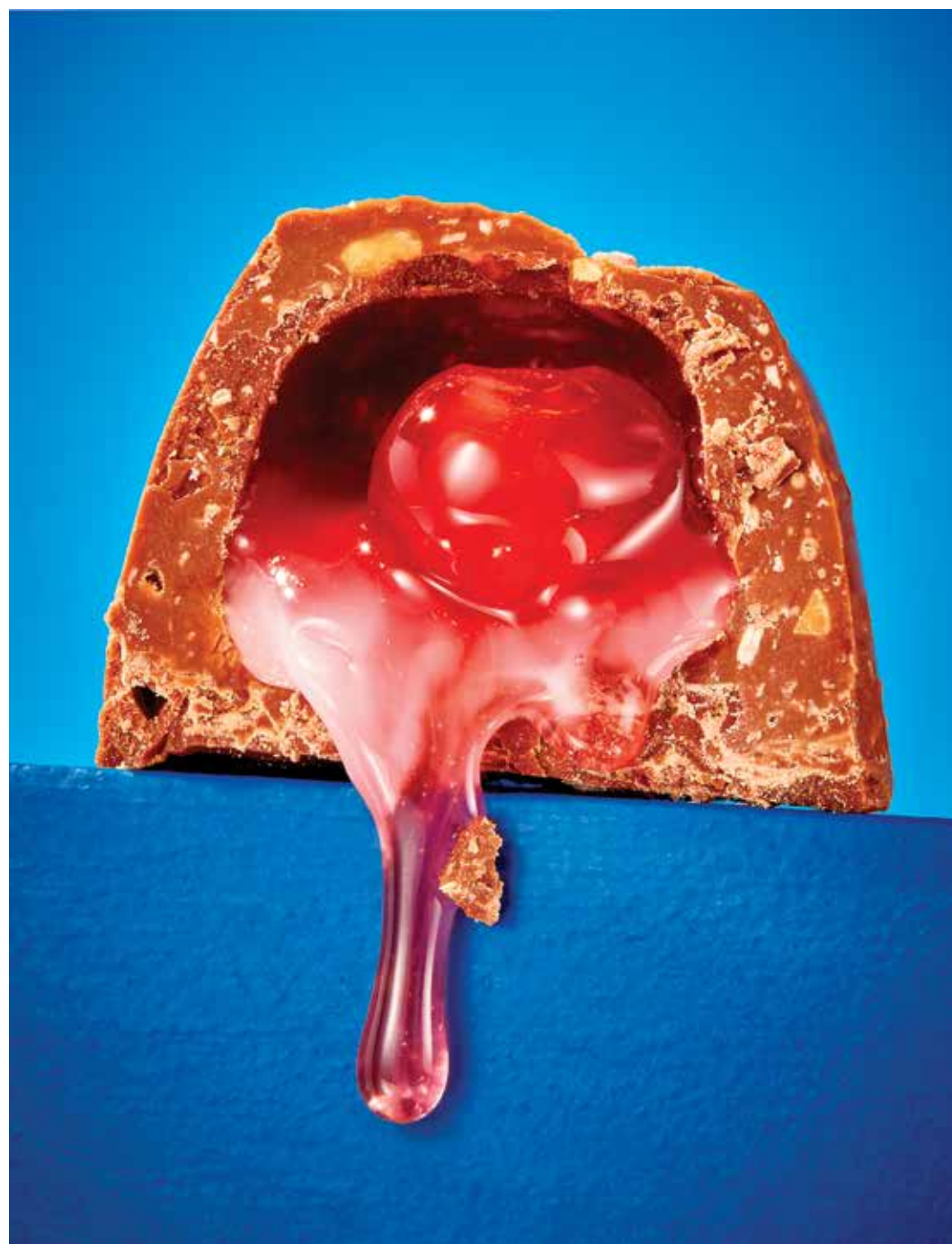


However, the best marketing strategy might be scarcity. As soon as news broke that the Cherry Blossom was being discontinued, it was reportedly flying off shelves. Store owners upsold them for \$10 a box, Canadian confectionery Purdy's offered free cherry cordials, and demand for Christopher's somewhat similar Big Cherry candy increased in Canada, too.

The once-beloved Cherry Blossom was derided before ending its days as a supply-and-demand-created luxury.

Perhaps this swan song popularity is to commemorate something from a bygone era. The exclusively Canadian chocolate was still very American in that it built in a reward system. You had to toil away at a thick layer of chocolate bark before getting to the cherry. Eventually, people wanted to skip the foreplay. As Batt and I wrapped our call, he was in the grocery store, eyeing one of the few yellow boxes left. He said he'd email me once he tried it.—*Sara Black McCulloch*

Usually derived from yeast, invertase is an enzyme that lends confectioners a helping hand. Aged like a fine wine, the candy's cherry, lurking beneath that crunchy choco layer, was slicked with this substance that turned the solid into a droopy liquid in about a week's time.



In Poland's evolving dining scene, menus are taking a page from Soviet-era milk bars by revisiting styles that have been around the bloc.

I Shot the Serif

Plastic white print formed neat rows on black letter boards, listing the day's simple offerings: sour rye soup, cabbage stew, dumplings. Paper strips were taped across items after supplies dwindled. Like other hallmarks of the Polish People's Republic (PRL, the Soviet-aligned state spanning from 1947 to 1989)—oil-based paint, bare terrazzo tabletops, metal chairs—these menus captured the socialist period's zeitgeist. They reflected the state's push for uniformity amid ingredient scarcity. After communism's fall in 1989, Poland's restaurant menus transformed from bare-bones necessity to kaleidoscopic choice, chronicling a journey from Soviet austerity to free-market capitalism.

The 1990s saw McDonald's quickly pop up with backlit displays of colourful burgers. Fancy restaurants opened with gold-embossed leather menus, and working-class local spots, despite subsidies, struggled to keep up with international competition.

Over the last decade, Polish restaurants have started looking back to the PRL for aesthetic inspiration. Food anthropologist Monika Milewska suggests this trend is in step with an influx from the past: "For younger generations, communist Poland is an

exotic, strange, and interesting land. The elderly, on the other hand, are looking for the flavours of their childhood and youth. For them, the cuisine of the People's Republic is spiced with nostalgia."

Leading this style shift is the resurgence of Poland's milk bars (*bar mleczny*). First opened in 1896 as cafeteria-style canteens serving dairy-and flour-based meals when meat was scarce, they became synonymous with PRL-standardized dining, numbering over 40,000 at their peak. "Design in food is more than aesthetics—it's storytelling," explains Oksana Shmygol, creative director at Kraków's Studio Otwarte. That was clear in the original milk bars, every detail reflecting collectivist ethos: dark menu boards listed hearty food meant to fill stomachs rather than excite palates. Diners ate from blue-rimmed plates marked *Spółem (together)* in bold italics, the state consumer cooperative's insignia.

There are about 100 subsidized locations left. While prices remain low and the service brisk, many are updating their menus, transforming rigid PRL-era designs into modern, dynamic layouts. "One of the biggest influences from that era is typography," says Shmygol. At Sady in Warsaw, chunky lettering with razor-sharp edges

Rather than list dishes by portion size (the smalls, mediums, and larges of this world), milk bar menus traditionally announced prices by the gram. This allowed the canteens to doll out pierogi orders, borscht helpings, and bowls of pudding with communist-era precision.



from the bar's original signage has been transformed into a sleek, downloadable font for all to use. In Kraków, Bufet's name glows in white, drawing from 1950s–70s neon designs. The bold sans-serif letters cast stark light on tiled walls; the same typography appears on the bar's menus and glassware.

Couched in a debate around nostalgia and gentrification, menus have become objects of cultural fascination. The Museum of Warsaw's "For Here or To Go" exhibition guides visitors through centuries of culinary history and lets them design menus for a Polish food truck, while online archives like Art of

the Menu document the evolution of restaurant typography and design.

"About 15 years ago, many rebrands were direct reworks of PRL-era clichés. Now, it's much more subtle," notes Shmygol. At Bar Prasowy, the once-utilitarian menu typography traces the silhouettes of Warsaw buildings that no longer exist. Meanwhile, their digital menus—accessed via QR codes—offer options in Polish, English, and Russian: signs of cosmopolitan progress.

These menus, once intending only to list the day's offerings, have become timestamps of Poland's evolving identity.—*Rachel Naismith*



Head into the belly of the beast and meet the animals crafting implements to get at their grub.

Tools of the Trade

Aphids (tiny sap-sucking insects) feed on plants and, in their feasting, secrete a liquid called honeydew. Ants are like kids in a candy store when it comes to the sugary substance, and they're willing to cut Tony Soprano-worthy deals for it. They herd aphids around the juiciest plant parts in exchange for protection from predators, carrying them into their nests at night. Then, the ants use their antennae to stroke the captives and coax them into secreting the liquid that is tastier than a slice of gabagool.

