



# Sub-Saharan African Cuisine and Western Perceptions

Fran Osseo-Asare



BETUMI: The African  
Culinary Network

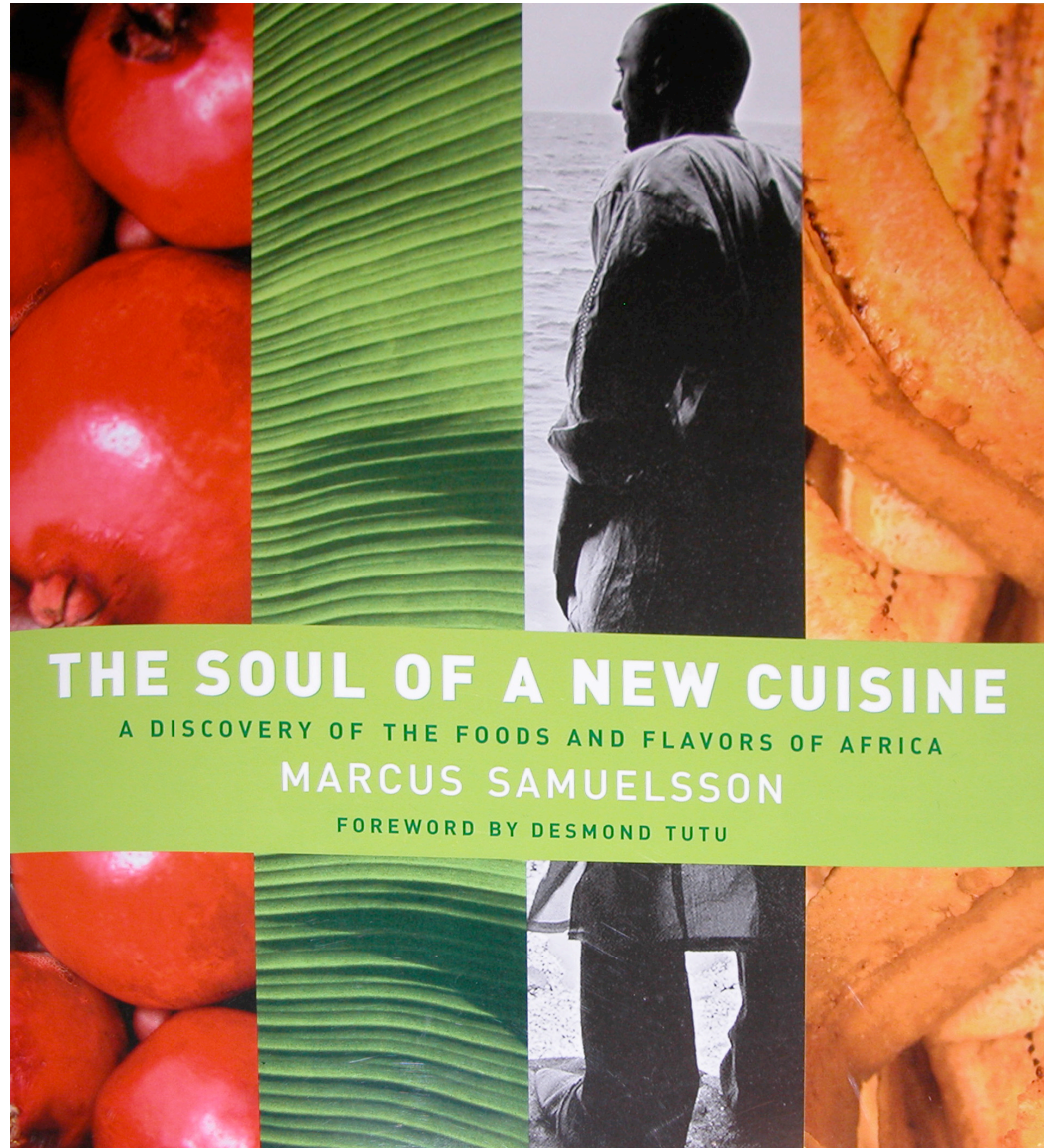
June 8, 2006 Boston



Did you hear **Anthony Bourdain**, executive chef at Brasserie Les Halles in Manhattan enthuse about Ghanaian food on NPR on May 25, 2006 when he was talking about his recent trip there: “**The food in Ghana is terrific in particular. It’s spicy, a lot of stews, very colorful, hearty stuff.**”



