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# Hemispheres

JUNE 2015



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WHERE MUSIC HAPPENS

+

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# HEMI CULTURE

FOOD, DRINK, HOTELS, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



CONNECTICUT

## Appetite for Destruction

Environmental chefs are working to eliminate invasive species, one delicious dish at a time

BY JODI HELMER

### ON A ROLL

A zoomed-in look at a tiny, crunchy Asian shore crab at Miya's Sushi, in New Haven, Connecticut

ANDREW HETHERINGTON/REDUX

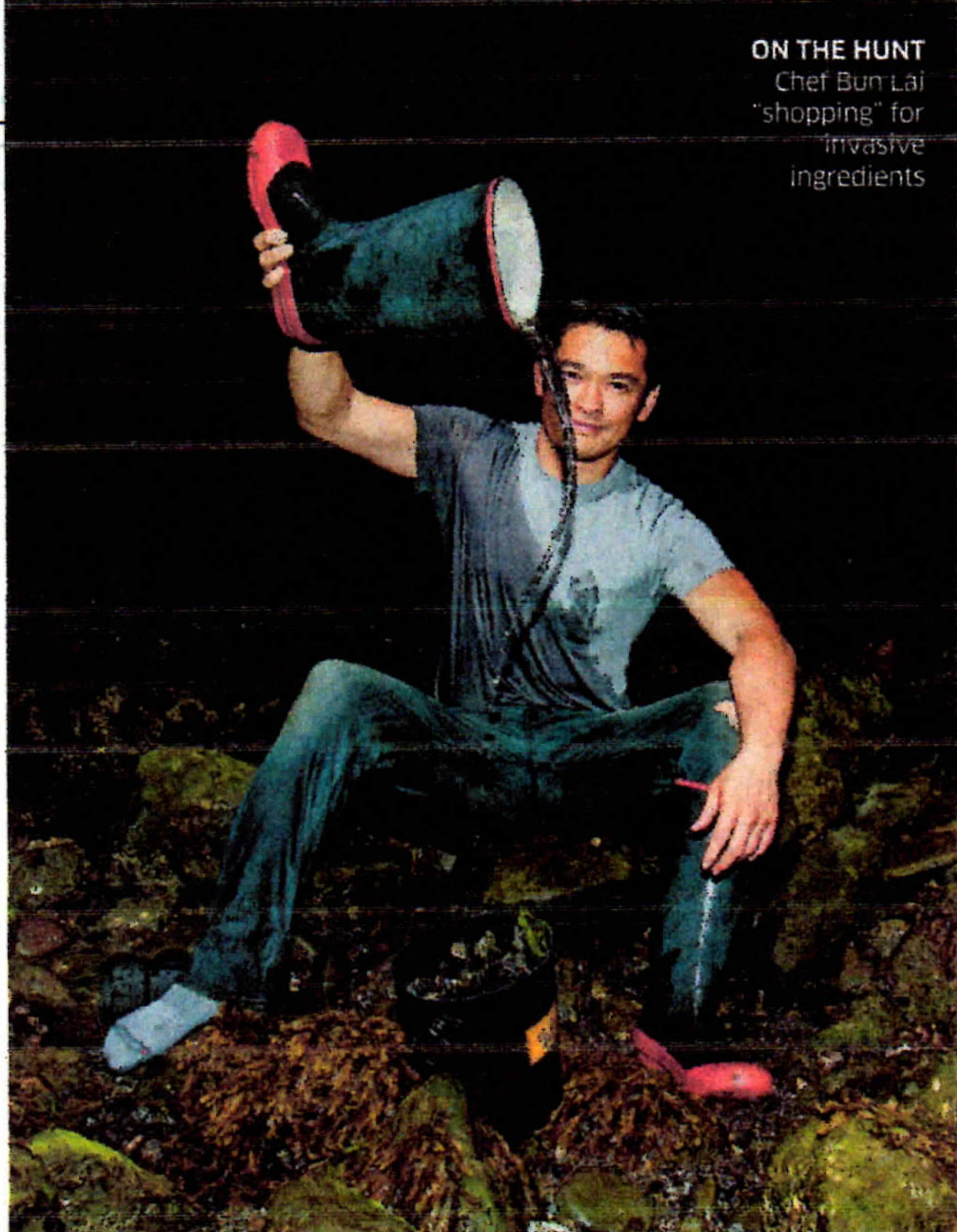


**N**ight after night, the same scene plays out at Miya's Sushi in New Haven, Connecticut. A few less-than-courageous patrons spend minutes gawking at the menu before turning around and walking right back out the door. The reason? Instead of beef negamaki, salmon avocado rolls and tuna sashimi, James Beard Award-nominated chef Bun Lai has filled his inventive menu with peculiar offerings such as lionfish sashimi, slow-roasted swan and other dishes based on such unappealing-sounding items as mugwort, sea squirt and feral hog.

"We wanted to think outside the box and make sushi that helps support the environment," Lai explains of a special menu that is comprised solely of invasive species and plants that have been introduced to the U.S.—intentionally or accidentally—and are now wreaking havoc on an environment that has no way to fight back. "Though we get national and international accolades for our approach, it takes a while for people to warm up to it."

A growing number of chefs across the country are adopting a similar ethos, creating signature recipes featuring invasive ingredients. In addition to taking pride in using their appetites to help the environment, diners are delighted to discover that invasive species are often delicious.

Conservation biologist Joe Roman, who created the Eat the Invaders campaign to support consumption of invasive species, encourages developing a hearty appetite. "Our end goal is extinction; we want to eradicate these species," explains Roman, a researcher at the Gund



