



**TASTING CULTURE**

**With René Redzepi, Ruth Reichl, and David Chang**

**October 6, 2010**

**LIVE from the New York Public Library**

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**Celeste Bartos Forum**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber, and I'm the Director of LIVE from the New York Public Library. As you know, my goal here is simply to make the lions roar, to make a heavy institution dance, and, if possible, to levitate. But before saying anything else, let me introduce to you Ambassador—and I hope I pronounce his name correctly—Jarl Frijs-Madsen, who's presently the

Consul General of Denmark in New York. Ambassador Frijs-Madsen would like to say a very few words about his countryman, René Redzepi.

**JARL FRIJS-MADSEN:** Thank you very much, Paul. You did a great job pronouncing my name, except my first name, which is “Yal,” but the rest of it was perfect. Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be here at the New York Public Library for an evening of Tasting Culture. Just thirty years ago, Copenhagen and the rest of Denmark had very few restaurants, and actually the food at those restaurants was really not worth eating. Today Copenhagen has twelve restaurants with Michelin stars, and this is one of the highest per capita anywhere in the world. The top star among these restaurants is, of course, Noma and their chef René Redzepi.

I think that everyone who has had the pleasure of dining at Noma have their own little story to tell, and I have mine. It’s a little bit private, but since I will only be sharing it with three hundred people, I think it’s okay. It was the day when my wife and I finally were to go to Noma after waiting for months, and we were really looking forward to this. And our youngest son, who is nine years old, was very preoccupied by the fact that we were going to what at the time was nominated as the world’s third best restaurant. And we had a, although he is only nine years old, a kind of philosophical discussion about whether you could in fact state whether a restaurant was number three in the world, and I said something like, “Well, Noma is undoubtedly one of the top restaurants in the world, but whether it’s number one, it’s number three, or it’s number ten, it’s difficult to say.”

Later that evening, after a seven-course lunch at Noma, the best and most extraordinary meal I have had in my whole life, and I have had many and many good meals, I had to go home and say something which is very difficult for me to say: "Daddy made a mistake." I told him Noma is not just the top three restaurant in the world, this is undoubtedly the best restaurant in the world. Seven months later, Noma received this acknowledgment by *Restaurant* magazine at the San Pellegrino awards. Denmark is as you probably know a small country with 5.5 million people. We have very few megastars at the same time. But right now we have at least two, we have the world's second-best tennis player, Caroline Wozniacki, and we have the best chef in the world, René Redzepi. Thank you very much.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Thank you very much, Ambassador Frijs-Madsen, I won't dare pronounce your first name. I would like to quickly tell you about what's coming up on the LIVE menu this season. You probably have seen our announcement. I ask you to refer to it. I asked our designer this year that I wanted to create a new kind of menu for the LIVE season, and he took my words literally and created a menu, so, for instance, if you like martini, I suggest you come and hear Angela Davis and Toni Morrison. Tacos, Edwidge Danticat, steak, of course Lady Antonia Fraser, eggs, David Grossman and Nicole Krauss, wine, Zadie Smith, cupcakes, Jay-Z, bananas, Keith Richards.

Now, speaking about Keith Richards, who will be coming to the Library on the twenty-ninth of October—no, tickets are not yet on sale. Keith Richards I invited for one very simple reason. He said in his autobiography, which is coming out, that when he was a child, he wanted to be a librarian, a *geste manqué*, I think his life has had certainly has diverged from that path, he did say that he wanted to become a librarian. He said that when he was growing up, two institutions mattered to him, “the church, which belongs to God, and the library, which belongs to the people.” “The library,” he said, “is a great equalizer.”

Now, in that spirit I would like to encourage all of you to become Friends of the New York Public Library for just forty dollars a year, which is a pretty cheap date. You will get discounts on all LIVE events. I would also like to announce that tonight’s program is being telecast in real time, meaning I’m somewhere out there, by ForaTV, so anyone can be live for the conversation by tuning in online. To access a live stream you simply go to <http://fora.tv>.

Tonight we have the pleasure of welcoming back to the LIVE from the New York Public Library stage Ruth Reichl, who will moderate, modulate, I hope instigate a conversation between René Redzepi, whose restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, as you heard, was voted the best restaurant in the world after Ferran Adrià, who was on this stage a couple years ago, was bestowed with that same honor for elBulli. And I believe René Redzepi actually worked for Ferran Adrià. Ruth Reichl was the editor in chief of *Gourmet* magazine for ten years. She’s the editor of the Modern Library

food series. Her books include *mmmmm: A Feastyary, Comfort Me with Apples, Tender at the Bone, For You, Mom, Finally*, originally published as *Not Becoming My Mother and Other Things She Taught Me along the Way*.

David Chang is the executive chef and owner of Momofuku Noodle Bar, Momofuku Ko, Momofuku Milk Bar, Ssäm Bar, and chef and co-owner of Má Pêche. Chang has taken home three James Beard Foundation awards. Ssäm Bar was named one of the fifty best restaurants in the world by *Restaurant* magazine. His most recent book is *Momofuku*. They will all sign their books after this event.

René Redzepi is head and owner of Noma restaurant in Copenhagen. Noma was named the number one world's best restaurant in the world at the San Pellegrino 50 Best Restaurant Awards. He is widely credited with reinventing Nordic cuisine. At Noma, which is set in a shipping warehouse from the eighteenth century, he creates inventive takes on Nordic cuisine with a distinctive emphasis on regional specialties. At the age of thirty-two, the other one is thirty-three, it annoys me greatly. Redzepi is one of the most influential chefs in the world. His first major cookbook, which he will sign tonight, thanks to Phaidon and to our independent bookstore, 192 Books, you get the book there, they're signed over there, is *Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine*.

