GLUTTONY

MARIO BATALI, DAN BARBER, BARBARA KAFKA, AND CORBY KUMMER

***The Atlantic* Day of Ideas**

November 18, 2006

South Court Auditorium

New York Public Library

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ELIZABETH BAKER KEFFER: U.S. competitiveness in the global markets, China as a superpower, presidential politics, civil rights and race relations, does God exist? And now, gluttony. And who better on this topic than Atlantic's senior editor, Corby Kummer, the man who has written in our pages about—just a few things: organic yogurt, Alaskan wild salmon, artisan bacon, heirloom poultry, Tuscan-style olive oil, true wild rice, sustainable pork, grass-fed beef, smoked sablefish, quinoa soup, Maine potatoes, and many, many other topics. A little taste of Corby from the July/August issue, for those of you who have not seen it, a piece on online grocery shopping. Corby writes:
"Convenience trumps ideals in everyday life and sometimes the farmers' market is inconvenient. Sometimes you long for the days when phone numbers had five digits and city grocers wrote down your delivery list with soft leaded pencils on brown paper bags."

Those days are over, and we're actually here to talk about technology in the kitchen and the challenges and opportunities that presents.

Let me give a moment of introduction to Corby. As I mentioned, he's Senior Editor of *The Atlantic*. He's been with *The Atlantic* since 1981. He is one of the most widely read, authoritative, and creative food writers in the United States. His 1990 book *The Joy of Coffee* was called the most definitive and most engagingly written book on the subject to date by the *New York Times* and his more recent book, *The Pleasures of Slow Food*, celebrates the slow food movement and artisanal growing and food preparation techniques. Corby was the restaurant critic of *New York Magazine* across 1995 and 1996 and since 1997 he's been the restaurant critic for *Boston Magazine*. He was educated at Yale and has been the recipient of three James Beard journalism awards, including the M. F. K. Fisher Distinguished Writing Award. And he's here to moderate our panel today, so I'll turn things over to you, my friend.

CORBY KUMMER: Thank you very much, Elizabeth, and thank you all very much for coming, we're really glad to see you. We've got this terrific group of people who probably need no introduction, but let me introduce them.

Mario Batali, familiar to you all, creates magic in his many New York hotspots. Babbo Ristorante, which we were just talking about, opens at 4:30 tomorrow so we might see you all at 4:30 tomorrow. And Enoteca, Enoteca Greenwich Village, he was honored as best new restaurant of 1998 by the James Beard Foundation, which kind of is a theme in all of our lives, the James Beard Foundation. Other restaurants include Lupa, Eska, Otto Enoteca Pizzaria, Casa Mono, Bar Jamon, and Del Posto, along with Italian Wine Merchants, which I frequent. Mario apprenticed with London's legendary chef Marco Pierre White, and spent three years of intense culinary training in the Northern Italian village of Borgo Capanne, which is actually going to come up today. Mario hosts two Food Network programs, *Molto Mario* and *Ciao America!* and has authored *Simple Italian Food, Mario Batali Holiday Food, The Babbo Cookbook*, and *Molto Italiano*. Most recently he created the first-ever cookbook for NASCAR fans. This is news to me.

Mario Tailgates NASCAR-Style. Is this true? **(laughter)** It must be true, I mean it's right in your bio. Wow.

Dan. Dan Barber, who is Mario's backdoor neighbor, downtown, I mean that's the route we all want to be able to travel, right? Began farming and cooking for family and friends at Blue Hill Farm in the Berkshires. In 2002 *Food and Wine* magazine featured him as one of the country's best new chefs, and he's addressed food system issues through op-eds in the *New York Times*. Since May of 2000, Dan has seen Blue Hill grow from a noted neighborhood restaurant to recently receiving a three-star *New York Times* review. Both Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns, where Dan just drove down from about ten seconds ago, have received Best New Restaurant nominations from James Beard Foundation. In the spring of this year, he was awarded Best Chef, New York City. Dan serves on Harvard's Center for Health and the Global Environment Advisory Board, so come to Boston and visit us.

Barbara Kafka, the author of—who I have to say is one of my best friends in the world, though I'm not supposed to admit it—is the author of award-winning books her readers swear by, among them *Vegetable Love*, winner of the 2006 IACP—that's International Association of Cooking Professionals—award for best single-subject cookbook. *Roasting: A Simple Art*, which is probably on everybody's shelves here, won the Julia Child Cookbook Award, and *Microwave Gourmet*, a landmark book that will come up in our discussions today. She was a regular contributor to the *New York Times*, and has written extensively for food magazines in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, including a monthly column, "The Opinionated Palate" for *Gourmet*, and others for Family Circle and Vogue. Go out and buy *The Opinionated Palate*, a book that was collected. It's one of the great collections of food writing. In the past, Barbara was active as a consultant to restaurants, industry, and as a product designer. For many years she taught with James Beard, and around the country on her own.

So obviously we could talk about just anything with this incredibly distinguished group, but I've chosen a subject not dear to many people's hearts, including people right here on

stage, which is technology, technology in the kitchen, which we can't escape reading about. You can't escape reading about it if you open *The Atlantic* this month, because I have a piece about sous vide, vacuum-packing, cooking meats under the sous vide technology, which has taken hold in almost everyone's kitchens except, I believe, Mario's. And we just have to know about it. If we're thinking about food now, we've got to know about these machines and where it can be. So I'm going to start with Mario. I have broad questions about this. And the techniques you used when you worked in Italy, training, the ones your father uses making his sausages. If you all go to Seattle, you've got to go to Armandino before 4:30 in the afternoon, right? It's a lunch-only place. Just remember this when you're going to Seattle. Lunch only at Mario's father's, Armandino's, for home-cured sausages and home-cured meats and just—do they make the ragouts and stews that we had?

MARIO BATALI: Everything.

