

Sweet Seasons

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OK

If 2008 had proof of a summer, it was Bruce Sherman's anise-hyssop sorbet. Served after the James Beard Foundation Awards, the sorbet shared the table with the potted herb that gave it its flavor and its name.



Visit Sherman's Chicago restaurant North Pond in the winter, and dessert will perfectly suit that time, too. A self-defined "seasonal cook," Sherman links his dishes—both savory and sweet—with the year's cycle, and that dedication shows throughout his menus.

Sometimes, working seasonally means looking in a different field. "For me, talking about farm to menu, it doesn't mean exclusively local," Sherman says. "In the wintertime, we use citrus, and we use a farm in California. That's not local at all, but it's seasonal; that's what we do."

"I think there's a misunderstanding about what people who support local are about. I'm a seasonal cook first and a local cook second. Local is not the be-all-and-end-all for me. Seasonal is. In the late spring and summer and early fall, it's great because the two work together."

Sherman balances imagination with practicality. His aim is "to work seasonally and offer a creative, diverse menu that satisfies the diner, the cook, and the cash register." It's a balancing act. There's always something chocolate on the menu—but the seasons have their say.

Sometimes, that's about planning ahead. In cold months, Sherman works with fresh fruit from California, Florida, or Texas, but he also makes use of stored things, such as dried fruits and preserves. Listening to him describe a cool weather dessert (a nougat glace on pain d' epice sponge served with house-made cherry jam), it's easy to long for winter.

Sherman revels in the changing challenges of the year. "Each season has its own pleasures in that it's new again every year. My analogy is snow, because we live in Chicago. People look forward to the first snowfall of the year, and it's always a magical thing. It last a couple of months, until it becomes a burden to shovel and navigate around. By the end of the season, people are glad it's not going to snow again and bitter about how much precipitation there is."

"And it's no different with—plug in a fruit or plug in a vegetable: leeks, apricots—people may be tired of using them or eating them by the end of their season, but when they become available again, people really look forward to them. For me, it's a real shortcoming of living in a place where there are no seasons, when things are available all year. Some of the magic is gone."

As this year cools and darkens, Sherman is working with squash and Jerusalem artichokes and chestnuts. "We just started getting these awesome apples," he says, his tone of voice sounding as if autumn fruits were the definition of luxury.

A little something stored, a little something from the farm, and a whole lot of inspiration from the season...Bruce Sherman is making sustainability sweet indeed.

—Seanan Forbes, www.creativedichotomies.com