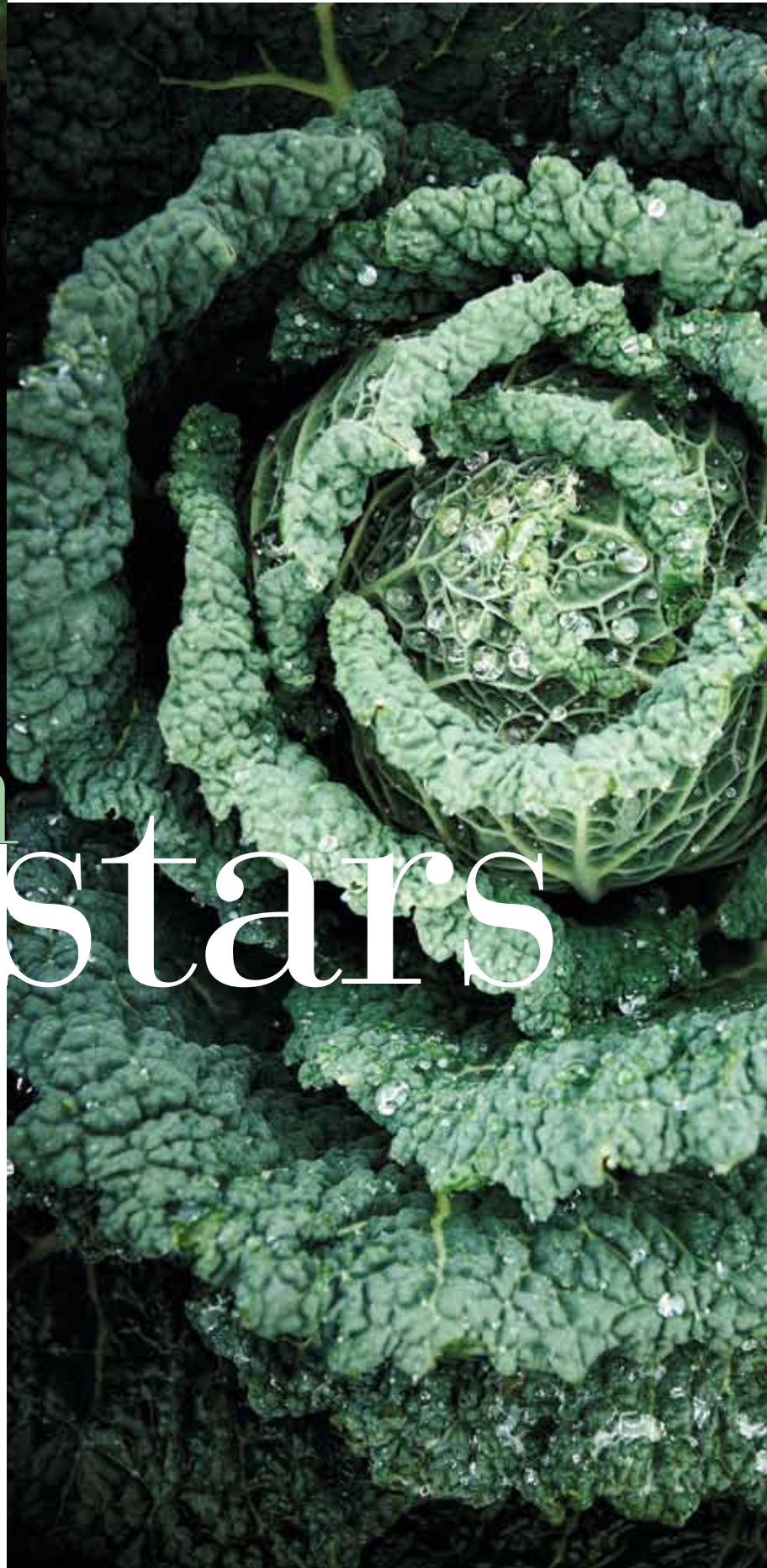




BEYOND NOMA, THE DINING LANDSCAPE IN THE NORDIC LANDS IS FAR FROM FRIGID. CHECK OUT SOME OF THE BEST DENMARK, SWEDEN AND NORWAY HAVE TO OFFER BY SAMANTHA LEE

The North stars



In winter, the view from one of the 12 seats in Faviken Magasinet is one of improbable whiteness, broken only by snow-dusted birches and the dark rim of mountains in the distance. One of the most exciting restaurants in Sweden—and indeed, the world—is also one of its most remote, located some 600 kilometres from Stockholm, in the rural northern province of Jämtland. But that's the point.

This far from everywhere else, chef Magnus Nilsson's austere brand of hyper locavorism takes on the mantle of necessity. The seasons and the lay of the land are the great dictators here—ensuring that everything on the plate is hunted, foraged, fished and harvested from within Faviken's 24,000-acre estate or close by. The scallops, served over smoking juniper, hail from nearby Hitra Island. That glistening, marbled pork chop came from the whey-fed pig of a local farmer. Root vegetables are preserved in an underground cellar to last through the frigid months. What diners get is the chef's distilled interpretation of the soil, the seasons, the essential. They are partaking of the land itself.

Despite Nilsson's isolation, he's not alone. Cut to Horve, Denmark, where chef Claus Henriksen literally lives off the land at Dragsholm Slot, a 13th century castle that now houses a hotel, a fine dining restaurant and a casual



BJÖRN SVENSSON
AND JOE BØE KLAKEGG
OF FAUNA



FAUNA



FAVIKEN MAGASINET

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+
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GOURMET



MAGNUS NILSSON OF FAVIKEN MAGASINET

bistro. An hour's journey from Copenhagen, but a world apart, Henriksen claims his bounty from the acres of fruit orchards, bee farms, crop fields, lamb pastures and herb garden surrounding the castle. Not to mention the forests begging to be foraged and the ocean a minute's walk away.

