

THE WORLD IS AN AMASS

STORY *by* ANDREA PETRINI
PHOTOGRAPHY *by* TIM SPREADBURY



19 August, 12.32 pm. A dispatch from Matt Orlando's email address (it could be the personal or work account, or probably both) with the following message: "Andrea...I don't know exactly what you had in mind for next Friday, but I must tell you that the time I have available is quite limited. I want to do this article together with you because you were the first person, years ago, to talk about me (do you remember our trip to Mexico?) but I also have to think about the restaurant and my team. I have organised an appointment at the warehouse of one of my seafood suppliers at 6 am. He is very excited about meeting you, there will be loads of fish and cool stuff to rifle through. Afterwards I thought we could go and have a coffee at Sweet Treat in Christianshavn before coming back to the restaurant. There are loads of places where I would like to take you, like Falafel in Christiania and maybe in the old naval workshop next to Amass, but I don't think I'll have time before Sunday or Monday or even Tuesday after the MAD Festival."

You can take Matt Orlando at his word, for he is a mix of the best of Anglo-American pragmatism with Scandinavian precision. I had forgotten what a fascinating character he is, with that toothpaste advertisement smile and crinkled brow, that genuine good will to tackle problems and find solutions. I remember him clearly from a few years ago with his frayed shorts and perfectly ironed t-shirt during our circumnavigation of Mexico. It was 2007, and I was following René Redzepi, beardless and

almost unknown at that time, who was an honoured guest in Yucatan (a noble villa anchored in the scorching beach sand, exotic fruit and spices in endless bottles of fruit juice and cold beers (that were never enough) that took us through to dawn while solving the world's problems). It was the young American's final goodbye to the European ranks, a leave-taking of his Danish mentor and a return to his native soil. I kept following him from the Old World, noting the salient stages of this extraordinarily talented youngster with his head firmly on his shoulders. In his early thirties, he was finally ready to use his experiences to make the great leap.

"I left Noma for home with something already in the wind. Working at the Gramercy Tavern in New York was a big challenge, but you know how things go. First they promise you the earth and sea but when you get to the crunch you realise that your margins to move are actually quite limited. Gramercy, historic restaurant of Manhattan, was interested in numbers, lots of covers. I saw René when he was in town; we always kept in touch. He was happy when I told him on the phone that I had an appointment with Thomas Keller and if it went well, I was going to work at Per Se. It was one of those things you don't forget as long as you live. I found myself one day in the restaurant kitchen, preparing a tasting menu at lunch with various dishes only for Thomas. I was petrified and felt like that throughout the marathon service, when finally Keller said: 'Get ready,



"CALM, PLACID, EVEN TOO REASONABLE, MATT, HAS HIDDEN DEPTHS"



you've got the job'. He added: 'You are the only one, in the history of my company who has earned the role of head chef without climbing the usual ranks. Get ready, because the brigade will not forgive you for this. They will make you spit blood.'

As the saying goes, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.. When, two years later, Matt made the reverse journey, depositing his suitcase once again on Noma's doorstep, it was not so much a re-entry home as a confirmation of a lifestyle choice. "Copenhagen is not New York. It's a small community; our relationship with nature is strong. The seeds planted at Noma have grown and borne their fruit. In the city we work closely with many growers whose products influence and open new perspectives in our kitchens." It was also the confirmation of a friendship that goes well beyond the perimeter of the restaurant.

René says: "More than the best lieutenant who has ever been through Noma, Matt is almost a soulmate. He is family, like everyone who has worked at Noma and who has become part of the project, growing with us, getting a family together; having children. Now it's their turn and they

are beginning to open their own restaurants, like Matt, Sam Nutter and Victor Wagman with the new Bror."

Orlando confessed three years ago that he was just waiting for the right moment. He was looking around, seeking the ideal location, the place that gets your heart racing at first sight. We all know that sometimes, by seeking the needle in a haystack, you can miss the beam that's holding the whole barn up, and the place where Matt finally opened Amass on 17 July 2013 was in fact right in front of his eyes. He had a good excuse for missing it the first time around. He had a leg out of action at MAD (the unique annual symposium organised by René Redzepi's team) last year, and greeted the festival goers leaning on his crutches. He was not exactly mobile and didn't perhaps even look that hard at the building just a few hundred metres from the MAD pavilion where the staff had stocked boxes and cartons of beer and wine to refuel the conference participants at lunchtime.