Before the signing, there will be time for a Q&A. A question, I have calculated, you've heard me say this many times, is about fifty-two seconds long, and a good question

is about forty-seven seconds long. Two years ago nearly to the day, on October 10, 2008, on the LIVE from the New York Public Library stage, we welcomed Ferran Adrià. In 2008, elBulli was voted restaurant number one in the world. Flash Rosenberg, our LIVE from the New York Public Library artist in residence, drew the conversation. She will very quickly now introduce a clip you will see, then we will swiftly move from the pleasures of elBulli to those of Noma. Flash.

**FLASH ROSENBERG:** Thank you very much, Paul, for the opportunity to be artist in residence for LIVE from the New York Public Library. What I do is I set up at a table that's kind of lit there in the back, you can see it, to draw the speakers' conversations live in real time during the events. My quick sketches are then videotaped and edited and they create then a summary of the program's ideas and comments.

What I do when drawing is sort of like this bread that I baked this morning. Imagine each ingredient as a concept. I took the boldness of fresh beets, the attitude of dill, the argument of onion, in conversation with organic whole wheat and a bunch of other ingredients, to create this overall impression that's a dialogue of the ingredients, which I call Beat Poet Bread. It is shaped as either a baguette or a little mini-loaf to represent how each person shapes how they hear in different ways. And when you slice it open, it's not what you expect. It's pink and savory. And since tonight's focus is on food, as Paul said, it seemed appropriate to now show you a

finished one of these discussions called—it's a conversation portrait with Ferran Adrià, Harold McGee, and Corby Kummer. Thank you.

**(applause)**

**(conversation portrait plays)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** After Ferran Adrià, please welcome to this stage René Redzepi, Ruth Reichl, and David Chang.

**(applause)**

**RUTH REICHL:** Okay, I think after watching that we have to begin by—I mean, it seems to me that you're doing almost the opposite of what Ferran is doing, I mean, when he says that you can't understand food, it seems to me that what you're trying to do is make people understand food, that you come at this from a very different place.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yes. Well, I mean, I'm trying to understand food myself first of all. That's where the starting point is. I mean, understanding the process of how to cook the carrot, what happens, that has been explored a lot. For me, what's very interesting is still, of course, to explore how the carrot is cooked and what happens in the process once the water is boiling and so on, but in fact what is a carrot? Why

is the carrot in our part of the world? What seeds belong in our part of the world, and how are they grown best and where does the carrot originate from? What is a carrot, you know? Is it the true carrot we're eating, or is a carrot meant to be something else? That's what our job is a big part of.

**RUTH REICHL:** Okay, maybe we should play, David, we should play number 4, since you've brought up carrot.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** I'm just going to stand up. It's called Vintage Carrot.

**RUTH REICHL:** Yeah, it's number 4. Yes!

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** There we go. So, okay, yeah, we'll see here this is a farm. This is chamomile—there grows two types of chamomile there, and then that one on the bottom we'll cook with. I'll explain about the vintage carrot, because it actually is a vintage carrot, it's an old carrot. Just we'll just talk you through the dish. Afterwards I'll explain to you about the carrot, the vintage carrot.

We cook it in goat's butter a long time. We add chamomile to the pan. It infuses beautifully. The sweetness of a carrot with the sweetness of chamomile is just fantastic together. And this particular type of chamomile, the small buds or heads there of the carrot, or the chamomile, is fantastic to eat as well. Please notice the



meat there, of the carrot, the leathery texture of the outside, I'll explain more about it.

This is sorrel leaves. The best part of a sorrel leaf is the stem. I think. Usually probably that's what you throw out. It's a very, very simple dish somehow of cooked carrots with these sorrel stems and different types of wild sorrel leaves. The jus, or the sauce, is simply juiced sorrel with a touch of rapeseed oil.

So, the vintage carrots. We had an extremely, extremely cold winter in Denmark this year, beyond belief. The water was frozen outside our restaurant. I've never tried it before, and since we are restaurant that focuses on ingredients that surround us we of course were having problems in February and also in March, the winter was stretching, and we were having so much trouble that we were actually thinking that we were going to have to import ingredients to have enough diversity to actually cook for our guests. It was a major crisis that we had, but we still wanted to keep the work within our frame, which is the Nordic, we work with the ingredients that surround us, that's it.

So we went to one of our farmers. We asked him, "What do you have? Just give us whatever, we'll look at it." What happened is that he had put carrots onto the field. They're supposed to be harvested in summer. He left them there, nobody bought them, it was a new variety, as you saw it was a blue carrot. And then he left them. They wintered in the soil. Next spring, he left the field to rest. Then when autumn

came he plowed the field, took the carrots up, and then he put them in a storage room, just for no reason, he didn't even think about it. And then we were in his farm in his cold room with these carrots, utterly old, shitty, horrible carrots when eaten raw—mealy, starchy, you would just throw them away normally, but we were of course desperate.

So what we did is that we thought to ourselves, I thought, “How is it that you cook a piece of meat?” You know, if the chefs are there, you know, when we take a piece of meat it's expensive and an animal has to die for it, so you treat it with respect, you cook it on a pan, it has the right temperature, it's also the right pan, it's a good pan, and you twist it and you turn it and you spice it, you add herbs and you nurture it and you nurture it and you baste it and you put butter and you nurture it again and you twist and you turn and you take so good care of it so that this piece of meat can be exactly as perfect as possible. So we tried, we said to ourselves, “Why don't we try to do that with the carrot? With this horrible, shitty, carrot, we'll try to treat it with the same amount of respect.”

This video here is taken when spring came so we used the chamomile, but it started as a dish where we took the carrot and we put it on a pan with goat's butter and we twisted it and we turned it and we nurtured it and we basted it, and we had herbs and we had spices, and it took almost two hours to cook this carrot, of this size here, slow heat, twisting, turning, nurturing. Transformation like magic, this starchy, shitty carrot, melts together and becomes as you saw there almost meaty in its

texture, with a leathery outside that has the so rich and caramelized flavors, and the sweetness was just beyond belief.