Have you heard the buzz about **Marcus Samuelsson** (the chef and co-owner of Restaurant Aquavit, two-time James Beard Award-winner, youngest chef ever to receive 2 three-star ratings from the New York Times, called by *Gourmet* “one of the most innovative chefs in the world”, and star of the Discovery Home television series *Inner Chef*) and his upcoming book ***The Soul of a New Cuisine: A Discovery of the Foods and Flavors of Africa?***



# THE SOUL OF A NEW CUISINE

A DISCOVERY OF THE FOODS AND FLAVORS OF AFRICA

MARCUS SAMUELSSON

FOREWORD BY DESMOND TUTU



Did you catch Lydia Polgreen's February 2006 article in the dining out section of The New York Times on street foods of Ghana in which she observes: **"People travel to Africa for history and for scenery but never the food. I don't get it.** I have found that Africa, with thousands of languages and cultures, each with its own cuisine, always rewards an adventurous eater

Or restaurant critic **Robert Sietsema's "Foo-foo Fundamentals"** in the October 2005 issue of *Gourmet* in which he concludes: **So after more than two months of eating in African restaurants from Newark to Houston, am I convinced that Americans are ready for *cheb* and *foo-foo* with peanut sauce? Absolutely."**

- Introduction
- Data sources
  - Conferences
    - IACP (Intl. Assoc. of Culinary Prof.)
    - ASFS/AFHVS
    - African Studies Association

- Popular Culinary Magazines
  - *Gourmet*
  - *Saveur: Savor a world of authentic cuisine*

- Will summarize and make observations on each piece of data
- Will discuss briefly and make some concluding remarks



# IACP Summary

- 8 years between 1997 and 2006
- 2 presentations totally on Africa or an African country ( $\sim 0.7\%$ )
- 6 presentations where Africa or an African country were included tangentially or substantively ( $\sim 2\%$ )
- Roughly 288 presentations

# Selected IACP Conferences, 1997-2006

Year	Theme/Place	# presentations	Places/Ethnicities Represented in Presentation	Relationship to Africa, Title and %
1997	Culinary Crossroads: Culture/Tradition/Pleasure Chicago	N.A.	N.A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sankofa: A Culinary Tour of Africa</b> (likely 1/47 or <b>2%</b>)</li> </ul>
1998	Taste & Technology: Food for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Portland	47	Asia/SE Asia, Japan, Greece, Norway, India, Turkey, Brazil, Israel, Latin America, Middle East, Regional U.S., Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food &amp; Wine Pairing in the Global Village (sample African, Caribbean, Mediterranean, Asian, and Latino flavors) (e.g., 20% of 1/47, or <b>0.4%</b>)</li> </ul>
1999	Building Community: An Exploration of Food and Culture Arizona	48	Latin, North America, Americas, India, Mexico, Chinese, Greece, Asia, Brazil, Regional U.S., Italy, Persia/Siam (Iran/Thailand)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With Camels that Bear Spices (mention spices brought by Queen of Sheba to King Solomon (tangential, on spices))</li> <li>• Exotic Grains (tef, quinoa, wild rice, Thai black sticky rice), wheat-free baking (25% of 1/48, or <b>0.5%</b>)</li> </ul>

# Selected IACP Conferences, 1997-2006

Year	Theme/Place	# presentations	Places/Ethnicities Represented in Presentation	Relationship to Africa, Title and %
2001	Trends and Timelessness  Minneapolis	49	Native American, Asia, Greece, Scandinavia, France, India, Finland, Thailand, China, Mexico, U.S., Mediterranean, Mozambique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>And the Indians came bearing curries (3 curries, from Mozambique, Fiji Islands, India)</li> </ul> (33% of 1/49 or .7%)
2002	Catching the Wave  San Diego	49	Asia/SE Asia, Vietnam, Latin America, Mexico, Hispanic, China, U.S., India, Central & S. America, Pacific, Middle East, Europe	No presentations on Africa, but optional preconference Moroccan picnic (N. Africa) (Note: another session on African-American, Latino, and Asian consumers) <b>0%</b>
2003	Montréal: Le Goût du Terroir (The Taste of the Soil)	52	Canada, Greece, France, U.S., Italy, India, Asia, Spain, Europe, N. America, Thailand, Vietnam, Sweden, Japan, Philippines, Mediterranean, Middle East, Australia	<b>0%</b>

