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JUNE-JULY 2025

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THE MAGAZINE CHEFS LOVE TO READ

gourmet

volume 20, issue 6



UNDERDOG UNDEFEATED DAYA

Meet Chef Udaya Nilanga, winner of the Best Cuisinier title at the 2025 Salon Culinaire

pullman
Udaya Nilanga

THE UNSTOPPABLE EMBER

Chef Sevda Dursun shares about finding clarity through challenges, and the importance of showing up, no matter what



STILLNESS IN SUGAR

Chef Mulyatna Sardiono on pastry innovation, staying relevant, and a special recipe for the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery competition



RISE WISE LIKE THIRUMALAI

Chef Thirumalai Murugan talks about cost control, handling kitchen chaos, thinking green and leading with joy





*Bob's Red Mill
Oats*

*Hershey's
Chocolate Chips*

*Rich Ribbon
T55 Flour*

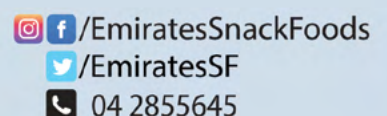


A CRUNCH OF INDULGENCE



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president'sstation

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Proud and Grateful

These are the words that keep coming back to me as I think about the Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025. Proud that we were once again able to put on this incredible event. Kudos to every chef who participated. Grateful to every judge who gave their time and expertise and every marshal who helped behind the scenes. And most of all, thankful to all the supporters of the Guild, our partners, the industry, and this community for their presence throughout the three days and the awards ceremony of Expo Culinaire 2025.

Over three exciting days, we witnessed something special. Chefs from all backgrounds, skill levels, and corners of the region came together to compete, learn, share, and to push each other to be better. This year's competition was larger than we imagined. And yes, we are already looking ahead to 2026 with even more excitement.

Our cover story this month features a chef who never attended a formal hospitality school. Instead, he had something more powerful in the form of hands-on training experiences, a hunger to learn, and a mindset that never let him stop moving forward. He continues to chase knowledge to this day.

There is no single path to success. Your journey may look different. Perhaps you are still taking your first few steps. But if you continue learning, keep showing up, and hold on to the love for what you do, you are already on the right track.

As chefs, we carry more than the hat. We carry our values into every plate we serve.

This issue is filled with stories like his, so do not miss the chance to read them.

We invite you to visit issuu.com/gulfgourmetmagazine to explore past issues and emiratesculinaryguild.net to stay updated on events and news. If you have not already, follow us on social media to see what chefs around the world are creating and perhaps connect with someone who inspires you.

Take a moment to explore the company profiles of our corporate members. Also, do look at the Friends of the Guild pages to see all of our amazing supporters. These are the people and companies that help us keep the spotlight where it belongs: on chefs.

A heartfelt thank you to all our advertisers and partners. Your support enables us to focus on the culinary arts while staying ahead of trends and innovations.

As always, if there is something you would like to see in a future issue, send us an email. Let us know what matters to you, what stories you want to be told, and what lessons you have learned along the way.

If you have any questions about the events, please reach out to us at emiratesculinaryguild@gmail.com.

Thank you for being part of this community. Let us continue to learn and improve, even in the face of setbacks. Listen to that inner voice that says, 'Just try one more time,' and keep raising the bar together.

Culinary Regards,
Alan Orreal



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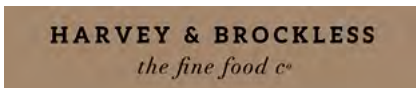
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newsbites

Empowering Young Chefs: Rational Workshop in Dubai

On April 8th, 2025, the young chefs had the opportunity to attend an engaging and informative workshop hosted by Rational, a renowned company known for their innovative kitchen technology. Held at Gold & Diamond Park in Dubai, the event was aimed at training young chefs on the practical use and advanced features of Rational's iCombi ovens, VarioCooking, and iCombi Care systems.



The session was led by two highly skilled professionals, Chef Amarnath Mylavarapu, Regional Sales Manager, and Chef Jacob De Clerk, National Corporate Chef at Rational, who brought a wealth of culinary expertise and technical knowledge to the event. They guided participants through the intelligent functionalities of the iCombi ovens, explaining how these smart appliances streamline cooking processes,

improve consistency, and save time in a professional kitchen.

A major focus was also placed on iCombi Care, Rational's integrated cleaning and maintenance system, which ensures the longevity and optimal performance of the ovens. Through live demonstrations, young chefs were shown how to harness the full potential of these machines

using various cooking methods, from steaming and roasting to baking, all with just a few intuitive commands.

What truly stood out was the hands-on experience offered during the workshop. Participants had the opportunity to work directly with the equipment, apply what they learned in real-time, and ask questions to deepen their understanding.

Hands on Iftar Session

On the evening of March 25th 2025 young chefs took part in a hands-on Iftar session that was organised by Chef Majed Sabagh founder of (CIC) Chef Training and Consultancy in Dubai. The idea behind was to familiarize young chefs with the history of Ramadan and cultural dishes being cooked during Iftar in the Middle East.

The session saw young chefs from across the UAE come together, sharing a meal and exchanging experiences with chefs from various culinary backgrounds.

Chef Majed Al Sabagh, President of the Syrian Culinary Guild and host of the event, greeted attendees with warmth and generosity as he shared culinary insights and techniques behind the traditional dishes being prepared for



Iftar. A spread of iconic dishes, including Moutabel, Tabouleh, Ouzi, Fatayer, Sambousek, Shawarma, and fresh fruits, filled the table, as participants gathered in eager anticipation, exchanging stories of their fasting day.

The Iftar gathering not only nourished the body but also nourished the soul

leaving everyone with a deep sense of peace and connection. Chef Fay Abreo President and Chef Islam Masoud Chairman of ECG Young Chefs thanked Chef Majed Al Sabagh, Chef Badya Khiraledeen and the entire team at CIC, and the distinguished chefs for coming together to create the exquisite Iftar experience for young Chefs.

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

The Unstoppable Ember

Chef **Sevda Dursun** from Emirates Snack Foods has become a symbol of tenacity. She is never one to sit idle; she hustles and gives her best every day, staying up-to-date with trends, conducting demonstrations, and practicing empathy through constant learning. When she does take a moment for herself, she remembers her philosophy: sometimes, you have to close your eyes to see things clearly. In this candid conversation, Shreya Asopa speaks with Chef Sevda about confronting the hard truths of her life and the importance of showing up, no matter what.

It is 4:30 PM in Dubai on a Monday, the second half of a demanding workday. In front of me sits Chef Sevda Dursun, troubleshooting audio echo issues. After some effort, she finally resolves everything and settles back, still in her chef's uniform. The chock-a-block schedule indicates that she has tackled the Monday blues with vigor, confirmed minutes later when she shares that she just returned from City Walk after a demonstration featuring bread products.

"I mean, you really have to love your job to be in this industry," she says. "Just now, during the demonstration, I observed a young chef who was passionate about her work. I can tell the difference by the way she prepared the mise-en-place. So clean, professional and clearly devoted to what she does."

This passion she knows inside and out. At ESF, she has found her dream job. She is up at five, energized by her routine, an hour at the gym, morning rituals, and then off to work. "I am in love with my job... really in love with my job. Even at home, I countdown the time to return



Knowledge grows when you share, but so does the responsibility of choosing what to share

to work," she radiates enthusiastically. Watching her speak, it is clear she is in her element. Maybe it is her hunger for excellence that gives her doggedness, or maybe it is second nature to her; either way, her love for her job is a rarity.

"Is this eternal love for cooking something passed down to you?" I ask her.

"It started on my 16th birthday," she replies, "blowing out the candles on a cake my parents bought. That's when I decided to bake," she says, peeling back her childhood years in Ukraine.

As a Turkish woman in Ukraine, Chef Sevda initially imagined her future in

fashion design, believing her creative instincts could find her voice there. She still dabbles in it today, sewing and making dresses by hand. But it was on her 16th birthday that her culinary destiny was first scribbled in the margins of her life.

After discovering her passion for cooking, she attended the College of Food Technology in Ukraine. Later, she moved to Turkey, where she worked at a bakery and pastry shop for a few months before relocating to Dubai in 2003. "I worked as a pastry chef at Istanbul Flower Restaurant for five years. Then, I moved to work with Pinar Arabia, where I developed numerous recipes and had the opportunity to represent them at Gulfood. One of my creations was chocolate labneh, a concept that was not much of a trend back in 2014. I also made soups like tamarind soup, desserts like cheesecake, bread and sauces."

When Chef Sevda joined Emirates Snack Foods in 2019, she felt her life had finally come together. "I thought, yes, this is me. This is exactly what I want, to train, develop recipes. Over the years, I went



I am in love with my job... really in love with my job. Even at home, I countdown the time to return to work



from being a pastry chef to becoming a corporate chef."

In her current role, she oversees culinary operations, collaborates with chefs, provides product demonstrations, and sells a full range of culinary solutions to restaurants. "We offer A to Z culinary options, from bakery and pastry to snacks. If you are opening a restaurant, we have everything you need. Around 80% of our products are made from raw materials. Be it bread or desserts, you can create anything with our products."

Considering the abundant assortment, you might expect automation to dominate their culinary processes. But they navigate automation with prudence in order to have a balanced approach. "For example, we have mixes that must be combined with flour to create products from scratch. Flour is measured, salt, yeast, and water are added, everything is done manually. We handle raw materials for bread, pastries, chocolate, everything. And through this process, we are not just producing items but also teaching the chefs and clients."

Talking about demonstrations, Chef Sevda shares that she is frequently inundated with requests, so she always anticipates every detail. "From measuring the oven's maximum steam temperature to confirming the right equipment is on hand, checking the oven client uses, the mixer type, I think about everything," she explains.

Chef Sevda has parlayed her knowledge into a rigorous preparation process. She knows that if she skips these checks, she risks arriving at a demo only to find they lack the necessary tools or settings. For her, being ready is non-negotiable. "We cannot guarantee a perfect product, but we will do our best," she emphasizes.

Her thorough approach does not end at the demo. She sits down with clients, discussing their equipment, determining what is suitable and what needs adjustment. "If they want to produce



Cooking can heal you. When life gives you lemons, you should cook.

high-quality results, these adjustments are essential," she insists.

On the one hand, Chef Sevda visits various institutions, conducts demonstrations, and imparts wisdom. On the other, she's working closely with four chefs in-house, expanding the range of ESF snacks and dreaming up new creations. It is a balancing act of developing, inspiring, and staying creative. To keep that spark alive, she keeps experimenting with new ideas.

Creativity in the kitchen means inventing in more ways than one. If she develops a successful recipe, she considers proposing it to a restaurant, particularly if it fits their menu. "We create two or three new recipes, then propose them to the team. We discuss which ones stand out. If one is particularly liked, I go back and train the chefs to perfect it. It is all part of the creative process," she says, adding that this process comes naturally after working alongside renowned chefs, creating ten different recipes and preparing about 1,500 plates for people to taste in a single day. "Through these experiences, I have learned to see ingredients as endless possibilities. Even something as simple as cream, I imagine all the different ways it can be used."

From Her Heart to People's Hearts

Art, in any form, speaks volumes, even when the artist is hidden behind the scenes. In the words of Robert Henri, 'The true artist regards his work as a means of talking with men [and women], of saying his say to himself and to others.' Chef Sevda lived by this belief every day.