So, of course, as a chef this is a revelation. That here we are thinking that we have to eat as fresh products as possible, and we're eating a carrot that is a year and a half old. This was real—like a complete surprise for me. And because I am the way I am I start thinking, “What is a carrot, really? What if this shitty thing that we thought it was, what if that is a carrot? What if this is a true carrot? Who knows?” Nobody knows about these things anymore. We just think that they are the way they are because that's how we get them. And I tracked the carrot—the last country I tracked the carrot down originally from was Afghanistan. And imagine what happens since it just left Afghanistan and it came to Denmark and ended in our kitchen. Maybe we were close to the original carrot from Afghanistan.

So we asked our farmer what else do you have of old, shitty vegetables? Because it was still winter, and this is just one dish, you know, people come and they want more, they want a lot to eat. Vintage potatoes, and that's even better. Vintage potatoes is the same thing but what happens here is that in the second year of this potato's life it starts to shoot. You have the mother potato, and then small shoots come out. Very small potatoes the size of a hazelnut forms and that lives off the nourishment of the mother potato, resulting in a potato that's again, just beyond belief. Not starchy, more in fact textured as a carrot and needs to cook very little, you know. That one actually needs texture when you cook it, because it doesn't taste

raw just when it gets a little bit of heat. It has all the wonderful, and beautiful nutty flavors that a very good potato would have.

**RUTH REICHL:** The thing that's so interesting. Have you ever tried the limitation? I mean, you know, here in New York, we have everything available to us, right?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Smog.

**DAVID CHANG:** We don't have everything, but that's what I'm always amazed that René does, and I think it's one of the strengths of Noma, it's putting a limitation on what you cook. And reanalyzing and reevaluating these things like a carrot or a potato, they put a creative ceiling on what you can do, and it forces you to sort of work with what you have and making the best of that. And I think that in New York we do have everything and sometimes we get carried away and we lose the focus.

**RUTH REICHL:** Can you imagine a New York cuisine that was like a Noma cuisine?

**DAVID CHANG:** Well, that's what I hope for, that we're going to create an American cuisine, because René's done it in a very short period of time, he's put, you know, people want to say New Scandinavian. I just say it's he's interpreting, you know, Copenhagen, Denmark, you know, his crew, what they do, it's in their food and it's—in a very short period of time he's created a food culture, which is something that

I'm always struggling to identify—what is New York food culture, what is American food culture? And, you know, the guys at Noma have done it in seven years.

**RUTH REICHL:** When you set out, I mean, did you think about what is a restaurant? I mean, when you thought about what Noma was?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yes. I did. I mean, even though I was young I—at that point when we were opening a restaurant in 2003, I was already—I had already become tired, this is my own personal opinion, of what I call the act, the act of restaurants, where I as a diner and probably the server, they together join an act of three to four hours where everybody pretends that they're part of a different social layer that they're not really. The waiter is very aaah and the very diner is at the same time, you know, you're sitting next to each other and being formal because this is—this is—somehow this is what great food has to be surrounded by. So we wanted to have a place that signaled some rawness to it without tablecloths, stripped away from, you know, you should feel without pretense that when you came into our restaurant you should feel that the emphasis was on the ingredients and the people, that was most important, not on the so-called luxury that somehow had to be there in order for it to be great food.

**RUTH REICHL:** I mean, one of the things when I tried to think about what—I mean, because your cuisine, you're very good friends, but you serve very different kinds of

food from each other, but you're both kind of reevaluating what the relationship between the customer and the kitchen is.

**DAVID CHANG:** Very much, and I think it was by accident, if I'm not mistaken. I don't know if all of you guys have been to Noma, but if you do go eat there, the cook serves you the food. And oftentimes the cook that's serving you the food also picked the herbs and picked the vegetable and prepped it all out and is also cooking it and then serving it to you. So it's a—you know, it's this whole experience that makes Noma that special and you know you're seeing that popping up you know a few places, I think I was asking Soren, one of your sous-chefs, how that happened. And you were like running the pass, and you were just like, "Just get it out there, just serve the food, serve the food," and that sort of became—

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** It started in that way, just get the food out, we are all part of a big team, I wanted to break these barriers that usually are in restaurants where there's really two teams within the team, and it's difficult to get these people somehow, sometimes to work as a unit together, so it was a way of initially just saying, "okay, we're together on this, you know. What is this that we want? Why are we here? It's to make people happy, let's just make people happy all of us, and just serve the food while it's ready. Don't stand there and shout on waiters, because they're probably not lazy, they're just a little bit busy."

What has been so interesting in this whole period of looking at the chefs while they are serving food and seeing what happens to people. It's just extraordinary. Because I think—what I found out was that a lot of chefs, they are so trained in following a format, they follow the recipe and that's it, you know, let's say there's a watercress sauce and there's a recipe for it, and the recipe demands 200 grams of this and that and whatever, and they follow that, period, full stop. What if it rains the day before? All the chefs know that if it rains a lot, then the watercress tastes more watery, so therefore the recipe doesn't function anymore.

It was incredible to see when they start interacting with the guests, when they ultimately had the feeling of giving food, and at the same time we also put chefs in nature, picking their own foods, harvesting it, seeing how it grows, following it week by week, going back to the kitchen, picking it, cooking it, then serving it, giving it to the guests themselves, which for me is the essence of a restaurant, is actually that you're giving to people. It created a whole new level of commitment and a level of awareness on how they cook, because they are looking people in the eyes and they are giving it to them, so they go back and they taste it, you know, they don't just tell themselves, "it's a recipe, it's all right," you know, they're tasting, they're taking stronger standpoints to how they're cooking, and that was, you know, a very pleasant surprise that the whole kitchen changed like that, and I would say that is very much the essence of our place is that we have this team where everybody is so committed, and they are every day taking so strong standpoints on what they're doing, constantly.