"Matt, your place doesn't necessarily need to be in the centre of Copenhagen," was the advice he got then, with a hint to look at what was under his nose. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since. I don't remember an

opening that was as talked about as the one for Amass. Maybe about ten years ago for the opening of Grant Achatz's Alinea in Chicago, at the dawn of the Netosphere, when it was enough to post press releases to go viral around the world. This time the announcement that Redzepi's alter ego was going out on his own was enough to gather a landslide of articles and an overflow of requests for interviews for Amass, before the menu had even been put up outside the restaurant. Fortunately, René did not declare to eater.com what he had confessed to me at the end of summer: "It's not really stuff you want to spread around because my role is minimal, more than anything symbolic, but to help him get Amass – the project of his life – together I also put in some money."

When I arrive, it's after the early bird call to his seafood supplier Jarvo on the city outskirts ("he is an ex-chef who had enough of the kitchen and works only with small fisherman. Fish, molluscs and seafood come principally from the region of Skåne in Sweden. The haul is essential minimalist – two or three crates of produce – and is placed at auction in the afternoon. He has the best of the best. Our menu changes every day, partially or totally on the basis of what Jarvo finds and brings home"). Amass stands at the end of a street with a stretch of no man's land on one side and a sunny field on the other, like an open book.

The entrance is via stairs. At sunset, the large windows that frame the kitchen are the first thing you notice, a slice of openness; a certificate of total transparency. At the end of the stairs, ("we put candles on them for effect") when you enter the main doors, you have a perspective of the whole room from on high.

The retina records the scene in a flash: the main dining room with its multifaceted expanse of space, the open kitchen sitting lengthwise in a corner, the tables like points in a constellation immersed in the industrial space. In the back on the right there is the bar, location of the ritual aperitif, but also of the pre-service briefing ("watch out, Pascal Barbot is at lunch today with Bertrand Grébaut's girlfriend and Andrea Campos, Alex Atala's assistant. This evening Petrini is dining with his son and there is also Ms Morelli with Joe Warwick"). On the other side of the immense space is a long narrow table for the walk-ins.

For who, Matt?

"For those who come in without a booking. Far too often restaurants are conceptualised from the point of view of the cook and not the client. When you come to Amass, or you go somewhere else and you have booked, you arrive with a certain idea. You are prepared to abandon yourself to the experience. When you arrive unexpectedly, you want to eat differently, less stuff and quicker, without lots of dishes. The fact that you're on a stool, and not a chair, changes your way of thinking about the place; it radically changes your perception."

What I feel is a great mouthful of freedom. There are those who arrive as if they were going to Milan's Scala theatre. There are those who arrive in their designer jeans. Pontus, the corpulent ex-sommelier from Noma arrives in nudist-like short shorts and flip flops with his friends. There is even



the slim silhouette of Fredrik Berselius, the Swedish cook from Aska who has Brooklyn and Manhattan all abuzz.

I even see the Finn, Sasu Laukkonen from *Chef & Sommelier*, a few steps from a fire in the garden where tobacco fiends and clubbers faithful to the Pall Mall slogan 'wherever particular people congregate' make up a Greek chorus for the dramaturgy of the evening.

Ahh...I was forgetting there was also the Mexican Sergio Meza, easy to recognise with his shaggy Angela Davis mane. He has arranged for leave from his employer, the Chilean Rodolfo Guzmán of Boragó, to resume his European travels after MAD ("a year in Belgium at Kobe is an experience you don't easily forget"). Camera slung around his neck, he moves between the floor and the kitchen, and announces, before the person who is charged with the job, what the most important dishes to taste are. He also makes the presentations: "Do you already know Emile, Matt's second-in-charge? He is a prodigy; for me he is the best chef today in CPH". Only Lisa



Abend, the Time Magazine reporter, is missing. She spent a week in Matt Orlando's shadow while writing a piece for the annals of international journalism on the arrival of Amass onto the world stage.

