

[TCH Archives](#) > [Sunday Business Post](#) > [2005/12/25](#) > Highlights of the culinary year

## [Highlights of the culinary year](#)

Sunday, December 25, 2005 - By Ross Golden Bannon

The annual culinary round-up is an opportunity to raise the flag for foodie heroes. There are also plenty who deserve tarring and feathering, but you just can't get quality bitumen these days. Instead, this is my opportunity to point a finger or two and celebrate the joy of food.

Eating at the Carnivore Restaurant in Nairobi, Kenya, has to be my top culinary moment of 2005. Famed across Africa and beyond, its staff just keep bringing meat to your table until you give up. Incomparable chicken, lamb and beef was matched by more exotic ostrich, camel and crocodile. Not for the fainthearted. The nearest airport Ryanair flies to is Palermo.

More hazardous food was involved in Europe's most dangerous sport: mushroom hunting. More people die from eating poisoned mushrooms than any other leisure activity.

Big Bill O'Dea's annual wild mushroom hunt included an excellent lunch and a taster of the mushrooms gathered by enthusiasts. As he is keen to ensure repeat custom, the mushrooms are carefully checked by expert mycophagists.

Check out [www.mushroomstuff.com](http://www.mushroomstuff.com)

The Slow Food Movement continues to grow (why not join at [www.slowfoodireland.com](http://www.slowfoodireland.com)) and is matched by a more seasonal look at food delivery in many restaurants.

Even if we haven't won the ecological argument for consuming seasonal, locally-produced food, the business case is clear: seasonal food is cheaper. Except, of course, if we're talking about truffles.

The Cellar restaurant in the Merrion Hotel changes its menu regularly to match the seasons. This year executive chef Ed Cooney created a special two-week menu to celebrate wild mushrooms and truffles. Blink and they're gone, that's what makes it such a treat.

The five-star Marriott Druids Glen Hotel has similar innovations, such as its seasonal Italian and Portuguese menus. Chef Jonathan Pratt created a beautiful, light meal with his Italian season and continues to change the menu with style.

This year's greatest mystery was the translation of the famed L'Gueuleton restaurant. All can now be revealed: L'Gueuleton is an anagram for "Troy Maguire (L'Gueuleton's owner and chef ) is cool, feck the service." We love the food, but the booking policy - you can't reserve a table - has got to change.

The depth of knowledge and enthusiasm of the folk at Matthews Cheese Cellar on Baggot Street in Dublin will overwhelm you, as does the rich aromas from the temple-like interior. It has over a hundred varieties of native and foreign cheeses and is conveniently located next to Oddbins wine off-licence. How about that for culinary karma.

Culinary books abound, but I had two favourites this year. The first was Michel Roux's Eggs. His latest hagiography to food is simple, beautifully illustrated and well written. This aristocrat of the culinary world continues to entertain and educate with surprising dishes such as pear and cinnamon omelette. Well worth the €25 for 299 pages.

The other book was Ruth Riechl's Garlic & Sapphire. It tells the story of her time as restaurant critic for the New York Times and how she hid her identity by dressing up as a retired school teacher and a little old lady, among other characters. She then wrote double reviews on how she was treated as a critic and how she was treated as an ordinary mortal. I feel a plan hatching for 2006.

Speaking of little jewels, Cafe Una on Kildare Street, Dublin, has been serving superb Irish stew for lunch since it opened earlier this year. The good news is that it now has a wine licence and opens in the evening.

This year's guilty pleasure has to be Cully & Sully's pies.

They have only been on the market for a year and a half, but Cullen Allen and Colum O'Sullivan's product is everywhere. Their traditional shepherd's pie is a bit of a find on a winter evening when you're not keen on cooking.

The tiny medieval village of Eymet in the Dordogne may not be on everyone's map, but picture this: an entire suckling pig spit-roasted and offered to passers-by with hunks of crackling and a glass of wine. The price? A mere €6.

As a judge at Food & Wine Magazine's annual culinary awards, I enjoyed myself hugely at the awards lunch in the Four Seasons. Dessert included cream-filled brandy snaps which raised the question, how do you eat them?

The Merrion Hotel's Patrick Guilbaud looked scared when I asked him if you were supposed to suck or blow.

More disgraceful behaviour was in evidence when I checked my list of trips outside the Pale.

My low batting average will be rectified in 2006, especially if places such as the Chart

House restaurant in Dingle are anything to go by. Its memorable dishes included mussels steamed with aniseed, lemon and garlic, as well as its Annascaul black pudding.

You could do worse than stop off at the Olive Grove in Athlone, which matches good service with high-quality, innovative food.

The shift towards healthier food in schools and the debate about obesity is a welcome addition to the culinary landscape. Healthy options are now appearing on menus as restaurateurs realise dining out is now a regular and ordinary activity.

Some people even have to do it for a living.

To combat this constant eating out, I have a special seasonal diet of my own: Irish coffee. As the actor Alex Levine points out, Irish coffee provides in a single glass all four essential food groups: alcohol, caffeine, sugar and fat.

Have a cool Yule.