**RUTH REICHL:** What made you decide that what you wanted to do was this kind of very rigorous, difficult to do, locally based cuisine? I mean, you didn't come out of that, you worked with Adrià, you worked with Keller.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Well, yeah, and a lot of these journeys, actually, was a big push in the right direction. Going into Ferran Adrià, we just saw, he's incredibly inspiring. When I went there, this was in '98. Before, where I worked, the whole world was French cuisine, for obvious reasons. I would like to say before I continue that I love French cuisine; I love it. When you hear me say anything, you're not hearing me talk against it because more or less any cuisine has a foundation of Carême in them, but I thought I was going to travel the world, go back to Denmark, and do my version of French cuisine and suddenly I found myself after I had been working at a three-star in France going to Spain and just seeing a whole new way of thinking, which was just so liberating. I left that place with a big sense of freedom.

**RUTH REICHL:** And freedom to do something completely different.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Freedom to think—freedom to think, well, maybe it's not the absolute truth, French cuisine, maybe there's other ways of approaching it. I was of course just in my—I was nineteen, twenty years old, and then another lucky shot was that Grant Atkins, he was at elBulli that year, and he brought the book of the *French Laundry*, and I remember clearly, when reading the book of the French



Laundry that back then I didn't know anything about America, well, I'd seen movies of course, like anybody, you watch the movies and *Terminator* and all these things, **(laughter)** but what I knew about the eating culture and what people eat was what was available in Denmark, and what is that, McDonald's, Burger King, you know, big corporations that are poisoning Planet Earth, and if you heard about anything, you heard about great French chefs going to America, so here I was reading this book and an American chef incorporating some type of pop culture, the coffee and doughnuts, the macaroni and cheese, embracing what many people just made fun of, and I thought it was inspiring to see that, that I went there, I just told Grant, "Please, Grant, can you get me in there?" And he got me in, and then he left.

**RUTH REICHL:** I think we should open the bag here. You all have a little goody bag here. Okay, so tell us, you got these ingredients, right?

**DAVID CHANG:** Well, we have had a few people I guess vice versa, but we have had a few of our cooks and sous-chefs go to Noma, and they come back and one of chefs at Ssäm Bar came back from Noma and he was just like, David I need to get a forager, and he developed this relationship, and we have a few of René's ex-cooks at Momofuku, and Daniel Burns and Company, they created this beautiful bag of local vegetables and herbs and sea vegetables from Maine and Vermont. You have a couple types of sea asparagus, radishes from New York.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Mention this one. Get your green one out, everybody. Get the green one out, everybody, because this is just a perfect example of what has happened at Noma for so many years and so many times have just been surprised. You want to tell them what that is?

**DAVID CHANG:** It's a type of kiwi.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** It's a wild kiwi from Maine.

**RUTH REICHL:** Oh, it's so delicious.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Can you believe that?

**RUTH REICHL:** It's so delicious.

**DAVID CHANG:** And you know when I went to Copenhagen, I was fortunate enough to just walk around, if you walk around with René anywhere, he's going to start picking stuff out of the ground, and he did, you know, we were in the park, and he starts picking stuff, but when we went to, you know, it's the discovery of stuff that you would normally just pass by, like the bulrush, which I had never had before, and I tasted it and it was like a cucumber, hearts of palm, and I thought, "how did I never have this before?" And it's just sitting there in your backyard and nobody knows.

And that was sort of the curiosity that I think the team at Noma has, is no stone is going to be left unturned.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yep. Mmmm.

**RUTH REICHL:** Do you see—I mean foraging is this thing that—I mean, when Jean-Georges opened, he had a forager, and he said he was going to be foraging ingredients and that sort of vanished. Has its time come in America?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Not too bad, not too bad.

**DAVID CHANG:** It's never gone away, it's always been around, I mean, we just don't have it readily available, and I know there's spots to forage in Central Park, but I think people would freak out if we were in whites and going to get the morels where I know they are and stuff like that, and there's some beautiful stuff in Maine.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Why not forage in Central Park, why not? I mean, it's there, it's edible, and if you can have foraging trips in Central Park . . .

**DAVID CHANG:** There are foraging trips.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** There is? Great!

**RUTH REICHL:** We used to forage in Prospect Park for *Gourmet*.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** I would like to comment on this—the whole foraging notion, and for me the idea of foraging is bigger than just the word, “let’s go forage,” it’s about going back to nature, you know, understanding what is out there, seeing the big diversity. If you go to a supermarket or even if you call your supplier, David, there’s a list of ingredients to choose from, which, I don’t know. Maybe there’s forty, maybe there’s fifty. If there’s a lot of ingredients to choose from, then you have seventy, eighty various greens and so on. If you look at any book about wild foods, there’s thousands to choose from. So we have a diversity out there that’s just ready to be used and to get reconnected with and also in that way I think you’ll have a bigger diversity on the different menu cards around the world, which we have to agree on or we have to just perhaps not agree on, but I feel that increasingly, increasingly, menu cards are all the same all over the world. If you close your eyes and you eat in Sydney, even in New York, in London, or some places, you don’t know where you are anymore, which there’s no, there’s lacking somehow a sense of connection to its place, which I think is a shame, and I believe that going a step back and reconnecting with nature is a good starting point at least.

**RUTH REICHL:** How do you feel about eating insects? Do you serve insects at Noma?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** If there was insects that I knew I could get, and they tasted delicious, I would serve it. Of course I would.

