



BEYOND CEVICHE

A growing rank of talented local chefs, such as Stubborn Seed's Jeremy Ford, are creating a bona fide Miami food scene

Text by SHAYNE BENOWITZ

At Stubborn Seed, chef Jeremy Ford's new South Beach restaurant, a large picture window, framed by a wall of vertical white subway tile, offers a portal to the kitchen where diners can glimpse the athletic ballet required to prepare Ford's artfully plated, thoughtfully sourced chef's tasting menu.

With a *Top Chef* Season 13 win under his belt and a stint as chef de cuisine at Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Matador Room at the Miami Beach Edition hotel, Stubborn Seed is Ford's first foray as chef-partner. In his new role, he's relishing the intimacy and immediacy of being at his 74-seat restaurant after working the volume-driven kitchen at Matador Room. "It's just us and the guys here cooking every day," Ford says. "It's a great place to be. I've never been so happy to come in and get my ass kicked as much as I do."

A native of Jacksonville, Florida, Ford, 32, is part of the growing rank of local chefs turning Miami's culinary scene on its head. "It's completely different than when I came down here 10 years ago. A lot of local heroes have made their mark," says Ford of the emergence of a legit Miami food culture. This new class of homegrown and local talent includes chefs Brad Kilgore, Giorgio Rapicavoli, José Mendin, Eileen Andrade, and Niven Patel. Not only are they building empires with multiple restaurant concepts, they're also shaping the identity of Miami's burgeoning neighborhoods, like Wynwood and South Beach's Sunset Harbour, by drawing a devoted local fan base.

In the kitchen, Ford is impossible to miss, with a tall, athletic build, shaved head, and sleeve of tattoos. He and his longtime chef de cuisine, Joe Mizzoni, are awheel in constant motion as they conduct their kitchen staff through a symphony of inventive plates, like the smoked foie gras on grilled sourdough with aged sherry vinegar, quince-paste ravioli, and a dusting of microplaned Marcona almonds soaked in Sambuca. This, delivered to the table beneath a glass dome to release the smoke for an olfactory hit and a dramatic presentation.

Some of his more surprising ingredients include Egyptian star flowers, mingling with quail egg atop a bed of caviar in his warm celery root and crackling maitake mushroom dish; and Monterey Bay sea grapes, for a briny splash of the ocean, when served with kajiki fish flown in daily from Hawaii.

Ford also has an affection for more straightforward ingredients: the humble carrot, making multiple cameos. "Teaching someone how to properly glaze a carrot is actually a lot harder than you think," he says with a laugh. Heirloom carrots are even the centerpiece of a mural on his kitchen wall, framed by radishes and fish bones.

He insists that Stubborn Seed's product-driven, meticulously plated dishes are not overly precious. "It's really not that complicated. We take our time making sure all of the components are flavorful and they look as good as they should on the plate, but it's not a molecular-style kitchen at all."

He says his time under Vongerichten was particularly influential in honing his skills for contrasting and balancing flavors, as well as the use of acids and, specifically, dried chilies, an ingredient found in Stubborn Seed's menu almost from start to finish. There's the garbanzo chili dip served with warm bread, Thai chili mignonette, Fresno chili oil, pickled chili, and fermented green chili buttermilk.

"Jean-Georges was a game changer. It was probably the smartest career move. His style of food is going to be part of my repertoire for the rest of my life," Ford says. "And we use a lot of chili, that's for damn sure."



Chef Jeremy Ford (top left) has developed a devoted local fan base with creative dishes including slow-cooked snapper (right)

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FORD'S MIAMI EATS

Flanigan's Seafood Bar and Grill

"I love Flanigan's for simple stuff with the family. It's somewhere I take my daughter, and she loves the ribs." 2721 Bird Ave., Coconut Grove & various locations (305-446-1114; flanigans.net)

Momi Ramen

"I go for noodles in Brickell with the boys. They've got a great kimchee ramen. I'm actually craving it right now." 5 SW 11th St., Miami (786-391-2392; momiramen.com)

Pubbelly Sushi

"Pubbelly spots are always cool. I get their crab roll; that thing's addictive." 1424 20th St., Miami Beach & various locations (305-531-9282; pubbellysushi.us)

Tacology

"This is a new spot at Brickell City Centre. I always get their ceviche made to order." 701 S. Miami Ave., Miami (786-347-5368; tacology.us)

Matador Room

"I already miss the chipotle chicken tacos with grilled jalapeño salsa." 2901 Collins Ave., Miami Beach (786-257-4600; matadorroom.com)

