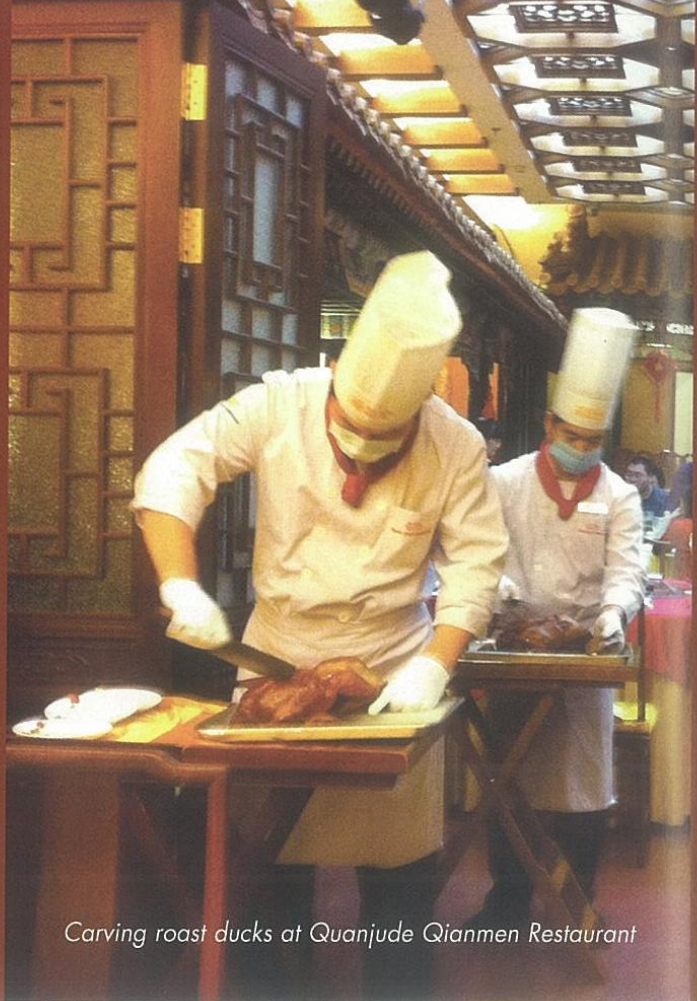


# Wining and Dining

## More Best Bites

*Here are some additional dining treats from 2010's movable feast.*

EDWARD AND MIREILLE GUILIANO



*Carving roast ducks at Quanjude Qianmen Restaurant*

In our last column we ruminated about some of the best dishes we had in the past year, but we had to turn in our article before year's end. Shortly thereafter the *bon temps continue*, and we had a few remarkable dishes. So, we decided to extend and conclude our best bites highlights with the Chinese New Year, February 3, 2011, the Year of the Rabbit. And speaking of rabbit, the *terriner de lapin* at **Bar Boulud** is glorious (1900 Broadway, New York; 212 595-0303; [www.danielnyc.com/barboulud](http://www.danielnyc.com/barboulud)). Our point about best bites is that more and more we remember restaurants and return to restaurants as a destination not for the temptation or memory of a complete, multi-course meal, but for a dish ... a memorable dish, a great dish, a special and highly executed dish we are in the mood for, say spaghetti and meatballs. Okay, not quite spaghetti and meatballs more than once or twice.

### SCORPION ANYONE?

Without question, the best, the greatest scorpion we have ever eaten was in Beijing at the famous duck restaurant, **Quanjude Qianmen Restaurant** (No. 30 Qianmen St.; tel. 86-10 67011379 65112418; [www.qmquanjude.com.cn](http://www.qmquanjude.com.cn)). The *scorpion* came on a plate with two slices of sesame duck. Scorpion is good for us, we were told; it is a purifying medicine. Ours was deep-fried, crispy and had a charcoal-burnt quality. Not bad, though we

are unqualified as judges, as it was the first (and perhaps last) time we experienced scorpion. There is good roast duck in many places in Beijing, and this restaurant's bird in its many parts and preparations is quite good, though not the best we have enjoyed in Beijing. However, established in 1864, it is the first of the duck restaurants and where many heads of state and celebrities have gone and still a trusted destination. And like Tour D'Argent in Paris, you get your official and numbered duck certificate. There are several branches, but go to this one, the "original" Quanjude Restaurant, if you can as the location and traditional décor are rewarding, and the many tables and chairs are filled with Chinese and not as many tourists as the other locations. By the way, it also served the best duck hearts of this kind we've ever tasted, but then again only once have we eaten duck heart slowly cooked and marinated with Moutai served on a bed of coriander salad.