"I remember preparing a batch of my finest Turkish desserts for a company event. During the event, a woman approached their kiosk, tasted one of the sweets, and immediately asked, 'Where is this sweet from?' The representative replied that it was brought from Turkey. But before he could finish, she interrupted, saying, 'Why are you lying? These are Sevda's sweets!' The representative was completely stunned and called me, asking, 'How do people recognize your desserts, even when they have never met you?'"

She continues, "The answer was in passion. It is because I put my heart into this. It is prepared with love."

Chef Sevda admits that while ambition powers her, managing five restaurants alone can be overwhelming. Despite this, she defies limits, stays adaptable, adjusts her schedule, and works long hours to keep operations running smoothly. "Never, never, never give up," she stresses. "When I came here, I wasn't speaking English or Turkish. My language was Russian because of my upbringing in Ukraine. Learning Turkish and English at the same time was a struggle, but I never gave up. I ignored the opinions of others. With the desire to learn, you can overcome anything."

Having seen the industry turn a new leaf, she notes while there's still a long way to go, more women are breaking the glass ceiling and carving out their space in professional kitchens.

"I always believed women should work hard because there are not enough of us in this field. At my previous company, I was one woman in a team of 25. When I moved to another place, it was the same story, alone again. It is not just about being outnumbered; it is about being seen and heard."

But she never let that silence her. "Sometimes, as a woman, it is challenging. But if you raise your voice, you can be heard."

Takeaways From The Highs, The Lows, And The Burnt Bits

In the culinary world, some days test your patience. Chef Sevda knows this better than most. Turning back the clock, she recalls a time early in her career when she was finishing her pastries for display and an experienced head chef stood before her, focusing on the task at hand. "That is when my manager walked in, tasted the rice pudding, and praised the head chef, who replied, claiming he had made it that morning. When he turned around, he saw me standing there, stunned. All my efforts to come in early and prepare the desserts were completely disregarded."

For this reason, she beseeches young culinary students never to shy away, even when walking away seems easier. "You might think, 'Okay, today I'll resign.' But the problems may still loom. If you want to be a great chef, keep going. Work hard. Don't dwell on yesterday. Sometimes, you have to close your eyes to see clearly."

To brave the bright, the bleak, and the brutal, you also need a great team. Chef Sevda credits much of her success to the fortuitous opportunities that came her way, which introduced her to mentors who helped her progress in her career and taught her when to sheathe her doubts and keep moving forward. "Mr. Arda Cenk Tokba, the General Manager of Pinar, has visionary leadership and unwavering support that are truly inspiring to me. It is an honor to know him. And Chef Özkan Koç, in my eyes, is one of the most talented and exceptional chefs of all time. His passion and brilliance continue to inspire me every day. I am deeply grateful that our paths have crossed. Sometimes I wonder how I got so lucky. But then I remind myself that I did it. I accomplished a lot to get to where I am now."

Trends are often born from the simplest things. One post, one video, and suddenly, everyone's paying attention. "New creations pop up every day.



Sometimes, you have to close your eyes to see things clearly

Who would have thought kunafa with chocolate would become a global sensation? We have always loved the classic pistachio pairing with chocolate but never thought of it becoming a trend. Like chocolate croissants. I thought it was special. Then I saw this video: someone pressing chocolate croissants in a toaster. The next day, a café displayed a toasted croissant. That afternoon, during a kitchen demo, someone asked if we could make toasted croissants. This cannot be normal."

But keeping up with trends shouldn't mean abandoning tradition. Chef Sevda explains that in catering to diverse tastes, we must not forget the classics. "I've had my share of strange requests," she recalls. "Once, the restaurant owner asked if we could mix Turkish rice pudding with Turkish coffee. I thought it was unbelievable. Sure, you could add

a little orange zest, but Turkish coffee? I couldn't understand why we needed to experiment with something so beloved."

"That's the challenge," she says, her voice firm. "We have no idea what will trend tomorrow. We must stay ahead, be bold, and take risks."

She has an intrepid calmness, choosing to wait for the right moment to speak about her future plans. This takes her back to the 2017 Abu Dhabi Literary Fair, where she was invited as a guest chef. Over three days, she worked with children from a local center for kids with Down syndrome, creating cookies and snacks that brought joy and creativity.

"In that event, a woman approached me and asked for the recipe for my unique fruit dessert. So I hesitated but shared it, and days later, she told me it had become a bestseller in her business. I was genuinely happy for her," she smiles.

Knowledge grows when you share, but so does the responsibility of choosing what to share. Although she keeps a tight lid on her plans, she does give a hint. She hopes to create a bakery and pastry shop. Having lived in Dubai for nearly 22 years, soon to be 23, she has analyzed the market, identifying gaps she can fill with fresh, innovative ideas.

Her parents are in Turkey, but her father's roots remain in Ukraine. A farmer by trade, he refused to leave the scent of damp soil. She has inherited his work ethic; two days off feels excessive to her. "Yesterday, following work and socializing with friends, I came home to find time on my hands. So, I went to my kitchen, tossed ingredients and baked cookies. Kitchen is my therapy. When I am blue I turn to cooking. I always tell my friends that when life gives you lemons, you should cook. Cooking can heal you."

Indeed, such is the unflinching love for work that, like a glowing ember, it makes her unstoppable in conquering every goal. ■

Foodverse

Middle East's Biggest Culinary Competition Got a Digital Makeover with Foodverse-FV Compete...

The atmosphere was different this year at the Emirates International Salon Culinaire, held during ExpoCulinaire 2025 in Sharjah. Judges weren't rustling through papers or scribbling notes on clipboards. Instead, 23 international judges and their UAE-based counterparts were all focused on one thing: their phone screens. Why? Because for the first time ever, the competition was powered by the FV Compete module on the Foodverse app.

This year marked the 28th edition of the region's most prestigious culinary competition. With over 930 chef entries from the UAE and 11 countries, participants competed in 39 categories, including Practical Cookery, Emirati Cuisine, Cake Decorating, and Artistic Showpieces.

For the judges, it was a seamless experience. FV Compete digitized the judging, scoring process, and created a record of every competition entry with images of dishes included to ensure transparency and fairness.

FV Compete: A Seamless Experience for Judges

"The judging process was quick," said Chef Fernando Aracama, veteran chef-restaurateur from the Philippines. "I've been judging for nearly 16 years. This was the first time I've seen something like this and it worked. No papers, no confusion. It saved us time and made everything smoother."

Chef Benny Dong, Executive Chef at Shanghai Disney Resort, emphasized the importance of meaningful interaction. "Earlier, we were buried in paperwork. This time, with FV Compete's



speech-to-text feedback and clear judging parameters, I had more time to connect with competitors and that's what really matters."

The competition also highlighted culinary storytelling and innovation. Andy Cuthbert, President of Worldchefs, shared, "This year's event marked another level of excellence. From the new National Cuisine Challenge, where teams showcased heritage dishes to dignitaries, to the zero-waste lunch initiative, it was a dynamic celebration of culture, skills, and technology."

Foodverse: A Digital Ecosystem Built for the Industry

More than just a judging tool, FV Compete is part of a broader vision by Foodverse, a platform developed by ICCA Dubai to digitally empower the food industry.

As Sunjeh Raja, Director & CEO, ICCA Dubai, and Founder, Foodverse, explained:

"This platform is designed for the global chef community. With FV Compete, we're setting new standards for how competitions are run with fairness, credibility, and real-time engagement. It's only the beginning."

The brilliance of FV Compete was not only witnessed at the Emirates International Salon Culinaire, but also showcased at The Chefs Table during The Hotel Show 2025 at Dubai World Trade Centre. Over three days, nine hotel teams competed in a complex format that brought together both front-of-house and back-of-house teams. Their task: to collaboratively deliver an exceptional, restaurant-style food and beverage experience, from handcrafted mocktails and three canapés to a four-course set menu, followed by a main course, plated dessert, and a bespoke coffee creation for each guest.

What's Next?

The success of FV Compete at Emirates Salon Culinaire marks a turning point. With global collaborations underway including with Worldchefs, EHTL School in Luxembourg, and My Food Story Global Guild coming onboard, Foodverse is setting the stage for a digitally connected, community-driven culinary world. ■







Underdog to Undefeated That's Chef Udaya

Over 930 chefs battled it out at The International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025. But one chef, whose love for cooking runs deep and measures success by his own progress, stepped outside the usual and took home the prized Best Cuisinier title. Meet the champion, Chef **S.D. Udaya Nilanga**...

The 28th Emirates Salon Culinaire (ESC) 2025 wrapped up last month at Expo Centre Sharjah. Held alongside ExpoCulinaire 2025, which welcomed over 5,800 visitors, the competition saw chefs from near and far compete across 39 intense classes. The event was a tremendous success, expertly organized by Purple Kitchen Events.

Experienced judges lent their expertise

to uphold the standards of a world-class competition. Among them was culinary legend Chef Otto Wiebel, who has been part of the Guild for 26 of its 28 editions. He was joined by founding members of the ECG and global culinary leaders, including the Guild's first President, Mike Lee (who led from the Guild its inception until 1999), VP of Worldchefs and Chairman of the Culinary Committee Dr. Rick Stephen, the Worldchefs Board of Directors, and the full committee of the

ECG. All were present to guide, support, and elevate the event.

Among the many accolades awarded at the event, the prestigious title of Best Cuisinier at the International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025 went to Chef S.D. Udaya Nilanga from Pullman Dubai Creek City Centre. With no formal culinary training or hospitality school background, his success is built on an alchemic combination of raw talent,

curiosity, and hard work. His inspiring underdog burns away skepticism on talent and background. After all, what counts is not where you start but how eager you are to learn and grow along the way.

Hailing from Kalutara, located about 43 km south of Colombo, a small city known for its coconut-fiber crafts and lush mangosteen harvests, Chef Udaya grew up in a milieu where nature and history lived side by side. "I love to eat. I eat everything," he laughs. "My mother was my first favorite chef. I liked to eat whatever she cooked." But it was his older brother who first introduced him to hospitality. Starting as a chef before becoming a tour guide, his brother once worked at Mount Lavinia Hotel. "I used to visit him there, and that is where I saw Chef Pabilis Silva working on a dish. I was 15 then, and right there, I knew I wanted to be a chef."

With nothing but passion and curiosity, he applied to Heritance Kandalama as a trainee. The doors seemed locked, but only the courageous could find a way to open them. That is precisely what he did, and landed a position there, learning under the guidance of Executive Chef R.J. Hassim. "He is a great mentor. He did not just teach me cooking; he taught me life."

The hotel's location in the middle of the jungle meant there were no distractions. "We lived on-site, just learning. I worked 14-hour shifts that started at the crack of dawn. But I did not waste a minute."

His efforts grew into achievements. After three years, he rose through the ranks to become Commis 3 in the hot kitchen. "I gave it my all, putting in full volume to learn. No shortcuts, no excuses. I was there to learn," he says.

With an eagerness to grow on his side, he applied to Dubai Marine Beach Resort & Spa in 2008. He began rigorously training in Italian cuisine, and after three years of building his foundation and



What counts is not where you start, but how eager you are to learn and grow along the way

sharpening his skills, he moved on to Frankie's Bar & Grill at Oasis Beach Tower.

