

PLATE AS CANVAS  
Massimo  
Bottura's lemon  
tart is one of  
many artful  
dishes recreated  
at In Situ

FINE DINING

## TASTEFUL ART

At his new restaurant in the revamped San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, chef Corey Lee puts culinary masterpieces on display

**WHEN ASKED AT** what point food becomes art, Corey Lee counters with more questions: “When does art become art? Is it the intention or how it is perceived?”

Lee, the three-Michelin-starred chef of San Francisco’s Benu, is at the helm of In Situ, the restaurant inside the new San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. After a near three-year closure and \$305 million in upgrades, the museum reopens this month with more than triple the gallery space. But painting and sculpture aren’t the only art on display: Chef Lee is curating the best dishes in the world. “There are opportunities now for chefs to make food that goes beyond taste—and there is an audience for that as well,” Lee says. “That dynamic sets the stage for food as art.”

In Situ’s frequently rotating menus will feature dishes by 90 top chefs. The museum tapped Lee to lead the restaurant, and he developed the concept, reaching out to a dream team of chefs and asking them to submit one recipe each. Some are signature dishes (such as Daniel Boulud’s Maine sea scallops in black tie and Massimo Bottura’s lemon tart). Some are retired dishes (“now memorialized in a museum,” says Lee of entrees such as sea urchin

in lobster gelatin, which was so popular at Amber in Hong Kong that chef Richard Ekkebus couldn’t offer uni another way). And some chefs simply wanted to see their dish made with California ingredients (such as Mauro Colagreco, of France’s Mirazur, whose “forest” of quinoa risotto, mushrooms, and parsley moss will use whatever wild mushrooms are available in Northern California). Since last summer, Lee has been meeting each chef in person to learn the technique and plating of each dish for a faithful recreation—often down to the exact china.

So, after you’ve walked through Richard Serra’s 214-ton, labyrinthine steel figure eight, *Sequence*, and stared at the brushstrokes of Matisse’s *Femme au chapeau*, you can savor Alice Waters’s Meyer lemon ice cream or René Redzepi’s wood sorrel and sheep’s milk yogurt. Beyond the gastronomic experience, guests will have the opportunity to browse a library of published works by the represented chefs. “There are many parallels between the museum and what we’re doing [at In Situ],” says Lee, “but most important is making things that are beautiful more accessible to the public.” —LEEANNE JONES

## Three of Chef Lee’s Delicious Forgeries

### CUTTLEFISH CAPPUCCINO

CHEF: Massimiliano (Max) Alajmo  
RESTAURANT: Le Calandre in Rubano, Italy

DISH: Wanting to create a universally appealing dish based on texture and temperature, Alajmo thought of mother’s milk. Inspired, he concocted a cup of soothing and silky potato milk—with a texture between drinkable and spoonable—over soft-cooked, inky squid.

WHY: In 2002, at age 28, Alajmo became the youngest chef to achieve three Michelin stars, and having the opportunity to work with him was one of the highlights of Lee’s In Situ research. “Max is one of the greatest chefs in the world,” he says.

### CREPES AND GRILLED ONIONS

CHEF: Blaine Wetzel  
RESTAURANT: The Willows Inn on Lummi Island, Washington

DISH: A large, crispy crepe seasoned with leek ash and bonito flakes and served with a spoonful of fermented green garlic jam.

WHY: The Inn is only open nine months of the year, and you have to take a boat to reach it, making James Beard Award-winning Wetzel’s cuisine a rare treat. “This is the perfect example of what we’re doing,” Lee says, “making food accessible.”

### CHESTNUT PUDDING WITH RUM-FLAVORED COFFEE JELLY

CHEF: Tetsuya Fujiwara  
RESTAURANT: Fujiya 1935 in Osaka, Japan

DISH: The custard is served alongside a small box of chestnuts, which are flamed by the chef and blown out upon arrival at the table. Diners are enveloped in the aroma of roasted chestnuts as they eat.

WHY: Fujiwara brings contemporary European training to traditional Japanese flavors—here, a popular autumn street food. “Smell memory makes this a very evocative dish,” Lee says. “It puts you in a certain place at a certain time of year.”