

THE COMFORT COMEBACK



In a gastronomic world enamoured of molecular gastronomy and food trends, traditional home style cooking flew off the menus. But all that's changing. According to **Fareeda Kanga** a new breed of innovative chefs are adding a spin to classic favourites by using upscale ingredients and helping to notch comfort food out of the comfort zone.

Around the world, chefs who love the taste, aroma and flavours of full-bodied carb-rich food are reintroducing items on their menus that people really want to eat—and it's called 'Comfort Food'.

"While I think food trends like fusion and molecular gastronomy have their place in the evolution of cuisine, it is basic comfort food which most people remember. This of course means different things to different people," suggests Pure based food consultant and bestselling cookery book author, Karen Anand.

In the UK, this could be the roast potatoes around the Sunday joint or a particular cake or tart. In France, it could be runny Brie for dinner or a garlicky dressing on a salad or the smell of warm croissants as you walk by a bakery. In Italy, it's probably a bowl of risotto and a plate of crispy fritto misto.



Karen Anand, cookery book author, shares her great aun't's recipe of Goan prawn curry



"This is my great aun't's recipe for prawn curry. Most households in Goa have their secret ingredient or touch. My aun't used to thicken the masala with sesame seeds instead of grated coconut and added the coconut milk separately. She used no oil. This gives a more refined flavour and makes for a lighter curry."—Karen Anand

Goan Prawn Curry
Ingredients
 500 gm raw prawns peeled and de-veined
 4-5 pieces kokum
 Salt
 ½ lt coconut milk thick
 1 cup coconut milk thin
 (If you are using canned or ready-made coconut milk add 3:1 ratio coconut milk to water for the thin coconut milk)
 Grind to a fine paste with a little water the following:
 10 dry Kashmiri chilies
 1 tsp black pepper corns
 1 tsp jeera
 ¼ turmeric powder
 10 medium cloves of garlic
 1 in piece of ginger
 2 tsp til (sesame seeds)

Method
 Put the masala into a heavy bottomed pan with the thin coconut milk and slowly stir until the masala (spice paste) cooks on a low flame (about 5-7 min), the colour will change. Add the thick coconut milk a little at a time until it is all incorporated. Throw in the kokum and simmer. Add the prawns just before serving and heat through once. Add salt to taste. Never boil the curry as the oil from the coconut milk will separate and come to the surface. The same masala can be used for fish curry. Serve hot with steamed rice.

"If you have a mother that cooks, you would probably remember something she made. That memory is associated with love and family, not necessarily the taste of the dish. Out of that context it may be a very ordinary dish. So comfort food works as a memory trigger, something which satisfies you emotionally as well as physically," Anand explains.

Swish restaurants in the country are also reviving this trend. "My food style leans towards comfort food," says executive chef Kelvin Cheung of Mumbai's Ellipsis restaurant. This native of Toronto is one of the chief protagonists for creating dishes that take you back to your childhood, that give you a warm nostalgic feeling.

At Ellipsis, Cheung's innovative menu

features comfort foods that are modified using newer techniques to create the same creamy velvety flavour in a lighter, cleaner format. For example he makes a traditional roux without flour by using sodium citrate that changes the pH level of cheese giving it a rich texture minus the heaviness of flour. His signature Chicken and Waffles also works with unusual ingredients and comprises of homemade sourdough buttermilk waffles with smoked honey truffle butter, bacon sriracha maple syrup gastrique and buttermilk-brined chicken. "These dishes are heavy in umami and amino acids and give your mouth the feel of comfort food with less of the grease and heaviness," he explains.

Whilst Cheung may play on the



Irfan Pabaney, The Sassy Spoon, relives his school days with a refreshing Kala Khatta cocktail



Very Berry Khatta

Ingredients
 4 mulberries
 1 orange wedge
 60 ml grape juice
 30 ml kala khatta syrup
 2 lime rings
 Black salt
 Pomegranate
 Crushed ice

Method

Mix two mulberries, half the lime and one orange wedge. Add grape juice, kala khatta syrup, and black salt to taste. Serve over crushed ice and garnish with fresh mulberries, pomegranate and lime rings.

scientific side of ingredients, at The Sassy Spoon, executive chef, Irfan Pabaney relives his school days with a refreshing Kala Khatta cocktail that initially raised eyebrows when it was introduced at the swish eatery but is one of their best sellers today. "People love it because it's crammed with flavours that remind them of an era when life was uncomplicated and pleasures were simple. An ice gola or kala khatta was all it took to put a smile on a kids face back then," he avers.