Institute for Ecological Economics at the University of Vermont. "Traditional methods [of eradication] are economically and ecologically expensive, so it makes sense to put our appetites to good use."

## What to Order Here's how your next meal just might save the environment



### ASIAN SHORE CRAB

**THE PROBLEM** Native to the Pacific, these crabs are about the size of a quarter, but they pack a surprising ecological punch. Since appearing off the Jersey Shore in the late 1980s, they've spread widely along the Eastern seaboard, competing with native shellfish for food and taking over their habitats.

**THE SOLUTION** Bun Lai hand-harvests crabs on certified Connecticut shellfishing grounds, a process he likens to weeding. He turns them into a flavorful stock and fries them whole as a crunchy garnish for a dish called Kanibaba.



### WILD BOAR

**THE PROBLEM** Feral and fearless, wild boars can now be found in 45 states, where they inflict massive environmental damage by feasting on endangered sea turtle eggs and native plants. In most environments, these ecological troublemakers have no natural predators.

**THE SOLUTION** The Rabbit Hill Inn, in Lower Waterford, Vermont, serves braised wild boar shanks, which are known among chefs for their succulent, lean meat.



### NORTHERN SNAKEHEAD

**THE PROBLEM** While the fish (which resembles a snake) is a delicacy in its native Asia, it's viewed as a major eco-menace in the States, where it was introduced by fishmongers hoping to create harvestable local populations and by aquarium owners whose pets had outgrown their tanks. It's known for being an immensely voracious predator.

**THE SOLUTION** At the new Laotian restaurant Thip Khao in Washington, D.C., snakehead has been featured in a traditional soup and in a pounded larb salad.



### ZEBRA MUSSELS

**THE PROBLEM** These miniature mussels originated in Russian lakes and hitched a ride from Europe on the hulls of ships. Now, an estimated 10 trillion mussels clog the Great Lakes, feeding on plankton and stealing an important food source from native fish.

**THE SOLUTION** Minnesota's Excelsior Brewing Company uses zebra mussel shells and Eurasian milfoil (an invasive aquatic plant) taken straight from Lake Minnetonka in its Milfoil Lakehouse Saison Ale.