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AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2026

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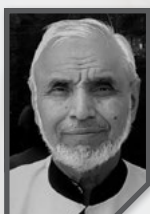
volume 21, issue 8

NOTHING TO LOSE

PURPLE BREAD, BOLD IMAGINATION
AND A COMPETITION TO REMEMBER

CUISINE IS A LEARNING OCEAN

Honorary ECG
Member Chef
Babu Khan on the
greatest mistake a
chef can make



GARNISH GETS ITS GLORY

Chef **Pasindu
Adeesha Navodya**
takes on this season's
Arla Pro Pastry
Mastery competition



EISC 2026 IN ACTION

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Dear Fellow Members, Chefs, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to commend the excellent sportsmanship displayed throughout the EISC Class Competitions 2026. Since June, the competition floor at the ICCA facility has seen remarkable talent and, above all, a spirit of encouragement and mutual respect among chefs.

A competition is about taking a chance on yourself, knowing that someone is going to judge your work and you are going to walk away a better chef than when you arrived. Win or lose, every competitor leaves with something that cannot be hung around the neck, which is experience.

I am grateful to ICCA for once again providing world-class facilities that have enabled us to host the EISC Class Competitions. My thanks also go to our partners, sponsors, and supporters, whose continued support and the dedication of our organisers, judges, and marshals have made this season another outstanding success for the Emirates Culinary Guild. It takes a village, and our culinary village never disappoints.

It is fitting, then, that this issue carries that same message. Honorary Emirates Culinary Guild member Chef Babu Khan shares why the biggest mistake any chef can make is believing there is nothing left to learn. I could not agree more. The moment we think we know everything is the moment we stop growing.

You will find that same message in our opinion pieces and features. Our industry never stands still. New ingredients, new techniques, new ideas and new generations of chefs continue to develop our profession. The best chefs I know are still asking questions, still listening and still learning.

Our cover story features Chef Hajira Siddiqua, whose first EISC Class Competition did not end with a medal. She came with an open mind and was not afraid to think outside the box. With nothing to lose and everything to learn, she won the hearts of judges and fellow chefs alike. There is always something to learn from competitions; that is the beauty of it.

We also continue to shine a light on the next generation of talent. This month, Chef Pasindu Adeesha Navodya from Hilton Dubai Jumeirah Resort competes in this season's Arla Pro Pastry Mastery competition. Opportunities like these give young chefs a chance to compete, learn and help raise the standards of our industry.



As always, I encourage every member to keep an eye on the Emirates Culinary Guild calendar. There are more competitions, workshops and events on the horizon, and I hope to see many more familiar faces and plenty of new ones taking part.

Past issues, upcoming events, chef spotlights and more are all waiting for you at issuu.com/gulfgourmetmagazine and visit emiratesculinaryguild.net to stay updated on guild competitions and news. Check out our social media to see what chefs around the world are creating and perhaps connect with someone who inspires you. You can always share your thoughts and write to us at emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com.

Finally, thank you to every competitor who has entered the EISC Class Competitions this season. Thank you also to our judges, organisers, marshals, partners, sponsors and supporters.

We still have more EISC action ahead, and in our next issue we will bring you more photographs, stories and highlights from the competition floor. Until then, keep learning, keep challenging yourself and, most importantly, keep cooking!

Culinary regards,

Alan Orreal

President, Emirates Culinary Guild ■



**WORLD CHEFS
YOUNG CHEFS**



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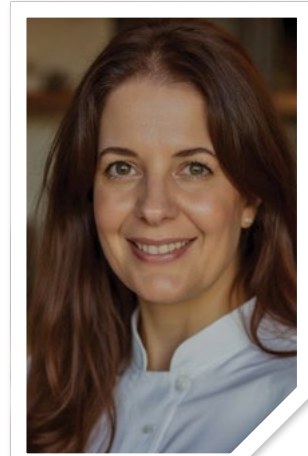


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ALLIANCE
ABROAD

The Business of Becoming Busy

Before a business gets busy, there is plenty of work no one sees, Chef **Tarryn-Leigh Green**



Walk into a bustling restaurant on a Friday evening and everyone immediately recognises hard work. The dining room is full, the kitchen is in full flow, orders are flying through the pass and every member of the team is focused on the service ahead. It is visible. It is measurable. More importantly, it is productive.

But there is another kind of busyness that receives far less recognition.

I call it **"busy becoming busy."**

It is the work that happens before the customers arrive, before the orders begin to flow and before the business finds its rhythm. Ironically, it can be the hardest work of all.

Hospitality has always celebrated visible success. We admire the packed restaurant, the successful product launch, the new opening or the production line operating at full capacity. Yet these moments are only the tip of the iceberg. Beneath every success story lies an enormous amount of work that few people ever see.



Every successful business has a season where it is busy becoming busy

When business slows, the workload rarely does.

In fact, it often increases.

A quieter restaurant does not simply wait for guests to return. Menus are re-engineered, recipes are reviewed, priced and refined, suppliers are renegotiated, staff are retrained, systems are reviewed and marketing plans are reimagined. Every decision is made with the hope that today's effort will create tomorrow's momentum.

The same is true throughout the wider food industry. Manufacturers review formulations, improve efficiencies, redesign packaging, explore new markets and develop new products. Distributors strengthen customer relationships,

optimise logistics and search for opportunities in an increasingly competitive landscape.

This work is demanding not because it is physically harder, but because the outcome is uncertain.

A busy dinner service provides immediate feedback. Guests arrive, orders are placed and revenue follows. "Busy becoming busy" offers no such reassurance. You can spend weeks, months or even years refining a concept, improving operations or investing in growth without knowing whether those efforts will ultimately deliver the results you are striving for.

That uncertainty can be one of the greatest challenges in hospitality.

It is easy to mistake activity for progress, or to assume that because results are not yet visible, little is happening. In reality, some of the most valuable work a business ever undertakes happens during these quieter periods. Foundations are strengthened, ideas are tested, processes are refined and opportunities are created long before success becomes visible to anyone else.



The industry celebrates the visible moments, the packed dining room, the launch of a new product, the successful opening. What it rarely acknowledges are the months, and sometimes years, of invisible work that made those moments possible. Every successful business has a season where it is busy becoming busy. We may never eliminate the uncertainty that comes with that stage, but perhaps we should give it the recognition it deserves. ■

newsbites

A Dhow of Friendship

Emirates Culinary Guild President Presents Traditional Dhow to All Japan Chefs Association in Tokyo

The Emirates Culinary Guild (ECG) president chef Alan Orreal visited the All Japan Chefs Association (AJCA) headquarters in Tokyo marking the occasion with the presentation of a traditional dhow to AJCA President Toshi.

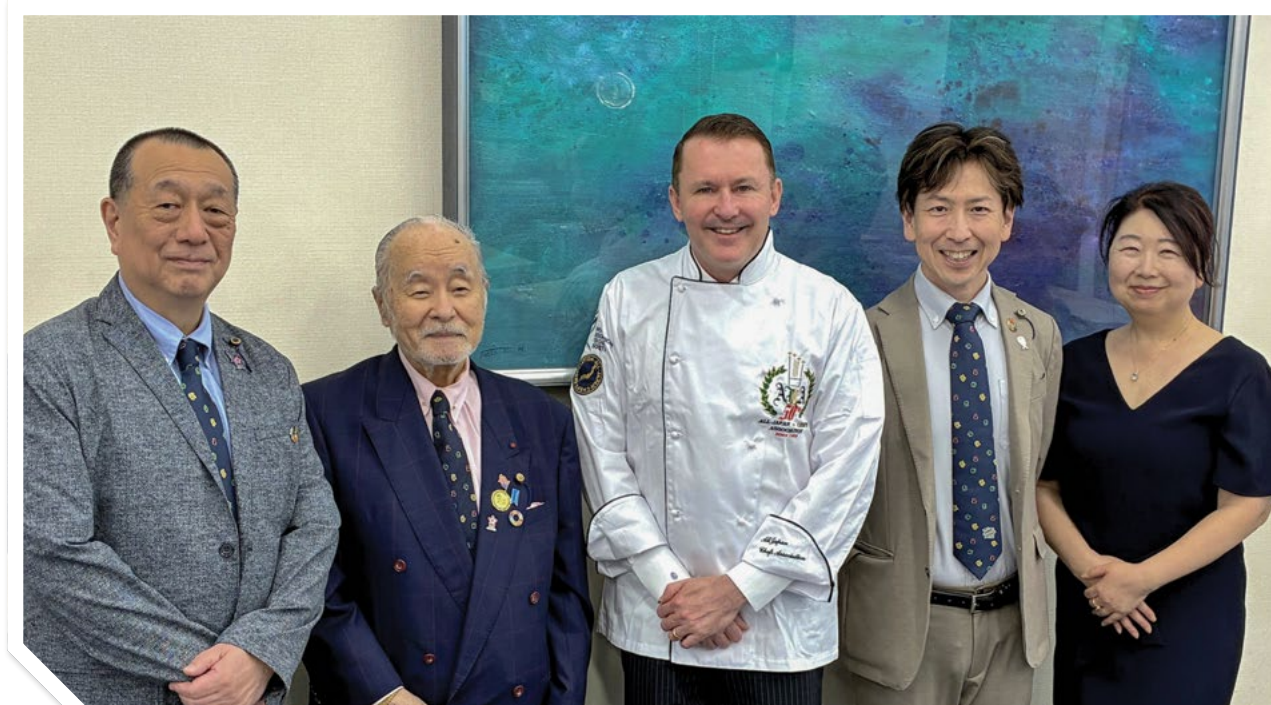
"This symbolic gesture from the Emirates Culinary Guild is a reminder to all that visit the AJCA headquarters of the power of the White Jacket and enduring friendship between all of the associations of WorldChefs," says Chef Alan Orreal, President of the Emirates Culinary Guild.

Since its inception, the ECG has worked to foster friendship and fellowship among chefs internationally, with a

continued focus on sharing culinary and cuisine culture and supporting culinary education for young chefs both within the UAE and beyond its borders.

"Chefs are the ambassadors of the world's cuisines, and it is our privilege and responsibility to preserve our cuisine knowledge and to share it equally," adds Chef Alan.

The presentation marks another step in the long-standing partnership between the Emirates Culinary Guild and the All Japan Chefs Association, reaffirming both organizations' shared dedication to culinary excellence, cultural exchange, and the global fellowship of chefs under Worldchefs. ■



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CATALOG 2026-27



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August-September 2026 **Gulf Gourmet**

Cuisine Is an Ocean of Learning! It Never Ends

Chef **Babu Khan**, Honorary Member of the Emirates Culinary Guild and Founder Member of the Oman Chefs Guild, chats with **Shreya Asopa** on life, legacy and why the greatest mistake any chef can make is thinking they have nothing left to learn

It is not every day you get to chat with someone who was in the room when it all began. One of those individuals was Chef Babu Khan, who was a core committee member of the Emirates Culinary Guild from its inception and helped develop the Guild in a time when the culinary profession in the region was still finding its identity.

Chef Babu flips his phone around to give me a tour of his small, family-run restaurant in Churu, Rajasthan, the camera sweeping across warm walls hung with hand-painted ceramic plates in cobalt blue, canary yellow and smoky



The moment any chef thinks I know everything, that is the end

gray. Blue pottery, he explains, is a craft native to Jaipur. It is made without clay and there are several motifs in it. "These are hand-printed pottery pieces crafted

by artisans in Rajasthan. My son looks after this lovely restaurant," he says, panning his phone around to give me a glimpse of the space. But Chef Babu Khan is still very much in the kitchen, handling the menu, the training, the standards, the soul of the place. It is, he says, what he does after retirement. However, anybody who has spoken to him for five minutes knows that retirement, for Chef Babu, is little more than a change of address.

When Chef Babu arrived in Dubai in 1980, the hotels were few enough that you could name them all without missing

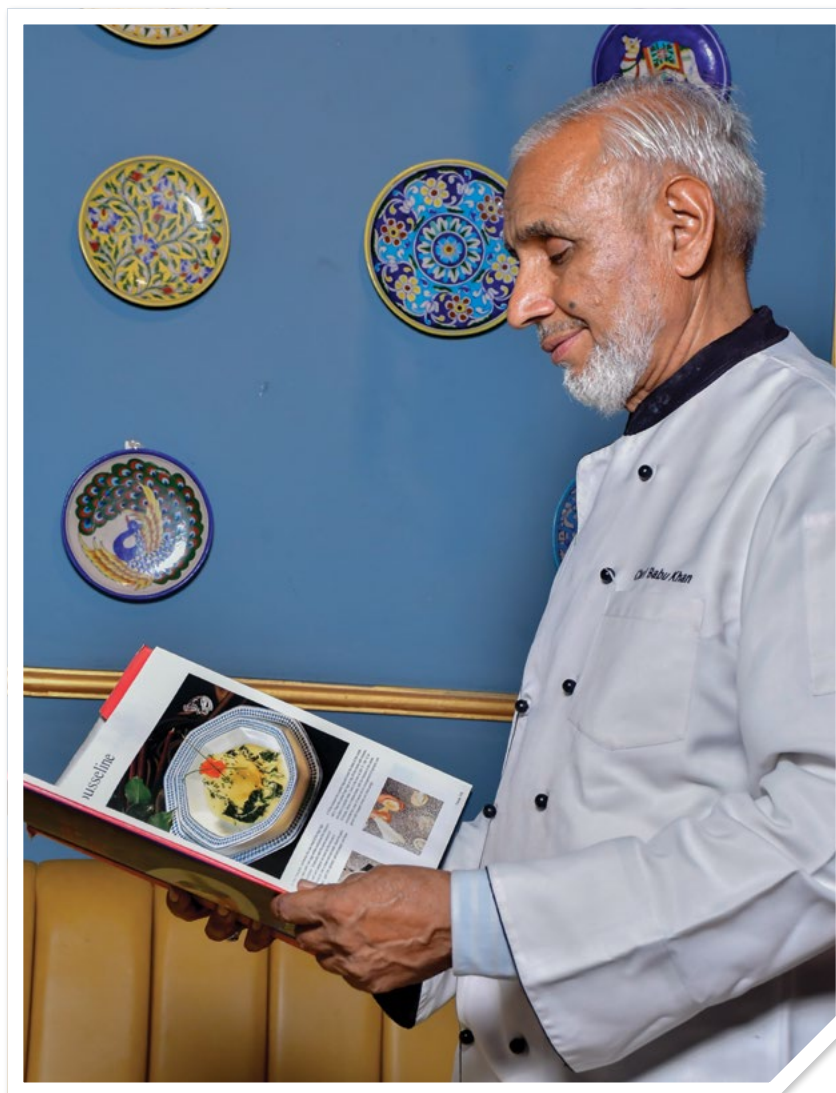
a beat. "I joined the Jebel Ali Hotel Group as a commis, working through every section of the kitchen over the years that followed," he recalls. "Overall, I worked thirty years with JA Resorts and Hotels, across the Jebel Ali Hotel and the JA Hatta Fort Hotel. I did leave twice in between, once for Penny's Food in Sohar as Executive Chef, and then for the National Hospitality Institute in Oman as Chef Instructor. But I always came back. And in 2013, I returned as Executive Chef at Hatta Fort."

