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THE DISH

Staying Sharp

What chefs do when they're **unemployed**

While there are certainly exceptions to the rule, cooks are generally mobile and mercenary in mindset. We jump from restaurant to restaurant for a variety of reasons. Some moves are financially motivated, others in the hopes of greater creative control, and sometimes we sacrifice pride and money for knowledge and experience.

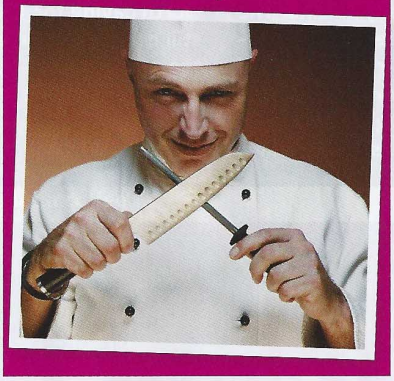
In a perfect world, we would have our next jobs lined up months in advance, but I'll let you in on a little secret: we chefs aren't very good at planning ahead. Between egos, flaring tempers and bad luck, we find ourselves all too often in a random lull in employment.

Now I relish a vacation as much as the next guy, and you feel great the first week off, touching base with friends and eating out like regular citizens, but by the second week, most of us are ready for some action. It's our own version of Stockholm Syndrome: we bitch and moan about the hours and pain our jobs inflict on our bodies and lives, but once we go without, we start remembering why we love it so much. So what do we do about it?

First off, we cook at home. A lot. So all of you with chef friends, be properly sympathetic if your friend has lost their job, but in your heart you can allow yourself a small squeal of joy: their misfortune is your windfall. Out of sheer boredom and the need to be in a kitchen, we crank out cookies, breads, pâté, sausages, anything that we've been interested in but never had enough time to try. There's no way we'd ever be able to finish all that we make since we're trained to cook at restaurant quanitites, so we always end up with 15 peoples' worth of pastrami and find ourselves sharing.

The second thing many do is stage. Not like the theater, but rather the fancy French restaurant term. It's basically an externship. We apply to restaurants and offer our services for free to see another chef's style and to work in another kitchen without the commitment of full-time employment. It's a time-honored tradition and one of the best reasons I can think of to cook.

It's our version of Stockholm Syndrome



Right now in my restaurant I am hosting two great line cooks out of Germany. These bright young guys (their former restaurant just garnered its second Michelin star) saved up some money and have spent the last six months traversing Asia, cooking at different restaurants in different countries. They work for free, a week or two at a time, all in the name of bettering themselves.

Art may go in and out of fashion, and technology will forever be evolving, but people will always need to eat. That reassurance is one of the reasons I cook. I hope to never stop learning my craft, but rest assured, if I ever find myself out of a job, there are still ways to keep myself in the game.

Austin Hu
The chef Hu keeps it local at Madison

Want to know my favorite restaurants? Want to get the inside scoop? Check out The Dish blog at **www.cityweekend.com.cn**

Mr & Mrs Bund's
super tart

BEST LEMON TARTS

Pucker Up

French | **Mr & Mrs Bund**

No list of Shanghai's best lemon tarts could ever be complete without Paul Pairet's iconic "Lemon & Lemon Tart" (¥100). The clever spin on the classic bistro dessert features a lemon sorbet, silky lemon curd and vanilla Chantilly all enveloped by an entire candied lemon. The three-day process to make this decadent flavorful sweet is well worth the effort—with a single prick of the fork, the lemon filling oozes out and the whole thing disappears almost instantaneously. Not only is Pairet's creation the most imaginative lemon tart in Shanghai, it's also the tastiest.

Find it: 6/F, Bund 18, 18 Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu 中山东一路18号6楼, Tel: 6323-9898

Cafés | **La Boulangerie**

While the newly opened trendy shops and cafés on Yongkang Lu have seduced Shanghai expats like a siren in recent weeks, La Boulangerie is no stranger to charming this city's French set: they're the bakery behind Le Saleya's desserts. Their classic lemon meringue tart is simple yet superb. Its shortcrust is buttery, its curd filling velvety and sweet and its meringue airy and light. The generous ¥28 serving is powerful enough to brighten even the darkest and coldest winter day.

Find it: 60 Yongkang Lu 永康路60号, Tel: 3425-0210

Desserts | **hoF Bar & Brasserie**

While satisfying our chocolatey cravings at Brian Tan's hoF with bites of cakes and truffles, we recently discovered that chocolate isn't the only thing he does well. hoF's classic French lemon tart (¥36) boasts enough butter to make Paula Deen swoon and is both as comforting and as seductive as Tan's staple creations. The sweet and tangy filling stands up well to the crumble of its shortcrust base, but one of the best parts of tasting a lemon tart at hoF is enjoying it with a glass of their signature Grand Mimosa (¥48), Prosecco mixed with fresh orange juice and a dash of Grand Marnier. It's the ultimate citrusy indulgence.

Find it: DBS Tower, 1318 Lujiazui Huan Lu 陆家嘴环路1318号星展银行大厦, Tel: 5010-0800

■ **Jake DeLois**

Did we miss your favorite place for lemon tarts? Leave a comment at **www.cityweekend.com.cn/three-best**