When Chinese Chef Ku was working in Japan and the first Michelin stars were awarded, he got one for his Chinese restaurant! Now at **Yu** in the Ritz-Carlton (No. 83A Jian Guo Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing; 86-10 5908-8888; [www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Beijing/Dining](http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/Beijing/Dining)), he offers what friends and critics cite as one of the finest of the high-end Chinese restaurants in Beijing albeit with Cantonese overtones. The meal is memorable (and not just because it has New York-Paris prices), especially for his signature treatment of Wagyu beef, as in *sautéed Wagyu*



## BEST BITES SAMPLINGS:

Deep-fried, Crispy Scorpion with Sesame Duck *and* Duck Hearts with Moutai on a Bed of Coriander Salad — *Quanjude Qianmen Restaurant, Beijing*

Sautéed Wagyu Beef and Onion, Black Bean Sauce — *signature dish of Chinese Chef Wu of Restaurant Yu Ritz Carlton, Beijing*

Tofu in Seasoned Soy Milk, *a dish for the gods* — *Tofuya Ukai Hana, Tokyo*

Beet Salad with Mache and Yogurt, most memorable — *Blue Hill Stone Barns, Pocantino Hills, N.Y.*

*Dining room at Blue Hill Stone Barns*



*beef and onion, black bean sauce ... a contemporary marriage of Japan and China.*

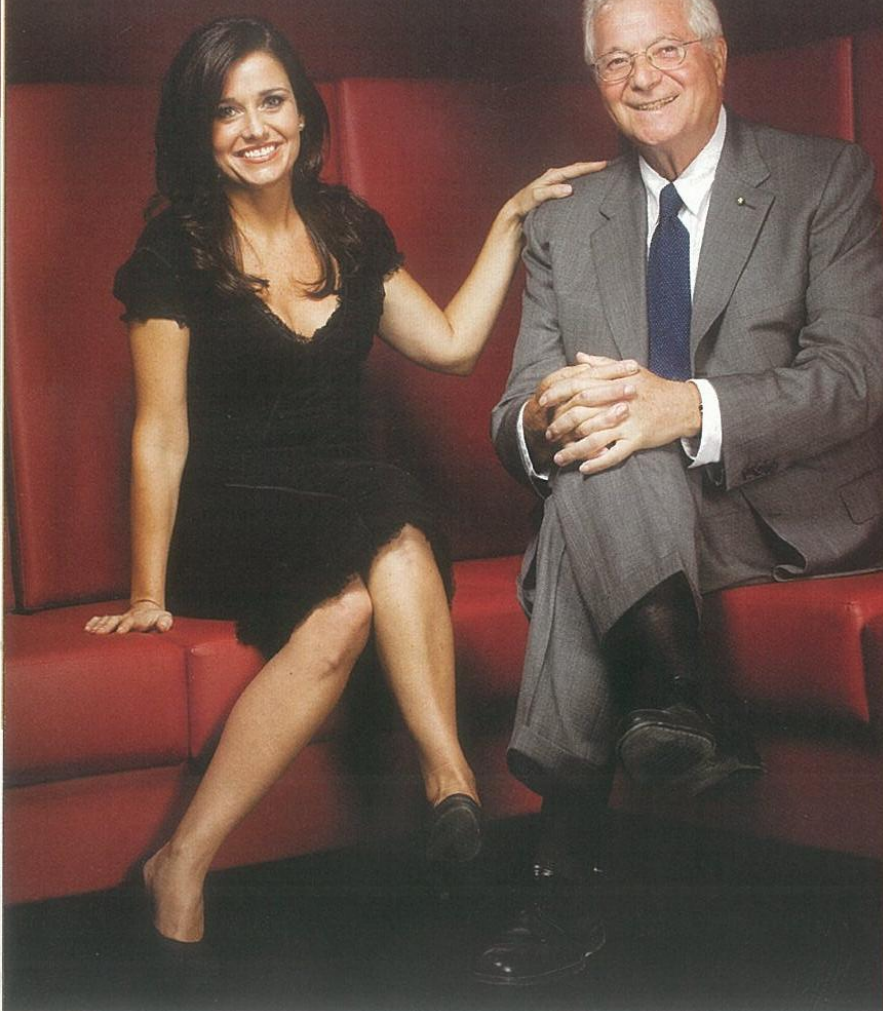
Speaking of Japan, we are happy to report that our best *sushi and sashimi* of the year was at the venerable national shrine of sushi, **Kyubei** at its original Ginza location (8-7-6 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo; 3571-6523). This third-generation establishment that is an almost obligatory stop for moguls and movie stars, has long sourced the finest fish. The chefs here are expertly trained for years before they can face a customer, and one chef serves not more than six people at one of the intimate sushi bars. Ours had eleven seats, all but ours peopled by Japanese, and served by a staff of five, and at times six. Truly remarkable parade of melt-in-your mouth fish and seafood you thought you knew.

