

Sixlife

WITH A PINCH OF COZY AND A HEAPING DASH OF GLAMOUR, FALL'S IN THE AIR

In his Broome Street loft, Geoff Bartakovics (left) toasts his team.



Taste of the Town

Geoff Bartakovics, the CEO of Tasting Table, decides what you'll be eating six months from now. We scored an invite at *his* table and got an early dish on the best food trends for autumn.

Recipes by **Brendan McHale** for Tasting Table

Text by **Kirsten Matthew** Photography by **Elizabeth Lippman**

In a sprawling Soho apartment, an open-plan kitchen is a hive of activity. INXS blasts from an iPod as chef Brendan McHale lays out small bowls of herbs and whips up a homemade vinaigrette. On the stove, a pot of garlicky clams bubbles away. Guests congregate at the breakfast bar. Buzzing around McHale is the dapper master of the house, Geoff Bartakovics.

“It smells unbelievable,” says Geoff, leaning over the counter to chop some Italian parsley.

Dressed in a gray suit, pink shirt and burgundy winklepickers, the 33-year-old CEO of Tasting Table is one of the most influential tastemakers in the city. He started the media company, which creates a free daily email for 100,000 trend-addicted foodies, in 2008 after leaving a job in investment banking. Nick Fauchald—a French Culinary Institute-trained cook, former *Food & Wine* editor and co-host of tonight’s fete—later joined as editor in chief.

By year-end, the third floor of Geoff’s Soho building will house Tasting Table’s offices. In 2011 they will add a test kitchen and an event space for monthly chef’s dinners, too. These salons will be frequented by culinary insiders: the kinds of restaurateurs, mixologists, winemakers, artisanal food producers and chefs that Tasting Table excels in profiling.

Fostering such gatherings was a natural decision for Geoff. “The only thing I do in my spare time is make dinner parties,” he says. “I entertain large and organized, and I throw all my time and energy into it.”

“Organized” might be an understatement. Geoff never serves the same thing to the same person twice or makes the mistake of serving meat to a vegan, thanks to a file that itemizes guests, when they last came to dinner, what they ate and with whom, as well as any food allergies. Furthermore, at the beginning of each season, he plots out his next three months of weekend parties, planning guest lists and menus well in advance. “If they go well, my structured dinner parties run until 3 or 4 in the morning,” he says.

Geoff Bartakovics (left) and his editor in chief, Nick Fauchald, dress up for a tasty September spread.

TASTING TABLE’S TOP FOOD TRENDS FOR FALL

- 1. Wine on tap.** “It will take off like crazy,” Nick claims. “Every winemaker is asking if they should put wine in kegs.”
- 2. Home sous-vide machines** (where food is cooked slowly inside a plastic bag while immersed in water) hit store shelves this fall. “It sounds so chef-y, but it’s an entertainer’s dream,” says Geoff.
- 3. Late-night menus.** Hot spots like Pulino and Patty Cue already offer special menus after midnight, and other hip eateries will follow.
- 4. Rum.** Tiki bars like Painkiller and the Hurricane Club will be huge this fall. “In a year or two, everyone will know all about rum and its different qualities,” says Nick.



savory Mediterranean dinner menu for Geoff and a coterie of friends.

The hearty meal, just right for evenings with a slight chill in the air, is dished up family-style. “It’s like a woman’s fantasy; all the guys are serving,” says Geoff as he passes his colleague Kai Mathey a plate heaping with light-as-air ricotta gnocchi.

“Yeah,” quips Brendan, “It’s the culinary version of Chippendales.”

“I’m the complete opposite,” adds Nick, the youngest of six children. “My mom would plan on eight and end up with 14, so I inherited some of that.”

Tonight’s “insiders only” soiree, with its carefully curated guest list, is a delicious preview of things to come when Tasting Table begins its salon series. As Geoff chats with guests, Nick creates his pre-dinner cocktail, a smoky apple sidecar. “A little peaty Scotch gives it a bit of smokiness, like a fireplace burning in the distance,” he says. It’s the perfect precursor to a menu of autumnal small plates featuring some off-the-beaten-track ingredients.

Tonight’s special chef, McHale, 32, an alum of high-end hipster hangout Jack’s Luxury Oyster Bar, has crafted a





BE APPROACHABLE, WITH A TWIST

“This is a very Tasting Table recipe. The sautéed escarole is a great alternative to the tired cream sauce or brown butter you usually see with gnocchi, and that little drizzle of Chinese chili oil really makes it memorable,” says Nick.



