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THE MAGAZINE CHEFS LOVE TO READ

NOVEMBER 2026

volume 21, issue 10

# BREAD IS OUR HEART

Chef **Mulyatna Sardiono** and Chef **Sasidhar Dasari** on how they kneaded a winning recipe for the Sounbula Mills Artisan Bakery Class Competition

## MISS COMMENDABLE

Chef **Lhyzelle Alejandro** on handling large-scale kitchen operations and breaking the glass ceiling for women chefs



## PLAN B TAKES THE CAKE

Chef **Chathura Maduranga** recounts his pastry path and brings a tropical twist to the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition



## THE MEDAL GOES TO...

A look at the chefs and teams that earned recognition at **EISC 2026** and the skills that won over the judges



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Dear Fellow Chefs, Members, Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is always a lot going on in our industry, and if there is one thing we know, it is that chefs rarely sit still for long. One competition wraps up, another comes around the corner, and before we know it, we are already planning for the next challenge.

The EISC-Class Competitions 2026 kept us busy over four months, bringing together chefs, pastry chefs, bakers, and f & b professionals who were ready to put their skills to the test. We saw talent, hard work and plenty of determination on the competition floor. Congratulations! to those who walked away with medals. For those who did not, keep at it. A competition has a way of showing you where you stand but also what you are capable of. Sometimes, the lessons you take home are worth their weight in gold.

Of course behind every successful competition is a team of people working away behind the scenes, marshals, along with partners and sponsors who put their trust and support. To all our EISC partners, sponsors, judges, marshals and supporters, thank you. Your contribution helped bring this season to life even in the challenging times.

Now, the baton passes to our national team. In association with our partners Meiko and Food Tech, the Emirates Culinary Guild will send 40 chefs from across the Emirates to Luxembourg from 17 to 27 November to compete against the best in the world at the Expogast Culinary World Cup 2026. This will be our fourth participation in the event since 2014, and it is a proud moment for the Guild and our chefs.

I wish you the very best of luck to the



team. You have put in the hours and passion and now it is time to give it your best shot. Competing on the world stage is no small feat and I hope you make the most of every moment. We will be cheering you on! My thanks also go to FoodTech Group and Meiko, particularly Tim Walsh and Attila Pető, for continuing to support our national team. Having partners who believe in our chefs makes a real difference.

There is plenty to get stuck into in this month's Gulf Gourmet, too. Chef Mulyatna Sardiono and Chef Sasidhar Dasari of Arada Hospitality & Entertainment tell us how they won the Sounbula Mills Artisan Bakery Class Competition and about getting the little things right so that it can make all the difference when it counts. We also hear from Chef Lhyzelle Alejandro and Chef Chathura Maduranga, who share the highs, hurdles and lessons that have made their journeys in the kitchen. We are also beginning our roundup of the EISC 2026 winners in this issue. There are plenty of achievements worth celebrating, and we will be sharing more of these stories in the issues ahead.

With the final showdown of Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition coming up, there is more to look forward to. At this stage of a competition, the pressure is on, and the smallest details can tip the balance.

October also brought World Chefs Day, a chance to celebrate the people who make this profession what it is. Chefs spend so much time looking after everyone else, be it through the food they serve, the teams they lead or the young cooks they mentor. It is worth taking a moment

to recognise that contribution, and to remember that the knowledge we pass on today will make the kitchens of tomorrow.

As always, my thanks go to our members, partners and supporters for standing with the Emirates Culinary Guild. To the chefs who competed this season - Well Done! for putting yourselves out there. And to those preparing for the next competition, keep practising and learning from the people around you.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Gulf Gourmet. You can find past issues and more chef stories at issuu.com/gulfgourmetmagazine, and keep up with Guild news and events at emiratesculinaryguild.net. We would also love to hear from you at emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com.

The festive season is upon us. I hope you get to enjoy some of that cheer yourselves, at work and at home. Between all the rush and running around, remember to save some energy for the celebrations. After all, even Santa needs a good kitchen brigade to keep the festive spirit cooking!

Culinary regards,
**Alan Orreal**
*President, Emirates Culinary Guild*

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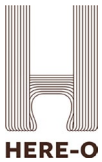

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# Chef or "Masterchef"

## Chef **Andreas Kurfürst** gets to the heart of the distinction

Nowadays, many culinary courses, online and in-person, offer MasterChef classes for anyone. "To become a MasterChef in a very short time," "Learn from a MasterChef", etc.

**My questions are:**

- What is MasterChef, really?
- What makes you a MasterChef?
- Who decides that you are a Masterchef?

Working for an exclusive Swiss Hotel Management Institute, I led marketing and cooking demo trips to many countries and universities to advertise our school.

And on these trips, I have been called a "Masterchef" many times over. I think it is due to my many years of experience, but actually, the more I learn, the more I realize that there is so much more to learn.

I do not see myself as a MasterChef at all, just a Chef with quite a bit of experience.

Nowadays, I see more and more advertising, claiming "MasterChef So-n'-So" is cooking for you, "MasterChef This-n'-That" is teaching you how to cook, etc., etc. And they are all young chefs.

I feel this title is becoming just an advertising tool, just like some certification labels on products, where the production company is actually issuing the certification label.

Well, in Germany we do have an official title for a Masters Degree; we call it Meister. This applies not only to the culinary world, but to almost any profession where specific practical, theoretical, and managerial skills are required, like carpenters, builders, electricians, mechanics, etc.



> The more I learn, the more I realize that there is so much more to learn

In a German kitchen, to be officially called Masterchef (or "Küchenmeister" in German), you will have to have several years of actual practical experience (usually 4-6) in specific roles within an operational kitchen, and many hours of theoretical training in subjects like hygiene, finance, people management, culinary knowledge, marketing, purchasing, etc.

And then there are extremely strict exams, both practical and theoretical.

The overall fail rate for 2024 was 49.2%; that's almost half of applicants. You are allowed to take the exam only 3 times.

And, if you want to have apprentices/ trainees in your establishment eventually (and you do, because trainees are cheap labour and will work hard), you are legally required to have a Masterchef (Küchenmeister) employed. But that is Germany. The US has something similar, the CMC (Certified Master Chef) program, awarded only by the American Culinary Federation (ACF), which is shorter than the German version and usually requires a culinary school background, plus other ACF or WACS Certifications.

I believe that there could be some other, simpler, and more universal qualifications, applicable throughout the world, to allow you to be called "MasterChef".

If a Noodle Food stall in Singapore can achieve a Michelin Star without having certain prerequisites or qualifications, we should be able to come up with something that qualifies someone who cooks really good food all his life to be officially called a "MasterChef".

At its core, a Master is someone who has transitioned from effortful learning to seamless execution, combining profound knowledge, continuous commitment, and (most importantly) the capacity to teach others. To have talent is one thing, but to be a true Master, that takes many years of practice, knowledge and experience. ■

# newsbites

# Dubai Prepares for Second Global Arabic Chefs Salon & Competition

Two days at the Chef Training and Consultancy (CIC) in Al Qusais will bring chefs and industry professionals together for a power-packed celebration of culinary talent

The second edition of the Global Arabic Chefs Salon & Competition will take place on 11 and 12 November at the Chef Training and Consultancy (CIC) Center in Al Qusais.The two-day event brings together chefs and industry professionals for live competition, display categories and shared learning.




The competition follows a debut edition held in January 2026. "The response to the first edition was strong enough to convince us to keep going, and to commit to a second edition within the same year. That day we promised that we will do it in November, and now we are doing that," said Chef Majed Al-Sabbagh, Founder & Director of Chef Training and Consultancy.

With roughly a month to go, interest has already outstripped expectations. Registration remains open for the static, or display, categories, where competitors will present finished work for judging. The competition runs across around 16 categories. The first edition attracted about 244 entries, and this year's event is expected to be bigger.

"We are still looking to grow the numbers further, even as the live classes have reached capacity. Our classes are open to professional chefs, students, amateurs and also chefs with special needs, and this is something we are proud of that in one competition, under one roof, you have all these categories together. When a student stands next to a seasoned hotel chef, and a chef with special needs stands next to both, standards rise because the whole community shares the same space. Many talented cooks spend years in busy kitchens without ever being measured against an independent benchmark, and this competition gives them that opportunity," said Chef Majed.

The competition is endorsed by Worldchefs as a regional competition. Worldchefs certified judges and members of the Syrian Culinary Guild and Emirates Culinary Guild will judge the competitions and to help maintain standards across both days. Competitors will receive direct feedback from the judges. By working to a recognised standard and hearing candid assessments from experienced chefs, participants will be able to identify their strengths, address their weaknesses and build the confidence to compete again. The aim, Al-Sabbagh said, is to help chefs grow and, through them, to strengthen the wider industry.

Al-Sabbagh describes the event as a working space where the whole industry learns together. "I always call it a workshop because everyone is working together with different experiences, and everyone is participating, whether competitor, judge or visitor. Each will bring a different level of experience to the room."

For Dubai's hospitality sector, the November edition will offer a chance to see emerging talent alongside established names, and to watch a young competition build a growing track record in just ten months. With live classes full, display categories still open and Worldchefs-approved judges ready to give honest feedback, the second Global Arabic Chefs Salon & Competition looks set to build on the promise of its first.



# Young Chefs Discover Versatile Cooking Ideas at Unilever Food Solutions

By **Oliver Ochieng**
*(Core Team Member)*

The Emirates Culinary Guild Young Chefs Club (ECGYCC) attended a hands-on workshop at Unilever Food Solutions on 22 September 2026, exploring ways to use its products in everyday cooking.

The session opened with a welcome from Chef Joanne and Ms. Sally.

Chef Joanne and Chef Eddie then demonstrated the versatility of Mediterranean Herb Seasoning through three preparations: a salsa verde, a sauce for fusilli pasta and a salad dressing. The demonstrations showed how a single seasoning can be adapted across a range of dishes.

Chefs also sampled short rib tacos, salads, pickles, juices and other dishes prepared for the event. Throughout the session, they engaged actively with their Unilever Food Solutions hosts,





asking questions about unfamiliar products and discussing how to apply them in their own kitchens.

The workshop gave the young chefs a valuable opportunity to learn, taste and exchange ideas with industry professionals. In a closing note, ECGYCC thanked Chef Joanne, Chef Eddie, Ms. Sally and the Unilever Food Solutions team for their hospitality and informative demonstrations. The club also acknowledged the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG) for its continued support of learning and development opportunities for young chefs. ■

To get your chef or company related news featured in this section, email **editor@gulfgourmet.org**




# Miss Commendable

She manages around a hundred cooks, plates exquisite dishes for passengers, and holds the Culinary and Kitchen Champion of the Year Commendation from the 11th Middle East Hospitality Excellence Awards 2025 to her name. Meet the Senior Sous Chef of Emirates Flight Catering, **Lhyzelle Alejandro**, who is commendable in every sense of the word

There comes a moment in every career when we find ourselves in a quagmire that says as much about our courage as it does about our ambition. It strips everything back until one question stares back at us. What do you do when you do not know what you want? Chef Lhyzelle Alejandro's story comes as an answer we did not know we needed. Because not knowing what you want is not a weakness. In her case, it was exactly what made her exceptional. It kept her curious, kept her moving, and kept her hungry long after others had settled.

When Lhyzelle Alejandro's grandmother first handed her a recipe, neither imagined its outcome. 13 years later, having worked at several establishments, including Marriott Al Jaddaf, Nikki Beach Hotel, Address Downtown, JA Hotel and Resort, 5 Hotel The Palm and Nammos, her path has led her to one of the most prestigious culinary operations in the region. The 32-year-old Filipino chef is now in her second year as Senior Sous Chef at Emirates Flight Catering, leading over a hundred kitchen staff daily. In a candid chat with Shreya Asopa, she shares her journey. Excerpts from the interview.




**What does a typical day look like for you at Emirates Flight Catering?**
It is totally different from the other establishments where I worked. Here, it is all about systems and consistency. I am learning a lot about costing, menu development, and managing large teams. We work concourse by concourse. There are three concourses, each with eight kitchens. On any given shift, I manage at least 100 staff, answer their questions, assign them to different locations, and handle orders. It is huge, but it is fun. That is the beauty of it.

**How do you approach menu development and cost control across such a large operation?**
Before we execute any menu, we collaborate as a team. We all come together. We create the dish, everyone tastes it, all comments are recorded, and we refine it before it ever goes to the lounge. Since we are serving premium passengers in first class and business class, it has to meet the highest standard in both presentation and taste. We are a very systems-driven environment here. Consistency is the priority. We also take care of wastage. For example, leftover croissants become Umm Ali. Overripe bananas become banana bread or banana yogurt served at breakfast every day. Before placing any order, we check passenger numbers so we know exactly how much to order and minimize wastage. It is a huge operation, and every decision matters.

> Do not be scared of starting from scratch

**What are the biggest challenges you face in managing such a diverse team?**
The biggest challenge is handling so many different nationalities. Some people understand instructions quickly; others need more explanation. You have to balance your approach, understand each person, and make sure nothing gets misunderstood. It is a continuous learning process, and honestly, it makes you a better leader every single day.

**How do you keep up with food trends and incorporate them into your menu?**
Food trends change constantly, and social media helps us stay up to date. It shows us what's trending and what people desire, but we also draw inspiration from our team's diverse backgrounds. We regularly brainstorm and exchange ideas, always aiming to create something that feels both

modern and distinctively ours, rather than simply replicating others. Our goal is to create something that feels current but still has our own signature.

**What is your favourite comfort food?**
Sinigang. It is a Filipino sour soup dish. It feels very homely and satisfying.

**Tell us about your childhood and what inspired you to pursue culinary arts.**
As a kid, I loved cooking, but I never thought it would become a career. I watched my mom and dad cook and slowly picked up their tricks. My parents separated when I was 12, so I grew up with my grandmother and siblings. She is the one who really taught me the old traditional recipes, the ones you do not find in any book. I completed my basic culinary education in the Philippines and came straight to Dubai. That was always the goal.

**How did you actually end up becoming a chef? You mentioned you originally applied for a different role.**
Surprisingly, when I first arrived in Dubai, I applied for a front-office position. It was a chef at Marriott who reached out through a mutual friend and offered me a Commis Chef role. That is how I found my way into the kitchen. The executive chef there told me something I will never forget. He said, "Lhyzelle, do not be scared of starting from scratch." Do not listen to anybody. If you don't know what you want, keep trying. That stayed with me from then on.

**How did working across so many different sections shape your culinary identity?**
My journey has never followed a straight line, and I think that is what made it rich. I chose to experience as many sections as possible- hot, cold, grill, sushi, fine dining, gastronomy, and catering- because I believed a great chef needs to understand food from every angle, not just one type, but also the culture and context behind it. Taking those risks, was it all worth it? Every new environment taught me something I could not have learned by staying in one place. Before coming to the Emirates, I had built a strong focus on Japanese cuisine, specifically sushi. Here, I decided to set that aside and immerse myself fully in international cuisine. In a way, I am rediscovering earlier skills and building from scratch again. It is challenging, but that is honestly how I have always grown best.

> Don't stop until you find what you love, and don't be afraid to take risks

**Hozpitality Group commended you as Culinary/Kitchen Champion of the Year at the 11th Middle East Hospitality Excellence Awards 2025. What did that recognition mean to you?**
It was shocking, honestly. I did not expect it at all. I went there to celebrate my colleagues, not thinking my name would ever be called. When I saw my name on that stage, I could not believe it. I was competing against some of the most professional chefs, many of them Executive Chefs. Getting that recognition after all these years was overwhelming, in the best way.

**What advice would you give to young chefs entering the industry today?**
Do not get too caught up in social media. A lot of what you see there makes it look easy: just plating a dish, and it goes viral. But it is not easy. You need to truly understand every ingredient you are working with. Most importantly, keep trying. Don't stop until you find what you love, and don't be afraid to take risks. That is what shapes you into a well-rounded chef and eventually a good leader.