Then someone told us about a sushi restaurant that is “one of the best in Japan, but so far off the restaurant axis that Michelin inspectors don’t take the time to go there.” In a Calvin Trillin moment, we did. A 55-minute plane flight from Tokyo to Tokushima, then a 20-minute car ride to a small, handsome restaurant incongruously set in a flat, residential neighborhood just off an unattractive commercial drag, we found a kind of sushi heaven. We knew we were somewhere special when we walked into the sushi bar and a couple sitting there was drinking 2008 Ridge Santa Cruz Mountain Estate Chardonnay.

Turns out the owner of Ridge, Akihiko Otsuka, eats there a lot, so they carry his wine. They being the husband-wife team that has run their own restaurant for 33 years, **Sushi Katsu** (Tokushima, Japan; tel. 088-685-7603). Chef Fukuike treated us to a stellar parade of a dozen preparations. The sea urchin with sea salt from Brittany was remarkable, but the *local squid sushi with salt* was more so. And the big shrimp, *kuruma ebi*, from his tank to our plates in two minutes was a colorful experience. Around the ninth course, he offered us very rare, gold-medal-winning sake, “Takashimizu Akita.” What a palate cleanser — served chilled, it was lush but elegant, slightly sweet and mild but with a little hit to the finish.

**Tofuya Ukai Hana** (4-4-13, Shibakoen, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0011; tel. 03-3436-1028; [www.ukai.co.jp](http://www.ukai.co.jp)) is zee place for the best tofu in Tokyo. This six-year-old restaurant at the foot of the Tokyo Tower is sheer magic for giving you a sense of ancient Japan. Walking through the gorgeous passages of lush green trees and plants transports you to the countryside and nature. You pass an elegant bar, a brewery room with wood tank and sake press and go through corridors with lacquered pillars and rooms of rural simplicity and urban sophistication furnished in the style of traditional tea houses, some opening to gardens. And then comes the food: and an eight-course tofu dinner was a discovery. All the dishes were exceptional, but the *tofu in seasoned soy milk* was a dish for the gods.





*Man cannot live by pasta alone, though sometimes that takes some convincing, so how about Pan-seared Monkfish with Salsify, Porcini Mushrooms and Chestnuts in a Red Wine Sauce at SD26 . . .*

*Father and daughter team, Marisa and Tony May, of restaurant SD26, New York*

## PASTA ITALIANO ANYONE?

We've enjoyed pasta and meat dishes at **Del Posto** (85 10th Ave., New York; tel. 212 497-8090; [www.delposto.com](http://www.delposto.com)), but a recent *carne cruda with truffled salsa, parmigiano and shaved porcini* was exceptional and a close reminder of some of the best Piedmontaise appetizers we've had.

Pasta, right. A brother, P. G. Ricci, and his sister Lella come from Parma via London where dad had a restaurant, but somehow they ended up in Jamaica and never went back. With an-ongoing emphasis on fresh fish, the preparations at this restaurant change daily function of the catch. But it was the pasta that kept us going back. *Spaghetti in an ever-so-light tomato and cream served with local lobster* that looked more like a big "langouste" or crayfish was sheer delight at **Toscanini**, located at the ground level of a 19th-century stone pavilion with an art gallery upstairs (Route A3, Harmony House, Ocho Rios, Jamaica; tel. 876 975-4785).

Man cannot live by pasta alone, though sometimes that takes some convincing, so how about *pan seared monkfish with salsify, porcini mushrooms and chestnuts in a red wine sauce* at **SD26** (19 E. 26th St., New York; tel. 212 265-5959; [www.sd26ny.com](http://www.sd26ny.com))? Perhaps there are cooks and chefs who thought about chestnut served with a moist medallion of monk fish, but we hadn't. (Nor have we surfed the side channels of the web to see who else has.) Executive Chef Matteo Bergamini pulled a lot together in this strikingly good and flavorful dish. The fish took on character from the wine and mushrooms and the salsify accented the other flavors well. It did not hurt that we drank a truly superb 1985 Brunello di Montalcino from Lisini with it. The wine was big, round, deep with mature, dark fruit flavors — bigger than we anticipated, but with the red wine accent of the fish preparation with the mushrooms and the chestnuts married exceedingly well. A mature wine matching and elevating a striking dish.