CORBY KUMMER: They are incredible ragouts and stews, but you know, that you don't associate them with anything to do with high tech. So the techniques your father uses making his sausages and cured meats, the ones you use now, where do machines help you, and where have you decided that they actually hurt?

MARIO BATALI: Machines make excellent espresso. **(laughter)** They can be trusted to roll out the pasta. They can churn gelato, and they can freeze things quite nicely. We use a machine to keep the hot water boiling for our cooking of the pastas. That's about it. That's all we have.

CORBY KUMMER: That's a real, you know, laying out—

BARBARA KAFKA: No refrigerator?

MARIO BATALI: Well, refrigerators and freezers, yes.

CORBY KUMMER: They not only freeze things, they refrigerate things.

BARBARA KAFKA: No oven?

MARIO BATALI: The oven comes under the stove, yes, but I don't consider that a machine, that's more just a box of fire.

BARBARA KAFKA: Ah-ha-ha.

(laughter)

CORBY KUMMER: We've got Barbara all ready.

MARIO BATALI: I don't want to sound like a neo-Luddite. I'm not against technology, I just haven't figured it out, all of it.

CORBY KUMMER: And Barbara was one of the first people to think about ovens, and you know, what's our definition of an oven, and what can a microwave do and not do, but also, I want to take you back to the food processor, because as far as I know, Barbara wrote the first book about cooking with food processors when—

BARBARA KAFKA: No, I edited a magazine for Carl Sontheimer.

CORBY KUMMER: That's it, who was, who brought the Cuisinart to this country.

BARBARA KAFKA: And I contributed to Jim Beard's book for the food processor.

CORBY KUMMER: And you were thinking then about how—what do knives do and not do?

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, you see, the thing is, I asked Mario that not just to be provocative, although it comes with my territory.

CORBY KUMMER: Comes naturally to her.

BARBARA KAFKA: But I said it because I think that we define technology almost per se as something that is new to us. I would claim that the technological advance of the patent stove, the closed stove, wood-fired or whatever, was the most liberating thing that ever happened to women, because you didn't have to stay up all night to feed the fire. You didn't have to get down on your knees to stoke the damn thing, and you could—it would heat the water, and it really was liberating. So—but we don't consider that technology anymore. The refrigerator, when it first came, everybody assumed the gases were going to kill us. The same thing was true of electricity, they thought electricity was going to come out of the wall.

CORBY KUMMER: Sometimes it does.

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, yeah, Corby, but, you know, gas, yes, electricity is not liable to do you in, coming out of the wall, unless it's a lightning strike. But the thing is that we've grown accustomed to these things, so we don't consider them technology anymore. The food processor is a very interesting phenomenon. It personally, oh, personally, it *singly* drove the quenelle off the upscale menu. In other words, quenelle used to be necessary, you know, that forced-meat dumpling thing that—of fish that has to be poached.

CORBY KUMMER: Floats in soup.

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, or has a wonderful nantua sauce. It's a great, great delicacy. I adore it still. But the point was that it used to be so difficult that only the fanciest restaurants would make it. Suddenly any idiot with a food processor could make it. Well, where was the acclaim in that? You know, that sort of thing, so that was an interesting

thing. It's *terrible* at chopping onions, because it exerts so much pressure that it forces the juice out and the same thing is true of herbs. But to tell you the honest-to-god truth, I wrote for the home cook, I am a home cook. If I can get a meal out, if I can make something that tastes pretty good, I'm going to be happy with it, and the food processor is a great invention. And I'm sure you have one in your kitchen.

MARIO BATALI: Yes!

BARBARA KAFKA: Ha!

(laughter)

CORBY KUMMER: And what do you use it for?

MARIO BATALI: Vinaigrettes, making bread crumbs, grinding chocolate, anything.

BARBARA KAFKA: Nuts.

MARIO BATALI: A thousand things, but not herbs, not onions, there's things that just don't make sense with it, but things that have to be reduced quickly to small, relatively consistent pieces, is that. It works great.

BARBARA KAFKA: Do you have a food processor, Barber?

CORBY KUMMER: And what do you use it for?

DAN BARBER: The same things. No herbs, no onions, but pretty much everything else.

BARBARA KAFKA: Right. So the answer is that we're basically agreed that there are things that *don't* work in *any* form of technology. It's like toasting marshmallows. There

are a lot of things you're not going to stick on a stick and stick in a fire. Even if it's a green stick.

CORBY KUMMER: It sounds good to me, though. That we're getting back to the—

BARBARA KAFKA: The microwave?

CORBY KUMMER: No, we'll wait for the microwave and go over to sous vide. Because one of the things that Barbara always comes up with provocative ideas is saying is that eventually what becomes a great luxury is actually *doing* things by hand, that once these machines become part of everyone's life and everybody has the same shortcuts, so that making a quenelle is no longer a sign that you're in a grand luxe restaurant, in fact, anybody can do it who buys a—

BARBARA KAFKA: Not well, but they can.

CORBY KUMMER: But they can all do it. So having something, you know, that's incredibly labor-intensive, we like, have to a go to a Mario restaurant for it, we have to find somebody who's willing to invest the money in hand work for it, but I want to talk about transformation of cuisine and how you conceive of a dish. And I'm going to get to you and microwaves and how it changed your conception of thinking through how you make a dish. But I want to ask Dan, who uses a lot of sous vide, and, you know, explain it briefly for how it attracted to you in the first place, and how it's changed the dishes you make, because you were classically trained, before sous vide became a part of everybody's vocabulary.

DAN BARBER: Well, I wouldn't, it doesn't change the way I conceive of a dish. I would say that all the dishes were conceived without sous vide and then added to or benefited from sous vide, so that's a big difference. But—

CORBY KUMMER: But give us as example of how it benefits a dish.

DAN BARBER: Well, a pork belly is a good—

MARIO BATALI: Well, I think, first of all, what the hell is sous vide?

