

# NATIONS' Restaurant News

THE NEWSWEEKLY OF THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY

## A look at what's on winter menus

*Chefs give seasonal cold-weather dishes a fresh twist*

December 13, 2010 | By [Bret Thorn](#)

Chefs are dusting off their braising pans and stocking up on root vegetables as the nation hunkers down for winter.

The mercury might be dropping, but the trends of comfort food with a twist, distinctive ingredients, small plates, and local and seasonal products are all on the rise.

Chefs say we can even expect a continuation of lighter fare on menus.

For example, John Metz, chef-owner of seven-unit Marlow's Tavern, based in Atlanta, and Aqua Blue in Roswell, Ga., is using starches with more fiber than traditional pasta, rice and potatoes — such as faro, parsnips and butternut squash.

For example, at Marlow's Tavern he is featuring such dishes as grilled turkey meatloaf with Parmesan, thyme green beans, pan-roasted root vegetables, and wild mushroom and truffle gravy; a grilled stack of Prestige Farms chicken breast with oven-dried Roma tomato, buffalo mozzarella, "tiny asparagus," and fricassée of parsnip, butternut squash and fresh herbs; and slow-roasted beef short ribs with red wine shallot demiglace and wild mushroom and caramelized onion faro "risotto."

At Aqua Blue, Metz is offering seared ahi tuna with jumbo cous cous, shiitake mushrooms and winter squash in a Napa Valley Merlot sauce; as well as crispy trout meunière, made with Georgia mountain trout and served with spaghetti squash, scallion, "tiny green beans," red pepper, capers, white wine and sage.

Stefano Cordova, vice president and executive chef for Bertucci's Italian Restaurants, said he expects to add Sicilian stuffed, fried rice balls, called arancini, to the menu at the 93-unit concept this winter. He's planning on stuffing them with crab or lobster.

"Burrata's also coming on strong, even to us," he said, referring to the Pugliese specialty of mozzarella filled with cream and mozzarella strips. He said he's working with that for the first time.

Cordova said he also hopes to put baby cod from the Mediterranean on the menu with "some kind of beans, with a nice sauce that you can dip your bread in."

For dessert, he's playing with a new chocolate-hazelnut product that's bound with hazelnut oil so that, unlike traditional gianduja and other hazelnut-chocolate items, it doesn't break when heated. He is planning on making a crostata with it, possibly with banana. A chocolate bread pudding also is planned for the dessert menu.

At The Palm Court at The Plaza Hotel in New York City, executive chef Willis Loughhead is roasting a traditional Christmas goose for the holiday. Accompanying it will be a roasted butternut squash soup

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Beef ribs with chimichurri at Tango & Malbec in Houston.

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are imported and served with local organic produce and seafood.

Tango & Malbec has a wood oven and is using it to make pizzas that reflect South American flavors. An example is the Pizza al Asado, topped with short ribs and chimichurri.

Ardeo + Bardeo in Washington, D.C., has added an array of snacks and small plates to their menu. Among them is popcorn with palm-sugar caramel and dried blueberries, roasted black grapes, veal and ricotta meatballs with citrus-scented tomato sauce, and salt cod fritters with celery root rémoulade.

Also in Washington, Danny Bortnick at Firefly is using kuri squash in his pumpkin pie ice cream. He's also braising oxtail and serving it with ricotta gnocchi.

The Red Cat in New York recently added red-wine braised short ribs with spicy escarole, pear-celery root purée and pink peppercorns to its menu.

While braised beef is always a popular wintertime item, seafood expert Ben Pollinger, executive chef of Oceana in New York, points out that a lot of fish, from fluke to mahi mahi, take on more fat as the water cools, giving them great texture and flavor.

He's also using a lot of Nantucket Bay scallops, stone crabs and Belon oysters.

Pollinger is poaching mild fish such as halibut in duck fat these days, which he said gives them great flavor and keeps them moist. He is also brining fish in beer before cold-smoking them, which he said helps the fish take on the smoke flavor better.

He also pointed out that winter is the height of citrus season, and he's using a variety of them, including pomelos, satsumas, Persian limes, blood oranges and Meyer lemons.