# Selected IACP Conferences, 1997-2006

Year	Theme/Place	# presentations	Places/Ethnicities Represented in Presentation	Relationship to Africa, Title and %
2004	Culinary Trade Winds  Baltimore	47	Italy, Panama, Asia, Greece, Korea, U.S., England, Latino, Turkey, Sicily, Mediterranean, Australia, France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dakar: It's More Than Just Okra</b> (1/47 or <b>2%</b>)</li> <li>• <b>Almonds: Antiquity to Marzipan</b> (includes N. Africa, W. Mediterranean, Turkey, Sicily and Italy) 20% of 1/47 or <b>.4%</b></li> </ul> <p>(Note: The Great Migration of Soul Food was about African-Americans; session on Panama: A Multicultural Experience referred to Chinese, Afro-Antillian, French and Spanish cultures)</p>
2006	Inspiration, Creativity, Innovation  Seattle	43	Asia, U.S. India, Italy, Mexico, Colombia, Panama, Russia, Asia, Peru, France, Spain, England, Ethiopia, India, Japan, China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chocolate and Coffee</b> (mention Ethiopia tangentially, along with Mayans, Sumatra, Brazil, but not the major part of the presentation) (maybe 0.5% of 1/43 or at most <b>0.5%</b>)</li> </ul>

# Observations, IACP

- Selective, invited presentations
- Jessica Harris and I only 2 making them with a direct focus
- Small but constant presence



# ASFA/AFHVS Summary

- 6 years (2000-2005, excluding 2002 from %)
- Over 847 papers/posters presented
- 16 (01.8%) of all papers on Africa
- 0.6% were on African cuisine
  - 2 by students discovering ethnic foodways
  - 2 by me

# ASFA/AFHVS summary, cont.

- Other papers:
  - Policy and agric. development
  - Food security
  - Trade and marketing
  - Colonialism
  - GMOs
  - Urban planning
  - Gender
  - Education and nutrition

## Selected ASFA/AFHVS Conferences

Year	Theme/Place	#	Places/Ethnicities Represented	Africa-related and Title
2000	Millennial Stews: Food & Food Systems in the Global City  New York University	~131	Iran, Italy, Norway, China, India, Turkey, Amerindians, <b>US</b> , S. Korea, China, East Africa, Mauritius, Nigeria, Ghana, Central America, Latino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educ. &amp; Fd. Consumption in Mauritius (poster)</li> <li>• Adapting the Policy Process to an Adaptive NRM Devel. Process: Examples from Agroforestry res. &amp; devel. in E. Africa &amp; Central America</li> <li>• Towards a Sustainable Agric. Devel. for Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Cultural Values, Indigenous Orgs. &amp; Word Bank Initiatives (no show)</li> <li>• <b>Beyond Gumbo: A social &amp; cultural overview of Ghanaian Cookbooks</b></li> <li>• Economic Assumptions, the World Fd. Program &amp; the Mining Industry in Ghana</li> </ul> <p>(Note: Urban Farm Markets: A paradigm for improving health &amp; home in the Af.Am. community)</p>
2001	Food Chains and Food Change: Food & Agricultural Issues at the turn of the Century  Univ. of Minnesota	~98	US (incl. Puerto Rico), New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Hungary, Germany, Mongolia, Italy, Canada, Vietnam, Latino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Student Discovery of Ethnic Foodways: Somali in Minnesota</b></li> </ul> <p>(Someone from the Univ. of Western Cape in S. Africa presented "Globalizing Ethics: N-S Engagement in Ethical Sourcing Initiatives")</p>

2002	Loyola Univ., Chicago	N.A.	N.A.	<p>Info. on panel presentations only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Organic Farming and Household Food Security Strategies in Semi-Arid Kenya</li> <li>•Promotion of High Quality Soyabean Flour in the Food Industry: Evidence from Rural Women in Nigeria</li> </ul>
2004	Agriculture to Culture: The Social Transformation of Food	180+	France, Ireland, Canada, <b>US</b> , Japan, Italy, Israel, Ecuador, Asia, S. Korea, Argentina, China, Belize, Ecuador, Brazil, Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Regreening Nairobi City: An Integral Approach to Urban Planning</li> </ul>

