

SOPHIA: In the kitchen of an uptown restaurant in New Orleans, a chef in black T-shirt and jeans is prepping a grilled Caesar salad.

NATHANIAL ZIMET: We take a heart of romaine, and we cut the very top off, which is the very leafy, dark green.

SOPHIA: Here at the restaurant Boucherie, chef Nathaniel Zimet says Caesars are a staple.

ZIMET: We have a grill on. We have lettuce. We have parmesan.

SOPHIA: Cooking lettuce, he admits, is not traditional, but he thinks Caesar salad is improved by searing the romaine.

ZIMET: It's almost like it locks in the crunch of it.

And is it cold? No. Is it hot? No. Is it charred? Absolutely.

SOPHIA: Not many foods could be traced back to a specific date in history.

SOPHIA: But in 1924, the Caesar salad was born at a popular Italian restaurant in Tijuana, Mexico.

JEFFREY PILCHER: This is an Italian salad.

SOPHIA: Culinary historian Jeffrey Pilcher studies Mexican foodways.

In 1924, he says, Tijuana was a bustling border town popular with tourists during prohibition.

Mobsters and movie stars flocked to Tijuana's bullfights and nightclubs, where you could enjoy a perfectly legal cocktail and listen to 1924 dance music like this.

SOPHIA: Pilcher says the city was cosmopolitan, built by Mexicans, Chinese, people from California and elsewhere.

PILCHER: Caesar Cardini, the inventor of the salad, was an Italian immigrant, and there were many Italian immigrants to Mexico when they opened up restaurants.

SOPHIA: Cardini's restaurant was completely overwhelmed by holiday travelers on July 4, 1924.

They gobbled up everything.

As legend has it, someone there, maybe Cardini, maybe his brother, desperately threw together a few provisions on hand - olive oil, lettuce, parmesan, egg.

The salad at Caesar's restaurant was a hit.

It still is.

ZIMET: We have a little Worcestershire, a very small amount of lemon juice and Tabasco.

SOPHIA: Caesar salads today, like at the New Orleans restaurant Boucherie, often include anchovies.

But you'll also find them with kale, bacon, kimchi - all kinds of trendy ingredients.

And that's why the Caesar endures, says chef Nathaniel Zimet.

The salad is a showcase for innovation, yet rooted in resourcefulness and kitchen creativity.

The Caesar is a salad for today and maybe for always.