In 2012, he took on a new role as Demi Chef de Partie at Pullman City Centre. "I mostly worked with Italian food before, but here I learned Indian, Arabic, and international cuisines. I also took on more responsibility under the guidance of Executive Chef Roziro Mathias. I was promoted almost every year and worked my way up to where I am now, handling the smooth operations in the outlet as well as maintaining the quality and consistency."

The making of a chef is never a solo act. Chef Udaya credits many mentors and colleagues for paving the way for his career. "Mr. Nishan Silva, Regional GM at Accor. He consistently provides new ideas for recipes, encourages the team to participate in competitions, tastes my dishes, and offers honest feedback. He never says no." He is equally thankful to General Manager Laura Nicli and Executive Pastry Chef Dammika Herath for their encouragement and motivation through thick and thin.

It is rare to see a chef with years of experience willingly step into the ring like this. As an executive sous chef, many freeze at the thought, worried about losing or failing. But Chef Udaya does not seem shaken by this.

"Instead, I think I need to learn. I believe I am always competing with myself to improve. Even when I am up against my colleagues, I am happy to compete because it is a chance to learn. I have

taught them and worked alongside them. Either way, I feel like I am winning."

This is not his first time on the competitive stage. He bagged Gold in Fish and Seafood Practical Cookery at Expo Culinaire in both 2020 and 2021. "We did Chef's Table last year and took home gold. And at the Salon Culinaire last year, I won as First Runner-Up."

He then reveals a close call at the competition this year. "I wanted to mince the chicken, and the blender got stuck. I tried everything. Time was ticking, and with just 20 minutes left, my main dish was not even cooked."

With the clock breathing down his neck, he had to overhaul his plan. "On the spot, I wrapped the chicken, boiled it in a pot, and sealed it with foil like a roulade. It was a real challenge. It is not just about winning. It is about playing the hand you are dealt. You should adapt and move fast."

Right after last year's competition, he started preparing for the next edition. Ideas for dishes, the dream to win, and educate himself with new pairings and flavors kept him awake. "I did not sleep all night. I kept tweaking the menu until I was satisfied," he says. "I gave my best. My chefs and mentors at the hotel supported me like family. Even with this win, it felt like a win for all of



No shortcuts, no excuses. I was there to learn

us, not just me."

When it comes to winning the competition, flavor is only half the battle. It is also about keeping your eye on the clock. "To prepare for the one hour of the competition day, I spend countless hours planning it and practicing. I break the time into smaller targets. If I lose 30 minutes on one challenge, I know I have to complete the next step in 10 minutes. It is like having mini finish lines within the main race," he explains.

His hands-on style covers more than just cooking. He labels every item and follows a strict checklist for cleanliness and hygiene, which won him the Best Hygiene Practices Award in the Chicken Class. "I take care of labeling and hygiene regardless of competition or not. It is not for display, but to me, these small details matter."

Talking about taste, he says it all comes with practice. "You have to taste before

serving," he pauses. "And it is not just one try. Maybe if you taste it three times, you will get it right. It is a continuous process. I am passionate about food. I love tasting everything. Wherever I go, I think about what to eat. You need a genuine love for food," says the 40-year-old.

As far as plating goes, he advises keeping it balanced with space and colors, using hues that complement each other to enhance the visual appeal.

Outside the kitchen spotlight, Chef Udaya finds his grounding force in his family. His world revolves around his 10-year-old daughter and his supportive wife, both of whom call the UAE home.

"My wife is a homemaker. The first thing I want when I go home is food, and she is there, ready with a hot meal," he smiles. "She cooks Sri Lankan food, the way I grew up with. Even a chef needs a chef sometimes."

Not all families would be so supportive. Some might start asking questions, "Where are you? What are you really doing?" But my family never doubted me. I am blessed. Even on competition practice days, whenever I came home late and then headed back to work, they would pack food, medicine, and clothes for me. They have always been by my side."

He believes in working smart as much as working hard helps him prepare for whatever comes his way. For anyone who wants to step into his shoes and start prepping now for the year ahead, as he did before, he has some simple words to chew on. "Set a clear goal, and work towards it. Most importantly, build a strong foundation. Without solid basics, you cannot win when things get tough."

And if something goes sideways during a competition? "Reset your thinking. Do not get stuck on things like 'it's not working' and panic. If the blender is not working, use your knife to chop. That is why you master the basics and think on your feet," he answers swiftly. ■



Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025 Breaks New Ground

Culinary talent met global ambition at this year's Emirates Salon Culinaire. The milestone edition was a love letter to cooking, featuring heritage flavours, digital judging, and zero-waste goals. Find out what made this year's competition unlike any before it

The 28th edition of the Emirates Salon Culinaire concluded last month at Expo Centre Sharjah, drawing over 930 chef entries from the UAE and 11 countries across the globe. The three-day event featured 39 classes, ranging from practical cookery and cake decoration to Emirati cuisine and elaborate showpieces.

Judged by a seasoned brigade of 23 international judges who joined their UAE-based counterparts to evaluate talent across all disciplines of the culinary arts, the competition became a platform where talent was tested, and trends were set.

The event also hosted the Africa and Middle East semifinals of the Global Chefs Challenge for the World Association of Chefs Societies, where teams from seven countries battled for a ticket to the Worldchefs Congress in Wales in 2026. Qatar, UAE, and Namibia secured top spots on the leaderboard to represent the region in the senior, young, vegan, and pastry chef finals.

Mike Lee, Emirates Culinary Guild's first President, noted that the standard of competition "just keeps getting better year on year. I am proud to have been the first president and to have started the competition. To see it now is just inspiring and very humbling."

Alan Orreal, current President of the Guild, described this year's event as one for the books. "We are proud to have once



again been able to put on the event, and we are grateful to the supporters of the Guild, to the courage of the chefs, and to the industry for their support and presence during the three days and the awards ceremony of Expo Culinaire 2025. The competition was bigger than we could have hoped for, and we are already excited for 2026," he remarked.

Worldchefs President and founding member Andy Cuthbert, based in Dubai, noted that this year's competition was another sign of the impressive growth of the culinary arts in the UAE. "We also introduced a new competition this year, the National Cuisine Challenge, powered by TAAZA Ever Fresh and supported by Mr. Jeyaram, where 11 teams presented their national cuisine to diners, offering a glimpse into the heritage cuisines they represented."

He further added, "This was another competition aligned with achieving zero food waste, as guests consumed all the food during hosted luncheons by consul generals and dignitaries from the various competing teams, including Indonesia, Nepal, Malaysia, India, and Sri Lanka, to name a few. This was coupled with the return of the Sounbula Mills Artisan Bakery Arena, alongside the semifinal of the Global Chefs Challenge. It was a three-day event packed with culinary and gastronomic excellence."

For the first time, the competition was powered by Foodverse, a new, end-to-end digital platform developed in partnership with the International Centre for Culinary Arts (ICCA) Dubai. The platform handled everything from registrations to judging. With its focus on transparency and efficiency, it promised to bring

a fresh layer of credibility to culinary competitions worldwide.

Sunjuh Raja, Managing Director of ICCA and the visionary behind Foodverse, described it as a platform rather than

just a digital tool. "It is set to become a credible platform for chefs across the globe. Not only for competitions but it is set to empower the entire food industry and create meaningful opportunities for young chefs worldwide."

Meanwhile, ExpoCulinaire 2025 ran alongside the competition, bringing together suppliers, educators, and tastemakers under one roof.

"ExpoCulinaire 2025, being run alongside so many culinary competitions, allowed us to make the most of the strengths of all the individual parts, exhibitions, and competitions to bring a truly complete food and beverage event to the Emirate of Sharjah," said Joanne Cook, Managing Director of Purple Kitchen Events.

"Education remained front and center." She further emphasized, "To be able to maintain our commitment to chefs and education was essential. Our certified education sessions have become a pillar of the overall event, so delivering them in 2025 thanks to ICCA, DET, IRCA Academy, École Ducasse, and CIC was an excellent added value for all our audience."

As eyes now turn to 2026, this year's edition was a plate proof that the future of food is all heart, brains, and no waste. ■

Sounbula winners

Sr No	Company Name	Participant Full Name	Award	Ranked
1	Al Naseem Jumeirah	Pawan Kumar Laungani	Gold	1st Place
2	Al Naseem Jumeirah	Suraj Kumar	Gold	
3	Westin Minaseyahi	Mohamad Riluwan Mohamed Husni	Gold	2nd Place
4	Westin Minaseyahi	Ruwanpura Thusara Sanjeewa De Silva	Gold	
5	Arada Hospitality	Mulyatna BN Sardiono	Gold	3rd Place
6	Arada Hospitality	Sasidhar Dasari	Gold	

GCC

Country	Name of the Participant	Category
Namibia	Elizabeth Puleni Taati Isai	Global Chefs Challenge Senior
Qatar Airways	Kevin Glorial Putra Pamara	Global Chefs Challenge Young Chef
UAE	Ruwan Kumara Phille Gedara	Global Chefs Challenge Pastry Chef
UAE	Janam Maharjan	Global Chefs Challenge Vegan Chef

Best Hygiene

Sr No	Description	Sponsored by	Company	Name
1	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Arabic Mezzeh Class	Ecolab	Jumeirah Creekside	Abdelaziz Taha
2	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Fish & Seafood Class		EKFC	Kerolouz Abdelsayed
3	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Beef Class		Meydan	Deepak Nougaien
4	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Emirati Cuisine		ICCA	Shamlan Abdul
5	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Chicken Class		Pullman DCC	Udaya Nilanga sattambiralalage don
6	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Potatoes Savory		DWTC	Sureeporn
7	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Plant Based Thryve		Movenpick Grand Al Bustan Convention & Center Dubai	Aayush Kafle
8	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Syrian Cuisine Traditional & Modern Plated Class		Radisson Blu	Nour Ahmed
9	Best Hygiene Practices Award - Syrian Three Kibben Plated Class		Grand Hyatt	Ayham Khair
10	New Generation Hygiene Leader		Dubai College & Tourism	Roshni Kikla
11	Best Hygiene Practices Leader		EKFC	Upeksha Sandaruwani

ESC 2025 Trophies

Sr No	Description	TROPHY	TYPE	SIZE	Name	Company	Prize
1	Winner - Best Effort by a Corporation International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	BIG		Hilton	Hilton Dxb Jumeirah, Al seef, Yas Island, M Square, Canopy, Doubletree, Al Habtoor
2	Winner - Best Effort by an Individual Establishment International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	MEDIUM		DWTC	
3	Winner - The Student Challenge International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW			ROSHNI KIKLA	Dubai College Tourism	
4	Winner - Best Pastry Chef International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	MEDIUM	Nimesh tharuka	W the Palm Dubai	
5	Winner - Best Kitchen Artist International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	MEDIUM	Jayson Cueto	DWTC	
z	Winner - Best Effort by Culinary School International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	MEDIUM		Dubai College Tourism	
7	2nd Runner - up - Young Chef of the Year International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	SMALL	Vishnu Karthyani	Jumeirah Al Qasr	Tramontina Knife
8	1st Runner - up - Young Chef of the Year International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	SMALL	Chanchal kumar shaw	Jumeirah Al Qasr	Tramontina Knife
9	Winner - Young Chef of the Year International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	MEDIUM	Chigurupalli Sandeep	Jumeirah Al Qasr	A 2 day trip to Convotherm Headquarters in Eglfing, Germany and a day of sightseeing in the beautiful region of Bavaria. Additional prize: A bag of knives
11	2nd Runner - up - Best Cuisinier International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	SMALL	Abhilash Asokan	Hilton Dubai Jumeirah	Tramontina Knife
12	1st Runner - up - Best Cuisinier International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	SMALL	Nuwan Kumara	EKFC East Wing	Tramontina Knife
10	Winner - Best Cuisinier International Emirates Salon Culinaire 2025	DHOW	GOLD	BIG	Udaya Nilanga sattambiralalage don	Pullmann DCC	A 2 day trip to Convotherm Headquarters in Eglfing, Germany and a day of sightseeing in the beautiful region of Bavaria

