

TAILORED TASTES

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Like some modernist mad tea party, dining at Sam Mason's debut restaurant, Tailor, in New York City's Soho is a surreal interaction with food that's been artfully sculpted by science. Formerly the pastry chef at chef Wylie Dufresne's progressive downtown eatery, wd-50, Mason is an enthusiast of molecular gastronomy—a culinary movement based on introducing provocative foods by altering the physical properties of the ingredients. This occurs via inventive cooking methods that employ everything from liquid nitrogen to lasers and/or the use of obscure starches and proteins like xanthum gum or agar agar. Mason conceives of dishes like pork belly with miso butterscotch, a terrine of foie gras and peanut butter, or chocolate gnocchi with Brussels sprouts and lime puree. Imaginative pairings, to say the least.

"We're always throwing combinations around and trying things out," Mason divulges. "Sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. It's just trial and error for the most part." Instead of apps, entrees and desserts, the menu is divided between small plates either sweet or salty. The result promotes an esthesia for unconventional flavors. "I get grouped in there with pastry chefs," Mason reflects. "But I don't know if what we do here is necessarily pastry-driven. It's just started to take on its own identity."

When he is not laboring over highbrow confections, Mason moonlights as host of his own online cooking show, *Dinner with the Band*, teaching indie-rockers like Holy Hail, Matt & Kim or Tokyo Police Club to make "more layman" fare like gumbo or spiked milkshakes. Sometimes his reputation as a hipster of haute cuisine can be an albatross, Mason says. "People are always trying to group me into these rock star-ish scenarios," he laments, "They come to the restaurant, and I think they are surprised that I am not walking around to all the tables. But I just want to be in the kitchen. I don't want people staring at me."



Instead, he wants you sipping the libations at the palette-pushing bar downstairs, which offers lemon verberna-flavored rum, tobacco bourbon and pumpernickel raisin scotch. This, amid an ambience inspired by the life of an eccentric fictional couturier: leather remnants dress the tables, custom pinstripe textiles wrap the banquettes

and a cabinet of sewing ephemera (and taxidermy and handcuffs) abuts the kitchen. In other words, don't expect apple pie or cranberry relish. Right? "Oh, maybe," quips Mason. "Maybe, y'know, done with some strange colloid, set on fire and with a liquid center."

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