

Should we eat snow? Probably not

By Matt Blitz, Food & Wine

With winter upon us and snow coming down in delicious flakes (in some parts of the country), it's hard to fault the hungry people who are racing outside to scoop up the fluffy white stuff by the spoonful. OK, maybe you haven't filled up a natural snow cone yet this winter, but humans have been eating the stuff for thousands of years.

Legend has it that Cleopatra served her lover Mark Antony a frozen slush treat after a rare Egyptian snowstorm and the extravagant Roman emperor Nero had snow transported from the tops of nearby mountains to his table for a sorbet-like dessert. Even Marco Polo may have brought back a snow ice cream recipe from his Far East travels that Kublai Khan kept a closely guarded secret.

While we always knew not to eat yellow snow, unfortunately recent studies now say that perhaps we should avoid eating this wintry treat falling from the heavens altogether.

Read the whole story

K's Kitchen: Hash that makes you sweat

By Kathryn Reed

If you don't like spicy, stop reading.

This is so good I just wanted to keep eating, albeit with a sip of wine and water in between bites.

I couldn't find adobo sauce on its own in a local grocery store, but I didn't try any of the Hispanic stores. I used the sauce from a can with chipotles. Cut back the amount and the heat will be reduced, or add more for a super kick.

The intensity of the dish did not increase the next day. It was better, though, or maybe I was getting used to the spiciness.

I also couldn't find the cheese in a crumbled format, but it crumbles easily.



Spicy Veggie Hash

2 T olive oil

3 C sweet potato, peeled and diced

2 T oregano, chopped

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp kosher salt, divided

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground cumin

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cinnamon

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp ground red pepper

7 garlic cloves, minced

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ C water, divided

1 C green beans, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 T adobo sauce

1 15.5 ounce can black beans, drained

$\frac{1}{2}$ C queso fresco, crumbled

1 plum tomato, diced

Add oil to large skillet over medium-high heat. Add potato, oregano, and half teaspoon salt. Add cumin, cinnamon, red pepper, and garlic. Add half cup water; cover and cook over reduced heat until potato is soft.

In separate pan bring three-quarters cup water to a boil in a saucepan. Add remaining salt and green beans; cook for about 7 minutes. Stir in adobo sauce and black beans.

Place half cup potato mixture in four bowls; top each with equal amount of bean mixture, cheese, and tomato.

K's Kitchen: Mushrooms too good to share

By Kathryn Reed

Sometimes I don't want to share the food I make. I really do have a mushroom problem; I could have eaten all of them on my own.

The problem, so to speak, is I cooked them for a wine tasting I was hosting, so I had to share. They were paired with a JCB 2015 Pinot Noir. I'm not a big Pinot fan, but this one was great – or maybe it was the mushrooms that made the difference.

I used a Cabernet in the recipe, and the mushrooms tasted fantastic with it as well the following day.

Thank goodness there were leftovers. The mushrooms were good cold, reheated and on pizza.

This would be a good side dish for a steak, or even on top of the steak.

Some of the grocery stores on the South Shore have a container of mixed mushrooms. To that I added sliced cremini and baby portabella. Wild mushrooms are pricy, but the flavor compared to regular button mushrooms is night and day apart.



**Roasted Mushrooms with Red
Wine**

3 lbs mixed mushrooms, such as cremini, oyster and chanterelle

$\frac{3}{4}$ C, plus 1 T canola oil

1 T thyme leaves

1 tsp rosemary, minced

1 large shallot, minced

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 C dry red wine

3 T cold unsalted butter

Kosher salt

Pepper

$\frac{1}{4}$ C tarragon, chopped

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Heat two rimmed baking sheets for at least 10 minutes.

In a large bowl, toss the mushrooms with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the oil, thyme and rosemary. Spread mixture on warmed baking sheets and then roast for 30 minutes. Mushrooms should be tender and browned.

Heat remaining oil in skillet. Add the shallot and garlic, cook over moderately high heat until softened. Add the wine and simmer until reduced to a glaze. Mix in the butter, salt and pepper.

Put mushrooms in bowl. Add wine sauce and mix. Toss in tarragon.

**Sierra: Come for the skiing,
stay for the food**



Eric Sorensen is a master at the “pour over” coffee venue at Sierra. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

TWIN BRIDGES – Sierra-at-Tahoe has lunged to the top of its game as being a foodie destination this winter.

Four years on the job as food and beverage director, Scott Justice has upped his game at the ski resort’s restaurants, small eateries and satellite food stations.

