

# Pig's blood ice cream? Why chefs are seeing red

Use everything but the squeak, it's a matter of respect. **Tom Whipple** and **Christopher Arden** sample a culinary trend

Ben Reade likes to surprise with his recipes. "You taste it, and it tastes a bit like chocolate," he says as a bright-red ice-cream mix is stirred behind him. "And you think, why does this strawberry ice cream taste like chocolate?" The answer is, because it is neither — it is made with raw pig's blood. Surprise!

For too long, chefs would have us believe, blood has been overlooked. It is consigned to black pudding and jugged hares or, more often, just wasted. Our squeamishness has meant that its value as an ingredient has too often been missed.

No longer, because Reade, from the Nordic Food Lab, founded by the Noma restaurant in Copenhagen, is one of a number of chefs exploring innovative uses for blood. For him it is completely natural that one of those uses is in desserts — often as a substitute for egg white. After all, he explains, "we have

salted caramel ice cream". Indeed.

What is the advantage of blood, though, even if it is an egg white substitute? "Is there an advantage to using a lentil?" he replies. "An advantage over what? To me, if you kill an animal, you should use it all. This is about an acknowledgement that meat involves death."

Other projects from his laboratory include collecting fermented grasshopper and pheasant essence and investigating the flavour properties of a recently acquired beaver's anal gland. ("We have a Swedish beaver and bear hunter who supplies us").

"We don't do this to shock," he says. "Sometimes it does, but that is by mistake. We don't see this as sensationalist."

Reade is not alone. The two-Michelin-starred Mugaritz in Spain serves an "extraordinary" pig's blood macaroon, while Italy has a chocolate dessert called sanguinaccio that contains blood.

Jennifer McLagan, a Canadian chef, says that the Anglo-Saxon taboo against the ingredient is a shame. "It is rich in iron, protein and when mixed with grain or milk becomes a complete food," she explains.

**Ben Reade says: "If you kill an animal, then use it all"**



**Blood meringue: the ingredient is just as nice in ice cream or pancakes, chefs say**

Fergus Henderson, from the St John Restaurant in Farringdon, Central London, agrees that we have been slower in Britain at catching on to the trend, but argues that there is no reason to avoid blood.

"It's sweet. It's good stuff," he says, although he conceded that there was the "vampire" issue to contend with. "I guess it's had some bad press because of those horror films," he adds.

However, if the young bloods of the culinary world are rehabilitating the in-

redient, actually finding it remains like, well, getting blood from a stone.

Reade had happily agreed to cook dessert for *The Times*, but on condition that we supplied the blood. Even in the bacon capital of the world, raw pig's blood is hard to come by — so hard that we had to find a pint in a Chinese supermarket in Soho and then fly it, somewhat nervously, to Denmark.

There might be good reasons for that. The Food Standards Agency said that it would "strongly advise against using

raw pig's blood" on the ground that it might contain Hepatitis E.

In the Nordic Food Lab the food looks too enticing for such concerns. The blood ice cream is ready, the blood pancakes are cooling. It is time to taste. "Mmm," says one member of Reade's

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laboratory, holding a tentative spoonful. "The animal thing is there," he adds — in a slogan unlikely to be adopted by Wall's.

"That would be the blood," says Avery McGuire, a vegetarian who has done most of the cooking. "Yes, there's a definite livery taste."

*The Times* samples enough to concur. Apparently frozen pig's blood from Soho that has spent several hours in an aircraft might not be restaurant-grade, even leaving aside the hepatitis issue. Reade, however, is sanguine.

"A lot of what we do here is to provoke thought. If we do something with blood and someone says, 'That's disgusting,' but has a conversation about meat and death, then that's a good thing. We're not talking Jamie Oliver cookbook material here.

"Let's face it," he adds, "Blood ice cream is bloody weird."



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