2005	<p>Visualizing Food and Farm</p> <p>The Benson, Portland, Oregon</p>	~193	<p>Denmark, <b>US</b> (including Puerto Rico), Finland, Mexico, France, India, Spain, Japan, Canada, Russia, New Zealand, Canada, W. Africa, Ghana, U.K., Germany, Switzerland, China, Jewish, Buenos Aires, N. America, New World, N-S, Hispanic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring Food Security in Ghana—The Role of Maize Storage Systems (Parul Armah)</li> <li>• <b>Culture as Cuisine with Commensality in Experiential Involvement with Ethnic Food (students visit Indian, Mexican, and Ethiopian restaurants)</b></li> <li>• Can the West African Cocoa Farmer Survive in a Free-Trade World?</li> <li>• Differing Visions of GMOs Worldwide: Ethics, Values and Equity Implications (includes Zambia with Thailand and India in a broader discussion)</li> <li>• How Do Gender Roles Play Out in Food Decision-Making Processes in African Canadian, Punjabi Canadian and Euro-Canadian Families?</li> </ul> <p>(Note: Theorizing Food and Race (a roundtable, includes examination of interconnections between Af. Am. history, material culture and foodways; also, “Who Day Say Chicken. . .” Researching African American Foodways)</p>
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2006	<p>Place, Taste, and Sustenance: The Social Spaces of Food and Agriculture</p> <p>Boston University</p>	~245	<p>U.K., Chile, US, Canada, France, Laos, Lebanon, Albania, Mexico, India, Russia, Brazil, Italy, Japan, New Guinea, Hungary, China, Korea, West Indies, Middle East, Latin, Africa, Gabon</p>	<p>•<b>African Cuisines as Historical Conjecture: Tastes and Textures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sad Cattle, White Bread, and Stale Rice: Imported Foods and Colonial Changes in Libreville, Gabon</li> <li>•Rural Development and Agric. Relevance for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria</li> </ul> <p>•<b>Sub-Saharan African Cuisine and Western Perceptions</b></p>
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# ASFA/AFHVS observations

- Much larger number of papers presented than IACP, wider spectrum of interests, most papers accepted (?)
- Compared to other countries, much less of a focus on African food as "cuisine" (e.g., in literature, film, foodways and culture)
- Small, but constant presence of papers

# African Studies Association Conference, 2004, New Orleans

- Theme: The power of expression: Identity, Language, and Memory in Africa and the Diaspora
- PDF File: over 100 pages, hundreds of presentations, searched under **FOOD**, **AGRICULTURE**, and **NUTRITION**
- Single hits for maize, khat, kitchen, palm oil, manioc
- **NO hits for cook, culinary, cuisine, recipe, gastronomy, meal, provision, national dish, feed, corn, fufu, grain, millet, tef**

# Papers clustered under topics:

## Nutrition

- Weight Aspirations and Knowledge Among Educated Young Women in Malawi
- Women's Nutrition and Women's Control Among Tanzanian Maasai
- Contemporary and Traditional Diets: Efficacy and Effectiveness in Health and nutritional Status of Young Adults of Imo State of Nigeria

# The related topic of Food Insecurity

- Famine Early Warning in the Horn of Africa: Defining Populations' Vulnerabilities
- Redefining the Public Trust: Food Security for the Poor
- Free Trade and Wheat Futures: The Transformation of South African Agriculture
- Feeding the Hungry While Starving the Farmer? US Food Aid and Agricultural Biotechnology in southern Africa



# Food Insecurity, cont.

- Human Security and Civil War in Côte d'Ivoire: The Regional Dimensions of Environmental Degradation and Food Insecurity
- Land Reform and Urban Food Security in Zimbabwe
- Challenges to Food Security Programming and Evaluations: A Case Study from Uganda

# Or Food, Land and Markets

- Feeding the Global Supermarket: Kenyan Workers and the Politics of Guilt
- Expressions of Power: “Structuring” Milk Farming in Northern Cameroon

# By far, most had to do with politics/economic exchange/imperialism/power relations/development

- The Counter-Intuitive Case of Katwe Salt in African Economic History
- Palm Oil Conflicts: gender, economy, and culture in colonial Nigeria
- The Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism

# Politics, etc., cont.

- The Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism
- Themes for a New Paradigm on the History of Agriculture in Nineteenth-Century Liberia
- The Development of the Plantation System at Fanisau
- After Liberalization: Rice in the Informal Sector vs. Cheap Imports