**Marea** (240 Central Park South, New York; tel. 212 582-5100; [www.marea-nyc.com](http://www.marea-nyc.com)) is the reigning top Italian seafood eater in Manhattan. Excellent, and its signature appetizer of *Astrice — Nova Scotia lobster, burrata, eggplant al funghetto, and basil* is the standout dish of recent memory.

The *smoked herring on warm fingerling and the salmon tartare with a touch of mustard, fennel and dill* all in subtle proportions at the newly opened **Millesime** (Carlton Hotel, 92 Madison Avenue, New York; tel. 212 889-7100; [www.millesimerestaurant.com](http://www.millesimerestaurant.com)), brought back memories of the old Aquavit but with an added French touch. The oh-so-talented Laurent Manrique has returned to New York to pamper us and oversee what is a winning brasserie right down to the hit or miss service.

The new concept at über restaurant **11 Madison** (11 Madison Ave. at 24th St.; tel. 212 889-0905; [www.elevenmadisonpark.com](http://www.elevenmadisonpark.com)) of replacing a large formal menu with a daily postcard size ingredients list works for us. More restaurants should apply it





Main dining room of SD26, New York

No need to go through long menus and listen to detailed descriptions. The chef presents a card listing ingredients like carrots, foie gras, john dory, chicken, lamb, chocolate and as a function of the three- or four-course menu option you select, your meal is picked in a few seconds. A recent lunch was heavenly with strips of carrots with duck fat, garlic and a mix of spices like cumin and mustard as well as rosemary followed with John Dory in a beurre blanc with edamame, but the winner was the chocolate dessert: a base of crumbled Oreo cookies topped with a squash sorbet, a maple gel, ribbons of chocolate ganache all surrounded by lightly sweetened butternut squash purée and to top it all a pumpkin-seed tuile.

A meal in 30 miles north of Manhattan in the hilly surroundings at **Blue Hill Stone Barns** (630 Bedford Road, Pocantico Hills, New York; tel. 914 366-9600; [www.bluehillfarm.com/food/blue-hill-stone-barns](http://www.bluehillfarm.com/food/blue-hill-stone-barns)) is an experience worth a day trip. A four-season farm and education complex

created by chef/owner Dan Barber and his team boasts herb and veggies garden, café, shop, special function rooms and a delightfully formal high-end country restaurant. Sometimes or maybe more often than not with top ingredients, simplicity is best, and although we tasted an amazing range of dishes the *beet salad with mâche and yogurt* stays the most vivid one that evening.

### PARIS ANYONE?

Mushroom season is a good excuse to be in Paris as so many restaurants offer daily specials on their menus. A *cream of champignons de Paris with a poêlée of wild mushrooms sautéed in garlic and parsley and served with hazelnut Chantilly cream* was heavenly at **l'Arôme** (3, rue Saint-Philippe du Roule, 8ème, Paris; tel. 01 42 25 55 98; [www.larome.fr](http://www.larome.fr)). And we must say the desserts were unusual and over the top in taste and presentation. The millefeuille with three caramels was served with

popcorn and hazelnut brittle and a vanilla bourbon ice cream and the Nyango dark chocolate rocher had a licorice fondant in its center and was served with a crème glacée and feuille croquante. Yummy.

Another Paris "bistronomie" discovery and a wonderful overall menu worth the detour is **Café Moderne** (40 rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, 2ème, Paris; tel. 01 53 40 84 10; [www.cafemoderne.fr](http://www.cafemoderne.fr)). Here the *codfish with green curry served with veggies ravioles and herbs and patchoi cabbage* makes the best-bite list.

Finally, it is good to visit an old friend who is still full of life. And one can certainly enjoy the wonderful menus of France's southwest at Paris' **Au Trou Gascon** (40 rue Taine, 12ème, Paris; tel. 01 43 44 34 26; [www.trougascon@orange.fr](mailto:www.trougascon@orange.fr)), but for those who are not ready for a five-course dinner, head there for a prix-fixe lighter lunch and end with the *crumble of pear confite with smoked tea*.

We hope you are experiencing many best bites in 2011. ☞