He’s essentially traded the team sports arenas for playing in a team environment at the slopes for a different sport. Justice came from Center Plate, a concessionaire company that furnishes ballparks with stadium and arena food, having traveled from the Cajun country of New Orleans to the East Coast culinary flair of Washington, D.C.



Solstice is focusing on Asian flavors like noodle bowls with ahi. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Justice has revamped or tweaked the menus at Sierra Pub, Mama's Kitchen, Solstice, Aspen Grill, 360 Smokehouse BBQ, 360 Grab n' Go, Golden Bear Terrace Grill, Baja Grill, Nacho Mama's, Treehouse Donuts and Java Junction.

He follows trends, keeps an eye on what works and comes up with the food offerings. He has also hired the right people to prepare, cook and serve the items. Sierra-at-Tahoe has long been revered for its community-minded, "get real" philosophy. Now the real deal is its culinary acumen.



Sierra General Manager John Rice and Pub manager Belen Urrutia talk about elevating the food scene. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“You’ll be excited about what we have,” Pub restaurant manager Belen Urrutia said, whipping out a menu she’s proud to have helped contribute to. That’s the forget-the-hierarchy thing with Sierra. Everyone has a role, and good ideas can come from anywhere. Urrutia’s are far reaching geographically, as she hails from Argentina.

Urrutia is especially enthusiastic about the chimichurri steak sandwich on the Pub menu. This diner can see why. A staple in Argentina, the sauce resembles an explosion of flavor. Surprisingly, it’s simple – parsley, olive oil, cilantro, pepper and salt in the unbelievably tasty concoction. Next to the red meat and provolone cheese and red peppers, it’s a complete meal except one needs to make room for the variety of fries, soup or kettle chips it comes with. (Note: you won’t need to eat for the rest of the day and night.)



The chimichurri steak sandwich is inspired by the Pub manager's native Argentina. Photo/Kathryn Reed

What makes working with ski food challenging is catering to that balance between providing the common staples expected at the slopes by thousands of guests while dipping into creative territory. It's also not easy to be efficient and fresh when serving food in bulk.

"We're trying to find that sweet spot in volume," Justice said.

He compliments food supplier Sysco for going out of its way to accommodate the resort, including providing ingredients from the region so it's as local as possible when appropriate.



Susan Wood cuts into chicken and waffles, a first for her. Photo/Kathryn Reed

With all the rage being sustainable, local food, Justice started receiving his barbecue meat for the 360 Smokehouse at the Grandview Lodge from Sonny's BBQ in South Lake Tahoe, where the pork simmers for 14 hours.

As far as the ski area's target audience, the San Francisco Bay Area still rules as the lake region's feeder market. From the Bay comes a large Asian demographic seeking a bit of its home cuisine.

That's why Justice took aim at its latest restaurant on the plaza. Solstice has become enlightened in a big way to serve up dishes that may rival any Asian eatery on the South Shore.

It's one thing to have a Thai chicken lettuce wrap, it's quite

another to serve up ahi chunks atop of a noodle bowl complemented nicely with green onions and carrots. It's best served alongside a Banh Mi sandwich served with gulf coast shrimp, teriyaki beef or tofu (intended as a nod to vegetarians) – an exquisite combination national park-traveling cook Nathan Vandenberg said he whipped up in about five minutes. Aiming to further impress, the Solstice staff hopes to add a miso salmon sandwich.



Scott Justice, who is in charge of all food and beverage operations at Sierra, is able to be more creative at a resort that isn't overly corporate. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Overall, Justice has found the appeal widespread.

"Americans as a whole are getting more adventurous," he told *Lake Tahoe News* on tour of the resort's restaurants.

And the ski area known for its seasoned athletes has expanded

its repertoire of seasonings in the kitchen.

“I believe part of the difference (with ski resort food) runs parallel to food service at stadiums,” said Justice, who grew up skiing at the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania.

It used to be stadium food’s reputation rested with hot dogs, chicken tenders, pizza, burgers and fries – which all have a place with “a captive audience” associated with sporting events.



Shrimp and grits represents the Southern flare at Sierra.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

“Today, it’s sushi,” he said. “Anything you want is there. We’re fortunate enough to see that progression.”

Justice would even like to expand into North African flavors in his offerings and beef up the Indian cuisine in the near future.

“Those spices are so different,” he said.

Beyond the flavor, much can be said for style at the Baja Grill. Also in respect to the Bay Area, Justice’s team will summon the Mission-style burrito named after the renowned Mexican food district in The City.

