

Anyway you slice it

Foie gras is now found in many cuisines in different guises, writes Vicki Williams

Foie gras, the fattened liver of a goose or duck, has had its ups and downs recently. Although France legally protects it as part of the country's cultural and gastronomic heritage, California banned its sale starting from July 1 because it is the product of a traditional feeding method of animals called gavage. Bans of varying degrees also exist in other places, including Australia.

Detractors of gavage consider it cruel. However, fans disagree, and there are scientific studies to support their view. What's more, not all producers practise gavage on their fowl.

In any case, consumer demand for foie gras is growing, and countries such as China, Vietnam, Hungary, Russia and Canada have joined France in producing it. In Hong Kong, demand is high. It is a popular diners' choice, as can be seen by its increasing use in modern dishes by local chefs.

Take Frenchman and executive chef of Chez Patrick, Patrick Goubier. On his menu are four foie gras dishes, all using duck liver, which he prefers. This includes the modern foie gras trio with orange and bitter chocolate sauce. A slab of foie gras terrine is served with two profiteroles, one filled with foie gras ice cream, the other containing duck liver which has been marinated in the sweet wine Monbazillac and baked in an oven for a few minutes. This is finished with a drizzle of sauce that includes balsamic vinegar reduction, orange zest and dark, bitter chocolate.

"The idea was to create a surprise for the diner. First you taste the robust chocolate, which is quickly replaced by the acidity of the orange and then the delicate foie gras," says Goubier. The dish is delicious and moreish, the chocolate serving as a fine complement to the liver.

No stranger to creating something from a traditional



inspiration, Alvin Leung, chef owner of Bo Innovation, uses savoury ice cream in a foie gras dish. *Muy choi* flavoured ice cream and preserved Chinese mustard greens sit atop a bed of ginger biscuit crumbs. The preserved vegetable is traditionally used in Hakka cuisine and is often paired with braised pork belly. Here, the fatty protein element is duck foie gras. The liver is seared in a pan until it is browned, with a firm outside and soft centre. The dish is garnished with a dehydrated, crispy leaf of preserved mustard greens.

Leung is not the only chef substituting foie gras for pork belly. A friendship inspired Jason Atherton, the chef behind tapas bar 22 Ships, to create a popular dish – chargrilled Iberico pork and foie gras burger with avocado and pickled cucumber. "I invented this for Asian film director Eric Khoo, who is a family friend. When I was working on my tapas restaurant in Singapore, he asked me to include a good pork burger, so it was born out of that. I wanted to create the



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PATRICK GOUBIER, ON HIS FOIE GRAS TRIO

ultimate burger." The mini burgers are a combination of minced pork neck and duck liver served on a brioche bun that adds a hint of sweetness. The cucumber is used to balance the richness. Also on offer is foie gras and sweetbread empanada with capers and burned onion jam. Finished with a piece of pan-fried foie gras, it is indulgence on a fork.

Ming Court's executive chef, Tsang Chiu-king, is well-known for his innovative creations and use of luxury Western ingredients. The current foie gras offering is an evolution of the traditional taro puff. This puff has a fluffy, extra crunchy outside that gives way to a succulent blend of pork, taro, and goose liver. It's a delight to eat, with a rich mouthfeel as the flavours of pork and taro lead to a lingering foie gras finish.

At the two-Michelin-star Shang Palace, there are six goose liver dishes on the menu. Executive Chinese chef Mok Kit-keung believes the richness of the liver enhances certain dishes, particularly seafood. That includes the signature dish, stewed spotted grouper with foie gras and black garlic, and braised South African six-head abalone and pan-fried foie gras in abalone sauce. In the grouper dish, it certainly adds depth, and with the abalone dish, it provides textural and taste contrasts.

On offer at three-Michelin star Lung King Heen are wok-fried prawns with duck liver and almonds, which are deep fried. According to executive chef Chan Yan-tak, the dish was the result of experimenting with ingredients that would complement and bring out the flavour of prawns, which he believes can be rather tasteless on their own. The liver is slow-cooked before being pan-fried and then added to the wok with the other components, resulting in a balanced dish with complexity and three distinct tastes and textures that



combine seamlessly. He says each mouthful is a new experience.

Foie gras is making an appearance in a sushi roll at Roka. The Japanese spin of foie gras *nu ume she* is to give the duck liver the appearance of a thick-cut *futomaki* style sushi roll. It is poached in Japanese plum wine and wrapped in seaweed. It comes with a squid ink *nori* (seaweed) bread. Head chef Manabu Oikawa says the dish is an homage to classic French poached foie gras, but the presentation and flavour are firmly Japanese. The result is an intense and successful combination with notes of fruit and spice playing off the liver, with the taste of the sea from the bread adding playfulness to the dish.

More surprises are in store at Whisk. Part of a degustation menu that highlights dishes from around the world, "Scotland" is the first course. It is a combination of Scottish oyster, foie gras and grapefruit granita. Chef Bjoern Alexander Panek describes the thinking behind it: "It is a dish designed to surprise the palate. The oyster gives saltiness, the duck foie gras is buttery, while the grapefruit granita gives texture and freshness. The palate experiences cold first, then fattiness and finally saltiness." foodandwine@scmp.com