So, as he sees chefs coming straight out of catering college, hungry for titles, the conceit of it all is too familiar to him. "Within a year or two, they want to be chef de partie. A few more years and they want the title of sous chef or head chef. They are still so young. In our time, when you become a sous chef or an executive chef, you would have gray hair simply because you had worked as a garde-manger, saucier and in every station. Not a few weeks here, a few weeks there."

He is not against ambition and understands the appeal of the low-hanging fruit of a quick promotion. "A commis working with me today will move if another hotel offers a better title and a little more money. There is nothing wrong with a change in title. I am not saying stay in one place forever. But give it time. Learn from the company before moving to the next."

Harking back to Classic Culinary Days

Reminiscing about his days with the guild, he goes back to the time when there was a small community of close-knit chefs. It was from that tight circle that the idea for a chef's guild originated. "There were a few of us back then. I was a chef de partie at that time. My Corporate Chef was Michael Lee at Jebel Ali Hotel, and there was also the late Chef Alen Thong, a good friend of mine. We would all discuss the idea of forming an association because Dubai was growing rapidly. In those days, everything was coordinated through landline phones and face-to-face meetings. Over time,



The cuisine is an ocean. It never ends. You keep on creating; you keep on learning

I saw many of the seasoned chefs from that era come together to discuss the vision, the name, and the structure of the organisation. Eventually, the Guild was established in 1992."

Looking back, he leads me through a winding trail of culinary memories: the early committee meetings at the Metropolitan Hotel, international judging competitions, even world

records, recounting each with unmistakable nostalgia.

In 2009, he was invited to Oman as part of the jury panel at the Oman Expo. "We were three judges from the UAE, judging a different category from all the other judges. It was a serious responsibility. Judging is not an easy job. You need training for it. A small mistake by a judge, and it can damage a participant's motivation. We cannot do injustice to anyone," he recalls.

It is a weight he understood from both sides of the judging table. Chef Babu has judged several international competitions for years, learning from seniors like Chef Uwe, attending seminars on how to evaluate a plate fairly. For young chefs entering the culinary competitions, he reels off the fundamentals. "Focus on detailing. The composition on your plate, such as the

carbohydrate, the protein, the starch, the portion. Hygiene, taste, texture, and presentation are also the points. And your timing," he says, noting that timing in a live competition is a hair-trigger affair.

In these memories of medals, you catch that he measured every competition against standards burnished by years at the stove. Born in Rajasthan, India's desert state, Chef Babu Khan set out on a long apprenticeship in his craft. He began his culinary odyssey at the Hotel Career Centre in Bournemouth, before training at some of the most renowned kitchens in Europe, such as the Hotel de Crillon on Paris's Place de la Concorde, and Claridge's in London. When asked about the teachings that stuck with him, a story surfaces with a nostalgic, casual

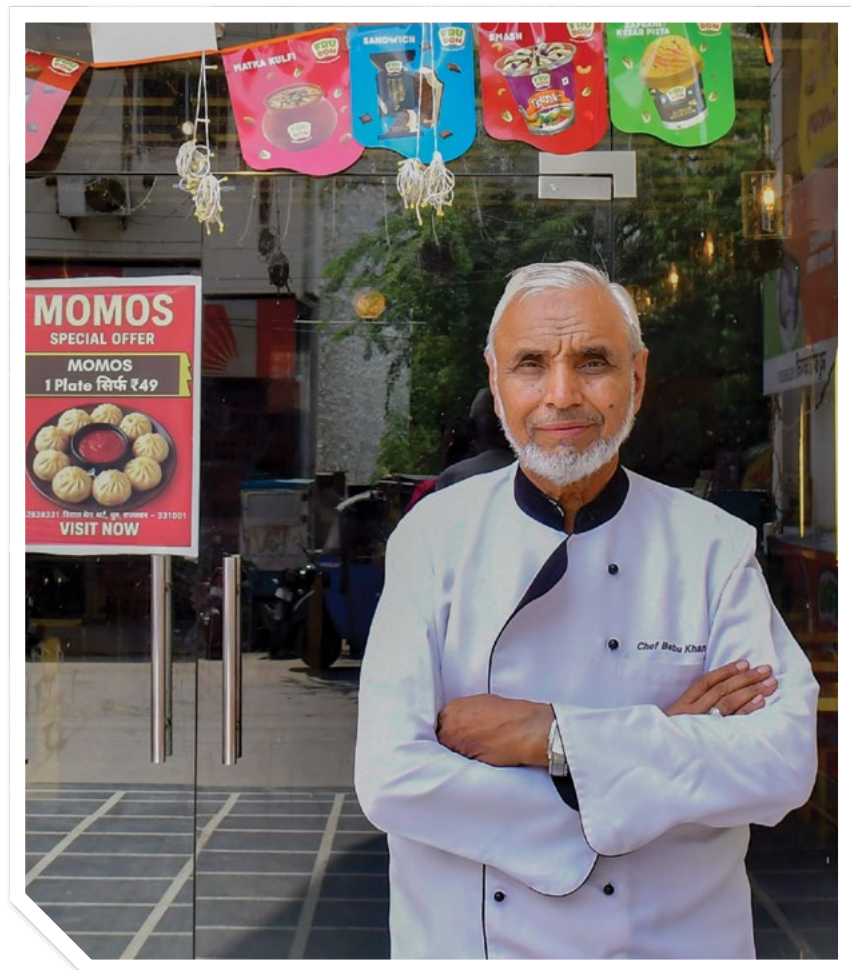


admission. "I remember a butchery class where I made a mistake on a lamb saddle. As a consequence, I had to haul the entire carcass out of the walk-in. That was my lesson," he says.

The question that sears your brain is whether such lessons still exist. "Nowadays, we cannot do that. But in those days, the foundation was strong. Strong because nothing came easy and nothing came ready. Every sauce was made from scratch. That experience stays with you forever." Which is exactly why what he sees today gets under his skin. He shares the same lessons with his staff. "Make your own sauce, make your own pizza base, make your own stocks. People are buying ready-made. Everything is ready-made," he says, adding that solely relying on the ready-made culture is reprehensible. "If you are buying everything ready-made, you are not a chef. You are an assembler."

A Life In Kitchen

By 1979, Chef Babu had joined the Aqua Marina Hotel, a beachside resort in Aqaba, Jordan, as a commis chef learning the language of the kitchen before he had mastered its grammar. The years that followed took him through kitchens of every scale and style. In 2002, he spent two years teaching at the Al Kafaat Foundation's Institute of Hotel Management in Beirut, one of the largest hospitality institutes in the Middle East. At the same time, he worked alongside celebrated Lebanese television chef Ramzi Choueiri, contributing recipes and photography to one of his books. There were many more chapters, including working at Sohar Beach by Swiss-Belhotel in Oman and the Ras Al Khaimah Hotel. In 2022, he was invited by the Sur Plaza Hotel

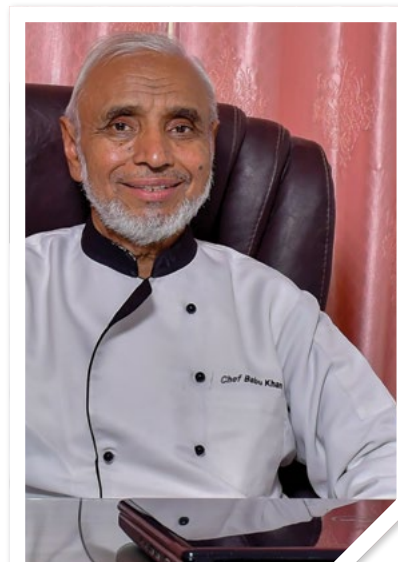


I am 70, but I still read a lot of books. I am not an internet chef. I am authentic. I am still learning

in Oman to consult on a food festival, to line up the staff and streamline the operations. He continues to take on freelance F&B consultancy projects. Wherever he went, he treated every kitchen as a classroom. Being married to one's work is a cliché best avoided in writing, but for Chef Babu, it happens to be true. Nearly five decades in, even now, the kitchen remains as contumacious as ever, refusing to let him go.

It was in 2017 that he came back to India. He opened La Maison Blanche, the first Mediterranean fine dining restaurant in the city of Jaipur, which won the Best Restaurant title from the Jaipur Mag Food Awards in 2018. Then COVID came, a whammy of lockdowns caused lost revenue and uncertainty. "I am a professional chef, but I am not a businessman. I was only depending on the restaurant, and we could not survive. So I sold out."

What came next was a role at Empire Regency Hotel Jaipur, then another consultancy project, and now the current restaurant, where his son manages the floor and Chef Babu runs the kitchen. "Even if one day, if I do not go to the kitchen, I feel uncomfortable. I always find something to fix at the restaurant," he says.



For young chefs to take away from his story, the answer comes in three parts. Patience with building the foundation. Loyalty in learning. And above everything else, humility, undoing every expectation of what a career in this industry should look like.

"The moment any chef thinks I know everything, that is the end. I am 70, but I still read a lot of books. I am not an internet chef. I am authentic. I am still learning. And that is the only way." He pauses, then says with resolve. "The cuisine is an ocean. It never ends. You keep on creating; you keep on learning. Always respect the seniors. Learn from them."

Dubai was not just a career for Chef Babu Khan. It was a life. Both his children were born there. The family grew up in a city that was growing alongside them. "Good times, bad times, tough times," he says quietly. "We were there during the Gulf War. We have seen all the days."



If you are buying everything ready-made, you are not a chef. You are an assembler

Through all of it, the guild succeeded in spades and was his constant. His fidelity to the culinary fraternity was recognised in 2009 when he was elected Vice President of the Oman Chapter of the Emirates Culinary Guild. "I never missed a meeting. Even if I had to travel 100 kilometres, I travelled and attended. It was my passion. Be it there as a marshal or as a jury member, I always showed up." Some stories end in retirement. This one, clearly, is still being written. ■

The Shawarma Search Continues

Four months, countless meals, and the hunt for the perfect shawarma. The best way to experience a new city is through its food, writes Chef **Helen Morris**

Four Months In ...and still hunting for the perfect Shawarma. So here I am, sitting out on my balcony on an August evening; I KNOW – August, right! Surprisingly, it is not unbearable. Humid? Yes. Warm? Absolutely. But still just comfortable enough to enjoy a quiet evening outside before that inevitable moment arrives when someone, somewhere, turns the giant hairdryer on, and the Gulf reminds you exactly where you are.

For now, I am surrounded by construction sites, cranes, dust and the constant soundtrack of progress. Ras Al Khaimah is changing almost daily. Every week another road diversion or building, well, the start of one, seems to appear from nowhere, and the skyline edges closer to what will eventually become one of the UAE's most exciting destinations. I know that one day I will look back on these weekends and remember sitting here when there was little more than sand, mangroves and construction fences. In years to come, the luxury hotels, beach clubs and buzzing promenades will probably make this version of Ras Al Khaimah feel like a distant memory. But enough about the view. Let us talk about what really matters. Food.

Because, let us be honest, by now you have probably realised that my internal satnav is not programmed for tourist attractions; it is programmed for restaurants. My greatest challenge so far? Finding **the shawarma**. Not just a shawarma. The shawarma. The one that has you inventing excuses



My internal satnav is not programmed for tourist attractions; it is programmed for restaurants

to drive past the restaurant. The one that whispers your name at 10 o'clock every evening. The one where the garlic sauce deserves its own fan club. So far... nothing. What is even more concerning is that every person I ask gives me a completely different answer or shrugs their shoulders. Mind you, most of us are relatively new to Ras Al Khaimah, so perhaps we are all on the same culinary expedition together. It is becoming less

of a search and more of a public service. I will happily sample dozens in the name of research; it is a sacrifice I am prepared to make.

Until then, let us see what I have gotten up to. One evening I developed one of those random cravings that simply refuses to go away. Chinese. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Now.