Pabaney's special concoction hits all the right notes and differs from the roadside classic because it's loaded with fresh mulberries, oranges and pomegranate. For mains the old-fashioned mac-n-cheese gets a hit with Goa sausage as an accompaniment.

"When you're depressed, you need to feed your mind, body and soul with all things good," says executive chef, Ashish Bhasin at Trident, Bandra Kurla, Mumbai. "Comfort food refers to any kind of food or beverage to which an individual might turn for momentary respite. This category of food is very subjective and is different for every individual. For some, it could be a childhood favourite dish and for others it could be a dish linked to a place or time that brings positive memories."

Bhasin believes there are some evergreen dishes on every menu that will always be the superstar performers. However, in order to take the diners experience to another level, it is important to present comfort food stylishly. At



Award-winning chef **Manu Chandra** takes us on a culinary journey of his favourites at the quirky, non-conformist gastro-pub, **Monkey Bar**. This is a menu that defies stereotypes, bringing boldly to the table comfort food from days gone by and lets you indulge in your Indian roots, with a totally fresh perspective.



Ellipsis' Kelvin Cheung's signature Chicken and Waffles works with unusual ingredients

Trident, Bandra Kurla, Mumbai, Bhasin jazzes up a poached egg, risotto, goat cheese by adding truffle flavored beetroot and goat cheese risotto with crumb fried poached egg. And khichdi is served in a multigrain form with acharai raisa.

Down the road, at The Taj Lands End, Executive Chef Anirudhya Roy says, "For me, mutton curry has the power to take me back in time every Sunday my mother used to prepare the curry which my siblings and I used to look forward to the entire week. We have brought the same experience to Masala Bay with the fundamental curry, cooked in the pressure cooker. With different cuts of lamb, the curry will be brought to the guests in the pressure cooker set on a wooden plate

and the steam will be left off in front of the guests to transport them back in time."

The Sahib Room at Mumbai's Palladium Hotel is helmed by Chef Anand Rai who explains that the cuisine here is timeless, with a twist. The Guccu ke Tikki, are not the aloo tikkis, which we're all so familiar with, but Chef Anand's version includes Himalayan Morel mushrooms. "The Lahori Chaampaan are unique as they're marinated in a special fennel rub; traditional shorba becomes Sarwar Pista Ka Shorba with the addition of toasted pistachio and asparagus crème; even the Subzari Paneer Tikka is accompanied by a spiced prune chutney," he elaborates.

Award-winning chef Manu Chandra takes us on a culinary journey of his



Chef Anshuman Bali of Four Seasons & his Lemongrass crème brûlée



Lemongrass Crème Brûlée

Ingredients
 300 ml cooking cream
 300 ml milk Amul Taza
 200 gm sugar castor
 5 eggs
 100 gm lemongrass
 1 Kaffir lime leaf
 50 gm sugar demerara (brown)

Method

Boil the milk and put in bruised lemongrass and torn lime leaf, let it infuse. Separately heat cream with vanilla pod. Mix both milk and cream. Meanwhile whisk egg yolks with castor sugar, add the milk and cream mixture to eggs and give it a good whisk. Strain the mixture and pour in the serving dishes.

Bake at 150 degrees for 50 mins on a water bath. Let it refrigerate. For serving dredge brown sugar caramelize with a blow torch and serve.



"Dishes like butter chicken khichdi & pulled pork belly really hit the spot, beat the blues & have a feel good factor." —Chef Manu Chandra, Monkey Bar



favourites at the quirky, non-conformist gastro-pub, **Monkey Bar**. This is a menu that defies stereotypes, bringing boldly to the table comfort food from days gone by and lets you indulge in your Indian roots, with a totally fresh perspective. Chandra suggests we sample the butter chicken khichdi and pulled pork curry with

pita bread. "These dishes really hit the spot, beat the blues and have a feel good factor," he suggests.

The desserts carry forward the same quirky tone, enticing you with a mishmash of flavours that melt in your mouth. A sundae is converted into a multi-layered sandwich, with great skill—the Mobar

Sundae Sandwich, while others pick up two different elements for delightful results—like the Rasmalai Pannacotta or the Khova Brioche Pudding (a sinful mix of almond cream, berries and ice cream), and if you are still in doubt, just opt for the Old Monk Chocolate Cake.



"The mutton curry has the power to take me back in time when every Sunday my mother would prepare it"—Chef Anirudhya Roy, Taj Lands End, Bandra



Ashish Bhasin, Trident, Bandra Kurla jazzes up a poached egg, risotto, goat cheese by adding truffle flavored beetroot & goat cheese risotto with crumb fried poached egg