The snow beach outpost at the West Bowl section is extremely popular with the afternoon crowd. Also from the west side, street tacos will round out the menu there by transporting a hungry patron to Mexico. For veggie lovers, Sierra has added a chili relleno burrito there.



Old standbys like chicken tenders and burgers, albeit the latter is grass fed, are still available at Sierra. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Carnivores can order Mama’s mainstay item at the base to start the day – the breakfast “bro-rito,” which is heavy with carnitas, scrambled eggs, shredded cheese and tater tots wrapped in a tortilla. The all-in-one meal satisfies the no-plate-necessary guest – another trend Justice has noticed.

Justice’s staff has even brought a new flair to the

mysteriously popular chicken and waffles dish at Mama's. The fried chicken, albeit doused with syrup, comes with a slightly healthy hint of kale slaw.

For other breakfast offerings, the shrimp and grits will take your taste buds away as a unique, New Orleans-inspired dish that will prompt anyone to give up cereal and oatmeal.

Even the presentation matches, if not exceeds, most lake-level restaurants.

"Presentation is all a part of the food. People eat with their eyes," Justice said.

Indeed, this foodie who admits to cooking at home is a visionary and passes that on to the 120 employees he manages. The team at Mama's on the first floor of the main lodge is usually teeming and bustling with skiers and boarders trying to prepare and fill up for a hardy day on the slopes.

"Teamwork – you can accomplish so much firing on all cylinders," he said.

Most of the food venues are at the base area, giving those who are not skiing or snowboarding an opportunity to eat well, too. Dishes are reasonably priced, and portions ample.



Craft beer is what most people choose to drink at Sierra. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The beverage brigade

Sierra's servings don't just translate to the food. Pairing food with a beverage is all part of the experience.

Forget your grandmother's Folgers. Skiers and boarders can jumpstart the day with a "pour over" coffee blend handcrafted by barista Eric Sorensen. Just smell the Ethiopia Harrar Golecha Natural eight feet away, and your taste buds will want to follow.

Even coffee addicts who junk up their mugs won't want to do that. Drinking it black helps to pick up the mere hints of blueberry.

At the Sierra Pub by midday, it's hard to find a barstool empty on a busy ski day – with riders lined up for rounds of craft beers.

By the end of the day, even visitors streaming into Tahoe up Highway 50 may want to stop in to get a box dinner for those seeking convenience before landing in town. Sierra understands this and aims to accommodate that at Solstice. Bottles of wine

with the Sierra label are available, too – a Zinfandel blend resort staff made with the help of Madroña Vineyards.

Beer release to benefit fire academy scholarship fund

South Lake Brewing Company is hosting a release party for Fog-Nozzle IPA on Jan. 5.

This is an opportunity to honor the firefighters who protect the area. The goal is to bring attention to wildfire protection basinwide and raise money for the Lake Tahoe Basin Fire Academy scholarship fund.

The night starts out with music from former firefighter Kevin Marcy.

Feel like you can firefight better than the pros? Compete against the pros in a water bucket brigade.

Doors open at 5pm, show starts at 6pm for this free for all ages event.

South Tahoe Brewing Company is located at 1920 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

LTCC receives grant for culinary apprentice programs

Lake Tahoe Community College is one of a handful of educational providers in the state to win a \$500,000 grant from the California Apprenticeship Initiative (CAI) to help build and launch culinary pre-apprenticeship programs in South Lake Tahoe.

The money will be used to help better prepare South Lake Tahoe's workforce and to improve local residents' ability to secure in-demand jobs and progress to higher-wage careers in the Tahoe basin.

LTCC will receive \$500,000 over two years to create and implement pre-apprenticeship programming, including a heavy focus on expanding the culinary and transition offerings of the ADVANCE network and career center, which is housed at the college.

The CAI grant will provide the foundation for LTCC's long-term plan to launch the Tahoe Culinary Academy, a registered apprenticeship program aligned to American Culinary Federation (ACF) standards.

A hospitality management program will be the next program developed at the college, also based upon the apprenticeship model. The proposed Hospitality Management program will be designed in alignment with the American Hotel and Lodging Association standards.

K's Kitchen: Hummus that isn't ordinary

By Kathryn Reed

Hummus always seems like a safe bet as an appetizer. The problem I have, though, is that so many store bought ones taste bland.

This one is not bland. In fact, it has a bit of a kick. That can be adjusted by altering the seasoning, the cayenne in particular. The amounts listed are what I found to work well. But if you are not sure, start with less and then adjust to your liking.