BARBARA KAFKA: Cryo-vacing.

MARIO BATALI: But cryo-vacing at any guaranteed temperature? I mean, I think there was a big issue recently when they went into Momofuku for example, and threw away everything that had been cryo-vaced but not measured and not done with a HACCP system. Is sous vide a technique now, or is it a style of cooking? I think it's just a technique.

DAN BARBER: They came to Blue Hill and threw away everything even though it was measured and temperatured as well.

MARIO BATALI: So that's just them not knowing the rules, right?

CORBY KUMMER: And Dan developed the first HACCP plan, so he's been the leader in developing HACCP plans to—under permits, he can actually do this in his restaurant. So why are you attached to it?

DAN BARBER: To sous vide?

CORBY KUMMER: Yeah, why did you—

DAN BARBER: I'm just sold on the taste. It was very simple in the end, I mean, just the flavors of a piece of let's say pork belly, which I was just beginning the example of, that is braised in a traditional pork-belly stock with vegetables is a delicious cut of meat. It's even more delicious cooked sous vide. I mean, it's as simple as that.

BARBARA KAFKA: Why?

DAN BARBER: I think the reason is two. For one, when you braise a pork belly, you are losing, by virtue of the braise, some of the flavor of the belly within the broth that you're braising it in. When you blanch a carrot in water to cook it, it's a delicious carrot when it's cooked properly in well-salted water, but you're also losing some of the carrot flavor in the water. So number one, sous vide is a dry environment, and you are retaining the taste, the true taste of the carrot or of the pork belly within that bag, and then second, you have control, where you don't have control in a big kitchen, especially if you have two hundred restaurants, you are—you can't possibly control a twenty-two year-old cook cooking, blanching a carrot who goes off to take a telephone call and comes back and takes the carrot out of the water and shocks it. You can have a precise number of minutes at a precise temperature, and your carrot will essentially be the same every time you cook it.

CORBY KUMMER: You know, it's funny because the argument you're making is it preserves the true flavor, it's like the *truest* carrot you can get because you're not losing anything, despite the delicious soups that can result, you just want that carrot flavor. Isn't that also what drove *your* interest in the microwave, your artichoke revelation?

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, that's a—he could easily be describing microwave cookery. In other words, you seal your container, with "cling film" if you're British, or plastic wrap, you are making a sous vide, basically.

DAN BARBER: That's right.

BARBARA KAFKA: And you have total control. There have been—there was a study, there was a woman at Cornell, at the University, and I'm terribly sorry I can't remember her name, but she was a professor there and she did a series of experiments, and she proved that things, vegetables, cooked in a microwave, in effect, because of the same

things that Dan was talking about, retain more of their vitamins. People say “steaming,” but if you steam the thing, look at the water underneath, and it’s turned color.

CORBY KUMMER: I never want to look at the water underneath when I steam the vegetables.

BARBARA KAFKA: Prude.

MARIO BATALI: And thank God you don’t have to, Corby.

BARBARA KAFKA: He’s a prude, he’s a prude.

CORBY KUMMER: It’s true! I’m a prude.

BARBARA KAFKA: But the answer is that it changes color. And that color, like beta carotene, is what carries the vitamin with it. So the same thing is true. I thought that there were going to be restaurants with banks of microwaves for exactly the same reason that you’re discussing.

CORBY KUMMER: There are banks of sous vide machines now.

BARBARA KAFKA: So that’s what I’m saying.

CORBY KUMMER: And why aren’t there banks of microwaves, why didn’t it catch on?

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, Jeremiah did it.

CORBY KUMMER: Jeremiah Tower.

BARBARA KAFKA: Because he came to see me, and I showed him about cooking marrow in the bone, and it didn't get soggy, it didn't get blood all over it, you know, it was just—it was terrific. But yes, the first thing I would tell anybody to cook in the microwave is a vegetable. And there are still things that I think it cooks better even than sous vide, which are asparagus, corn on the cob, which you can do right in its shuck, artichokes, and so forth. You have perfect control of timing, you have no water in the environment whatsoever. So that—you know that wonderful experience of taking an artichoke out of a pan, and then it's dripping all over the kitchen, or onto the plate of the person eating it? And that doesn't happen with an artichoke that's cooked in the microwave, the color stays better, and it's just better. Asparagus. People are always saying to me, "How did you make these wonderful asparagus?" There are two answers. Well, three. One, grow it.

CORBY KUMMER: Yeah, one, you grew it, you picked it out of your garden, which is the best asparagus on Earth.

BARBARA KAFKA: Second is, I peel it, and people say "No, you don't need to, only white asparagus," big difference. And, the microwave oven. I also don't have to tie it in neat little packages, because it doesn't come apart.

CORBY KUMMER: Easy. So, Mario, say that the three of us are agreed that these are the best possible carrots, artichokes, and asparagus. Either sous vide—which I bet you do all of them sous vide—in fact, I know for a fact you do artichokes and carrots sous vide.

DAN BARBER: That's right.

CORBY KUMMER: What about asparagus?

DAN BARBER: No, I don't. I don't.

BARBARA KAFKA: (whispers) Try it!

(laughter)

DAN BARBER: Okay.

CORBY KUMMER: So, you know, say that we've said, "Oh my God, the intensity, the purity of the flavor, there's just nothing like it," you know, what's your answer to that? You decide that braises are really better, and you should have the melding of flavors that comes with old-fashioned cooking?

MARIO BATALI: I am not opposed to technology. It's easier for me to train seventeen people how to blanch a carrot than to buy the machine, train myself on it, and then show them how to do it. So it's easier, it's a path of less resistance, the way we do it.

DAN BARBER: I thought it was romantic with you.

MARIO BATALI: Well, it is romantic too, but easy is very romantic.