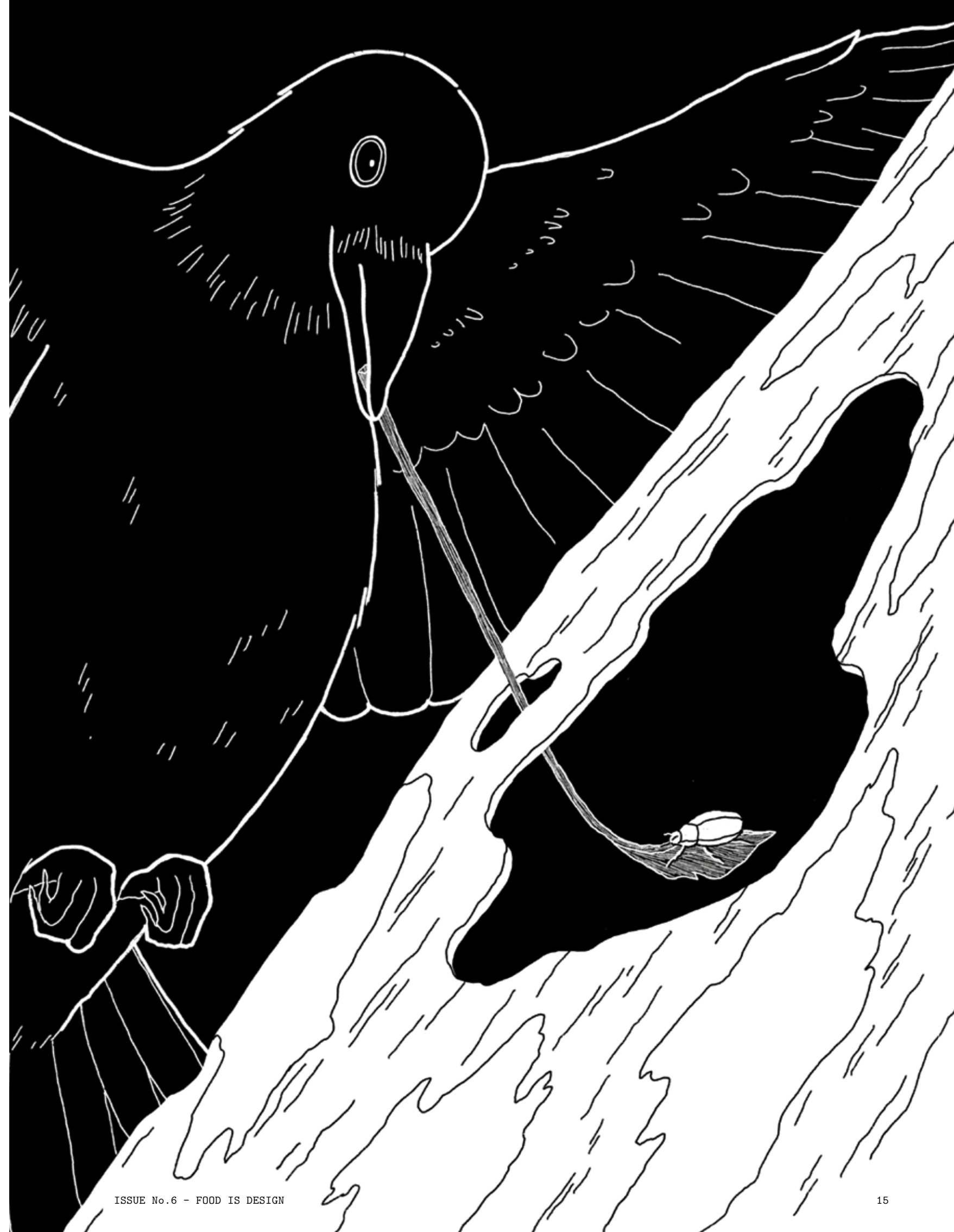
David Greybeard was hungry. He scanned the ground and reached for a blade of grass, long but not too long. With an experienced tug he dislodged one and headed for a mound of earth. He began to dip the blade, pinched between thumb and index finger, into the mound. He pulled it out and ate the termites clinging to the blade. In 1960, Dr. Jane Goodall spotted this silver-faced chimpanzee from afar. It was the first observation of tool use by chimpanzees, to which her mentor, Dr. Louis Leakey, responded: "Now we must redefine tool, redefine man, or accept chimpanzees as human."

Plenty of animals skillfully make and use tools to get their talons, claws, and paws on their next meal: Vultures crack eggs with rocks, ants use debris to transport liquids, and apes drink from leaf cups, but using implements is still upheld as an us-and-them distinction. Tools are an amplification of the body—a spoon extends the reach of an arm to stir a pot or a fermentation crock acts as a stomach.

Though they have an elaborate tool box, there are classes of animals beyond primates—our closest genetic relatives—that are equally if not more sophisticated in their device design and use. Enter experts in this department: New Caledonian crows. Beginning in

1996, researchers followed the crows from one foraging site to the next, watching the birds extract insects from holes in branches with a surgeon-worthy array of tools. They selected wood, feathers, leaves, stems, and the occasional human-made item like cardboard, tweaking and combining materials to suit their needs. New Caledonian crows manufacture, collect, and even travel with specialized hooks for fishing out insects and grubs from trees. In controlled studies they showed a talent for producing and using tools with multiple elements combined just so, like an avian Swiss Army knife.

These birds, rather than learning by demonstration, will design with a mental picture of the tool they plan to make, like an inventor, toiling away in their garage on a new back-scratcher. Similar to adapting a classic recipe, there is evidence of evolving cultural traditions in crow tool-making. Researchers have collected large samples of them and found they have different shapes, sizes, and textures that are not reducible to location. Instead, they share original designs from which others iterate based on their needs. As we become more aware of tool manufacturing and use by animals, we have to reject the idea that humans alone transform their environments in the hunt for something delicious.—Adriana Gallo



Serrated knives out: This food stylist, recipe developer, and cookbook author is cutting a path to the perfect sandwich.

Breaking Bread

Jason Skrobar hails from Windsor, Ontario, where his mom grew tons of juicy tomatoes in the backyard. Summer tasted like slices of the freshly picked fruit on homemade bread, with a little mayo. When visiting French Canadian family in Montreal, he faced piles of smoked meat on rye. Both styles shaped Skrobar's sandwich palate, planting the seed for a future ode to the dish: *The Book of Sandwiches*.

Skrobar describes people's eyes lighting up when telling them he wrote a book about sandwiches: "There aren't many foods that are so versatile, and so loved." Appealing to vegetarians and meat-lovers alike, the international, hand-held meal might be the greatest thing since sliced bread. Grab a napkin—the road to the ideal bite could get messy.

What categories do you consider when designing a sandwich?

Breads are the building blocks, they set the stage, and you need to pick the right one for the filling, which is ultimately the star. If it's crunchy or has a lot of texture, like fried chicken, you want the outside to be softer and let the inside do all the talking. Then there's sauce; whether it's hot honey, BBQ, mayo, or dressing, every good sandwich has

one. Next are add-ons, think lettuce, pickles, bacon, or cheese—they have to be well-cast or they can throw the whole production out of whack. Garnishes, sprinkled herbs, or flaky salt, are small flourishes that can make a big difference.

What are sins that can ruin a perfectly good sandwich?

Over-saucing is a no-no. If your bread gets soggy, it's game over. The question is to toast or not to toast—I tend to do it for texture. Whether it's brioche or sourdough, I use a cast iron pan with a little olive oil. That way, I can turn it often to see if it's the right level of toastiness.

Is there an underestimated ingredient in the sandwich toolbox?

Fresh herbs. Say it's December 26 and you have all this turkey in the fridge and some leftover herbs. Contrast last night's cranberry-gravy-and-stuffing dinner by making a fresh, bright pesto with lemon juice and whatever nuts you have on-hand.

Are there any ingredients you're ready to see retired?

These are all preferences! But people don't realize the power of truffle, whether it's salt or oil, and they use too much of



FOOD STYLING BY JASON SKROBAR



"Make someone a great sandwich and you've got a friend for life," is the opener of Jason Skrobar's cookbook. With over 40 savvy sandwich recipes and a slew of sauces, his bff dance card is likely on the full side.

it, so it's overpowering. Pre-shredded cheese is horrible, there's all kinds of stuff in it, like stabilizers to make sure it doesn't stick together. And pulled pork sandwiches, enough already. I have a recipe in the book for pulled lamb because nobody needs another pulled pork recipe.

Any controversial creations?
During sandwich-tasting parties I hosted

for the book, my Hawaiian pizza one was polarizing. It was brioche with melted mozzarella, homemade tomato sauce, pineapple grilled with honey and chili flakes, a lot of mortadella, and provolone on the bottom. Fewer people enjoyed it than didn't, but I kept it in anyway. When I moved to Toronto and discovered Hawaiian pizza, I immediately fell for the sweet-meets-salty contrasting flavours.—*Caitlin Stall-Paquet*

From Confucius to Kung Pao chicken, a Shang Dynasty utensil traveled far and wide, becoming the uncontested ruler of our takeout drawers.

Stick Figures

Decades of moving around—first from China to Canada, and then from rental to rental in Toronto—meant that my parents amassed a small army of chopsticks, adding to the collection each time we settled in a new home. When I open up their kitchen drawer, I'm confronted with a stockpile of mismatched chopsticks of varying lengths, colours, and materials, a frustrating collection that requires some excavating to find a matching pair. Desperate to be different, I decided I would invest in a set when I moved into my first apartment. Something ornate and decorated with paintings of orchids, elegant and far from the clutter of my childhood. This dream pair would serve excitement with each meal and, crucially, wouldn't require rummaging.

It was easier said than done: Mass-produced chopsticks proliferate in kitchen supply stores. They're crafted from easy-to-splinter wood or bamboo, shiny plastic that makes loud clicking sounds, or slippery steel that turns saucy dishes into a challenge akin to an obstacle course on *Wipeout*. None of the chopsticks within my budget were the beautiful utensils of my dreams: delicate, engraved wood, both easy-to-use and pretty. In the end, I settled for a set of wooden chopsticks with Hello Kitty printed on the tops in shiny lacquered plastic, promising myself that one day, perhaps when I visit Asia, I'd buy that lifelong treasured pair.

I'm not the first to search for the perfect set: Chopsticks have been around for millennia and evolved to fit changing needs. The oldest identified pair popped up in China during the Shang dynasty (around 1600–1046 BCE). "No one knows exactly when chopsticks were invented," says Chen Shen, a co-chief curator

at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), home to hundreds of chopsticks spanning thousands of years. Shen says they probably became common about 3,000 years ago, based on information about cooking and common types of dishes identified by archeologists. They also discovered that the first chopsticks were likely used for cooking, rather than eating. "There were a lot of stews at that time, so if you wanted to dig out goodies, it was easiest to use chopsticks." They were often made of ivory, or bamboo and wood (though these decomposed, so they're lost to history). However, emperors and other nobles had silver chopsticks, since they believed the metal would change colour to alert the diner to the presence of poison.

Around 500 BCE, the teacher and scholar Confucius gained fame throughout China and popularized chopsticks along with his teachings. A strict vegetarian, Confucius found knives and stabbing food too violent. "The knife goes away from the table because it represents death and war, so it shouldn't be where you gathered with food and your friends," says Gwen Adams, the collections specialist for Japan, China, and Korea at the ROM.

By 500 CE, chopsticks had spread around East and Southeast Asia via the Silk Road, arriving first in the Korean peninsula where Chinese influence was strong. Soon, they crossed the East Sea and landed in Japan, eventually making their way to what is now Taiwan, Mongolia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Despite how much the storied implement has travelled, modern chopsticks aren't that different from



Despite how much the storied implement has travelled, modern chopsticks aren't that different from ancient ones, with just a few small tweaks along the way.