The other good thing with hummus is that it can be made ahead of time. It's also something that can be served any time of year.



Spicy Hummus

2 C garbanzo beans/chick peas, drained

2 T olive oil

2 T lemon juice

2 tsp parsley

Roasted red peppers to taste (4 or so out of a jar)

$\frac{1}{2}$ medium onion, rough chop

4 cloves garlic

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cayenne pepper

1 tsp salt

2 T tahini

1 tsp cumin

1 tsp oregano

Combine all the ingredients in a food processor or blender.

K's Kitchen: Polenta with mushroom ragout

By Kathryn Reed

I could have this dish every week. It satisfied my need for comfort food on a cold night and as well as what seems to be a never-ending mushroom craving.

The trick to polenta is you can't leave the kitchen. It takes constant stirring.

The rest of the dish is pretty straight forward and easy. That is the wonderful thing; people will think you spent more time in the kitchen than you really did.

It's a hearty concoction. For me, it was a meal unto itself.



Polenta with Mushroom Ragout

$\frac{1}{4}$ C olive oil

$1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds sliced cremini or baby portabella mushrooms

1 C chopped shallots

2 T tomato paste

1 T fresh thyme

$\frac{1}{4}$ C dry white wine

$1\frac{1}{2}$ C vegetable broth

1 tsp kosher salt, divided

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp pepper

$\frac{1}{4}$ C unsalted butter

$\frac{1}{4}$ C flat leaf parsley, chopped and divided

1 C polenta

2 C mixed cheddar/Monterey jack cheese

Heat a large deep frying pan over medium-high heat until a drop of water dances across its surface. Add oil and mushrooms. Cook about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and stir in shallots. Cook until mushrooms have released their

liquid and shallots are tender. Stir in tomato paste and thyme. Stir in wine, and cook until it's mostly evaporated.

Add broth, half teaspoon salt, and pepper. Simmer until sauce thickens and mushrooms are tender. Remove from heat and stir in butter and 2 tablespoons parsley.

Cook polenta according to directions. Remove from heat and add cheese.

Divide polenta into four bowls, then top with mushroom mixture, garnish with remaining parsley.

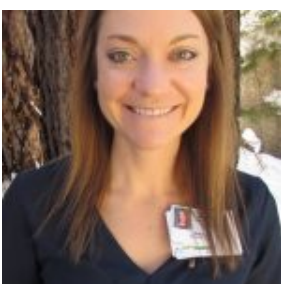
Ways to make healthy eating less of a chore

By Jessica Keys

The conversations and attitudes we have with children about food can be linked to their eating habits. Use these new sayings developed by childhood obesity researchers to help guide children in a healthier direction during the holidays and beyond:

Old: *Clean your plate.*

New: *Eat when you're hungry, stop when you're full.*



Jessica Keys

Forcing children to clean their plates can teach them to pair healthy dishes with anger and frustration. This frustration can evolve into guilt later in life when food is left on the plate and encourage overeating. Our bodies come equipped with natural systems to regulate food intake: hunger and fullness. Instead of overriding these innate signals with pressure to clean the plate, encourage kids to listen to their bodies and stop eating when they're satisfied.

Old: *Closely monitor each morsel.*

New: *Offer more healthful options.*

Instead of focusing on what not to eat, give your kids ample opportunities to make good choices. Research shows the more fruits and vegetables you offer, the more kids will consume them. New options can take time; children might need to try a new food 15 times before accepting or learning to love it.

Old: *Ban kids from the kitchen.*

New: *Involve everyone in healthy meals.*

Preparing meals as a family can be fun, and kids will feel invested in healthy choices. As you dream up new ways to cook veggies, talk about how delicious they taste and how strong and smart their nutrients can make you. Encourage your children to get creative! If they help make the meal, they're more likely to eat it.

Old: *Skip dessert.*

New: *Balance "sometimes" foods with healthier choices.*

Calling concentrated sweets like cupcakes and cookies "sometimes" foods can help you keep them in their proper place. When your kids face choices at events, especially during the holidays, teach them to balance their plates with

these “sometimes” foods as well as several nutritious options. Try baked apples or other fruit options for after dinner nutrition and satisfaction.

Old: *Nag kids about their weight.*

New: *Model healthy, positive habits.*

Set an example by eating more fruits and veggies yourself. A recent study by Australian researchers found this has a powerful influence on children’s eating habits. Model other healthy lifestyle habits, too: Stay active, get adequate sleep, and maintain a positive relationship with food and your body.