Tuck into one of Henriksen's creations—say, pan-roasted langoustines with Danish peas and smoked bacon—and there's that idea again, tugging at your senses. The recognition that you're experiencing the idiosyncrasies and flavours of the very terroir. Like Nilsson's remote outpost, Dragsholm Slot is so rooted in a specific place that its food is profoundly singular.

It's a culinary modus operandi made explosively popular by René Redzepi of Noma, voted *Restaurant Magazine's* Best Restaurant in the World from 2010 to 2012. To a dining realm oversaturated with the flash-and-bang excess of "molecular gastronomy", Redzepi's naturalist tenets arrived, soothing as lemon balm. Loosely termed "new Nordic cuisine", the movement champions "purity, freshness and simplicity". A return to Nordic ingredients and methods. Looking inwards, instead of out.



MATHIAS DAHLGREN



MATHIAS DAHLGREN

The baleful beauty of the Scandinavian landscape was recast as bountiful. Foraging, fishing and hunting could yield fresh produce. The age-old methods of preservation—pickling, brining, drying, smoking, curing—would colour meals during the winter months. There'd be lichen and moss, “vintage” carrots and “seven-month aged” beef. Redzepi harnessed the limitations of his surroundings to feed a boundless creativity, a philosophy that reverberated. Loudly.

Indeed, Nilsson and Henriksen (a former sous chef at Noma) are just two of many Scandinavian chefs emerging from the forges of Redzepi's smithy. “Noma opened the door for the rest of us,” Nilsson says. But don't mistake them for copycats. Redzepi himself started off in an unlikely arena: El Bulli. What he brought back wasn't—thankfully—gels and spheres, but a “sense of freedom”, a penchant for rule-breaking that his acolytes are well attuned to.

In Copenhagen alone, they are blossoming. These young chefs are creative and entrepreneurial, respectful of what they learnt under Redzepi yet eager to carve out niches of their own. Chefs Christian Puglisi of Relae and Jesper Kirketerp of Radio seem to have perfected the art of Noma Lite: pairing the trademark focus on innovative, vegetally minded cuisine with a buzzy, casual setting and lower prices.

Puglisi is branching out from what he calls “the dogmatic Nordic approach” —nudging his food away from the confines of haute dining and foraged fare towards the more accessible equivalent of a gastronomic dive bar. He's rewarded for his gumption: Relae boasts a Michelin star. Here, you'll find locals humming over dishes like crunchy turnip bites wrapped in sheep's-milk yoghurt and nasturtium leaves as Johnny Cash croons in the background. Radio, too, veils its pedigree under an unassuming appearance (small, wood-panelled, casual). Under Kirketerp (ex-Noma and Geranium) and partner chef Rasmus Kliin (ex-Geist), a stoic confidence in quality Nordic produce radiates gently through the dishes, with organic vegetables culled from a two-acre plot of land outside the city and meat sourced directly from local hunters. Their signature dish is appropriately down to earth: dehydrated beetroot, pickled in vanilla and beet juice, served with milk ice cream and locally farmed grains.

The fanfare isn't restricted to Copenhagen. Oslo, Norway, is also seeing a renaissance, with restaurants like the two Michelin-star Maaemo making headlines. New and notable is Fauna, overseen by chef Björn Svensson (previously of the Michelin-starred Oscargate) and yet another Noma



JASPER KIRKETERP AND RASMUS KLIM OF RESTAURANT RADIO



RESTAURANT RADIO



RESTAURANT RADIO



RESTAURANT FRANTZEN SWEETBREADS WITH LIQUORICE AND CARMELISED YUZU



RELAE

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alumni, chef and co-owner Jo Bøe Klakegg. Expect an earnest rendering of homegrown produce: raw Norwegian scallops served with celery, dill “snow” and milk foam; and Norwegian mussels swimming in horseradish milk alongside slices of apple and wakame.

Wakame—you read right. What place does Japanese wakame have in the ultra-patriotic confines of “new Nordic cuisine”? As it turns out, foreign influences are far from anathema to the chefs who find harmony in disparity. Mathias Dahlgren, chef of his eponymous restaurant in Stockholm, Sweden, was one of the “new Nordic” manifesto’s proponents in 2004. Yet he’s not opposed to incorporating the odd Asian touch in his dishes (which he now terms, simply, “natural cuisine”): fried wild duck accompanied by egg dumplings, or Jerusalem artichoke ravioli in cabbage broth spiked with chilli and ginger. Instead of being led by a strict set of rules, it’s the “natural produce that leads. I follow”.



CO-OWNER KIM ROSSEN & CHEF CHRISTIAN PUGLISI OF RELAE

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Restaurant Frantzen, 12th on the San Pellegrino’s World’s Best 50 Restaurants, follows a similarly embracing philosophy. Chef Björn Frantzen, who cites “Japan and their kaiseki kitchens” as potent inspiration, says, “I look for concentration in taste. It’s in the Nordic style of confit, in lactic bacteria, in different types of vinegar. Here I find a clear connection with Asian cuisines.” Yes, 95 per cent of the restaurant’s ingredients originate within Sweden’s borders, resulting in undeniably Nordic creations like soup of fermented rye with quark and smoked lard, or coal-flamed reindeer. But you’ll also find the briny surprise of uni paired with tofu atop a perilla brioche, or the citrusy pop of caramelised yuzu flavouring veal sweetbreads.

“Creativity, to me, is to try to see the possibilities beyond the conventions,” says Dahlgren. In a famously fickle industry, where last year’s fad is this year’s norm, the rising stars of Scandinavia are holding their own—foraging, fermenting, fusing and forging their way towards a brave New Nordic world. ■