

# Lab Work

Three top Atlanta chefs are making culinary chemistry.

| By Karina Timmel | Photography by Jamie Hopper |

At the forefront of the movement that's reinventing the culinary arts, ***Modernist Cuisine: The Art and Science of Cooking*** is the ultimate guide for anyone passionate about the art and science of cooking. The almost 2,500-page volume of five stunning books with state-of-the-art, original photography was compiled by scientists, inventors and accomplished cooks, including ex-Microsoft guru and Master French Chef Nathan Myhrvold. Also called "molecular gastronomy," the featured methods make chefs of all levels view cooking and eating in a whole new light.

We're talking freeze-drying olive oil that melts when it hits your tongue, cooking an egg into a custard consistency and infusing liquid smoke into noodles. Recently featured on *Top Chef*, the method is catching on in Atlanta. Here are three notable chefs who are plating with masticating magic.

\$625, *Modernist Cuisine: The Art & Science of Cooking* by Nathan Myhrvold, Chris Young and Maxime Bilet. Find it at Sur La Table stores in Atlanta. Be forewarned: There may be a waitlist.



**Jared Lee,**  
executive chef,  
HD1

Lee was first introduced to modernist techniques in 2006 when he was in the kitchen with *Top Chef* finalist Mike Isabella at Kyma. Later, he began cooking with the method again as the understudy of another *Top Chef*, Richard Blais, who opened HD1 and Flip Burger. "It's been great to work with chefs

who really understand the method—it's not about showing off your culinary expertise, it's about elevating the dish," says Lee.

Lee enjoys flipping through *Modernist Cuisine* because it brings the reader back to the most basic techniques on a molecular level. "The book breaks down a pot of boiling water and explains the importance of measuring an exact amount of water to cook 'x' amount of pasta so that it tastes just right," he says.

The modernist dish he's most proud of on HD1's menu is the veggie hotdog. Lee explains that this involves mixing all the spices found in hotdog seasoning (garlic, onion, paprika and more) with water and reducing it down to syrup. Carrots (peeled into a hotdog shape) are then vacuum-sealed in a bag with the liquid and placed into a 52.5-degree Celsius water bath for an hour and a half. "It looks and tastes like a hotdog," he notes, "but you still get some of that snap of a carrot." 664 N. Highland Ave., 404.815.1127, [hd1restaurant.com](http://hd1restaurant.com)

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Falvo has always liked chemistry. Which is why, though inspired by other master chefs like Ferran Adrià (adapted recipes of his are featured

**Janine Falvo,**  
executive chef,  
Briza Restaurant

in *Modernist Cuisine*) of world-renowned El Builli, she's mostly self-taught. "I am drawn to cutting-edge methods and find it fascinating to develop new textures with food," Falvo says. "Once I had a little taste of modernist cuisine, I kept going!"

At Briza in Midtown, she utilizes liquid nitrogen and flavored salts to manipulate taste, temperature and texture. "Recently, we tried 'shattered' raspberry in a new cocktail. The frozen, broken bits keep the drink cool and doesn't water it down like ice would," Falvo says.

Another favorite method of hers employs tapioca maltodextrin, a fat-absorbing powder, to create dishes like bacon-coated oysters. For this imaginative plate, Falvo pours bacon fat into the powder, which doesn't dissolve and remains a dust. "We then deep-fry the oysters and toss it in the bacon powder," Falvo says. She mimics the same technique with pork belly and Chinese oyster sauce, too. 866 W. Peachtree St. NW, 678.412.2402, [brizarestaurant.com](http://brizarestaurant.com)

**David Andrew Carson,**  
chef de cuisine of Bacchanalia  
and Quinones at Bacchanalia

Carson has read most of the 2,500 pages in his copy of *Modernist Cuisine*. "I believe it makes chefs question the way they approach their use of ingredients and equipment," Carson says.

His experience with the modern technique has mostly taken shape in the kitchens at Bacchanalia, while working with equipment such as immersion circulators, cryovac machines, dehydrators, pacojets and anti-griddles. "The cuisine at Bacchanalia has always had a clean identity as much as it is approachable and refined. We simply incorporate many tools and ingredients to get there."

You'll find these molecular gastronomy techniques mostly in his accents or garnishes. "The use of hydrocolloids, food starches and gums can be very useful to show the versatility of products in a composed dish," Carson says. For example, to incorporate a hint of marine-like flavor in a plate of wild foraged snails composed with traditional flavors including lemon, parsley, garlic and butter, Carson serves a light froth of phytoplankton bubbles as a garnish using soy lecithin. Of course, we don't know what that means, but it sounds delish. 1198 Howell Mill Road, 404.365.0410, [starprovisions.com](http://starprovisions.com)



As much as they would all love to work with centrifuges, freeze dryers, gastrovacs and rotary evaporators every day, it's not always practical for the food the chefs want to serve. "The most important thing one can take away from *Modernist Cuisine* is the amount of food-science history and knowledge about real products and cooking techniques. I believe it is the most important book of our time," Carson says. ▀