During the Qing Dynasty, tortoiseshell was a hot-ticket item used for decorating folding fans, snuff boxes, and chopstick holsters. Aligned with a use-every-part-of-the-animal ethos, the adornment was the byproduct of a status-hungry love for turtle soup. The shells were also used for divination, with the diviner heating them and interpreting the resulting cracks.

ancient ones, with just a few small tweaks along the way. In China, they're long and blunt, which makes them useful for communal eating. In Japan, they're shorter and tapered at the end, for precision when picking through fish bones. And in Korea, they're made of metal and are flat, so it's easier to pick out chunks in stew.

Chopsticks weren't just utensils, mind you, they were representations of the owners who often customized them with etched poems and proverbs. Up until the late 1800s and early 1900s, people in China also carried their chopsticks and knives (making a post-Confucius comeback) in ornate holsters. These were often made of brass or pewter, and the wealthy decorated theirs with miniature paintings, along with precious silver or tortoiseshell. "When you arrived at someone's home, you would bring your own chopsticks and they would be super elaborate to show off your wealth," Adams explains.

With the industrial revolution, ornate chopsticks fell out of fashion, as factories made it possible for people to have multiple sets. Today, mass-produced pairs are basically the only affordable option,

and wooden single-use chopsticks have taken over. Their convenience, despite splinters, outweighs the beauty of ancient, personalized sets.

Still, the objects carry a lot of symbolism. Shen keeps a pair specially for some of his favourite visitors: "Even today, when my son and his girlfriend come over for dinner, I have a designated pair for them—for hygienic reasons, but also because they symbolize their identity." When I look in my cutlery drawer, I see a mishmash of chopsticks; the ghosts of takeout orders past mixed in with my Hello Kitty chopsticks and a few I've amassed as gifts (or perhaps lifted from fancy restaurants) throughout the years.

Though I still crave my own special pair, for now, I take good care of my Hello Kitty chopsticks, washing them by hand so the print doesn't fade in the dishwasher. Regardless, eight years of using them as my primary utensil has worn down the tapered ends. And despite the initial dread that I'm turning into my parents, my drawer of mismatched, mass-produced, multi-coloured chopsticks brings me comfort each time I dig through it before sitting down to eat.—*Rebecca Gao*

Photography by
Vicky Lam

THE BREAKFAST CLUB

Styling by
Dee Connolly

*P*areidolia is a phenomenon in which people impose meaning onto something where there is none, usually in a visual context—see pointing at dog-shaped clouds or spotting Jesus’ face in toast. Photographer Vicky Lam’s fascination with the human mind’s search for meaning and connection is on par with her love of food and its cross-cultural ability to bring people together. In

the series *Soft Foods*, Lam combines the two. The artist uses clothing and accessories (they’re malleable, super varied, and, most importantly, accessible) to create *trompe l’oeil* pieces that look good enough to eat. “Clothing is familiar, yet it becomes unfamiliar when shaped into something completely unexpected,” she says. Rise and shine; Lam has cooked up her gentle take on breakfast.





RETOUCHING BY ROBYN OWENS



Feast for the Eyes

Catch an insider view of Mexico City's Cuauhtémoc borough via bottomless lunch, Michelin stars, and nostalgic Italian coffee, all in eateries flush with style to match.

Written by
Eve Thomas

Photography by
Maureen Martinez-Evans

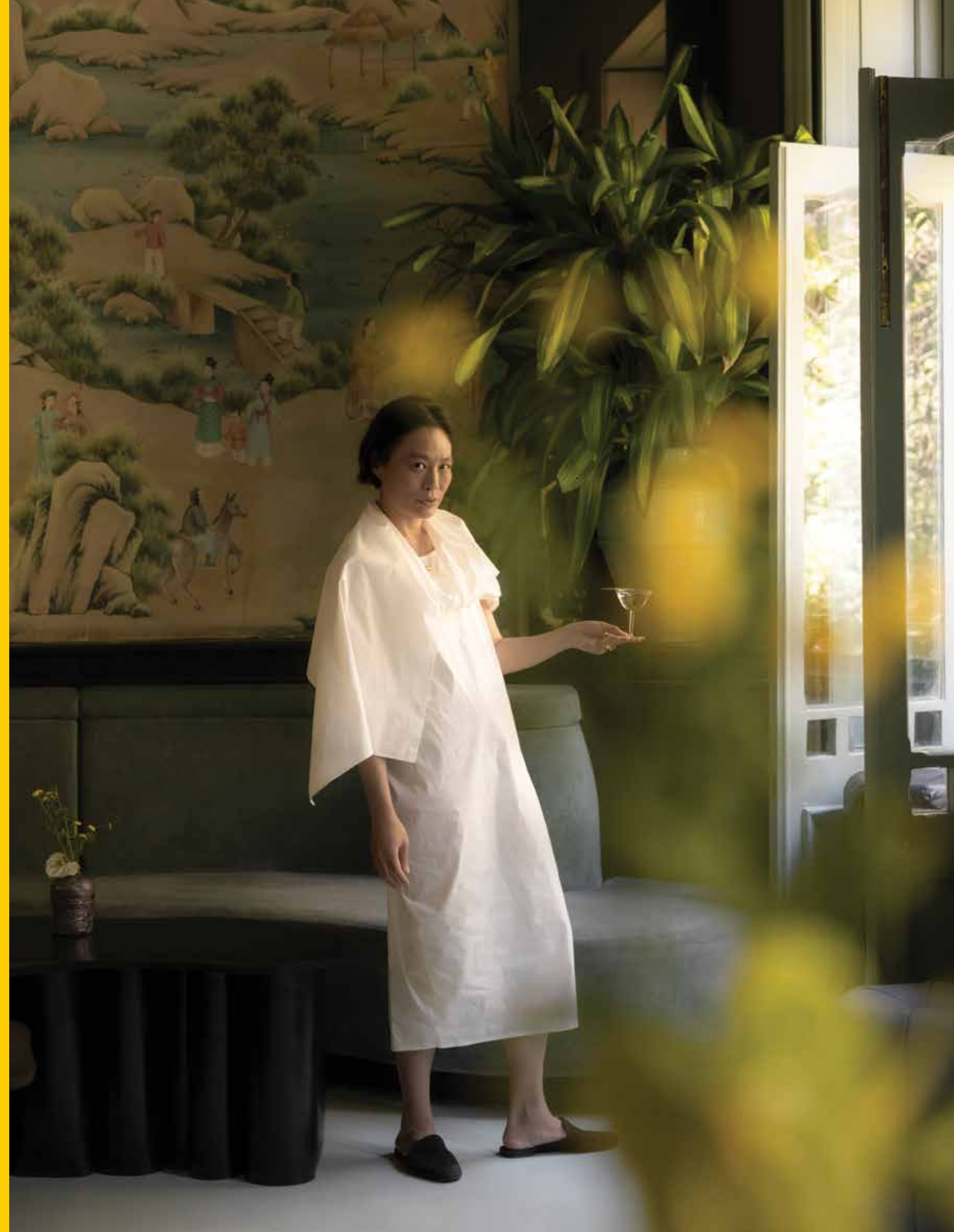


Writer and curator Su Wu doesn't save the good dishes for a special occasion. The CDMX multi-hyphenate (and curator-at-large for MASA gallery) regularly features gorgeous pieces in her exhibits, but she's also insistent on using them in everyday life for family meals and solo lunches alike, no matter how precious. "I think having unbreakable plates is a little bit morbid—things should have that capacity to move through full life cycles." A California transplant, she fell in love with the city while in town for an art fair, and made the move after a friend offered up a dream apartment.

Eight years in, she shares with us her favourite design-forward cafés and restaurants, along with some wise words for anyone new to local dining: "Meal time has a completely different meaning here, particularly around lunch. It's very fluid," she says. "People leave for a meeting and come back, and you can show up with a plus-eight."

CUAUHTÉMOC'S TOP SPOTS,
CARE OF SU WU

1. ROSETTA
Colima 166, Roma Nte.,
Cauhtémoc, 06700
2. EL MINUTITO
Londres 28, Juárez,
Cauhtémoc, 06600
3. EXPENDIO DE MAÍZ
Av. Yucatán 84, Roma Nte.,
Cauhtémoc, 06700
4. NIDDO CAFÉ JUÁREZ
Praga 24, Juárez,
Cauhtémoc, 06600
5. MÁXIMO BISTROT
Av. Álvaro Obregón 65 Bis,
Roma Nte., Cauhtémoc,
06700





Rosetta lets the outside in, along with the freshest Mexican ingredients from regions like Chiapas, Baja California, and Puebla.

7. Rosetta

“The creative community here has a propensity to overlap between disciplines, and projects are reflections of deep friendships, not just one-time collaborations,” says Wu. Nowhere is that interplay more apparent than at Michelin-starred Rosetta, in Roma, helmed by chef Elena Reygadas and located in a former Beaux Arts mansion. The women met two years ago at an exhibit curated by Wu, which they then reimagined

for an installation at the restaurant’s bar, Salón Rosetta. The perpetually crowded, sophisticated second floor serves as a showcase for locally made avant-garde objects, like rubber tables by American designer Brian Thoreen and silver-glazed vases from Mexican ceramist Chebos. The tiny shop next door, Mesa Rosetta, sells the kind of vintage and contemporary home goods you’ll find in the restaurant (and Wu’s own home).



All the details are ironed out at this two-floor, multi-purpose sensation in Colonia Roma.





Got a minute? If so, sidle up to El Minutito's bar for espresso and croissants by day, giving way to cocktails and salty snacks come happy hour.



2. El Minutito

Imagine a buzzing, stand-up Italian espresso bar dropped in the heart of Mexico City—with a few local touches. Translating to “in a minute,” the retro-inspired café and bar was created by architect and artist Lucas Cantú. The space stuns but stays cozy, with a ceiling inspired by Marcel Breuer’s suspended lighting grid at the Whitney Museum and vintage Mexican postcards, photos, and souvenirs affixed to a bulletin board. Drinks come out in the evening, and the establishment passes one of Wu’s tests for any bar: “It’s got an impressive Mezcal menu.”

