FOOD TRENDS 2023
The return of modernist cuisine

With the likes of Spain’s DiverXo and Disfrutar in the upper echelons of The World’s 50 Best Restaurants list, and Copenhagen’s Alchemist going from strength to strength, have reports of the death of modernist, molecular, or avant-garde cuisine been greatly exaggerated? We are going to hang our hats on Central in Lima finally topping the aforementioned list this year, as a kind of neat end (for now) to locavorism’s domination ahead of the modernist revival, which will see chef-scientists rise again – from a neat pile of olive ash no doubt.

Forgotten food

Waitrose, a UK supermarket, reports significant increases in beef shin, ox cheek and lamb neck sales, and a massive 34% increase in sales of fish heads. The suggestion is that people are cooking from scratch again with forgotten food – previously neglected cuts and trimmings, and even breeds – for economic or environmental reasons, or a bit of both, or as Waitrose claims, partly due to the rise of the slow cooker. The trend isn’t just confined to home kitchens. At Fallow restaurant in London, a dish of cod’s head in sriracha butter has been a huge hit on Instagram and in real life. So too their retired dairy cow burger that also happens to be one of the best in town.
Korean food at home

After a boom in Korean restaurants in recent years, many Western diners are now firmly familiar with their favourite Korean foods, such as kimchi, bibimbap, tteokbokki, and of course Korean BBQ. That now means more people trying to replicate these recipes at home. Expect to see Korean spices and ingredients becoming more popular and available – think gochujang and doenjang in mainstream stores – as well as failed kimchi-making experiments aplenty. South Korean brand Bibigo’s mandu dumplings saw a 500+% rise on overseas sales from 2015-2020, exceeding domestic sales. The K wave is still going strong.

Weekend closing

As restaurants seek a better work-life balance for their employees – both our recent Better Business and Front of House surveys identified it as key to staff welfare – so some are taking the brave step of closing at weekends. Chef Kristian Baumann’s new modern Korean restaurant in Copenhagen, JuJu, is only open Monday to Friday, while Albert Adrià’s Enigma in Barcelona is closed on Saturdays. And you can add chef Gareth Ward’s Ynyshir in Wales to a growing list of restaurants that are trialling weekend closing. “To open a business, we plan the menu, the wine list, the service, everything. So why not put the lifestyle we want to have into the equation?” says Baumann.
**No-lo 2.0**

Innovation in zero and low-alcohol drinks is proceeding at an astounding rate. Gone are the days of watery, tasteless alcohol-free beers and teeth-rotting mocktails. Some of the world’s best restaurants are recognising the demand for alcohol-free options that taste great, such as *Disfrutar* in Barcelona, where vacuum distillation is used to remove alcohol from fine wines while preserving flavour and aroma; or the various Chinese medicine-inspired ferments on offer at *Alchemist* in Copenhagen. With young people especially drinking less (abstinence in college-age Americans increased by up to 8% between 2002 and 2018), the demand for tasty, imaginative no- and low-alcohol drinks will continue to grow.

**Canada on the up**

Could the recent arrival of the *Michelin Guide* signal a period of global culinary recognition for Canada, a country with a deeply diverse food scene? The inaugural *Red Guides* to Toronto and Vancouver have been met with the usual criticism of playing to type by highlighting Euro/Japanese-centric fine dining. But perhaps the guides can be useful in other ways – to retain kitchen talent that might otherwise disappear to New York or elsewhere in pursuit of ‘Michelin excellence’, as has been suggested. Regardless, for the uninitiated, there’s a whole lot of country and a whole lot of food to discover, and as we’ve recently reported, that means indigenous foods too, which have started to exert a stronger presence at food events and symposiums.
Influencer food brands

Food is being infiltrated by influencers with huge audiences. *Prime*, an energy drink from Logan Paul and KSI; *MrBeast Burger*, a virtual brand; and David Dobrik’s LA pizzeria, *Doughbrik’s*, are just a few recent launches. And love or hate them, controversies and all, there’s no doubt that these influencers are, er, hugely influential. We’re also seeing companies spring up to help facilitate the process, such as Miami-based *Cura*: “A platform for passionate creators to launch their own food product lines”. It’s nothing new of course – think footballers with vodka brands or actors and burger chains. As the new celebrities on the block, it’s the influencers who hold the selling power currently.

Eater-tainment

Food as entertainment is a fast-growing market. Chef Todd English’s upcoming interactive food hall in Stamford, Connecticut, will feature immersive art exhibitions, a food science museum and an education centre, with technology key to all aspects of the experience, including the food. Edible cinema has been on the rise for years, pairing food and drink with iconic scenes in your favourite films to create more immersive experiences. Then you have hugely popular attractions such as the now global Museum of Ice Cream. It seems people can’t get enough of food, and not just eating it.
The co-op restaurant

Data from our recent *Front of House Survey* suggests that the offer of workplace equity could drive talent retention in the industry. Some chefs have realised this. Teague Moriarty at *Sons & Daughters* in San Francisco splits 50% of the restaurant’s profits with staff, which has enabled him to take people on when many restaurants are struggling to fill positions. *Zazie*, a neighbourhood bistro in the city, employs a similar model, with “25% of every menu item paid out directly to staff as revenue share,” again allowing them to successfully navigate the labour shortage. Co-operatives aren’t a new idea, but they just might be the right idea for now.

TikTok reviews

*TikTok* is increasingly becoming a search engine for Generation Z and that includes for restaurant recommendations. Young people are turning to the bitesize video format to get a digestible and, importantly, visual feel for a restaurant before visiting, rather than wading through written reviews. In effect, a very quick virtual thumbs up or down. Google estimates that close to 40% of young people now turn to social media when choosing where to eat. And it’s not just the Gen Zers. Another study found that over half (53%) of millennials have visited or ordered from a restaurant after seeing it on *TikTok*. 
Potato milk

‘How do/why would you milk a potato?’ may be your first response, but hear us out. Billed as the next big thing in the plant-based dairy business, now a booming sector worth $2.6 billion in the US alone, potato milk has sustainability as a main boon, with spuds requiring considerably less land and water for growing than oats, for example. Swedish brand Dug is already infiltrating supermarkets, with a milk that contains pea protein, rapeseed oil and other ingredients as well as potatoes. What does it taste like? So far, online reviews have been mixed for the starchy water, ranging from creamy to neutral to slightly bitter. Why not try making your own at home first, by boiling potatoes, blending with water and then straining?

Swalty

Does the idea of ‘swalty’ (sweet and salty) seem weird? It shouldn’t: sweet and salty popcorn has been littering cinema aisles for years, and salted caramel is everywhere. Think too of savoury cannoli, a favourite of fine-dining chefs, or London brand Happy Endings’ incredible ‘Naughty One’ ice cream sandwiches, which pair soy dulce de leche with miso salt caramel parfait and chocolate stout cake. Then there is the spicy and sweet trend: ice cream with chilli oil has been big on TikTok, and pepperoni and hot honey on pizza is a combination to die for. Spicy flavours on bakery menus have increased by over 100% this year according to reports. This won’t be news to lovers of chilli and chocolate.
Data sources

waitrose.com
statista.com
jamanetwork.com
gfi.org
restaurantmarketing.mghus.com
techcrunch.com
ift.org

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