

Ingredient newcomers are settling in from relatively unexplored regions of Asia (among them, China, Korea and Japan); the Middle East and Africa (including Turkey and Tunisia); and South America (especially Argentina and Brazil). Tom Mueller of Pineapple Alley Catering in Clinton, Md., refers to the "rapid recent gastronomical growth of Peruvian cuisine," which he attributes partly to chefs like Gastón Acurio and his restaurant La Mar, with locations in San Francisco and Miami. He notes that Asian street food has maintained a strong presence, too.

Trend spotters predict that the recent Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, and the upcoming 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil (as well as the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro) will call attention here to the cuisines of those countries, but most of these chefs did not agree. The exception was Jon Weinrott at Peachtree & Ward in Philadelphia, where smoked salmon cured and basted with Russian vodka has been a winner.

While caterers obviously are relishing all this global experimentation (calling it "fun" and "play"), there is a serious side to their efforts. Culinary stereotypes are giving way to sophisticated and artisanal interpretations. Examples? At Peachtree & Ward, the elegant Mexican-accented French dessert; at Componere in Emeryville, Calif., the house-made kimchees; and at Patina in Los Angeles, the ramen-style soups and stir-fries in a variety of international flavor profiles (Southeast Asian, Korean, Chinese and traditional Japanese, the most requested). Patina's executive chef, Alec Lestr, presents the noodle dishes on buffets, at plated events and "streetcart style." He notes that an on-going favorite of his, vadouvin—the French-style curry said to have originated in the once French-controlled Indian city of Pondicherry—will be spicing his flatbreads this spring. Some of the dishes that these chefs share are their passionate personal takes on tradition. But most might be termed "assimilated"—marriages of foreign and domestic elements in entirely original creations, or translations of traditional recipes to suit the catering world's requirements.



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Sea Urchin, Vietnamese Fish Sauce and Sudachi

Andrew Spurgin – Bespoke event styling & menu design, San Diego

The wonder of the **Fabergé Egg** (left and below)—a dish created by Andrew Spurgin for a Louis XIV-themed event that his recently launched catering, event-planning and menu-development firm, Andrew Spurgin – Bespoke event styling & menu design, produced and catered—is not just the glory of the hand-painted, gilded packaging, but the savory panna cotta inside, so flavor-packed and fresh-tasting that it doesn't disappoint. It brings together three of Spurgin's personal ingredient favorites.

He loves the briny "essence of the sea" contributed by the sea urchin, which he sources from local divers out of San Diego waters; and the umami boost provided by the fish sauce, a first-press artisanal product from the Phu Quoc Island archipelago in Vietnam. It's made from wild black anchovies

that are covered in sea salt and slowly fermented in tropical wood barrels for at least a year. Sudachi, a small, round, green sour citrus fruit that is a specialty of the Tokushima Prefecture in Japan, adds what the chef describes as an "ethereal and elegant" flavor to the recipe. Delivered to Spurgin seasonally as fruit, sudachi also is available in liquid form.

The filling begins as plain panna cotta, to which Spurgin adds the fish sauce and the fresh sea urchin, first putting it through a tamis until it is cream-like. Then the mixture is seasoned and poured into laser-cut sterilized eggs that have been decorated (or not), and allowed to set in their original cartons. Afterward, they are topped with a gelée made from sudachi juice and garnished with trout roe and 23K gold leaf. In case you're wondering, the dessert is eaten with a teaspoon from the top, as one would eat a boiled egg, the shells having been glue-gunned to the egg cups in which they are served.