So, onto Talabat I went and found a restaurant with excellent reviews. Normally that is where expectations become dangerous, but this one absolutely delivered. Sweet and sour chicken (yes, I know... culinary qualifications and I still order sweet and sour, judge away), perfectly cooked noodles, generous portions, and everything arrived beautifully packaged. Nothing was soggy, nothing had leaked, and every mouthful was packed with flavour. For now, I think I have found my go-to Chinese takeaway. Until someone tells me there is an even better one...

Thankfully, some of the chefs who arrived before me pointed me towards what has quickly become my favourite Lebanese restaurant, around twenty minutes away. Now we are talking. Beautifully charred mixed grills with that unmistakable smoky aroma from the charcoal. Tender lamb kebabs still dripping with juices. Chicken Taouk marinated until every bite was fragrant with garlic, lemon and spices. Then came the mezze. Silky hummus with enough olive oil to make you smile. Smoky baba ghanoush. Creamy mutabal. Fresh warm Arabic bread that disappears far

quicker than you would ever admit. And then...the lentil soup. Simple. Velvety. Comforting. Gently spiced with cumin and finished with fresh lemon. Honestly, I had happily ordered a barrel full of it.

To my Sushi fix. Fortunately, I have already solved one important problem. Karma Kafé has become my happy place. I was actually staying in the hotel when I first discovered it, so visiting became dangerously convenient. The service has been faultless every single time. The beverages are excellent. And the menu? Far too tempting. I am the sort of person who wants to order half of it, then remembers that I only have one stomach. The black cod was exceptional, delicately flaky, coated in that rich caramelised miso glaze that balances sweetness, saltiness and umami in every bite. The chicken truffle gyoza arrived beautifully with a perfectly seasoned filling and just enough truffle to enhance rather than overwhelm. Then came dessert. Mochi. Well, who doesn't like Mochi!

Now everyone needs their neighborhood café. Back in Doha, my favourite café was Twisted Olive. It was one of those rare places that gets absolutely everything right: great people, consistently excellent food and an atmosphere that somehow makes you stay much longer than you intended. I was not expecting to replace it so quickly. Then I found The Cyclist Café. It is practically across the road from me.

Unfortunately, thanks to all the roadworks, actually getting there involves a route that resembles a Formula One qualifying lap. It is about three minutes away... unless you want to obey the roads, in which case it is closer to ten. The first thing I ordered was an açai bowl because, quite frankly, I have a slight addiction. It arrived beautifully chilled, packed with fresh berries, crunchy granola, banana, coconut, and every topping exactly where it should have been. Someone had clearly cared about how it left the kitchen rather than simply



The greatest challenge so far? Finding the shawarma

throwing ingredients into a bowl. The second visit was Eggs Benedict. Poached eggs with perfectly runny yolks. A rich, buttery hollandaise with just enough acidity. Beautifully toasted muffins. Everything was seasoned properly, which is surprisingly rare around here at times. It has become my café. I suspect it will become even more dangerous once winter arrives and sitting outside becomes one of life's great pleasures.

Another discovery has been a Central Asian restaurant serving one of my all-time favourite comfort foods, Manti.

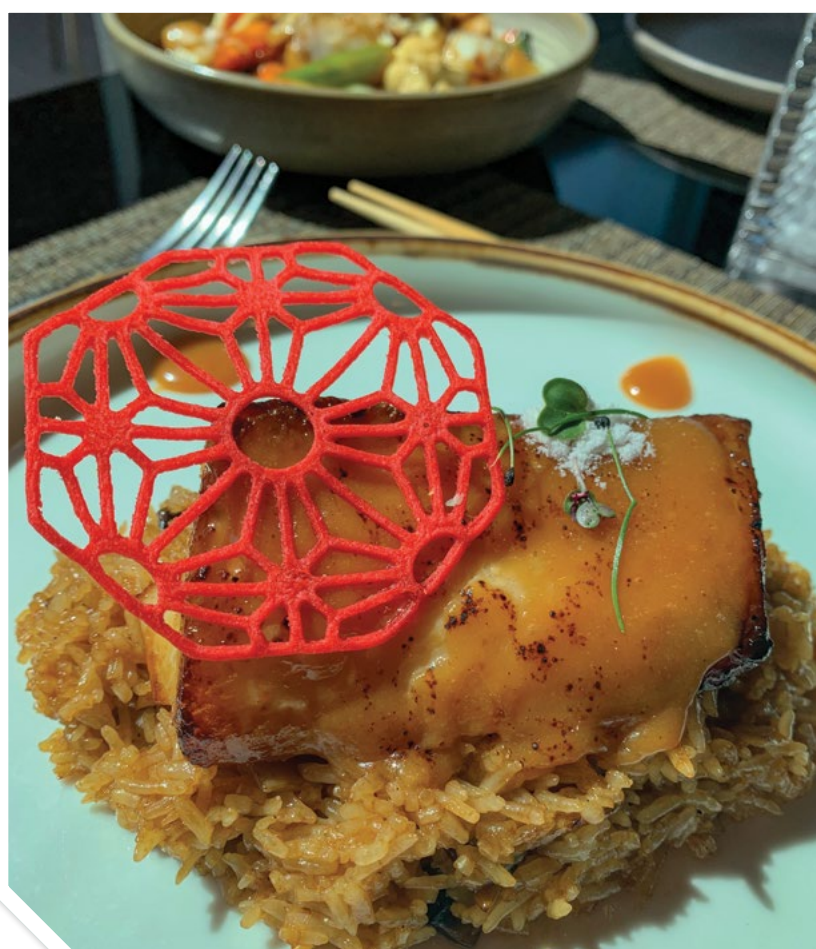


Large handmade dumplings filled with beautifully seasoned meat, steamed until soft and served with cooling sour cream (smetana). Absolute happiness. Alongside them, I ordered Achuchuk salad. If you have never had it, you are missing something wonderfully simple. Sweet tomatoes, delicate onions, herbs, and just enough seasoning to let the ingredients shine. Except...There were

no tomatoes from Uzbek. Rather than substitute inferior ones, the restaurant simply removed the dish from the menu that day. As a chef, I respected that enormously. Sometimes saying "no" demonstrates more integrity than pretending everything is fine. Quality should always win.

Now my next adventure is Afghani food. It should have been this evening until I remembered I had chicken in the fridge. I have never had a bad Afghani meal. One of my favourite memories is from Bur Dubai where there is a tiny bakery producing enormous rounds of traditional Afghani naan almost continuously. The last time I visited, they were only one dirham each. They emerged from the tandoor blistered, slightly smoky, wonderfully chewy and still warm enough that resisting tearing pieces off on the journey home was almost impossible. Naturally, I bought far too many and delivered them to a friend. Sharing food always seems like the sensible thing to do. I will let you know next time whether Ras Al Khaimah's version lives up to the memory.

Beyond that, I have done a fair amount of cooking at home, partly because I enjoy it. Partly because sometimes you just want your own food. The real exploration will begin once winter arrives. That is when I will head into Ras



Al Khaimah city, wander through the fish market, browse the vegetable souk, discover tiny family-run cafés tucked away down side streets and, hopefully, uncover those hidden gems that never appear on Instagram but always have queues of locals outside. Those are usually the best ones.

So, there you have it. Life here is quieter than it has been for a long time. I enjoy sitting on my balcony overlooking the mangroves as the sun disappears behind the cranes. Actually, I do not have a view of cranes, thankfully, but they are everywhere. I am enjoying learning the little quirks that every place has. Who has the best laundry service? Who is the person you call when something inevitably breaks? Where do you buy that one ingredient nobody else stocks? And, of course... Who makes the best food?

Thankfully, I am surrounded by fellow chefs who have already begun doing the difficult research. They are introducing me to hot pot, and some hidden gems and all sorts of places I probably would



Sometimes saying 'no' demonstrates more integrity than pretending everything is fine

not have discovered on my own. It is a dangerous friendship. Mostly for my waistband. So, the journey continues. Winter is getting closer. Markets are waiting. Restaurants are waiting. And somewhere in Ras Al Khaimah, I am convinced, the perfect shawarma is waiting too. I will keep looking. Purely in the interests of research, of course.

Until next time... Stay cool. Eat well. And if you know where that legendary shawarma is hiding... Please tell me before I accidentally have to eat another twenty trying to find it. ■



Are you being served?

Luke Bonner explains why some of the best restaurants get almost everything right and can still let you down

Picture this. End of the week and you are on a night out at one of your favourite restaurants. French, let us say, for fun. You rock up with high hopes. You pretty much know the menu and the specials look interesting. You begin with a tried cocktail, order as you go and the food is fine. The staff is present and pleasant. At the end of the night, you pay the bill and leave. What went wrong?

Well, nothing really. The atmosphere was fine, like many others. But on the way home, you and your significant other begin discussing the experience, trying to justify those minor imperfections. And there you have it. It was not the late pours, nor the knowledge of what the specials came with, and as you looked around the room, it was not the absence of bright-young-things after the mains were done with. No. It is the one thing that restaurants get almost right but can still miss the mark. Good service, hardly hospitable. But maybe all is not lost.

The Manhattan restaurant Eleven Madison Park (EMP) once plated \$2.00 hot dogs because some guests



missed the chance for the genuine NYC version – complete with actual hotdog carts. The same restaurant that turned a private dining room into a beach with sand, staff in beach garb, umbrellas and cocktails. The very same place that saw staff sneak off to feed a guest's parking meter due to their lack of knowledge. No wonder they were voted the number one restaurant in the world in 2017. Of course, none of these things is actually on the menu. It is simply ungodly, unreasonable hospitality. See, restaurants can get almost everything right; the food, the



What we really want is to feel noticed, not seen

wine, the room and still fail at the one thing none of that can substitute for.

When we think of what hospitality means, we default to the thought of delivery, all things being equal, in harmony, in tempo. What we really want is to feel noticed, not seen. And it scales down as well. It is the difference between what I can get you to drink versus what I am thinking that you are an Old Fashioned kinda guy. It is the waitress who finds a pashmina to solve a chilly outdoor seating, and in blue, which just so happens to match your significant other's outfit. It is the snide little 'my compliments to the chef' tossed off without expecting an answer, that does not vanish into the kitchen, but comes back out, apron and hat, to answer it with more respect than you gave it, which is its own kind of embarrassing. We diners want an experience, and there are a lot of great places that do it well without the need for a beach.

Whether it is the usual place or brand new and whether you are prepared to admit it or not, it is the attention we want, not the recital of some script but rather, the unscripted banter that is the basis of connection. Get that right, and we will tell our friends all about it, long before we ever get to the food. Maybe what you wanted all along was not French cuisine, just a French connection. ■





Are We To Be Blamed?

A young cook looked Chef **Tarek Mouries** in the eye and said, we followed all your advice. That answer changed everything

Business comes first. We have said it so many times that it rolls off the tongue in white jackets and planning sessions, and nobody questions it anymore because everybody believes it. And I believed it too. The operation must run, the client must be served, the numbers must make sense.

But somewhere along the way we let those three words become a wall. And after decades in this industry, after watching generation after generation



And we must ask ourselves, are we to blame?

of young cooks walk through my doors with fire in their eyes, I think we have built a trap. **And we must ask ourselves, are we to blame?**

As a culinary mentor who has worked alongside chefs for decades, I had a front seat to the industry evolution. I graduated in 1981. Back then, we taught with a spatula in one hand and a notebook in the other. Mentorship happened in the middle of service. We were on the line and teaching at the same time, and nobody thought that was extraordinary because it was simply what you did. But a few days ago, all of this made me question when I sat down with one of my young cooks after a practical assessment. He

was someone who had been walking through foundations, techniques and the reasoning behind every single thing we asked them to do. But when the assessment came, the standard collapsed completely. I pulled him aside, away from the kitchen, the way a father sits down with a son when something needs to be said without an audience. I asked him simply what had gone wrong. He looked at me with complete sincerity and told me, ***Chef, we followed all your advice. We did our best.***

I stood there, and I felt something shift inside me. I kept thinking, when did they stop asking why? When did they stop staying late to watch a sauce reduce, or coming in early to practice a cut? The sharpest cooks I ever trained did not wait for me to teach them. They hunted for knowledge. And I had to ask myself honestly, is this entirely our failure? Or is there a fire that only the cook themselves can choose to light? A cook who waits to be told what to do next will always be one step behind the kitchen. That proactive thinking has to be awakened. And somewhere between the operation and the deadlines and the business coming first, we forgot that awakening was also part of our job.

The very next day I found myself standing over a competition plate that told the same story in a different language. This young competitor deserves the benefit of the doubt. Competition environments are intense, and pressure can unsettle even a prepared cook. But what I saw on that plate was not a lapse. It was the absence of something that should have been second nature. The vegetables were meant to be cut in batonnet, but all were different thicknesses, different lengths, and all placed into one pot. I asked the room one question. If you place vegetables of different sizes into one pot, how do you expect them to cook evenly? There was complete silence.

I then asked the young cook one more question. Imagine you are walking into a



We built volume champions, but we need to work better to develop chefs

job interview and you present this plate. Would they hire you? Because what you present on the competition floor and what you present in a job interview are the same plate. The competition does not end when the judges walk away; it follows you into every kitchen you will ever walk into. A winning plate opens doors. That is where the need for a strong foundation also pops in.

