OLD-FASHIONED FLOWERS in the Southern Appalachians

"There's satisfaction in making something as beautiful as it can be, and then letting it go."
-- ALAN HETZEL, THE DAHLIA KING

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A Clean Flavor

When rabbit tenderloin lies in front of you on a fine ceramic plate, don't stick your nose in the air.
Taste it.

In 2010, rabbits started popping up on restaurant menus in New York and California. Since then, people have taught classes on how to properly slaughter and cook the animal, fans have made the hare its own website—therabbitrevolution.com—to promote the "ideal animal" meat, and rabbit farms have popped up across the nation to supply chefs with rabbit meat.

"The right meat at the right time," The New York Times calls it.

In Chapel Hill, Executive Chef Jimmy Reale was already familiar with the animal's succulent taste before the recent hype. For years, he prepared marinated rabbit loin for the winter menu at Carolina Crossroads Restaurant and Bar at The Carolina Inn. At times, he uses rabbit in a pupusa—a traditional Spanish dish made of handcrafted tortillas—and stuffs the tortilla with the rabbit, cheese, and peppers. He tops the pupusa with a green chili sauce.

But he must be careful.

"People are scared of it," he says.
He's never had the problem one restaurant in Brooklyn, New York, had when customers were so upset to see rabbits on the menu, they walked out.

Sometimes, Reale has as many as 10 customers a night who order the marinated rabbit loin. Other nights, the rabbit has no fans.

Reale thinks people are afraid to order the rabbit because they think it won't taste good.

But that's not the case.
Reale marinates the loin with orange zest, roasts it with rosemary and thyme, and serves it with spinach and tomatoes. He tosses in some fregola sarda, a hand-rolled Sicilian pasta shaped like peas, for added texture.

"The flavor is just so clean," he says.
— Sarah Perry

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