**What are your future aspirations?**
Ten years ago, I thought I might eventually go back to the Philippines. But now I am not ready. I want to see more, learn more, and witness how the culinary industry continues to bloom globally. In 10 years, I do not see myself in a Sous Chef jacket anymore. I see myself as an Executive Chef. One big reason that drives me is that I do not see many female Executive Chefs out there. I want to break that mindset.

**Any thoughts on how kitchen culture has changed with the newer generation of chefs?**
Kitchen culture has evolved a lot, and in many ways, that is a positive thing. The awareness around respect and well-being in the workplace is so much better now. What I do hope the newer generation holds onto is the understanding that feedback, even when it is direct or tough, often comes from a place of genuine care. In the old days, a chef would push you hard, and the next day it was forgotten- no hard feelings, just growth. That bond between a mentor and a young chef is something special. The scolding and the love were always equal. It was all for your development.

I know this because I lived it. I am thankful for the privilege of working under the guidance of Chef Satya Beeknoo and Chef Udo Moreau. Their mentorship has been instrumental in shaping my culinary career.

Chef Satya Beeknoo, my Chef de Cuisine in 2014, was my first real mentor. He encouraged me not to fear starting from scratch until I found my own path. Chef Udo Moreau, my Executive Chef in French fine dining in 2016, challenged me to perfect every single dish and taught me the value of perseverance over shortcuts. The hard way, but always for the long term. I learned so much from them.

**Three words that describe you as a chef?**
Strong, independent, and curious.




A great chef needs to understand food from every angle

# The Art of Interviewing Without Shooting Yourself in the Foot

Think you nailed the interview? Chef **Helen Morris** tackles the details candidates often overlook

I think I have a few stories from the UK after spending a couple of weeks there in September. I can confirm the temperatures were amazing, the locally produced food was fantastic, and my nostalgia levels were running high. There is nothing quite like a bit of British sunshine and good food to remind you what you have been missing.

However, I am saving my UK culinary adventures for another time. This month, I am putting down my fork and picking up a rather different subject: job applications, interviews, and the increasingly mysterious art of professionalism.

It has been a bit of a bugbear of mine for some time, and recently it has become more prominent. Having reviewed countless CVs over the years, both professionally and while helping students prepare for their careers, I have started to wonder whether we have forgotten something fundamental. Getting a job starts long before you walk through the door or, these days, log into Teams.

Let us start with the CV. I remember many moons ago, paying a company a small fortune to professionally design my CV and cover letter. It was expensive, but at the time, getting help to present yourself properly was worth considering.

Today, we have our trusted friend, AI. You can organise your career history, improve your wording, correct spelling and grammar, and tailor your CV to a specific job in minutes. You can even ask it to identify which of your skills and experiences best match the job description you are applying for.

Of course, AI is not a miracle worker. You still need to check the facts, make sure



the CV sounds like you, and ensure your experience is represented honestly. AI can polish your story, but it really should not be writing your autobiography for you.

But there really is little excuse for submitting a CV that is poorly formatted, riddled with spelling mistakes, out of date, or so disorganised that the reader needs a strong coffee and a detective magnifying glass to work out what you have actually done. I am reviewing a CV, not auditioning for Sherlock Holmes!

Your CV is your first opportunity to demonstrate professionalism. In hospitality, we expect attention to detail, consistency, and presentation in our daily practices. If we are asking our chefs to produce beautifully presented plates, surely we can expect them to produce a well-presented CV.

I have rejected candidates not necessarily because they lacked the skills, but because they had not made the effort to present themselves properly. If you cannot take the time to check your CV when applying for a job, what does that suggest about your attention to detail when the pressure is on? After all, if your CV cannot pass quality control, why should I assume your mise en place will?

And then there is accuracy. I once interviewed a candidate who spoke about their current job, which sounded relevant to the position. The problem? It was not listed on their CV. When I asked where they were currently working, they explained that they had actually left the job around two years earlier. I checked the CV again. It clearly stated that they were still employed there. What surprised me was not simply the discrepancy, but the apparent lack of concern. There was little acknowledgement that the information was incorrect, let alone an apology- just an "oh yeah, I should update that." Seriously!! Interview over.

Of course, mistakes happen. But there is a difference between making an honest mistake and failing to take responsibility for it. Professionalism is about being honest, accountable, and willing to put things right. Do not be surprised if the interview becomes less about your culinary skills and more about investigating a cold case. And I have not even asked you to make a hollandaise yet.

Think of yourself as a brand. Your brand is communicated through how you speak, listen, how prepared you are, and the questions you ask. Your appearance and attitude also tell a story. And remember, you probably are not the only person applying for the job. So, what makes you stand out?

It is not necessarily the longest CV, the loudest voice, or the ability to squeeze

the word passionate (another overused word – yes, I am guilty of that too) into every other sentence. It is showing that you understand the opportunity, respect the process and have made an effort to prepare.

So, let us talk about appearance. I have absolutely no issue with a beard. A neatly trimmed beard can look perfectly professional. A well-kept beard is one thing; looking like you just rolled out of bed is another. I have interviewed candidates in T-shirts when the occasion called for something more professional. Others have appeared on video calls so close to the camera that I could practically conduct a skin consultation. Online interviews are convenient, but they are still interviews.

Check your camera, lighting, background, and sound. Dress appropriately. Look engaged and give the interviewer your attention. You do not need a television studio or a background suggesting you live in a luxury penthouse. You simply need to look as though you have made an effort. And please, check what is behind you. A laundry mountain, yesterday's takeaway containers, and what appears to be a small domestic crisis create an impression. Or simply use an appropriate background filter.

If you have no interest in the position, decline or cancel in good time. Better to be honest than turn up as though attending were an obligation imposed by a persistent email. You applied for the job and made the shortlist, so where is the enthusiasm? You need not bounce in like an overexcited Labrador chasing a tennis ball, but some genuine interest should show. You should be able to explain why the role appeals to you, what you can bring to the team, and how your experience fits the position. You should have researched the organisation and prepared a few questions of your own.

Questions show that you understand an interview is a two-way conversation: the employer is assessing you, but you are also deciding whether the opportunity is right for you. There is a world of difference between asking thoughtful questions about the organisation and saying, "Well, you've seen my CV, haven't you?" One shows engagement; the other suggests the interviewer should simply hand over the contract.

> Nobody expects a Michelin-starred CV, but please do not serve it up on a chipped plate

Confidence is a good thing. Arrogance, however, is confidence that has forgotten its manners and possibly left its listening skills at home. You may be perfectly capable of doing the job, but the interview is your opportunity to demonstrate that, not assume your CV has already done all the work. Being qualified for a position does not mean you are entitled to it.

This brings me to a question I keep coming back to. Are we doing enough to prepare people for interviews? In culinary education, we spend considerable time developing technical skills. Do we teach them to write a professional CV, research an employer, answer questions clearly and demonstrate enthusiasm without sounding rehearsed? These are employability skills, not optional extras. Well, yes, on the whole we do, but perhaps not to the level that we should in a competitive job market.

A technically gifted chef who struggles to present themselves professionally may miss opportunities their talent deserves. Meanwhile, a candidate with slightly less experience but excellent preparation, honesty, and a willingness to learn may make a stronger impression. A smart suit cannot compensate for poor technical skills, and a polished CV is no guarantee that someone can run a kitchen.

I have experienced both sides of the recruitment coin. I have interviewed candidates with exceptional CVs, only to find that once they joined the team, their performance was far less impressive.

Employers must look beyond first impressions, assess candidates fairly, and verify their experience. Equally, candidates need to understand that an interview is not simply an opportunity to recite their career history. It is a chance to demonstrate who they are and what they could bring to the team.

It is checking your CV, arriving on time (even online), dressing appropriately, being honest about your experience and listening carefully. And if you make a mistake? Own it. You do not need to memorise a script or manufacture a personality. You simply need to present the best version of yourself: prepared, professional, interested, and authentic.

For those of us in hospitality, perhaps it is time to apply the same thinking to recruitment that we apply to guest service. We spend hours ensuring a guest's arrival is welcoming, and every detail reflects the standards we promise.

Surely, our own careers deserve the same attention. On the flip side, should employers be transparent and let candidates know interview expectations, suit, picture, CV formatting, the art of interviewing, and then at least we may align on the 'big day'.

So, before you press send on that application or click join meeting on your next online interview, take a moment to check your work. They cannot see your potential if you do not give them a reason to look for it. Your CV is your calling card. Your interview is your opportunity. Your professionalism is your responsibility.

And if you are going to serve up a career opportunity, at least put a little effort into the presentation. Nobody expects a Michelin-starred CV, but please do not serve it up on a chipped plate. ■



# Who Tastes the Rice?

## Leadership centred on one person versus systems that last, writes Chef **Tarek Mouriess**

Here is a question that can ruin your morning coffee. Are your people succeeding because of you, or in spite of you? In four decades of professional kitchens, I have seen leaders lift everyone around them. The difference lies in whether you see your team as people to nurture or simply tools to get the job done. People leave jobs, not always for more money, but because recognition was missing.

A friend in a senior position once told me about an incident from his years working in a hotel kitchen. At 5.30 one morning, the team was preparing for a banquet serving thousands, so he decided to taste and do random checks. The first stop was the big kitchen. Two senior cooks who could teach a masterclass were pulling trays of roasted chicken out of the oven. They tilted every tray and poured the jus straight down the drain. The marinade, fat, everything that dish had been building towards since yesterday belonged on the rice. It was going down the drain like dishwater. Second stop, the small kitchen, the one doing lunch for the VIPs. One of his best cooks was dishing lemon rice with roasted lamb. But when he tasted it, the rice was like baby food. Soft, overcooked, finished. The youngest cook had prepared far too much rice and had cooked it to death. My friend was not angry with him. The boy had made a mistake in a kitchen that let him make it.

The rice was cooked again, and the meal was saved. But the real problem was someone else. A chef with 20 years of experience had looked at the plate, nudged it along, and let it go without tasting it. That was when the question stopped being about rice. It became: Who tastes the rice?

A leader walks into a room full of habits, and the longer you have sat in the chair, the more your habits become everyone else's. You carry a legacy whether you want one or not, so we, as leaders, have to decide what it is.



> If the kitchen cannot function without you, you have built a monument to yourself. If it thrives without you, you have built a legacy

John Maxwell had the antidote. "A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit."

### Enter the Absentee Leader

You do not need to be physically missing to be absent. The Absentee Leader sits in every meeting. He manages upward beautifully, with polished updates for senior management and a cheerful "I am working on something". He moves only when pressure arrives from above, and he mistakes motion for progress and a title for leadership. Downstairs, the team feels it. After a massive event, they look up and wait for a nod. And the leader walks past, pockets the praise from the executives, and says nothing.

Peter Drucker drew the line neatly. Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things. Management fixes the broken equipment. Leadership asks why it sat broken for so long.

"The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win. Everyone wants to win, but not everyone wants to prepare to win." - Bobby Knight.

Preparation is the invisible foundation of leadership. A team that is unguided or unprepared will inevitably falter under pressure, leaving junior staff to make basic errors while senior cooks pass the buck.

### The Recipe for Accountability is Here

- Taste before it leaves. Taste every dish, every time, no exceptions, however senior you are. If the person sending it out does not taste it, nobody has.
- Own your share. When the system fails, the first question is not who did it? It is: What did I leave undone?
- Write it down, train your successor, praise in public. If it is not written down, it dies when you leave. Your legacy is who you leave behind. Recognise your brigade loudly and manage upward quietly.
- Process outlasts people. The Emirates Culinary Guild started in 1992 with a handful of chefs around a table, and today its Salon Culinaire is one of the biggest chef competitions in the world. It got there on shared standards and collective mentorship.
- Every leader eventually leaves. If the kitchen cannot function without you, you have built a monument to yourself. If it thrives without you, you have built a legacy. ■

# Bread is Our Heart

How does a team climb from third place to the top of the podium in a single year? Arada Hospitality and Entertainment's Chef **Mulyatna Sardiono** and Chef **Sasidhar Dasari**, crowned the Sounbula Mills Bakery Team of 2026, trace it back to endless practice sessions and eight hours of holding their nerve



## A WINNING INSTINCT

***What does it take to impress the judges? Chef Mulyatna Sardiono on flavor, technique and artisan baking.***

Nothing could fluster Chef Mulyatna Sardiono on competition day. Not a proofer shared with competing teams, ovens with other bakers waiting their turn, or eight hours on the clock. Not even the memory of last year, when his team emerged as runners-up. Losing teaches a baker more than winning does, and there was no hubris in Chef Mulyatna's team, only homework. It spent the year studying what the judges wanted. Before the competition, he and his baking partner, Chef Sasidhar Dasari, had visualized the whole day, divided the work and rehearsed that sequence for the showdown. At the Emirates Salon Culinaire 2026, Chef Mulyatna and his baking partner, Chef Sasidhar Dasari from Arada Hospitality & Entertainment, were named winners of the Sounbula Mills Artisan Bakery Arena Class.

"We aimed to surpass last year's performance. We put the plan in black and white. We invested considerable time in practice and research. In the two weeks leading up to the competition, we experimented with one flavor after another. Anything that felt uncertain or tasted too ordinary or overpowering was dropped. Once we were satisfied with a product, we committed to it and concentrated on refining its flavor," explains Chef Mulyatna.

Amid the confluence of flavors, three ideas packed the biggest punch. The first was ube (purple yam) paired with raspberry. "We had been following the flavor as it rose in popularity and wanted to bring in its special character. The second was mango and sago, chosen because Emirati tastes lean towards it, and we also wanted to add sourness, freshness and sweetness in different combinations. The third was coffee bean flavor, and we also had




> You cannot borrow their experience; you have to build your own but learn from them

coffee cream, the spectacular baking done by Chef Sasidhar," elucidates Chef Mulyatna on the art of pastry combinations that come together in the orosensation of pastry, where a cream yields, a crumb gives way, sweetness refreshes, all in a single bite.

Chef Jurgen Ellenbeck, Master Baker and Master Pastry Chef Owner of Home of Breads, who judged the class, saw those flavours land. "The UAE has very talented bakers, and we are very proud of that. Bakers were always left behind, and now they have a stage to show themselves, thanks to Sounbula Mills."

On what set Arada apart, Chef Jurgen says, "Arada handled unfamiliar equipment with great confidence, and they organized with a very structured time plan from A to Z and the techniques were executed in a very professional manner. All three Danishes were outstanding in design, taste and flavor, and highly innovative."

The margin was thin. "In a competition, a small gap separates first place from second. The Arada team learned from being runners-up last time. A Danish with coffee cream was over-flavored last time, and that one thing cost them first place. This year everything was balanced and very good, which made them stand apart," he adds.

Across the spectrum of baking in the competition, Sounbula Mills flour had to rise to the occasion in every bake. Chef

Mulyatna describes it as a flour with a range of protein and gluten that works for daily production, special occasions and competitions alike, provided the baker respects the technique.

"We use a lot of ingredients from other brands, like French and Italian flour. But Sounbula Mills, as a local brand, gives us room to experiment while supporting us. With bulk production, keeping costs in check is as important as quality. Sounbula Mills helps us balance food costs with great use across our daily production, cake shops and outlets," he says of the flour's versatility.

## Doughn't Rush

Even the best dough can fall flat in the rush of live cooking. "Sometimes, a good dough can go wrong during proofing and baking when we are in a rush. In live cooking, the pressure is high, but we remind each other to slow down and get it right. Salt, yeast and flour may be basic ingredients, but even a small imbalance can affect the result. We must respect the recipe and follow the steps and timings."

The virtue of concentration and patience has long roots. In an interview last year, Chef Mulyatna recalled a lesson from his training days, when he was preparing tiramisu and left a pot of sugar and water unattended in a rush to mix other ingredients. The sugar scorched, smoke filled the restaurant, and even the security guard came running into the kitchen, but it taught him a lesson once again. "Whatever you do, you need to focus," he said then. "Your mind, hands and eyes must collate together."