Best in Class

Sr No	Description	Sponsor	ON STAGE	Hotel Name	Competitor	Medal	Awards & Prizes
1	Cake Decoration - Practical Powered by Felchin Switzerland	Masterbaker	Mr Ravi Bambhani -Business Development Manager	Al Jawaher	Asanka Senavirathna	Gold	An international trip of education to the chef with highest juding points of the class. The winner will be sent to Felchin for a Chocolate training at Condirama Felchin Training center in Switzerland
2	Wedding Cake Three-Tier Powered by Pristine	IFFCO Professional					No prize giving
3	Plated Dessert Powered by Arla Pro	Arla Pro	Angeli Nair - Marketing Specialist	W Hotel The Palm	H Nimesh Tharuka	Gold	Highest point will receive iphone
				DWTC	Ajith Pushpa Kumara	Silver	Highest point will receive apple watch
				Pullmann DCC	Amila Ian Monarawilla	Bronze	Highest point will receive iphone airpods
5	Baked Goods & Loaves & Showpiece Powered by CSM Ingredients Schapfen Muehle Germany	Masterbaker	Mr Ravi Bambhani -Business Development Manager	Intercontinental Dubai Festival City	Renjith Pillai		An international trip of education for training to Germany training center
6	Petites Fours, Pralines Powered by Marguerite & Candia Professional France	Masterbaker	Mr Ravi Bambhani -Business Development Manager	DWTC	James Frederick B Arbis		An international trip of education to Candia Training Center in France
7	Chocolate Carving Showpiece Powered by Veliche Chocolate Belgium	Masterbaker	Mr Ravi Bambhani -Business Development Manager	Royal Keita Catering	M Tharishma Madushanka Mendis		An international trip of education to Candia Training Center in Belgium
23	Savory Tartlette Creations Powered by HUG	HUG AG		Atlantis the Royal	Sayanth E.K.		An international trip to Switzerland
24	Sweet Tartlette Creations Powered by HUG	HUG AG		DWTC	B.V. Sewwandi Udayangani		An international trip to Switzerland



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Coconut Water*

*Alpro
Coconut Drink*

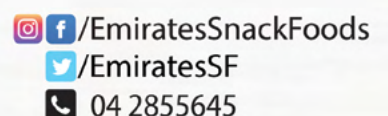
Andros Fruits



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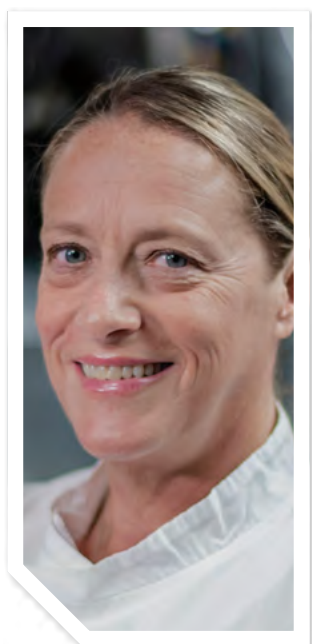


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Fork First Questions Later

Chef **Helen Morris** takes us through the culinary delights of Dubai to Belgrade, experiencing authentic flavors and connecting with the local culinary spirit at each stop



Eat emotionally.
Drink with
curiosity. And
always – always
– say yes to the
next bite

I am not one for lying on beaches anymore. I know, shocking. I used to spend hours taking all the Vitamin D on offer on Jumeirah's golden sands or cool pools. For someone who lives in a region with enough sand to last a thousand lifetimes, you would think I would enjoy basking under the sun with a mocktail in hand.

But I am not that person anymore. Give me sneakers, a camera, and a map dotted with food stops, and I am off. Exploring is my cardio. Walking miles, getting lost in alleyways that smell like fresh bread, and tasting my way through cities with the sort of dedication that borders on Olympic.

If there is food and drink involved, consider me already en route. This brings me to my recent culinary escapades in Dubai and Belgrade, a tale of Michelin stars (well, one star), mysterious meat parts, pastry cream regrets, and one heartbreakingly failed lemon mint.

Dubai. It is a glittering oasis of air-conditioned experiences, edible gold, and enough restaurants to make even the most decisive eater spiral into an existential crisis. Every time I land, my stomach and I go into strategy mode. Top of the list this time? Mimi Kakushi is a sensual, stylish dream of a place where the décor whispers, 'Stay for a cocktail,' and the food shouts, 'Order one of everything!' Naturally, I obliged both.

But the real excitement? Nick Alvis – yes, that Nick – resurfaced on the Dubai



scene with a new gem: The Beam. Now, for those not emotionally invested in the Dubai dining soap opera, let me catch you up. Nick and Scott were the culinary power couple; from Table 9 to Folly, they had me hooked. So, when the break-up news hit a few years ago, I took it personally. Like, 'eat an entire baked Camembert in pajamas' kind of personal – heartbreak! I attended their 'last supper' (not overly dramatic at all) and got a photo with the duo for all the memories. Anyway, I digress. The Beam is shining, the food dazzled, and the beverages? Mostly fabulous, except for one tiny hiccup. A lemon mint, that timeless, humble mocktail, could not be made.

On a Thursday night. In Dubai. I was baffled. It is lemon. It is mint. It is not alchemy. Still, one cannot stay mad

when Chef Borjan pops out to say hello mid-meal, exuding charm and truffle-scented hospitality. Suddenly, I was emotionally invested all over again. One perfectly presented plate and a chef's greeting later, and I am already planning my next visit, preferably with pre-dinner drinks at their new edition Blush.

Next stop, Belgrade. I had heard whispers about this city, rustic charm, rebellious spirit, and food that clings to your soul (and thighs). I had no expectations of Belgrade. And if I am honest, my first impressions were lukewarm, a bit of grey, gruff, a little 'what am I doing here?' But fast forward six hours, one walk, one accidental pastry, and a mildly dangerous enhanced beverage later, and I was smitten.

I stayed in a quirky boutique hotel in the Old Town with a balcony view of a bustling street full of coffee shops and cheerful chaos. It was the perfect setting for my favorite travel activity: people-watching while nibbling something flaky and buttery. Honestly, it should be a competitive sport.

Like any responsible food adventurer, I booked myself onto a local food tour, which turned out to be four hours of gluttony, joy, and digestive acrobatics. That is what happens when you combine a great guide, enthusiastic fellow tasters, and strong Serbian spirits at 10:30 AM. We began with pastries from the oldest bakery in Belgrade. No sign, no branding, just baked gold and the intoxicating smell of something sinful.

We were told the pastries used a 'special fat.' It was delicious! Vacation calories do not count when you are on a culinary mission. Then came Cevapi, a masterpiece of grilled finger-sized sausages served in portions of 10 with cabbage, chopped onions, and Kajmak, a side-dish made from milk, all lovingly embraced in a homemade flatbread that whispered sweet carbs into my ears. This was accompanied (still morning, mind you) by a hoppy beverage that made my toes tingle.



If there is food and drink involved, consider me already en route

After regaining partial use of my limbs, we headed to a long-standing restaurant where we were served a local offal casserole – liver, kidneys, and other tasty ingredients slapped inside a giant bap and slathered with Kajmak (I loved this). Tres Leche followed (giant size, I may add), then on the move to a Truffle tasting of various pastes, oils, and time to purchase, then a tour of the fresh market where I met every cured meat and cheese that Serbia had to offer, and a fish platter fit for a banquet. By this time, I was in a state of culinary euphoria and mild indigestion.

I waddled back to my hotel that evening with the walk of someone who'd just done a triathlon. But did I stop? Of course not. The next morning, I had a date with Princess Puff, a large choux bun filled with pastry cream so light it defied gravity. It was heavenly. It also took me three days to walk off the guilt. Worth it? Absolutely.

For my final act, I dined at Langouste, Belgrade's first Michelin-starred



restaurant. And deservedly so. Every course was art. Every bite is an explosion. Ingredients were local, flavors were masterful, and the service, after the usual Serbian brusqueness, was warm, sincere, knowledgeable, and passionate. The only oddity? The view. When I first sat down, I was staring at... shrubs. Followed by a car park. Followed by a bit of the Danube in the distance. But come sunset, the lights shimmered on the river, and the whole scene transformed. Kind of like Belgrade itself, a bit rough around the edges at first, but full of charm once you give it a moment.

What truly stood out in Belgrade, other than the delicious food, was how ridiculously affordable everything was. I'm talking truffles without needing a second mortgage. Dining experiences that feel exclusive but priced like a Tuesday lunch special. Every food lover's dream is quality, quantity, and no financial regret.

So, here's my advice: forget your beach holiday. You must visit Belgrade at least once. Book a table. Then a tour. Then another table. But whether it is the polished glitz of Dubai or the rustic charm of Belgrade, travel through your taste buds. Eat emotionally. Drink with curiosity. And always – always – say yes to the next bite.

Culinary regards with pastry crumbs, an expanding waistline, and passport stamps. ■

The Upside of Upcycling

Upcycling food is having a moment, but does it have a future? Experts share how to make it more sustainable, its staying power and giving food a second chance

Shreya Asopa

For the several-th time, the world is being reminded of the perilous consequences of unchecked food waste. In response, innovators are undergoing a paradigm shift, rethinking the category of upcycle food altogether, converting what was once dismissed as refuse into viable economic and ecological assets. Companies like ÄIO use specialized yeast to turn side streams into nutrient-rich fats. These fats offer a sustainable alternative to palm and coconut oil. Kazoo turns 40% of corn germ into tortilla chips, and Spudsy, converting imperfect sweet potatoes into snack puffs, is pushing the boundaries of what was once considered refuse.

"Using all we produce is good stewardship," says Amanda Oenbring, CEO of Upcycled Food Association from the Upcycled Food Association (UFA), an organization that is at the forefront of this movement. With over 180 members spanning 14 countries, the UFA gathers diverse groups ranging from academic institutions, research and development organizations and ingredient and product companies from startups to multinationals. "At UFA we are all about furthering knowledge and connecting to make sure food reaches its highest and best use," she adds.

According to InsightAce Analytic, the global market for upcycled food products was valued at \$59.2 billion in 2024, with projections to soar to \$119.8 billion by 2034. This upward trend opens the floodgates to vast opportunities.



The choice of substrate for upcycling tells a story — not just of waste, but of what we choose to value

Observing the projection, Amanda points out that upcycled ingredients are gaining ground, with small percentage swaps in current formulations driving big changes in function, value, nutrition, and novelty. "Upcycled products are also looking ahead to create the food streams of the future: cocoa-free chocolate and bean-free coffee, for example, redirecting demand of climate-constrained supply chains," notes Oenbring.

