



Oyster? Sushi Rice? Kyle Schutte Revolutionizes Ice Cream

David Jenison

In 2014, Hatfield's restaurant in Los Angeles announced it would close. Hearing the news, Chef Kyle Schutte considered taking over the space and renaming it McCoy's, a sly reference to the infamous Hatfield-McCoy feud in the late 19th century. The idea, though never realized, epitomizes the maverick streak that makes Schutte one of the most daring chefs in the country.

This month, Chef Schutte adds to his rep with a six-night pop-up titled Ice Cream for Dinner. The eight-course tasting menu includes savory courses like oyster ice cream (with dashi sand and meyer lemon sea foam) and lemongrass ice cream (with pork belly and fish caramel sauce) and sweet courses like brown butter ice cream (with candied pistachios and bruleed buratta). The first three nights of the [Feastly-hosted Los Angeles event](#) (July 12, 13 and 16) sold out quickly, leading to three additional dates (July 23, 26 and 27). As for his ice cream rep, Schutte previously won the Food Network's *Cutthroat Kitchen* (in record-setting fashion, no less) in an episode titled "[The Cone Ranger](#)." In the final round, he had to make ice cream and a cone inside a red traffic cone, and he named his winning dish L.A. Street Cone Nachos.

Schutte is currently running the kitchen at the newly opened [Prospect Theatre](#), a pre-prohibition-style dinner theater, and working on upcoming ventures like The FLATS restaurant. PRØHBTD spoke with the chef to learn more.

You won *Cutthroat Kitchen* with an ice cream dish. Can you tell me about it?

I had never made an ice cream cone before, but I knew the fundamentals of doing it. That said, everything went out the window during the show. The challenge made me approach ice cream in a whole new way because I could not use a mixing bowl. Instead of thickening it with eggs, I thickened it with a cornstarch slurry. I had no idea what the ratios should be, but I just went for it, and the dish could not have come out better. I wish I could remember the ratios so I could continue to do it.

The Ice Cream for Dinner includes courses like sushi rice and oyster. Are those pairings or ice cream flavors?

Ice cream flavors.

Paired with something savory?

Yes. There are eight courses total. The first five are savory courses. For the sushi rice, the canal of ice cream is meant to act as the little canal of sushi rice that you get under nigiri. The ice cream is going to have sea urchin laying over the top, and you eat it like a piece of nigiri. The oyster ice cream had to be on there. It's got some textural components so it's not just like eating cold oysters. For the salad course, I'm making a roasted peach ice cream that will act as the dressing. The beautiful thing about ice cream dressing is that it keeps the greens super crisp. It's not wilted. It's not warm. It's not room temperature. It's cold and crisp, and it's awesome. For the warm savory courses, we're doing a pork belly with macadamia nuts and fish sauce caramel. The ice cream for that is a lemongrass. You usually think ice cream is what brings the heaviness and the fat, but in this course, it's what cuts through the heaviness and fat of the pork belly. It should be a lot of fun.

I'm still trying to wrap my head around this. So it will have the texture of ice cream but not the sweetness?

It's not *as* sweet. Ice cream is challenging because you must have enough sugar so it doesn't set into a rock in the freezer that you'll never be able to scoop. You need enough sugar where it's set but not solid. There will be a little sugar, but all the components around it offset that sugar where you won't even notice it in the ice cream. It's like worlds colliding. Why not do it?

I opened this place in 2012 called 54Twenty, and I had ice creams all over that menu. For breakfast, we served french toast with maple ice cream and steel-cut oats with brown bread ice cream. A couple buddies with food blogs—Eddie Lin of [Deep End Dining](#) and Valentino Herrera of [Trippy Food](#)—came to the restaurant one day. They said, "You ever try oyster ice cream?" Eddie wanted to do a piece for KCRW on oyster ice cream, which was big in the Madison White House, and I said, "No, but come back in a week." I messed around with it, and we had oyster ice cream. They were like, "This is crazy. It's actually good."

