The FRESH WAY of EATING

It’s modern Nordic cuisine, and it’s taking over dining tables everywhere. Driving the new food movement: creative herb combos, healthy ingredients, and memory-making flavors that hit every note, from deliciously delicate to daring and bold.

Photographs by KANA OKADA

SWEDEN AND CALIFORNIA ARE more than 5,000 miles apart, but in their San Francisco restaurant, Pläj (pronounced “play”), the husband-and-wife team of Roberth (the chef) and Andrea (the manager) Sundell brings the cuisine of these two foodcentric cultures together. “We take traditional family recipes from Sweden and present them in a new, modern way, highlighting California produce,” Roberth says. In reinventing these nostalgic dishes of his childhood, he’s made them lighter but also bolder, with more intense tastes.

“The true flavors and textures of the fresh vegetables and fish stand out; they’re not masked with heavy sauces,” Roberth says. It’s that focus on produce and seafood (along with vegetable-based oils, low-fat dairy, whole grains, lean meats, and fruit) that makes Nordic food so good—and so good for you.
Pickle-Poached Salmon With Cucumber and Fennel

Serves: 4
Cook time: 10 minutes
Total time: 20 minutes

1 cup distilled vinegar
2 cups water
2 bay leaves
1 teaspoon whole allspice
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon allspice
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon white pepper
1 yellow onion
1 leek (white part only)
41/4 cups water
1 tablespoon molasses
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 pound sunchokes
1/2 pound baby Chioggia (candy cane) beets
1 tablespoon cider vinegar
2 ounces hazelnuts
2 teaspoons olive oil, plus more for reheating vegetables
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt, white pepper, nutmeg, allspice, and cloves, and sweet vegetables for about 5 minutes to build flavor. Put a lid on pot for a few minutes to let vegetables steam.

2 Add carrots, molasses, port, and water to the pot, along with bay leaves. Let simmer until vegetables are tender, about 1 hour. Discard bay leaves.

3 Serve in soup bowls, topped with rye croutons and chopped parsley.

Nutrition score per serving: 286 calories, 8 g fat (1.5 g saturated), 13 g carbs, 8 g protein, 15 g fiber, 308 mg sodium

Spiced Cabbage Soup With Rye Croutons

Serves: 4
Cook time: 1 hour
Total time: 2 hour

2 thick slices rye bread, cut into cubes
1 teaspoon butter
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon olive oil
1/2 teaspoon chopped garlic
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1 head white cabbage
1 leek (white part only)
1 yellow onion
1/2 teaspoon white pepper
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon allspice
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
2 carrots, grated
1 tablespoon molasses
1 cup port or any dark beer
4 cups water
1-2 bay leaves
Chopped parsley

1 Sauté rye cubes in a pan over medium heat. Add carrots, molasses, port, and wine to the pot, along with bay leaves. Let simmer until vegetables are tender about 1 hour. Discard bay leaves.

2 Serve in soup bowls, topped with rye croutons and chopped parsley.

Nutrition score per serving: 349 calories, 16 g fat (2.2 g saturated), 11 g carbs, 30 g protein, 2 g fiber, 314 mg sodium

Fall Beets and Sunchoke Salad

Serves: 4
Cook time: 50 minutes
Total time: 1 hour

2 ounces hazelnuts
2 teaspoons olive oil, plus more for reheating vegetables
1 teaspoon sugar
1/2 pound baby golden beets
1/2 pound baby Choggia (candy cane) beets
1/2 pound sunchookes
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon white truffle oil
2 tablespoons cider vinegar
8 ounces baby watercress
Roshier salt
Black pepper
2 ounces Wästerbotten, thinly sliced (A cow’s milk cheese; you can substitute Parmesan or any other hard cow’s milk cheese)
Sea salt

1 In a pan over medium heat, toast hazelnuts in 1 teaspoon olive oil and sugar, stir until lightly caramelized. Remove from heat.