3. Expendio de Maíz

This tiny, cash-only favourite doesn't take reservations, so Wu and her friends like to arrive early to get a coveted spot right by the open-air, volcanic stone kitchen. There, clay pots are stacked beside piles of seasonal fruit and dried herbs. The look comes care of French

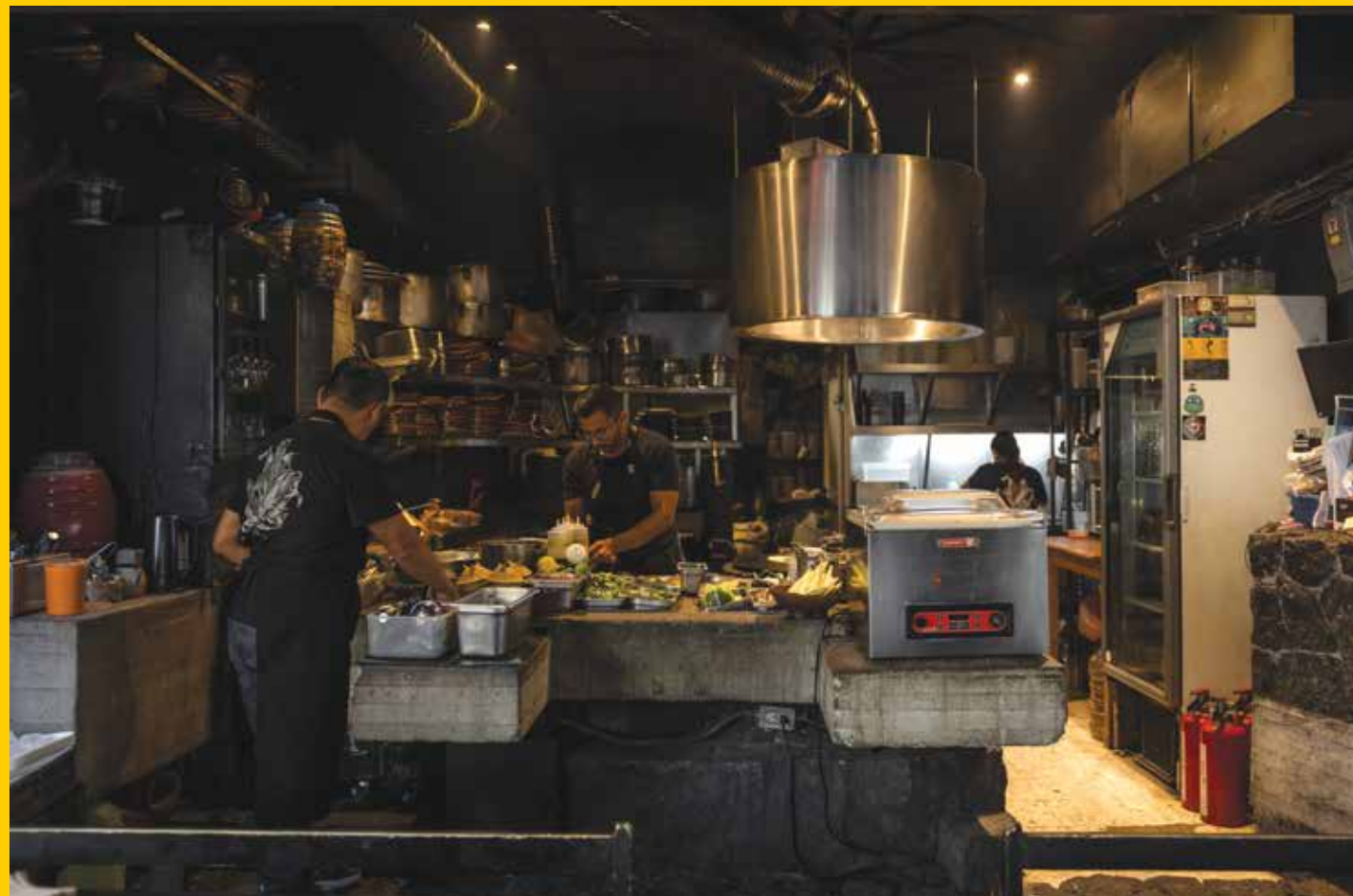
architect Ludwig Godefroy, while many of the ingredients (heirloom corn, white cacao, *quelite* edible greens) are from the owner's family farm in Guerrero, along with trusted rural suppliers. But the spot's cult status may be due to its unconventional no-menu serving style: "They ask if you have any allergies, then keep bringing you dishes until you ask them to stop," Wu says with a smile.

4. Niddo Café Juárez

Now a mini-empire of cafés and eateries serving hearty dishes like shakusha and chilaquiles, and standout pastries including Mexican concha alongside blueberry scones and babka, the Juárez outpost holds a special place in Wu's heart. It was designed by famed

young Mexican architect Frida Escobedo, who went on to bring us London's lauded 2018 Serpentine Pavilion and the new limestone-clad wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Wu points out that Escobedo's signature style was already on display in the tiny corner spot—a shimmering, flowing swathe of green glazed terracotta tile.

Say when: The fast-moving kitchen at Expendido de Maíz will sling as many plates as you can stomach.



Caffeinating and catching up at one of Niddo's seven locations.



You'd never know the chic Roma Norte space has past lives as an auto repair shop and pool hall, namely due to desert-scape tapestries and hand-crafted mesquite wood tables and chairs.



S. Máximo Bistrot

The effortlessly luxe eatery made a name for itself with unpretentious upscale Mexican-French fusion (think octopus ceviche and wagyu beef with mole) in a rustic-chic setting. The vibe is a mix of fate and collaboration: Owner-chefs Eduardo “Lalo” Garcia and Gabriela Lopez met lauded designer Charles de Lisle by chance, while working at a resort to raise money for their first restaurant. Wu confesses to one fine dining design pet peeve: “Objects that seem to say very little about the restaurant except ‘This was expensive.’” Here, from the handwoven Oaxacan linens to the ficus tree growing in the middle of the room, every detail is intentional. “Nothing is off the shelf, nothing is someone else’s version of luxury,” she adds. **\$**

The Politics *of* Piping

Written by
Sierra Marilyn Riley

Photography by
Saty + Pratha

Styling by
Isabel Mendoza,
Shannon Nocos,
and Claire
Geddes Bailey

*Pastel-hued
buttercream is
taking a time
out, and now the
feminist folks
pulling the apron
strings can have
their cake and
eat it too.*



“Dessert is the best time.”

So begins Larry Mitchell’s 1977 gay-manifesto-masquerading-as-fable *The Faggots and Friends Between Revolutions*, in which a gaggle of lesbians gab while gorging on sweets. Mitchell positions dessert as communion. And whether it has ornate networks of Rococo ruffles or a tiny bride and groom sitting on top, cake is the apex of shareable, joyful desserts. But baked into the layers of vanilla sponge is a history of colonialism and patriarchy.

Britain’s colonization of the West Indies in the seventeenth century made sugar cheaper, and elevated sweet treats proliferated. By the late 1800s, cake crossed the pond to the United States where it became a staple dessert among families, no longer confined to special events. In the early twentieth century, cake ensured the continued oppression of women in the kitchen when appliances were supposed to give them more time outside of it. The dessert turned political when suffragists baked “election cakes” as promises that they would keep cooking even with the right to vote (the 1909 *Washington Women’s Cook Book* opened with, “Give us the vote and we will cook / The Better for a wide outlook”). Housewives proudly continued spending countless hours weighing sugar, folding dry ingredients into wet, and stacking tiers of sponge. When Betty Crocker released its first instant cake mix in the late 1940s, the product flopped because it didn’t require enough effort, so the brand re-marketed the mix as one step of many, culminating in frosting and decoration.

Nowadays, cake is bound to the politics of identity. On social media, the dessert functions as a sugary show of a user’s personal brand. Girl boss? Literata? Eco-goth? There’s a cake for that. Pinterest’s trend prediction for 2025 lists “Rococo cake” as a hot item; enter it in the search bar and the app’s infinite grid will neatly pack in a pastel collage of perfectly symmetrical baroque-style piping patterns. It’s no coincidence that this confectionary prophecy comes in tandem with the trad-wife movement, which reveres traditional roles in heterosexual marriage. While there’s nothing inherently problematic about this nostalgia, the captions on some trad-wife posts (e.g. “Protect femininity the way God created it to be”) spell major feminist backpedalling.

Bubbling beneath trad-wife conservatism is a cake counter-culture celebrating femininity’s myriad

forms. Enter the punky, gooey, and sometimes grotesque confectionery delights taking over social media feeds. Behind the stand-mixers is a community of women and non-binary bakers who are disrupting Rococo traditionalism with unconventional cakes that subvert prim-and-properness.

Shannon Nocos, founder of Toronto’s Kwento, brings twee subversion to the kitchen, juxtaposing punk and purity. Her bakery specializes in bait-and-switch Victorian gateaux decked out with classic buttercream ribbons, but iced with cursive expletives or painted black for goth flare, glittery cherries optional. (One heart-shaped creation, baked for pop princess Olivia Rodrigo’s Guts Toronto pop-up, came with a knife jutting out of the middle.)

People turn to Nocos for unconventional sweets: “That’s a badge of honour that I wear,” she says. Her predominantly femme clientele call on Kwento to commemorate plastic surgery, cancer remission, divorces, and friend reunions. Every cake weaves a narrative—Make Kwento, which she uses for social media handles, is Taglish for “sharing stories”—and many incorporate ingredients from Nocos’ Filipino roots, like sour calamansi curd and earthy ube.

Baking can be a universal language, a unifier, even an act of self or community care. For Madeline Bach, better known by her *nom de plume*, Frosted Hag, baking is a way of coping with what she describes as the hell that is the current political climate. On a given workday, she’ll spend seven to 12 hours transmuting emotion into confectionary chaos from the shared kitchen of her Manhattan flat. There, Bach builds vibrant, dream-like, occasionally nightmarish mounds of cake to the sounds of her album *du jour*—Chappel Roan has been on repeat of late. Frosted Hag’s cakes, like Roan, are done up in drag, festooned with bows, feathers, berries, and flowers. At their (sometimes) blood-orange-curd-filled core, these decadent treats are an expression of Bach’s angst and creative sensibilities.

Though she sees food often being treated as separate from art, Bach compares baking to her other beloved media: drawing and painting. The baker’s self-described emo self-portraits and drawings from middle school were dark, bizarre, and emotionally charged, much like her Frosted Hag creations. She just swapped a pencil for a piping bag.

In both the art and culinary worlds, Bach has encountered sexist

diminishment, with peers describing her work as “cute.” These days, she brushes it off. “It’s okay if people don’t have this academic, artistic vocabulary, because I know that my work speaks for itself. And it also speaks to people who don’t necessarily have that background, which is what I think art should do.”

