

# What's the **strangest** dish you've ever made?

by Paula Pant



**Abby McCune**  
*Matts' Rotisserie & Oyster Lounge*

Twenty years ago, when I was a line cook fresh out of culinary school, I had to prep 200 pounds of eel for Julia Child's 80th birthday weekend. It was heinous. The eel was soft and mushy, and it smelled like the forest. It had already been braised in red wine, so it looked purple. I don't even know how they served it—my job was just to peel the skin from the bone, all the while

being yelled at in French to go faster. For that same party, I had to put single strands of saffron—which is the tiniest thing in the world—on top of 1,000 little sea scallops.



**Warren Seta**  
*Yama at the Galleria*

My dad worked construction. He would often come home tired and hungry and then he'd cook dinner for my mom and us three kids. One day when I was 11 or 12, I decided to have dinner ready when my parents came home from work, hoping to score major brownie points. I'd never made fried chicken in my life, but I figured it couldn't be hard. I set the table with chicken on everyone's

plate, and my parents looked so happy, so hopeful—until they took a bite. The outside was crispy. The inside was as raw as could be.



Topping the lists "eel" and "heinous" is a delicacy in Japan that involves baby eels placed in a big, glass bowl of water with a large block of tofu at the bottom. The bowl is placed over a flame, and as the water gets hot, the eels burrow into the slightly less-hot tofu where they are cooked alive. The finished product is sliced like a fruitcake and served.

Most oysters live in brackish water and not the Rocky Mountains. Their shells are made of two calcified valves encasing a soft body. They have gills that filter plankton from the water, and strong adductor muscles that hold their shells closed. They also have a three-chambered heart, kidneys and—like bulls—gonads. When eaten on the half shell, oysters are still alive. This may seem cruel, but it's the closest you're ever going to get to actually tasting the sea.



**Janine Doran**  
*Café Flora*

Around Christmas, people want traditional pies, like pumpkin or apple. But back in the '80s, I decided to invent a wacky candy-bar Christmas pie for the family. I gave it a meringue crust—dried out in the oven so it was crunchy—and then melted Snickers bars onto the bottom. I filled the inside with chocolate amaretto mouse, sprinkled shaved Heath Bars on top,

and put whipped cream on top of that. They thought I was nuts—a crazy cook with a real sweet tooth just playing around in the kitchen.



**Eric Hellner**  
*Union Square Grill*

It was seven in the morning, and our corporate chef was having us thinly slice some unidentified meat. It wasn't gamey, but it had a distinct texture. We weren't quite sure what it was, but hey, the sun had barely risen. We pan-fried it golden brown, added a slice of lemon, and then dined. When we were done eating, he told us we'd just had Rocky

Mountain oysters—bull testicles. It didn't settle well, but I didn't have to race to the toilet or anything.