What happened on that plate was not entirely that young cook's fault. When a plate arrives at the judges' table in poor condition, the first question is never about the competitor. It is about who allowed him to walk out with that plate. That responsibility sits with us. There is an entire generation of young cooks inside catering divisions, airlines, and bulk operations who are exceptional at what they do. And although we have been training them with one skill, we are letting the other go. Walk into one of those kitchens and ask a commis to cook you a single fish fillet, season it, taste it, and present it with intention. What you will find are hands that know how to fill a tray but have never learned to read a piece of protein or why you dry a fish before it hits the pan. ***We built volume champions, but we need to work better to develop chefs.***

I know what is running through your mind right now because it has run through mine. The operation does not pause. There is always another function or an urgent matter. It can make training and foundations feel secondary. But development cannot wait. When the kitchen gets busy, the basics are the first to slip, even though that is when

we need them most. As I mentioned in my last article, I was up at 3 am because I wanted to be a chef. It was never just a job. Today, I see too many young chefs treating it as one. Not all, but it is something we need to confront

Honestly, the generation that trained me understood that. The mentors who built my foundation broke the task down to its bones. I remember Chef Markus Iten, who taught me the basics, one technique per day. That foundation stayed with me my whole career. An exam at the end of the month so the learning had a destination. This shows what good mentorship looks like.

I have heard the argument for a clean slate. Remove the underperformers and bring in fresh blood who can deliver. I understand that. But a clean slate is a delay, not a cure. You do not fix the river by changing the water. You fix the river by fixing the banks.

And here I also want to make a point about motivation. It does not arrive with a morning briefing. It arrives when a cook looks in the mirror and decides, today I will care about my growth. This generation needs self-care, but self-care is not just rest. It is also the daily discipline to push yourself. It is choosing to be curious. Without that inner fire, no mentor on earth can save You.

The young chefs need environments that grow them. We reap what we sow. ***We are the keepers of a craft that took generations to build and can be lost in a single generation of neglect. Balance both operation and foundation. That is a note to myself as much as anyone reading this.***

Let us not fear the fall. Sometimes we must hit rock bottom to remember what sky-high truly feels like. The blame is shared, so the fixing must be shared too. Mentors, we must teach again. Young cooks, you must chase again. We hit the floor together. Now, together, we reach for the ceiling. ■

Rubies Add Some Sparkle to Food Waste

Bent carrots, abandoned mangoes and a bold idea were the unlikely ingredients behind Rubies in the Rubble, the UK-based, award-winning sustainable condiment brand. For more than a decade, **Jenny Costa** has alchemised the discarded into the desirable. Her new hot sauce is the latest jewel in its upcycled crown

By **Shreya Asopa**

Recently, as Rubies in the Rubble unveiled its Sweet & Spicy Hot Sauce range, founder Jenny Costa finally turned up the heat on a long-held ambition. For the better part of seven years, the UK-based company has been championing surplus-ingredient ketchups and mayonnaises. Hot sauce, however, was a different beast. "It has been something that I have been pushing and beating the drum for a long time. I am thrilled that we have finally brought it to market," says Costa.

Like finding a ruby in the rubble, the real treasure is not the obvious one. Look beyond the rescued chillies, pears and another ingredient comes into the spotlight. "Actually, carrots are the highlight in this," Costa says. "The range is built on wonky carrots, specifically the ones the system does not want. Rather than delivering a single hit of heat, the carrots lend sweetness and balance, meaning you have got a full mouth of taste."

The hot sauce is only part of the story. The bigger chapter belongs to the ingredients that never made the cut. As food waste climbs the global agenda, yesterday's surplus is finding new life on today's plate. Consumers, too, are becoming more willing to buy products made from ingredients that would otherwise have gone to waste. According



Look at what you have, and make it extraordinary

to research published by the Upcycled Food Association (UFA), roughly 54% of consumers state they are aware of upcycled foods, and 60% express an explicit intent to buy upcycled food products when informed of their environmental impact.

"I remember growing up with the usual condiments on the table or sauces my mum made, always finding a use for every bit of produce. That same thinking was behind Rubies in the Rubble. We wanted to create something people already loved, but make it better for them and better for the planet by using surplus produce from our farmer partners. Today, those sauces are served in schools, hospitals, and restaurants," explains Costa, for the brand has since grown into one of the UK's best-known upcycled condiment companies, earning recognition from the Great Taste Awards, The Sunday Times and, most recently, the Vegan Food & Living Product Awards.

Diamonds in the Bin

It was 2012. Fresh from reading an article on food waste, Costa set her

alarm for 4:30 a.m. and cycled through Covent Garden before dawn. She found piles of discarded mangoes, beans and other produce waiting to be thrown away. Where others saw waste, she saw possibility. "I got very excited," she recalls.

She traces that response back to her upbringing on a farm in Scotland. "I knew how much work it took to bring fruit and vegetables to the table. You would never let them go to waste. My mother was always preserving anything we could not eat from our vegetable garden," she says, adding every harvest deserves a second chance.

There is a version of Rubies in the Rubble that lives in the minds of the early market-goers who stopped at a stall to pick up mismatched jars wrapped in fabric scraps with handwritten labels. Asked about the brand's pivot around 2018 to engineered squeeze bottles and shelf-ready packaging, Costa smiles. "I loved the messy poetry of those jars, but it was a huge change."

Those mismatched jars were challenging a throwaway culture. "We are definitely in a consumer cycle of just taking and throwing, and so we collected them, cleaned, poured, clipped the lids, sold everything by weight, and everything was different heights and shapes."

But the romanticism had a ceiling, and the farmers made it visible. "I have 15 tonnes of tomatoes every week that I

am throwing away. Either you can do something with them, or you can keep taking your half-tonne," she recalls. The choice clarified itself. "We thought raising awareness was no longer enough. To become a practical solution for farmers, Rubies in the Rubble had to scale."

Scaling solved one problem. Winning over consumers was another.

Every bottle of surplus ketchup or hot sauce competes with products people have bought for years. Breaking that habit is far harder than rescuing surplus fruit in the first place.

"There were many trials and understanding consumer preferences. One of my favourite products we ever made was a banana hot ketchup. We eventually stopped making it because it became a distraction. It was expensive to produce. It had a loyal following, but a very small one. People simply did not understand how to use it. The usage occasion is everything. People need to understand the product, know how to use it, and reach for it instead of what they already buy. Then, of course, the price point changes the game."

As Rubies in the Rubble expands into markets such as Dubai, Costa is mindful of the push and pull between centralised production and localised, grassroots farming models. The company still scratches the surface of the surplus available from its farming partners. "We are using about 10 percent of what our farmers waste. So we need to expand production from existing bases and export, rather than fragment the model. The carbon logic also supports it. The movement of exporting by boat or by truck is the smallest part of the carbon footprint compared to growing the food in the existing phase," she says.

With around 70% of Rubies in the Rubble's business going directly to chefs, restaurants, hotel chains, schools, sports stadiums and offices, the brand has earned as much of a professional kitchen



presence as a household one. "We have made many long-standing partnerships with chefs. Marriott Hotels, for example, was one of our earliest adopters and has been with us for more than eight years," she adds. But how chefs actually use the products continues to surprise her. "A lot of chefs will use a bit of both. They will have the sauces on the table for people to use and then use the 10-litre bucket in the back of the house. If they are making a burger, they might mix the ketchup with the barbecue sauce for a burger sauce. You think you have got one product, but you have got four different ways of serving it."

For Costa, there is another bonus. A bottle sitting on a restaurant table does more than flavour a meal. Curious diners pick it up, read the label, creating a halo effect around the restaurant's efforts to reduce food waste.

She has watched the story of loving and valuing produce gather pace. More chefs are writing menus around the seasons and making sustainability part of what diners expect.

"Seasonality is something we should champion in this industry. Chefs can make that change by buying locally and seasonally. For example, when it is apple season, we should make the most of the harvest and the glut of apples. Naturally, that helps reduce food waste because you are cooking the ingredients when they are at their best. Look at what you have, and make it extraordinary."

The story comes full circle at home. With three young children tending a vegetable garden, the Costa kitchen has become its own small test lab. "We do a lot of roast vegetables in our house; my children are all into growing vegetables, and whenever we have roast vegetables, our garlic mayonnaise is probably our go-to. Ketchup is an ever-present fixture at the table. I even put it into a Bolognese if I am making pasta for the kids. We make a lot of marinades with the ketchup, and I will cook with it in a sauce. But lately with the hot sauces, I think for my husband and me, they have definitely already taken over."

Building a business has taught Costa plenty. If there is one thing Costa wishes more women had when starting a business, it is confidence. "Women are leaders. We are organised. We know how we want things done. What changes is confidence. A man reads a job description, sees two things he can do, and applies. A woman reads the same list, spots the two things she cannot do, and talks herself out of it. The only fear worth naming is the fear of someone else's judgement. But it is not a real fear."

After all, Rubies in the Rubble began because she chose to see possibility where others saw waste.

For anyone holding on to an idea they cannot stop thinking about, her advice remains uncomplicated.

"Life is too short. Chase your passion." ■

August-September 2026 **Gulf Gourmet**

Queen of Hearts

A purple loaf, a chicken that fell short, and a room full of chefs asking the same question. **Gulf Gourmet** follows the EISC Class Competitions 2026, where one entry did not need a medal to be remembered

She did not win.

That is the first thing to say about Chef Hajira Siddiqua, and also the least important. In the artisanal sandwich category at the Emirates Culinary Guild's EISC Class Competitions 2026, she walked away without a medal. She left with something harder to earn: a room full of chefs asking the same question.

Who made that bread? The bread was purple. There were no artificial colors, only purple cabbage and a simple trick with lemon juice that Chef Hajira had worked out through trial and error to stop the color turning brown in the oven. It caught everyone's attention. The judges were all intrigued by the dish. Not every competition is remembered for the chef who wins. Sometimes it is the one who leaves everyone talking.

The Emirates International Salon Culinaire (EISC) Class Competitions 2026 have no shortage of moments like this. Running from June to September at ICCA Dubai, the four-month competition, organized by the Emirates Culinary Guild in partnership with Foodverse and supported by industry partners, has brought together chefs from across the UAE to compete and learn from experienced judges.

For Chef Harald Oberender, Vice President of ECG Corporate Relations and one of the competition's head judges, the standout this year has been the enthusiasm and support of the culinary community. "There has been enormous energy right from the start. The talent and creativity from these young chefs have been genuinely amazing. Watching the judges support one another and seeing the young chefs soak up every piece of feedback like sponges has been encouraging. None of this happens without the continuous work of the entire Emirates Culinary Guild, the judging panel, senior chefs, and our marshals, who keep everything running smoothly behind the scenes," says Chef Harald.



Whatever you cook, whatever you make, make it from the heart

Of the many areas that have brought energy to the competition, Chef Harald points to the savory potatoes, five-course menu, vegetarian sustainable menu, bakery and static displays, with the high tea challenge also standing out. "There were so many good efforts,

ideas and innovations we have not seen before in all the categories. For example, in the live cooking and in the artisanal sandwich category too, some young chefs made excellent efforts. The chefs were even given, by surprise, six ingredients to incorporate, and they made great efforts. The effort and the energy really showed in the integration of their dishes."

Chef Hajira was one of the chefs taking on the artisanal sandwich challenge, her first cooking competition. The idea for her entry began with bread. "People are making bread; they use normal flour. I thought of turning it into colored bread without using artificial colors. Beetroot,



purple cabbage, turmeric and spinach all found their way into my experiments, and a lot of mentor guidance before I decided on the purple bread," she recalls how the concept came together and how her two instructors, Chef Shefali and Chef Sergio, helped her work through the dish.

Come competition day, everything came together, bread and all the fillings from scratch, Romesco sauce, chicken, sumac onions, arugula leaves, and feta cheese, except for one element. "I finished everything, but the chicken did not come together the way I wanted. I could not win, but the bread became a subject of curiosity among the chefs. Chef Jurgen, Chef Andy, the senior mentors and judges all asked me about the process, from the stretch and folds and cold fermentation to the baking stage and temperature. Chef Andy also gave me a copy of Flavor of Dubai to inspire me to make more recipes. I never had this idea that one crazy idea in my mind, the purple bread, was going to start all this."

The confidence behind that purple loaf had been a long time coming. She credits ICCA with making the impossible feel within reach. She remembers looking at two heavy books on her first day and thinking, "No way I am going to learn all this in three months." Three months later, half the books were done. The bigger lesson was learning the science behind cooking. "At ICCA, I learned to knead with my



Techniques and recipes can be learned, but the emotion you pour into a dish is what makes it unforgettable



hands. There was no hiding behind a machine when it came to dough. You can understand the texture of the dough exactly, when it is the turning point, when we add the butter, when we knead. They are championing the artisanal bakery, handmade everything, and built our foundation."

The funny thing is, cooking was never her obsession to begin with. Now it has become something she cannot switch off. "Even if I am tired or sleepy, you can wake me up and ask me to cook, and I will cook," she chuckles. Her fascination with cooking goes back to Hyderabad, a city of biryani, where food is less a meal than a language. Chef Hajira was 14 when she began trying her grandmother's and mother's recipes, experimenting with different dishes that her family loved. In a twist many traditional households would find unthinkable, it was her mother who barred the kitchen door, not the other way around. "My mother was like, this is your time to play and enjoy life. Why do you want to come inside the kitchen?"

Her mother, a homemaker herself, wanted her daughter to spend those years elsewhere. Her father, too, pushed her towards education, ambition and becoming somebody in her own right. "Behind every milestone I have



Practice will build your muscle memory, and you will be able to finish your challenge on time

achieved are the values I learned from my father. He taught me that integrity is worth more than success, and that kindness and humility are marks of strength," she adds.

