

John Sedlar Creates Pacific Standard Time Menu at Playa, With Dishes Inspired by L.A. Art

By Catherine Wagley

published: Mon., Feb. 6 2012 @ 1:56PM



Photo by Calvin Lee

Main course inspired by Ed Ruscha's painting
[LACMA on Fire](#)

"You screwed up," [chef John Rivera Sedlar](#) told Getty curator Andrew Perchuk in the months before [Pacific Standard Time](#) began. The sprawling, Getty-funded celebration of postwar SoCal art should have included food. But Perchuk, already working to facilitate exhibitions at 60-plus institutions and organizing his own show, felt he had plenty to worry about besides appetizers and

entrees. Later, though, after the frenzy surrounding PST's launch subsided, he decided Sedlar was right: PST *should* include food.

After all, didn't gallerist Everett Ellin open the Chez La Vie café beside his original West Hollywood gallery in 1958, to serve the art-viewing public? Didn't dealer [Virginia Dwan](#) install working fountains by sculptor Jean Tinguely in homes of collectors before hosting a progressive dinner, plying guests with Champagne as they bussed from house to house? And hasn't Al's Café, the 4-month-long pop-up restaurant artist [Al Ruppersberg](#) staged in 1969, where he sold plates of art rather than food, become almost mythic for the way it made conceptual art a social experience?

The official PST menu, which debuted Saturday at Sedlar's year-old West Hollywood restaurant Playa and will be available to all diners starting Tuesday, Feb. 7, is far sleeker, honed and literal in its approach to food-as-art than anything I imagine Ruppertsberg, Ellin or even the posh Dwan served when they dabbled in dining years ago.



Photo by Calvin Lee

The first course of "The Secret Pacific Standard Time" menu debuts at Playa

Sedlar, who as a child in New Mexico frequented the Ghost Ranch -- home to sensuously bold painter Georgia O'Keefe -- published his guide, *Modern Southwest Cuisine*, in 1986 and has given Latin fusion extra cachet since opening Rivera, the first of his two newest restaurants, in 2009. He likes stories and he likes food to be visually striking. "I see restaurants as repositories of

culture," he told me shortly before Playa opened in 2011. And since all that culture has to be captured and communicated in "that one square foot of [the plate]," his dishes are composed down to the placement of garnishes, and at Rivera, messages are stenciled in spices across the china.

Sedlar devised his PST menu with the help of Ron Cooper, the founder of Del Maguey, Single Village Mezcal, and mixologist Julian Cox, who develops drinks for both of Sedlar's restaurants. Saturday's preview, attended by as many curators and artists as restaurant insiders and food bloggers, began with pre-dinner cocktails developed by Cox and inspired by particular artworks.

The *47 Chevy*, with mescal, lemon, agave and lavender, had the same yellow color as the Chevy Oscar Castillo photographed in front of a Mexican market in 1972. Castillo was there to sample the drink he'd inspired. So was Larry Bell, whose 1964 glass cube is behind the Untitled cocktail, made with vermouth, Italian wine, sherry and an elliptical grapefruit peel angled upward in the same way as the ellipsis dividing Bell's sculpture.

Dinner began after Ron Cooper spoke briefly about art as nourishment for the soul and food as art, then made the shape of a cross on the floor with his mescal in honor of God and the agave the alcohol is distilled from.



Photo by Calvin Lee

Seafood platter inspired by artist Beatrice Wood's ceramic Fish Platter (1970)

The first course was fresh and smoked seafood laid out over an image of eccentric ceramic artist Beatrice Wood's 1970 piece *Fish Platter*. Then, in homage to Ed Ruscha's rebellious 1965 painting [LACMA on Fire](#), came fire-grilled chicken breast with "incendiary salsa," goat cheese and a Cobb salad with egg, the chicken towering and tilted like a bursting building and red salsa

spread around to evoke embers. Desert was "splashes" of sorbet colored yellow, red and green like the flames and sky in Carlos Almaraz's 1982 painting *Beach Trash Burning*.

"It's the only PST event you can eat," said writer Norman Koplas, who sat beside me. "If you haven't had Ron Cooper's handmade Mescal, you haven't lived," tweeted Hammer Public Programs director [Claudia Bestor](#), sitting two tables away, during the first course. "This chicken is incredible," said Pamela Brown, of the blog [My Man's Belly](#).

It turns out food that resembles historic artwork inspires much more enthusiasm than it does profundity.

The Pacific Standard Time dinner menu will be available at Rivera and Playa through March 31.

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It was an awesome experience and great food! Thanks for featuring my photos. :)