But as the trend is gaining traction, a layer of skepticism shadows the movement. The choice of substrate for upcycling tells a story, not just of waste, but of what we choose to value. A report from the University of Otago's Public Health Communication Centre warns that when high-energy processing is involved, a heavy carbon footprint may offset any sustainability benefits. Professor William Chen of Nanyang Technological University suggests a two-step upcycling towards building a zero-waste food circular economy. This dual strategy focuses on nutrient recovery and converting remaining solid

residues into usable materials, thus minimizing the carbon footprint.

Upcycling in the food industry walks a fine line. What begins as a sustainability win can quickly backfire if risks are overlooked. Repurposing by-products like brewer's spent grain for human consumption is not just about ingenuity; it requires assurance that the process does not quietly erode the environmental gains it seeks to deliver.

Common practices, like channeling brewer's spent grain into animal feed or disposing of it as waste, can have negative environmental consequences. "Treating it as food waste either by incineration (energy consumption) or dumping in open fields (contamination and pollution) results in negative environmental impact. In contrast, upcycling allows recovery of nutrients and/or other usable materials (e.g. packaging) and reintegration into the current food systems, thus creating a food circular system," says Professor Chen.

Even so, he articulates, brewer's spent grain and other food processing side-streams may have cumulated chemical (mycotoxin usually at higher level on the husks) or biological hazards (microbial contamination if not stored properly). These contaminants tend to stay on after upcycling. His counsel is a call to action: "Proper food safety risk assessment and appropriate mitigation technology need to be carried out and developed." Such measures set the table for converting upcycling from a superficial band-aid solution to maximal benefits solution.

A key piece of the puzzle lies in the hands of those shaping what and how we eat. Chefs, who are at the forefront of this culinary renaissance are balancing tradition and innovation. With a rivulet of experimentation running through techniques like fermentation, pickling, and crisping, they are turning food scraps into something new.

"Our food system is rebuilding muscle memory of past generations and learning from food cultures that still celebrate these traditions today is a path to stop food waste," says Oenbring. She continues, "Chefs are master experiential storytellers and provide fantastic avenues to help eaters understand that wasted food is not waste until it is wasted," says Amanda, observing the increasing presence of upcycled ingredients across global menus.

The secret sauce may as well be in the science behind the ingredients themselves. Professor Chen points out that while processing side-streams are rich in nutrients, they are also prone to microbial contamination. "Ideally, chefs should work directly with the companies generating these side streams to process them as soon as possible," he explains. Solid-state fermentation, he adds, offers a solution. "For example, chefs may consider implementing solid state fermentation, which prevents microbial contamination, as shown by us at Nanyang Technological University Singapore. Interestingly, fermentation generates new flavors that can vary depending on the conditions. This allows chefs to create entirely new dishes using upcycled side streams, without the need for added flavorings."

Another barrier is that upcycled products are frequently labeled as pricey and niche. A pared-back approach that applies principles of critical pedagogy can help stakeholders see beyond entrenched routines and grasp why upcycling must be reframed from a niche gimmick into a commonsense strategy.

"Part of our role at a membership-based



global trade association is working to scale upcycled food both in terms of volume and awareness. As that growth continues and quantity, cost, and availability become more accessible, we envision greater mainstream adoption across many segments even beyond traditional food categories as innovation is already happening in pet products, cosmetics, home and personal care, packaging, etc," says Oenbring.

What comes close on the heels of this growing awareness is the need for transparency. Consumers increasingly demand proof behind environmental and ethical claims. "Verification of claims builds confidence and trust in the products they buy. Upcycled Certification, owned by Where Food Comes From, has seen impressive growth across food and beverage sectors, though especially in pet products and snacks. Multiple claims, such as Upcycled Certified + Non-GMO or Upcycled Certified + Organic, are becoming increasingly influential in purchasing decisions," notes Oenbring.

To effectively integrate upcycled foods into mainstream food systems, a shift in processing technology, one that reduces the generation of side streams in the first place is necessary. "This is possible at least with the soybean processing industry by producing prebiotics beverages from the entire soybean," states Professor Chen.

However, he adds, this effort may take time to implement, and may not be as straightforward for all the side-streams such as brewer's spent grain.

Nobody believed a day would come when food systems would be forced to reckon with their own excess. Today, we face dwindling resources and growing waste; the reckoning is here. The UAE Food Bank, for example, has launched a strategic plan to cut food waste by 30% by 2027, zooming in on partnerships with food service establishments and digitizing operations. "It is an important goal in the global quest to prevent food waste. These moments are where cross-sector collaboration and partnerships can be transformative in helping all sorts of streams be captured to rescue nutrition and stabilize it in a form that can ensure human consumption while addressing social goals. At UFA, we highlight the innovators providing the infrastructure, equipment, and models to help make these successes possible," affirms Oenbring.

Beyond its environmental imperative, the upcycled food movement represents a kind of catharsis, a break from outdated systems that discard the nourishing. By treating by-products and surplus ingredients as resources rather than baggage, it reinforces a circular economy built on innovation, efficiency, and responsible use. ■

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Cooking up Change

Chef Tarryn-Leigh Green writes about the Power of Women who take action

From building a business to navigating leadership as a woman and even navigating motherhood, one lesson keeps showing up again and again:

High agency changes everything.

It is a term you will hear more often now, especially in entrepreneurial and leadership circles. But what does it really mean?

High agency is the mindset that says, "I will figure this out."

It is not about having all the answers. It is about believing that no matter the problem, the goal, or the obstacle, there is a way forward, and you are going to find it.

It is how I have navigated a male-dominated industry, built a business, raised children, started The Women's Culinary Chapter, and stayed true to my values when it would have been far easier to blend in.

The high agency is choosing momentum over perfection. It has been one of my hardest lessons, which I still work on daily. I instinctively strive for perfection. Many of us do, not because we are control freaks but because we have been raised to equate our value with how flawlessly we can execute. To tick every box. To be prepared, polished, pleasing. But perfection is a trap. It delays us. It fuels procrastination. It disconnects us from action. And beneath it all, there is something even deeper: many women have also been taught to ignore the one thing that could guide us through it all: our instincts. That inner voice of



knowing, of wisdom, of quiet courage. We override it, silence it, second-guess it. And it is often only in hindsight that we realize it was right all along. The high agency asks us to break that cycle. To trust the voice within and take the next step, even when it is imperfect. Because momentum creates clarity, it builds confidence. And it gives that inner voice space to grow louder and be heard.

In 2025, I believe high agency is the superpower, especially for women.

Why? Because the food and beverage landscape is transforming rapidly with evolving consumer preferences, increased corporate expectations, and a growing emphasis on environmental responsibility, it is reshaping how leadership in kitchens, hospitality, and beyond must adapt. People want real. They want courage. They want women who are not waiting for permission.

I have seen too many brilliant women pause. Wait. Overthink.

We tell ourselves we are not ready or need one more course, one more round of validation. But here is the truth: no one is coming to hand us the power. We take it. By stepping in. Speaking up and building what does not exist yet.

And high agency does not mean going it alone. In fact, it thrives on community. It is women uplifting other women. It is asking for help, sharing knowledge, making the intro, and rewriting the story that says we have to do it all by ourselves.

It also means getting honest. Sometimes, that looks like saying, "I need rest." Sometimes, it is, "This is not aligned anymore." High agency is not about burnout or bravado; it is about intentional action.

The women shaping the next decade are not just dreamers or disruptors. They are the ones who say, "This matters. I will go first. I will find a way."

Whether you are leading a team, raising a family, building a brand, or still figuring it all out, you already have it in you. That voice that says, "There is more, and I can do it." That is your high agency speaking. Trust it.

2025 does not belong to the loudest voice in the room. It belongs to the women who take action when it counts, the ones who choose courage over comfort and clarity over chaos.

If that is you, keep going. We need more of us out there. ■



How to Stylize Drinks Like a Pro

Food stylist **Henriett Braun** shares tips for toast-worthy drink styling

We have chatted about food styling in general and even got our hands greasy with burger styling tips, but now it is time to pour ourselves into the world of drinks. Styling drinks might seem like a slippery challenge (pun intended), but when done right, the results are truly stunning. From the dreamy swirl of a marbled latte to the fizzy sparkle of a fresh soda, drinks can bring so much visual drama to a shot. The way different layers in a drink interact through marbling, layering, carbonation, or gentle blending can create artistic, almost painterly effects that bring the drink to life and give it tons of character on camera.

First things first: the setup.

We always start with empty glasses to prep the scene. The actual drinks come in at the last minute. Why? Because drinks change fast—condensation fades, ice melts, and garnishes wilt. If the client's mood board leans light and bright, we use airy props and backgrounds. If it is moody and dark, we switch to rustic tones or even build a whole new set from scratch (just check out our dramatic matcha example for proof).

Often, we shoot drinks in their natural habitat, such as a bar, a restaurant table, or even a sunny windowsill. But no matter the location, we always use a “stand-in” first. This lets the photographer lock in

the lighting and gives us time to perfect the scene. Only once the client provides the green light does the hero drink make its grand entrance.

Opaque vs. Transparent: Know Your Drink

Drinks fall into two camps:

- ♦ Opaque: Think coffees, smoothies, and milkshakes.
 - ♦ Transparent or semi-transparent: Cocktails, mocktails, iced teas, sodas.
- Each has its styling approach, but one thing is always true: Details matter. We always ask clients for references; they often have strict guidelines in place. Do they want sharp layers or a soft, blended look? Should the drink reach a specific

level in the glass? Is there whipped cream on top? Sauces, sprinkles, garnishes?

Here is how I build a perfectly styled marbled coffee:

1. Set up the scene based on the client's mood board.
2. Get client approval.
3. Place a stand-in to adjust lighting and finalize styling.
4. Prep all ingredients—sauces, garnishes, whipped toppings.
5. Add ice or fake ice to the glass.
6. Spray the glass with fine water droplets using a mini spray bottle.
7. Fill the glass halfway with coffee, then place it on set.
8. Mix half cream and half milk separately, then slowly pour them in to create that dreamy marble effect.
9. If using whipped cream, go for stability:
 - ♦ Dream Whip makes a great thick option.
 - ♦ Or use cold whipping cream with plenty of sugar, whipped until firm, then piped.
 - ♦ A firm meringue also works.
 - ♦ Avoid canned or machine-made whipped cream—they collapse too quickly and will not hold garnishes.
11. Add sauces using a small piping bag or squeeze bottle.
12. Place garnishes carefully with a toothpick for control and precision.

Clear Cocktails?

Here is the Game Plan

Steps 1–4 remain the same. Then:

- ♦ Add thick sauces to the glass first, following how a barista would swirl them.
- ♦ Build fruit and ice cubes step by step for mojitos or layered cocktails.
- ♦ Place the glass on set before pouring the drink to avoid spills.
- ♦ Top with foam or garnish gently. Do not move the glass!

Pro Tips for Drink Styling

- ♦ For fizzy drinks, add the soda right before shooting. Ask the photographer to use a fast shutter speed to catch the bubbles at their peak.
- ♦ For condensation, use a 1:1 mix of



These images were shot for De Linos Bahrain by photographer Kulsum Kunwa.

water and glycerin in a fine mist spray bottle; it lasts longer and looks natural.

- ♦ Do not be afraid to get creative! Play with colored backgrounds, dramatic lighting, low camera angles, or dripping sauces to make your drink pop.
- Styling drinks blend science, art, and a

touch of magic. So have fun, get messy, and don't forget to taste test (a perk of the job, right?).