**DAVID CHANG:** He serves a lot of shrimp right now.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yeah, we have live shrimps, I mean, that's just as ugly as—

**RUTH REICHL:** We should look at the sea.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** We have some videos.

**RUTH REICHL:** The sea one is number 3.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yes, this is for you to kind of understand how we work when it comes to creativity. So it's called The Sea, because I didn't know what to call it. It might as well be called The Shrimp. Water. Sea. Beach plants. These grows in the sand. I don't know if you noticed this before, but you can even see it on the ground there, that there's a lot of seaweed flush there. This is perfect growing conditions. So much nutrients and what shoots up there is just some of the most incredible ingredients. This one, I can't remember the name of this, but this is the ingredient that the Vikings used to eat to survive so that they could crusade over to England and to plunder, rape, **(laughter)** so, look at the variety. This is beach peas, for instance. Here we have twelve varieties of beach plants, each of them very

significant and unique in their own respect, and there's beach mustard in front of you with a very strong flavor to it. We have taken the beach rocks and the beach water, and we kind of just put the plants back. The sea that you looked at, there's two types of shrimp. This is a more deep-sea shrimp. This is a vinaigrette of just very, basically cream, a low-fat cream, and dill oil, works with the creaminess of the shrimp. And then there's early-season urchin, which we take everything out of it, and then we freeze it, and we grate it. There you have like a big taste of the sea. Can we go to the oyster, which is number—

**RUTH REICHL:** The oyster is number—sorry—2.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Number 2, because there's another example of this one's called steam oyster, there's another part of Denmark, you see very low water, low tide there, there's different plants growing right there. You see all the seaweed there that's just been flushed in. It's perfect conditions for all these plants to come up. Again, it's a type of beach pea, it's very sweet. This is beach cabbage, a type of wild cabbage. This one is one of the—can you pause for a second here?

**DAVID CHANG:** Is that the sea coriander?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yeah. This plant is one of the first times where I thought, well, we're on to something. When I tasted this, we went, and took a trip onto the beach, like we do. And you saw this plant. Once you start being a lot in nature, you start to

be able to see what looks edible and what's not. And this one was thick and juicy, looked succulent, but also had an appearance of a chive.

**DAVID CHANG:** Looks like grass. Looks like a lawn to me.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** For the untrained eye. You tried it. You remember. And I remember picking this and the juices start oozing out of it and putting it in your mouth and tasting it. It has a perfect crack to it, you know, nice texture. Lots of juice and then it comes, such a mild and elegant flavor of coriander, which is for me was just extraordinary. Here I was in the cold north and suddenly you have a flavor of coriander, something you've always expected to belong to somewhere else, certainly not in the north.

**RUTH REICHL:** Does it taste like coriander leaves, like cilantro?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Like cilantro.

**DAVID CHANG:** Just like the juice and it was very pure and clean, and it was just a matt—I mean, when I tasted it, I was just like, “no way, this, I’m eating like a lawn,” I really thought it was, and it tastes like a nectar of coriander or something, it’s just beautiful.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** It's here as well. We found it here. Chang found it here. In his search for grass. **(laughter)** The edible stuff, that is. The other stuff is easy to find. So. You know it's just such a surprise when you're there and you're eating coriander. All your life you've been thinking it belonged somewhere else, and it's an exotic plant, and then just by research and going there and talking to people and trying you find something that was just unusual and you start thinking to yourself, well, maybe there's so much more out there that we don't understand.

Should we continue again with the Oyster? This is a dish of these beach plants again, it's a native oyster, quite large, it's eight years old, we line a pot with beach rocks and seawater again, sea plants and seaweeds and so on, old shells, and then a touch of horseradish, one of the cornerstones of Scandinavian cuisine, along with rye bread. Pickled these are unripe pickled elderberries, that is fantastic, gives a, you know, a flowery taste to it. These are things we do a lot. We have a room, a huge room that's filled with preserves and salted things and dried things for winter, that's one of them. We line the beach plants under, and then we close it up. We put it back into let's say its environment, into the pot, with the beach plants and the seaweeds and the rocks and the seawater, and then four minutes later you have a dish, a perfect dish that's served like that in front of the guests, and the hot seawater just brings a flavor of the sea and a smell of the sea to the whole restaurant, and another perfect example on your inspiration can be found very, very, very close by. If you search, you know. You don't always in fact have to look so many places. Shall we take one more now that we're at it?



**RUTH REICHL:** Oh, sure, why not? Look at the Hen and the Egg?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Let's take the Hen and the Egg, yeah.

**RUTH REICHL:** It's 1.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** That's number 1.

**RUTH REICHL:** Or do you want to do asparagus and spruce?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Let's take the asparagus and spruce.

**RUTH REICHL:** 5.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Number 5.

**RUTH REICHL:** So how did you figure out—how did you learn about foraging?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Hold on. Let me explain this. So I don't know if you just noticed, there was an asparagus field. Did you notice what was just next to it? There was a spruce, there you go, the spruce right next to it, spruce grows. And that became, that became the dish. We were there, talking to a farmer, taste the beautiful white

asparagus this year, and the spruce was right there. So we harvested the asparagus. The green ones we grilled. Once they'd been grilled and heated through, we juiced them. And the end result is something again magical, a vegetable sauce that is just beyond belief, so, you know, pure and intense.

We take the asparagus that grows right next to the spruce and tie them onto the branches and then we grill them like that. What happens is that the resin and the essential oils of this spruce incorporates and infuses into the asparagus and that citrus tone, almost eucalyptus-y note there is to that is for me perfect this sweet asparagus. We do also pick the tips of the spruce, which is delicious. I found out that you could eat them by looking at the animals in spring they were so you know eating all the tips. There you go, the tips is there, and then there's a sauce of the green asparagus with a bit of spruce oil to it, and then we add a dot of whipped cream to go with it. Looks pretty good, huh?

**(applause)**

**DAVID CHANG:** I just wanted to add that yes, it's foraging, and it's all this stuff, but I think what separates Noma from a lot of restaurants is it's all about execution and there's so much discipline and the cooks, it's a camaraderie that I've rarely seen and an integrity level that, you know, I try to get our guys to emulate. You know, we recently had a cook come back from a *stage* and he came back and he was like reborn. What makes the food at Noma even better than it should be is because

there's so much care, there's tenacity in the kitchen to make it really good, and I think that you just don't find that that often. It's a very rare trait.

