

## Vinaigrettes Switch Courses, Going Savory and Sweet

By ROZANNE GOLD

**C**HEFS around the country are shaking up preconceived ideas of what vinaigrettes are and how they can be used. Tom Colicchio has taken to braising fish in vinaigrette. Thomas Keller of French Laundry and Per Se anoints pan-roasted duck with an emulsion of olive oil and 50-year-old sherry vinegar. Michael Moorhouse, the pastry chef at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, is pouring warm orange vinaigrette on figs.

No longer just for salads or summery meals, these newfangled dressings are more like "quick sauces," many of which can be replicated at home. Chefs rely on vinaigrettes because today's carb-, calorie- and fat-obsessed customers demand "lightness" without necessarily knowing what it means.

"Because of all the health concerns, many people are ordering their sauces on the side, so vinaigrettes will likely become the way I'm going to finish my dishes," Gray Kunz of Café Gray said.

As Eric Ripert, at Le Bernardin, put it, "Vinaigrettes give the illusion of lightness."

"Using vinaigrettes to emulsify sauces adds sparkle to my food," said Dan Barber, executive chef of Blue Hill at Stone Barns, who whisks vinaigrettes, instead of butter or cream, into his hot stocks to thicken them. "They add vibrancy and clarity."

At Hamersley's Bistro in Boston, where seared scallops and glazed sweetbreads are doused with warm bacon and garlic vinaigrette, almost one-third of the chef's fall menu features vinaigrettes: some hot, some cold.

Shea Gallante has given this category of revved up vinaigrettes a name: vins. At Cru, where he is executive chef, smoked pear and sesame vin is brushed on grilled pancetta; blue fin tuna is dressed with red apple vin (made from red currant purée, green apple juice and porcini oil), and wolffish with tripe, apple and cucumber is served in a pool of warm fennel vin. When I was a young chef, vinaigrette was nothing more than olive oil, vinegar or lemon juice, and a hit of dry mustard to emulsify these two antagonistic liquids. But today the trend is toward more ingredients, which are increasingly exotic.

At Café Gray roast organic duckling with quince, endive and walnut vinaigrette includes aromatic vinegar from a monastery in upstate New York. I have vowed to keep his source secret, a monk's recipe from the 1200's, as only five gallons of the batch are left. The vinegar is at once winy and spicy with notes of clove and allspice, and it stitches together sweet and tart flavors.

The mysteriously named Minus 8 vinegar has a slightly larger following among chefs. It is made in Canada in the style of ice wine from the juice extracted from several varieties of grapes picked at minus 8 degrees Celsius (18 degrees Fahrenheit). Still frozen when crushed, the grapes expel water as bits of ice; the remaining juice is turned into sweet wine and the wine into a concentrated, Madeira-like vinegar. Mr. Colicchio, Mr. Ripert, Mr. Keller, Bill Yosses and Laurent Tourondel all use it.

David Myers at Sona in Los Angeles poaches prime beef tenderloin with Indonesian long pepper in a licorice root and dried cherry broth that gets emulsified into a vinaigrette with Minus 8 vinegar and Ardoino olive oil.

But even unconventional vinaigrettes can be simple. Michel Nischan, the former chef at Heartbeat at the W Hotel and author of the cookbook "Taste Pure and Simple," has compounded a three-ingredient dressing: three cups of apple cider reduced to a third of a cup, one-quarter cup of apple cider vinegar and one-half cup extra virgin olive oil blended for two minutes. The result, as sweet and crisp as an apple, is dreamy spooned over turkey leftovers. It's not bad on a salad, either.