Claire Geddes Bailey (she/they), a Toronto-based creative writing grad student and visual artist who goes by Spool Oven on Instagram, is more hesitant to call her cake art. Rather, she thinks of baking as an act of affection. Spool Oven is defined by its creator’s attentive care to her clients’ and friends’ interests. She sculpts absurd “translations” of unorthodox prompts, which include poems, swans, art exhibits, or even the odd German horticultural technique.

No cake is pre-planned; they are improvisationally sculpted and only revealed to clients on the day of celebration. A recently commissioned cake with “brutalism” as the prompt was translated into a cluster of asymmetrical cuboids coated in thick black-sesame icing and trimmed with silver bows. A chocolate cake made for Bailey’s dad’s birthday came generously iced and leaking with a gooey mint-orange marmalade discharge, like a wood fungus growing over mud. Underneath Bailey’s odd decorative ingredients—like lychees, roasted chestnuts, and Halloween candy—are equally strange flavours that come together in delicious harmony: coconut sponge with lime curd, or black cocoa almond oil cake with cherry compote and anise-infused ganache.

Bailey’s craft has undoubtedly evolved into more than a hobby; they joke about one day having a storefront à la TLC’s *Cake Boss*. “I can’t tell you how many hours I spent watching that show,” she says with a smile. Their cake commission process inadvertently mimics Buddy Valastro’s, the *Cake Boss* himself: “I’m doing a consultation with people, I’m getting a prompt, like his customers would give him a prompt, and then I’m like, *I’ll take it to the max!*”

Though Buddy served as early inspiration, Bailey’s baking is primarily rooted in traditions of female labour within her family. What began as a matriarchal rite of passage (she learned how to bake from her mom and granny) has since evolved into something that is her own, tied to queer politics. “It’s a very traditionally feminine thing to do, but then at the same time what I’m doing with it is,” she pauses, “something else.”



“A symbol of community and individualism, purity and gluttony, mess and precision, domesticity and liberation, cake has long been as much a paradox as femininity itself, which is slippery, ineffable, and always changing.”

We are witnessing an online cake coming out of sorts, bakers queering the norm with cakes that ooze and squelch and wobble. “Who’s to say,” Bach muses, “that just because this cake is blue and has four thousand different sides and you can’t tell what layer is what, that it’s not super high femme?” Interpretation is up to the cake-eaters.

A symbol of community and individualism, purity and gluttony, mess and precision, domesticity and liberation, cake has long been as much a paradox as femininity itself, which is slippery, ineffable, and always changing.

After all is frosted and done, the only thing that really matters about cake is that it’s going to get eaten as an act of communion, in a place where affection and sweets are shared freely. The eflux of conflicting ideas cake brings about? That’s just the glitter-cherry on top.





Distrust the Process

Written by
Stacy Lee Kong

Artwork by
Stephanie H. Shih

Photography by
Robert Bredvad



Decades of market and scientific research have turned many foods into something else: easily consumed products fine-tuned to our cravings, and aimed at marginalized people most of all.

7u

PepsiCo, and others. Prego pasta sauce is perhaps his most famous success story. The discovery that U.S. consumers wanted more options helped the company earn \$600 million over the next decade from the sale of chunky sauce alone.

Beyond jarred sauces, Moskowitz's most notable contribution to food science may be the concept of the "bliss point." This is the spot at which a food is flavourful enough to make people want to continue eating, but not so flavourful that their taste buds get overwhelmed. In a 2013 article in *The New York Times*, Moskowitz cautions that more isn't always better. His research finds that, while consumers do prefer a product the sweeter or saltier it gets, there is a point where they like it the most. After that sweet (or salty) spot, their enjoyment decreases.

Other food manufacturers took note, and Moskowitz's work became a major reason why grocery store shelves are stocked with so many ultra-processed foods (UPFs), a broad category that includes staples ranging from Cherry Vanilla Dr. Pepper and Wonder Bread to sweetened peanut butter and Lipton Cup-A-Soup. If you're the CEO of one of these companies, or perhaps a marketing expert creating content on LinkedIn, this chain of events is an unqualified success. For consumers, though, it should be a disturbing look at how UPFs took over our food systems. This is particularly concerning since, technically speaking, they're often not actually food.

According to the NOVA food classification system, which was proposed by University of São Paulo researcher Carlos Monteiro and his colleagues in 2010, what we eat falls into four categories: unprocessed or minimally processed, processed culinary ingredients, processed foods, and ultra-processed foods. Products in the last category pack in unhealthy fats, refined starches, sugar, and salt. They're also low in the protein, dietary fibre, and micronutrients (think iron and vitamin A) that our bodies need. According to Rosie Mensah, a Toronto-based registered dietician and food justice advocate, not all processed foods are created equal. "There's a gray area when it comes to foods that technically fall under the UPF category but still provide important nutrients, which includes things like fortified plant-based milk, whole-grain bread, or plain yogurt with added probiotics," she says.

Generally though, as Monteiro and his team explained in a 2017 paper published in *Public Health Nutrition*, UPFs

the mid-1990s, British neuroscientist Francis McGlone joined the Research and Development division of Unilever, the parent company behind brands like Ben & Jerry's, Knorr, and Hellmann's, to establish a new area of study for the conglomerate: cognitive neuroscience. The goal was to use his knowledge of how our brains function to help Unilever develop products that were, to use a not-so-scientific term, "more-ish."

McGlone's team devised studies to track the neurological response to certain flavours in specific combinations via tests like electroencephalography (EEG), electromyography (EMG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). In a recent episode of *The Nature of Things* titled "Foodspiracy," he gives the example of feeding study participants different types of ice cream and watching their brains glow "like a furnace."

It's not just Unilever, of course. Mathematician and food scientist Howard Moskowitz's résumé gives us an idea of how widespread the practice is. In interviews with *The New York Times* investigative reporter Michael Moss for his 2013 book *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*, Moskowitz detailed the research he'd done for Campbell Soup, General Foods, Kraft,



Ultra-processed foods have invaded grocery aisles, corner stores, and gas station shelves, in many cases becoming default go-tos and, sometimes, the only food option.

are a major problem in our diets. They are designed to be not just shelf-stable and convenient, but also appealing to our taste buds and eyes, and consumable anywhere, any time. "Their formulation, presentation, and marketing often promote overconsumption," the study highlights.

UPFs have invaded grocery aisles, corner stores, and gas station shelves, in many cases becoming default go-tos and, sometimes, the only food option. This shift is to everyone's detriment, but is especially damaging for people who already experience marginalization because of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location.

Canada's food networks are rife with systemic barriers that make it difficult for marginalized groups to access fresh, healthy food. "When you're on a tight budget, UPFs can make a lot of sense. Processed foods tend to be cheaper, and don't spoil as quickly as fresh produce," Mensah says. "And let's be real, if you're working long hours or multiple jobs, cooking from scratch might not always be realistic." Since not everyone has the luxury of making the healthiest choices, it's important not to demonize the consumption of certain foods, but UPFs themselves deserve scrutiny. Along with being unhealthy and designed to be addictive, they are making up an ever-increasing portion of our diets.

A new study published in *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* in November 2024 found that over 45 percent of the calories consumed by Canadians come from these products. Lead author Virginie Hamel, a registered dietician and PhD candidate in the Faculty of Medicine at the Université de Montréal, notes that her team used the most conservative parameters for what counts as ultra-processed, so this number could be much higher. (In the U.S., it now sits at 54 percent, while in the U.K., it's 56 percent, climbing to 66 percent among teenagers.) Researchers also found that the Canadians who consume the most UPFs tend to be younger, male, Indigenous, rural, and have lower education and income levels. Since many of these groups already experience marginalization, the many negative impacts of UPFs can be compounded.

"In terms of physical health, a diet high in UPFs has been linked to everything from weight gain to diabetes, heart disease, and even some cancers," Mensah says. In fact, the more researchers study the health impacts of UPF consumption, the more risks they uncover. A recent

systemic review found direct associations between UPF consumption and cardiovascular disease-related mortality, type 2 diabetes, adverse sleep-related outcomes, and wheezing. New research out of the Université de Montréal (funded by the Heart & Stroke Foundation) also states that 38 percent of all heart and stroke deaths are caused by high UPF consumption. And there is evidence of a link between the amount of UPFs people consume and depression and other mood disorders, along with ties to early death, faster aging, and worse academic performance among adolescents.

However, UPF consumption does not affect everyone the same way. Some groups are already at higher risk of developing certain diseases because of factors like systematic racism, historical oppression, and biased healthcare systems. Black Americans are not only more likely than white Americans to have high blood pressure, they tend to have more severe hypertension, and to develop it earlier in life. Researchers have also found that Black Americans who consume significant amounts of UPFs had a 55 percent higher risk of developing high blood pressure than their white counterparts. Similarly, Asians are more likely to have a disproportionately high body fat percentage for their body mass. This puts the group at increased risk for metabolic diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which are in turn compounded by UPF consumption.

Socioeconomics is a thornier problem within this issue, though. Across Canada and the Western world, low-income communities and communities of colour are more likely to have difficulty accessing healthy food: a phenomenon that is the product of intentionally discriminatory systems and policies. Canada's food system—a complex web of food producers, distributors, and retailers—is rife with barriers for Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities, as well as people with disabilities or experiencing poverty, pushing them toward UPFs. For Indigenous people in particular, colonization, capitalism, and climate change displaced entire nations from their land, which disrupted their ability to grow and prepare traditional dishes. These factors continue to contribute to high rates of food insecurity and chronic health issues.

Meanwhile, food companies specifically market UPFs to marginalized communities, and advertise these

The focus on profit and sheer ubiquity of UPFs in our food systems can feel like a path that is set in stone. But, there are solutions.



foods more heavily in low-income neighbourhoods. According to Mensah, this strategy is an example of how food environments can shape people's dietary decisions: "Low-income neighbourhoods often have more fast food options and convenience stores than grocery stores with fresh produce," she says. "When what's affordable and available is ultra-processed, that's what people are going to get." Similarly, urban design shapes access to healthy ingredients.

Low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to be food deserts, which are defined by the Government of Canada as areas where people are more likely to be experiencing poverty, and their homes are located more than one kilometre (in urban areas) or more than 16 kilometres (in rural ones) from a large grocery store. These are more common in the U.S., but many Canadians live in what researchers studying food disparities in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans dubbed food swamps, or communities where there are abundant food options, but those are mostly unhealthy. The result is a Venn diagram, where discriminatory urban design compounds injustice. Mensah highlights that, over time, high UPF consumption comes with higher rates of diet-related chronic diseases: "[Those] conditions already disproportionately affect these populations due to historical and ongoing inequities in healthcare, employment, and income."