Jessica Keys is a registered dietitian at Barton Health.

Squaw Valley creating on-mountain dining experience to match its legendary terrain



Dining with a view is what the Terrace at the top of the Squaw's tram is all about. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – November skiing is always something to be thankful for in the Sierra because Mother Nature seems to be so fickle in the fall.

Out of the last five years, this is the most terrain Squaw Valley has had open this time of year. It's obvious there has been a ton of natural snow coming down based on what is in the trees and the rocky chutes. Snowmaking guns are keeping the more popular routes open so they don't get skied off in between storms, and until there is a solid base.



All the runs off Shirley Lake are open. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Over the weekend it was a bit like spring skiing with the conditions being slick in the morning and softening up as the day progressed.

While the mountain isn't open top-to-bottom just yet, there is a mix of terrain available to satisfy all ability levels. Eleven lifts give access to 39 trails and 16 groomed runs. Tracks could be seen where skiers went off-piste. A small terrain park is open, too.



Squaw Valley's rugged terrain is complemented by picturesque views of Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

High Camp, at the top of the tram, is going through a \$1.8 million renovation that is expected to be finished by Christmas week. The last time any of the facilities here were updated was in 1991 – and it was showing in wear and dated offerings.

The Marketplace is open. This is where people can get grab-and-go food items – some healthy, some not as much. Courtney, the pastry chef, makes sweets fresh on a daily basis. Organic items are available, as well as edibles for vegetarians and those with wheat allergies. Gloves and goggles – items people may have left in the car or condo – may be purchased there as well.

This area used to be a larger retail area.



The Marketplace at High Camp offers prepackaged food, espresso and some retail.
Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

One level below is a space that had been underutilized, with few people knowing there was retail there. On Saturday it was packed with people eating food they had bought upstairs or had brought from home. Traditional tables are mixed in with more relaxing sofas. There's also a small alcove for little kids to play in.

Behind this area is the Terrace Buffet and Bar with its

expansive views down to the village and out to Lake Tahoe. The multitude of windows beckons photo opportunities. The 180-degree seating – which is still in pieces – is the most scenic dining spot on the mountain.



Comfortable seating has been added as a place to chill or eat without being in a restaurant. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Gone are the half booths. In their place will be round tables near the windows, with seating for four and two at rectangular tables. The old green carpet is gone. The flooring is now shades of brown.

The wood has been refinished to the point it looks new. A couple of the old brass railings have been made to look antique-ish.



Lance Crafts is in charge of the entire High Camp lodge. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

The bar is the focal point. With it dropping down, the bartenders and their bottles don't impede the view. Lance Crafts, manager of High Camp, said the smoked old fashioned is something to experience.

The portable buffet stations will offer a variety of food choices – some hot, some cold.

Chef Andrew Gregory, who is in his second year at Squaw, oversees the various kitchens. He said the renovation of the entire High Camp operation is energizing him as well as his team.



Chef Andrew Gregory wants to do more than provide skiers and snowboarders with delicious food. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“We are going to elevate the food and the service,” Gregory told *Lake Tahoe News*.

While burgers remain one of the most popular entrees, don’t expect only traditional ski resort grub. Gregory was raving about a pappardelle pasta dish as well as the Sierra cassoulet and the authentic po’ boy sandwich.



The granite bar at the Granite Bistro looks out onto the pool area. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Nearby is the Granite Bistro, which replaces the poolside restaurant. The footprint is the same – as is the location – but the interior will make it look like it's been built from scratch. This dining/drinking spot will be the last to come on board. It's been gutted pretty much to its foundation and supporting beams.

The old wood bar has been replaced with granite. A stack of granite tabletops is one corner. This gray motif matches perfectly to what's out the windows – Squaw's rugged mountains and the Granite Chief Wilderness Area.

The food here will be served more family style, and the space allows for people to bring in their own food. The smoked pheasant soup is returning and is recommended. This is where the burgers are, as well a salmon, steak, charcuterie and cheese boards.



The Granite Bistro should be open by Christmas. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Two chairlifts will be installed to bring ambiance and a unique place for people sit and eat.

However, cooking just for skiers or those sightseeing via the tram isn't enough for everyone.

"The chef and I are pushing for nighttime dinners. It's such a magical, unique place," Crafts told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Having on-mountain evening dinners would elevate Squaw's dining experiences to a level that is rare for Tahoe area ski resorts. Most close the doors when the lifts stop running. CEO Andy Wirth hinted their dream might be realized.