Cheers to your next shoot. If you have any further questions about food styling, please reach out on socials @redapplecrumble. ■

A Dash of AI in the Kitchen

AI is now part of the recipe, writes Chef Vivek Huria

It was back in 2021, just before I established my restaurant, Jalfrezi, when I had a conversation that changed everything. I was in that pre-opening phase, knee-deep in prep mode. I had spent years in kitchens, building up muscle memory and instinct. But when it came to what was next, I had no recipe in mind.

As I was sketching out ideas to streamline workflow and handle the usual chaos that comes with opening a restaurant, I remember calling up my nephew. He is a proper brainiac, founded a billion-dollar company, and writes code like it is poetry. We got to talking, and I vented about the mess behind the scenes in most kitchens.

I told him, "What if we build an app? One platform where I can input ingredient costing, recipe tracking, plating consistency, chef training, you name it, and keep everything in sync?"

At the time, it was just a brainstorming session; nothing more came of it. But flash forward a few years, and AI has already served up half that vision on a silver platter. With apps like ChatGPT and others, our wild ideas are coming to life at record speed. The tides have really turned and fast.

Pantry to Plate

From the inventory system to the recipe management board, AI is slicing through inefficiencies like a hot knife through butter. We can have a system with AI that logs everything in your pantry, tells you what is running low, and even suggests dishes based on what is already on hand.

Last year, while attending the World Chefs Expo, I had the opportunity



to attend the session "The Digital Revolution in the Kitchen" led by Belinda Moore. An expert in strategic planning, she explained where AI is headed.

Belinda pulled up a photo, not even of her own fridge, and ran it through a prompt she had prepped. Bam! The AI scanned it, processed everything, and suggested stir-fried veggie wraps with a tangy sauce. AI is not here to replace chefs; it is here to stop us from losing our minds mid-service.

Very recently, I used the Foodverse app during the semifinals of a young chefs' competition. First time using it, and it felt smoother than clarified butter. Super user-friendly. It is built like a judging sheet; each judge enters their scores, and before submitting, you can chat with the other judges to align and finalize the ratings. Plus, there is a QR code system for each entry. Judges scan, view full details, snap pics, and everything gets logged. Even better, each judge had to take their own photo of the dish, so we had real-time visuals, side-by-side with the original plating

idea. It was a great example of how tech can enhance judging.

So, where else can AI sharpen our tools? Let me break it down:

- ♦ **Ingredient Costing at Scale:** You punch in the purchase cost of ingredients, and AI auto-generates costing per dish, margin analysis, and even flags high-cost items. No more Excel madness or guesswork during supplier switch-ups.
- ♦ **Dynamic Plating Design:** You feed it the ingredients and portion size, and AI recommends plating styles based on harmony, contrast, and balance.
- ♦ **Smart Sourcing Platforms:** Want to know if your truffle oil is ethically sourced or if that fish is certified sustainable? AI can link your ingredients to real-time sustainability databases. That is accountability, served fresh.
- ♦ **Smart Fridges:** Modern smart fridges connected with AI can now monitor internal temperature, humidity, and item expiry. If something is about to go bad, it warns you.
- ♦ **Food Waste Management:** AI can predict usage trends, suggest recipe tweaks for maximizing leftover utilization, and calculate the optimal amount of stock to order. It can also provide you with tips on using the FIFO approach.
- ♦ **Carbon Footprint Analysis:** I recently read about chefs calculating the carbon footprint of every dish they make. AI logs food miles, energy use, and suggests low-impact swaps. That is the future. Not just cooking for taste but for the planet.

So whether you are running a bistro, judging competitions, or mentoring the next gen, strap in. The AI train is moving fast. Learn to ride it, or you will be left behind. ■

From Polaroid to Selfies

Elvis Taylor, multi-unit manager for New Shanghai restaurants, talks about the fading art of guest conversations in hospitality

I remember it vividly—the hum of the air cooler, the ticking clock, and the muffled voices of my dad and his friend drifting through the hallway.

They had just returned from a long shift, jackets wrinkled, faces tired but lit with camaraderie. I lay in bed, pretending to sleep, eavesdropping on their nightly ritual: reliving the day's chaos and guest interactions.

"We had this French couple tonight..." his friend would start, launching into a story about a language barrier, a misfired order, and a perfectly timed joke about escargot that turned the evening around. They were not just solving complaints; they were connecting. Storytellers, fixers, psychologists, and magicians, all without a POS screen.

Fast forward 20 years, and things are... different.

Today, when we approach a table, we often get cut off with a polite but rushed, 'Thank you, everything is fine!' I have triggered a pop-up ad they cannot wait to skip. Tap skip. Keep scrolling.

My father used to say, 'A good manager knows when to visit a table and when not to.' Back then, it was instinct, reading body language, and knowing your guests as if they were family. Today, it's dashboards, sentiment analysis, and TikTok reviews before the appetizer is even finished.

So, how do we still authentically engage guests in a hyper-digital world?

Bridging the Gap

1. Presence over WiFi

WiFi matters. Instagrammable corners matter. But what matters more is being

truly present. Millennials love a story, Gen Z loves a vibe, and Boomers love eye contact. Everyone loves to feel seen.

2. Timing is Key

Do not barge in with a robotic, 'How is everything?' Wait. Observe and approach when there is eye contact or a pause in conversation. Teach your team to read the room, not follow a timer.

3. Embrace the Improv

Most guest interactions today feel scripted. That is your opening. Bring back the charm. A genuine compliment or well-timed joke can leave a lasting impression.

4. Humour as a Superpower

My dad's crew knew how to disarm tension with humor. In an era of instant reviews and viral rants, empathy and laughter can still turn a situation around before it ever reaches the internet.

5. Train Intuition, Not Just SOPs

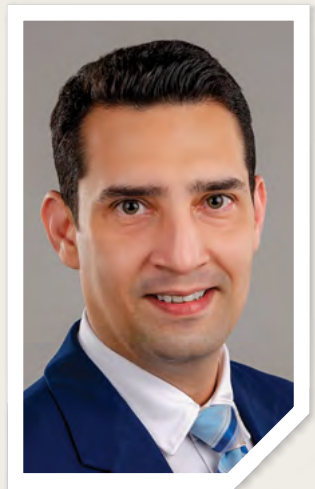
Speed and accuracy matter, but great hospitality is about intuition. Share stories, encourage reflection, and let the younger generation remix old-school warmth with today's tools.

Hospitality evolves, but human nature does not. Beneath all the tech, guests still crave warmth, laughter, and connection. It may not look like it did 20 years ago, but it matters just as much.

So whether you are managing Gen Z diners or scribbling names in an old reservation book, remember: it is not about checking a box but reading the room.

And if in doubt, tell them a story about a French couple and escargot.

They will remember that. ■



Teach your team to read the room, not follow a timer

Nurturing Young Talent and Building a Sustainable Gastronomic Future

A recent trip to Dubai found Chef **Carl Shi** marveling at the city's rise as a culinary powerhouse and the verve of young chefs competing at The Emirates International Salon Culinare

This week, I revisited Dubai after a two-decade absence; the experience was nothing short of transformative. My earlier stint at the Intercontinental Hotel Dubai from 2000 to 2005 provided the foundation of my culinary journey, and so returning this year to attend The Emirates International Salon Culinare competition held at the Sharjah Expo Centre felt like a full-circle moment. This prestigious event brought together aspiring chefs from individual restaurants and luxury hotels, vying for recognition in various competition classes. Reflecting on everything I witnessed during this trip, I feel compelled to share my insights with my fellow chefs, young talents, and those shaping the global hospitality industry.

The Evolution

Walking through Dubai's streets after a 20-year hiatus was striking. The transformation is palpable. This futuristic, technology-driven city has not only grown in architecture and commerce but has also established a niche for itself in the global gastronomic arena. In fact, the city was rated the second-best "Gastronomy Capital" of 2024 by the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (2025). This accolade stems from four key factors: an incredible **variety of cuisines**, **continuous innovation**, preservation of **cultural heritage**, and the presence of **world-class chefs**. The culinary evolution



As culinarians, we must acknowledge the environmental responsibility that accompanies our craft

here embodied the "Theory of Planned Behavior" (TPB), highlighting that intentions, attitudes, perceived control, and social norms collectively drive behavior. Dubai's intention to position itself as a food capital has become a reality through structured planning, investment in local and international talent, and encouragement of creativity.

What struck me most during this trip was the dedication and passion exhibited by young chefs in the competition. I witnessed the determination etched on their faces as they perfected each dish, carefully measured ingredients, adjusted temperatures, and presented masterpieces to the judging panel. Their ability to channel focus, perseverance, and attention to detail is nothing short of sacred to me, as it reminded me of my early days when I, too, stood in their shoes, eager to learn, grow, and push boundaries.

The Spirit

The atmosphere during the competition was electrifying. It was inspiring to see young chefs immerse themselves entirely in their craft, competing with integrity and enthusiasm. I could feel their energy radiating through the hall, an energy that was contagious and uplifting. I do not doubt that these young talents are destined for greatness.

Equally commendable are the judges, marshals, and the entire team of the Emirates Culinary Guild. Whose dedication was unmatched. Waking up at 5 am (as many judges came from overseas experiencing jet lag), catching the 6:15 am bus to the competition venue, and returning to their accommodations at 7 pm or even later—this rigorous routine highlights their commitment to nurture the next generation of culinary artists. The judges' constructive critiques and encouragement undoubtedly gave the contestants invaluable lessons to further refine their skills.

The Challenges

The competition was undoubtedly a celebration of talent and creativity, but as I observed the operations closely, it became evident that the hospitality industry still has areas for improvement. One critical issue I noticed relates to waste management. Competitors' plastic water bottles, food leftovers, glass jars, and metal cans were discarded

indiscriminately, with waste segregation not being given the priority it deserves. As culinarians, we must acknowledge the environmental responsibility that accompanies our craft. The lessons we teach young chefs today will shape the future of the industry.

I never see such a challenge as criticism but as an opportunity to grow and improve. How can we make small yet meaningful changes to ensure a sustainable future in practice? Imagine if young chefs embraced reusable containers or gastronomy containers for practical competitions or replaced single-use plastics with biodegradable materials (such as biodegradable cling film), bring the glass bottles and metal cans back to your hotel for recycling, etc. Every small action contributes to a larger impact over time, and as a chef in this field, it is our duty to lead by example.

The Nurturing

Young chefs, as you pave your way in this dynamic industry, the question to ask yourselves is, What does it take to become a world-class chef? The answer lies not only in mastering technical skills but also in developing competencies that set you apart. Sharpen your creativity, hone your adaptability, and, most importantly, embrace a lifelong learning mindset. Culinary arts, like any other form of art, require constant evolution. Stay curious and committed to exploring new techniques, ingredients, and global culinary trends.

Equally crucial is cultivating the ability to reflect on your work critically. Seek mentorship from seasoned professionals, strive for excellence without fear of failure, and understand that every experience—success or setback—is a stepping stone toward mastery. Your journey as an aspiring chef does not end with learning how to cook; it extends into understanding the essence of hospitality, forging meaningful connections with others, and leaving a positive impact through your work.



