

brain food

# Einstein's Kitchen



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Photos by Heather Mull

## Alimentary Alchemy



You are seated at a comfortable table in a fine restaurant, perusing the menu. "Let's see now. Foie Gras with Blackberry Reduction, Black Truffle Risotto, Braised Ribs of Kobe Beef, Sauerkraut Pierogie ..... Whaaaaaat? Pierogie? Are they serious?"

Intrigued and a bit apprehensive, you order the pierogie appetizer. But when it arrives, it looks nothing at all like a pierogie. It looks for all the world like salmon-roe caviar. You spoon a few of the chilled little globules into your mouth, where they explode with flavor. And damned if they don't taste exactly like a sauerkraut pierogie!

Is there some kind of wizard in the kitchen who can wave his magic whisk and, Midas-like, transform a lowly pierogie into golden caviar?

Yes. His name is Kevin Sousa, and the restaurant is the Bigelow Grille in – you guessed it – Pierogie Town USA. Right here in the 'Burgh. There, a 16-course "Alchemy" tasting menu can be had for \$100 per person (\$150 with wine) plus tax and tip. (Reservations required.) You will experience – and I mean *experience* with your eyes, nose, touch and wits, not just your palate – food in forms that may resemble

anything from cotton candy to plastic sheets, caviars, olives and startlingly-flavored jellies. They will make you laugh out loud with surprise and pleasure.

Sousa isn't the only kitchen wizard who can change prosaic foods into startling new forms. Avant-garde chefs around the world are practicing such wizardries, inspired by Chef Ferran Adrià, of the three-star restaurant El Bulli in Catalonia, Spain, about an hour and a half's drive from Barcelona. And if some of Adrià's culinary creations strike you as surreal, remember that Catalonia also gave us Salvador Dalí and the imaginative architect Antonio Gaudí.

Almost exactly ten years ago, Ferran Adrià, his brother Albert and their colleague Oriol Castro established what they call *El Taller* (el tal-YEHR, the workshop), to house their scientific experiments in the deconstruction and reconstruction of foods into new and unexpected chemical and physical forms, textures and flavors. Restaurant cuisine has not been the same since.

The butt of ridicule at first, Adrià's *espumas* (foams), gels, emulsions, "airs," faux caviars and balloon-like "olives" that burst in the mouth are today being replicated and extrapolated by chefs such as Juan Mari Arzak of Restaurante Arzak in

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