



L'Etoile is often called the *premier restaurant* for foodies in Madison, Wisconsin—a college-town-turned-state-capital where social and environmental awareness runs high.

Launched in 1976 by Odessa Piper, dubbed the Alice Waters of the Midwest, its operation was based on her passionate dedication to local foodstuffs. Of course, this culinary philosophy is far easier to maintain in Waters's sunny California than in the permafrost of Wisconsin. To make it work, Piper and her kitchen crew scoured the farmers' market, held weekly during the summer on the state capitol grounds, just outside the restaurant's front door, snaring root vegetables to store and summer fruits to preserve. These put-by foods embellished winter menus and created an unsurpassed reputation for locally sourced ingredients.



Saving Grace:

Putting UP
Summer Produce

The Next Generation

Tory Miller, a Wisconsin native, signed on at L'Etoile as a cook in 2002, and when Piper retired in 2005, Miller and his sister, equally passionate believers in local sourcing, bought the restaurant. It was a natural move, Miller confides: "I'd established relationships with farmers in the county, so I thought I could run with the baton with fresh legs and new energy, but [with] the same commitment to serving only foods from nearby."

"In fact," he continues, "I took that mandate a little bit farther, buying everything even more locally, from the Dane County Farmers' Market." There is no pineapple, no lobster, no green beans out of season. "I was determined to stay local, even in the winter months, but no longer just through canning. For example, we're making the actual tomato sauce, cooking it and then cryovacing [vacuum sealing] and freezing it."

The chef and co-owner discussed this season's purchasing plans last June: "I've committed to purchase up to 700 pounds

of tomatoes, which will make 800 quarts of sauce. Same with strawberries," he explains. "The first strawberries of the season appeared at last week's market. I bought 16 quarts—eight for now, eight to go into the freezer for later on. To preserve them, we froze some and dried others to use on yogurt and granola."

Miller is a recent convert to the vacuum-sealing method as a means of preserving. One of his cooks came up with the idea, and the ensuing experiment proved so successful that Miller adopted the technique full force. To cryovac strawberries, for example, berries are washed, then set to dry individually on a sheet pan. Then they're sliced in half, set back on the pan, and put into a convection oven with no heat. "Just run the fan," Miller says. "Then they're cryovaced and stored in the restaurant's wine cellar at 58 degrees." Miller also employs a second drying method, using a food dehydrator ("just like on TV," he jokes) for produce such as mushrooms, blueberries, strawberries, and tomatoes.



A Multitude of Methods

When it comes to pickling springtime's ramps, Miller employs two methods as well. In one technique, he places the ramps in a vacuum-sealable bag along with a pickling liquid composed of sugar, salt, water, vinegar, and spices. Then he uses a vacuum machine to suck the air out and push the pickling liquid into the ramps. "This produces a very crunchy, textured pickle and requires no cooking, no sterilizing. When you pull them out to use, they have a beautiful texture and color," he notes.

Miller also puts up a more traditional pickle by cooking the ramps in a pressure cooker, then ladling them into canning jars that have been sterilized in the dishwasher or oven. "It's nice, if you have the storage space," he says, adding, "We fight over it with our wine director."

As an advocate of vacuum sealing, however, Miller stresses these advantages: "The applications for a restaurant are larger than I'd imagined. It's not only for sous vide. In a restaurant, you can use a small machine. The resulting packages save on space because they stack so nicely, and they're easier to label. We used to put the produce in ziplock bags in the freezer, but those can break open, get freezer burn, et cetera. Cryovacing is good for all fruits and

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mushrooms. Just IQF [instant quick freeze] them individually, suck the air out, and you won't end up with broken berries." (As an aside, he offers, "I also love using the technique on red meat, which we used to immerse in olive oil to retain its red color, which cost a lot. No more. Cryovacing retains the attractive color you want, too.")

Fruitful Harvests

In summer, fruits are readied for winter's sauces. For rhubarb, a favorite accompaniment for pork, Miller advises, "Just cook it down with sugar, but not to the point of sauce; you want to retain a little texture. Then freeze it. It will be far better than simply freezing raw, because when it melts, the cell structure will become watery. So instead, we IQF it, then cryovac it."

As an alternate storage method, Miller suggests storing fruit in dishwasher-safe quart-size plastic containers with a good seal. "I use this for my Concord grape sauce, made with red wine, sugar, and vinegar. Strain it, chill it, then pour it into those quart containers or cryovac bags to use later as a base."

When it comes to preserving vegetables, "we just don't," Miller states. "No matter how good it tastes, serving corn in January is just not right if you call yourself a seasonal restaurant," he believes. "Instead, we cellar things, like apples and root vegetables, in a cool, dry place. They pick up sweetness. We

Savor the *flavor*

1. Purchase double in summer with winter in mind.
2. Invest in a vacuum-sealing machine. It pays off in ease, more compact storage, and less waste due to broken bags.
3. Traditional methods, such as canning, pickling, and dehydrating, work well, too.
4. Don't be intimidated. Little special training is involved, and no esoteric techniques are necessary.
5. To maintain seasonally oriented menus, restaurants in northern climates should stick with root vegetables in winter.

Slow-Cooked Chicken-Filled Crepes

with Put-By Strawberry Gastrique

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

Crepes:

All-purpose flour	1½ cups
Salt	1 tsp
Eggs	3
Whole milk	2 cups
Butter, melted	3 Tbsp
Chives, chopped	½ tsp
Tarragon, chopped	½ tsp
Parsley, chopped	½ tsp

1. Combine the flour and salt in a bowl.
2. Make a well and whisk in the eggs and milk until smooth.
3. Add the butter and herbs. Let the batter rest, overnight if possible.