You are not only
the future of the
culinary world but
also its present

We should never underestimate the value of communication and teamwork. Working in high-pressure competition environments is not only about individual brilliance but also about collaboration. Learn to listen to others, share your ideas, and bring out the best in your peers. The essence of gastronomy lies in sharing joy with those you serve.

Final Reflections

As I boarded my flight back from Dubai,

I felt a renewed sense of purpose. I carry the lessons I learned during this trip: the importance of focus, perseverance, and the value of nurturing young talent. But even more significant is the reminder that, as an industry, we must rise to meet the challenges of sustainability head-on while continuing to celebrate creativity and innovation.

I sincerely thank Dubai and the Emirates Culinary Guild for hosting such an enriching event. To all young chefs, I leave you with this: be courageous, be curious, and never stop learning. You are not only the future of the culinary world but also its present. Strive for excellence every day, and together, let us redefine the future of food.

Let the spirit of innovation and sustainability guide you toward making your mark in this ever-evolving industry. ■

The Flying Slipper

Before there were calendars and planners, there was the flying slipper to teach you discipline. Chef **Tarek Mouries** gets nostalgic and explains why some lessons still land the hardest



Discipline is not about hearing it; it's about absorbing it, planning for it, and moving like clockwork even when the heat kicks up

A heartfelt congratulations to the Dubai World Trade Center Team for their incredible achievement at the Salon Culinaire 2025. Every moment was a lesson in discipline, humility, focus, and the spirit of continuous learning.

We got flying slippers-like lessons in the last few months while preparing for it....

If you know, you know, the flying slipper needs no introduction. Invented by mothers long before drones were a thing, these slippers never missed their target. But on a serious note, it was never about punishment; it was about discipline. The mums would throw their slippers quicker than you could think, and somehow, they always landed right when you needed a wake-up call.

I remember an incident from one of my tenures when, three weeks before a culinary competition, I sat my team down and gave them the heads-up. I told them that until the end of the month, we would be filled with culinary tasks. Royal weddings, five thousand banquet dishes, and a high-stakes competition running parallel. It is pressure-cooker-level chaos. So, we mapped it all: who is competing, who is covering the service, and who is holding the line.

I needed punctuality. I needed presence.

Then, just a day before everything was set to run, a chef strolls up, cool as a quenelle, intern in tow, and asks, "Can I switch my shift from morning to evening?" and no reason given.

To me, that was not a gentle request.

That was a flying slipper moment.

You know what I mean, not an actual slipper, not some dramatic scene. Just that feeling. That invisible jolt when you realize someone has lost the plot.

We are not baking cookies for a school fair; we are prepping for five thousand guests. Half the team is in competition mode, sixty-five entries to coordinate, and someone wants to reschedule.

You cannot suddenly reroute your responsibilities. It was about timing. Awareness. Commitment.

We chefs? We know the deadlines. We have seen the calendar. You tell a person in February, "Competition is in May." Come mid-May, and if someone is asking, "Where is my jacket?" My brother in brûlée, what have you been doing for three months?

I have had plenty of flying slippers in life to be what I am today. I lived in Switzerland for seven years. If you did not show up or bring the heat, you were automatically phased out. No one ever raised their voice. No one needed to. You did not belong, and you felt it. Like biting into an under-seasoned risotto. Something is off.

Same thing in Japan. You do not hustle; you do not shine. No slippers. Just silence. And honestly, that is scarier. There was a notion that I do not need to scream or chase you with a ladle. I am not your mother. I am not your therapist. I am your chef. You either deliver, or the brigade moves on without you.

This job demands initiative.

I can show you where the oven is. I cannot hold your hand while you decide whether to preheat it.

I mean, I cannot really ask you to write something one hundred times as punishment? "Yes, Chef, I will not burn the consommé." "Yes, Chef, mise en place is sacred."

Discipline is not about hearing it; it is about absorbing it, planning for it, and moving like clockwork even when the heat kicks up.

Have you ever noticed that before the slipper flies, there are always red flags? Warnings. Gut feelings. The look. The 'do not do it' moment. We all get those signs in life or in the kitchen, but some of us have to wait for the actual slipper to register.

Funny how those hits stay with us, though. You remember the slipper that landed. You do not remember the email, the memo, or the meeting, but you remember the moment that metaphorical (or literal) slipper made contact.

Let me share one last flying slipper story. Years ago, during a tasting, I asked a young chef, "If you were out to dinner with your wife, your mother, and family, and this hot mezza hit the table, would you come back to this restaurant?" At the time, the question did not land well; too personal and too pointed. But for me, it was always about one thing: cook food your family would be proud to eat. That is how you cook with heart.

Years later, I heard that same line, my line, used by someone else while mentoring young chefs. It had become a mini gospel, a common trope passed down. And for me, that was a slipper moment of another kind. A full-circle lesson.

Real discipline is not about barked orders or pointed fingers. It is about setting the bar high enough that others want to



Before there were calendars and planners, there was the flying slipper to teach you discipline

meet it, even if it takes years. It is about knowing that what you teach today might not click until much later. But when it does, it sticks. It travels. It transforms.

Honestly, how many flying slippers do we need before we learn the lesson?

You have had time, training, and every tool in your hand. What you might be short on is urgency. Initiative. Self-start. Discipline. Because, at the end of the day, it is not about the slipper. It is about what it taught you.

Culinary life is not just about knife skills or fancy foams. It is about grit. Slippers may fly. Tempers may boil. But the kitchen is where transformation happens. So, if you have ever been on the receiving end of a flying slipper, count yourself lucky. That means someone cared enough to expect more from you.

So get up. Show up. And please, do not ask to switch shifts in the middle of service without genuine reason. We all rely on each other out there. ■

Sustainability on the Menu

Dr. **Taghreed Aljaffal**, a hospitality educator, researcher, warrior mama, and chef at heart, breaks down the foundations of kitchen sustainability -from the prep station to the bin. Because sustainability is not only about the food we serve; it is also about how we serve it

Somewhere between the steam of simmering stock, the sizzling sounds of the food, and the chaos of kitchen banter, a quiet revolution is bubbling. I am talking about sustainability —practical, bite-sized actions that chefs can integrate into their daily kitchen operations. Nothing complicated, nothing out of reach; just good intentions, common sense, and great practice.

Last month, I presented the idea of incorporating sustainability into our kitchen operations and menu offerings, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. This response served as a reminder of the critical mission that drives our culinary community: to drive change that is both delicious and feasible. By embracing sustainability, we can create impactful shifts in our industry while maintaining the enjoyment of food.

Scrap Revolution: Transforming Kitchen Scraps and Leftovers into Culinary Gold

Let us begin with the clear villain in our sustainability story: waste. I do not mean just the large, dramatic kind; I am talking about everyday scraps, such as peels, stems, fish bones and stale bread ends. Those broccoli stalks you trim and throw away? Dice them up and add them to a stir-fry for a delicious twist. Herb stems? Use them to infuse oils or blend them into vibrant green sauces. Bread ends? Transform them into crunchy croutons or golden breadcrumbs, giving new life to what would otherwise



Sustainability is not only about the food we serve; it is also about how we serve it

be discarded. In my kitchen (and classroom), we refer to this approach as the Scrap Revolution. Try this practical tip: conduct a week-long food waste audit. Weigh your trash, label what you throw away, and reflect on why. Chefs

use these numbers not just to cut costs but also to help the planet!

Engage your team with a weekly 'Leftover Mystery Box' challenge, where they transform yesterday's scraps into new dishes. This approach sparks creativity and promotes sustainability, as every gram, leaf, and drop is valued. For instance, using herb stems for pickling could lead to innovative menu items, such as carrot top pesto or watermelon rind chutney, potentially becoming the next big trend.

One of my favorite practices, whether in a cozy home kitchen or a bustling restaurant- is fostering a culture that perceives food as the blessing it truly is. For that, we need to promote the Reinvention Ritual, in which we look at what is leftover —everything from sauces, cooked plain rice, brisket, or grilled veggies —and create a reinvention menu. It fosters respect for ingredients and breeds creativity. Or how about staging a zero-waste cooking demo to teach your team and followers how to transform scraps into surprising snacks? Believe me, this will spark enormous interest and attract countless views!

Promoting these ideas will inspire your followers and many mothers to follow suit by contributing to your sustainability efforts and lending their support. You will promote a culture that views leftovers not as discards but as components of opportunity. It builds both culinary confidence and kitchen morale.

Celebrating Local (Surprisingly Budget-Friendly)

Establishing relationships with your local farmers, fisheries, and suppliers is a wise and strategic decision. Seasonal produce shines with superior freshness, delightful taste, and, quite often, a lower price tag. So, always choose local and invite them to your kitchen. Knowing your tomato's backstory makes your sauce richer and fills your dish with an aroma your guests will love. And here is something else: guests care. A menu note like 'our fresh, vibrant carrots from Fatima's Farm, just 25 km away,' adds warm emotional value. You are not just serving food; you are telling a story and celebrating legacy.

Ready to dive even deeper? Consider hosting a seasonal tasting night to spotlight local producers, partnering with nearby growers for a staff pop-up in your dining room, or even cultivating a small windowsill herb garden for instant fresh garnishes. You could launch a weekly 'Farm-to-Table Special' that features one standout local ingredient in an appetizer, main, or dessert and swap single-use plastics for reusable (maybe clay) locally made authentic jars and containers. By weaving these practical steps into your kitchen routine, sustainability becomes a celebration, rich with delicious bites and cozy aromas, never a lecture.

Research shows local sourcing enhances customer dining experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty. That keeps tables booked.

Green Culture

Implementing effective waste management practices requires more than just having top-quality waste bins, clear signage, and an advanced compost program. It is crucial to foster a culture of sustainability among your team. Make sustainability a collective goal rather than an individual responsibility. Organizing monthly kitchen huddles can facilitate discussions around sustainability efforts and help keep everyone engaged. Acknowledge and

celebrate successes in waste reduction to motivate the team. Additionally, encourage contributions from all team members, including the youngest commis, to suggest new eco-friendly habits. This collaborative approach is essential for achieving lasting sustainability in your operations. Remember, culture trumps policy, always! The kitchen is a mirror: what we value gets reflected in the taste of our food. If we value the earth, we'll show how we shop, prepare, chop, clean, store, and serve. Create rituals around sustainability: Meatless Mondays, Zero Waste Fridays, or Ingredient of the Month challenges. These spark joy and commitment.

So, keep the fire lit and be a lifelong learner. Staying updated on sustainable practices, emerging research, and evolving trends keeps us relevant and responsible.

Participating in seminars and subscribing to sustainability journals can be incredibly rewarding. It is essential to share our successes and the challenges we face along the way. By doing this, we can learn and grow together as a community. Additionally, reading articles like this one can provide valuable insights. Remember,

sustainability is not about being perfect but about having the courage to take that first step. Some days, you will feel empowered to make the right choices, while others, you might forget and toss the parsley stems. And that is completely okay. We are all on this journey together, learning from each experience. When your kitchen becomes a place of learning, growth follows. And from growth comes change.

In my lectures, I integrate rigorous academic analysis with practical experience from culinary environments, fostering a dynamic learning atmosphere that bridges theoretical concepts with real-world applications. My students leave not just knowing the 'why' but also the 'how.'

What matters is consistency, intention, and the collective movement toward something better. And let me tell you, when chefs lead the way, others follow. Diners learn. Suppliers adapt. The industry shifts.

