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The French call it *terroir*, the Italians *geniuo*. Both terms refer to the qualities of taste that distinctly resonate with place, from the crops grown to the food produced in a particular region. In recent years, food and wine professionals have led the way in increasing understanding and preparation of a place-based taste experience.

The development of a terroir-based sensibility signaled the beginning of a new role for food and wine. Today, this concept is a powerful vehicle for rediscovering authenticity and meaning in modern life.

Connecting to a sense of place enhances our customers' or clients' quality of life. From a business-development standpoint, it gives marketers an important and relevant anchor from which to promote their own particular experience, indigenous ingredients, or unique seasonal offerings.

Food professionals recognize that local, fresh, place-based eating provides a high-quality experience even while it presents exciting new opportunities for their businesses. Restaurateurs, winemakers, and food purveyors can capitalize on these regional idiosyncrasies as a way to offer their customers—indeed anyone who loves to travel and to eat—an experience they literally can get nowhere else.

In essence, it comes down to understanding and explaining to customers that the “sense of place” principle offers a unique opportunity not only to satisfy customers' hunger and thirst, but to differentiate local, specialty products and experiences from the global, mass market experience and experience products that speak authentically of the place of local origin.

Promoting a Sense of Place

For years, the industry worldwide has been tuned into the value of presenting local and seasonal products and agriculturally based tourism. A leading example of this is the appearance and worldwide expansion of the Slow Food Movement, which started in Italy, a country where a person's connection to a particular place is a matter of paramount importance. In fact, it's so important that the Italians even have a word for a person who is particularly passionate about his own indigenous place: *campanialismo*.

In the United States, the use of local products and the preservation of traditional cuisine and methods of food preparation took hold around the country in the 1990s, when from Maine to Florida and from Texas to Oregon, a grand menu of regional tastes and products flowed onto the market in stores and restaurants.

Across the country, chefs, winemakers, and producers of all kinds of local fare felt the pleasure unleashed by bringing the food experience into rhythm with the natural ecosystem. “There's always something in season,” says Dickie Brennan, of Dickie Brennan's in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S. “Crabmeat, softshell crabs, crawfish, red fish, oysters...we're blessed with these natural resources. We're just coming out of our Louisiana strawberries; next we get the June-July blueberries...Go with nature [and] there's always something there that's at its peak.”

From New Orleans to Portland, Oregon, U.S., it's now clear that cooking or dining where the food is grown provides broader satisfaction because eating fresh, local produce in season ties the consumer back to a time when people had no

other choice than to do so, and were, we believe, more likely to be in harmony with their world.

"For chefs, coming home with an indigenous ingredient that no one knows is the ultimate trophy," says Regina Schrambling, deputy editor of the dining section of the *New York Times*. "It's about learning and growing from every trip."

As food professionals, we constantly need to express our passion for what's real and different to our guests, customers, students, and readers. "Consumers are very interested in knowing what it is that makes up a place, from its cultural, environmental, and personal connections to the author," says Rebecca Staffel, an agent with the Doe Coover Agency, a literary agency based in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S. "Seattle-based chefs Tom Douglas and Jerry Traunfeld, and others, have done a good job at writing about regional ingredients, yet they managed to translate that to a national audience. I think that's the key in terms of presenting an authentic sense of place. Food professionals need to satisfy the growing curiosity about specific locations, but we need to make our stories relevant to a wider audience," she notes.

Untapped Resources

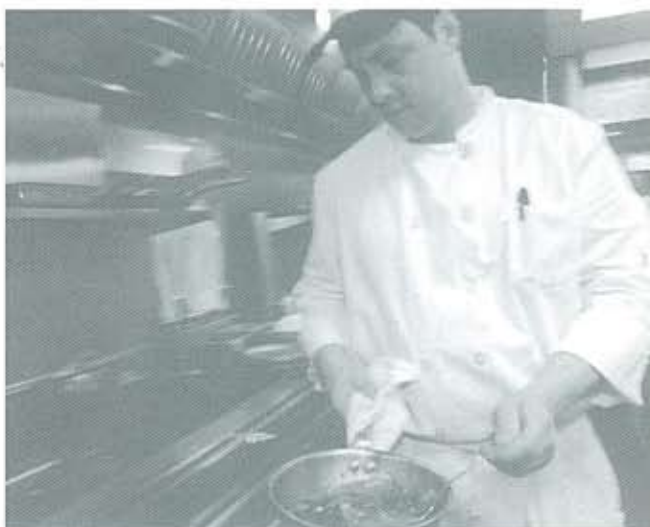
While many chefs and other leaders in the culinary world have mastered the art of working with local ingredients, there are many facets of marketing a sense of place that remain untapped. On a mass-market level, many consumers are new to the pleasures of visiting a place and taking home a singular product, whether it's a jar of mustard from Napa, California, U.S., or a bottle of aged vinegar from a remote village in Valle d'Aoste, Italy.

Farmers and manufacturers such as Cascadian Farms in Washington State, U.S., are heavily committed to the importance of place in defining their brand's personality. "We know that people want to see where the berries grow and that once they've experienced the local climate and seen our farm, they will forever have a connection to our product," says John DePaolis, head of marketing for Cascadian Farms.

Beyond flavor and product quality, Cory Schreiber, Oregon chef and author of *Wildwood: Cooking from the Source in the Pacific Northwest*, believes that using the definition of place should be a major part of the marketing plan. "I think moving away from the world market lends a stronger sense of permanence to our definition and roles in the local community."

He also believes thinking locally allows business owners to become more sensitized when making critical decisions. "These decisions have to do with whom we buy from, whom we support with charities. The importance of place also lends a visual to people who are not familiar with our businesses and where they are located," continues Schreiber.

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Photos by Mark Fekunatadi

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Attracting the Savvy Consumer

The “place principle” is universal to all culinary professionals. Consumers crave the real deal: an expert purveyor or restaurateur, a freelance writer, small candy manufacturer, or regional organic grower—someone who knows what grows in his or her backyard, guides customers to it in season, and explains why buying and consuming locally produced products not only enhances the quality of a culinary experience but also provides connection and a sense of belonging each time they enjoy a food or wine product from a clearly defined place.

Successful businesspeople and their advisers will continue to recognize the powerful business opportunities and benefits that flow from providing consumers a local place-based experience. They will develop and market their products, stores, and restaurants in a way designed to make the optimal use of the attraction this kind of experience has to savvy, curious consumers.

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Lisa Donoughe is founder of her own boutique public relations firm, LAD communications, inc., dedicated to helping the best chefs in America heat up their careers, based in Portland, Oregon, U.S., and New York City. She has led campaigns for Charlie Palmer, B. Smith, Pino Luongo, Ismael Merchant, and many more. Today, her practice focuses on helping entrepreneurial artisan food and wine producers shape and tell their stories. In her diverse international career, she has developed breakthrough campaigns to launch brands, grow businesses, and expand our commitment to sustainability.