

# A Touch Of Spice

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## Across the globe, chefs are creating a new 'World cuisine' laced with spices and stronger flavours that add a twist to traditional favourites says Fareeda Kanga



**Pinenut pattice, ragda hummus, feta salad**

An invitation for dinner at a traditional Gujarati home was greeted with much enthusiasm as I was looking forward to some authentic 'DBS' (dal, bhat and shak) served in trademark silver thalis that we are accustomed to seeing... I couldn't conceal my disappointment when the farsan was replaced by fajitas and tacos displaced the theplas!

Sadly, traditional home cooking is getting diluted with influences from Western cultures due to the immense exposure through TV and foreign travel. In fact the boundaries between Asian and Continental

cuisine are getting increasingly blurred with ingredients such as fungus, star anise and galangal sneaking their way into classic European and Western cooking. The contrasting flavours are slowly creating an alternative cuisine to match the demanding flavours of a new generation. Even in five-star kitchens the trend is apparent. Most chefs are working towards creating a unique world cuisine where the chef doesn't hesitate to limit his creativity to one particular cuisine.

It has been observed that Asian cuisine and Asian hospitality are gaining popularity. "Asian ingredients like soya sauce, galangal, makroot, varieties of mushrooms, rice wines, kalamansi are becoming an integral part of most Michelin star chefs and European kitchens. The endeavour of the chef is to create cuisines and dishes, which appease the palate with the different mix of spices and herbs and ingredients as opposed to standard fare. It's all to do with creativity and how you package your food and balance the flavour," says Chef Joy Bhattacharya, executive chef at Trident, Nariman Point.

Meanwhile I witness something quite extraordinary that adds growing evidence to this trend. In London I am invited to sample fare prepared by a team of chefs from British Airways who are the sponsors at 'Taste of London,' Britain's most revered food festival. According to Lynn McClelland, head of catering at BA, "Shepard's pie used to be a favourite inflight meal but now passengers hanker for butter chicken, a rich protein packed hot dish designed to help create a feeling of comfort and induce sleep." Other dishes on their Trans-Atlantic routes are also heavily Asian influenced with pak choy and lemon grass featuring prominently in first class menus in lieu of the traditional steak and kidney pie style offerings.



**Marinated sesame crusted tuna with honey-chilli sauce**



**Continental grilled tiger prawn in Mango Moilly, a mildly spiced gravy of shallots, mango and coconut milk**

Commenting on the rise of a global cuisine, a spokesperson for the Park Hyatt, Goa says, "The time when each chef had his or her own little notebook with years of recipes, notes, ideas, is gone. The easy accessibility of information has changed the shape of hospitality and dining experiences. Guests are more knowledgeable, have travelled the world and therefore the way we are cooking has changed as well."

According to Chef Satbir Bakshi – executive sous chef at The Oberoi, Mumbai, "This generation of customers does not really care too

much about authenticity as much as the actual taste and uniqueness, so chefs are going all out to explore these Asian ingredients to make their menus look exotic and a cut above the rest. It is all about doing different things while still not tampering with the basics."

Although a blend and interplay of ingredients can be refreshing one needs to follow certain basic guidelines or else the resultant cuisine could end up being without any identity or too overpowering in taste.

"Fusion cuisine has been increasingly accepted by customers in the country but one needs to be extremely careful about maintaining a fine balance of flavours. This balance would essentially be the defining line between what makes the dish fabulous and a complete disaster. At Mamagoto, we believe that food need not necessarily be authentic for it to taste good," says Janti Duggal, food director of Azure Hospitality.

Back at the Taste of London Festival, I attended a culinary master class with Chef Vivek Singh and Eric Chavot (A Michelin star chef currently based in London). It was truly engaging to watch the chefs share secrets from each other's kitchens. Singh cooked a tandoori partridge with much aplomb combining a classic French game with Indian ingredients. Chavot, a traditionalist, was happy stirring dal makhani and adding garam masala to hard-core French dishes.

Is this trend here to stay?

After watching some of the finest chefs go viral on the spice and flavour trail, ditching bland for bold, I think it is!



**Continental poached fish and grilled asparagus with tamarind sauce**

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