(laughter)

BARBARA KAFKA: Yeah, but there is a difference, also, I mean, in other words, you're talking about braising, you're talking about all the different kinds of flavor results that you're looking for. We're talking here essentially—I am talking here essentially—about very simple kinds of preparations. I want to get dinner on the table, I want—now, there are some vegetables that people will object to because they're not used to the strength of the flavor.

CORBY KUMMER: I want to go back to Mario's just saying "It's simpler," because Dan's argument, and many of the celebrity chefs now, who, like you, have multiple restaurants, but they're in different countries—you can go around on your Vespa, or how is it that you got here?

MARIO BATALI: Vespa.

CORBY KUMMER: On your Vespa, I just guessed. I just guessed, on your Vespa, and you can check in at these restaurants to see how closely—

MARIO BATALI: Every day.

CORBY KUMMER: How those chefs are—

MARIO BATALI: I may not be there during the carrot-boiling moment, though. **(laughter)**

CORBY KUMMER: But you can trust that that carrot-boiling—

MARIO BATALI: I'll admit I miss a few carrots every now and then. **(laughter)**

CORBY KUMMER: You can trust that it has proceeded under your expert and loving and romantic guidance. But many chefs, including Dan, who's only got two restaurants, can say, "Boy, a piece of foie gras is a really expensive investment, I don't want to lose that money and I'm getting it sourced well, and I'm paying top dollar for that, I want to make sure that it's not lost or wasted, and so I know that in this formula I've developed for sous vide, *this* many minutes, *this* temperature, it's going to be perfect, and I protect my investment." You use a lot of expensive ingredients too.

MARIO BATALI: I would claim that Dan doesn't do it because he's worried about losing the piece, I would say he's looking for the exalted and maximum quality.

DAN BARBER: It's never about money, right?

MARIO BATALI: It can't be. I mean, eventually it is, you could lose a hundred foies in a week. No, no, no, but I mean, flavor's why he's doing it, he's not doing it just because he likes technology, he's doing it because in his opinion it makes a tastier thing. And I'm down with that, and I love that and I eat in his restaurants, and it *is* remarkably delicious. My only issue with sous vide as a concept is that there's never very much crust on it. And what I like is a hot roasted rack of lamb that's got burnt bits on the outside, that of course makes a lot of smoke and you've got to wash the pan a lot more. But I prefer that eating of that lamb. When I'm going to eat a piece of chicken, I'd rather have it the way he's going to do it, because it's cooked perfectly all the way through, and it has just the most chickeny flavor.

DAN BARBER: I'll fight you on the lamb. I mean, I thank you for the chicken, but I'll fight you on the lamb.

(laughter)

CORBY KUMMER: All right. Thumb-wrestle right now. **(laughter)**

DAN BARBER: 'Cause you can do both. You can sous vide your rack of lamb and then you can sear it off your testosterone-driven high-heat fire-burning thing.

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: It was funny, all the searing in my family was always done by my grandma, who as far as I could tell never had any testosterone at all. **(laughter)**

DAN BARBER: In my family, it's done by my father.

BARBARA KAFKA: But in any case, the thing is that a rack of lamb in a hot— a really hot oven, because I wrote that book, too, takes exactly fourteen minutes, so you're not really saving any time. And that's what I was getting at before, when I said it's a question

of what result, what flavor, what thing you want. Not only is not every technique to me good for *every* ingredient, but it's not for every flavor, every result. There are times when I'd rather have that rack of lamb cut into chops, little baby ones like in Italy, in the spring—ahhh, heaven!

CORBY KUMMER: But Dan, you're playing with fire with this, so to speak, with this moment where you sear things, because everybody wants the seared crust, right, everyone at his restaurants wants the seared crust, because it's a little alarming to have the beautiful white piece of chicken that kind of looks like an oversized Q-Tip—you know, you want that skin on it, and you are getting it, but you've also said that your meat chefs, and you, have to be hugely careful when it comes out of the sous-vide bag, perfect texture, perfect temperature, but you want to get that seared moment, because if they do it like two minutes too long, they've ruined the whole thing, right?

DAN BARBER: Right, but that's true of an open flame as well. I mean, I think I was talking to you at that moment about cooks who come to me from a tradition of very high-heat cooking and open-hearth cooking, which I adore. I'm on the fence, here, I'm just playing a part, but, you know, they can't them come into my kitchen and act that out with the searing hot pans and the smoking oil, because, yeah, I don't think that's the way to cook, it's an emotional response to—

BARBARA KAFKA: But the answer is you can do it in the oven. In other words, when I did 500 degrees in my roasting book, right? What is that man doing to you?

MARIO BATALI: Anything he likes. **(laughter)**

BARBARA KAFKA: Ooh! The question was that people thought I—I even had one reporter saying I was doing it for the publicity. And I said, "I guess this person has never been in a professional kitchen." You don't play around with the temperatures in the oven. An order comes in, do you mean to say that that oven is then going to go down in temperature and up in temperature? If I have six poussins, they're going to go in boom,

boom, boom, and they're going to stay there and if they're properly cooked, then they will have a crisp outside and a very moist inside and, as a matter of fact, I would claim that they're somewhat moister because the subcutaneous fat from the skin melts and goes into it. I don't baste my turkey. Same thing. The fat goes through, comes out—you can pour it out, you can quantify what you're getting rid of.

CORBY KUMMER: And you want the intensity of that flavor, but I was thinking about replicability, because you were saying and teaching and whether these techniques can be reproduced, you're saying it's easier just to do it in the old-fashioned way with that carrot. But a lot of chefs, including Dan, would say, "I can, you know, send an e-mail saying I've got this formula for cooking this. It took me a long time. I developed it with these machines, and you guys do it just that way." And in a way you were doing it in the microwave book. The microwave book had endless charts, which I still consult, may I add, in the summer for corn season. I still open up *Microwave Gourmet* and I look at the chart for cooking times. So yours is the very romantic model which is using the apprentice, that, you know, that you have to learn from Mario, and then you can do it right at the restaurant.

