

Oldest cooking method now the hottest trend

By Julia Kramer

My winter smelled of smoke. Night after night, I caught a whiff of burning logs, of fat dripping onto coals, of sourdough toasting and rib eyes charring and knobby carrots blackening over jumpy flames. This scent welcomed me to North Yarmouth, Maine, where chef Krista Kern Desjarlais bakes crackly Montreal-style bagels in a woodburning oven built into the side of her 544-square-foot cottage, the Purple House.

The aroma hit me when I walked onto the patio of Vicia in St. Louis and (unsurprisingly) into a hipster hangout named Campfire in Carlsbad. It recurred as a motif among four of the most talked about recent openings in Chicago, whether the cuisine was Argentine (El Che Bar), American (Elske), Mexican (Leña Brava), or Mediterranean (Publican Anker). And it—smoke—was visible through the kitchen window at the start of a \$293-per-person tasting menu at Single Thread in Healdsburg, emanating from a pile of local almond wood.

It's funny to call this return to cooking with fire a trend. If it is, it's certainly the oldest trend in the book. And yet there is no arguing that the burning hearth has of late gripped the restaurant world, seeming to bestow the imprimatur of "serious chef" on anyone who embraces it.

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