In a time of drab utilitarianism, when a machine can produce almost anything at the press of a button, he argues, a bakery still depends on people who understand the product and the ingredients. "We know we have built something real when our staff understands the product even without machines. What will last is the strong foundation, knowledge and skill. These will never be lost, even with the introduction of new machines.



> Whatever you do, you need to focus

His advice to younger bakers is plain, and in a nutshell, it is patience. He says no amount of wheedling will get anyone to hand over experience. It has to be built. Know the product you want to make and the technique that suits it, because a technique that does not fit the product leads to a bad result. "We need consistency, and a chef must taste and check constantly. If you only sit in the kitchen or work only with your colleagues, it adds no value. You need to talk with your friends and colleagues, see what other people are doing, and then try to implement it. You cannot borrow their experience; you have to build your own but learn from them. Above all, pastry and bakery require patience. My bakery chef and I collaborate with communication and mutual respect to create something special in competitions and everyday production. These qualities also make you a better mentor to your team," he adds.

## Time to Rise

The nucleus of Chef Mulyatna Sardiono's success was his unexpected turn towards pastry. At the Bandung Tourism Institute, he had his sights set on the hot kitchen, but with limited places available, he had to choose between waiting a year and learning pastry. His mentors opened his eyes to the artistry of it. Soon, he went on to be the only one of 15 applicants from his batch selected for the pre-opening of Kempinski Hotel MoE in Dubai, became an executive pastry chef in 2011 and joined Erth Abu Dhabi in 2019. Today, he is Executive Pastry Chef at Arada Hospitality & Entertainment.

The competition schedule sits on top of a full working life. At Arada, he has the freedom to run things his own way, but balancing daily operations with competition prep means knowing what's a priority, taking responsibility for both, and keeping everyone updated. The hours are longer, but he believes the tiredness pays off for a team that keeps its aspiration and focus.

The win has set the next target. Chef Mulyatna says the Arada team plans to keep entering competitions, and next month, with a frisson of anticipation, it will compete at Salon du Chocolat. He perceives competitions as a meeting point for generations of chefs, a passing of the torch in which the seniors prod the younger ones into doing better. "Even those who do not win gold gain the experience, and the hard work pays off when they see the result. Competitions bring back passion and motivation. They push us to drive ourselves to make something better together, and to make our culinary community stronger."

Chef Mulyatna is swift to share the plaudits, knowing that success is never a one-person show. From his wife and children to his mentors, general managers, and colleagues, he acknowledges those who have stood by him. He also tips his hat to the ICCA Dubai, Emirates Salon Culinaire, Chef Jurgen, Karim Al Azhari of Sounbula Mills and the judges for providing such a prestigious platform to showcase

their skills and passion for the culinary arts. "I also want to thank the Arada team and COO Mr Amit Arora for their continued support, encouragement and commitment to developing talent and fostering a culture of excellence. We are also grateful to the Emirates Culinary Guild, its members and marshals, whose collective spirit brings positivity to an industry facing challenging times and gives talent room to shine."

## PROOF OF CONCEPT

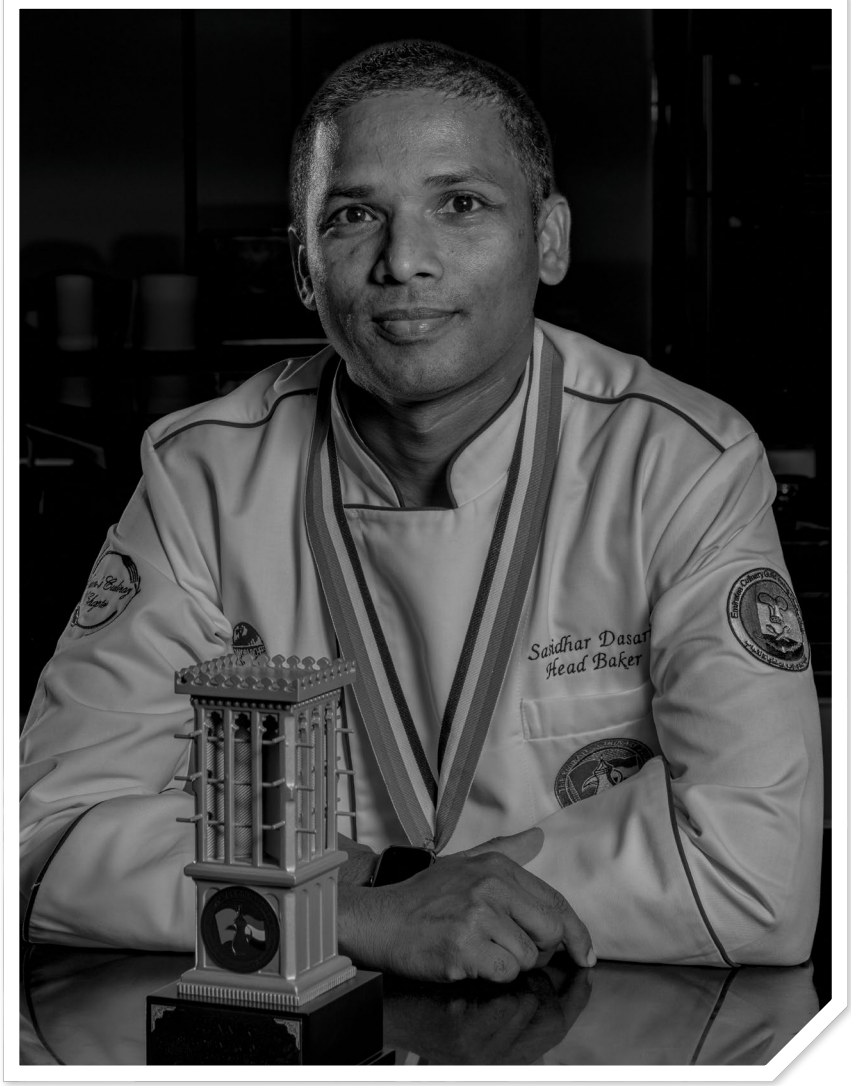
***In a world that venerates speed, Chef Sasidhar Dasari trusts patient hands and unhurried dough, an ethos that has just won his team the Sounbula Mills Bakery Team of 2026 title.***

"Finally, we have achieved our dream!" That was what Chef Sasidhar Dasari told Chef Mulyatna Sardiono when Team Arada was announced as the Sounbula Mills Bakery Team of 2026.

The title ends a long chase for a baker who says he has never left a competition empty-handed. Chef Sasidhar, Head Chef at Arada Hospitality & Entertainment, has won medals at several editions of the Emirates Salon Culinaire, Hospitality Qatar 2016 and Salon du Chocolat Dubai 2025. "I never come back without medals," he says. However, the top title in the Sounbula Mills Artisan Bakery Arena Class had eluded him. "I took part in the Sounbula Mills competition twice before. This is my third time participating, and we finally won." An earnest trier whose persistence has finally paid off, Chef Sasidhar has given his rivals every reason not to write him off.

More than 30 sessions put them through their paces. The team ran through each product until satisfied, then worked on timing. Every task and finish time went into a file to track the schedule.

Translating preparation on the competition floor meant the team had to navigate logistical constraints, with limited access to shared equipment. The




> For bakers, bread is our heart

proofer, essential for allowing the dough to rise properly, had to be shared among competitors. Although a second was available, the time required for adequate proofing made it difficult to depend on it. Oven access presented another bottleneck. A plan that depends on a free oven can capsize at the first delay, so the team's answer was to take careful note of every timing. "We had exactly eight hours, so we divided the time and tasks systematically. A bread bake takes about 30 minutes, which helped us plan the schedule. We also coordinated with the other competitors to share the equipment at different times. Communication mattered as much as timing and practice."

Another factor that set Chef Sasidhar apart was his decision to proof the dough manually using warm water, avoiding the wait for a shared proofer. But it posed a temperature-control challenge. If the dough gets too warm, the butter can soften or melt, compromising the bread's lamination.

"It all depends on fermentation and proofing. Water temperature is crucial, and a natural starter needs regular feeding and consistent conditions. I have used the same starter for more than 20 years. Poor maintenance can compromise the bread's quality. You also need to check the starter's pH, which helps you monitor its acidity and influence the bread's sourness, one of its defining flavors," explains Chef Sasidhar.

## Loaf, Actually

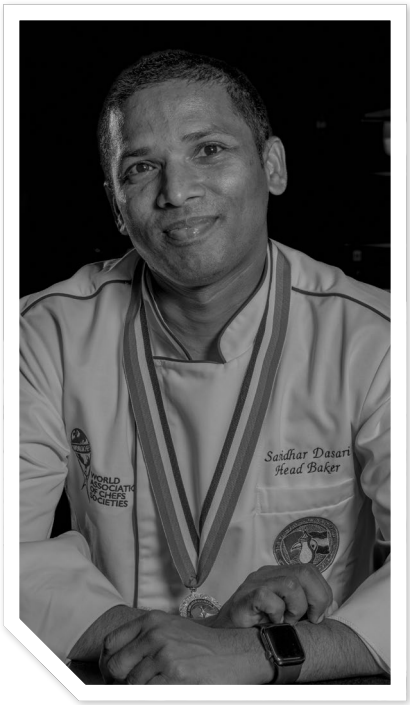
The pernicious temptation of shortcuts holds little appeal for him. "As a baker, I cannot take shortcuts. You always lose quality. I am very strict about quality because I do not want my reputation to suffer. For bakers, bread is our heart." For him, the dulcet crackle of a cooling crust is a satisfying sign of the work that has gone into a loaf.

Two mentors help instill that discipline. Chef Raghupati, a mentor from his graduation days, encouraged him to strive for excellence and taught him to understand flour. "First mentors are always special. He told me to build a career better than others. I had spent three years studying books. He told me to learn to distinguish flours by touch and how flour varies in protein, starch, mineral content and other properties. My second mentor is Chef Mulyatna; I have been working with him since 2022. He is my boss and mentor, but we are also friends. He has helped make me the baker I am today."

Talking about his time after completing his hotel management degree in Hyderabad, he recalls returning home for a year to care for his ailing father. "Parents come first, then our careers. I put my career on hold to be there for him. In life, you should always have two options because you never know what might happen."

He began his career at a couple of restaurants in Hyderabad before moving to the UAE in 2013. A bit of serendipity and a whole lot of grit landed him at Atlantis, where he was hired as a pastry chef but assigned to the bakery. Initially disappointed, he soon realized he preferred baking to pastry. When offered the chance to return to pastry six months later, he declined and was promoted to chef de partie in the bakery.

The vicissitudes of his career took him to Qatar and another catering operation before he returned to the UAE. He spent three to five years as a sous chef for a mass-production catering operation,




> You always lose quality if you take shortcuts to bake

but eventually grew disillusioned with the factory-like environment. In 2021, he became head baker at Pullman Dubai Downtown. After a year, he moved on, missing the scale of a larger operation. He later joined Chef Mulyatna at Erth, producing 20,000 to 30,000 meals daily, alongside fine-dining operations and a cake shop. Then, together, they moved to Arada as part of its pre-opening team.

At present, Chef Sasidhar oversees weekly production, daily operations and events, while developing healthier concepts and recipes tailored to specific calorie requirements and client briefs. On the morning of the interview, he had just come back from an event and was preparing a cake display for a new location.

He credits the Emirates Salon Culinaire, Chef Jurgen, Chef Bernard and Chef Alan for supporting him. "I thank Chef Bernard for five years of candid feedback and for pushing me to maintain my standards. I also want to acknowledge the Arada team, including the general manager, other managers, Chef Mulyatna and Chef Sumedha, for their support during competition preparations. I also want to praise Mr Karim of Sounbula Mills for supplying samples without hesitation. Whenever I asked for samples, he provided us with what we needed. He is always supporting us," he says.

That gratitude extends to the people he competes against. Chef Sasidhar remains genial about his competitors. "For me, the whole event was one team. It is called hospitality. There is no enemy. It is about embracing each other and being together. Maybe tomorrow we will compete again, but we still need to respect each other's work."

Chef Jurgen says the Sounbula Mills competition holds its own on the world stage, backed by partners who provide the best equipment available anywhere. "Thanks to Ferneto, MIWE, Sounbula Mills and all the other partners for supporting us. We are really blessed with our partners, and the best equipment allows us to put the best results on the table."

He hopes young teams will take part next year and this year's teams will return. He mentored several of them. "We compete, but we're a family." Mentoring, he says, is a duty. "Not many people choose to be bakers. When young people want to join us and are willing to learn, it is our obligation to pass on our experience, skills and knowledge so they can shine. Everybody who reached the top had a mentor."

But it is also a two-way street. "Even chefs should have passion. You have to wake the lion in them, to be hungry to learn."

Machines will keep getting faster, and shortcuts will keep tempting tired bakers. This title does not end that debate, but it shifts the focus to the ineffable bond between the bake and the dough. Chef Sasidhar and Chef Mulyatna are the answer, in the beautiful uncertainty of a living dough. ■




Marshals and Judge

# Meet the Medalists!

## Over 400 chefs competed at the International Emirates Salon Culinaire Salon Classes Competition 2026

More than 400 chef entries from across the UAE competed in the Emirates International Salon Culinaire (EISC) Salon Classes 2026, where 266 medals were awarded: 69 gold, 87 silver and 110 bronze.

Organised by the Emirates Culinary Guild, the competition was redesigned this year to give chefs a platform to compete during a challenging period for the UAE hospitality industry. It ran over four months and combined static display classes with practical cookery classes, which were the highlight of the event.

Endorsed by Worldchefs as a regional competition, it was adjudicated by a

| AND THE MEDAL GOES TO.. | |
|---|---|
| **Best Cuisinier 2026** | Roshan Pradeep Novotel & Ibis Deira |
| **Young Chef of the Year 2026** | Owen Rodes Vincent Movenpick Hotel JLT |
| **Best Pastry Chef 2026** | Amila Iyan Pullman Deira City Centre |
| **The JM Foods Non Alcoholic Cocktail Challenge** | Eshan Shamal Askin Yas Plaza Hotel |
| **Sounbula Artisan Bakery Arena Class** | Arada H&E Chefs Sasidhar Dasari & Mulyatna Sardiono with Owner Mr Karim Al Azhari |
| **Best Pastry Chef** | Amila Iyan Pullman Deira City Centre |
| **Young Chef of the Year 2026** | Owen Rodes Vincent Movenpick Hotel JLT |
| **Best Cuisinier 2026** | Roshan Pradeep Novatel & Ibis Deira |
| **The Food Tech Hi Tea Challenge** | The team from EKFC Rajee Sathurappan & Hari Krishnan Anilkumar with CEO and General Manager Attila Peto |




Best Pastry chef Amila Iyan Pullman Deira City Centre

team of certified Worldchefs judges. Competitors entered 23 classes covering practical cookery, static displays, Emirati cuisine, cake decorating and showpieces.

The event took place at the International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA) Dubai, where modern, professional kitchens and school facilities gave competitors an outstanding setting in which to compete.

"We are proud to have once again been able to put on the event, and we are grateful to the supporters of the guild and our committee and marshals and to the courage of the chefs and to the industry for their support and presence during the 4 days of EISC Salon Classes 2026. The competition was bigger than we could have hoped for, and we are excited for 2027 already," said President of the Guild, Alan Orreal.

New classes brought more of the industry into the competition. This year's additions widened the field beyond kitchen teams.

Hi-tea class for airport first-class lounges and hotel lobby lounges, sponsored by Food Tech, which brought chefs and service teams together. Artisanal bakery arena, presented by Sounbula Mills, which showcased crafted breads and pastries from some of the country's top bakers.

Non-alcoholic cocktail challenge, sponsored by JM Foods, which opened the competition to bartenders for the first time. Lamb butchery class, also supported by JM Foods, which tested the skills of professional butchers.

The competition was once again powered by Foodverse, an end-to-end app-based platform developed by Foodverse with ICCA Dubai. It covered the whole process, from registration to judging, and was designed to make the competition more transparent, efficient and credible.