# Politics, etc., cont.

- Tea, Conflict, and Cooperation: Development and the Impact of Tea Outgrower Schemes in Zimbabwe
- Marginality and Cultures of Khat Consumption in Kenya
- The politics of GM Agriculture in Africa
- How Africa's Maize Turned White: The Color and Textures of African Agrarian Change, 1900-1960
- Manioc's Place at the Table: Reconsidering the History of the Low Status Food

- There was one presentation with literary connections (possibly on eating disorders): In Her Mother's Kitchen: Discourse, Place and Memory/forgetting in *Nervous Conditions*

# ASA observations

- Few if any considered African cuisine and food history in a positive light
- Likely thought it frivolous scholarship?
- Little attempt to explore contributions of food and popular/material culture, or food in arts, except for bleak pictures of loss

## *Gourmet* summary

- Reviewed 11 issues between Feb 2004 and Dec 2005
- 1 contained an article about West African food
- 1 had a travel article on Botswana by author Alexander Smith, not on food
- A restaurant in Cape Town, S. Af., was listed as one of the world's best



# Selected Issues of *Gourmet*, 2004-2005

Date	Major cuisines featured in magazine	Africa-themed articles
Feb 2004	Mexico, Scandinavia, Asia (Bankok), France, NY, S. Carolina, Mediterranean, California, China	0
Mar – April 2004	N.A.	N.A.
May 2004	France <b>South Africa</b> , Britain, India, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Italy, Thailand, Caribbean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 lists a restaurant in Cape Town, South Africa, as one of the world's best restaurants</li> </ul>
June 2004	N.A.	N.A.
July 2004	Colorado, Greece, NY, Kansas, Italy, Wisconsin	0
Aug-Dec 2004	N.A.	0
Jan 2005	Spain, Texas, Buenos Aires	0
Feb 2005	Spain, Brazil (includes <i>farinha de mandioca</i> , like W. Af. gari), Chile, Caribbean, Asia, North Carolina	0
Mar 2005	N.A.	N.A.
April 2005	Oregon, China, Niagara Falls, Maine, Japan, Indonesia, Italy	
May 2005	N.A.	N.A.

# Selected Issues of *Gourmet*, 2004-2005

Date	Major cuisines featured in magazine	Africa-themed articles
June 2005	Spain, S. Dakota, Texas, U.S. (Asian/American)	0
July 2005	NY, N. Carolina, Vermont, Tennessee, France, Mexico, Costa Rica	0
Aug 2005	Italy, <b>Botswana</b> , S. America, China, Greece, Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Amazing Grace</b> by Alexander McCall Smith, talks about the author spending a week in Botswana], mentions fillet steak from Botswana's cattle, but not really about food)</li> </ul>
Sept. 2005	N.A.	N.A.
October 2005	<b>West Africa</b> , Italy, Portugal, Maine, Illinois, California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Foo-Foo Fundamentals: on W. Af. restaurants in U.S. by Robert Sietsema, w/ recipe for chicken stew w/okra)</b></li> </ul>
November 2005	Montana, Europe, U.S., Australia, India, Massachusetts, Spain, Mexico, Chicago, France	0
Dec 2005	N.A.	N.A.

# *Gourmet* observations

- Very small but visible presence of Africa
- Increasingly covering many foods of Latin America used in sub-Saharan African cuisine (manioc, corn, chili peppers, plantains, coconut)
- Increased geographical range of interest

# *Saveur* summary

- 13 issues between Dec 2003 and May 2006 reviewed
- 2 articles on African countries
  - One on coffee in Choche, Ethiopia (3 pages of 104, ~3% of issue)
  - One on Durban, S. Af.'s ethnic Indian population (2 pages of 116, or ~2%)

# Selected Issues of *Saveur*: Savor a world of *authentic cuisine*

Date/Pages	Countries/Ethnicities	Africa-related material
May 2006  100 pages	Italy, regional U.S., Spain, Japan, India, Greece, New Zealand, Portugal Festivals: Germany, Spain, S. Korea, U.S., Poland, UK	<b>0%</b>
April 2006  100 pages	Middle East, France, Italy, Denmark, regional U.S., Scotland, Spain, Mexico, Jewish Festivals: U.S., Peru, Italy, France, Latin	<b>0%</b>
March 2006  96 pages	Ireland, Trinidad, Sicily, Turkey, France, regional U.S., Italy Festivals: Australia, New Zealand, U.S., Serbia	<b>0%</b> (But featured Carnival in Trinidad, a black cuisine, “Calypso, sequins, and spice”)
Jan/Feb 2006  104 pages	(100 Best) France, India, New Zealand, Iberia (ancient Spain), regional U.S., China, India, Italy, Mexico, Sweden, Japan, U.K., Spain, Turkey, Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Korea, New Zealand, Vienna, Buenos Aires, Hungary, Canada, Thailand, Middle East, Ecuador, S.E. Asia Festivals: Canada, U.S., Philippines, Italy	Featured a food book: <i>Hungry Planet: What the World Eats</i> (on p. 1 of the book is a picture of a family in Mali, shown in a small photo) (tangential, less than 8% of one page, or about <b>.07%</b> of the issue)