2 Preheat the oven to 350°. Fill a large pot halfway with water and bring to a boil. Add beets and cook until soft, about 45 minutes. Remove beets from water to cool, then peel and slice them.

3 While beets cook, drizzle sunchookes with 1 teaspoon olive oil. Roast until tender, 20 to 30 minutes; set aside. When cool, slice, leaving skins on.

4 In a small jar with a lid, combine extra-virgin olive oil, truffle oil, and vinegar. Shake the jar to combine. Toss watercress with the vinaigrette.

5 Reheat beets and sunchookes in a hot pan with some olive oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add to salad, along with toasted hazelnuts and cheese. Serve with a sprinkling of sea salt.

Nutrition score per serving: 418 calories, 33 g fat (5.6 g saturated), 25 g carbs, 10 g protein, 6 g fiber, 998 mg sodium

Peppery greens complement the sweet beets and earthy sunchookes in this salad.
Swedish Buttermilk Pancakes With Wild Berry Jam and Whipped Cream

Serves: 4
Cook Time: 45 minutes
Total Time: 55 minutes

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 1/4 cups low-fat milk
- 3/4 cup plus 1 1/2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla paste or 1 1/2 tablespoons vanilla extract
- 3/4 cup mixed berries, such as strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon butter

Whipped cream, for serving

1. In a large bowl, beat eggs, then add buttermilk and low-fat milk and whisk to combine. Add flour, 1 1/2 teaspoons sugar, and salt and stir until combined. Add 3/4 teaspoon vanilla paste and mix until combined. Place batter in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, make the berry sauce: In a small bowl, mix together berries, water, cornstarch, 1/2 cup sugar, and remaining vanilla paste. Transfer to a saucepan and simmer over low heat until berries break down and sauce thickens, about 30 minutes. Let cool.

3. Heat a nonstick pan over medium-high. Add butter, then pour about 3 tablespoons of batter into pan and swirl until pan is evenly coated. When air pockets appear, flip pancake. Cook 1 to 2 minutes; repeat with remaining batter.

4. Serve pancakes with berry sauce and whipped cream if desired.

Nutrition score per serving: 350 calories, 12 g fat (2.5 g saturated), 24 g carbs, 29 g protein, 8 g fiber, 975 mg sodium

Pork Chop With Roasted Kohlrabi, Rutabaga, and Wild Kale

Serves: 4
Cook Time: 30 minutes
Total Time: 35 minutes

- 2 kohlrabies, peeled and cut into wedges
- 2 rutabagas, peeled and cut into wedges
- 1 teaspoon shaved garlic
- 1 teaspoon rosemary, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon thyme, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt, plus more for seasoning
- 1 teaspoon black pepper, plus more for seasoning
- 8 kale leaves, torn
- 1/4 ounce Danish blue cheese, frozen and finely grated
- Sea salt
- Cooking spray
- 4 5-ounce pork chops

1. Preheat the oven to 400°. In a large bowl, toss together kohlrabi, rutabaga, garlic, rosemary, thyme, olive oil, and 1 teaspoon each of salt and pepper. Transfer vegetables to a rimmed baking sheet and roast for 15 to 20 minutes or until vegetables soften, adding kale leaves for the last 2 minutes of cooking. Remove baking sheet from the oven, transfer vegetables to a serving dish, and top with the grated blue cheese and a sprinkling of sea salt.

2. Meansime, make the berry sauce: In a small bowl, mix together berries, water, cornstarch, 1/4 cup sugar, and remaining vanilla paste. Transfer to a saucepan and simmer over low heat until berries break down and sauce thickens, about 30 minutes. Let cool.

3. Heat a nonstick pan over medium-high. Add butter, then pour about 3 tablespoons of batter into pan and swirl until pan is evenly coated. When air pockets appear, flip pancake. Cook 1 to 2 minutes; repeat with remaining batter.

4. Serve pancakes with berry sauce and whipped cream if desired.

Nutrition score per serving: 462 calories, 12 g fat (2.5 g saturated), 24 g carbs, 19 g protein, 8 g fiber, 975 mg sodium