And yet the culinary door that had opened was one Chef Hajira would leave standing ajar for years. She earned an MBA, married, had two children and spent six years working in the corporate world as an HR manager and medical credentialing specialist. In 2021, she started her own medical billing company in India, Lone Star Medical Management, later opening a UAE branch in 2024.

The name Lone Star carried a piece of her father with it. "I named it Lone Star because my father used to call me that, the lone star. He always wanted me to stand on my own, find my own way and

never be afraid to keep going. That name has stayed with me."

Then, in the middle of her usual work routine, she came across an advertisement for ICCA. "I thought, okay, why not go to ICCA and take a look?" Walking into ICCA, Chef Hajira was not looking for a culinary calling. The smell of fresh baking, the mentors moving around the kitchen, and a slice of bread served with butter stopped her in her tracks. "I just went to experience and to learn about bread. Believe me, just to learn how to bake bread, which turned out to be one of my best decisions," she smiles.

From there, the learning spilled onto a much bigger plate. During her advanced diploma, she returned to a childhood favourite, Gil-e-Firdous (Heaven's Complaint), a dessert her mother once served in a simple cup. She reimagined it as a rose, added fine dining elements and called it Rose of Paradise. The dessert was still rooted in that childhood memory, but it now had a place on a fine dining plate. She also created a gluten-free menu around Indian millets, while nihari, another dish drawn from memory, was given its own fine dining plating.

Much of Chef Hajira's growth has come from the people at ICCA who saw more in her.

Ms Shanaaz and Mr Sunjeh have always encouraged their students to step forward and get involved. "I have always tried to participate. Recently, I took part in the Taste of Dubai event, where I assisted Chef Marco Pierre White and met Chef Vineet Bhatia. Whether it's participating in events or coming up with ideas like the supper club, both Shanaaz ma'am and Mr Sunjeh have always encouraged me. They have always told us to come forward, take part and make the most of every opportunity. Their support gives us the confidence to try new things and see where they take us."

Competitions have given her another chance to put herself in front of experienced chefs and judges and learn from their feedback. Her recent participation in the EISC had its own learning curve. "Select your protein properly. Because my protein ditched me. It is going to make a lot of difference," she says, laughing. Speaking about young chefs, she comes back to the same thing she has relied on herself. "If I could teach young chefs one thing, it would be to cook from your heart. Whatever you cook, whatever you make, make it from the heart. Techniques and recipes can be learned, but the emotion you pour into a dish is what makes it unforgettable." She began her culinary journey later than many, but points out that passion and consistency have mattered more than where she started. "Practice will build your muscle memory, and you will be able to finish your challenge on time."

With graduation from ICCA around the corner, she already has her sights set on what comes next. A café is the plan, and she has been preparing for it in her own way, testing recipes and recording them by hand, sorting dishes into categories before there is even a physical shelf to put them on, a cookie list here, a bread list there.

Family, for Chef Hajira, means a full house. "We are seven siblings, and I am the eldest one of seven." Being the eldest



When you really put your heart into something, people will notice

came with its own education. "You grow very early when you are the eldest." Her siblings have each gone on to different professions in their own lives, but none followed her into professional cooking. Not everyone around her saw the appeal of the work itself. Someone close to her once told her, "It is a terrible job. Why do you want to do it?" But she was not swayed by the noise. She had already seen what cooking gave her. "When you really put your heart into something, people will notice. I love feeding people. I do not know why I find so much comfort when somebody eats the food I give," she says, adding that seeing someone enjoy what she has made is the real payoff.

At home, her husband, a doctor, has stood behind her throughout. They have two children, both autistic, and Chef Hajira speaks about her role as their mother with pride. "I am very honored that God gave me the responsibility of those kids." She has heard the assumptions that can come with an autism diagnosis. "I have heard so many weird views on this. But I say, 'I take it with honor that I am honored with this responsibility.'" Her husband, she says, has supported her just as strongly. "He is like the most supportive person ever, in every decision I have made, be it cooking or life."

Chef Hajira's purple bread may not have taken home a prize, but it did exactly what competitions are meant to do. It made her question, experiment, listen and want to come back better prepared. And that, Chef Harald believes, is where the real value of the EISC lies. "Competitions bring out the absolute best in chefs. It brings out a stellar effort

in challenging times. Again, energy is my favorite word at the moment with the class competition. You feel it immediately when you walk into a kitchen. The atmosphere, the focus, the pace, it all tells you whether a team is switched on or not," says Chef Harald.

The medals bring their own satisfaction, from gold to silver to bronze, but Chef Harald sees value in having young chefs step forward and test themselves. The ECG's role, he notes, is to give them that platform, encourage participation and support the wider culinary community. With the competition drawing support from sponsors, judges, marshals and chefs across the industry, he sees the EISC moving in the right direction.

The Salon Classes 2026 still has two rounds to go before wrapping in September, with more chefs set to take their place on the competition floor, test their skills and chase the medals. If the first rounds are anything to go by, there is plenty more worth watching.

Somewhere out there, in a whole different multiverse, there is Chef Hajira who nailed the chicken, scored higher, and walked home with a medal. Iconic, sure. But honestly? Not the plot twist anyone remembers. Cooking, at its most real, was never about getting every single thing perfect. It was about the courage to try something no one asked for, a purple loaf born from cabbage and sheer bullheadedness, and the willingness to let people taste exactly how much of herself she put into it. She did not win the sandwich category. She won the room. And honestly, that is what makes her the Queen of Hearts, not a crown she was chasing, but one she earned without even realizing it.

Since this piece was written, Chef Hajira has added to her competition run at the Salon Classes 2026, taking bronze in the Practical Cookery - Fish & Seafood category. She will next compete at the Sounbula Mills Artisan Bakery Category 2026 on August 27. ■



Whatever you
cook, make it
from the heart



August-September 2026 **Gulf Gourmet**

EISC 2026 Serves Up The Heat

photo credit: Cody Cuthbert

EISC Class Competitions 2026 set a new benchmark for young culinary talent in the UAE, offering four months of competition, team spirit, and standout dishes across savoury, bakery and live cooking categories. *Gulf Gourmet* brings you all the action!

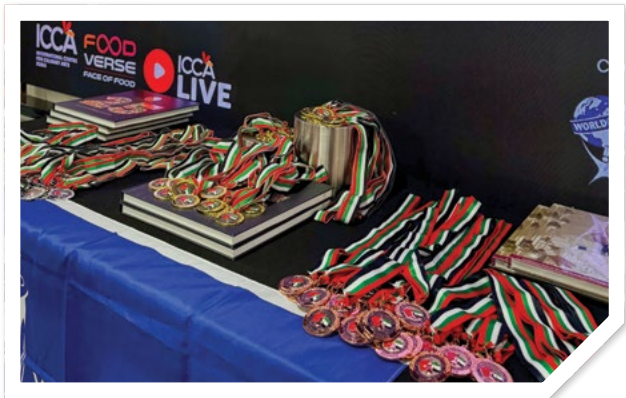
In June, the Emirates Culinary Guild brought the UAE's young culinary talent together at ICCA Dubai, where the Emirates International Salon Culinaire (EISC) Class Competitions 2026 kicked off. This year, things were different, as the competition ran across four months rather than a single weekend. Organised by the Emirates Culinary Guild in partnership with Foodverse and supported by industry partners, the competition brought together chefs from across the Emirates to test their skills under the watchful eyes of some of the industry's most experienced judges.

The extended format gave participants

time to prepare and experiment, and many brought out-of-the-box innovations rarely seen on the competition floor before. As competitors plated their dishes against the clock, judges moved from station to station, tasting, questioning and recording feedback with the kind of detail that comes from years in professional kitchens.

For all its intensity, the competition had both learning and enjoyment. Chefs who return year after year were as engaged as first-time participants. Take a look at the images that follow to see the talent and action of EISC 2026 up close. ■





August-September 2026 **Gulf Gourmet**



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Garnish Gets Its Glory

This month, Chef **Pasindu Adeesha Navodya** from Hilton Dubai Jumeirah Resort is vying to win this season of the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery competition

In pastry, the eyes eat before the fork ever gets a chance, and no one understands this better than Chef Pasindu Adeesha Navodya. The

26-year-old, who hails from Sri Lanka, has turned that single idea into a signature style as Chef de Partie at Hilton Dubai Jumeirah, where he specialises in pastry, cake artistry and chocolate garnishes. Much of his work follows that same notion of garnish before chocolate, to create the wow before the bite without compromising on taste.

It was in his mother's kitchen in Colombo that the cooking bug first bit him, and there was no looking back. That early spark took him to Hilton Colombo to train, and then to Hilton Dubai Jumeirah Resort, where he began his journey as a commis and has since worked his way up through the ranks. This month, he is throwing his hat in the ring for the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery competition with figs, flavour, and finesse.

Here are excerpts from a conversation with him:

Take us through a day in your kitchen.

I start work at around 7:00 AM. My day begins with preparing desserts and chocolates for the café, then I review my mise en place list to ensure everything is organised for the day. After that, I work on a range of tasks to contribute to efficient operations, be it supervising a junior team of nine members, monitoring inventory, garnishing cakes, preparing à la carte desserts, or assisting in buffet preparations. Every day is busy, but I am always trying to create new desserts and new things in my life. I rarely look at the clock because I am always focused on my work. My goal is to improve my skills and create new desserts every day. It is a big responsibility, but I am grateful for the opportunity.

Walk us through your creative process.

How does an idea become a dessert?

It starts with an idea, then sketching the dessert, adding any concepts. Then I discuss it with the senior chefs who



People eat
with their
eyes first

guide me with ideas to improve it. Interestingly, I begin with the garnish rather than the chocolate, as the garnish defines the presentation. Once I know which garnish suits the dessert, then flavours come step by step. If changes are needed after tasting, the process starts again until everything is perfect.

Why does garnish hold such importance in your work?

People eat with their eyes first. The first impression should make someone say, "Wow!" before they even take a bite. Flavour is important, but presentation

is exciting. A beautiful garnish makes guests eager to taste the dessert.

Was cooking always your passion, or did you discover it later?

A bit of both. I was born and raised in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with my mother and grandmother. As a kid, I used to help my grandmother in the kitchen by chopping onions and doing simple tasks. Watching her cook and the amazing aromas inspired me to go into hospitality. That passion took me to hotel school, and after graduating, I joined Hilton Colombo as a pastry trainee, marking the beginning of my culinary career.

How did your journey take you from Sri Lanka to Dubai?

I trained at Hilton Colombo, working 15 to 16 hours a day. During that time, a senior chef noticed my dedication and curiosity to learn and told me about an opportunity at Hilton Dubai Jumeirah. I have now been here for almost four

years and have grown from a commis chef to Chef de Partie.

Who are the mentors who have shaped your career?

There have been many mentors who have supported me throughout my journey. Still, Chef Eranda Liyanage, Cluster Executive Pastry Chef at Hilton Dubai Jumeirah and Hilton Dubai The Walk, is someone who really inspires me. He constantly encourages me to grow and experiment with new desserts. He always pushes me to improve while also being there whenever I need advice.

Everything I have achieved today is largely because of his guidance and support. He always asks me to try new things. He always tells me never to give up. I have learned so many dessert garnishes from him, and it has been awesome for me here at Hilton.

Tell us about the dish you have prepared for the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery Competition.

The fig cheesecake. I wanted to create something for a competition using fresh figs, which are popular in the UAE. The dessert is a cheesecake with a whole fresh fig inside, paired with fig ice cream made using homemade fig jam.

For the garnish, I kept the presentation simple and rustic to reflect the local culture and traditions. Honey and honeycomb were added for natural sweetness and a crunchy texture. The combination of figs, ice cream, cheesecake, and honey creates a smooth, balanced dessert.



The first impression should make someone say, 'Wow!' before they even take a bite

You have a bright future ahead of you. What are your long-term goals?

I want to become an Executive Pastry Chef and continue specialising in pastry. I also want to learn mixology and expand my skills, learning something cutting-edge. There is always more to learn, and the aim is never to stop growing.

What do your mother and grandmother think of your success?

They are very proud of me. They never imagined I would reach this stage in my career. I video call them to show the desserts I have created. My mother jokes that when I first started baking at home, the desserts were too small, but I caused so much wastage; she teases me about it to this day.

Now she sees how much I have improved and how efficiently I work with creating more with less. Seeing them proud of me is one of my greatest achievements. I am grateful for everyone who has supported me, especially Chef Eranda, my mother, and my grandmother. Their encouragement has helped me become the chef I am today, and there is still so much more to learn about desserts.

Fig Cheesecake With Honey and Fig Ice-Cream

Fig Cheese Cake

Arla Cream Cheese	95 g
Egg	114 g
Icing Sugar	27 g
Arla Sour Cream	17 g

Sugar	70 g
Lemon Zest	1 g
Vanilla	1 ml
Corn Flour	3 g

Method

- ♦ Beat the Arla Cream Cheese, corn flour, and sugar until smooth.
- ♦ Add the egg one at a time, mixing well after each addition.

- ♦ Mix in the Arla Sour Cream, vanilla, lemon zest, and icing sugar until smooth and fully combined.

Fig Oven Roasted Compote

Fresh Figs, Stems Removed And Quartered	1 pc
Sugar Or Honey	40 g
Water	10 ml

Lemon Juice	10 ml
Lemon Zest	1 g
Vanilla Extract	2 g
Salt	1 pinch

Method

- ◆ Add the fresh figs, sugar (or honey), water, lemon juice, lemon zest, vanilla extract, and salt to a small saucepan.
- ◆ Bring to a low simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally as the figs begin to soften.
- ◆ Reduce the heat and cook for 10–15 minutes until the figs collapse and the liquid thickens into a glossy syrup. Let cool completely before using or storing.