**RUTH REICHL:** How do you make this pay? You have what, you have two cooks for every seat?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Well, yeah . . . **(laughter)** I just forgot about that.

**RUTH REICHL:** That kind of dedication costs money.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Of course, it costs money and that is why it is expensive and the notion of the book in fact is one of the most incredible things for me personally running this so-called fine dining restaurant is it's not reaching out to enough people, because you have to be able to afford it, you know. That's why I think actually a book can be a great thing to kind of showcase it for an affordable price. But you're right. How can you make this happen? There's no way around it, you're just going to have to have a lot of hands, especially if you are out there taking ingredients yourself and washing them. They don't come home in a package where they're prewashed and cut perfectly. Everything is yourself. It's very time-consuming, much more than it is to slice a piece of salmon into ten portions, for instance. It's much more time-consuming to do ten portions of the shitty carrot, for instance. It truly is, and there is a thing there, that—that I'm not too sure how many people understand how extreme and passionate chefs are for their trade and how

much commitment there is to it. I mean, today, these packages here. I was completely surprised. I asked David Chang to help and I go and I check out in the kitchen and there's six guys packing this for you and just because they want to, they want to learn, they want to experience, and yesterday I was in San Francisco, in Seattle, and a journalist says to me, "Well, why do you work for free?" You know, it was complete—just a wrong notion for him. And that is chefs, you know, they are just so passionate. And I don't think that great restaurants would exist if it weren't for these people, because if they were to just keep it to very square, it would be so expensive to dine out and it wouldn't have the level that we do. Chefs are natural-born martyrs.

**RUTH REICHL:** It's true, you do not do this if you want to make a lot of money.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** They would make the best terrorists in the world.

**RUTH REICHL: (laughs)** Now, there's a good line. You'll hear that quoted, I'm sure. But you know one of the things I appreciate so much about what you've done, David, is that you actually figured out a way to make to make cuisine that is daring and challenging and affordable for people. Did you ever think about trying to do something that is—I don't know, a food cart of some kind? René's food cart.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Yeah. I mean, I wish that I had the brains to do it. I don't think I have. That is—well, it's difficult. And what, for instance, I think what David Chang

has done is just a revolution in that sense. Because I think that, you know, food that's affordable and that's also so fucking delicious. I'm sorry to say it, we used bad language here, you know, it's very, very, very difficult and you have to have the right set of brains to do it.

**RUTH REICHL:** And it's a real respect for the audience. I mean, it's something that people don't do very much at an affordable price, which is say, you know, "I trust you that you'll trust me," and to really try doing things that aren't easily gettable.

**DAVID CHANG:** Just trying to make tasty food.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Come on!

**DAVID CHANG:** It's a team effort. Team effort and right place, right time.

**RUTH REICHL:** But it's great that you send people off—where else do you send your people off to *stage*?

**DAVID CHANG:** Obviously because of Noma hitting number one, it seems to be, "David, do you think you can get me a *stage* at Noma?" But I think having spent time in that kitchen there—I just think it's a great training ground for young cooks to have respect for the profession and to learn integrity and camaraderie and to not—teamwork is to not let someone else down. I mean, that's why I love sending cooks

there, because they come back and they have this sense of, “I’m not going to let you down. I’m not going to burn this two-year-old carrot. You know why? Because it’s been aged two years. Even if it tastes shitty, somebody picked it, and I had to go to the farm today.” You know, there’s a sense of ownership that I think that is really something that we’re trying to cultivate, and I know a lot of restaurants are trying to cultivate here in America. But we don’t have the resources—I just didn’t know that Copenhagen had the abundance of natural resources—it’s amazing. Thirty minutes away you’re on the beach, thirty minutes away you’re at Dragsholm, this massive field that’s been, you know, dried out and you have every type of herb and wild and everything that’s delicious. And we just don’t have that.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Are you sure about that? I’m not too sure.

**DAVID CHANG:** We don’t have a field of asparagus where the water’s been, you know, dried out and you have a bed of seashells and the mineral content makes the vegetables that much better, we just don’t have that on the east coast, so it’s a special place, Copenhagen itself.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** I would comment now as we’re talking you sending *stages* to Noma. One thing that is just also incredible to watch with people that haven’t tried it before, is when people come they have a training, they are so-called chefs or cooks, they have gone to school and they’re now cooks, so and, you know, they know how to make the Béarnaise and the this and the that, according to whatever school they

walk and what repertoire they have, and, you know, there's a certain amount of excitement when people see new dishes or they see a new way of doing a sauce, but nothing—and this is really, really true, nothing beats the excitement of seeing a chef the first time on his knees picking some little herb somewhere in nature. There is just something that is so buried in us, I believe, that even the toughest New York chef like David Chang was on his knees and harvesting and pushing all the other chefs away because it was his herb that he was going to cook with.

**DAVID CHANG:** I wanted to sabotage everybody.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** And I think it's just so magical to notice that moment when people realize it and they get that—the moment that that connection happens, and I think once you have it, you have it, you know. It's there for your life.

**RUTH REICHL:** Does that feeling translate? There's something almost mystical about the idea that this food—it's not, it's not something that's been cultivated by man, that it's out there, it's a gift, nature just gives it. I mean, can you translate that feeling for the people who are eating it?

**DAVID CHANG:** That's very meta.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** I don't know if I could translate it. I think that somehow, of course, the way that you cook, the way that things are cooked, somehow can represent it,

and maybe it's a small translation of it. I think that if you're out there, a lot of people would say that—I hear this all the time, that our dishes they are so landscape-y and they look like a, you know, a forest or a shoreline or something like that. And it's not intentionally that it happens like this. This is because this is where we are, this is how we work, this is our everyday life, and it just becomes like that, so I guess that is a translation of it somehow.

