

Hello Moto

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IT'S NOT often we get to hear of gastronomic gurus being passionate scientists at heart.

Moto is a restaurant in Chicago that is famous for serving up futuristic dishes - a reputation that probably stems from its extraordinary employees, who are both chefs and engineers.

The executive chef, 29-year-old Homaro Cantu, uses his self-taught engineering skills and inventiveness to create striking dishes. Perhaps his greatest innovation for Moto is a modified Canon i560 inkjet printer (which Cantu calls the "food replicator" in homage to *Star Trek*) that prints flavoured images onto edible paper.

The print cartridges are filled with food-based "inks", including juiced carrots, tomatoes and purple potatoes, and the paper tray contains sheets of soybean and potato starch. The printouts are flavoured by dipping them in a powder of dehydrated soy sauce, squash, sugar, vegetables or sour cream, and then freezing, baking or frying them.

The most common printed dish in Moto is the menu (pictured, below). This can be torn up and thrown into a bowl of soup once it's been read - eco-friendly as well as tasty. Another unique selling point is the restaurant's two-dimensional take on sushi,



The polymer fishbox: cooks your fish while you watch.



Images courtesy of Stephen Orlick and Homaro Cantu

The new GM: Gen i



where photos of maki rolls are printed and sprinkled on the back with soy and seaweed flavouring (below right). And Cantu is not afraid to infuse his work with a sense of humour - an image of a cow grazing might taste exactly like filet mignon.

Imagine flicking through a magazine and eating an advert for a pizza delivery company. This science-fictional concept is not as far off as you'd expect - Cantu has already started to get his food ideas into the media, and advertisers are interested in a future with Moto's technology.

The fun doesn't just stop there. A laser normally used in surgery or welding has been exploited by Cantu to create "inside-out" food. Steaks are seared in the centre but become less well-done towards the edges. Laser-cooked bread rolls can be served alongside the edible menu, with crusts in the middle and soft dough outside.

The epicurean experimenter has been playing with ice as well as fire, creating several dishes that involve freezing by liquid nitrogen. One of Moto's desserts is created by filling a sphere with fruit juice and spinning it while applying liquid nitrogen to form a thin, frozen shell. Cantu is hoping that one day he will be able to inject helium into this shell and float it like a balloon in front of diners.

In case the helium trick doesn't work, Cantu's got a backup plan for levitating food, using superconductors and hand-held ion particle guns. So far, he's managed to levitate salt and sugar but he eventually wants to make entire dishes fly around the restaurant.

Cantu works on all his inventive prototypes with Deep Labs, a product development consultancy. He relies on weekly design meetings with their aerospace and mechanical engineers to brainstorm the latest off-the-wall ideas. These ideas are not limited to just the food techniques, but also include Moto's restaurant décor. Not content with just spiral-handled cutlery, stuffed with aromatic herbs to bring out the flavours in his dishes (above), Cantu has come up with an all-in-one invention consisting of a single utensil with knife, fork and spoon. But will the new contraption look quite as artistically intriguing as Moto's current corkscrew-forks?

Probably. Cantu's culinary creativity stretches to every aspect of his work, so there is little doubt that all of his future inventions will push the boundaries of what we know as food. Food is not just nutrition in Moto, but a futuristic and delectable art form that impacts every one of the five senses. ■

