

dining

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Big wheels keep on cookin'

Mario Batali signed on as official NASCAR chef and has a new cookbook, "Mario Tailgates NASCAR Style," to prove it. Other alliances we'd like to see:

- Charlie Trotter as exclusive raw foods provider to the Professional Bull Riders Association
- Rachel Ray (right) puts meat on the bones of the Junior League
- Bobby Flay serves up organic corn dogs for the Professional Bowlers Association



► Forget the **EASY-BAKE** and get your tyke "Nora's Dinners," recipes for kids from "Jamie's (Oliver) School Dinners" co-star Nora Sands.



platter

food finds, restaurant news and dining trends |
By CHRISTINA MELANDER

PILOTING A REVOLUTION — When microbrews reached critical mass in the late 1990s, brewers began staging multicourse dinners to show that beer was the new wine, that it could harmonize with food just as well. Brewers dinners gave birth to Lambic aperitifs, porter-braised pork cheeks and a cotillion of chocolate desserts chased with stout. Now, microdistillers are riffing on this model, contending that cocktail-and-comestible pairings can take palates to new places. (Or, depending on your self-control, to new hangover depths.)

"In America, we drink booze on its own. But in other cultures, consuming food and spirits together is part of daily life," says Lee Medoff, a founder of Portland distillery **House Spirits**. Medoff doesn't have to look any further than his Russian roots for examples of food-and-drink rapport. "Zakuski is a traditional Russian spread designed to be eaten while you drink," Medoff says, referring to the array of pickled salads, blinis, oysters, caviar and cheeses that complement shots of icy vodka.

If zakuski is the perfect antidote to bleak winter nights, then gin will see you through the summer. Last week Medoff and co-commissar Christian Krogstad unveiled Aviation Gin, their follow-up spirit to 2004's Medoyeff Vodka. Aviation is a Dutch-style gin, more unctuous and fragrant than London dry gins, with a spicy, vaguely sweet flavor and no metallic back-bite. Medoff and Krogstad are working with mixologists Ryan Magarian of Seattle's Kathy Casey Food Studio and Park Kitchen's Kevin Ludwig to develop drink recipes that take advantage of Aviation's come-hither flavor and demonstrate the potential for synergy with food.

A sampling of pairings that included a Negroni with seared venison loin and an Aviation cocktail (a classic drink dating from Edwardian London, from which House Spirits' new product derives its name) with scallops dressed in sour cherry vinaigrette proved that mixed drinks can be an eye-opening complement to food. In the Negroni matchup, the tempered sweetness of Campari amplified the meat's caramel lushness. The Aviation cocktail is made with maraschino liqueur, a no-brainer partner for the concentrated cher-

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TOP: House Spirits distillery founders Lee Medoff (left) and Christian Krogstad (right) gather 'round the still for a cocktail with mixologist Ryan Magarian.

ABOVE: The Portland outfit's new Aviation Gin is a Dutch-style formulation and features a swanky label.

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ry sauce enrobing juicy scallops. You could pair a pinot noir with a cherry aroma with the same dish, but to actually taste the fruit in both drink and dish is pretty cool.

You can check out cocktail and food pairings at **Park Kitchen** and **Southpark**. Nostrana, Three Doors Down and The Heathman also stock Aviation Gin, as do Portland-area liquor stores.

USING YOUR NOODLE — **Pastini Pastaria** is targeting late August/early September for opening a fifth location. Renovations are under way to convert the former Vat & Tonsure restaurant and adjacent retail space at the corner of Southwest Taylor and Park Avenue downtown to a fresh Pastini that will feature a dedicated take-out counter to facilitate speedy lunch orders. What's the secret to opening five restaurants in as many years? "We've hit a niche that not that many people are addressing — good food at a really affordable price point," says Susan Bashel, one of four owners. "The beauty of what we do is that the setting is nice enough for a date, it's inexpensive enough for families and retirees, and the food is good enough for anybody." A few menu tweaks, such as eight new classic pasta dishes and the recent upgrade to Pearl Bakery bread, show that Pastini is determined to maintain its market share.

A REASON NOT TO BROWN-BAG IT — **Noble Rot** opened for lunch this week, serving a scaled-back \$10-and-under version of its dinner menu. "We're here at noon, and everyone was always coming by and asking if we were open, so we decided to go for it," says co-owner Kimberly Bernosky. Former sous chef Henry Kibit III will be working the burners. Lunch is available 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays.

GOT A RESTAURANT TIP? Send to *A&E Platter*, *The Oregonian*, 1320 S.W. Broadway, Portland, OR 97201. Or fax: 503-294-5029.

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