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"Our cuisine is no longer about liking or not liking something. It's about trying to influence everyday life. If I put aesthetics and ethics together, that is the future of cuisine."

— MASSIMO BOTTURA, THE HIGHLY CONCEPTUAL CHEF OF OSTERIA FRANCESCANA IN MODENA, ITALY



Drawing inspiration from, attention to, WILD EATS

AMY SERAFIN
For The Associated Press

Rene Redzepi was crouched and using a sharp knife to scrape lichen from rocks. The tiny green tubes usually feed reindeer in this land above the Arctic Circle. "If animals can eat it, we can," said Redzepi, who was among 14 of the world's most influential chefs at a gathering in Lapland earlier this month. The goal was to dig their hands in the soil and make a meal from whatever they could find in one of the last untouched places on earth.

Called "Cook It Raw," the event marked the third time in just over a year that these chefs have hunted, fished and foraged together — each time in a new location — then prepared a meal while leaving the smallest possible footprint on the environment.

A pair of Italians, a restaurant consultant and a food writer, first organized Cook It Raw as a prelude to the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen last year. At that gathering they asked the chefs to prepare dishes using little or no conventional energy, leading to memorable creations such as Redzepi's squirming live prawns, or Massimo Bottura's "pollution" soup, illustrating a projected future in which the oceans contain only squid and jellyfish. The group then came together again in January in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy, where the ingredients they used included raw venison and rare Rosa di Gorizia radicchio.

This time, they flew to Helsinki from as far afield as London, New York, Sao Paulo and Tokyo, took a 14-hour train ride north, then marveled at the bounty of a land where the northern lights shimmer like an electric green cloud and the indigenous people have 90 words for snow. But civilization is taking its toll here too, with global warming driving up temperatures and foreign companies mining for gold.

TEST YOUR IQ

How many kilometers did the chefs travel for this event?

As the planet transforms, an increasing number of chefs are stepping out into the wild and creating food defined by a specific time and place — a way of cooking that has become the next big movement after the science projects of molecular gastronomy.

One of its pioneers, Redzepi, who is from Denmark, shot to first place on Restaurant Magazine's list of the world's 50 best restaurants this year with his Copenhagen restaurant, Noma. In Lapland, he saw a world of gastronomic possibilities in the fuzzy mosses and mushrooms of the forest floor. For the dinner, he covered carrots with pine needles and steamed them so their essential oils impregnated the vegetables.

"We are showing others how to harvest in nature, because the things you find there taste better than anything grown," he said. "Try one of those blueberries, then a stupid one grown in a greenhouse. Your reference point for what a blueberry tastes like has changed forever."

Superstar chef David Chang of New York's Momofuku restaurants also participated. He was struck by the abundance of edible shoots and leaves to be found at the top of the world. "To be able to forage everywhere, it's crazy," he exclaimed. He created a Lapland version of Japanese dashi soup,



with spruce and reindeer milk.

Bottura, the highly conceptual chef of Osteria Francescana in Modena, Italy, cooked reindeer tongues sous vide for 22 hours. And he did it in his bathroom so he could check their progress throughout the night. He purposely chose a body part other chefs might discard. "Our cuisine is no longer about liking or not liking something," he explained. "It's about trying to influence everyday life. If I put aesthetics and ethics together, that is the future of cuisine."

Brazilian chef Alex Atala flew in from Sao Paulo, where his restaurant, D.O.M., features ingredients from the Amazon, another endangered region. Outraged that hunting is illegal in most of Brazil yet deforestation is not, he has acquired 57,000 acres of rainforest in an effort to protect it. He said, "Like Rene and Massimo, my ethical awakening came from my job as a chef, searching for products in nature."

Inaki Aizpitarte and Petter Nilsson, from the wildly popular Chateaubriand and La Gazzetta restaurants in Paris, teamed up to create a dish from beginning to end, waking at dawn and fishing, cutting woodchips to smoke their catch, mixing a broth from lichen and mushrooms they gathered, garnishing it with berries and sorrel. "It had a taste of where we had put our feet," said Nilsson.

One morning the group witnessed a reindeer slaughter, and the blood inspired several chefs. Daniel Patterson from Coi in San Francisco roasted beets in the hearth until their skins were black, then served them with a sauce of beets, blueberries and blood, a simple dish that was sweetly intense and gamey.

Then pastry chef Albert Adria, who made his name alongside his brother Ferran at the Spanish restaurant elBulli, created "snow" like freshly fallen powder next to a lingonberry cocktail that was warm like blood.

"If you are lost for three weeks in the wilderness here, you will eat reindeer and drink snow," he explained.

Tears of emotion came to the eyes of the Japanese chef Yoshihiro Narisawa when he presented his dish. He had splattered white bowls with a lingonberry sauce that echoed the blood spurting from the reindeer's neck that morning.



Fish caught (top) during the "Cook It Raw" event in Lapland, Finland.

Rene Redzepi, (above) third from left, and his team presenting the final dish on the last evening during "Cook It Raw" in Lapland, Finland. Chefs help prepare a meal in Helsinki, Finland, as they help prepare a meal. — AP PHOTO/COOK IT RAW, ERIK REFNER

Paivan keitto (catch of the day soup) prepared for lunch by local people after fishing and collecting herbs.



Nestled in the sauce were strips of meat from hare who might have fed on the berries. Over this, he poured a clear consommé made from wild hare, snow grouse and the leg of a bear. The dish represented how much life it takes to offer us life.

Meanwhile, the hard-partying Italian chef Davide Scabin, from Combal.Zero in Turin, packed salmon trout in moss and baked it in a hole in the ground. "I wanted to do something different," he said, lighting up a cigarette with one of the logs. "I didn't travel 3,000 kilometers to do the same thing I do every day."

The lake (background) where the chefs fished during "Cook It Raw" in Lapland, Finland. The event marked the third time in just over a year that the international group of chefs have hunted, fished and foraged together in a particular location, then prepared a meal while leaving the smallest possible footprint on the environment. — AP PHOTO/COOK IT RAW.

Smoked fish soup (left middle) with beetroots, mushrooms, woodsorrel, berries, brown butter, broth of mushrooms and raw lichen, prepared by chefs Inaki Aizpitarte and Petter Nilsson during "Cook It Raw," in Lapland, Finland.