What Mensah is describing is called food apartheid. Coined by American food justice activist Karen Washington, the term is gaining popularity among advocates over the more common food desert and food swamp, neither of which adequately illustrate how segregated food systems are designed and enacted. Not only do these terms have negative connotations, they also imply that food insecurity and a diet high in UPFs are the consequences of individual actions. Food apartheid, though, explicitly acknowledges how greed, problematic government policies, and discrimination—including racism and classism—work together to limit access to healthy food in low-income neighbourhoods. This might be partially due to bylaws restricting large-scale retail to commercial areas, while prohibiting retail in others that have been zoned as residential.

Perhaps the most important factor to consider here is our economic system, which prioritizes profit over everything else. Dick Sadler is an associate

professor in the Charles Stewart Mott Department of Public Health, College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University. He is also an urban geographer who is particularly interested in the intersection of urban planning and health. Sadler largely blames food apartheid on capitalism: "Old cities were naturally walkable, which meant economies were local and small-scale. But contemporary cities are separated by land use and economic class, so the economy is global and on a massive scale," he explains. Stewart also notes that this shift means food companies are subject to thin profit margins, which encourages them to prioritize stocking shelf-stable items like chips and crackers over perishable ones like vegetables, which can't be marked up as much. "It's not just about profit, it's about 'where can we make the *most* profit?'"

The focus on profit and sheer ubiquity of UPFs in our food systems can feel like a path that is set in stone. But, there are solutions. Last year, U.S.-based researchers conducted policy simulations to determine how a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages—combined with subsidies for minimally processed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and healthier drinks—would incentivize people in low-income communities to eschew UPFs by saving them money. They found these fiscal policies could accomplish both goals, with a relatively low cost to governments. Mensah would like to see a broader slate of interventions, including stronger regulations on marketing, especially to children and marginalized communities, more funding for school meal programs, and incentives to encourage grocery stores in underserved areas to stock nutritious foods. She sees the focus on economic empowerment and education as particularly important: "Addressing poverty through higher wages and stronger social support is key to ensuring people can choose healthier options."

Most experts stress that focusing on individual consumer choices is not the best way to reduce UPF consumption. As Hamel points out, the actual goal is to make it easier to access other options. "When we are talking about ultra-processed foods, we want policies, we want the environment to change so it's easier for people to access health food. We don't want to demonize [UPFs] or create guilt," she says. "We need to take some weight off the shoulders of individuals." **S**

Fine Dining's Ice Age

In Manitoba's capital, freezing temperatures are a chance to suit up and take a bite out of winter. If you can't take the cold, stay out of the temporary kitchen.

Written by
Nicolas Mongeon

Photography by
Sierra Pries and
Simeon Rusnak



*For 21 days
last winter,*

you could spot a space-age reminiscent shelter perched on the frozen ground near the confluence of Winnipeg's Red and Assiniboine rivers. The structure wasn't an intergalactic home, mind you. Wooden beams, scaffolding, and inflatable vinyl roof panels were carefully assembled to create a 48-seat temporary restaurant. This 450 square-metre contraption is where the RAW:almond food festival celebrated its tenth edition, with two daily services of seven plus courses. The fleeting space housed Nordic culinary invention, inflected with the cuisines of 29 alternating guest chefs, alongside local chef Mandel Hitzer, one of the event's founders.

The festival sprung from the combined brain power of Hitzer and his pal, designer Joe Kaltornyk. "I was frustrated that we weren't taking advantage of the winter in Winnipeg," explains Kaltornyk. The pair decided that one of the planet's coldest cities needed a place for diners to gather outside when the mercury drops to cryogenic-

worthy temperatures (-30°C isn't uncommon).

The one-of-a-kind event sees chefs from Canada and the U.S. bring their culinary backgrounds along for the tasty ride: Joel Watanabe from Vancouver's Kissa Tanto blends Japanese and Italian traditions, while Michigan-based Lane Regan brings their Eastern European heritage to the plate. No matter the style, dishes call back to Manitoba's terroir, with the help of ingredients like black trumpet mushrooms and trout from Lake Winnipeg.

Hitzer compares the concept to King Arthur's Avalon. To him, the event is a bit magical, existing for a short period of time before disappearing. The space is fleeting, rebuilt and taken down annually, leaving behind imprints in the snow until the thaw.

Guests, minus their winter jackets, settle in on chairs equipped with sheep's skins for extra coziness. A wooden floor defends boots from the frozen-solid Manitoban soil, while Frost Fighter propane heaters keep temperatures at sweater weather. Akin to a puffer coat, the roof's 78 inflatable diamond-shaped panels trap warm air in as a line of defence against the elements. These custom-made pieces dictate how the space is built, and rebuilt. Kaltornyk explains that the lozenges allow the structure to be redesigned in different configurations each year, like a massive Lego project. For their big 10, the team thought outside the box and went pentagonal.



Green means go in the interior of Raw:almond's enclosed pass. Mise en place, cooking, and plating all come together in the rectangular temporary kitchen attached to the dining room. The ins and outs are all managed by a musical chair-style collaboration between chefs and front of house.



All-hands-on-deck: Chef Gus Stieffenhofer-Brandson of Vancouver's Published on Main slides Hokkaido scallop with pumpkin vinegar, physalis, and koji over to Hitzer on day three of the festivities.

A three-bite course of chargrilled lamb belly tartelette, truffle duxelle beignet, and veal tartare, by chef Danny Beaulieu of Ankor in Canmore, Alberta.



Chris Wiebe, Owen Hughes Pearce, Mandel Hitzer, Joe Kaltornyk, and Jon Reid spent 20 days building the restaurant. Just outside, a bonfire paired well with a glass of champagne as a nightcap. After the last plate is cleared, the team has ten days to disassemble their creation, and head back to the drawing board to figure out what will shape up next winter.

A Girl Walks Into a Bar
Impromptu dance
floors, cozy nooks, and the
occasional effervescent
red wine are setting the
scene at queer hangouts
bubbling up in London.

Written by
Sadiya Ansari

Illustrations by
Madison van Rijn



When a mysterious Instagram account announced the opening of a pop-up lesbian bar in east London last February, gossip about who could be behind it quickly escalated into a full-blown urban legend. Pre-empting questions, a cheeky event listing explained the need for secrecy: “So my ex-girlfriend’s girlfriend still comes.” Oh, she came. And so did hundreds of others.

Dreary winter weather didn’t stop a crowd from clogging Broadway Market, a scene-y street in Hackney. They were all trying to get into a tiny basement where Clara Solis and her then-partner Alex Loveless were holding their very first event featuring the simple pleasures of a Madrid wine bar. For Solis, the response was overwhelming, and there was a clear message. “There’s a real need for this,” she told me.

I missed this epic gathering, having planned to go with a friend who bailed last minute. Watching several viral TikTok videos about the seemingly historic event didn’t help my FOMO. But within a month, Loveless and Solis announced they found a permanent (above ground) spot and christened it with the pop-up’s name: La Camionera. In Spanish, this means female truck driver, and it’s also slang for butch.

This lesbian wine bar is part of a queer renaissance in east London. Particular attention is being paid to designing spaces for queer women that are more niche than the kitsch, rainbow-flag-clad bars that tend to focus on gay men. La Camionera is one of two bars catering to FLINTA folks (female, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans, and agender people)—to open in the last year. These new venues are a departure from what we think of as a gay bar, certainly, but also the classic lesbian club. They represent a new inclusivity, especially important amid backlash against transgender folk, that sees the first lesbian private members club set to open in London in 2025 banning trans women. Neither of these spaces existed when I first moved here in 2023, and I was surprised at the lack of permanent queer spots in a city of 8.8 million.

As it turns out, that was one of the worst periods for FLINTA bars in particular. A study by the city showed that 60 percent of LGBTQ+ venues shut down between 2006 and 2022. And out of the 50 or so that were left, there was only one lesbian bar: She in Soho, a historic hub of LGBTQ+ nightlife. She even managed to survive the pandemic, as closures that plagued the nightlife industry at large also hit queer venues hard, especially as rent hikes regularly lead to shuttered doors.

Although it’s owned by a man, there’s a certain respect for She in the community, and it has devoted regulars. However, many queer women I’ve spoken to about the club conclude that it isn’t quite what they’re looking for, and I see what they’re saying.

I ended up there one night last summer on a whim, with a friend. A bouncer nodded at us and pointed down the stairs. Despite perilously low ceilings, I felt more free dancing on that sticky basement floor than I had since moving to the city. The door policy keeps unaccompanied men from entering, and the crowd inside was young, but friendly (my flailing arms knocked over a young woman’s pint and she refused to take me up on my offer to replace it).

But the subterranean space had zero charm, and the DJ’s cool-girl aesthetic didn’t make up for her bad taste in music. Plus, I’m at an age where low-shelf highballs aren’t

a selling point. As a woman of colour, I also longed for a more diverse space—the crowd at She didn’t reflect the city. This is, unfortunately, what many have come to expect in bars for queer women: a lack of choice. And, according to Erica Rose who is part of a duo tracking the number of lesbian bars in the U.S., this sad state of options is part of a historical pattern: “Queer women never occupied or held public space in the same way that gay men did. We don’t really have a gayborhood,” Rose told *Architectural Digest*.

Part of this phenomenon results from the relative privilege gay men have within the LGBTQ+ community, making them more likely to have the resources to sustain venues. Pippa Catterall, a professor of history at the University of Westminster, echoed Rose’s sentiment about London. “You don’t necessarily have permanent lesbian enclaves within the city, in comparison with gay men, who tend to be much wealthier,” says Catterall, who co-authored a 2021 report on queering public spaces.

Pop-ups have been one way around soaring rents, and over the last decade, the city has been spoiled rotten with them, including Femme Fraiche at Dalston Superstore and PXSSY PALACE, which is geared toward POC FLINTA crowds. Most are club nights, but Lucy Nurnberg created something a little different. “Obviously everyone knows us for our arm wrestling tournaments,” she says, laughing.

UHaul Dyke Rescue was born out of Nurnberg’s MA thesis focused on speculative design. She imagined a not-so-distant future in which the trends of London queer spaces closing and right wing politics rolling back queer rights have both persisted. “Throughout history, when [facing] persecution, the queer community has really found ways to build community. And the response is often done with a lot of humour and joy,” she says.