If one was looking to find a real jewel, the detail that makes all the difference could be the cloakroom in the lift ("everyone presses the button and helps themselves"). Or perhaps it is what announces itself, at first sight, as the dish of the year.

The tastiest? Maybe yes and maybe no, but it is surely the most demented, the most complicated. It shows the absolute dedication of Matt Orlando to a 100% personal concept of cooking. It's a *mille-feuille* of masochistic design, made of 140 chicken skins, compressed one on top of another, layer on layer. It's a rectangular entrée; a plate between the dark *Tête de Veau* (better than *An American in Paris* by Vincente Minnelli, Matt has mastered Frenchy fundamentals like few have) and still-crunchy *nervetti milanesi* (a dish of beef tendons); a spectacular

intermission that bounces between the crunchiness of fresh, spicy, grilled almonds. It's to die for, Oscar winning stuff that would put Carlo Cracco on his knees, and he is one who knows these unclassifiable twists.

You may not have noticed, but Orlando has just got you seated and chattering for his team. If he had time to check, looking out from the open pass in his clogs, he would see the impact on his audience of those fermented potato *galette* stuffed with kale and Jerusalem artichoke that open the dance. We wolf them down as morsels. "Go away, please. Forget about us and don't bring them back," pleads Joe Warwick, who at the beginning of the meal is already regretting his t-shirt with a tight elastic waistband.

Orlando's cooking is lightness made pure. Vegetable pairings, contrasts of acidity, natural fermentation and craggy wildness. He sends out wondrous, enormous, disturbingly intense yellow mushrooms that look like the shells of Coquilles Saint-Jacques. He doesn't hesitate to place them at the



beginning of the meal together with St John's Wort paired with beans, sea asparagus and fresh cream, as if they were green *macarons*. The art of dramatic dialogue was never about mere squabbles but the emphasis in discourse, intentionally seductive with variations of intensity that hit the palate for their complexity and apparent simplicity.

Take the calamari with basil and green beans. The saltiness seems untouchable next to the textural sweetness of the molluscs and strong crunchiness of the beans. An impossible conversation you say? And yet it is made real by the chlorophyll impact of the blanched vegetables and a mussel mousse that subtly enhances their fundamental accord.



Don't wake the sleeping dog. Here in Amass I am not telling you word for word how many feathers the chicken in the 31st layer of *millefeuille* had. And neither exactly when the eighth Norwegian micro prawn buried under a layer of foie gras snow was fished. However, if you want to know where the amazing eggs that they have just served come from, they are from Christine, who I just met before the dinner service at aperitif time: "Christine works in an office with René's mother-in-law. Since she moved to the country with her companion, her two chickens scratching in the garden became legend, and the eggs even more so. They have yolks that are incredibly rich. One day she brought them into the office to try. René's mother-in-law spoke to him about them. Around Easter there is an enormous demand for eggs to be hidden in the garden as part of children's games, and one day Noma found itself suddenly without. Remembering the eggs that he had tasted once at her house, René called Christine and said: 'I need one hundred a day'. Christine replied: 'Give me three months to square it with the health department and then let's talk again'. It's been two years that we have used her eggs at Noma; the client can fry them at the table with herbs. And

now that I have Amass, Christine also supplies me. *Happy Family...*"

If it's a choice between nature and culture, Matt chooses the former. Even if he knows from experience – that ranges from the Fat Duck to Keller through the public sphere of Danish laboratories – the paths that lead from science to a natural approach. And just when I had sworn that I would never again eat meat that has been undercooked at low temperature (as if scientific hi-fi guarantees a low-fi indie spirit) he sends out – with a little smile, to provoke us and prove the opposite – a lamb breast from the garden of delights, cooked *à la pochée* sous vide with white berries, melon, honey cucumber and sea mint. Meat, yes, but it's like walking on clouds. A boiled-not-boiled meat that even Bottura would go crazy over. A dish to unhinge doors. It opens pathways between the animal and the vegetable, upsetting a stale balance of power between protein and vitamins, flavours and aromas, positioning the sea mint in the role of Virgil, a companion to the lamb on its seaward journey that Brittany's Prés Salés can only dream about...