"Foodverse is set to become a truly credible platform for chefs across the globe," said Sunjeh Raja, Managing Director of ICCA and the visionary behind Foodverse. "Not only competitions, but it's set to empower the entire food industry and create meaningful opportunities for young chefs worldwide."

Andy Cuthbert, Worldchefs President, Guild founding member and Dubai-based coordinator, said this year's competition was another sign of the growth of the culinary arts in the UAE. "With the



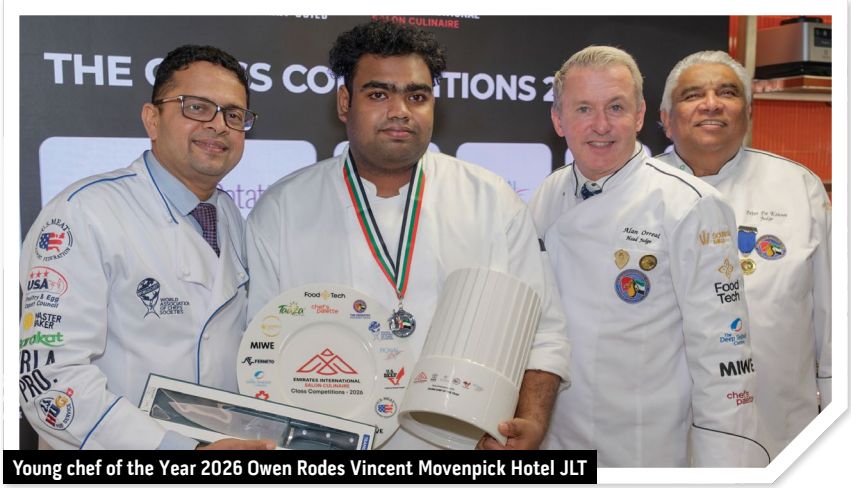
Sounbula Mills Winners The team from Arada H&E Chefs Sasidhar Dasari & Mulyatna Sardiono with Owner Mr Karim A Azhari




The Food Tech Hi tea challenge: The team from EKFC Rajee Sathurappan & Hari Krishnan Anilkumar with CEO and General Manager Attila Peto

support of our partners we were able to give back to our community and keep our chefs focused and learning skills. The new categories were a fantastic addition to this year's competition."

The Emirates Culinary Guild thanked its partners for their support in making the event possible and expressed pride in being associated with Sounbula Mills, Food Tech, Taaza, Ronai, RAK Porcelain, Chef's Palette, USMEF, JM Foods, The Deep Seafood Company, Ferneto, HK Gourmet, MIWE, FABE La Royale, Potatoes USA and Arla Pro, recognising their contributions to the hospitality industry. ■



Young chef of the Year 2026 Owen Rodes Vincent Movenpick Hotel JLT




Best Cuisinier 2026 Roshan Pradeep Novatel & Ibis Deira




# Partners in Every Win

Celebrating the partners who helped make the EISC 2026 a success.

Successful culinary competitions rely on strong partnerships as much as they do on talent. The Emirates Culinary Guild thanks the partners and supporters that helped make EISC 2026 a platform for learning, achievement and the recognition of emerging culinary talent.

WORLD ASSOCIATION OF CHEFS SOCIETIES

### World Association of Chef Societies

Worldchefs is a non-political professional organization, dedicated to maintaining and improving the culinary standards of global cuisines. It accomplishes these goals through education, training and professional development of its membership. Founded in 1928, Worldchefs represents the largest international membership of food and beverage professionals with more than 230 member national associations, education partners, and industry allies. The World Association of Chefs Societies was also present during the culinary competition to officiate, with members of its leadership team present, making the event of international importance.

THE EMIRATES CULINARY GUILD

### The Emirates Culinary Guild

The Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG) is the association of professional chefs of the UAE. It is a non-profit-making organisation, organised by volunteers dedicated solely to the advancement of culinary art in the UAE. The World Association of Chefs Societies is the 105-nation fellowship of the world's various professional chefs' organizations. The ECG received its charter into Worldchefs at a ceremony in Stavanger, Norway, on June 28, 1994, during the Worldchefs 26th World Congress. Worldchefs endorses the ECG as the authorized professional culinary association for the UAE. The ECG, thereby, has an international culinary focus and multi-national support for the staging of its various competitions, seminars and events.

**The aims of the ECG, broadly, are:**

- To encourage and inspire young chefs through training and competition.
- To enhance the culinary prestige of the UAE internationally.
- To encourage UAE nationals to consider a career within the hospitality industry.

Emirates Culinary Guild Young Chefs Club

### Emirates Culinary Guild Young Chefs Club

The Emirates Culinary Guild Young Chefs Club is a part of the Emirates Culinary Guild. It is a local fraternity for a multicultural group of young chefs, dedicated to the development and upskilling of regional budding talents.

Women's Culinary Chapter
Connecting | Supporting | Inspiring

### Women's Culinary Chapter

The Women's Culinary Chapter (WCC), a part of the Guild, aims to be a vibrant community designed exclusively for women chefs, created to empower, connect and celebrate the incredible talents of women in the culinary

industry. The Women's Culinary Chapter (WCC), founded by Tarryn-Leigh Green, came together with the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG) to create a milestone moment for the industry. Female counterparts are encouraged to join WCC and become an integral member of this dynamic community.

### ICCA

Established in 2005, homegrown in the UAE for the world, ICCA has been featured among the "Top 10 Culinary Institutes in the World" and awarded the "Recognition of Quality Culinary Education" by the World Association of Chefs Societies (Worldchefs), a global authority on food standards. Remaining committed to helping the talented and deserving but financially underprivileged Young Chefs of the UAE Hospitality Industry, the centre runs the ICCA Dubai Culinary Scholarship Program. This one-of-a-kind and self-supported corporate social initiative, in strategic partnership with the Emirates Culinary Guild and the World Association of Chefs' Societies (Worldchefs), aims to educate and empower the young chefs to achieve their dreams.

The Scholarship Program has to date transformed the lives of over 200 industry chefs, with an international education and qualification worth over USD 2.0 Million. ICCA offers a range of Professional Programs, Amateur Programs, Artisanal Courses for Artisan Development, and Professional Development Programs in Culinary. Salon Classes 2026 took place at the prestigious International Centre for Culinary Arts, ICCA Dubai, located in Dubai Knowledge Park.

### Foodverse

Foodverse is a first-of-its-kind platform that connects, enables, and empowers chefs, food enthusiasts, and industry brands within a unified digital ecosystem, where learning, creativity, connectivity, and commerce happen across every corner of the world. Created by ICCA Dubai, the Middle East's leading culinary school with over two decades of excellence, Foodverse was designed to address real industry challenges by combining a connected community with purpose-driven technology.

The result is a platform that empowers every stage of the culinary journey. Foodverse brings together everything food professionals need in one connected platform. From building a professional profile and accessing continuous learning to discovering global career opportunities, connecting with mentors, earning rewards, and participating in digitally managed culinary competitions through FV Compete, the platform empowers chefs with tools that support growth, recognition, collaboration, and career advancement at every stage. Foodverse is more than technology; it is a global movement connecting everyone passionate about food.

### Sounbula Mills

Sounbula Mills is redefining flour production in the UAE through advanced milling technology and continuous investment in innovation. Since 2022, the company has enhanced its capabilities to meet the precise needs of professional chefs and bakers, producing premium-quality flour and bran for breads, pastries, pasta, cakes, biscuits, and other bakery applications. With a strong focus on consistency, performance, and quality, Sounbula Mills serves both local and international food manufacturers while supporting the next generation of culinary professionals.

### FoodTech Group

FoodTech Group is a Dubai-based company dedicated to supporting the growth and development of the Middle Eastern bakery and pastry industry through reliable technology, practical expertise, and honest partnerships. The company's portfolio covers a full spectrum of solutions, from compact artisan equipment to fully integrated industrial lines, allowing them to support businesses of every size with the same level of care and technical precision. For them, contributing to the Guild and culinary community goes beyond supplying machines; it means helping create an environment where creativity and craftsmanship can flourish. What truly defines them is its understanding of regional production realities, where climate, ingredients, workflow, hygiene, and staff training directly influence the final output. By acknowledging these practical challenges, they design and implement solutions that are effective in day-to-day operation.

### RAK Restofair

Restofair RAK is a joint venture between RAK Porcelain and ECF Group France, a €415M company with 1,400 employees serving 80,000 customers in the HORECA industry, with nearly 140 years of experience, passion, know-how, and innovation. Many years of know-how and expertise in Europe facilitated the opening of Restofair RAK in the Middle East 15 years ago, offering quality services to the HORECA industry. They stock a wide range of products, covering Chinaware, Glassware, Cutlery, Table

Accessories, Buffet, Disposables, Menu & Signage, Barware, Kitchen Utensils, Plug-in Machines, Pastry, Housekeeping & Stewarding, Uniforms, Hotel Apartments, In-Room Items, etc. With a central warehouse in Ras Al Khaimah, a Dubai Cash & Carry outlet, offices in Ras Al Khaimah, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi, and direct sales agents all over the UAE, they serve customers in a fast, timely manner without compromising on product or service quality.

www.ronai.ae

**Ronai**

Established in the UK in 1947 and expanding to the UAE in 2006, Ronai LLC is a leading distributor of premium hospitality brands across the Middle East. Alongside world-renowned tableware and kitchen equipment, the company designs and manufactures its own Uniforms by Ronai and bespoke hospitality apparel in the UAE. The collections are suitable for use across various job functions, as well as in the hospitality and aviation industries. The Bespoke by Ronai brand offers a unique, tailor-made collection, designed exclusively for the individual property. Built on decades of trust, quality, and industry expertise, Ronai continues to deliver innovative solutions for the region's hospitality sector.

**MIWE (Michael Wenz GmbH)**

MIWE (Michael Wenz GmbH) is a premier German manufacturer of commercial baking technology, established in 1919. We design energy-efficient production ovens, in-store baking systems and freezing/proofing equipment renowned for precise climate control and automated baking solutions. MIWE Middle East FZE, located in Dubai Silicon Oasis, is the ninth subsidiary of MIWE and is intended to strengthen its market position in the Middle East and parts of Africa and the Indian subcontinent. The company's goal is to intensify existing business relations with a stronger local presence and to further promote the MIWE brand.

**Ferneto Group**

As a business group, Ferneto integrates several companies that operate in the bakery industry, in Portugal and around the world. Ferneto brings together several companies operating in the bakery industry, in Portugal and around the world. As the gluten net, represented on the front of the company, Ferneto has grown by structuring itself differently within the bakery world, promoting the values of partnership, transparency, and ethics. Across the globe, Ferneto has learned and evolved alongside its customers and local partners. Each region, each reality, and each culture enriches the company's understanding of the bakery industry, giving it a truly global presence and perspective.

**The U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF)**

The U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) is a nonprofit trade association aiming to increase the value and profitability of U.S. beef and lamb industries by enhancing demand for their products in export markets through a dynamic partnership of all stakeholders. Headquartered in Denver, it is a nonprofit trade association responsible for developing international markets for the U.S. red meat industry. Through its worldwide network of offices and representatives, including the Middle East, USMEF manages to create new opportunities, develop existing international markets and enable U.S. companies and U.S. products to become integral parts of international red meat markets. These activities focus on total Carcass Utilization to maximize export demand for value-added products and "Underutilized" cuts. By promoting the quality, consistency, versatility, and sustainability of U.S. beef and lamb, USMEF plays a vital role in connecting producers with global consumers and ensuring U.S. red meat remains a preferred choice across diverse international foodservice and retail sectors.

**The Deep Seafood Company**

The Deep Seafood Company began its journey in 1986 and has since grown into a legacy in the heart of the UAE. Starting as a humble supplier to royalty and government in Abu Dhabi, the company blossomed into a seafood powerhouse. Holding prestigious certifications like Chain of Custody ASC & MSC, HACCP, FSSC 22000, ISO 9001, and ISO 14001, and a registration with the USFDA, the company sets the benchmark for industry standards. In addition, their in-house brands include Oceano (premium packaged seafood), Gulf Choice & Sea Power; they also operate Gourmex (Meat and Poultry Division), and Royal Future (KSA). Its mission is to provide the best quality products and set a new standard for seafood consumption worldwide.

**JM Foods**

JM Foods has emerged as a beacon of culinary excellence in the heart of

Dubai. The company lives by 'quality promised, quality delivered,' offering a diverse and unparalleled range of premium products sourced from across the globe. From fresh seafood to a variety of meats, game, poultry, gourmet cheeses, appetizers, frozen retail items, beverages, gluten-free and vegan products, the company ensures a diverse selection to meet every culinary need. JM Foods' reach extends far beyond the borders of the UAE, with exports spanning the entire GCC region, Africa, the Maldives, Georgia, and Sri Lanka. As JM Foods continues to uphold its commitment to quality and innovation, it remains a leader in the global gastronomic landscape.

### Chef's Palette Logo

Chef's Palette is a leading culinary brand developed by chefs for chefs, offering a portfolio of over 30 premium condiments, sauces, and dressings. Distributed by Chef Middle East and Kerry Foodservice, it includes popular co-branded innovations like the Chef's Palette x Tabasco range. Chef's Palette's premium condiments and sauces are designed to elevate food experiences, whether it is a classic or gourmet creation. From tangy ketchup to rich BBQ sauces, each product is crafted to enhance flavours and satisfy customers' cravings. The brand is highly popular across the GCC and MENAT regions, supporting fast-casual diners, global chains, and fine-dining kitchens.

### Taaza

Taaza brings 40+ years of industry expertise and established relationships across the supply chain, delivering superior service from cultivation to packaging to guarantee freshness and safety. The company's dedicated team is committed to promptly addressing inquiries or concerns and providing personalized assistance to ensure customer satisfaction. With flexible delivery schedules and reliable in-house logistics, Taaza ensures its products reach customers in optimal, temperature-controlled conditions and on time. From farm to table, Taaza prioritizes excellence in every aspect of their operations, ensuring that customers receive the freshest, highest-quality fruits and vegetables with responsive customer service, sustainable practices, and adherence to the strictest industry certifications.

### Fab La Royale Chocolatier

Fabe La Royale Chocolatier creates exceptional luxury chocolates in the UAE. The journey began in 2018, when Abdul Rahman's visionary approach to the foodstuff trading industry crossed paths with Chef Sisra, a culinary expert known for creativity and innovation. United by a shared passion for creating extraordinary delicacies, they came together with a vision to transform the art of chocolate making. That vision gave birth to Fabe La Royale Chocolatier, a brand dedicated to creating premium handcrafted chocolates that combine exquisite taste, elegant presentation, and exceptional craftsmanship. Whether it is an elegant chocolate box, a customized wedding favour, a corporate gift, or a beautifully designed chocolate arrangement, every creation reflects the brand's commitment to quality and presentation.

### HK Enterprises

Established in 1984, HK Food Group has built a strong presence in the food service and support industry. The company is recognised as one of the major importers and distributors of frozen and dry food products. It is chaired by distinguished businessman Mr. Harwant Singh Sahni, with Mr. Rajpreet Singh Sahni and Mr. Kulpreet Singh Sahni serving as Managing Directors. The success and decade long sustenance are the result of team effort bringing the best of global brands to UAE servicing the HORECA industry. The company serves customers throughout the UAE and other GCC countries. Consistently evolving, they are committed to deliver quality, convenience and freedom of choice on time every time, everyday.

### Potatoes USA

Potatoes USA works to expand the reach and demand for American-grown potatoes through marketing, research and promotional activities. Representing potato growers across the United States, the organisation collaborates with foodservice businesses, retailers and industry professionals to highlight the versatility of US potatoes. Its work covers fresh, frozen, dehydrated, chipping and seed potatoes, with a focus on understanding consumer needs, identifying market opportunities and supporting the growth of the potato industry in domestic and international markets.

### Gulf Gourmet

Gulf Gourmet Media partner of the EISC competition. Gulf Gourmet is the official publication of the Emirates Culinary Guild and the only regional culinary magazine in the Middle East recognised by Worldchefs. Last year, it was also honoured to be named Best Magazine in the World by the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards.