Chicken:

Olive oil	2 oz
Whole chicken, broken down into 4 parts	1
Salt and pepper	to taste
Salt pork, lardo, guanciale, or pancetta	4 oz
Garlic, chopped	4 cloves
Sage, chopped	1 Tbsp
Rosemary, chopped	½ Tbsp
Unsalted chicken stock	2 cups
Rice wine vinegar	2 tsp
Chives, chopped	1 Tbsp
Shallots, minced	2 Tbsp
Honey	2 Tbsp

1. Heat a Dutch oven on medium-high. Add the olive oil.
2. Season the chicken on both sides with salt and pepper. Brown the chicken on both sides and remove from the pot.
3. Dice and add the pork to the pot and cook until nicely rendered.
4. Add the garlic and herbs and stir for about 1 minute.

5. Add the stock and bring to a simmer. Add the chicken pieces and cover. Place the covered pot in a preheated 300° oven for 45 minutes to an hour. (The chicken should pull apart but not fall apart.)
6. Remove the chicken and then add the vinegar, chives, shallots, and honey to the pot and stir.
7. Cool the chicken, then pull apart and place in the bowl of a mixer. Using the paddle attachment on low speed, slowly drizzle in the pan liquid.
8. Reserve the filling to roll up into the crêpes.

Gastrique:

Riesling	2 cups
Honey	½ cup
Champagne vinegar	¼ cup
Sugar	½ cup
Frozen strawberries	2 cups
Dried strawberries	½ cup

1. Place everything except the dried berries in a pot, and bring to a boil. Reduce the mixture by 75 percent.
2. Place the dry berries in a heat-safe bowl. Strain the reduced liquid into the bowl while it is still hot.
3. Cover and let stand at room temperature for 20 minutes. Then chill and serve.

Miller plates the dish with pan-rasted cauliflower and collard greens.





Put-By Tomato Sauce

To preserve tomatoes:

1. Wash tomatoes and blanch for 1–2 minutes to loosen the skins.
2. Remove skins and cut out cores.
3. Place in vacuum-sealed bags, seal, and freeze. (Vacuum sealing maximizes freezer space. Alternatively, if a vacuum sealer is not available, one can force air out of a ordinary freezer bag by hand.)

Sauce:

Yield: approximately 1 quart

Tomatoes, put by	4 cups
Olive oil	3 Tbsp
Garlic, minced	6 cloves
Onion, minced	1
Salt and pepper	to taste
Dried basil	1 tsp
Dried oregano	1 tsp
Crushed red pepper flakes	½ tsp

1. Crush the tomatoes by hand or pulse them in a food processor.
2. Heat the olive oil in a saucepan on medium-high, and add the garlic. Cook until lightly browned.
3. Add the onion and season with salt and pepper.
4. Add the spices and herbs, and cook for 1–2 minutes, until the onion turns translucent.
5. Add the crushed tomatoes and stir to combine. Bring the sauce to a simmer and continue simmering for 15–25 minutes.

also freeze goat cheese and that's a cool thing, too. I was really surprised. The trick is to cut off 2-pound chunks because you need to thaw it and use it all at once."

Of creating his winter menus, Miller says, "It's all about living in the moment. I create my daily menu standing in the walk-in versus summer when there's so much stimulation." Looking at summer's preserved mushrooms, he says, "Devising a use takes no brain power. Just throw a rock and you'll make something delicious," like a filling for crepes: "Saute them with Sherry, cream, and black truffle oil. I serve the dish (\$29) with goat cheese and a gastrique of blueberries or currants. Our vegetarian friends love it," he testifies.

Special Sauces

Other winter pleasures on L'Etoile's menu include strawberry sauce with duck confit served in crepes, and blueberry sauce paired with pork or duck. Miller also loves to use stored apples in winter on a plate of artisanal Wisconsin cheeses. As he explains, "I tasted these root-cellar apples in January, and man! I didn't want to cook them down!" But sometimes he does, in a savory brown-butter sauce, which uses also his cache of stored hickory nuts. "I pair this with a fried sheep's milk cheese served with grape must: crunchy, tart, and sweet." To create an appetizer (\$12), Miller peels, slices, and cooks the apples in butter, then deglazes the sauce with pork stock and apple brandy and serves the dish with crispy pork belly.

For Valentine's Day, he came up with an über-romantic, show-stopping dessert by placing a white chocolate dome over a bombe cake plated with strawberry sauce. "It's elegant and beautiful, and I'm so proud of it," he declares. Another dessert hit (\$9) is Chocolate Vesuvius served with black currant coulis.

Wine pairing comes easily. With his strawberry sauce on something fatty, sweet, and tart, for instance, he claims, "Riesling is a no-brainer." For pork paired with fruit, he turns to a dry Gewürztraminer, "and with a Pinot Noir from California's Central Coast, you're always safe." For the Valentine dessert, Miller suggests a sweet, late-harvest wine.

"Before the advent of freezers, people used to put up food for winter to be self-sufficient; they just got out of the habit. We use what the farmer and land will give us—we try to be self-sustaining." His staff is similarly committed, and better yet, so are his customers.

► Carla Waldemar is a Minnesota-based wine and food writer and a *Zagat Survey* editor. Her work appears in numerous national consumer and trade publications.

As this issue goes to press, an independent panel of 2008 Santé Awards judges granted L'Etoile a perfect score and conferred upon it the title of 2008 Santé Awards Culinary Hospitality Restaurant of the Year. Congratulations to Chef Miller and his staff.