Nurnberg designed UHaul as a travelling party in the summer, which expanded into hosting club nights in colder weather. The team puts in a ton of work for each pop-up—creating go-go dancer cages and a jungle gym, for one—but at the end of the day, Nurnberg says the challenge remains that they’re working in venues that weren’t created with queer women in mind. Part of what she loves about the new venues is that this crowd was their starting point, providing places to hang out, wine glass or cocktail in hand, without the pressure of a club night.



Arriving at Goldie Saloon with three girlfriends, our Uber driver stopped in front of an alley adjacent to the overground train tracks. Goldie's sits beneath the art gallery GUTS in Hackney, and was co-founded by Ell Pennick and Mai Harris. The space opened in July, but I first walked through its discreet doorway to ring in the New Year. The bar at the entrance served well-priced classics like negronis and old fashioned, mezcal jello shots as a NYE special, and beer on tap from Queer Brewing, the U.K.'s first queer-owned brewery, along with Lucky Saint for those looking for a non-alcoholic option. We walked through the buzzy front room, across the bit of space that morphs into an impromptu dance floor to the quieter and cosier back room,

done up with benches and cushions. I quickly discovered this bar attracts a younger demo—the crowd yelled the lyrics to “Pink Pony Club” with the fervour I would have sung “Hollaback Girl” back in the day. But I didn't feel like the weird old uncle in the club. Even if I wasn't the target demo, the vibe was welcoming.

Though they throw the occasional party, Goldie's typically closes at 11 pm and was not designed as a club. The space is just as likely to be hosting a queer poetry night or drag social, while the daytime crowd includes annoying people (like me) working on laptops. After my Goldie's NYE visit, I decided it was finally time to make the pilgrimage to La Camionera, a mythical place that turned out to be less than a 30-minute walk from my flat. When I stepped inside, a couple was sitting at a nook in the front window, almost like an ad for the venue, giggling over glasses of wine. While being shown to my table, I was led past a custom metal bar in a cool white room, to the back area that hummed with conversation.

The whole scene, along with the perfect playlist (“Don't Speak” by No Doubt included) confirmed that, yes, this was in fact the bar of my dreams.

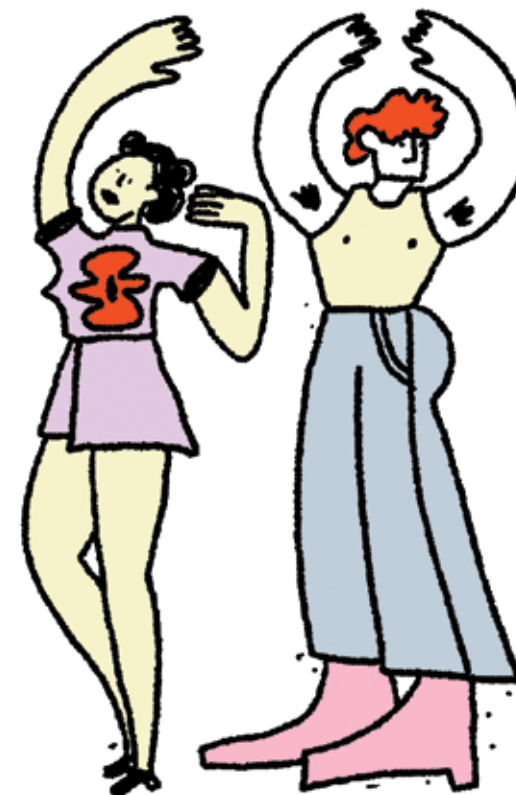
From my perch atop a bar stool, I watched the warmly lit back room fill up with women, their drinks balanced on a mahogany ledge to my left, and sitting at benches and bistro tables to my right. By 7 pm, the room was full of chatter—catching up, flirting, talking about the art hung on terra cotta walls, all sourced locally. The whole scene, along with the perfect playlist (“Don't Speak” by No Doubt included) confirmed that, yes, this was in fact the bar of my dreams.

There was a thrill in being there, and not only because it was immediately declared a scene-y spot by *Dazed* and *Vogue*. It was inspiring to see how the community helped bring this place to life. Yes, they pack the bar on any given night, but they also supported the idea through raising \$143,000 to make it happen. While Solis and Loveless managed to pull together the majority of funds on their own, this last chunk was crucial in getting the space together quickly.

The pair got very hands-on when overhauling the deli they took over to realize their vision. Inspiration came from the wine bars Solis hung out in when visiting family in Spain. She also tells me everything was bought second-hand where possible, including stained glass Tiffany light fixtures and lamps. Even the bulbs are DIY—Solis found them too bright, so she painted them orange, giving the bar its inviting glow. And when searching for custom tiles, but realizing how expensive they are, Solis sourced plain white ones for the walls, hand-painting them with blue figures of women.

Scanning their menu, it unsurprisingly focused on wine, mostly Spanish but with a mix of French and Italian reds, whites, and oranges at different price points. An effervescent red from Emilia-Romagna piqued my interest, with olives and a bit of baguette on the side. I shared some of my snacks with a new friend: a former employee at She. We marveled at the scene, a beautiful spot designed with us in mind—soft lighting, music at a level that didn't drown out our conversation, and sophistication without a jacked up price point.

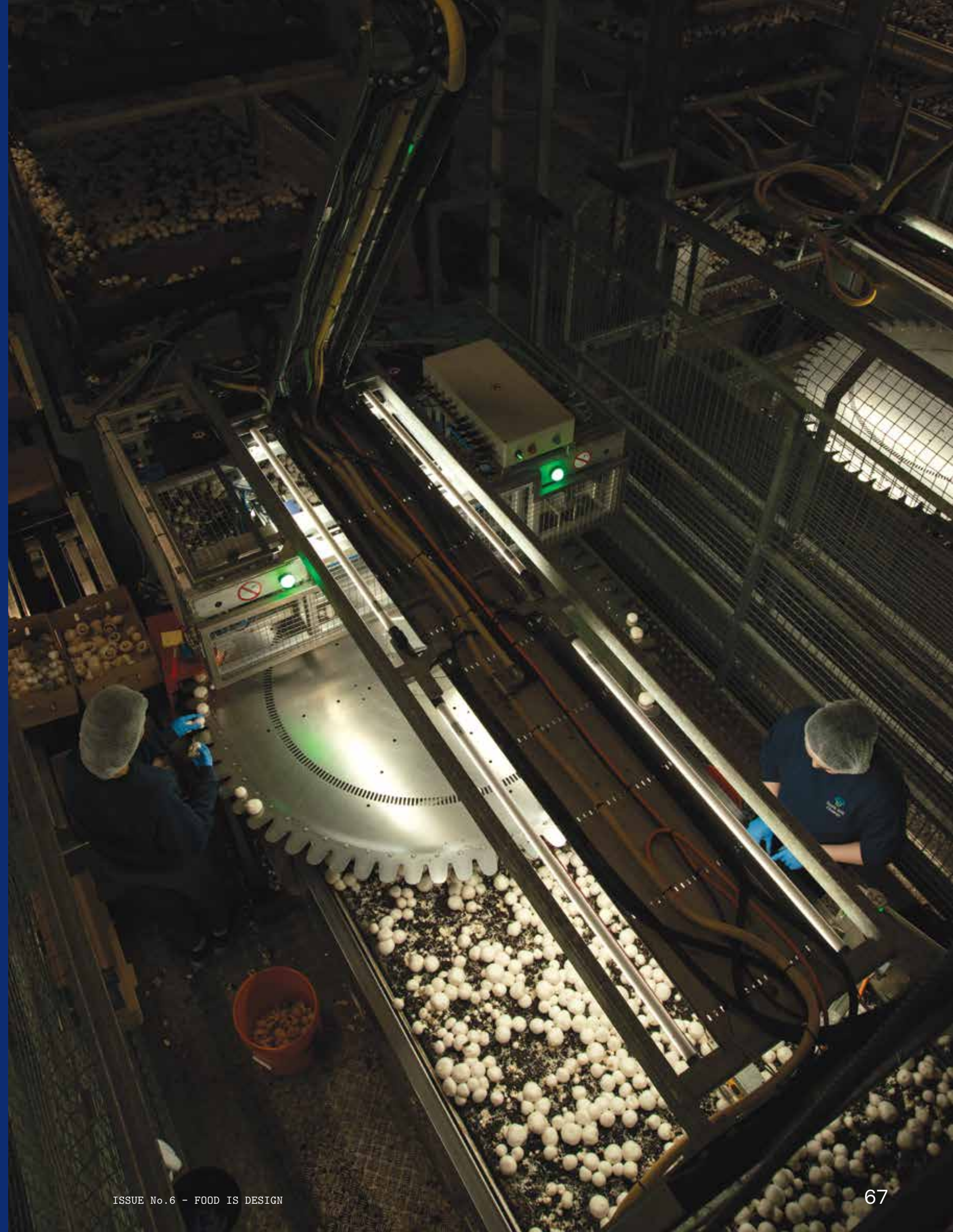
I felt a sense of relief, realizing I'd finally found my go-to where I could pop in solo after a hard day, or take a friend out to celebrate. Beyond providing a neighbourhood haunt, new spaces like La Camionera are a clear signal that it's not enough to declare your venue a safe space. People want that, with an earthy glass of natural wine, too. I'll drink to that. **S**



GROWTH OPPORTUNITY

Robotic harvesting is poised to bring commercial mushroom farming out of the dark (and humid) ages.

Written by Sarah Musgrave
Photography by Eamon Mac Mahon



S

Sun-dappled woods. Foragers toting bespoke wicker baskets and pushing back the underbrush with anticipation. Ah, the romance of mushroom picking. Connecting us to the deep mysteries of the planet since before *sauce forestière* or shroom chocolates were a thing. However, there's not much wildness or whimsy in the dim, damp warehouses where fungi are harvested on a massive scale. Commercial mushroom farms are labour-intensive operations; a multi-room facility can harvest 700,000 a day, picked by hand, trimmed with a knife, and ever-so-delicately packed—because this produce bruises more easily than your ex's ego.

Humans have been farming *agaricus bisporus* (the same species, at different ages, gives us button, cremini, portobello, and *champignon de Paris*) pretty much the same way for centuries. In a slippery, shadowy, high-CO2 atmosphere, pickers move up and down between tall stacks of shelves up to eight tiers high. It's a tough job, largely reliant on migrant workers who

get up to speed only to have their work permits expire. And it's all about keeping up, because mushrooms double in size every 24 hours, round the clock, in all seasons.