Vanilla Sablés

Arla Butter	50 g
Icing Sugar	20 g
Egg	2 pc
Salt	1 pinch
Flour	40 g
Vanilla	2 ml

Method

- ◆ Beat the Arla Butter and icing sugar together until pale and fluffy. Add the egg yolk and vanilla, mixing until fully incorporated.
- ◆ Add the flour and salt, mixing just until a soft dough forms. Shape into a log or disc, wrap, and chill for 1 hour until firm.
- ◆ Roll the dough to 1 cm thickness and cut into rounds, or slice the chilled log into 1 cm discs. Bake at 170°C (160°C fan) for 15–18 minutes, or until golden around the edges.

Fig Ice Cream

Arla Cream	75 ml
Fresh Ripe Figs, Stems Removed	1 pc
Sugar	45 g
Water	20 ml
Lemon Juice	10 ml
Vanilla Extract	3 ml
Fine Salt	1 pinch

Method

- ◆ Combine the sugar and water in a small saucepan and heat until the sugar dissolves. Stir in the Arla Cream and allow the mixture to cool completely.
- ◆ Halve the figs and scoop out any tough stems. No need to peel. Add the fresh figs, cooled syrup mixture, lemon juice, vanilla extract, and fine salt

to a blender. Blend until completely smooth, then chill for at least 2 hours until very cold.

- ◆ Churn the mixture in an ice cream maker until thick and sorbet like. Transfer to a container and freeze for 2–4 hours before scooping.

Fig Coulis

Fresh Figs, Stems Removed	
And Quartered	1 pc
Honey Or Sugar	58 g
Lemon Juice	10 ml
Water	15 ml
Salt Or Vanilla	1 pinch

Method

- ◆ Combine figs, water, sugar or honey, and any optional aromatics in a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat for 8–10 minutes, until the figs collapse and the mixture becomes syrupy.
- ◆ Remove the aromatics (if using). Blend the mixture with an immersion blender or in a regular blender until completely smooth.
- ◆ Pass the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve to remove the seeds and skins. Stir in the lemon juice.
- ◆ If the mixture is too thick, whisk in a splash of warm water. If it is too thin, return it to the pan and cook briefly to reduce.

Honey Tulip

Arla Butter	50 g
Granulated Sugar	50 g



Honey	50 g
All-Purpose Flour	50 g

Method

- ◆ Melt the Arla butter, granulated sugar, and honey together until smooth. Remove from the heat and whisk in the all-purpose flour until a glossy batter forms. Chill for 20 minutes.
- ◆ Preheat the oven to 180°C. Spread teaspoon-sized portions of the batter into very thin circles on a lined baking tray and bake for 5–7 minutes, or until golden around the edges.
- ◆ While still hot, carefully lift each disc and drape it over a cup, rolling pin, or small bowl to form a tulip shape.

Honeycomb

Granulated Sugar	50 g
Honey (Or Light Corn Syrup)	70 g
Baking Soda	7 g

Method

- ◆ Add the sugar and golden syrup to a saucepan. Heat over medium heat without stirring until the sugar has melted.
- ◆ Let the mixture bubble until it reaches a deep golden color (around 150–155°C if using a thermometer).
- ◆ Remove from the heat and immediately whisk in the baking soda. The mixture will foam dramatically.
- ◆ Quickly pour the foaming mixture into the lined pan. Do not spread it, let it settle naturally. Let it cool completely (about 1 hour), then break it into shards. ■

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Apprentice or Student?

Chef **Andreas Kurfurst** weighs the merits of learning through hands-on kitchen apprenticeships versus formal culinary school education

Apprenticeship in a professional kitchen or study in a culinary school? Well, that is the question I have been seeing come up more and more on social media lately.

And it is a valid question, as each learning style has its own pros and cons.

For myself, I did the normal thing in the mid-70s, a regular three-year apprenticeship.

During my professional career, which went from Junior Cook to Pastry Cook, Pastry Chef, Corporate Pastry Chef, Executive Chef, and to F&B Director in four and five-star hotels in a number of different countries, I never went to any professional culinary course or classes.

All self-taught and learned.

Fortunately, in our industry, you can become successful and build a career without diplomas and certificates.

Then, my last stop in my professional career was the opportunity to work in a Swiss Hotel Management Institute as a Culinary Teacher and Executive Chef.

Suddenly I was at the other end of the spectrum, now teaching the new generation. There, I really became aware of the difference between the two styles of learning.

An Apprenticeship

That is a bit like you are joining the army during the war and you are going to the frontline on the very first day, right there with the experienced soldiers.

And you better learn real fast in order to survive.



In the end, it does not really matter which course you take, apprentice or student

You also learn the pressure at busy service times, learn how to get your prep ready in time, how to communicate during real tense situations, and how to prepare 3-4 things at the same time. You will pick up many practical skills, as you will be doing some thousand things over and over again, until you can do them in your sleep, literally.

The good thing here is, you are getting a salary right away. You are now earning.

The Culinary Student

You are also joining the army, but first attending a three-year military academy before actually joining the frontline. You will learn and have broader knowledge of many kinds of international food, dishes, food preparations, and how a basic food cost is calculated and why it is important.

You will know what is important in menu design, what menu engineering is, and what food pairing is. We teach you Marketing, Social Media, Research and Development. You may even get to try to cook several dishes of your choice and may even have the possibility to experiment and come up with new dishes.

But you have to pay the School. Of course, school fees are not cheap, as they may include food and lodging for about 6 months of a full school year. That said, many schools also offer scholarships or financial aid to talented students, helping offset some or even all of these costs.

But having attended a Culinary School for 3 years does not guarantee that you will have an advantage over a Junior Chef with a 3-year apprenticeship.

Certificates and Diplomas are helpful, but it is your performance in a high-pressure kitchen with your team that matters in the end.

But culinary education will prepare you for a better future career.

In the end, it does not really matter which course you take, apprentice or student. What matters are really only two things:

Yourself: Are you willing to adapt, comply and learn? Do you have the passion and right attitude for this job?

Your Chef or Teacher: In either School or Restaurant, your mentor/teacher is crucial for your future success. If you have a good teacher/mentor, you will be alright either way.

Best Wishes and Great Dishes,
Chef Andy ■

Understanding Condiment Odour in Meat

Sulemana A. Sadik shares a guide for HoReCa operators and sales representatives

In the HoReCa sector, maintaining meat quality is paramount not only for customer satisfaction but also for food safety and brand reputation. One common issue observed in retail and foodservice environments is the presence of condiment or unusual odours in meat. Misunderstanding this phenomenon can lead to unnecessary waste, customer complaints, or hesitancy in using high-quality products. This article aims to educate chefs, foodservice operators, and sales representatives on the causes, prevention, and handling of odours in packaged meat.

What Causes Condiment or Strange Odours in Meat?

Vacuum Packaging and Storage: Most premium meat products are vacuum-packed to extend shelf life. While this preserves freshness, it can sometimes trap natural gases or aromatic compounds, creating a temporary pack odour. This smell is not a sign of spoilage and usually dissipates once the package is opened.

Cross-Contamination of Flavours:

Odours from marinades, sauces, or other ingredients stored near meat can transfer through packaging if proper separation is not maintained. In foodservice settings, refrigeration hygiene and organization are critical to avoid flavour migration.

Chemical Reactions in Meat: During storage, enzymes in meat continue to break down proteins and fats. This can release subtle odours, sometimes mistaken for spoilage or strong condiments. These reactions are natural and can vary depending on the cut, animal breed, and feed.

Temperature Fluctuations: Improper storage temperatures can enhance odours by accelerating microbial activity or fat oxidation.

Always maintain recommended refrigeration conditions:

- ♦ Fresh meat: 0–4°C
- ♦ Frozen meat: –18°C or below

While odours in vacuum-packed meat are often harmless, operators should look out for real signs of spoilage:

- ♦ Slimy or sticky surface on the meat
- ♦ Off-colour (greenish or grey hues)
- ♦ Excessive liquid in the package
- ♦ Unpleasant sour or rancid smell that persists after opening

Proper staff training is crucial so that sales representatives and kitchen staff can confidently distinguish between natural odours and spoilage, reducing unnecessary waste.

Practical Steps for HoReCa Operators

- ♦ Store meat in clean, well-organized refrigerators.
- ♦ Separate different proteins and prepared foods to prevent odour transfer.
- ♦ Rotate stock using the first-in, first-out (FIFO) principle.

Package Handling

Allow vacuum-packed meat to rest at refrigeration temperatures before opening.

Open packages just before cooking to minimize exposure to air and maintain aroma.

Staff Training

Educate chefs and kitchen staff about condiment odours vs spoilage.

Train sales teams to explain these phenomena to customers confidently.

Customer Communication and Sales Representatives

- ♦ When selling or serving meat, explain that minor odours are natural and not a safety concern.



- ♦ Highlight proper cooking and storage methods to assure the best dining experience.
- ♦ Sales representatives provide technical knowledge about packaging, storage, and meat characteristics.
- ♦ Offer practical tips on reducing odour perception in high-end foodservice kitchens.
- ♦ Build trust with clients by ensuring they understand that odours do not necessarily indicate spoilage.
- ♦ A knowledgeable sales rep can reduce customer complaints, increase confidence in product quality, and ultimately drive repeat business.

Understanding condiment odour in meat is essential for every operator and sales professional in the HoReCa sector. By recognizing the natural causes of odours, implementing proper storage and handling procedures, and educating staff and clients, businesses can maintain the highest meat quality standards, reduce waste, and enhance customer satisfaction.

Proper awareness transforms what may initially seem like a problem into an opportunity to demonstrate expertise and professionalism in foodservice operations. ■

The Skills That Got You Here Won't Keep You There

Samer Abou Daher on why great chefs must also be prepared to lead

Dear Chefs,

A few years ago, I owned a small restaurant in Dubai called Uptown Pizza & Burger. I did not have the most spacious kitchen or the largest marketing budget. What I did have was an extraordinary pizzaiolo. His name was Chef Bashir. To this day, I still believe Chef Bashir made the best pizza I have ever tasted.

Watching him work was almost magical. He spoke to the dough, smiled at it, and sometimes even sang to it. Every pizza that left his station reflected his passion and craftsmanship. Because of Chef Bashir, Uptown Pizza & Burger was voted the third-best pizza in Dubai on Kris Fade's Virgin Radio Show.

One afternoon, a friend who was the HR director of one of Dubai's leading five-star hotels called me.

"Samer... do you know a good pizza chef?"

I smiled. "I know exactly the right person."

When he told me the salary they were offering, I paused. It was almost double what Chef Bashir was earning with me.

I had a choice.

Keep my best chef...

Or help him build a better future.

I recommended him without hesitation. A few weeks later, Chef Bashir joined one of Dubai's finest hotels. I was incredibly proud. I believed I had changed his life.



Looking back today...

I realize I only changed his job. Sometimes the greatest opportunity we provide someone is only the beginning of our responsibility, not the end of it. Chef Bashir had everything needed to become an exceptional pizza chef. But his new role demanded something completely different.

He was no longer expected to simply make great pizzas. He was expected to lead people. To coach. To give feedback. To build trust. To inspire a team. And that is where the real story begins. Not because Chef Bashir failed. Because I failed him. I taught him how to make better pizzas.

I never taught him how to build better people. Great chefs master recipes. Great leaders develop people. For years, I believed leadership naturally came with promotion. Today, I know better. Leadership is a skill. It must be taught, practiced, and intentionally developed.

Looking back, I do not blame Chef Bashir. I blame myself. I was his manager and leader. His development was my responsibility. I invested countless hours developing his technical skills; I invested very little preparing him for the leadership responsibilities that would eventually define his career. During the past twenty-three years, I have seen this story repeated across our industry.

Hospitality promotes people because of their technical excellence. Then it expects them to succeed because of their leadership excellence. Those are two completely different professions. The skills that earn you the promotion are rarely the skills that make you successful after it. As chefs, we spend years perfecting recipes. Perhaps it is time we invested the same passion in perfecting conversations, in our feedback, coaching and in listening.

Because one day, someone from your team will receive the same life-changing phone call that Chef Bashir received. When that day comes, do not just send them into a bigger kitchen. Send them prepared to lead. Your greatest recipe will never be written on paper. It will be written in the people you leave behind.

Food for Thought

Before our next issue...

Ask yourself one question.

If your best chef accepted a promotion tomorrow, would they thank you only for teaching them how to cook... or also for teaching them how to lead?

Samer Abou Daher is a foodservice professional, leadership trainer and people & culture leader. ■

When Sustainability Becomes a Beautiful Story

Chef **Carl Shi** takes an in-depth look at the greenwashing problem in five-star hotels

During one of my recent trips, I stayed in a five-star hotel for five nights. Like many hotels today, this property placed a small sustainability card in the guest room. The message was very familiar. If I did not want my towels or bed linen changed, I could leave the card in place. By doing this, I would help the hotel save water, reduce energy use, and support the environment.

I have seen this message many times. In many ways, it has become part of the modern hotel room. It sits next to the towel rack, on the bed, near the bathroom basin, or beside the housekeeping card. The language is usually gentle and polite. It tells guests that small actions can make a difference. As a guest, I understand and respect the message. As a hospitality professional, I also understand why hotels use it. Laundry is expensive. Water and energy use are significant. Linen handling creates labor pressure. So, in theory, a towel reuse programme should make sense.