BARBARA KAFKA: They're still going to have to learn it from Mario. Because flavor is not something that you can make a prescription for, and, in fact, the only problem I would have—and I'm not disapproving of what you do, because I think—

DAN BARBER: It's good to hear.

(laughter)

BARBARA KAFKA: No, but I mean, it's very much like what I do with the microwave. It seems perfectly logical and reasonable to me.

DAN BARBER: Sure.

BARBARA KAFKA: But at some point, each piece of something is different, and at that point there is a question of pushing it with your finger to see how well done it is, or if you're that kind of person, using a thermometer, what have you, and that's the greatest problem I had with the microwave, was that people who had learned to cook in other ways (a) wanted the sensual gratification of the interim thing, and they just didn't trust you. Reeny Saks, a friend of mine, Irene Saks, who's a food writer, and she writes for the *Daily News* and all sorts of places as well. And she—after *Roasting* came out, she would call me and she would say, "Well, I thought I would add some time, because you like your meat rarer than I do."

CORBY KUMMER: So you don't mean the herb, you mean she was going to violate your instructions and roast it longer than you said. Which I would do with sous-vide, by the way.

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, all right, I said what the answer is—

CORBY KUMMER: I immediately want to say, "Five more minutes."

BARBARA KAFKA: But you have to know what you're doing and you have to try it. And then I had taken into account that most people don't like their meat as rare as I do, so I gave a range, but in fact there is a point at which the texture of that piece of fish is something that you have to perceive.

CORBY KUMMER: And all of you have read Bill Buford's *Heat*, which last brought Mario to this stage, where an enormous amount of that book is talking about trying to understand that whole set of instinct, so that you know that something is done, something isn't done, all the various extrasensory or very sensory cues, you get from touching a piece of meat, from looking at it, from knowing how that texture is going to be, and that's a lot of what has drawn a lot of cooks to this new technology, is it is this guaranteed, always reproducible way I can get what I want.

BARBARA KAFKA: It's very important.

CORBY KUMMER: But I want to change the subject to Spain. Because Spain is behind all of this. I mean, whenever you're talking about the technology takeover today, not to do with the Cuisinart and the microwave, but sous vide, siphons, that make those weird foams that appear in so many restaurants, you're looking at a lot of the spillover, that foamy tide, from Spain. And both of you have had really close experiences with Spain. Mario went to high school in Spain so he really—and Dan has traveled there and really talked to chefs. And I wondered, Dan, what really influenced you? You grew up going to a farm in the Berkshires, so you had very close contact with animals and food and how they were grown, but then—and you decided to learn to cook and trained in France, but then what did you discover when you went to Spain and saw how they were cooking there?

DAN BARBER: Well, I saw, you know, what I think is sort of the future of food. I mean, I saw a group of chefs, especially in San Sebastian, who are now, you know, are now acclaimed, but back when I was first traveling there, are, were doing things that no-one else was doing. In terms of—not so much manipulating flavors, but in terms of cooking techniques, sous vide being one of the applications, but a forward-thinking philosophy about food, and taking the sort of traditional French techniques and moving them into a modern context, which to me felt very exciting.

CORBY KUMMER: But give an example of something you ate that you thought, wow, I wouldn't know how to make that any other way, it was so good.

DAN BARBER: Well, look, so there was a group of Spanish chefs who came a couple weeks ago to New York to do a series of demos.

CORBY KUMMER: The biggest stars, I don't know if any of you witnessed this.

DAN BARBER: Yes, it was the top fifteen chefs from Spain, *the* top, and widely considered some of the fifteen best chefs in the world, and there's, you know, a little bit of disagreement about that only because some of them are very far out in their thinking, and I'll give you one example, which is provocative, to say the least, and this guy's personality is very provocative, I won't use his name, but I came to his demo, and he cooked a Bellon oyster from Maine, so he's using a sort of semilocal product, roasting it, he actually cooked it sous vide to begin, and then he roasted it to get that crust, and then he served it with a sheath of platinum. Now I—of course, everyone was aghast at the sort of look of it. I mean, it looked like something out of the space age. You know, it was this just beautiful sheath that covered it you know a little bit like napalm, like this—

MARIO BATALI: Like napalm? Sticks to your burning arm!

(laughter)

DAN BARBER: Well, that's a bad analogy, but that's the one I thought of. At any rate—

MARIO BATALI: Gold leaf would be a nicer example.

DAN BARBER: So you ate this thing, it was—

BARBARA KAFKA: What appalled me was the cost—

DAN BARBER: The cost, right, so I, I, he described how he did this, it was an absolutely delicious and different way to eat an oyster.

MARIO BATALI: You ate it?

DAN BARBER: I ate it. And then afterwards, you know, I went around to where he was preparing, and on his shelf he had, very freely advertised, this bottle of the platinum in its granulated form, and all over the bottle it said: WARNING: NOT FOR HUMAN

CONSUMPTION. **(laughter)** So I tell you that example not because, not because I think this is indicative of the future of cooking, but because I think it's indicative of what I learned when I was there, which is there's a lot going on that's really interesting. Like cooking an oyster sous vide and roasting it to get that flavor that we were talking about before.

CORBY KUMMER: So that far you could go.

DAN BARBER: I could go as far as creating this sheath that had this crunch of almost eating a shell of an oyster, which is what he was after. So, intellectually, it was really stimulating but the application was all wrong, in my opinion. You know, it was poison, it's like, so you know, what are you doing?

(laughter)

MARIO BATALI: Would have violated one of the main rules, keep your customer alive.

(laughter)

BARBARA KAFKA: Arsenic and old lace!