Now, with increasing market demand and workforce shortages, the \$70-billion global industry is finding itself ripe for a rethink. The future may be in the hands of robots—more precisely in the proprietary gripping mechanisms of agricultural robotics developer Mycionics. At one of South Mill Champs' 11 farming facilities in British Columbia, the Canadian firm is piloting some of the most technologically advanced mushroom harvesting in the world.

While most of your grocery store mushrooms are still picked by people, you may already be buying ones scanned and plucked by a Mycionics robot with a cutting-edge vision system, machine learning, and remarkably soft-yet-firm fingers. Her colleagues call her Jessica.

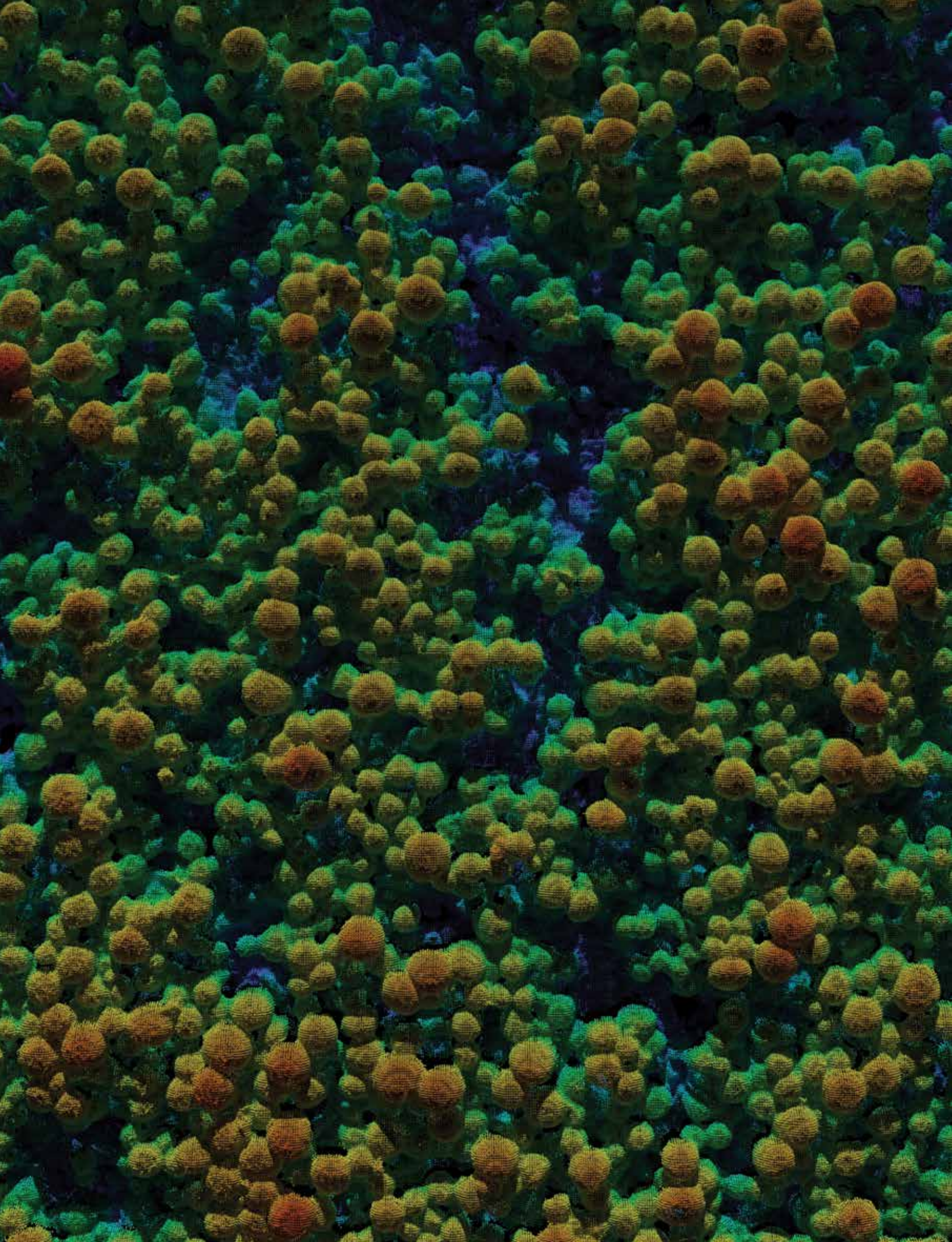
Some mushroom farms still use traditional wooden shelving infrastructure—imagine a dusky Victorian library, with pickers climbing rolling ladders to access the highest stacks. The “Dutch shelf system,” introduced in the 1980s, improved efficiency with aluminium racks. In the drawer system—a more recent innovation from the Dutch-based Christiaens Group—beds are designed to come to pickers (and robots) in the harvesting room.





LEFT: With 10,000 square metres of growing surface area, South Mill Champs' Apex 2 is the proving grounds for smart farming. Automation and humans work in tandem. Lead robotics operator Diem Ky Ngo is part of a tightly knit staff of largely Vietnamese origin, many hoping for permanent residency. It took just a few hours for her to train on the Myconics system—and to affectionately name its pivoting pincers. "Jessica is gentle," she says.

ABOVE: Harvesters have to stay ahead of the wave. Mushrooms expand by 4 percent every hour, busting out in growth spurts called breaks, requiring a labour force of fast, safe, available hands. Pickers can do 30 mushrooms a minute when cutting stems; with automation, like the harvesting disc, the rate jumps to 60 per minute.



Cropscout software collects and relays real-time data on size, growth rate, density, and microclimate.

Connected agriculture is the future, according to Mycionics CEO and technical lead, Stefan Glibetic. “It all comes down to eyes, brain, and hands,” he says. The robotic harvester his team developed doesn’t just use its dual cameras and infrared projection to calculate how to use its fingers effectively to pick perfect-sized specimens. It also scans and digitizes the bed, giving each mushroom a unique ID.

Cropscout software collects and relays real-time data on size, growth rate, density, and microclimate. South Mill Champs’ farms director Bryan Madden can

see at a glance which areas are growing better, which mushrooms were under-picked, or where irrigation may need adjusting. (“As long as I can run the team, I can run these farms from my phone,” Madden quips.)

With a combination of algorithms, including AI, the system can also offer everything from the makeup of the compost to the performance of different strains. It can also forecast which crops will be ready when, setting up a tighter feedback loop between sales and the growing floor, ultimately reducing time to store shelves and stroganoff pots.



ABOVE: The installation of Mycronics MDH20, serial number 00001, represented a decade of engineering challenges. The system needed to be finely calibrated yet low maintenance and easy to operate—even the screen icons were custom designed. It also had to be food-safe (meaning no lubricants) and resilient to human error, while withstanding a tough environment that includes steam cleaning, i.e. robot kryptonite.

RIGHT: Rinse and repeat: Beds move between growing rooms and harvesting rooms in a non-stop cycle at Apex 2. Next-gen mushroom farms are already online in Canada, the Netherlands, and the U.K., with more coming soon. In an industry where not long ago technology meant a fresh-air louver, a thermostat, and a fan, new technological solutions really are, well, mushrooming.



Written by
Renée Morrison

Table d'Hôte

Illustration by
Laura Junger

A chef, artist, and jiggly treat pioneer shares how to
throw a dinner party you can actually enjoy.



Hosting should be fun. And yet, more often than not, you're sweating over the stove while your guests are a couple drinks in, laughing over a story you've missed entirely. Zoe Messinger—the mastermind behind Gelée, a line of next-level tropical-flavoured jelly—knows how to play with her food, and get her guests in on the fun. Here, she dishes about planning out soirées she loves hosting and attending, too.

Is there a secret to actually enjoying your own dinner party?

There's a time and place for formal, white-tablecloth dinners, but yours doesn't have to be one of them. I like to live—and host—by my own rules. Take the pressure off, make your party interactive, and serve things you can eat with your hands. My mom has always loved eating with her hands, it's an ancient, almost sacred way of gathering around a meal, and I always try to incorporate that when I'm hosting.

What goes into designing the menu? Tell us about one of your best.

I recently hosted an amazing night at my place with just three friends. I decided to go with an omakase-style menu, so I picked up a bunch of fresh ingredients like sashimi-grade fish, nori, and produce. I took care of the mise en place ahead of time. Once my guests arrived, I just went with the flow and created hand rolls

as the night went on, taking ideas and requests. Before our meal, I gave out passionfruit-saketini koi fish as a jiggly amuse-bouche—essentially an elevated Jell-O shot.

Any fun or unexpected ways to get guests talking at the table?

My friends are all bold, outgoing, and talkative characters, so that's never really been an issue. I guess that could be the tip: "Cast" your dinner party appropriately, as if you were casting your own short film. Make sure you know there will be enough chatty folks to keep the conversation flowing.

You're a trained chef. Do you have any foolproof meal suggestions for a host who might be stressing about what to serve?

A fun cheese and charcuterie board feels really gourmet—like you put effort into it—but it's something you can design and prepare even a day or two ahead. I love a Spanish cheese like manchego, or a feta, with a square of guava Gelée. You can even use cookie cutters or moulds—I created the line to inspire people to be creative. And a board is a blank canvas where you can get creative without the stress of timing.

What's your stance on potlucks? Hosting hack or faux pas?

In my experience, people love a potluck. There's this anticipation that comes with preparing a dish that you're excited to share. Some of my favourite meals ever have started with going to the farmers' market on my own, seeing what's available, what looks good, and what speaks to me. My best friend will do the same thing, and then we meet up later, take stock of our ingredients, and come up with a menu. It's a stress-free way to dine together, and it always ends up being memorable because it's not just about the meal, but everything before it, too.

Do you have go-to dinner party tunes?

My dad was a big music guy, and since we lived in the middle of nowhere, he used to play me his favourites—lots of Rolling Stones—on the 45-minute drive to school. I like a wide range of styles, so I'll go through seasons where I listen more to one type of music until I'm onto something else. I recently had a phase where I loved the Brazilian guitarist João Gilberto, and I played his albums at gatherings. **S**



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From her office, Betty Bich Ho manages mushroom harvesters who work alternating eight-to-10 hour shifts. She's known for running a tight, clean ship, hosting rocking lunar new year parties and leaving no fungus memorabilia unturned.