# We have Got It, Chef!

Chef **Monal Malhotra** on why a restaurant should run smoothly no matter who is on duty, and what actually keeps guests coming back

You can almost always tell the exact second the person in charge steps onto the floor. Shoulders straighten, someone suddenly pays very close attention to the pass, and a waiter magically remembers the table waiting fifteen minutes for water. Service improves so dramatically and immediately that it is almost reassuring, until you stop to wonder what was happening five minutes before they walked in.

Whether you run an independent spot or an outlet in a luxury hotel, things ought to function just as smoothly when the owner, manager, or head chef is completely out of sight. Hospitality folk do occasionally need a day off, even if asking for a Sunday away feels like asking your boss for a kidney. Over the years, I have watched countless operations depend entirely on two or three people holding the whole place together.

They know every recipe, remember every guest preference, and handle every crisis. But you can imagine the mess when two of them leave together.

The true test of a restaurant is whether the team delivers the same standard on every shift. That takes clear systems, proper training, and a team that understands why things are done a certain way.

## The Guest Shouldn't Have to Consult the Duty Roster

Picture a guest returning for their favorite dish, having spent the entire drive telling everyone how incredible the kebabs are, which makes it a tragic moment when you serve them a dry, overcooked piece of meat. The guest does not care who is working the grill



> Long after you forget the menu items, you remember how the place made you feel

tonight. "Oh, the chef is off today" might explain the disaster to those of us in the kitchen, but it does nothing for the person staring down at a ruined dinner. Consistency gives guests the confidence to return and recommend us. We owe it to them to get the details right every single time, regardless of who is working.

## Start with the Weighing Scale

Take something as simple as a burger patty or a minced kebab. The balance of lean meat to fat dictates its flavor and texture, which means every batch must be weighed with discipline. Yet, ask a cook how much went into a batch and you will still occasionally hear: "Approximately, Chef." I treat that word with healthy suspicion. An experienced cook's intuition is valuable, but a great recipe must be simple enough for the next trained cook to follow. Marinades require that same respect. Extra salt, less acid changes the result. If you want to settle an argument about precision, tell a pastry chef you threw in "a little extra flour" because it felt right, and watch the color drain from their face.Recipes demand exact weights, methods, timings, and temperatures. The team needs to make it, taste it together, and learn to spot mistakes instantly. Once a dish is set, every guest who orders it deserves the version you promised.

## Service Deserves the Very Same Rigor

How a guest is met, seated, and cared for matters just as much as what is on the plate. Someone must notice when a table is ready to order, check in at the right time, and make sure they can pay their bill without waving across the room like they are stranded at sea. A clear sequence of service anchors the floor, ensuring everyone knows their role. Structure must always leave room for genuine personality. The basic care must be dependable, whoever is running your section. When people know their jobs, they can pay attention to the guests in front of them.

## The Manual Needs to Live on the Line

Almost every restaurant has an operations manual. And these manuals are usually kept in such pristine condition that you wonder if anyone ever looks at them. During a turnaround I led a few years back, one of the best changes we made was bringing those



recipes out of the background and putting them directly in front of the prep stations. Instead of searching through screens, cooks could glance up and check weights while working.

Checklists, cleaning schedules, handovers, and service standards all need that same practical setup, whether pinned on a wall or logged on a screen. They exist to help people do their jobs, and the team needs to understand the why behind them. Then comes constant coaching. Showing someone a technique once and asking, "Got it?" gets a polite nod, but tells you nothing about what happens when orders start piling up at 8:00 PM. I heard "Do it again, Chef" plenty of times in my early years. At the time, I would have preferred a bit more variety in the conversation, but I came to appreciate the lesson behind it. If leadership ignores a sloppy portion today because service is busy, you cannot explain why that same portion is unacceptable tomorrow.

## Building a Team That Takes Ownership

No manager can stand over every plate and monitor every table without losing their mind. A good restaurant relies on team members who help each other when things get hectic. A proper handover ensures the evening shift picks up on a special request made at lunch, without having to chase the manager for details. Once the team takes ownership, responsibility for the restaurant is shared.

## A Well-Run Restaurant Is Good. What Makes It Great?

Consistently delivering great food, sharp timing, cleanliness, and service day after day is a huge effort. When I think back to the dining experiences that stayed with me, there is almost always something deeper at play than just a well- cooked meal. I remember being greeted like an old friend and feeling looked after by people who actually cared if I enjoyed myself. Long after you forget the menu items, you remember how the place made you feel. Other times, a team catches wind of an anniversary and brings out a small dessert, after checking whether the couple actually wants the fuss. Some guests love a big celebration, while others would happily crawl under the table if a group of waiters starts singing to them. A great gesture works because someone actually looked at the people sitting in front of them. The guest leaves feeling understood, and that feeling becomes the memory they carry home.

## Give Your Team the Freedom to Care

You can train a team to listen and anticipate needs through daily briefings and practice. But live service will always bring surprises no manual can cover, requiring quick judgment. A team member sees a chance to make someone's night and has to decide on the spot whether to act. In those seconds, they need to know you have their back. If a simple gesture needs three levels of manager approval, the moment passes before anyone says yes. Give people sensible rules, let them make decisions that help the guest, and back them up when they try something thoughtful. Will they occasionally get it wrong? Yes. But that is just something to talk through calmly after service, without making them regret trying. When the daily operations run smoothly and the team feels trusted, people have the time and confidence to look after guests properly.

## What the Guest Takes Home

Guests rarely care about how efficient your shift handover was. They just know the food was as good as they remembered, and someone was there when they needed a hand. What stays with them is personal. They felt welcome, their family was looked after, or someone made an ordinary night feel special.

On the drive home, the conversation is simply, "Wasn't that lovely? They really looked after us." That is the ultimate goal. Good systems make a restaurant dependable, keeping quality high through clear standards and shared responsibility. But a great restaurant goes further, making people feel cared for in a way that feels natural and real. After all these years in this industry, I still believe that hearing a guest say, "We always have such a lovely time there," is the absolute highest compliment a restaurant can ever earn. ■

ARLA PRO. CHEF OF THE YEAR 2025

# Plan B Takes the Cake

Meet Chef **Chathura Maduranga Thennakoon**, who never planned on a career in pastry but found his calling in it. Today, he is bringing Caramel Tropical Delight to the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition



It is fascinating how much work goes into a breakfast buffet before the first guest picks up a plate. At 6 am, Chef Chathura Maduranga is already in the pastry and bakery kitchen at DoubleTree by Hilton Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah. An hour later, the buffet is ready to face a breakfast crowd. Behind the scenes, Chef Maduranga checks the pastry and bakery sections, answers requests from chefs, and keeps his team on course. "It is a huge scale of operation. Occasionally we also get special requests and custom orders. We make those as well, and I give guidance to my team," he adds.

As the morning service gets underway, preparations for lunch and dinner are already in motion. Desserts have to be planned, production has to be monitored, and the pastry counter has to keep offering something different. "With some guests staying for several nights, maintaining variety becomes another demand. The pastry department has a long list to get through. There are à la carte desserts, lobby lunch, signature cookies and coffee-break items for business events. Weddings

> Sometimes, the best careers come with a change of recipe

and other functions bring their own demands, with cakes, customised desserts and cookies added to the production list," he elaborates.

Then there are the inevitable banana skins of a busy kitchen. An ingredient may not arrive. A chef may call with an unexpected request. A dessert may have to be changed at the eleventh hour. When something is unavailable, Chef Maduranga does not see it as a stumbling block. The recipe simply has to change. "Keeping the team together is important. When I talk to my team, I do not just assign them the tasks; I ask them about their ideas too. Events, unexpected requirements and missing ingredients can all change the plan. If one ingredient is not available, the answer is to rethink the dessert rather than abandon it. At that moment, I am helping my team find a way to do it without any complaint."

There is plenty more to his role than overseeing production. He works alongside his executive chef on costing and menu preparation, bringing his pastry and bakery experience to the table while picking up lessons from the senior chefs. "I am there wherever the operation requires me. If my team needs me, I am there. I have to be there, whatever is required. I have to move between production, creativity, problem-solving and leadership. In a kitchen like this, I need to know when to step in, when to listen and when to find another way."

For the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition, he created 'Caramel Tropical Delight' encompassing different layers and different textures. "I have an almond and coconut sponge as the base, then white chocolate cream, and in the centre I have passion fruit, banana and mango fruit gel. Then I have caramel mousse, which gives the main caramel flavour. The finish is with nougatine, caramel sauce and whipped cream. I wanted to bring together the sweetness of caramel with the freshness and acidity of the tropical fruits, so every layer has a different taste and texture."



> We can build experience. But the attitude has to be there

He credits the chefs who guided him for helping him reach this point. "I want to thank everyone, my senior chefs, mentors. Because of them, I am here today. Without them, I could not have achieved my target." That support is something he also wants to pass on to younger chefs. "I support young chefs because of the people who guided me. Whenever you have the chance to teach someone, you should. It is good for them."

## Hire the Attitude

His creativity is both methodical and responsive, beginning with whatever the kitchen puts in front of him. Social media inspires, while the chefs who have guided him throughout his career have become part of his culinary grammar. "Work with what is in front of you and keep learning. I like creating unique plated desserts and cakes. Sometimes you do not know what ingredients you have. Whatever I have, I like to make something from it. You can do black box challenges too. You adapt when the ingredient changes. My executive chef and pastry chef are always there to guide me and give me advice."

The flexibility required at the pastry bench finds a natural counterpart in the way he handles a busy kitchen. "I am a friendly leader. For him, staying calm isn't about ignoring the pressure, but about making sure it doesn't travel down to the team. With such a large operation to manage, he believes that adding to the pressure would only make the work harder for those around him.

"As a leader, we have to control the pressure. Stay calm. Do not ignore the pressure, but keep the heat of service from spilling onto the team. We need to guide them, communicate with them to keep it steady through busy periods," he says, noting that adding to the pressure would only make the work harder for those around him.

The same balance of technique and temperament shapes how he builds his team. Experience is not his first consideration. Good Attitude is the thread that binds a good team. " We can build experience. But the attitude has to be there. I want someone ready to listen, learn, and work with the team. If they have the right attitude, technical skills can be taught."

For young chefs building their careers, he asks them to learn the technique, respect the process, stay balanced under heat, and allow time to do its work. He believes time spent learning is an investment that pays back later. "Every time in my briefing, I tell them to invest their time in learning. Whatever you learn now, it will become very useful in your life," he adds.

## Worth the Detour

Becoming a chef was never part of Maduranga's original plan. Growing up in Kurunegala, he had little idea where his career would lead, but after school, he had one ambition: to join the Sri Lankan Army. His family had other plans. With the civil war still ongoing, they were reluctant to let him pursue a career in the Army. His sister and brother-in-law saw another possibility

in hospitality. Plan B led him to the Northwest Hotel School, setting him on a path that would take him from his first training position in Sri Lanka to hotel kitchens across the Middle East.

His first hotel was Amaya Hills in Kandy, where he started modestly. He trained there for almost two years, learning the fundamentals before joining the Colombo Hilton. The culinary competitions during his tenure there gave his developing career its moments in the sun.



"Hilton was the turning point for me. They gave me a lot of opportunities. I went to Singapore, Malaysia for competitions. I won competitions." Hilton expanded his pastry repertoire, taking him beyond the daily production cycle and into competitions in Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. The work demanded the same discipline as a pastry station, only with less room for error. At the Hilton Colombo F&B Masters, he won the Willy Wonka Challenge; at the 2019 Culinary Art Food Expo, he won two gold medals and a bronze.

Following the pandemic, he moved to the Maldives, spending almost two years there before moving to the UAE. He joined Rixos Bab Al Bahr in Ras Al Khaimah, progressing to Junior Sous Chef, then moved to Millennium Al Rawdah in Abu Dhabi as a pastry chef. That chapter lasted only a few months before another opportunity brought him back to Hilton. " I joined DoubleTree by Hilton Resort & Spa Marjan Island as a Pastry Chef, and it changed my life."

Talking about his family, he acknowledges their support in helping him along the way. "When I started in this hotel field, actually, during training time, I thought, 'In this year, I will not achieve this target.' But I did it. I already did it. Whatever target I set for myself, I kept working towards it. Sometimes I thought it would take longer, but I achieved it step by step. My family always supported me, and that gave me the confidence to keep going. When you have people behind you, you feel you can push yourself a little further."

He had once envisaged a life in the army. Pastry was never part of the plan until one unexpected turn led him towards hospitality. And that second plan has taken him a long way. Sometimes, the best careers come with a change of recipe. ■

## Caramel Tropical Delight

### Almond & Coconut Sponge Base

| | |
|---|---|
| Egg Whites | 200 g |
| Sugar | 150 g |
| Icing Sugar | 160 g |
| Flour | 140 g |
| Ground Almond | 95 g |
| Desiccated Coconut | 110 g |

**Method**

- Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- Sift the flour and icing sugar together.
- Add the ground almond and desiccated coconut and mix well.
- Whip the egg whites until foamy.
- Gradually add the sugar and continue whipping until a firm meringue forms.
- Gently fold the dry ingredients into the meringue.
- Spread the mixture evenly onto a lined baking tray.
- Bake until lightly golden and fully cooked.
- Allow the sponge to cool completely.
- Cut the sponge according to the size of the cheesecake mold.

### White Chocolate Cream Filling

| | |
|---|---|
| Fresh Cream | 500 g |
| White Chocolate | 100 g |
| Gelatin | 20 g |
| Whipping Cream | 1L |

**Method**

- Soak the gelatin in cold water and allow it to bloom.
- Bring the fresh cream to a boil.
- Pour the hot cream over the white chocolate.
- Mix until the chocolate is completely melted and the mixture is smooth.
- Melt the bloomed gelatin gently and add it to the white chocolate mixture.
- Mix thoroughly.
- Allow the mixture to cool slightly.
- Whip the whipping cream until soft peaks form.
- Fold the whipped cream gently into the white chocolate mixture.
- Add crushed nougatine if required.
- Keep refrigerated until required for assembly.

### Passion Fruit, Banana & Mango Fruit Gel

| | |
|---|---|
| Passion Fruit Purée | 300 g |
| Banana Purée | 100 g |
| Mango Purée | 100 g |
| Gelatin | 100 g |

**Method**

- Combine the passion fruit, banana and mango purées.
- Warm the fruit purée gently.
- Bloom the gelatin in cold water.
- Melt the bloomed gelatin gently.
- Add the melted gelatin to the warm fruit purée.
- Mix thoroughly until completely combined.
- Pour into a suitable tray or mold.
- Refrigerate until completely set.
- Cut into the required size or shape for the cheesecake assembly



| Caramel Mousse | |
|---|---|
| Sugar | 180 g |
| Water | 50 g |
| Fresh Cream | 400 g |
| Egg Yolks | 300 g |
| Chocolate | 700 g |
| Whipping Cream | 500 g |
| Gelatin | 75 g |

### Prepare the Caramel

- Place the sugar and water in a saucepan.
- Cook over medium heat until the sugar dissolves.
- Continue cooking until a golden caramel color is obtained.
- Remove from the heat.

### Prepare the Cream & Egg Yolk Mixture

- Heat the fresh cream until hot.
- Whisk the egg yolks lightly.
- Slowly add the hot cream to the egg yolks while whisking continuously.
- Return the mixture to the saucepan.
- Cook gently until it reaches a light custard consistency.
- Do not boil the mixture.

### Combine with Chocolate

- Pour the hot caramel mixture into the cream and egg yolk mixture.
- Add the chocolate.
- Mix until the chocolate is completely melted and the mixture is smooth.
- Bloom the gelatin in cold water.
- Melt the bloomed gelatin gently.
- Add the gelatin to the chocolate-caramel mixture.
- Mix well.
- Allow the mixture to cool to approximately 30–35°C.