DAN BARBER: But it wasn't just that, it was that he was advertising that, you know, and that he was proud of that, and that to him it was, you know, something *dangerous* and something, again, provocative, and sort of the sign of the future and I think that's probably going in the wrong direction, but that's not to dismiss a lot of what I saw both in Spain and what these chefs are presenting, which is a different way to look at food, and some of them are doing it irresponsibly, and some of them, I think, are doing it brilliantly, and that's the test.

CORBY KUMMER: Mario, you have really witnessed this. I assume you've witnessed what Dan has tasted, because you've traveled, and you're going to do something on Spain. And what do you think of it? You have a real field of comparison, as if you grew up there, because you did spend an important part of your childhood there. How does it strike you now, what they're doing?

MARIO BATALI: I think Spain is in an excellent position. I think it's fascinating that the Spaniards and the Europeans and the Michelin guides have embraced this ideology and—

CORBY KUMMER: A kiss of death, the Michelin guides!

MARIO BATALI: Well, the kiss of death certainly in Italy, but not so much in Spain and certainly not so much in—look, we'll talk about the Michelin in a few minutes. There's something far more interesting going on. Spain figured out about fifteen years ago, kind of like England did twenty years ago, that if you stop burning the garlic and stop burning everything, everything tastes good and you have this amazing wealth of products and you can actually make really delicious food. What happened then, in the same sense that Salvador Dalí went off the edge in his days, and these people are up and around that kind of an area, they live for a provocation.

And guys like Adriá, who everyone's heard of, at this restaurant called El Bulli in the town of Roses, became the godfather of kind of this sense of provocation and initially his intention was merely to provoke the diner and then give them something to eat and whether it was absolutely taste or not wasn't the most important thing, but I think he still is the leader and he's come around the corner and I've been there six times. And the first time was pure provocation, and I loved it, and the second time it was pure provocation, and I didn't love it so much. In the last two times that I've been there, he has turned the corner and understood the real nature of the business of restaurants and the ideology of feeding people food, and he has completely re-embraced, although maintaining his technological edge, he has re-embraced the whole idea of hedonism being the main event.

And that's really where Spain is going to come to, it's just that some characters are going to get there slower than the others. And the process itself is fascinating, and watching them move from, "I'm going to bother the customer. I'm going to make customer happy. I'm going to bother the customer, I'm going to make the customer happy." And they go around in that, and that's a particularly Spanish brain-set, too, which is fascinating, so it's one of the coolest places in the world to go eat.

CORBY KUMMER: I have to tell you. Thank you. I have to tell you when Adriá speaks, because I heard him speak in Madrid at this fusion cuisine conference that lots of chefs go to to understand what the future of food is. He introduces it with a video, a video of people at his restaurant who are all looking at each other and their food as if it is the new way of going to bed. There is no—you know, it's the most sensual, as if it's triggered the most sensual possible, I mean, it's almost like watching soft porn, and there's almost no food in it, it's only the sensory reaction that they're having. So he really has embraced—he's really turned that corner you were talking about.

BARBARA KAFKA: Yeah, but he didn't before, when I first ate there—

MARIO BATALI: Well, it's a body of work.

BARBARA KAFKA: He was in the country and it was singularly one of the most unpleasant dining experiences I have ever had in my life.

CORBY KUMMER: And, you presume, by design, to provoke you. Do you think he thought it was good?

BARBARA KAFKA: I don't even think it was design, I think it was innate arrogance. We had driven there from Barcelona.

MARIO BATALI: It's still there, everyone does. Two hours. Twisty roads.

BARBARA KAFKA: The road was closed, the regular road, so we had to go up a rutted path. And we arrived—

MARIO BATALI: Barbara, I'm going to suggest that the path itself must have wrecked your meal.

BARBARA KAFKA: No, it's very hard to wreck my appetite. And we got there—it must have been three-thirty in the afternoon. Which, for Spain—

MARIO BATALI: It's still in the realm.

BARBARA KAFKA: It's not a big deal, but we had to get on to France that evening. But I was very tired, I was cranky, **(laughter)** and I said to the guy who came to the table—

MARIO BATALI: How hard is it going to be to make this meal great for you? It's going to be impossible.

BARBARA KAFKA: Oh, no, no. I got to the table and I said, "I'd like to eat something light if I can, because,"—and I explained. And the partner said to me, "Oh, no. You have to have the entire menu. It's the only way to understand the philosophy." I had it, but the words that would have come out of my mouth are not repeatable in this auditorium.

CORBY KUMMER: And so it was going to be hard to please her and the converse is—the converse is, usually when somebody says the very best thing they've ever had, because I wrote a book on coffee. And they would always, "Let me tell you about the best cup of coffee I had." And I would learn to stop them and say, "Were you on vacation?" Because it always was some place that they had these great associations with, so that has a lot to do with it.

BARBARA KAFKA: But there's something else about Spanish food, if I can, for one second.

CORBY KUMMER: Okay, but then I want to ask Dan.

BARBARA KAFKA: Which is that in Italy, and in Spain, what has happened with wine has been unbelievably extraordinary, let alone olive oil and the things that they have always had, but the wine production and flavor and quality has turned around almost a hundred percent and I think that we cannot talk about food or think about it without taking into account the wine that accompanies it, and the provocation, if you want, that wine, great wine, provides to a cook.

CORBY KUMMER: Thank you. That's a very good point. Mario was saying that he thought when he was at Adriá recently that he's turned the corner more toward pleasing—

BARBARA KAFKA: Pleasure.

CORBY KUMMER: Pleasing the group. And I recently saw him at an event Dan and I were both at called Terra Madre, Slow Food, which brought together 1,500 farmers and a thousand chefs, including Dan but not Mario, you weren't there. All from various villages, from various three-star restaurants, never been outside their country. It was a fascinating thing, but then Dan went and ate at a restaurant that might be *really* the wave of the future, right, La Francescana, which is near Modena, an area Mario knows like the back of hand because he's lived there.

MARIO BATALI: And I know La Francescana intimately.