But what should we expect on the other hand from this boy with a face that would not be out of place in a 1950s American film? Calm, placid, even too reasonable, Matt has hidden depths. You need to seek them out in the accompaniments that are never peevish, in the diamond-hard results on the plate. Yet, with Matt, there is rewinding that needs to be done.

Certain dishes need to be rewound to the origin of the product, because what really counts at Amass is the process that becomes work, the labour that is hidden behind the result that is dispensed with in two bites. "I really don't want the dishes to have any hint of doubt, of trial, of the anguish that is part of the creative process underpinning them all." Well, the not very furious Orlando doesn't have to worry. The cooking at Amass is all about freshness, the evidence of complexity. His vibrant sensitivity is also evident. At the end of our guided tour, he pauses beneath the enormous mural that dominates the interior of the restaurant. His voice changes timbre and he recounts the story of it timidly, but without embarrassment: "Why did I get the wall painted? I have always been interested in street art. The two



artists who did it had carte blanche. They could do what they liked. But there was just one condition: there had to be a butterfly and a feather. Since my father died, my mother, who has always been into esoteric stuff, got into parapsychology. One day she said to me: 'Every time you look at feathers and butterflies, your father's spirit will be near'. The artists understood that and executed the idea perfectly. When my mother came over from America for the launch of the restaurant, she entered Amass and saw the mural and burst into tears. And me too." I don't want to finish with a comment about a Wailing Wall, but the story moved me, too. The goosebumps are part of the package and felt throughout the whole menu. Amass is well worth a mass.

Amass Restaurant

Refshalevej, 153
1432 Copenhagen
Danimarca
Tel: +45 4358 4330
www.amassrestaurant.com

Chicken Skin, Burnt Kale and Almond Cream

Day 1

70 chicken skins
500 g almonds (skin on)
750 g filtered water

Layer and stack chicken skins (skins should overlap each other) in a square container (20cm x 20cm x 20cm) until the container is full. Take the stack of chicken skins, seal in a vacuum bag and freeze until solid. Steam at 80°C overnight (approx. 8 hours).

Toast almonds, and while almonds are still hot, blend with 750 g of filtered water in a Vita-prep or a blender. Pour almond/water mixture into a bowl and let sit overnight at room temperature.

Day 2

100 g cream
low acyl gellan gum
20 pieces baby kale
60 g almond oil

Remove chicken skins from steam oven and drain all the rendered fat off. Press with a weight until completely cool.

Strain almond milk from almond/water mix. Add cream to almond milk and weigh mixture. Multiply the weight of the mixture by 0.0012. Weigh out the resulting number in gellan gum. Add gellan gum to the almond mixture and blend thoroughly (the mixture will thicken upon blending). In a saucepan, bring the almond mixture to a boil. Pour the mixture into a container and cool in a refrigerator until cold and set.

While the mixture is cooling, clean all kale and portion into pieces approximately 5 cm in diameter. Take the cooled chicken skins, and slice across the grain in 2 cm thick slices. Set aside.

Take the cooled and set almond mixture, break into pieces and blend in a blender until smooth. Once the mixture is smooth, and with the blender running, slowly add the almond oil into the almond mixture until emulsified. Strain mixture through a fine sieve and season with salt.

To complete the dish

juice of 2 lemons
200 g grapeseed oil
salt

Sauté slices of chicken skin until extremely crispy on both sides. Portion crispy slice of chicken skin as desired. In a sauté pan, add 50 g grapeseed oil and heat until just about smoking. Quickly sauté the kale until they are black around the edges. Take blackened kale and dress with lemon juice and salt. Place crispy chicken skins on plate and season with salt. Add 75 g almond purée between portioned pieces of skin and place dressed kale on top of the chicken skins.





