

No Boundaries

Chef Matthew Mytro wants your next meal to blow your mind. / BY LAURA TAXEL /

TWO YEARS AGO, Matthew Mytro traded a steady paycheck for the risky life of culinary entrepreneur, choosing short-term cooking and consulting gigs to pay the bills. The 27-year-old chef, who built his reputation at Boulevard Blue and Paladar, wanted more time to focus on dreaming up out-of-the-restaurant concepts that foster a hip, alternative food scene in Cleveland. In just two years, Mytro has shown he can make it happen. Here's why you need to know this guy.

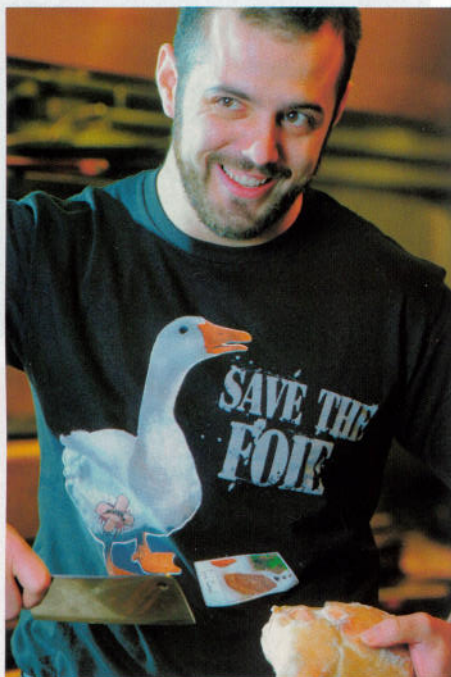
He keeps us guessing. Monthly Yumm gatherings at Mercury Lounge, hosted by his food-phrase T-shirt company Stove Monkeys, attract crowds of 150 with his molecular gastronomy creations. Using science lab techniques and tools, Mytro and his sidekicks prepare deliciously improbable edibles: liquid ravioli, Red Bull sorbet shots and poached ice cream. Flavor tripping is another mind-blowing Mytro-managed happening. He dispenses an African berry known as miracle fruit then feeds guests all sorts of sour and bitter bites. Because

the berry naturally alters taste perceptions, vinegar is as good as sweet iced tea and lemons are like candy. The sense-bending effect is safe, temporary and ridiculously entertaining.

He's spontaneous. Free of the confines of a singular kitchen, the chef can act on any impulse — a guarantee that new culinary antics are sure to keep coming. Lose touch with him for a few weeks and you'll suddenly find him finalizing plans for a new unconventional catering company that throws taco parties at bars around town and a truck that will take his nontraditional versions of the Mexican staple, such as rum-smoked mahi-mahi, to the streets. "He's got this something that makes you want to be a part of whatever he's doing," says Kim Burant, who runs Clear Cut Promotions, an event planning and staffing firm that works with Mytro on Yumm. "I love that he's bringing Cleveland a new and different way to party."

He's a tireless promoter. The progressive chef with the heart of a prankster is a savvy self-promoter. But the Texas transplant is also on a mission to increase the coolness quotient of his adopted hometown. "I love Cleveland, I want to see it do well and be cool, and I want to be a part of making that happen," he says. Pursuing that goal in unconventional ways, without a boss on the sidelines, is the business plan. "I don't want somebody telling me what I can and can't do, or have to convince them that my ideas will work. I want to have fun and follow my own path. This was the only plan I had when I started my own business."

➔ MORE INFO stovemonkeys.com



OPEN MARKET

Karen Small adds urban flair to the Flying Fig.

"EVERY NIGHT IS NOT a restaurant night," admits Karen Small. Looking to satisfy a broader hungry audience, the chef and owner of Flying Fig has transformed the overflow seating space of her Ohio City restaurant into an "urban general store" known as Market at the Fig. Patrons can snag Fig-quality salads, soups and specialty sandwiches, such as a smoked pork loin. There's also cooking utensils and a large wine selection. Don't get too attached to an offering, warns Small, who plans to change the menu frequently. The Market will, however, always offer five to six lunch and dinner options Tuesday through Sunday as well as homemade biscuits and blackberry scones around 10 a.m. Specialty grocery items are also a large focus, including house-made focaccia bread and fruit jams, cheeses from Lucky Penny Farm and meats from Aaron Miller Farms. Even one of Flying Fig's bartenders is getting in on the act, making homemade cookies, including red wine chocolate. "She's always brought [the cookies] around," Small says. "And we did use them on a cookie plate on the dessert menu for a while. They're excellent." 2523 Market Ave., Cleveland, 216-241-4243 // LEAH WYNALEK

THE RIPE TIME →

Not that we need another reason to look forward to harvest season, but the Cleveland Botanical Garden is providing one. It is playing host to local restaurants, farmers markets and gardening pros for the **RIPE! Food and Garden Festival** Sept.

24-26. "It's not just like going to one farmers market; it's like going to the best of all the farmers markets," says festival co-chair and Fire Food & Drink chef Douglas Katz. In celebration of all things local and edible, restaurants such as The Greenhouse Tavern and Crop Bistro will prepare street-fair food, and farmers from Tremont and Kamm's Corners markets will sell produce, honey, fruits, cheese and canned goods.

➔ MORE INFO cbgarden.org