### Fold in Whipped Cream

- Whip the whipping cream until soft peaks form.
- Gently fold the whipped cream into the cooled caramel-chocolate mixture.
- Do not overmix.
- Keep the mousse ready for assembly.

| Cheese mixers | |
|---|---|
| Cream Cheese | 1 kg |
| Milkmaid (Condensed Milk) | 2 tins |
| Icing Sugar | 200 g |
| Gelatin | 40 g |
| Whipped Cream | 1 packet |
| Lemon Juice | 2 tbsp. (or juice of 2 lemons) |

**Note:** For the crust/base, you will typically need about 200g of crushed biscuits (like Marie or Digestive) mixed with 100g of melted butter.

### Method

- Mix the crushed biscuits and melted butter together. Press the mixture firmly into the bottom of a spring form cake tin. Put it in the fridge to set while you prepare the filling.
- Mix the 40g of gelatin with about 4–5 tablespoons of cold water and let it bloom for 5 minutes. Then, melt it using a double boiler (placing the bowl over hot water) or microwave it for a few seconds until completely dissolved. Let it cool to room temperature.
- In a separate chilled bowl, whip the whipped cream until stiff peaks form. Set it aside in the fridge.
- In a large bowl, beat the 1 kg of cream cheese until smooth and free of lumps.
- Add the 200g of icing sugar and 2 tins of Milkmaid to the cream cheese. Beat well until the mixture is smooth and creamy.
- Pour the lemon juice into the cheese mixture and mix well. Next, gradually pour in the cooled liquid gelatin while stirring continuously to avoid lumps.
- Gently fold the whipped cream into the cheese mixture using a spatula until fully combined. Do not over mix.

### Caramel Delight Cheesecake Assembly

- Crust base
- Cheese mixers
- Almond & Coconut Sponge
- White Chocolate Cream Filling
- Passion Fruit, Banana & Mango Fruit Gel
- Caramel Mousse
- Nougatine
- Caramel Sauce – for finishing
- Whipped Cream – for decoration

### Assembly Method

- Place the crust base at the bottom of the cheesecake mold.
- Add a thin layer of cheese mixers after that almond and coconut sponge.
- white chocolate cream filling.
- Place the prepared fruit gel in the center.
- Fill the mold with the caramel mousse.
- Smooth the surface using a palette knife.
- Freeze or refrigerate until completely set, depending on the required production method.
- Remove the cheesecake carefully from the mold.
- Decorate with whipped cream, caramel sauce and nougatine.
- Finish with caramelized nuts or nougatine pieces if required.

Knorr PROFESSIONAL

# LIME SEASONING POWDER

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## FLAVOR PROFILE

- Fresh citrus aroma
- Tangy lime taste
- Balanced Savoury Acidity

**Best On**

French fries | Fried chicken | Seafood | Salads | Roasted vegetables



**With Knorr Professional Lime Seasoning**

- X No cutting
- X No squeezing
- X Less wastage

*All the lime flavour. None of the preparation.*

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# Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Twenty years of training chefs, yet the shortage continues. What has gone wrong? asks Dr **Carl Shi** (Part One)

In 2006, I arrived in Australia as a professional chef, having already spent several years working in international hotel kitchens. Like many chefs of my generation, I was passionate about cooking, committed to professional development and eager to build a successful career in the hospitality industry.

Twenty years have passed. During these two decades, Australia has invested considerable resources in culinary education and workforce development. Thousands of aspiring chefs have been trained through Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, private culinary colleges and apprenticeship programmes. The hospitality industry has also recruited substantial numbers of qualified chefs from overseas to address ongoing labour shortages.

Yet, twenty years later, we are still talking about the same problem: **Where can we find enough qualified chefs?**

What concerns me even more is that this challenge is no longer limited to Australia. Similar difficulties in attracting and retaining culinary professionals have been reported across Europe and other international hospitality markets. The World Travel & Tourism Council (2025) projected that the global hospitality sector could face a workforce shortfall of approximately 8.6 million people by 2035 if current trends are not addressed. Although this forecast covers hospitality occupations broadly, not just chefs, it illustrates the scale of the challenge.

This brings me to a rather uncomfortable question. After so many years of government training initiatives, culinary education, apprenticeships and international recruitment, why are we still struggling to maintain a sustainable culinary workforce? **Are we losing qualified chefs because the industry has failed to provide the working conditions and career opportunities they deserve?**



> We cannot continue filling a leaking bucket and expect the workforce shortage to disappear

Perhaps we have spent too much time discussing how to bring people into the kitchen, and not enough time understanding why they eventually walk away.

A recent study by Bournemouth University, conducted in collaboration with The Burnt Chef Project, provides some rather confronting findings. The report, **Should I Stay or Should I Go?** Insights from a Global Survey on Chefs' Intention to Leave, published in January 2026, examined responses from 460 chefs, predominantly working in the United Kingdom and other English-speaking markets. The researchers found that 69% of respondents often or always considered leaving their current jobs, while a further 27% sometimes thought about leaving. More than 66% reported looking for alternative employment at least occasionally. Another particularly concerning finding was that 68% reported moderate or strong interference between their working responsibilities and family life.

These findings deserve our attention. The survey was not a representative census of chefs worldwide, and considering leaving a job is not the same as permanently leaving the profession. Nevertheless, it raises serious questions about the sustainability of professional culinary careers. The most interesting point, in my view, is that many respondents had not necessarily lost their passion for cooking. They still enjoyed the creativity, teamwork and professional identity associated with being a chef. What they were questioning was whether the sacrifices required to remain in the industry were still worthwhile. **Perhaps chefs are not leaving because they no longer love cooking. They are leaving because they no longer love the conditions under which they are expected to cook.**

**When Passion Is No Longer Enough**

I started my culinary career in an era when long working hours and strict kitchen discipline were considered part of professional development.

We were taught to respect the kitchen hierarchy, maintain high standards and learn from senior chefs. Those experiences helped develop my technical abilities, resilience and professional discipline. However, we must distinguish between professional discipline and unnecessary hardship. Chefs work when other people celebrate. Weekends, public holidays, Christmas and New Year's Eve are often among the busiest periods of our working lives.

We accept that hospitality operates

outside conventional office hours. However, does that mean chefs should be expected to sacrifice their personal lives indefinitely? The Bournemouth study highlighted accounts of excessive working hours, unpaid overtime, chronic understaffing and significant work–family conflict. Some respondents described working between 60 and 80 hours per week.

We should not assume that such practices occur in every kitchen. Nevertheless, they demonstrate how easily professional commitment can become exploitation when there are insufficient organisational safeguards. Consider a young chef who is passionate about food, completes a culinary qualification, and begins working in a reputable restaurant or five-star hotel.

Initially, everything seems exciting. There is an opportunity to learn new techniques, work with experienced chefs and develop professional skills. But after several years, the chef is now older, perhaps married, raising children or managing financial commitments. Suddenly, limited family time and insufficient financial rewards become much harder to justify.

At that stage, passion alone may no longer be enough.

**Have We Created a Training System That Cannot Retain Its Graduates?**
Australia provides an interesting example. Over the past twenty years, the government, TAFE institutions, private education providers and hospitality businesses have collectively contributed to training a significant culinary workforce. However, the challenge is not simply how many students enrol in culinary courses. We must also consider how many complete their training, how many enter the industry and, perhaps most importantly, how many remain working as chefs five or ten years later.

According to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), the six-year apprenticeship completion rate for cooks who commenced training in 2019 was only 40.6%. This was among the lowest completion rates for major trade occupations. In addition, Service

> Outstanding technical skills do not automatically produce outstanding leadership abilities

and Creative Skills Australia reported in its 2025 workforce planning update that approximately 40% of chefs recorded in the 2011 Census were no longer working as chefs or in related managerial positions five years later.

These figures measure different aspects of the workforce, and moving out of a chef role does not necessarily mean abandoning hospitality permanently. This raises another important question: **Are we measuring the success of culinary education by the number of qualifications awarded, rather than by the number of sustainable professional careers created?**

As a hospitality educator, I believe formal training remains fundamental. A qualification may help someone enter the kitchen, but students need realistic expectations and opportunities for professional development. Likewise, employers must recognise that apprentices are not merely additional labour. Government training incentives are important, particularly for smaller hospitality businesses facing significant financial pressures. But increasing apprenticeship funding alone will not resolve the problem if graduates eventually leave because of poor working conditions.

We cannot continue filling a leaking bucket and expect the workforce shortage to disappear.

**The Problem May Also Be Inside Our Kitchens**
Another uncomfortable issue concerns leadership and organisational culture. The traditional kitchen brigade has served professional kitchens for generations. I have enormous respect for this system. However, there is a difference between being a demanding chef and being a poor leader. Humiliation, bullying, intimidation, and disrespect are not part of it. The Bournemouth researchers identified toxic leadership and abusive workplace cultures among the experiences reported by participating chefs. Importantly, these concerns were not limited to junior employees. Experienced chefs and senior kitchen professionals also expressed dissatisfaction.

Outstanding technical skills do not automatically produce outstanding leadership abilities.

A chef may be excellent at preparing food, developing menus and managing kitchen production, yet struggle with communication, delegation, conflict resolution and employee development.

Unfortunately, many chefs are promoted into supervisory and management positions primarily because of their technical abilities, without receiving sufficient leadership training.

This can create a cycle in which ineffective management practices are passed from one generation to another.

We sometimes hear the argument that younger chefs are less committed, unwilling to work hard or lacking resilience.

There may be differences in career expectations between generations, but I do not believe it is reasonable to explain an entire industry's retention challenge through the attitudes of young workers.

Perhaps younger professionals are simply questioning working practices that previous generations accepted without much discussion.

Rather than asking why the younger generation is unwilling to adapt to traditional kitchen culture, we should also ask whether some aspects of that culture need to evolve.

We can preserve culinary discipline, professional standards and respect for craftsmanship without preserving unnecessary hardship. ■

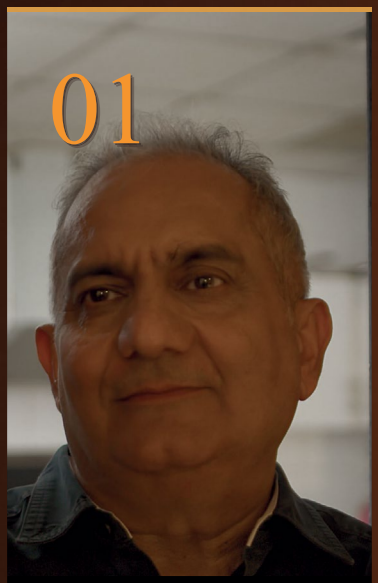
CHRONICLES OF A CHEF
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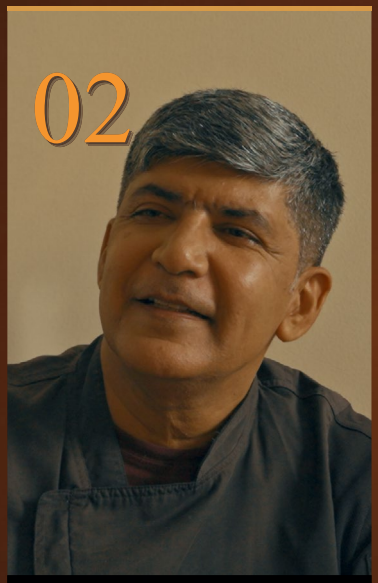
FOUR EPISODES. FOUR JOURNEYS.

The lives. The memories. The people we become.



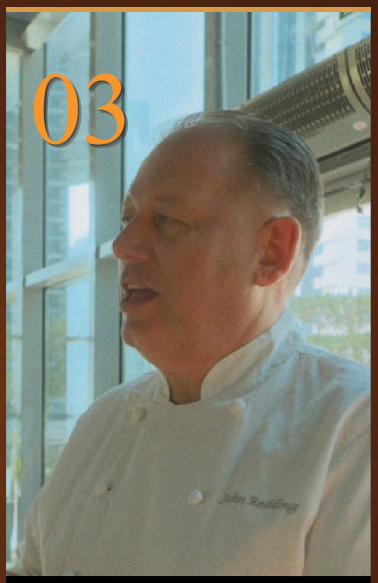

## ROOTS

**Monal Malhotra**



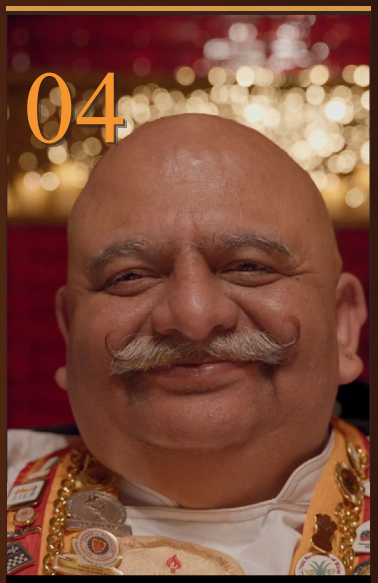

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# The Architecture of Spices

Prof **Vinod Huria** unpacks the scientific legacy of ancient spices and masalas

Ask a chef what masala is, and the answer will be flavour. Ask an Ayurvedic, and the answer will be healing. Ask a food scientist, and you will know that long before terms like nutraceuticals, bioavailability, and synergistic formulation entered modern laboratories, kitchens were practising them with astonishing precision.

Traditional spice blends are climate-sensitive formulations shaped by centuries of observation.

Across India, regional masalas reflect local climates and cooking traditions. Kashmir's Ver masala uses dried cockscomb flower with fennel and warming spices, while Chettinad blends red chillies, black pepper and stone flower. Maharashtra's Goda masala combines toasted coconut, sesame, coriander and cumin, while North-Eastern cooking pairs fiery Bhut jolokia chillies with fermented bamboo shoots for bold, umami complex flavours and preservation.

## The Synergistic Matrix

The principle is that food components, when intelligently combined, have a far greater effect than they do in isolation.

Consider North Indian Garam Masala. Black pepper contains piperine, a bio-enhancer that improves the absorption of nutrients like turmeric. Clove brings antimicrobial eugenol. Cinnamon contributes digestive cinnamaldehyde. Cardamom, with its 1,8-cineole, supports gastric motility, while cumin and coriander stimulate digestive secretions.

Separately, these compounds have individual effects; together, they form a functional matrix. When spices meet heat, fat, and moisture in sequence, they release volatile oils, bind with lipids, and enter the digestive system as part of a complex biochemical conversation. The traditional spice box was not just a container, it was a laboratory.



> The traditional spice box was not just a container, it was a laboratory

## The Science of Timing

Traditional cooking relies heavily on culinary kinetics, the timing of spice addition changes a dish's chemistry:

- Whole spices added to hot ghee or oil at the start (tadka or tempering) extract fat-soluble aromatic terpenes into the cooking medium.Powdered spices added midway interact with moisture, protein, and starch to thicken and deepen the dish.
- Volatile finishing spices, like Garam Masala, are added near the end to preserve delicate top notes that prolonged heat would destroy.

## Preserving Fragrance and Potency

In today's fast-paced world, mass-produced spice powders offer convenience but often lose essential oils, monoterpenes, and functional value through oxidation and industrial frictional heat. To reclaim the true soul of masala:

- Grind small batches: Freshly grinding a week's supply preserves aroma and potency. A slightly granular texture reduces rapid oxidation.
- Roast gently: Low heat for 90 seconds blooms dormant oils without scorching delicate compounds.
- Respect the sequence: Bloom whole spices first, add body-building powders during cooking, and save delicate finishing blends for the end.
- Store intelligently: Keep spices in airtight steel containers or amber glass jars, away from sunlight, moisture, and stove heat.

## A Civilisation in a Spoonful

Food is an informational biochemical input, signalling to the body the climate, season, and terrain it must adapt to. Masala bridges geography and physiology, flavour and function, tradition and technology. In this sense, traditional spice blends were never mere seasonings; they were climate-sensitive formulations shaped by centuries of observation and designed for the body, the region, and the season.