Fast-forward to this last year, I get a random email from a woman writing a book about ice cream. One chapter is about really odd ice creams, and she said, "Hey, I want to do something on your oyster ice cream." When she came to Los Angeles with her husband, I fed them all these random ice creams. I made oyster ice cream, of course, and a salad with Caesar ice cream. I showed them the whole-grain mustard ice cream I've served with charcuterie boards since I can remember. It just so happened that I had a meeting with Feastly about this pop-up a couple days later. They asked, "What do you want to do for your first dinner?" I said, "I've got ice cream on the brain. Let's do an Ice Cream for Dinner pop-up." Who as a kid didn't say, "I just want ice cream for dinner?"

I still say that.

Exactly.

So James Madison liked oyster ice cream?

His wife did.

Your recipe is similar to what they made in the White House?

I doubt it.

There are no records on how they made it?

I haven't seen any. At one point, I saw something that said it was just oysters and cream and salt or something like that. I'm sure it was frozen right there and eaten on the spot. I don't really know. I just took the idea, and it came out really well. It smells like oyster, which is startling, but it's balanced. The sugar balances out the brininess.

You worked in some traditional southern restaurants, yet your style seems like something you'd learn in a molecular restaurant in Catalan. How did you make the transition?

When I started at Tuskie's, which is short for Tuscarora Mill [in Virginia], I walked in with no restaurant experience and said, "I want to be a cook." They laughed at me, and they should've, but they gave me a chance. We did everything from scratch, and it was a really well-run machine. At night, they would make all the pastries and bread. I would work 16-hour days as a line cook, and my meal break was running over to grab some ciabatta and a Diet Coke during the lull between tickets. It was madness.

I spent four months there and learned a lot, but I would ask why we did certain things, and the chef's answer was always the same: "Because that's how you make stock. Because that's how you make bread." It was always the Hows and not the Whys. I told myself, "Unless I want to repeat what this guy is doing for the rest of my life, I need the Whys." I thanked him for his time and enrolled in culinary school. It became about making my own Whys, formulating my own recipes, and going with my intuition. Then during culinary school, I worked at McCormick and Schmick's, which was just soul crushing.

I can imagine.

For somebody who desires to make upscale food that's on the cutting edge... if I had to garnish something with a sprig of parsley and a wedge of lemon one more time, I was going to go postal. When I finished culinary school, I resigned. They offered me a sous chef position, and I said, "Thanks for the offer, but I'm out of here." Then I went around Atlanta and staged (*editor's note: worked as a chef's apprentice*) and interviewed everywhere. There were some kitchens where I would drop off my resume three or four times a week.

One day, I walked into this place called ONE Midtown Kitchen, and I didn't know anything about the chef at the time, [*Top Chef All-Stars* winner] Richard Blais. I went for a stage that Friday, and they were doing shit I had never seen except on television. They were making shrimp into noodles. They were foaming Caesar dressing. They were spinning ice cream with liquid nitrogen. They were sous-viding all kinds of stuff. I thought, "This is where I need to be." I just turned down a \$35,000-a-year sous chef job, and I had a pretty good offer from Cherokee Town and Country Club working for a certified master chef, but I took \$9 an hour to start from the bottom at this place. It was the best decision I ever made.

Richard is a super-talented chef, but at the time, he was not a good teacher. He was one of the few people doing these things anywhere, and he kept a lot of his information locked down. He and a couple senior guys knew what was going on, and the rest of us just tried to pick up what we could. There weren't standardized menus or recipes. With Richard, I learned that it's okay to be out there and do what you think is good, but I also took away that this is not how to get the most out of your hourly employees.

When Richard left, most of the kitchen went with him, and I stayed behind. This guy named Tom Harvey came aboard. You name one of the best restaurants in the South in the '90s, and that guy worked there. It was like going back to school—pickling, braising, brining, smoking, curing—all the things that made food really good for thousands of years. The liquid nitrogen tank went out the door, the circulators went upstairs, and Tom brought one of the circulators down at one point, and he fried it. I was under him for three years, and soon I was running that place when he wasn't there.

