

# personality PLAY

Fruit jams, chutneys and salsas offer vibrant, fresh voices to modern menus

By Nancy Maes

Fruit jams, chutneys and salsas are like scripted characters that lend their own distinctive personalities to a dish. Salsas are the sassy femme fatale; jams are the sweet ingénue; and chutneys are intense, even professorial. But while these condiments have traditional and distinctive traits, chefs are giving them makeovers and casting new roles for them to play.

## SALSA DANCING

The popularity of Latin cuisine has given the south-of-the-border salsas a prominent place in the culinary spotlight. "I define salsas as uncooked, partially cooked or cooked ingredients that are combined but never cooked together," says Mark Miller, executive chef-owner of Coyote Cafe in Santa Fe, N.M., and the author of "The Great

Salsa Book" (Ten Speed Press, 1994), who is credited with launching modern Southwestern cuisine. "Salsas layer ingredients and give you flavor pockets, but they are fragile in terms of timeline because they're not cooked."

Spicy salsas are thought to have originated with the Aztecs, who were the first to blend tomatoes and chiles. But today, salsas have crossed over from their origins and been welcomed into the global culinary community. At Kildare's Irish Pub in Philadelphia, Executive Chef Stephanie Goldberg pairs a red pepper-pineapple salsa with grilled chicken breasts and a pearl barley pilaf (\$13.95). "The pearl barley is indigenous to Ireland, but you want something refreshing with it because it has a mild, earthy taste and the chicken