In each blend lies a map; an aroma, a climate; in each spoonful, a civilisation. ■

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*Prof **Vinod Huria** is a former Senior Principal Scientist at CSIR-CFTRI, Mysuru, and former Senior Executive at NDDB, Anand. A distinguished scientist and author, he writes at the intersection of food technology, nutrition, dairying, fitness and lifestyle. He is the author of 'Food: An Insightful Exploration' and 'Beyond Vitality'*

# The Flavor Architect

Culinary researcher and Chef, **Mohammad Ameri** on how chefs can design flavor through the senses (part 1)

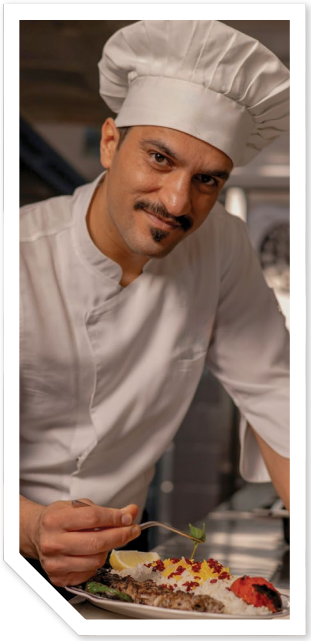
## The Dish Begins Before the First Bite

Four years ago, during a dinner service, I served caramel cream one evening on plates I had never used for dessert before. My usual blue plates had run out, so I had to use a simple white set. The desserts were identical. One portion, one temperature, one recipe. Yet the guests gave different impressions. Those who received the white plates insisted that the dessert was softer, that the vanilla was more noticeable, and that the sweetness was better balanced. That night, I concluded that the guests had been influenced by the beauty of the plate. I was wrong.

What I had called a luxury bias was, in fact, the natural operation of a brain that had already begun predicting the experience before the first bite. That experience was the first spark of a question that later became the backbone of my work: Is flavor in the food, or in the brain of the person eating it?

The answer, although complex, is clear: Taste is a chemical signal detected on the tongue. Flavor, however, is a multisensory experience constructed by the brain. And the Chef, in this equation, is no longer simply a cook; the Chef is someone who designs the conditions under which this sensory construction takes place.

This article continues a multi-year intellectual project on taste and perception. In a previous article, I examined the difference between Taste and Flavor through neuroscience and personal experience (Ameri, 2026a). Elsewhere, I explored how expectation and visual perception shape the experience before food enters the mouth (Ameri, 2026b). And in a study of Emirati



> The dish begins before the first bite

food, I examined the role of culture and memory in shaping flavor (Ameri, 2026c, forthcoming). Now it is time to bring these lines together into a single map: one that shows how the Chef can move from being a designer of recipes to an architect of experience.

## From Taste to Flavor

Before we reach design, we need to clarify the boundary. I discussed this distinction in detail in a previous article (Ameri, 2026a). Here, only a brief reminder is necessary. Within the classical framework of taste science, the five primary Taste qualities are sweetness, saltiness, sourness, bitterness, and umami (Verhagen & Engelen, 2006). Flavor is something the brain constructs from these signals together with other inputs: retronasal olfaction during chewing, texture, temperature, color, sound, and, most importantly, expectation, memory, and momentary emotion.

This distinction is the key to flavor architecture. If flavor existed only in food, everyone would experience it similarly. Yet taste depends on ingredients and everything the brain processes before, during, and after eating.GordonShepherd argues in Neurogastronomy that flavor does not simply reside in food; it is constructed by the brain (Shepherd, 2012). This idea is our point of departure.

## The Brain as the Flavor Interpreter

Now that we know where flavor is not simply located, we need to consider where it is constructed. Sensory information from the tongue, nose, oral somatosensation, eyes, and ears reaches different brain regions. The integration of these signals involves several areas, including two particularly important regions: the insular cortex and the orbitofrontal cortex.

The insular cortex plays an important role in processing taste and retronasal olfaction. Recent research has shown that retronasal odors and tastes can evoke overlapping patterns of neural representation in the insula (Khorisantono et al., 2025). This finding suggests that processing of smell and taste can partially overlap in the insula and may contribute to their integration.

It also helps explain an experience many of us know from having a blocked nose: foods such as apples and onions can lose an important part of their flavor identity when access to retronasal olfaction is impaired.

The orbitofrontal cortex, however, has another role. This region integrates sensory information with reward value. Rolls has shown that the OFC functions as a secondary taste cortex, represents the reward value of taste, and responds to changes associated with hunger and satiety (Rolls, 2008, 2015). Consequently, the pleasure of eating cannot be reduced simply to the intensity of a food's chemical signal; pleasantness and valuation emerge from interactions among sensory, cognitive, and motivational processes in which the OFC plays an important role.

A field observation from my work in the kitchen (Ameri, 2026b) illustrates this principle in practice. During one dinner service, a restaurant's signature dish was served under two different conditions of temperature and plating. Although the ingredients remained identical, guests complained about the cooler, poorly plated version, but were satisfied when it was reheated and replated. One possible explanation for this difference is reduced release of aromatic compounds at the lower temperature, together with a change in visual expectation caused by the plating. In any case, the experience demonstrated Spence's (2017) findings that temperature and appearance influence food perception.



## Before the First Bite

Setting the plate on the table is the first dramatic movement of a dish. Not because the server is professional, but because at that moment the guest's brain begins constructing a prediction of the experience before the spoon reaches the mouth. In one of my field observations (Ameri, 2026b), two identical bowls of vegetable soup were served. One had a gold rim, the other a blue rim. The service was repeated over several occasions and they were perceived differently, with guests describing the gold-rimmed version as richer and better seasoned. The difference was not the soup, but the expectation.

From Lisa Feldman Barrett's perspective, the brain continually generates predictions about the world based on previous experience, and these predictions influence moment-to-moment perception (Barrett, 2017).

Before food reaches the mouth, the brain begins constructing a scenario. A gold rim may be culturally associated, for some guests, with expense and formality. The brain can use such cues in forming expectations about the experience. The result? The same soup, at the same temperature and with the same composition, may be experienced differently.

But this mechanism also has a darker edge: the contrast effect. The stronger the expectation, the greater the disappointment if the food fails to meet it. A guest who sees an elaborate plate and expects an extraordinary flavor may judge an ordinary result more harshly than a similar dish presented without such a strong expectation. I have seen this repeatedly in luxury restaurant environments, where the perceived cost and presentation can raise expectations to a very high level, making even a small flaw feel disproportionately disappointing.

For a Chef, this means a paradigm shift: responsibility begins before cooking, with the design of the first visual encounter. The choice of plate, the color of its rim, the symmetry of the arrangement, even the empty space between ingredients, all of these are promises the Chef makes to the guest's brain. ■

*(To Be Continued)*

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# What Your Oven Will Cost Over Five Years



**Wilhelm Tittes** looks beyond the quotation to understand the cost of keeping a bakery working

In my previous article, I discussed why equipment selection should begin with what a bakery intends to produce. Once we understand the products, quantities, and production schedule, we can choose equipment that fits the operation.

**Then comes another familiar question: How much does it cost?**
Usually, we mean the amount at the bottom of the quotation. That is understandable. Opening a bakery requires investment, and every saving seems to leave more money available for something else. But an oven continues to cost money long after the invoice has been paid.

So, when comparing two ovens, I would ask one more question: What will each of them cost to keep producing over the next five years?

**The quotation is only the beginning**
Consider two ovens that take the same trolley and bake the same bread. One costs less to buy. The other requires a larger investment but uses less energy and can complete more batches within the working day.

The savings on the cheaper oven are immediate and easy to see. The savings on the more efficient oven arrive gradually, through daily production. They are less visible, but they keep accumulating.

In one rack-oven comparison, those operating savings more than covered the higher purchase price. Over five years, buying, powering and maintaining the professional oven cost around a fifth less overall.

The result depends on how the bakery operates. This comparison assumed the same operating schedule throughout the five years, with unchanged energy prices and maintenance costs. It covered the oven's purchase, energy, and maintenance, leaving out financing, ingredients, production labor, and losses from interruptions.

**Production still comes first**
The additional production capacity offered another potential benefit, but only if the bakery needed it. An oven that can bake more creates value only when dough is ready to load, and customers are ready to buy.

An oven may bake faster, but if the dough is not ready, it will wait. If mixing, preparation, or proofing cannot keep pace, the higher capacity will not become higher production. Equally, a bakery running a few batches a day will have a different balance of purchase and operating costs from one working a full shift.

That is why we need to compare the same product, at the same weight and quality, within the production hours actually available. The number of trays tells us something about the oven. The number of acceptable products coming out of it tells us more about its value to the bakery.

**Who will support it after installation?**
There is another part of the purchase that can be easy to overlook while the machine is new: the support behind it.

Imagine the oven stopping before the morning deliveries. Dough has been prepared. Staff are waiting. Customers expect their orders. At that moment, the question becomes very practical: Who can get this oven working again?

A telephone number and a warranty document are not enough if nobody can diagnose the problem or supply the correct component. The owner may end up looking for an independent technician while production remains interrupted.

Before buying, ask who installs and commissions the oven, who trains the operators, and who attends when something goes wrong. Ask which parts are stocked locally. Speak to a bakery already using the same equipment and find out what happens when it needs help.

The same questions apply to a professional oven. A respected manufacturer still needs a capable local service organization. When your production stops, the technician's knowledge and access to parts matter more than the name on the door.

**Think beyond the repair bill**
The cost of a breakdown may include dough that cannot be used, emergency outsourcing, or deliveries that cannot be completed. If another oven can absorb the work, the consequences may be manageable. If the failed oven is your only one, the whole bakery may stop.

Those losses are not included in the savings described earlier. Neither is the benefit of dependable support shortening an interruption. They belong in the decision nonetheless, because they affect the business you are trying to run.

Preventive maintenance belongs there too. Door seals, burners, and steam systems need attention. Keeping them in good condition helps the oven continue working as intended, rather than allowing a small fault to become an urgent repair.

Five years gives us a useful period for comparison. At the end of it, we should also consider how much working life remains and whether parts and competent service will still be available.

Before accepting the quotation, think about the bakery five years from now. Will the equipment still be producing what you need, economically, with someone available to support it? That is the value you are buying. ■

# Am I the Best Version of Me?

The night shift at a luxury hotel is a world apart from the one guests see, writes **Luke Bonner**

You pull up in your taxi and the valet promptly opens the door. You drag your suitcase to the front desk. Within minutes, you check in and wait for the elevator.

Thoughts of a hot shower and a bed with fresh sheets are interrupted as a man in a bow tie steps beside you. He is carrying a silver tray with a single unopened bottle of Tabasco. His name tag says Harry. Let us call him Harry. His gloved hand presses the button for the same floor as yours. You smile and he smiles firmly as the elevator takes its time. You both exit on your floor. He goes right. You go left. As you tap the key on the electronic door lock, you watch him slip down the corridor.

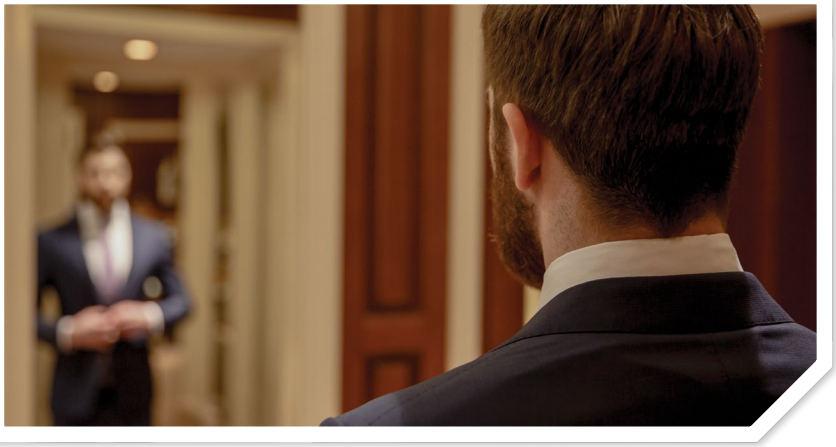
## Where does he go?

As your day ends on the pillow, Harry's shift is in full swing. He is usually found around the kitchen, but tonight, room 803 wants an extra fork. In 412, the TV remote would not work. And Mr. Johnstone on the first floor wants to discuss the pillow menu - again. Eventually, Harry earns a break. He makes his way down a service corridor and into the staff cafeteria.



Morning, noon, or midnight, it never empties. All are off the clock and mostly online, keeping to themselves in tight uniforms beginning to slacken. Friends across departments reunite to gripe about guests, share photos of their kids, and chances to quit. Upstairs, you are dead to the world. In here, the extra fork is already a story, told to the same two-faced people who will serve you breakfast.

They line up for the coffee machines and run bread through the conveyor toaster.



> The mirror by the exit asks: Am I the best version of me?

There are three giant tubs near the milk fridges. One holds strawberry jam, one margarine, one a different jam. And all three have a mix of each.

Outside, they puff smoke into the cold night air. Some stand shivering in dress shirts, arms crossed, staring down into the street and following cars in and out of the porte-cochère below.

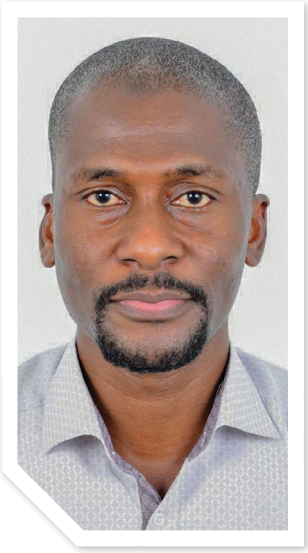
From chef hats to bow ties, they own their break. Any of them could be Harry. They spend their remaining minutes stacking food trays and squishing out cigarettes before a quick trip to the restroom. The mirror by the exit asks: Am I the best version of me?

As Harry ends his shift in the light of a new day, the taxis are already lining up with their drop-offs and pickups. Although off the clock, he opens the door for a sharply dressed guest stepping into a taxi. In the passenger window, he straightens his bow tie. Crossing the street, he looks up at the face of the building, past the smoke of the cafeteria balcony, all the way to the top.

As you get ready, there is a knock at the door. It is not Harry, but a new face bringing your coffee to go and the complimentary newspaper. You say thanks, knowing you will never, ever read it. ■

# How to Thaw Beef Safely and Properly

**Sulemana A. Sadik** shares insights on preserving the quality, texture and food safety of beef



In professional kitchens and at home alike, the process of thawing beef is often underestimated. Yet, it is one of the most critical steps that determines not only the safety of the product but also its final eating quality. Whether dealing with premium Wagyu cuts, Angus primals, or everyday mince, improper thawing can compromise texture, moisture retention, and flavour turning a high-value product into a disappointing experience.

Thawing is not simply about moving beef from frozen to ready-to-cook. It is a controlled transition that requires an understanding of temperature management, microbiological safety, and meat science. When done correctly, it preserves the integrity of the muscle fibers and ensures the beef performs as intended during cooking.

## Understanding What Happens When Beef Freezes and Thaws

To appreciate proper thawing, it is important to understand what freezing does to beef in the first place. When beef is frozen, the water inside the muscle fibres forms ice crystals. If the freezing process is rapid and controlled, these crystals remain small and cause minimal damage. However, slow freezing or fluctuating temperatures can create larger ice crystals that rupture cell walls.

During thawing, these damaged cells release moisture, commonly referred to as purge. Excessive purge leads to weight loss, reduced juiciness, and a noticeable decline in tenderness. This is why the thawing stage is just as important as freezing itself.

> Excellence in cooking does not begin in the pan; it begins long before, in how the product is handled

In addition, beef is highly susceptible to bacterial growth when exposed to temperatures between 5°C and 60°C, referred to as the "danger zone." The goal of proper thawing is to keep the outer surface of the meat out of this zone for as long as possible while allowing the interior to defrost evenly.

**The Refrigerator Method:** The most recommended and widely used method for thawing beef is refrigeration thawing. This method provides consistent temperature control and maintains food safety throughout the process.

