

SCIENCE IS BEING SERVED

An ex-neurologist combined two passions to create a concept in dining. Daniel Scheffler discovers the delights of brain food.

A NEW addition to New York's culinary landscape is giving people something to think about. Romera, which opened last month in the Meatpacking District, is about brain food. But don't be intimidated: chef Dr Miguel Sánchez Romera doesn't want to dazzle diners - he wants to satisfy the brain by shunning high fats and combining emotion-filled flavours in 12 courses. Could it be another death to pretentious food? And a new salute to "neurogastronomy"?

Traditionally brain food is a non-technical term referring to food (especially fish) that stimulates the brain and cognitive functions. This is the next frontier. Neurogastronomy, according to the Argentinian-born chef, is a manifestation of a scientific study of each ingredient's organoleptic features. What this presents is unprocessed, unrefined food compelled by the weightiness of neurosensory perceptions, taste-memory and emotions.

Neuroscientist Gordon Shepherd writes in his book (*Neurogastronomy: How the Brain Creates Flavour and Why it Matters*) that the belief that our sense of smell subsided with the development from primate to human should be challenged. The book discusses the mechanics of smell, the social issues and preferences around flavours, and even the regions of the brain that control emotions and cravings. Thus pre-

senting a new touchstone in scientific eating for explorative restaurants, strict dieticians, enthused home foodies and solemn critics.

A self-proclaimed modernist, Romera believes we don't eat with our stomachs but rather with our minds. The modern-day caveman with carnal desires satisfying himself by eating, albeit at a high price.

Romera's educational background comprises studies in neurology and epilepsy. This astute sense of science led him down a new career path. His determination to explore gastronomy steered the chef into his ingenuity around Total Cooking, a term expressing an inception of life which cooking leads to order and harmony. He believes life should be lived using the senses to the maximum.

Romera's "office" is a compact workshop among gas flames, charcoal and pressure cookers. He firmly believes in his own philosophy that the innate flavours of food should be encouraged and admired, and that dishes considered haute can still be healthy. Another example of the Romera spread is a patented opus of the master used by chefs and foodies across the world. It is called micri - a colourless and tasteless neutral base that does not intervene with the aromas, flavours and textures of other ingredients in a recipe. **S**

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

WHAT: ROMERA (<http://www.romeranyork.com>) serves up a new concept in dining called "neurogastronomy" which takes an holistic approach to food by studying the organoleptic properties of each ingredient.

WHO: Chef Miguel Sanchez Romera's first project in the United States offers guests the chance to experience neurogastronomy, a culinary style he pioneered while working as a neurologist in Spain.

INSIDE OUTSIDE: Custom-made light canopies hang above the tables illuminating each dish, while a rooftop space displays the mini-vegetables, edible flowers and herbs.

WOW: Each of the 12 courses is paired with Romera's signature Aqua Gourmand - ingredient-driven waters that compliment the flavours and aromatic properties of each dish.



Chef Miguel Sanchez Romera (top) on the rooftop garden of his Romera restaurant where he sources ingredients for his "brain food" (above and below).



NOW THAT'S AN INTERESTING IDEA...

With renewed appreciation for keeping it local, the Brooklyn Fare is a modern-day version of the grocer - with a tasting menu. The Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare (www.brooklynfare.com/) is part of the grocery store and offers a new way of thinking about eating and food shopping.

Brooklyn Fare is a convenience store with the old-world appeal of a "mom 'n' pop" grocer. The owner, Moe Issa, prides himself on the fact that he sells extraordinary ingredients. He sees his vision as a commitment to his district, his Brooklyn. Thus it makes sense that Chef's Table next door has the same values.

Nighttime exclusive, Chef's Table is the only two Michelin-star restaurant in Brooklyn and the chef celebrates its uniqueness with the prix fixe dinner comprising 20 small-plate courses. Chef Cesar Ramirez combines Japanese and French disciplines - a tasty mix of technique and presentation.

An undressed steel table in the kitchen and some personal attention from the chef play a sterling role in the feeling of belonging to a neighbourhood book club or card-game group. Ramirez believes in small servings of top fare.

The menu is simple and lists each course of food with a simple ingredient: bass, asparagus, pork. Just the simplicity a new decade desires.

Authentic Japanese food in a natural setting is rare in New York but one place, En (www.enjb.com), dishes it up