**RUTH REICHL:** It just seems to me that the cooking is a gift, but you're also doing something that is a gift from nature, it's something wonderful. So I just want to go back to how did you learn to forage? Because I'm sure we all now want to go out and forage. How do we train ourselves?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Get your inner scavenger forward. Well, of course, don't ever chance it with mushrooms, lesson number one.

**DAVID CHANG:** I did one.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Not *those* mushrooms.

**DAVID CHANG:** In Finland, I ate—I didn't listen to anybody, and I immediately ate a mushroom off the table and the forager was like, "That's a poisonous mushroom."

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Well, yeah.



**RUTH REICHL:** You're still here; did they rush you to the hospital?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Well, there's mushrooms that can kill you, there's mushrooms that can make you impotent, there's mushrooms that can choke you for a little while. But mushrooms is dangerous stuff, okay, take it easy with the mushrooms. I'm sure all you New Yorkers have foraged for mushrooms before.

Well, there was a lot of reading. There was a lot of going back in time, looking at old books and trying to find people that knew about what was out there. And this was very, very, very difficult, in fact. I mean, I could find signature books of great chefs and cuisines from around the world, read books about that, but in fact finding out about what was out there of ingredients that were old was very difficult and today, of course, things have changed but in the beginning it was a huge problem. And simply, it started by reading books and looking at who wrote this book, trying to track this person down and starting a conversation with this person and asking about ingredients and making them work for you and making them become part of the team and harvesting for you and teaching them.

Along the way, you know, we met historians that we worked with, biologists that we worked with, that's part of the team, a part of the e-mail correspondence that goes on all the time when we see a new or read about a new ingredient. That's what's so great about modern technology—you can be somewhere in the forest, and you take

a picture and you e-mail it and two minutes later, you get a—this is great. I mean, really, foraging with an iPhone, you know. You find a spot where there's great wild horseradish. And you put a—how do you say that in English, the mark on the map. The pin—you put a pin on there and you instantly e-mail it out to all the kitchen. And then it's there, you know, it's just incredible. So ancient ways with new technology has just been quite useful. And I would say that there's no way around it, you simply have to read. Read.

**RUTH REICHL:** Okay. I thought we would take some questions.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** I was going to say, should we look at the last dish?

**RUTH REICHL:** You want to look at the last one, you want to look at Hen and Egg?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Just check out the last dish here that we made you. We call it the Hen and the Egg, we were at this farm where the chickens they just lived so great, and the eggs were incredible and we were thinking to ourselves, "How does a chicken live?" Well, it sleeps in the house, surrounded by hay, lays its eggs in hay, and then it walks around in these greens and eat the seeds of all the flowers and so on, so we thought, well, let's just use that as our inspiration—the weeds and the flowers, the hay and the egg.

Now, since we've become quite, let's say—this is wood sorrel, for instance—since we have become known, you know, there is still a lot of people that kind of somehow enter our restaurant with a bit of anxiety, so we wanted to incorporate humor into this dish to show the guests that we are on their side, that we want them to be—to relax, and, you know, smile, have a good time.

We put a 320° Celsius warm pan onto wet hay. The guests, they do the dish themselves, they get a kit that you just saw, with the timer and everything. You should imagine that you're the guest right now. There's instructions and they're cooking it. This warm hay just releases—oh, sorry, the wet hay with the warm pan just releases hay scents, we add a hay oil to the pan, we crack the egg, we sauté the bitter greens and then we just sprinkle with it, and we do a sauce of all these greens that we find. And that's it, somehow you have become a chicken. All right, that's the last one.

**(applause)**

**RUTH REICHL:** That's beautiful. And while we're waiting for the first question, I want to say René will be signing his very, very beautiful book after this. The book is extraordinary.

**Q:** So America's gotten so foodie, especially in New York and on the coasts, and my question to the chefs is what does, how does this get sort of transmuted into the

mainstream? How does this sort of—what does fast food look like in ten, fifteen years?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Everybody's eating pork buns, of course.

**(laughter)**

**DAVID CHANG:** I've always been, I mean, not always maintained, but I think that a lot of the stuff that René's doing, and other chefs in Europe, maybe like Andoni Aduriz a lot of these guys who are interpreting their *terroir*. I think we're going to see a trickle-down effect in America. Just because it's just—it's very contemporary, it's modern, but it's not *rustico*, it's not just simple, it has a lot of technique. I think if it ever hits T.G.I. Friday's in ten years, then you know it's hit the mainstream, but—

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** But don't you think the role of a chef has changed? I mean, you must have seen that, the way that in many cases, some chefs have become almost role models that can actually—I mean, look at Jamie Oliver, for instance, the way that they can be a part of changing eating habits, very fast, in fact. And I think that chefs of today, the most influential ones, can actually be part of this, can inspire and can help change how people eat. I really believe it.

**RUTH REICHL:** I think one of the most for me fascinating things that's happened in food is that chefs really understand now that so many of the world's problems have

to do with food, and that it's part of their responsibility to try and make things better. I would say another answer to this question is one of the interesting things that's happening in food now is very much like what's happened in fashion. Food used to go from the top down, and now a lot of it is coming from the bottom up. I mean, the street food which is coming into restaurants. And so you're seeing a real sort of changing American palate as street food trickles up. So you have it coming from both directions, which is really interesting.

**Q:** A quick question—if I don't work for Momofuku, how can I *stage* at Noma? I work under chef Ed Cotton at Plein Sud right now and I'm also staging at restaurant Daniel, so I want to know if it's possible next summer, I can do nine months.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** How can we say no? Of course.

**Q:** Who do I need to contact?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** We'll talk afterwards.

**Q:** Sounds good, chef. Thank you.

**(applause)**

**RUTH REICHL:** The most public job application in history.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Anybody else?