That restaurant changed my life. The kitchen was in the middle of the dining room, and I had the ability to watch guests come in, see the expectation on their faces and watch as that experience unfolded and how they responded to certain things. Having the opportunity to study guests for three years shaped my philosophy on food more than anything.

Chef Harvey made you go back to the basics. What made you keep going with the science side of gastronomy?

I only worked for Richard for a couple months. I got my feet wet and then the rest was on me. What I like about the scientific side of cooking is the precision. The more I got into it, I understood the importance of the metric system and knowing there are 454 grams per pound rather than just 16 ounces. It's about having consistency and the ability to do some really cool shit with food.

There has been this big backlash—it's almost divided—you're either old school or new school when it comes to cooking. I get it sometimes. A lot of people said, "I can turn this into a foam or whatever the fuck" and put it on the menu just to say, "Look what I can do." It was technique for technique's sake, and that's a crime. You also have the old school guys who look at scales and say, "That's not cooking from the heart." That's bullshit. It's not about cooking from the heart. I mean, it is, but it's so much more than that. It's about bringing a consistent experience to your guests day in and day out. You can throw a pinch of this and a pinch of that, but when you tell your cooks to do that, it will come out different every time.

I'm trying to get this place in Beverly Hills opened called The FLATS. It's got all the techniques you would find in modernist cuisine, but none of them are thrown in your face. I have tried to strike a balance in my food between the old world and the new world. A long time ago, I drew my line in the sand and sat right on the middle of it. I said, "I'm living in both these worlds, and hopefully it'll work." I've tried to stay true to that.

You mentioned The FLATS. In spring of last year, I read that you were taking over the Red Medicine space. Did that not go through?

Everybody thinks that it's dead in the water, which is fine because it's a conversation I was sick of having, but we still have the space, and big strides have been made inside that building. It will open in the Red Medicine space, but it's taken a lot longer than we expected. We went into it with an ambitious timeline.

Will you do more pop-ups?

Right now I'm focused on these different concepts and trying to self-publish a cookbook. I'm working on a food blog every week called [52 Weeks at the Market](#). I'm opening The FLATS, and this fall we should break ground on a concept called That Chicken, which is a fast-food chicken and waffles concept. No one knows about that until now. I just got a call from an investor in the Arts District about a new concept. I might do a pop-up for that to see what the feedback would be. I like these one-off events so I can do something really off the wall and hopefully leave people saying, "When's he going to do that again?"

Being in California, have you considered making cannabis edibles?

No. Personally, I've never smoked weed. I was 27 and said, "Somebody hit a skunk," and my wife was like, "Dude, that's not what a skunk smells like." I'm like, "Yes, it is." She's from LA and I'm from northern Virginia, so I know what a skunk smells like, but she knows what weed smells like.

For me [to do cannabis cuisine] wouldn't be sincere, which is funny because XO, the first restaurant I opened years ago when I was 26, was a small plates restaurant in Charlotte. At this time, especially in

North Carolina, pot is not legal, but I figured out how to make an edible version of a potted plant. Joking around with my sous chef, I said, "We should bake a brownie in this and call it a pot brownie." That's as close as I ever came.

Brilliant idea.

It was just a joke that came out of my mouth one day, but some of the best stuff comes like that. I've become known for this chicken-fried watermelon that came out of my mouth as a joke, too.

I'm a contrarian. If everybody is doing it, I'm not going to do it. There's enough people with the same voice. [Food] is something that we can shape and mold into a million different things. What's the point of doing something that everyone else is doing? Honestly, kill me. It would be the equivalent of sitting in a cubicle and doing data entry your whole life. Or making the same dish, Duck à l'Orange, whatever, day in, day out for your whole life. It's like, it's like...

Working at McCormick and Schmick's?

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