That is why I followed the instructions. I left the card in place. But every day, when I returned to my room, fresh towels were there again. At first, it seemed like a small issue. After all, many guests may enjoy receiving clean towels every day. Some may even expect it in a five-star hotel. But for me, this small moment raised a much larger question. If the hotel asks guests to participate in sustainability, why does the operation not follow the instruction? If the guest has already agreed to reduce unnecessary washing, why does the system still replace everything?

This is where the problem of greenwashing begins to show itself. Greenwashing is not always a loud lie. Sometimes it is a quiet gap. It happens when sustainability becomes part of the hotel image but not part of the hotel operation. When the green story is visible to the guest, but the working system behind the story is weak, unclear, or missing.

In five-star hotels, this issue is especially important because luxury hotels are very good at presentation. They know how to create beautiful language. They know how to design attractive brochures, websites, lobby displays, annual reports, and guest room messages. They know how to present a brand as caring, modern, responsible, and environmentally aware. But sustainability cannot be measured by the beauty of the wording. It must be measured by what actually happens during the shift.

A towel card is only a small example, but it tells us something very important. It shows that sustainability fails at the point where marketing meets daily practice. The hotel may have a sustainability policy at the corporate level, on the website or in the guest room. However, if the housekeeping team does not have a clear process, if supervisors do not reinforce the instruction or if the service culture still says every towel must be changed, then the policy becomes weak.

The issue is not only whether the staff member made a mistake. The deeper issue is whether the hotel has built a real system.

In many hotels, sustainability is communicated as a guest choice, but it is not always supported as an operational



standard. The guest is asked to help, but the staff may not be trained properly to follow that choice. The guest is told that towel reuse matters, but the hotel may still judge room quality by the old standard of complete replacement. The guest is invited to act sustainably, but the staff may worry that leaving towels unchanged could lead to complaints.

This is the contradiction. Hotels want guests to see sustainability, but they also want guests to feel full luxury. Sometimes management tries to have both without changing the internal system. They want to save resources but do not want to challenge guest expectations. This is why greenwashing in hotels is also an operational culture problem.

For many years, five-star hospitality was built around abundance. A good hotel room meant fresh linen, new towels and many amenities. A good banquet meant extra food, just in case. A good guest experience meant visible generosity. I understand it very well because I come from that world. In kitchens and hotels, we were trained to avoid shortages, avoid complaints, and avoid anything that may look careless.

But sustainability challenges this old

thinking. It asks a hotel to provide excellent service without unnecessary consumption. It asks chefs to offer quality without overproduction. It asks housekeeping to maintain comfort without automatic replacement. It asks managers to measure performance not only by guest satisfaction scores but also by resource discipline.

This change is not easy. It requires a different understanding of luxury.

Real luxury should not mean waste. Real luxury should mean care, intelligence, precision, and respect. The problem is that many sustainability practices in hotels remain at the surface level. A towel card is easy. A green logo is easy. A statement about saving the planet is easy. But training every room attendant, adjusting every checklist, changing supervisor expectations, measuring actual laundry reduction, and reporting the results honestly are much harder. This is why some hotels stop at the message. The message is visible. The system is invisible. But it is the invisible system that decides whether sustainability is real.

The same issue appears in hotel kitchens. A hotel may talk about reducing Food Waste (FW), but the buffet is still overfilled because nobody wants to see an empty tray. A hotel may say it supports local sourcing, but the purchasing system is still driven by price, convenience, and supplier contracts. A hotel may claim to donate surplus food, but the chefs may have no time, no containers, no clear food safety pathway, and no authorized partner to collect it. A hotel may install



Sustainability cannot be managed only by slogans. It must be managed by routines

FW tracking technology, but if chefs do not have the authority to change production levels, the technology becomes another report rather than a real control tool.

This is why I say that sustainability cannot be managed only by slogans. It must be managed by routines.

Greenwashing also damages trust. Guests may not always notice every detail, but when they do notice the gap, they start to question the whole message. If I leave the towel reuse card in place and still receive new towels every day, I may begin to ask whether the hotel is serious about anything else it claims. Is it really sourcing responsibly? Is the sustainability report based on real action or just good storytelling?

Sustainability claims are no longer just public relations. They are becoming part of business credibility. Guests, regulators, investors, and younger employees are becoming more aware. They may forgive imperfection, but they are less likely to forgive dishonesty.

This is where five-star hotels have an opportunity to lead. They can move beyond decorative sustainability and

build practical sustainability. They can train staff properly. They can record actual linen change data. They can redesign housekeeping checklists. They can adjust buffet replenishment rules. They can improve forecasting. They can work with food suppliers on realistic order quantities. They can give chefs and supervisors the authority to make small but important decisions during service.

These actions may not look as attractive as a green marketing campaign, but they are far more meaningful.

Sustainability still has a long way to go in our industry.

I do not raise this issue to criticize hotels unfairly. I raise it because I believe the industry can do better. Hospitality has always been built on trust. Guests trust us to provide safety, comfort, cleanliness, food quality, and professional care. If we now tell guests that we are also protecting the environment, then that promise must carry the same level of responsibility.

A green sign should not be used only to make the guest feel good. It should represent a real operational commitment. If a hotel says it supports sustainability, then the staff should know exactly what that means in their daily work.

And like all disciplines in hospitality, it must be trained, checked, measured, corrected, and repeated. That is the real test for five-star hotels. Not whether they can write a beautiful sustainability message, but whether they can make that message true when nobody is watching. ■

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The "Busy but Broke" Trap

Chef **Monal Malhotra** on finding and plugging the tiny holes quietly stealing profit from a successful restaurant

"We had a massive weekend. The kitchen was slammed, the floor was buzzing, the reviews were great. So why is there no money in the bank?" I have had this conversation more times than I can count. An owner, or sometimes a whole leadership team, stares at a sales report that tells one story and a month-end P&L report that tells a much sadder one. Somewhere in the middle of that meeting, it hits everyone: this is not a sales problem. It is a leakage problem.

Early in my career, I worked with a cost controller on exactly this. We had a restaurant that was thriving by every measure: packed tables, great atmosphere, and happy guests. Yet, every month, the business was losing money. The team worked hard. The food was great; we had a lot of returning guests. So where was the cash going? We decided to go find it.

Restaurants rarely fail because of one big disaster. They fail because of 10 extra grams on a popular dish. The freebie nobody wrote down. The supplier who changed the pack size and didn't mention it. These are small things that happen every day, adding up to a nasty surprise at the end of the month. The money is not gone, but is hiding. And with a bit of focus, you can usually get most of it back.

The One Number Worth Knowing
Prime Cost = Food Cost (COGS) + Labor
 Add your food costs and your staff costs together, then divide that by your total sales. That one number tells you more about the health of your business than any 5-star review ever will. In this



The money is not gone, but is hiding

industry, you want to hit between 58% and 62%. Once you go past 65%, your profit starts to disappear. At 70%, even a packed house would not save you. You will just be losing money faster.

Where the Money Actually Goes

There is almost never one "bad guy." It is usually a collection of small habits and gaps that get

productive when nobody is looking. To solve this, my colleague and I did not just look at spreadsheets. We put an admin staff member on the floor for a full month just to watch the flow. Meanwhile, I sat with the restaurant manager and the chef and went through everything:

portion control, wastage, daily specials, event food, outdoor catering, buffet management, supplier deliveries. The money was leaking from half a dozen different places every single day.

01. Over-portioning: The "Generous" Mistake

An extra 10 grams on a plate does not feel like a big deal in the heat of service. The chef feels generous and the guest is happy. But multiply that by 60 plates a day for a month, and you have a very expensive habit. In this kitchen, there were no scales for some of the most popular dishes. We audited the mixed grill, which was the most popular dish on the menu and found the three skewers served were consistently heavier than the recipe called for, not by a little, but by enough to kill the margin.

The Fix

- ♦ Put scales and weighed pre-portioned proteins on the line.
- ♦ Put a reference photo of the dish right at the station.
- ♦ Do two quick, calm spot checks every week.

02. Recipes Nobody Could See

The recipe folder was kept on the head chef's desk. The cooks plating the food could not even see it. Standards cannot be followed if they cannot be seen. Every plate was going out based on muscle memory and habit. The recipe was theoretical.

The Fix

- ♦ Recipe folders on the wall at both hot and cold stations, with reference images.
- ♦ The person cooking the food needs the info right in front of them.

03. Waste and Guesswork

Most waste is not a cooking problem; it is a planning problem. The excuse was always: "Just in case we get busy, we do not want to run out." This led to over-production and some of the food being thrown away at night. On event nights, if more people showed up, the team just piled more food on the buffet without updating the bill. The food never ran out, but the extra revenue never came in either.

The Fix

- ♦ Track waste for 14 days. You will see the patterns immediately.
- ♦ Set par levels (limits) for your top 10 sellers.
- ♦ Monday's prep should not look like Saturday's prep.

04. The "Flexible" Specials

The specials board had become a suggestion. If the special was Shish Tawook and a guest wanted Mixed Grill, a dish with a much higher food cost, the staff said yes to be nice; it felt like good hospitality.

The Fix

- ♦ Specials are specials. Any swaps need a manager to sign off.
- ♦ Train the team to offer a different choice within the same food cost tier.

05. Discounts and Giveaways

A planned discount is a strategy. An unplanned one is just a reflex. We found that fruit platters were being given away to 50% of tables without any record or approval. It was just something the staff did by habit.

The Fix

- ♦ Set clear rules on who approves a comp, for how much, and why.
- ♦ Track the total amount weekly. The goal is to fix the problem that makes people feel they need to give things away in the first place.

06. Old Prices

Supplier prices had gone up, but the recipe costs had not been updated in



Most waste is not a cooking problem; it is a planning problem

months. The restaurant was losing money because they were operating on old data.

The Fix

- ♦ Pick your top 20 ingredients and lock in the specs.
- ♦ Check the prices on your top 10 items every 30 days.
- ♦ When a price jumps, update your recipe immediately.

07. Staff Meals

There was a staff menu; it was sensible and well put together. It just was not being followed, particularly by senior staff who ordered from the kitchen without it being tracked.

The Fix

- ♦ The staff menu applies to everyone. No exceptions.
- ♦ Log it like any other cost so you actually know where the food is going.

The Result

We fixed every one of these issues, not through enforcement, but by working alongside the manager and the chef. The team needed to understand why the changes mattered, not just be handed new rules. Recipe folders went up on the wall at both stations. Standards became visible. Within two months, the "leaks" stopped. The restaurant went from losing money to being consistently profitable with the same team and the same number of guests.

The most important thing I did was credit the manager and chef publicly with the turnaround.

When people feel they built something, they protect it. The team took pride in it because they were the ones who fixed it. ■

The Brain Eats First

Chef **Mohammad Ameri** on why we taste with our minds before we taste with our tongues

For centuries, we believed that flavor began on the tongue. Modern neuroscience suggests something far more intriguing.

Flavor may begin long before the first bite. Through personal observations from professional kitchens, informal field experiments, and insights from neurogastronomy, gastrophysics, and cognitive neuroscience, this article explores how expectations, visual perception, memory, emotion, and context shape the way we experience food. The brain often decides what we taste before the tongue ever has a chance.

My First Laboratory Was a Kitchen

Several years ago, long before I became familiar with terms such as neurogastronomy or predictive processing, I noticed something unusual. It started with a crème caramel. One busy evening, the blue plates I normally used for serving dessert ran out. Service was in full swing, and I had no choice but to switch to a different set of plates.

The desserts were identical- the same recipe, batch and mold. Nothing had changed except the plate.

Yet the comments from guests were noticeably different. Many of those who received the dessert on the alternative plate described it as better. Some believed it tasted smoother. Others felt the sweetness was more balanced. At the time, I explained it away as a form of luxury bias. People simply preferred the more elegant presentation.

Or so I thought.

Years later, another observation challenged that explanation. This time, it involved grilled kebabs.

The meat, the recipe, and the weight of the portion had not changed. Only the plating had changed.

By repositioning the rice and reducing empty space on the plate, the kebabs



appeared larger and more substantial. Guests immediately noticed.

Several commented that the kebabs looked bigger. Some said they seemed more satisfying.

One guest even asked: "Did you change the chef?" Nothing had changed except perception.

Then came the soup. Determined to understand what was happening, I conducted another informal experiment. Two identical soups were served. One in a simple white bowl with a blue rim. The other in a white bowl with a decorative gold rim. It is worth noting that in each of these service sessions, there were about 12 to 15 guests per seating (over 50 guests in total across three different seatings), and I asked for their feedback informally during normal post-meal conversation, without posing direct or leading questions, in order to avoid any bias.

The response was extraordinary. Guests consistently chose the gold-rimmed bowl first. When those bowls ran out, many asked if there was any of that soup left. I explained repeatedly that both bowls contained exactly the same

soup. Most refused to believe me. Some insisted the gold-rimmed version tasted richer. Others claimed it was more refined.

At that moment, I began to suspect that something far deeper than the presentation was taking place.

Flavor Does Not Live on the Tongue

While searching for answers, I encountered Gordon Shepherd's groundbreaking book *Neurogastronomy: How the Brain Creates Flavor and Why It Matters* (Shepherd, 2012).

In Chapter 2 (Creating Flavor), Chapter 3 (Taste and Flavor), and Chapter 4 (Putting It Together: The Human Brain Flavor System), Shepherd argues that flavor is not a property of food itself.

