

DARK MATTERS

A new grain is on chefs' minds like white on rice

BY AMBER GIBSON

WHEN THE WAITER ASKS what kind of rice you'd like with that, there are exactly two options: the tasty and the righteous. Diners who favor smooth flavor at the expense of nutrients will choose the white. Those who favor their figure will choose the brown. And that's that. Or is it?

If the recent proliferation of black rice among sushi spots and Whole Foods stores is any indication, there is soon to be a happy medium. Chewier than white or brown rice, with a fruity flavor and a deep purple color, black rice has begun to appear on restaurant menus alongside its less pigmented cousins. Said to have been so precious in ancient China that it was reserved for emperors, black rice also contains the same antioxidants found in acai berries. "Chefs see it as a superfood," says chef Ian Pengelley of London's Gilgamesh, a pan-Asian restaurant whose separate black rice menu contains such dishes as fried black rice with Chinese sausage, prawn and egg; black rice risotto with king crab, yuzu, truffle and bonito; and startlingly colored sushi rolls.

In Chicago, Union Sushi and Barbeque Bar mixes the exotic grain into rice pudding with coconut milk and sesame seeds. "The earthy aroma from the black rice and the touch of sweetness enhance the flavor," says executive chef Worachai Thapthimkuna. But regardless of health benefits or taste, he admits there's a superficial reason the grain is gaining in popularity: It looks cool on white plates.

COLOR WHEELS
Chefs' new and improved rice palette



Rye, Oh Rye

Old World loaves may be the best thing since sliced ...

Mention the canonical sandwich of the Jewish delicatessen, and most people will imagine piles of juicy corned beef and pastrami pressed between thin slices of forgettable, pockmarked rye. But that doesn't mean all rye breads suffer from an absence of character. Many Northern European countries have centuries-old baking traditions that remain devoted to the spicy grain. In countries like Latvia and Finland, rye bread is not simply a conveyance for sandwich fillings, but a cultural cornerstone that is said to impart strength and vitality to both baker and eater.

Naturally, three companies that hail from Northern European traditions—Storje, which is based in Latvia, and Black Rooster and Nordic Breads, which are located in New York City but are run by a Latvian and a Finn, respectively—are working to boost rye's reputation. Each company combines 100 percent whole-grain rye flour with

POUR OF YORE

A modern winemaker attempts the original beer

The craft brewing trend is fast conquering the world, but while many beer makers argue over whose methods are most traditional, Meinklang's Ancient Grains Ale might actually have a case for the crown. The golden-hued Austrian beer is brewed



from three of the world's oldest wheat varieties—einkorn, emmer and spelt—along with equally antique hersbrucker and spalter hops. Meinklang's proprietors, the Michlits family from Burgenland, Austria, are best known for their biodynamic wines, but in 2006 they began applying their holistic farming practices to grains