

Evergreen

INGREDIENTS

CHEF DAVID BARZELAY OF **LAZY BEAR**
 REDISCOVERS CONIFERS' DELICIOUSNESS

by Meg Maker

Ever eat a pine tree?

Actually, many parts are edible. The Japanese have long cooked with the tree's slender needles, the Scandinavians with feathery fir and spruce. Evergreens can be dried for tea, infused into oils and spirits, and tossed onto the hearth to add campfire crackle to meats, fish and vegetables.

Adventuresome American chefs are bringing evergreens indoors, too. Conifers are spiking everything from cocktails to desserts at restaurants like Prune, Daniel, Gramercy Tavern in New York and cult restaurant Noma in Copenhagen.

At Lazy Bear, in San Francisco's Mission District, chef-owner David Barzelay can't get enough of the stuff. "It's rare we have a menu without some conifer on it, somewhere," he says. "It's just an ingredient I love so much."

Barzelay especially loves working with redwood greens, which he views as iconic of the Bay Area. He forages the frilly new growth that sprouts from the base of the trunk. "It'll be bright green—like lime green—and super tender," he says. "You can just shove it in your mouth and eat it. And it's delicious! Just this citrusy, piney kind of flavor."

Lazy Bear's fifteen-course tasting menu, served communally, highlights seasonal ingredients hauled in by the fishers,

There's a new way to eat your greens: Conifers add complex flavor, served with a side of nostalgia.



farmers, ranchers and foragers of North Coast California. “We really focus on the produce of the Bay Area, both wild and cultivated,” Barzelay says. “We love for our foods to have a sense of place.”

But the aesthetic isn't just farm- (and sea- and forest-) to-table. “We incorporate that wild, San Francisco Bay Area reference point,” says Barzelay, “with an emphasis on nostalgia.” So while the cooking is modernist, it equally evokes sentimentality for bygone mid-century Americana—“housewife culture,” Barzelay calls it, with clear-eyed irony. Think Sterno and Swedish meatballs, macaroni salad, strong drinks. It's home-made glam, with a dipping sauce. “It's my critique of fine dining,” says Barzelay. “It's fine food, but formatted like a dinner party.”

Lazy Bear's food spoofs old standards, too. Take the appetizer of crispy fried vegetables, served with a dip made from crème fraîche that's been seasoned with a potpourri of house-dried local alliums and porcini. The flavor inspiration? Lipton French Onion Soup Mix.

But it's done with a wink, not a smirk. “I think we love our subject. It's not coming from a place of saying, that sour cream and onion dip we had growing up is horrible, now we've made it good. We're saying, we loved that—and we're making it slightly better.”



Chef-owner David Barzelay of San Francisco's Lazy Bear.

Guests have clicked with the *Mad Men*-meets-Muir Woods vibe. In 2016, Barzelay was crowned a 2016 Best New Chef by *Food & Wine Magazine*. Last October he earned his second Michelin star.

Barzelay first started working with conifers when a favorite forager brought a bundle of fresh Douglas fir tips to market. He'd heard about British chef Heston Blumenthal pairing Douglas fir with mango, but he'd never used evergreen in his own cooking.

He toted home some tips and got to work, trying them first as garnish and steeping them in cream. He loved the flavor: sharp and tart but also resinous and deeply evocative, conjuring “everything from Christmas to strolls in the forest.”

Soon he branched out, inventing dishes like grilled rack of lamb daubed with redwood tip and pine nut pesto, seasoned with a redwood tip salt, slathered with a redwood-infused lamb jus and plated in a nest of brilliant redwood fronds.

More recently, he's paired juniper or Douglas fir with matsutake, the pine mushroom, so-called because it grows under groves of evergreens and tastes of pine, too.

His arboreal interests aren't limited to conifers. He's using the curly bark of madrone to add a tannic, cinnamon snap to desserts, and is now “working on a sort of a deep forest kind of dish with acorn something and a sauce of nettles, foraged greens like lamb's quarters, and a wild boar jerky.”

Trying It At Home

Even urban cooks can forage forest flavors. Avoid the highly toxic yew, but pine, fir and spruce are fair game. Taste the new growth to get a sense of the flavor. The resinous tips infuse especially well in fats, oils and alcohol (try them in gin).

In the kitchen, Barzelay suggests pairing with chicken. Sauté a few breasts in a pan, tossing in a knob of butter along with a few sprigs of redwood, spruce or pine. Spoon this sauce over the meat as it finishes.

“As you're basting, you'll pick up a lot of that flavor. You'll get this wonderful aroma from it,” he says. Then plate it, too, on a bed of evergreens. And serve it—why not?—with a side of macaroni salad. ■*cr*