Instead, flavor emerges from the brain's integration of multiple sensory inputs:

- ♦ Taste
- ♦ Smell
- ♦ Vision
- ♦ Memory
- ♦ Emotion
- ♦ Context

What we experience as flavor is therefore not simply detected. It is constructed. This idea changed the way I thought about cooking. For years, I had focused almost entirely on ingredients and technique. Now I began to realize that perception itself was also an ingredient.

When the Eyes Taste First

Many of my kitchen observations found echoes in the scientific literature. In Chapter 5 (Seeing and Flavor) of *Neurogastronomy* (Shepherd, 2012) and Chapter 1 (Sight) of *Gastrophysics* (Spence, 2017), the authors describe a reality that chefs often witness but rarely explain:

Vision is not separate from flavor. Vision is part of flavor. Before food reaches the tongue, the eyes have already collected information about color, shape, texture, portion size, and quality.

The brain uses these signals to generate expectations. Those expectations influence the final eating experience. The crème caramel and the soup had taught me this years before I had the vocabulary to describe it.

The Predictive Brain

One of the most fascinating explanations comes from Lisa Feldman Barrett's *How Emotions Are Made* (Barrett, 2017). In Chapter 4 (Concepts, Goals and Predictions), Barrett describes the brain not as a passive receiver of information but as a prediction machine. The brain continuously anticipates what is about to happen. It creates expectations and then interprets incoming sensory information through those expectations.

Suddenly, the soup experiment made sense. The elegant bowl signaled quality. The brain predicted a better experience. And that prediction became part of the experience itself. The guests were not lying. Their brains were genuinely constructing a different reality.

But expectations are not always positive. Sometimes the prediction becomes so strong that the food cannot live up to it. For example, if a guest expects a specific flavor based on the visual presentation and the food turns out to be something else, the result is the opposite: disappointment, frustration, and sometimes a harsher judgment than if no expectation had existed. In fact, the more strongly the brain predicts pleasure, the more painful the gap between expectation and actual experience can be. This is what researchers call the contrast effect: the actual experience is evaluated as weaker compared to an inflated expectation than it would have been if no expectation had been there at all. Perhaps this explains why some famous restaurants occasionally receive harsh feedback from customers – not because of the actual food quality, but because of the expectation that was built beforehand.

Why Expensive Wine Tastes Better

Perhaps the most famous demonstration of this principle comes from the study



Vision is not separate from flavor. Vision is part of flavor.

by Plassmann and colleagues (2008). Participants tasted identical wines while being told different prices (Plassmann et al., 2008).

The wine itself never changed. Only the expectation changed.

Yet participants consistently rated the supposedly expensive wine as more enjoyable. Brain imaging revealed increased activity in regions associated with experienced pleasure. The lesson was profound. Expectation does not merely influence judgment. Expectation influences experience.

Gastrophysics: The Science of Things That Are Not Food

Charles Spence has spent much of his career exploring what he calls gastrophysics, the science of everything surrounding food (Spence, 2017).

In Chapter 1 (Sight), Chapter 2 (Sound), and Chapter 4 (Touch) of *Gastrophysics*, he demonstrates how factors that never enter the mouth can still alter flavor perception:

- ♦ The color of a plate
- ♦ The weight of a spoon
- ♦ The lighting in a room
- ♦ The music playing in the background
- ♦ The texture of a bowl

None of these changes the chemistry of food. Yet all of them change how food is experienced. As chefs, we intuitively understand this. Science is simply providing the explanation.

Flavor, Memory, and Emotion

Two other chapters from *Neurogastronomy* had a particularly strong impact on me: Chapter 8 (Flavor

and Emotions) and Chapter 9 (Flavor and Memory: Reinterpreting Proust) (Shepherd, 2012). These chapters explore how flavor becomes intertwined with personal history. A dish is never just a dish. It is a collection of memories, emotions, places, and people.

This may explain why childhood foods often seem impossible to recreate. The recipe can be repeated. The ingredients can be matched. But the original context is gone. And context is part of flavor.

Rethinking the Role of the Chef

These discoveries gradually changed my understanding of cooking. I used to believe my responsibility ended with preparing delicious food. Now I see things differently. A chef does not merely cook ingredients. A chef designs experiences. The plate, the lighting, the story, the environment, the expectations, all of them participate in creating flavor.

Food enters through the mouth. Flavor begins earlier. It begins with what we see, hear, remember, expect. And ultimately, with how the brain interprets the world around us. Years before I discovered neuroscience, neuroscience was already at work in my dining room.

The guests who preferred one bowl over another, who believed a kebab had become larger, or who insisted a soup tasted different were teaching me a lesson that science would later confirm:

The brain eats first.

And perhaps understanding that truth is one of the most important lessons a chef can learn.

Mohammad Ameri is a professional chef with over 15 years of international experience in Iran, Oman, and the UAE, specializing in culinary operations, kitchen leadership, and bakery production in luxury hospitality settings. He is also a food science researcher with international certifications in nutrition, food safety, and Codex Alimentarius, focusing on the intersection of gastronomy, health, and the neuroscience of taste perception. ■

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Partners in Culinary Excellence

Behind every successful culinary competition is a community of organisations committed to education, innovation and professional excellence. From international associations and training institutions to trusted industry partners and leading hospitality brands.



**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**

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**

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 is taking 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

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.



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

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, Fernetto integrates several companies that operate in the bakery industry, in Portugal and around the world. As the gluten net, represented on the front of the company, Fernetto has grown by structuring itself differently within the bakery world, promoting the values of partnership, transparency, and ethics. Across the globe, Fernetto 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 Gournex (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.



jmfoods inc.

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

CHEF'S PALETTE

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.

gulf gourmet

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.



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THE EMIRATES CULINARY GUILD

APPLICATION FORM

Date of Application:

Family Name:	First Name/s:	Ms/ Mrs/ Mr/ Other:
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: (Above the rank of chef de partie/ senior chef de partie on executive chef's recommendation).	AED350 joining fee/ AED150 renewal fee Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar
MEMBER: (Below the rank of chef de partie 29 years old and over).	AED150 joining fee/AED75 renewal fee Includes certificate; member-pin, member medal and ECG ceremonial collar
YOUNG MEMBER: (under 28 years)	Free 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:

For Official Use Only					
Remarks:					
Payment Received?					
Certificate Given		Pin Given		Medal & Collar Given	
Approved by President:			Signature:		
Approved by Chairman:			Signature:		

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



Chairman & Managing Director, Padmasingh Isaac and Executive Director, Abishek Abraham, of Aachi Masala Foods Private Limited, receiving the Emirates Culinary Guild medal and certificate.

Leading the spice sector, **Aachi** is renowned for its excellent sourcing practices and steadfast dedication to quality. Aachi guarantees unmatched freshness, purity, and authenticity by carefully selecting the best raw ingredients from well-known spice-growing locations, solidifying its standing as a reputable brand in the international spice industry.

We craft excellence with care, blending purity and quality to surpass every expectation, while nurturing harmonious



bonds with our suppliers, weaving a tapestry of trust and shared success.

To weave nourishment with purpose, ensuring each product harmonizes with affordability and quality; to enrich lives, elevate value, and set a standard where governance and trust walk hand in hand.

Upholding the essence of quality, sustainability, and affordability, while embodying the highest ethical ideals; fostering enduring partnerships, driving innovation, and championing excellence for shared growth and lasting impact.

Aachi stands at the forefront of the spice industry, recognized for its superior procurement strategies and unwavering commitment to quality. By meticulously sourcing the finest raw ingredients from renowned spice-growing regions. ■

August-September 2026 Gulf Gourmet

newmembers



Anjana Vaswani Kavasseri, General Manager-Middle East of Meyer Group Ltd, was formally presented with the Guild Member's Certificate at the Guild meeting.

Meyer Corporation, headquartered in Vallejo, California, is one of the world's largest cookware companies. For more than four decades, it has built a portfolio of trusted brands used by professional chefs and home cooks worldwide, supported by global manufacturing and distribution. Three of its brands are already making an impact in the UAE market: Hestan, Meyer and Circulon.

Hestan, handcrafted in the company's Italian factories and developed alongside Michelin starred chefs, has redefined what stainless steel cookware can do. Launched in the UAE in September 2023 through the Emirates Culinary Guild, the brand is now available across all Jashanmal Home stores and online.

MEYER[®] GROUP LTD

Its flagship NanoBond collection uses molecular titanium bonding to create a surface four times stronger than traditional stainless steel, delivering up to five times the lifespan and backed by a lifetime warranty. Endorsing the brand's chef's driven philosophy, world renowned chef Thomas Keller said: **"This is cookware designed from a chef's point of view. Each tool must help us cook better."**

Innovation continues with ProBond Luxe, recipient of a 2025 Red Dot

Design Award, combining Hestan's renowned performance with a striking mirror polished finish. The NanoBond range has also expanded with a 6-quart stockpot and 6- and 9-quart rondeaus, offering versatility from slow cooked stews to oven to table presentation. Hestan has further broadened its portfolio with the Provisions collection of ovenware, bakeware and accessories, which will be available through Jashanmal later this year.

This September, Meyer Corporation will introduce two additional brands to the UAE through the Emirates Culinary Guild, distributed by the Ridge Group across the UAE, with wider GCC expansion to follow. ■



THE BURNT CHEF
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mental health issues at least one
time in their career.



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Culinary Trends Express

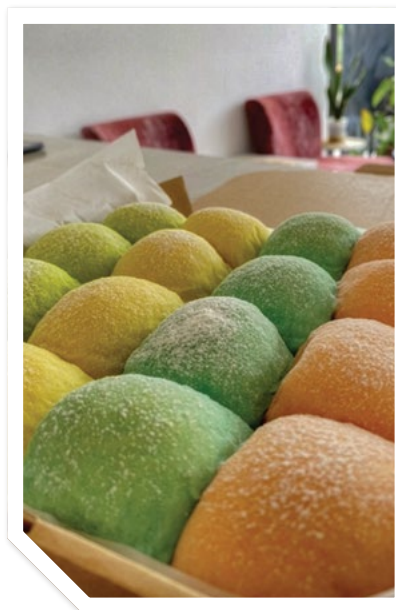
Simon Martin, Executive Chef and Innovation Consultant, looks at the culinary trends set to shape 2026, drawing on more than a decade of watching what is happening across the region

Welcome back to Trends Express. Without further ado, let us jump on board the "Trends Express" 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...

After a great summer, we are back on track, from amazing solar eclipses to the Football World Cup and many more events that seem not only to be catching the world's attention but also to be shaping future trends in our region.

This summer has seen record tourists visit the Orient, and we see this reflected in **ALL THINGS JAPANESE**. Think photogenic, sweet and soft, millions of views on Instagram and TikTok. Yes,



of course, it is those **JAPANESE MILK BUNS** also known as **SHOKUPAN**, light-colored tops with a soft fluffy cloud interior. Used with both sweet and savory, in every color of the rainbow. These are cost-effective compared to French brioche yet seem to beat it hands down. Invented in the early 20th century, when trying to combine European breadmaking techniques with local tastes. Personally, I love to use them to make **NATTO**! Toasted, topped with fermented bean paste and normally cheese, but I swap this for a crispy fried egg. The Land of the Rising Sun is also driving our consumers to lust after ramen, fluffy soufflé pancakes, all things miso, and fruit sando (fresh fruits and whipped cream sandwiched between soft slices of milk bread).

YOU SAY TARTE I SAY TATIN

The humble **TARTE TATIN**, that famous caramelized fruit baked inverted on rich buttery pastry, named after the Tatin Sisters who served it at their French hotel. Think dark, rich, sweet and sticky.... WAIT no! This humble dessert that was so liked across our region is becoming

a new trend **WITH A TWIST**. Yes, it is going savory, from gooseberry and goats' cheese to cherry tomato and rosemary. Last week I tried it with shallots and feta; it was amazing. As this trend grows across the region, we might even see more local versions with nods to tastes across the Gulf. Maybe Miso Date and Akkawi?? Who Knows. Have you tried the savory version on your menu?

The return of **LOOMI** and **SWEET HAWAII**. These classic store cupboard staples of the Middle East and the new heroes of a good spice rack- think about the rim of a mocktail glass, toppings for vegetables elevating them to the next level. Hawaii is gaining ground in coffee, tea and hot chocolate as well as baking as it delivers a warm, earthy, almost peppery note. Made from Ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. We are now seeing this in a syrup for soft serve or mocktails. Loomi sits with this, bringing earthy, tangy and slightly smoky notes to balance many foods. We are seeing the rise of **NOOMI BASRA CHAI**, the traditional Iraqi hot tea made by simmering Loomi, black tea and sugar.... So my preference is to serve it over ice; it is really mind-blowingly good. Go on, try it; you might be surprised!!

Finally, looking at trends, our corporate partners at the Emirates Culinary Guild are also helping define the landscape with their visions. Their foresight in making their latest products available to us at our monthly meetings reflects both innovation and current market trends. Stay ahead of the curve, talk to them and try their products. Join them and us in driving the trends in our region. ■



GLOBAL
FOOD WEEK 2026
الأسبوع العالمي للغذاء

ORGANISED BY

ADNEC
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that steals the show

Behind every signature steak, braise, or roast is a cut of beef chosen with care. Farzana provides premium beef that delivers flavour, texture, and reliability – the qualities chefs need to push creativity forward. From fine dining to high-volume service, our beef elevates every dish.



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& MEAT



SEAFOOD



EGGS
& DAIRY



BITES
& SIDES



CANNED
FOODS



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COLD
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