CORBY KUMMER: And in fact I wanted to ask you about your experiences there. Dan, tell me what struck you about the application of you know these new-wave techniques to the food you ate there and then I want to ask you what you thought about eating there.

DAN BARBER: Well, it seems to me that with all this—with all the talk of technology and the drive towards modernization, there's this, this sort of, what do you call it, bulls-eye missing, which is—there's a bulls-eye waiting to be hit, which is to apply these modern techniques and marry them with, you know, agrarian ideals of where your food's coming from, how it's being grown, how it's getting to you, its place, its sense of place and locale and that none of these chefs in Spain were doing that, maybe for good reason, because their agricultural history is a little shy, especially up North. But at any rate, it seemed to make sense that their drive towards the modern form of cooking didn't include anything about farming. And here was a chef who had a—and correct me if I'm wrong, but at least from what he explained had an intense history with his area, his agriculture, his agricultural tradition.

MARIO BATALI: Well, he's from Modena, which is the agricultural heart of all of great Italian food, so Parmigiano Reggiano, prosciutto di Parma, Aceto Balsamico, I mean, he comes from a place where like me, right now getting goose bumps, you just get goose bumps when you think about this place.

DAN BARBER: I thought that was because you were sitting next to me.

MARIO BATALI: There is that, too. That's this side. **(laughter)**

DAN BARBER: Okay, all right. So here's a chef who took that training and went off to train with el Bulli, with Ferran Adriá, for a few years, and a couple of other chefs, and married these two influences into what I think was an extraordinary meal. Both philosophically and just hedonistically, it was a delicious experience.

CORBY KUMMER: And of course it would resonate with you growing up on a farm and being—

DAN BARBER: Well, it's exactly what I want to do, but he was just doing it much better, yes.

BARBARA KAFKA: Awww.

DAN BARBER: No, really, really.

CORBY KUMMER: And Mario, did you have any of that interest and experience? Because Mario has really cooked this gastronomic-heart of Italy food.

MARIO BATALI: I love Massimo, I love his ideology, I love his passion, and his five textures of Parmigiano Reggiano is an eye-opener to this whole idea of what you can do.

CORBY KUMMER: Is one of them a foam?

MARIO BATALI: One of them is a foam and it's right. Not all foam is right. I've had smoked water foam that sucked. Badly. **(laughter)** But the tragedy for me about La Francescana is its three-block proximity to Osteria Giusti, which—

CORBY KUMMER: Yeah, of course, I've eaten at both places in the same night.

MARIO BATALI: —is the other end of the spectrum in the technology world, and you don't have to choose, but if I did choose one, I would say when I go to eat in Europe, I'm looking for something that both speaks of the place and of the creativity of the chef or the patron, but mostly what I want to taste is tradition and not so much innovation. I could not say, though, that one meal was better than the other because they were both perfect.

DAN BARBER: Or you could be with Jeffrey Steingarten and go to both, which is what we did.

MARIO BATALI: Oh, right, exactly. For lunch, right? Early lunch and late lunch?

DAN BARBER: We had two dinners.

CORBY KUMMER: I had two dinners there.

MARIO BATALI: That's the way to go, that's the way to really understand it, is to see both sides of that coin, because they are radically different.

DAN BARBER: But you see, I only went to Giusti because Massimo said to understand where I'm coming from, you've got to go here first, so we went at 5:30.

MARIO BATALI: Right.

CORBY KUMMER: Okay, so you will send people *where* before they come to you, would have evolved this cuisine—

DAN BARBER: Mario.

CORBY KUMMER: Exactly, and they're right next door to each other. We have a few minutes to open it to questions, so does anybody have any questions, and you're going to have to get the mike if you want to ask questions. There's a mike. Any questions? Provoking them?

MARIO BATALI: Maybe we should wake them up, Corby.

CORBY KUMMER: We've got somebody there. Go ahead, we have a gentleman there.

Q: This is not a question, it's a declaration.

CORBY KUMMER: The next will be a question, I hope.

Q: This is the most interesting and passionate lecture, seminar, whatever you want to call it, that we've ever attended at the Library, and I wanted to thank you for it. It's really wonderful to hear people—

DAN BARBER: This is better than a question. **(laughter)**

Q: It's really wonderful to hear people talk about something that they know in an articulate, intelligent, and humorous way, very difficult to do, so thank you.

(applause)

BARBARA KAFKA: Thank you.

MARIO BATALI: Thank you very much.

DAN BARBER: Thank you.

CORBY KUMMER: Thank you. My God, I couldn't ask for anything better.

BARBARA KAFKA: You planted him!

CORBY KUMMER: And we want to go out on that note, but we've got a few more minutes for questions, if anyone has any.

Q: What about gluttony? How can you have a ten-course meal and then follow it with another ten-course meal two hours later and taste anything?

CORBY KUMMER: Oh my God, this is just the incredible trenchermen's question. And so since you both have done this, how do you do it?

MARIO BATALI: I can't do two dinners, two meals in one period. And in all honesty, when I go to one three-star Michelin restaurant, I can't go to one at lunch and one at dinner. I just, it's sensory overload for me. As well as the fact that at a certain point in Europe when you're eating these really fancy meals, outside of a couple of the places, a lot of it's based on protein, particularly in Italy. So you just—you're looking for a lettuce leaf, you're begging for a carrot.

(laughter)

CORBY KUMMER: So true.

BARBARA KAFKA: There is another issue. I've gone, for instance—I've had many different lives—and it depends what you're going to the restaurant for and how you pace yourself. I once did a review for *Vogue* of L.A. restaurants, and I went to three or four restaurants in a meal period, and the same thing with Miami, when Miami was just beginning to happen, from my point of view.

MARIO BATALI: But this was your journalistic responsibility, obviously.