**Q:** So I've heard that David has said in the past that he's not so sure about when the best time it is to—if one's cooking improves as one has children and a wife or a family and I wonder if you have any feelings about that, if since having a child has changed the way you cook, has it improved or not improved?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Well, my life has improved, of course. I would say that one thing that has changed it actually is I'm not saying this because at all I'm opposed to it, my personal thing when I had my daughter, she's two and a half now, you know, once in a while, as a chef, you get these miracle powders that just can help you or transform textures and ingredients in a way that is just so incredibly helpful. But because we are not chemists or so on, I don't know what they consist of, I just know it's a chemical. So, since I've had a baby, if I get another miracle wonderful chemical that can make my life so good, I have new issues because I'm always, because I ask myself, "would I cook with this, would I cook my carrot with this and then give it to my daughter or would I give my daughter the carrot that's grown by the most passionate people in the best and the most rich soil from the best seed taken at the best possible time at the year and then just serve her that?" And then of course—It's very easy to choose, right? So it's done that for my kitchen. Do you have children, Chang?

**DAVID CHANG:** No, chef. **(laughter)**

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Anybody else, no?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** There's a dearth of questions, please don't be so shy. We called the program tonight Eating Culture, and when we prepared it we were intrigued by this notion of a certain form of cultural cannibalism. I'd love you to comment on that.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Should I go first?

**DAVID CHANG:** It's all you, chef, it's all yours.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Cultural cannibalism. What were we talking about when we said that?

**RUTH REICHL:** We were talking about this sort of national identity on a plate and how what we expect now, and one of the things that you've been doing so much when you're doing this whole idea of local food, is that we think we're ingesting our culture when we're eating. And it's a notion that we think about more and more these days. I mean, as we think about eating locally and "what does it mean to eat Nordic food?" what does it mean—I mean, you had this whole idea of you know, like, trying to think about what New York cuisine might be.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** That's true, and it's a very difficult question, actually, and I would say the most difficult part at Noma since we opened was actually how that you defined your region and all these ingredients—how did you transcend these onto your plate so that they felt like they belonged only here, because the notion and the idea of being local is easy to say and easy to implement somehow. You know, you can use the example of a crème brûlée, you can make a crème brûlée and put huckleberries in, but the culture of the dish is still a crème brûlée, it still belongs somewhere else, it doesn't become a New York dish or an American dish because there are huckleberries in it. That has been a big challenge at the restaurant Noma as well, that the food in itself tastes of belonging there without reference points.

**DAVID CHANG:** But you're so strict on that, though. Like no black pepper, doesn't exist, naturally.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** But that's a starting point, perhaps. That was necessary for us—necessary for me to have a strong frame of work so that I you know, I didn't fall into some traps, and the height of winter you didn't just put in a mango because it was easy, you had to dig deep and really investigate. Besides that of course it's—I mean, in our work at Noma we haven't just investigated old recipe books always or ingredients. We also read about own culture and tried to understand it, and we read about religion, how religion has had a huge impact on why we don't have a big



gastronomical high culture in Denmark and so on. All these elements were important somehow to reach where we are today.

**RUTH REICHL:** I mean, it's a big burden for food. Because I mean, when you think about what politicians do, when they go around and—here in this country they'll go and eat a Katz's pastrami sandwich and that says, you know, "I love the Jews," and then they'll go eat a piece of pizza and that's like, "I love the Italians," and they'll go up and eat you know fried chicken in Harlem with waffles and that's "I love black people," and if we're going to redefine what the national cuisine is, and we do, I mean we do have this notion of eating our heritage and now you redefine it, the idea of what your heritage actually is. It's a really interesting question, you know. It changes the whole cuisine.

**DAVID CHANG:** But it's a question I don't think people are asking themselves or chefs or restaurateurs or cooks, particularly in America. I think New York should be—everyone says it's the culinary capital of the world, but we're just a regular city, I don't think we have our own cuisine, so I want—it would be very nice to see more restaurants trying to have their own independent vision, trying to figure out what it is that they want to cook, not just more of the same stuff, and I think all of us moved to New York so we can be in the city and then that's something we're struggling with, and that's how I think this conversation and this question arose when we were trying to talk about this talk. It's something that—it's so difficult that I can't figure it out and we're just trying to figure out a better way and trying to find an identity, so,

you know, fortunately René's found his, but I think as a city, New Yorkers and the chefs, we have to find some more individual thinking and some creativity and that.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** I would say that, of course, it's also very important to say that what we do at Noma is not the absolute truth on how something Nordic should be on the plate, you know, it's our idea of it, and I think the way it can truly only become strong and perhaps if we're lucky become a gastronomical term, like you see the Italian cuisine or the Mediterranean cuisine, is if there is people that are having their own strong version of what their region is onto a plate by understanding all the culture and all the diversity of ingredients. By that perhaps, one day perhaps you know you can go to Scandinavia and, you know, you can see regional differences but we all fit in—in something common.

**Q:** With the growing popularity of foraging, is it sustainable?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Well, I can't say for here. I can't say for here. I think it's absolutely no problem. That's what I truly believe. There's so much out there. Of course you can't just, you know, release an army of chefs to—in the forest without a type of knowledge on how do you actually harvest and how do you preserve and what do you do so that it's still there next year? There needs to be knowledge in this as well, and I mean, do they do the same thing here in America, when you fish you have to get a card, you know, a license to fish?

**RUTH REICHL:** A license to forage.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** Why not?

**RUTH REICHL:** Here's your little plot, you have it for a week.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** That's it?

**RUTH REICHL:** I think that's it.

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** One more?

**Q:** I first wanted to say, that last night I read almost the whole book, and thank you for that, it finally replaces *French Laundry* as the most influential book in my life. Second, as a chef, what is your last meal on earth and who would you eat it with?

**RENÉ REDZEPI:** My last meal on earth, it would of course be with my family, my daughter and my wife, and it will probably be a bowl of blueberries with cream.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I think on that note—David, do you have a last meal?

**DAVID CHANG:** No comment.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** With no comment in mind, thank you very much to René Redzepi, Ruth Reichl, and David Chang.