

by Ron James

THE CHEF

Charlie Trotter is one of America's greatest chefs and his Chicago restaurants are celebrated around the world. But in the last few years, Trotter has become ensnarled in one of the great fine-food controversies of our time - to foie gras or not to foie gras.

In 2002, after visiting a foie gras farm, Trotter was so enraged by inhumane treatment of the geese that he took goose liver (foie gras) off the menu of his flagship restaurant, Charlie Trotter's.

In 2006, using Trotter as a poster boy for the anti-foie gras movement, Chicago banned the sale of the delicacy in Windy City dining spots. Then the liver really hit the fan. Chefs in Chicago and around the nation cried fowl - er - foul. The ban, they said, violated our freedom to eat what we want. Trotter was verbally pummeled from foie gras-loving fellow chefs - although he maintained his independence from animal rights groups.

CHARLIE TROTTER - One of America's great chefs, Charlie Trotter, right, wrote the best-selling cookbook 'Raw' with Roxanne Klein, seen here. He is so opposed to the inhumane treatment of geese that he took goose liver (foie gras) off the menu of his restaurant, Charlie Trotter's, in Chicago. CNS Photo. **SUPER SALAD** - Charlie Trotter's special salad features corn, jicama, Asian pear and cucumber tossed with a lime vinaigrette. CNS Photo. "I never wanted to become a de facto poster boy for the no foie gras movement," claimed Trotter in a 2005 New York Times interview."

Poster boy or not, Trotter did defended his decision vigorously, taking special aim at fellow Chicago chef Rick Tramonto who called his anti-foie gras stance hypocritical. Trotter fired back suggesting that Tramonto's own liver might be served up as a little treat.

Meanwhile, in acts of culinary civil disobedience, Windy Citizens got into the foie fray. In protest, dining spots large and small featured the unnaturally enlarged livers on their menus in very creative ways. One pizza parlor offers foie gras pizza and a hot dog stand has three kinds of foie gras sausage specials.

THE DISH

There is no foie gras in the featured dish, which is made up of humanely grown and harvested fruits and vegetables. This fresh salad is a combination of corn, jicama, Asian pear and cucumber tossed with a lime vinaigrette. It's bumped up a notch with a bit of chopped jalapeno, mint and flatleaf parsley, plus a touch of avocado puree. It's adapted from the recently released paperback version of "Raw" (Ten Speed Press, \$24.95), the best-selling cookbook written by Trotter and Roxanne Klein.

Until a decade or so ago, jicama was a rare ingredient in U.S. cuisine. Despite its rough exterior, the root is crisp, fresh and refreshing. Also known as the yam bean and Mexican turnip, it can be eaten raw or cooked as a starch. To prepare, peel the skin and fibrous flesh just below the surface. One pound will yield about 3 cups of cubed or shredded jicama.

THE WINE

"When most people think of German riesling," Trotter writes. "The first thing that comes to mind are sweet wines from the Piesporter and Blue Nun era. Yet a majority of the wines from the top German producers are actually trocken, or dry styles."

Follow Trotter's advice and select a Robert Weil 2005 Riesling Kabinett Halbtrocken (\$24.95) for the salad.

"Robert Weil's rieslings from the Rheingau are the perfect accent for the brightness and freshness of this dish," Trotter continues. "The lime-laced vinaigrette makes the salad sing with acidity, and the coolness and minerality of the cucumbers complement the flavors of the riesling."

CORN, JICAMA, ASIAN PEAR AND CUCUMBER SALAD WITH AVOCADO PUREE

Salad:

1/4 cup 1/8-inch dice jicama

1/4 cup sweet corn kernels

1/4 cup 1/8-inch dice unpeeled English cucumber

1/4 cup 1/8-inch dice peeled Asian pear

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

4 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice

1 tablespoon minced jalapeno chile

1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint

2 tablespoons chopped fresh flatleaf parsley

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Avocado puree:

1/2 ripe avocado, peeled and chopped

2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice

1/4 cup filtered or bottled water

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Lime vinaigrette:

1 1/2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

4 lime segments, supremed and cut into thirds

Garnish:

2 teaspoons chopped fresh flatleaf parsley

2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh mint

2 teaspoons finely grated lime zest

Yields 4 servings.

To prepare salad: Combine jicama, corn, cucumber, pear, olive oil, lime juice, jalapeno, mint and parsley in bowl and toss to mix. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

To prepare avocado puree: In blender, combine avocado, lime juice and water and puree on high until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

To prepare lime vinaigrette: Whisk together lime juice and olive oil in bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in lime pieces.

To serve: See photo. Spoon vertical line of avocado puree on center of each plate. Spoon on 2 additional lines, as if forming a large A with intersecting lines. Spoon some salad to the left of the intersecting points, placing it on puree. Drizzle vinaigrette over salad and around plate. Sprinkle with parsley, mint and lime zest.

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Food and Wine: Salad and riesling steers clear of foi gras flap by Ron James