BARBARA KAFKA: Absolutely, and the last place I went to in Miami was El Turbano, which is an Italian place that was very robusto, lots of stuff, and by then it was the fifth dinner, I think, and the tenth meal of the day, or what have you. And I was with a woman who is a food writer down there and she was about to go off to the hospital, leaving her children and her husband and so forth. So I said to him, would you put this in a container so I can take it home, or I can take it with me, and he looked smitten to death, but he did it. Of course, in Miami, everybody takes half the meal home. Well, the older population.

CORBY KUMMER: And they get there at 4:30, and it's not 'cause they were dancing until nine on Sunday morning.

BARBARA KAFKA: So in any case, we get to the car, we open the car, and it is full, absolutely full, of take-out containers, and he looks at me as if I'm *mad.* **(laughter)** And I finally explain this to him, but it's a question of pacing and even at a great, great restaurant, I don't like to be overfed. You certainly don't!

(laughter)

BARBARA KAFKA: I love to eat a lot.

MARIO BATALI: Maybe he does.

BARBARA KAFKA: He just has a wonderful metabolism, lucky son of a bitch. **(laughter)** But I, in fact, I don't think that loving food, and tasting it, and eating it, and even eating sometimes too much of it, is really about gluttony. I think it's about pleasure and voluptuousness and all sorts of other things. And if, in fact, people are gluttonous, I don't think they enjoy it as much.

CORBY KUMMER: No, I have to agree. We've got one more question, but I'm going to pick up something from that before we go. What's that question? This will be our last one. Do you need a microphone? Who's going to get that gentleman a microphone? We have two microphones here. Two questions. Okay, we'll come back to you.

Q: I'm writing a book on nutrition so I'm going to ask a question that you may not particularly like, but how do you combine gourmet cooking with health?

CORBY KUMMER: I can assure you everybody here has got an answer to that. Go right ahead. She wrote a book.

BARBARA KAFKA: Well, I wrote one book with the most awful title. I didn't choose the title.

CORBY KUMMER: It's a good book.

BARBARA KAFKA: It was the book after *Microwave Gourmet* and I wanted to call it *Microslim Gourmet* and everybody—once you're successful, everybody has an opinion. The bookseller, the book club, the salesmen, whatever.

MARIO BATALI: The reality of the book business.

BARBARA KAFKA: It came out—Oh, and Corby!

CORBY KUMMER: I didn't name this book. But I remember the title.

BARBARA KAFKA: But you were involved. Because I was going to then call it in desperation *The Healthy Microwave Gourmet,* and he said, "You can't use the word healthy!"

CORBY KUMMER: "It's health*ful*. It's health*ful*."

BARBARA KAFKA: So I had to change it once again. The answer is there's nothing unhealth*ful* about wonderful food and in that book I give the readout of everything. Now there are things we should not eat. We should not eat too many saturated fats, although we don't have all the answers yet. It turns out that coconut cream and coconut milk are perfectly all right. Everybody was feeding people polyunsaturated fats. I said then they were terrible and they're still terrible. They don't taste good, either, but the answer is it's not hard to cook wonderful food in a health*ful* style, and I think that it's just a question, like any of these technologies, any of these ideas, of applying the intelligence and the imagination and getting the result, and I don't think anybody that I know—now, maybe dessert is a problem.

CORBY KUMMER: Yeah, but dessert is a sacred topic, we're not going to get into dessert.

BARBARA KAFKA: All right.

CORBY KUMMER: But before opening a can of unhealthful coconut oil, let's go on to—or coconut milk—

DAN BARBER: But do we know what kind of book of nutrition he's writing, can we ask that?

CORBY KUMMER: He'll come up and tell, but I assure you, Barbara's been to many panels in Washington about nutrition when she was doing *The Microwave Gourmet Healthstyle Cookbook*, that was the title. And you could get that. And we have a question right here.

Q: Earlier when you were talking about sous vide and microwaving and there was a lot of talk about sort of pure flavors, like pure carrot and pure asparagus, can you maybe discuss if there's a difference between pure flavor and good flavor?

BARBARA KAFKA: Under what conditions?

CORBY KUMMER: I want to ask Mario that, because he was the one who wasn't emphasizing pure flavor, whether you get it in a microwave or a sous vide bag. But I bet you would think a lot about *good* flavor.

MARIO BATALI: I would say that pure flavor would be good flavor, but I would say that the flavor you're looking for mostly, particularly when we're talking about regional cooking, is the flavor of a specific region, so I'd rather have my asparagus grown in the Berkshires than I would have it grown in Atlanta because I'm looking to capture the pure flavor of the smell of the wind on a Thursday right before it's going to rain in *this region*. And that is a far more important credo to me than the purity or the ubiquity of a certain asparagusness, I'm looking for more *that* asparagus, and *that* apple, and *that* wild striped

bass, than salmon from here or there or apples from Washington or there. I'd rather have an apple from here even though I'm from Washington, because I'd rather capture that flavor. That's where I'm going with flavor.

DAN BARBER: And I was speaking of something much more specific in the carrot example, which is that you taste more carrot in the carrot, it's more carrot-y, and so, you know, what's interesting about that, and what I think maybe connects to the nutrition question or suggestion about can you be nutritious and eat gluttonously, you know, that you can use this technology to further the trueness of flavors and get more of that carrot flavor through this technology, just as through farming, through agriculture, you can grow nutritious carrots, and carrots that taste more of themselves, whether you're doing it in a small, biodiverse farm, or you're doing it organically, or you're doing it locally, a hundred different ways, that technology and good farming actually are quite close. They seem to be so far away that, you know, the ideals of Old World thinking about food and agriculture is blessedly different from using platinum on an oyster, but, in fact, combining some of these ideas of technology and Old World farming are quite close and I think is the future of food.

CORBY KUMMER: Dan has closed the circle, so we will close *our* circle, and we can return to open-hearted and open-hearth cookery, an expression I love, and go back to it with new enjoyment of both technology and farms. Thank you all for coming.

(applause)