Squid, Green beans, White Currants, Marigold flowers

For the squid

*1 squid (approx. 250 g)
500 g unsalted butter
salt*

Clean the squid, taking care to remove all entrails, cartilage and beak. Cut on one side to open the body up and thoroughly rub clean with a towel. Wrap in plastic and freeze overnight to tenderize. Take frozen squid and defrost in refrigerator. Slice lengthwise in long strips along the body, about 1 cm thick, and refrigerate until ready to use.

Lightly cook squid in warm butter, making sure the butter does not go over 70°C. Remove and season with salt.

For the beans

*20 small green beans
100 ml high-quality olive oil
50 ml sauvignon blanc vinegar
salt*

Blanch green beans in salted water and cool in an ice bath. Dress beans with olive oil, sauvignon blanc vinegar and salt.

To complete the dish

*40 marigold flower petals
32 white currant berries*

Lay the beans on a serving plate and intertwine with squid. Place white currants and marigold petals over squid and beans.



Fava Bean, St. John's Wort and Samphire

For the fava beans

20 fava bean pods
100 g crème fraîche
3 g finely chopped shallots
40 g roughly chopped samphire
500 g cream
75 g yogurt
1 lemon
salt

One day before serving, remove fava beans from pods. Set aside 7 pods worth of fava beans, and reserve the rest. Take the beans from the 7 pods and roughly chop. In a medium bowl, mix cream and yogurt together. Add the chopped beans to the cream and yogurt mixture, and cover the bowl with a kitchen towel. Keep at room temperature overnight.

The following day, remove fava beans from skins and blanch quickly (they should still retain some bite to them). Shock in ice water to stop cooking. Drain beans and chop the fava beans into a medium dice. Take yogurt/cream mixture and strain to remove solids. Refrigerate mixture. Combine chopped fava beans, samphire and 75 g of the yogurt/cream mixture together and season with lemon juice and salt. (The remaining crème fraîche can be used in any other recipe that calls for crème fraîche.)

To complete the dish

16 medium-sized St. John's wort leaves

Place a small spoonful of the mixture between two St. John's wort leaves (akin to filling a sandwich). Repeat until all leaves are used. Place on a flat plate and eat with your hands.

MATT ORLANDO



PETRA® LINEA DEL PANE

+39 0429649110
www.molinoquaglia.com



PANE SOFFICE

crosta liscia, quasi assente
mollica umida, morbida che si scioglie in bocca



CIABATTA

mollica quasi completamente priva
crosta croccante sottile
alveolatura irregolare aperta

CIALDA

crosta friabile
mollica assente



0h IMPASTO
12h RIPOSO

0h

1h

2h

3h

4h



FOCACCIA IN TEGLIA ALLA ROMANA

alveolatura aperta
crosta croccante

GRISSINO ALL'ACQUA

crosta croccante
interno cavo e leggero



PAGNOTTA

crosta croccante
mollica umida e chiusa



TUBI&SERVIZI.IT

L'uomo non ha ancora trovato il modo di fermare il tempo, perché **il tempo è il carburante della vita**. E così è per il pane: i fermenti nel tempo trasformano un impasto di farina, lievito, acqua e sale nei pani della nostra tavola. Lieviti vivi che si nutrono di farina e restituiscono l'energia che tira su il pane: dal cracker secco e sottile alla pagnotta con la crosta dorata e la mollica gustosa e ricca di umidità, passando per il grissino, la ciabatta, il panino morbido, la mantovana e così via. **Il tempo crea la struttura del pane, le consistenze, le diverse umidità, i sapori diversi a seconda dei piatti da accompagnare.** L'uomo non può fermare il tempo, ma il cuoco può controllare i fermenti dell'impasto. **E CON PETRA® USI UNA SOLA FARINA, UN SOLO LIEVITO E UN SOLO IMPASTO PER COSTRUIRE LA TUA LINEA DEL PANE.** Ti serve soltanto un orologio che misuri il tempo e questa linea del pane che ti dice quando bloccare la fermentazione dell'impasto. Da lì in poi saranno le tue idee a dare forma al pane della tua tavola. Facile, economico e buono. Come il vero pane.



dove la farina diventa arte