SERVES 6

Ricotta Gnocchi with Escarole

- ◆ ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ◆ 8 small shallots, thinly sliced
- ◆ 6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ◆ 1 small head escarole, roughly chopped
- ◆ ¼ cup chicken stock
- ◆ ¼ cup plus 1 tbsp. grated Manchego cheese
- ◆ 1 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ◆ 1 teaspoon chili oil
- ◆ 1½ lb. gnocchi

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. In a skillet, cook the oil and shallots over medium-high heat, stirring until the shallots have begun to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and continue cooking until the garlic has softened, about 3 minutes. Remove the shallots and garlic from the pan and reserve, leaving the oil in the pan.

2. Increase the heat to high and add the escarole. Cook, stirring, until the escarole has wilted, about 2 minutes. Return the shallots and garlic to the pan. Add the chicken stock and bring to a boil, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon. Cook until reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Add the cheese, butter and chili oil. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm.

3. Plunge the gnocchi into boiling water and cook as directed or until the gnocchi float. (For the full Tasting Table recipe for made-from-scratch gnocchi, go to nypost.com/pagesixmag.) Drain; transfer gnocchi to the pan with the escarole. Toss to coat and serve immediately.

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Designer Devon Scott (left), chef Brendan McHale (middle) and friend Kaitlyn Goalen (right), clad in a Nicole Miller dress, tuck in.



Food publicist Kai Mathey (right) enjoys the ambience.

BE PREPARED

An antique safe holds plenty of booze and glassware, while Geoff's industrial wine rack is always full of special vintages.

RED DRESS, NICOLE MILLER. COOKWARE, COURTESY WILLIAMS SONOMA. SUNFLOWERS, COURTESY MARLO FLOWERS LTD.

ALL RECIPES SERVE 6

Bibb Lettuce Salad with Crispy Shiitakes

- ◆ 8 oz. fresh shiitake mushrooms, stems removed and caps thinly sliced
- ◆ 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- ◆ ⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ◆ ¼ tsp. salt
- ◆ 2 heads Bibb lettuce, cut into quarters
- ◆ 1 orange, peeled and cut into segments
- ◆ vinaigrette
- ◆ ¼ bunch chives, cut in 1-inch pieces

1. Preheat oven to 300°; line a baking sheet with parchment. Toss shiitakes with olive oil, pepper and salt; arrange in a single layer on the baking sheet. Transfer to oven and bake, stirring occasionally, until shiitakes are brown and crisp, about 45 minutes.

2. Arrange the lettuce on a large serving platter; scatter the mushrooms over the top and drizzle with vinaigrette. (For a Tasting Table vinaigrette recipe, go to nypost.com/pagesixmag.) Top with the orange sections and chives and serve.



MAKE DRINKS SPECIAL YET SIMPLE

"It puts guests at ease," says Nick. "And you need to mix only three ingredients to make a pitcher of cocktails."



SMOKY APPLE SIDECAR

- ◆ 1 lemon wedge
- ◆ Sugar
- ◆ Ice
- ◆ ¾ cup fresh lemon juice
- ◆ 1½ cups Calvados
- ◆ ½ cup Cointreau or other triple sec
- ◆ ½ cup Islay Scotch
- ◆ 6 thin apple slices, for garnish

Wet the rims of 6 cocktail glasses with the lemon wedge and coat with sugar. Fill a pitcher with ice. Add the lemon juice, Calvados, Cointreau and Scotch and stir until chilled. Strain the drink into the prepared glasses, drop an apple slice into each and serve.

Clams and Sobrasada with Almonds

- ◆ 7 medium plum tomatoes, diced
- ◆ ½ large onion, thinly sliced
- ◆ ½ tsp. grated lemon zest
- ◆ 5 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ◆ 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- ◆ 5 oz. diced sobrasada (a spreadable sausage)
- ◆ 2 cups water
- ◆ 30 littleneck clams, cleaned
- ◆ heaping ¼ cup chopped toasted almonds
- ◆ 2 tbsp. chopped parsley
- ◆ 1 tsp. chopped chervil
- ◆ ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- ◆ ¼ tsp. salt
- ◆ ⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ◆ toasted bread slices, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 400° and line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment. In a large bowl, combine tomatoes, onion, zest, garlic and olive oil. Mix well and spread out on the prepared baking sheet. Transfer to oven and roast until the tomatoes are soft and the onions have begun to caramelize, about 30 minutes.

2. Add tomato mixture, sobrasada and water to a large pot over medium-high heat. Simmer for 10 minutes; add clams. Cover; continue cooking until clams have opened, about 10 minutes.

3. Remove pot from heat and add almonds, parsley, chervil, lemon juice, salt, pepper. Stir. Let stand, covered, for 3 minutes. Divide among plates or shallow bowls; serve with toasted bread.



FIND UNIQUE INGREDIENTS

Brendan served a version of his spicy clams at his old restaurant. "I've tried to make it at home, but it was never nearly as good as this," admits Nick. "Now I have the secret ingredient: sobrasada, a soft, spreadable Spanish salami."

Find sobrasada at Despaña, a Spanish specialty-foods emporium on Broome Street.