## *Saveur* summary, cont.

- 1 10-page article on peanuts included Africa for about 1 page (a recipe and pictures), or ~10% of the article
- A memoir on the 1964-5 NY World's fair briefly mentioned African nations' participation
- A couple of articles featured other blacks (Carnival in Trinidad and a memoir by an African American); a few other references
- Of 1372 pages, ~6 pages, or ~0.4% devoted to Africa

# Selected Issues of *Saveur*: Savor a world of authentic cuisine

Date/Pages	Countries/Ethnicities	Africa-related material
Dec 2005  112 pages	Spain, Mexico, Vienna, Pakistan, Mediterranean, France, regional U.S., Arab, China, Russia, Japan Festivals: England, New Zealand, Austria, Italy, regional U.S.	<b>0%</b> (no Africa, but featured a memoir by an African American: Late-Night Chitlins with Momma—It’s little country but has a lot of soul.)
Nov 2005  116 pages	Scotland, France, China, Italy, regional U.S., Mexico, Korea, England, Italy, Hungary, Mexico, U.K. Festivals: Japan, New Zealand, regional U.S., Philippines, France	<b>0%</b>
Aug/Sept 2005  116 pages	S. Africa, England, Finland, Canada, France, Italy, regional U.S., Germany, Argentina, Indonesia, Senegal, Mexico Festivals: France, Guadeloupe, Canada, England, regional U.S.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Deep Roots” (article on peanuts refers briefly to African history and includes a recipe for mafe and a couple of pictures), ~10% of article, or 1 page</li> <li>• <b>“Out of India: The Flavors are Asian, the address S. African”</b> (article on Durban’s ethnic Indian population, about 3 columns, or 1 page)</li> </ul> 2 pages of 116 pages = <b>2%</b>

# Selected Issues of *Saveur*: Savor a world of authentic cuisine

Date/Pages	Countries/Ethnicities	Africa-related material
Nov 2004  116 pages	Australia, Tahiti, Germany, Canada, Argentina, India, Hungary, Japan, Ecuador, France, regional U.S., Greece, Peru Festivals: U.S., Argentina, Sweden, Australia, Belgium	0%
Aug-Sept 2004 104 pages	--	0%
June-July 2004  104 pages	--	A memoir on the 1964-5 New York World's Fair mentioned "Newly independent African countries came together in the Tree House restaurant, which featured fried yams and gorundnut bread." negligible %
May 2004 104 pages	--	0%
March 2004 96 pages	--	0%
Dec. 2003  104 pages	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Coffee is Everything (3-page article on coffee in Choche, Ethiopia)</b> 3 pages, or about 3%</li> </ul>



# *Saveur* observations

- Disappointment (and a little surprised) that Africa so clearly underrepresented in the material
- Still, a persistent, if small, representation
- Wondered if the situation was unconscious, deliberate or simply a lack of good material coming in (as with *Gastronomica*)

# Final Comments

- New taste palates and openness to new flavors and ingredients and techniques (e.g., steaming and cooking with leaves)
- Many foods now available (manioc, chili, Indian corn, fruits, African-style yam, cocoyam, plantain, tropical fruits, coconut, etc.) are integral to African cuisine
- Increasing positive associations with Africans (Kofi Annan, Barak Obama, Alexander McCall Smith's "Ladies Detective Agency" series, Hotel Rwanda or Constant Gardener films, etc.)

- Increasing immigrant influence, via restaurants, specialty shops
- Blessing of high profile chefs, critics, etc.
- The rising interest in oil from Nigeria and Angola
- The last frontier in the search for novelty

- The slow foods movement and a rediscovery of the crockpot and the delight of blended flavors in soups and stews
- The rise of food studies as a discipline and the growing emphasis in training institutions on ethnic cooking
- A new generation of young adventurous cooks
- Virgin, exciting territory for writers and chefs and home cooks