**How it works:** Beef is transferred from the freezer to a refrigerator set at 0°C to 4°C. Depending on the size and cut, thawing can take anywhere from 12 hours to several days. Small cuts such as steaks or mince may thaw overnight, while larger cuts like brisket or whole primals may require 48–72 hours.

**Why it is preferred:** Refrigerator thawing ensures that beef remains at a safe temperature throughout the process. It also allows moisture loss to be minimised, preserving texture and natural flavour. From a culinary perspective, this method offers the most consistent and predictable results.

### Best practices

- Always place beef on a tray or in a container to catch purge.
- Keep it on the lowest shelf to avoid cross-contamination.
- Allow sufficient time; rushing this process undermines quality.
- Once thawed, beef should ideally be used within 24–48 hours.

In professional kitchens, this method is considered non-negotiable for high-value cuts.

## Cold Water Thawing: A Controlled Accelerated Method

When time is limited, cold water thawing offers a faster yet still safe alternative if executed correctly.

**How it works:** Beef is sealed in a leak-proof vacuum bag or airtight packaging and submerged in cold water. The water should be kept below 20°C, and ideally changed every 30 minutes to maintain temperature consistency. Small cuts may thaw within 1–2 hours, while larger portions may take several hours.

**Advantages:** Cold water conducts heat



more efficiently than air, significantly reducing thawing time while still keeping the meat outside the bacterial danger zone. When done correctly, it produces better results than room temperature thawing.

**Risks and controls:** The key risk in this method is temperature abuse. If the water warms excessively or packaging leaks, the surface of the beef can quickly enter unsafe temperatures. For this reason, strict monitoring is essential.

## Best practices

- Ensure vacuum packaging is intact and waterproof.
- Submerge fully and weigh down if necessary.
- Change water regularly to maintain cold conditions.
- Cook immediately after thawing.

This method is widely used in commercial kitchens during high-demand service periods but requires discipline and attention to detail.

## Microwave Thawing: Emergency Use Only

Microwave thawing is the least desirable method in professional practice but remains an option in urgent situations.

**How it works:** Using the defrost setting, beef is partially thawed using low-power microwave energy. The process is uneven, with edges often beginning to cook while the centre remains frozen.

**Limitations:** Microwave thawing can significantly damage the structure of the meat. The uneven heat distribution leads to partial protein denaturation, resulting in tougher texture and moisture loss. Additionally, certain areas may enter unsafe temperatures while others remain frozen.

**When to use it:** This method should only be used when no other option is available and the beef is intended for immediate cooking, such as minced beef for sauces, stir-fries, or quick preparations.

## Best practices

- Use only for small cuts or ground beef.
- Cook immediately after thawing.
- Avoid repeated microwave cycles.
- In professional kitchens, this method is considered a last resort rather than a standard practice.

## Room Temperature Thawing: A Common but Dangerous Mistake

One of the most frequent errors in handling frozen beef is leaving it out on the counter to thaw naturally. While it may appear convenient, this method poses significant food safety risks. At room temperature, the outer layer of beef quickly enters the danger zone while the interior remains frozen. This creates an environment where bacteria can multiply rapidly on the surface long before the centre has thawed.

Even though the beef may later be cooked, some bacteria produce toxins that are heat-resistant, meaning cooking will not necessarily eliminate all risks. From both a safety and quality standpoint, room temperature thawing is strongly discouraged in professional food handling environments.

## Professional Best Practices for Optimal Results

Across butchery, hospitality, and food service industries, consistent standards are applied to ensure both safety and quality. These include:

- **Planning ahead:** Proper thawing begins with forecasting demand and removing beef from frozen storage in advance.
- **Vacuum sealing:** Reduces oxidation and moisture loss during thawing.
- Temperature control: Maintaining strict cold chain integrity at every stage.
- **Labelling and rotation:** Ensuring FIFO (first in, first out) principles are followed.
- **Post-thaw handling:** Minimising exposure time before cooking or further preparation.

The thawing method directly influences the final eating experience. Properly thawed beef retains its natural juices, cooks evenly, and delivers expected tenderness. In premium beef categories such as Wagyu and high-grade Angus, the difference is even more pronounced. These products rely heavily on intramuscular fat distribution and moisture retention, both of which are sensitive to improper handling during thawing.

Ultimately, the respect given to the thawing process is reflected on the plate. Thawing beef is as much a science as it is a practice. While multiple methods exist, refrigeration thawing remains the benchmark for safety and quality, with cold water thawing serving as a practical alternative when time is limited.

What is usually overlooked is that excellence in cooking does not begin in the pan; it begins long before, in how the product is handled from frozen storage to preparation. For those who work with beef professionally or simply appreciate its quality at home, mastering the thawing process is a fundamental skill that should never be underestimated. ■





# The Guild Meet

The October Chefs meeting, held at the Fairmont Dubai, was a resounding success, bringing together esteemed partners and chef members in a spirit of collaboration.

We sincerely thank our corporate partners for their exceptional product showcases and presentations, featuring premium, high-quality products for our members to experience and appreciate.

We are particularly indebted to Mr Joe Nassoura, General Manager of Fairmont Hotel Dubai; Chef Bhatt, Executive Sous Chef in Charge; Shajahan, the IT expert; and the service team for their gracious hospitality and for hosting ECG's monthly meeting.

Finally, our members demonstrated their support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month by proudly wearing the pink logo throughout October.























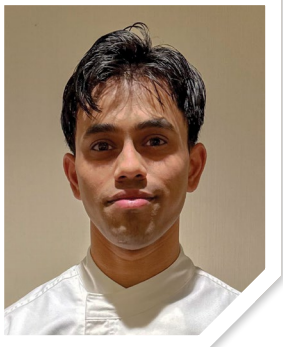







gulf
gourmet
GOLD IN THE
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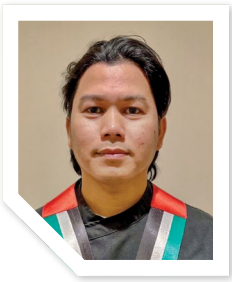
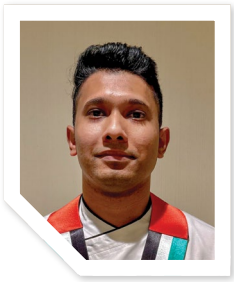


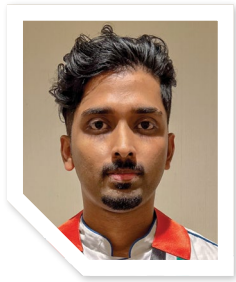






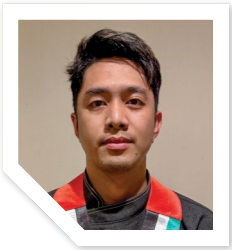

















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PRO.




DANUBE












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jmfoods
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Potatoes USA


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## THE EMIRATES CULINARY GUILD

# APPLICATION FORM

Date of Application: .....

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|---|---|---|
| | | |
| Nationality: | Civil Status: | Date of Birth: dd/mm/yyyy |
| | | |
| Employee/ Business Owner: | Name of Business: | Designation: |
| | | |
| Work Address: | Email Address: | Contact Number: |
| | | |

| Type of Membership: (please tick) | | |
|---|---|---|
| **SENIOR:**<br>(Above the rank of chef de partie/ senior chef de partie on executive chef's recommendation). | **AED350 joining fee/ AED150 renewal fee**<br>Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar | |
| **MEMBER:**<br>(Below the rank of chef de partie 29 years old and over). | **AED150 joining fee/AED75 renewal fee**<br>Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar | |
| **YOUNG MEMBER:**<br>(under 28 years) | **Free**<br>Includes certificate; member-pin | |

Declaration to be Signed by Applicant:

I wish to join The Emirates Culinary Guild in collaboration with The Women's Culinary Chapter.

I have read the ECG Constitution and By-laws. I agree to be bound by the requirements of the constitution. If elected, I promise to support the Guild and its' endeavours to the best of my abilities.

Signature: .....

| | |
|---|---|
| Proposed By: | Signature: ..... |
| Seconded By: | Signature: ..... |

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**Note:** The membership is only applicable to those who are working in the UAE as professional chef or with a background related as Chef in the hotel and restaurant industry.

# newmembers




Gulin Isik Sungar, Marketing Manager; Mubashira Bhaseer, Senior Key Accounts; and Fadi Bader, Executive Chef at Del Monte Foods (UAE) FZE, receive their membership certificate from the Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG).

For more than 135 years, **Del Monte** has been a trusted name in delivering high-quality food products to consumers and businesses around the world. Built on a heritage of quality, innovation, and reliability, the company continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of the food industry while maintaining its commitment to excellence across every category it serves.

Today, Del Monte is a trusted partner to hotels, restaurants, cafés, catering companies, and food service operators throughout the Middle East. With a comprehensive HORECA portfolio, the company offers a wide range of products and solutions designed to help professional kitchens achieve operational efficiency, menu consistency, and exceptional customer experiences.

From fresh fruits and vegetables to prepared foods, frozen products, sauces, specialty ingredients, and pantry essentials, our portfolio is designed to address the everyday challenges faced by food service professionals. Each product is carefully selected to deliver convenience, dependable quality, and consistent performance, helping businesses maintain high standards while optimizing time and resources.

With its regional headquarters in Dubai, Del Monte combines global expertise with deep local market knowledge. This unique advantage enables the company to understand the specific needs of operators across the Middle East and provide solutions that are both practical and relevant to local tastes, operational requirements, and market trends.

Beyond supplying products, we work closely with customers as a food solutions partner. The company's approach centers on building long-term relationships through dependable service, continuous innovation, and a commitment to helping businesses grow. By understanding the realities of professional kitchens, Del Monte develops solutions that simplify operations, reduce preparation time, support cost management, and enhance overall productivity.

Whether serving a luxury hotel, a quick-service restaurant, a catering operation, or an independent café, Del Monte remains focused on one clear objective: helping food service professionals deliver quality, freshness, and consistency in every meal they serve. ■

# Culinary Trends Express

**Simon Martin**, Executive Chef and Culinary Innovation Manager at JMM Meat Processing explores the latest food trends, from elevated fries to Korean cookies and smart kitchen technology

Welcome back to Trends Express. Without further ado, let us jump on board and see what is hot and appearing in our region. Remember, "**LIKE IT, BUY IT, SNAP IT, SHARE IT**."

They are not complicated, but just a few simple ingredients will rock your culinary planet...

As we edge into the winter season, BBQ's, roasted turkeys and buffets that seem never ending. This month will see us prepare for Diwali, thanks giving and national day. So let us take a minute to see what the new black in our region is.

**THE HUMBLE FRENCH FRY**. Is the French fry a staple or an everyday trend? **WELL**, only when you elevate it does the trend really take off. Regardless of whether it is shoestring, curly, steak-cut, or one of the other 33 cut styles of the French fry, it needs elevation. In fine dining, we have pommes soufflées; in street food, we have Tater Tots .... Personally, I like hot pommes allumettes (matchstick fries) topped with sour cream, crispy onions, and sweet chilli sauce. Yummy! As this trend grows, we are seeing key elements that are making the French fry rise again as the king of regional trends. Texture, flavour, and paradoxical temperatures are all key to this. No longer are a few sauces on fries enough to win our customers over. Just this week, I have seen Sando fries, Holy Grain Fries, Kito fries, and the amazing Logma fries with Khaleeji spices that will blow your mind. What are you serving your customers? Is it big, Instagrammable, and dirty? Let us also not forget the sweet versions, like sweet



> No longer are a few sauces on fries enough to win our customers over

potato fries loaded with vanilla soft serve, chocolate chilli sauce, and crunchy cinder toffee shards... ☺ I am salivating already just writing this.

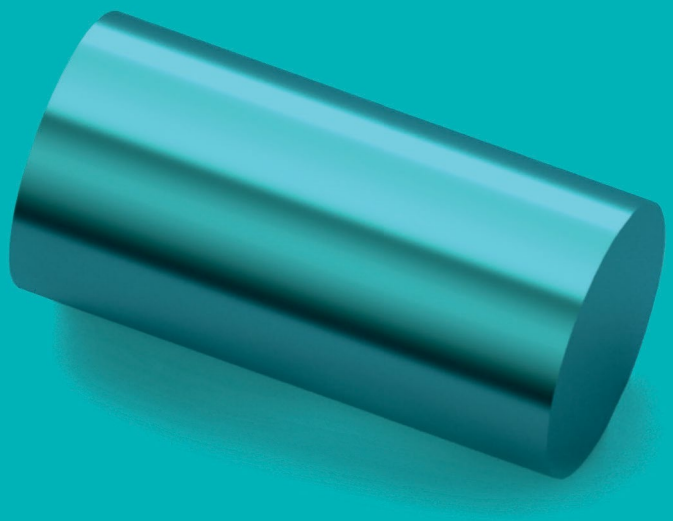
**KOREAN DUBAI COOKIES**. For those with a sweet tooth, the emergence of Korean-style, gooey, chewy cookies (**Du-Jjon-Kul**, also known as **Dujjonku**) is worth noting. Inspired by the craze for Dubai chocolate, the name is deceptive, as these are not dough-based baked cookies but a mochi-marshmallow-cocoa coating wrapped around a crunchy filling, such as kataifi or nut butter. These have come to our region through K-pop bands like **IVE**. Originally, honey cookies (**Yakgwa**) were known as medicinal confectionery and were typically fried. This trend is all over social media and is appearing in cafés and bakeries across the GCC. Think matcha, strawberry, pistachio, and even cheese and date. It is a must-try and will leave our customers wanting more.

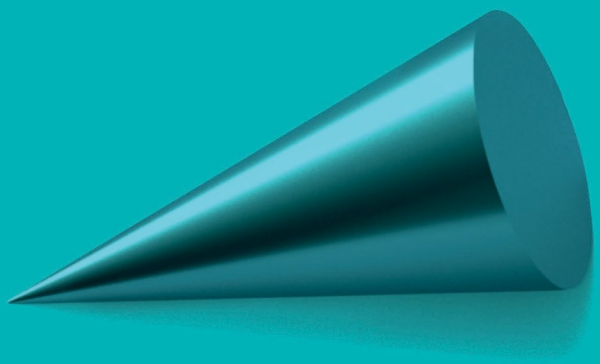
**SMART INDUSTRY UPDATE.** Connected ovens are easing centralised menu control, while smart refrigeration systems with real-time temperature monitoring, shelf-life tracking, and failure prediction are becoming the norm. Now, mise en place lists can be auto-generated based on expiring inventory. **WOW!** Robotic coffee arms and self-ordering systems are helping us cut prep times and address counter-service labour shortages. AI-driven supply chains are here to stay. Smart shelf labels in retail are changing prices throughout the day to steer consumers towards quieter shopping times and make the most of busy periods. **WHAT IS NEXT?** This month has been an eye-opener for me, as I have tried a few new things and revisited a few old favourites, from peach and cherry blossom iced tea to coffee and brown sugar 72-hour brisket. ☺

*Finally, when it comes to trends, our corporate partners at the Emirates Culinary Guild are also helping shape the landscape through their vision and innovation. Their commitment to making their latest products available at our monthly meetings reflects their focus on innovation and evolving market trends. Stay ahead of the curve. Talk to them, try their products, and join us in driving trends across our region.* ■

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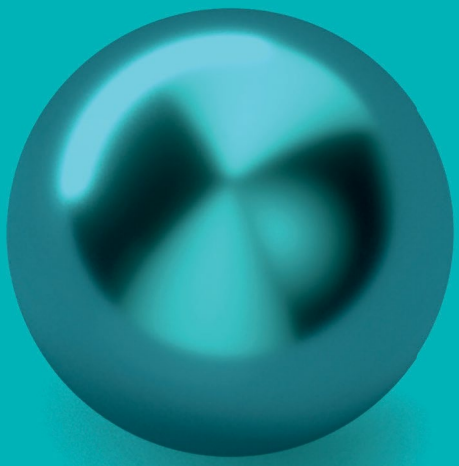




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# WE'VE CHANGED THE MENU



**4 out of 5 hospitality professionals have experienced mental health issues at least one time in their career.**

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