So cook with heart. Waste less. And remember: sustainability does not need to be a revolution. It can be a quiet, beautiful habit integrated like a soft herb into a simmering sauce. ■



**ARLA
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OF THE
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2025**

Stillness in Sugar

Mulyatna Sardiono, Executive Pastry Chef at Arada Hospitality & Entertainment, breaks down the essentials of culinary experimentation, explains what it means to stay relevant as a pastry chef in the tech era, and shares a special recipe he has prepared for the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery competition



I wanted to be in the hot kitchen... but thankfully, my mentors opened my eyes to the artistry and awakened a hidden passion for pastry

Stars gift some talents, yet it is the bearer who creates meaning from the gift. Pastry maketh, not Mulyatna Sardiono; nay, he maketh it an art uniquely his own.

When Chef Mulyatna reluctantly enrolled in pastry at the Bandung Tourism Institute (well-known as ENHAI) after missing out on a hot kitchen seat, he had no idea it would lead to a globe-spanning career. "I wanted to be in the hot kitchen," he recalls, "but due to limited seats, I had to choose between waiting a year or learning pastry. Thankfully, my mentors opened my eyes to the artistry and awakened a hidden passion for pastry."

What he once sought to distance himself from is now his greatest source of joy. At Arada Hospitality & Entertainment, Chef Mulyatna is gearing up for the pre-opening of a sprawling 3,000 sqm CPK – Central Production Kitchen. "This new hub will supply pastries and food to caterers in all areas of Sharjah, government, and VVIP events. We will have different sections, including gluten-free kitchens and vegan kitchens. We are even creating a menu for all clients that incorporates sustainability concepts, utilizing local farms through Manbat.

His day kicks off at 9 in the morning, when he greets his team and assesses

the atmosphere. By 10, he is briefing, divvying up tasks, and prepping for the weeks ahead. Beyond operations, his curiosity for unusual food pairings remains undimmed, primarily for the upcoming Emirati-inspired Restaurant.

"I still remember my arrival in Abu Dhabi to join Erth Hotel, where I first tasted Aseeda Bobbar, a traditional Emirati dessert made from pumpkin, wheat flour, ghee, honey, and spices such as cardamom, saffron, and rose water. The term "Aseeda" means sweet, while "Bobbar" refers to pumpkin. This spiced pumpkin pudding is a popular dessert in the UAE. Based on this unique flavor and textures, through trial and error, I refined the flavors and created them into cake, and eventually, people loved the new dessert. It was a great experience to connect with the history and culture."

It is difficult to distill over 18 years of an expansive career. After culinary school, Chef Mulyatna landed a coveted role at the pre-opening of Kempinski Hotel MoE in Dubai; out of 15 applicants from his batch, he was the only one selected. Fast-track through roles at multiple properties, he eventually fulfilled his promise of becoming executive pastry chef in 2011.

In 2019, he joined Erth Abu Dhabi. "Working there was about respecting

heritage," he says, describing cultural cues, from meal timings to breakfast rituals, which shaped their R&D process. "An important lesson learned there was that food must not just look good; it must feel right. Don't copy. Create what you like," he shares the key takeaway from the tenure.

Those lessons he now carries into his current workplace. "A series of restaurants we have been inspired by the Silk Road, a nexus of trade, exchange, and culinary storytelling. And also, the upcoming Emirati-Inspired Restaurant will be in the pipeline. Now, we bring that history and heritage to the table."

Navigating workplace dynamics demands talent and strong management support. It is common to hear requests piling up. The reality implies a scenario where concepts may have a limited window of relevance, and decision-makers can unintentionally delay new proposals.

To counteract this, Chef Mulyatna stresses the importance of proactivity. "I always prepare a yearly calendar of what I want to do, an action plan for short and long periods. Even before they ask, I have it and present it wherever they ask."

There is a larger subtext to this propose-first strategy. By presenting plans upfront, he aims to preempt any concerns the higher-ups might have.

It is rare to find someone who preserves the soul of an ingredient while making it visually compelling. "Open your eyes, see Instagram, read the book, and also talk with the people, either junior or senior," Chef Mulyatna says in his approach. "I love attending all the courses to share the knowledge and build the connection. I went to Turkey to see how flour is produced to make bread from scratch. I visited La Rose Noir in the Philippines to observe their large-scale production process, from mixing and molding to baking. It was amazing to see the consistent high quality. It is amazing



Even before they ask, I present it. A yearly calendar, an action plan—short and long. Always be ready

to see the consistency of high-quality products being produced, especially as they are famous for their macaroons, tart shells, and chocolate shells."

"Ingredients, equipment, and talent are key," he says. His mantra, "Keep testing, keep trying," may sound like a platitude, but it underpins his entire R&D approach. He makes the dish, his team tests it, they tweak it together, and only then does it go to management.

On the horns of a dilemma between staying ambitious and having zen-like calmness in leading the team, Chef Mulyatna has found a balance in structure. "First, discipline. Then, you need to build a system," he explains his philosophy, a kind of stillness in sugar. "Clear

communication and regular updates will keep the entire team aligned."

On the upside, he explains when you show something right, people will follow you. "And stay honest in commitments. Say only what you can deliver. Be loyal to work and respect others. If your team is doing well, say thank you, it goes a long way as recognition."

Threading the perilous track of trends, Chef Mulyatna circles back to his axiom of never squandering the gift of foundation. "First and foremost, the knowledge of foundation you get from pastry and other kitchen departments defines the idea curve because pastry overlaps with all aspects of the kitchen. Second, stay up-to-date and experiment with new without losing sight of the classics. And last, understand what guests need," he notes.

Health-conscious trends are emerging as the headline act of today's culinary shifts, with AI and personalized nutrition taking center stage. "We even compare fat and nutrition across hundreds of portions, and we check every guest's precise dietary needs, from allergies to low-sugar requests," he shares about the onerous task.

Making healthy dishes has become a Goldilocks tale, where sugar, gluten, and calories must be right. Chef Mulyatna explains that doing multiple food trials with different ingredients can help find the right combinations that avoid the complexity of allergens while still being delicious. "Once a satisfactory recipe is established, documenting every detail, capturing high-quality visuals through pictures and videos, and understanding the costs associated with each creation is important. This helps us know which items we will need when we present them again."

With food tech innovations no longer being a side dish, Chef Mulyatna insists that aspiring chefs keep scanning the new ingredients that could pop on the menus. "I have seen dairy-free alternatives and algae having the potential to adapt to our menus. Already, chefs are working to use it in desserts, conducting food trials because it can be the future of food."

Technology plays its part with machines that slice, mold, and benefit businesses. "There are also mold machines that are overriding the market. Even a small piece of equipment like this can be utilized to upgrade our chocolate molding and streamlining preparations."

For the Arla Pro Pastry Mastery competition, he has made a modern twist on cheesecake. "When I started pairing and experimenting, one memorable success was a mango cheesecake with coriander, so I am excited to bring it to the competition. What I like about their products is the consistency; the cream cheese is smooth, versatile, and reliable." His creation leans on originality, simplicity, and a solid foundation.

Oversimplification, he believes, can strip a dish of soul, so he aims for clarity without compromise. The presentation, he says, will follow naturally.

In a 2020 interview, Chef Mulyatna described his dream of creating a



Don't copy. Create what you like

chocolate room with an open kitchen where guests could watch desserts from bean to plate. "Some elements of this plan have aligned perfectly with my current role. We plan to build kitchens, install large windows, and create a beautiful space with a capacity for hundreds of guests, where they can observe the food preparation, specialty in viennoiserie, and coffee. "So, the dream is now coming better, actually," he adds.

On his share of memorable experiences, he takes us back to his training days when preparing Tiramisu. "When you boil sugar and water, you need to pay attention." In a rush to mix other ingredients, he left the pot unattended and bore the brunt of that slip within moments. "Smoke filled the restaurant. Everyone panicked. Even the security guard came running into the kitchen. The sugar had scorched."

But the lesson cut through it all. "Whatever you do, you need to focus. Your mind, hands, and eyes must collate together. Never leave something mid-task, or you might end up with a disaster like that."

Looking back, he laughs at the mindset of his early days. "When I started, I was

young and eager. Everyone wants to prove they belong. A constant race for validation." He describes the trepidation of not being seen. "Even if someone borrowed your knife, it wasn't about the knife. It was about ego. About trying to show who is the best."

But time, he says, humbles you. Maturity, he believes, comes when you no longer feel the need to prove everything and focus on doing tasks well. In what feels like a not-so-veiled nod to the values he now holds close, he advises the young chefs, "Keep doing what you love, push yourself over the limit, and the most important thing is to spread love to everyone by sharing your knowledge and experiences."

In moments of panic, remaining composed helps you sense the undercurrents beneath the surface. When leaders let their nerves get the best of them, their teams can quickly lose footing. "Once we identify the pressing issues and organize our priorities accordingly, everything else falls into place."

On the family front, Chef Mulyatna has four lovely children, each with a different personality, always keeping him full of life. "My wife used to be a pastry chef, and she gives me amazing support and is a great partner," he states, adding how he runs his recipe ideas by her before putting them into action. "Without my family, I am nothing; my family is my inspiration."

One of the holy grails for any chef is cracking the code of simplicity, making dishes that amaze with their subtlety and innovation. It takes an indefatigable spirit to bring that vision to life every day, and Chef Mulyatna, ever au fait with his art, seems to grow more attuned to it with each passing plate. How does he do this? He answers the ubiquitous question with his passion, "Keep trying. It does not matter if someone holds a high position or is considered the best in the world. Never stop creating or learning; this mindset will keep your knowledge fresh and relevant." ■



Cilantro Coconut Mango Cheesecake

Cilantro Mango Cheesecake

Arla Cream Cheese	120g
Icing Sugar	56g
Gelatin	7g
Mango Puree	37g
Arla Whipping Cream	275g
Fresh Cilantro Leaves	1.2g

Method

- ◆ Soak gelatine and set it aside.
- ◆ Clean cilantro/coriander leaves and chop them finely.
- ◆ Beat the Arla until it forms soft peaks, then set it aside.
- ◆ In a separate bowl, beat the Arla cream cheese with sugar and mango puree until creamy. Add the chopped cilantro and the soaked gelatine to this mixture.
- ◆ Gently fold in the whipped cream until everything is well combined.
- ◆ Pour the mixture into a mold and place it in the freezer.

Coconut Sago

Sago Pearls	40g
Coconut Cream Kara	140g
Sugar	25g
Vanilla Pod	0.5g

Method

- ◆ Soak the sago in cold water.

- ◆ Bring to boil the water and add sago. Cook until transparent.
- ◆ In a separate saucepan, bring the coconut cream, sugar, and vanilla to a boil.
- ◆ Pour into the sago, mix well, keep aside.

Raspberry Gel

Raspberry puree	100g
Sugar	15g
Agar - Agar	2g
Neutral Glaze	10g

Method

- ◆ Bring all together to boil. Pour in the tray and keep inside the chiller till set.
- ◆ Add neutral glaze and blend. Pour in a squeeze bottle and keep it aside.

Mango Veil

Mango Puree	100g
Sugar	15g
Agar - Agar	1g
Water	20ml

Method

- ◆ Bring all ingredients to boil. Pour in the tray and keep it from freezing.

Almond Tuile

Almond Powder	10g
Flour	5g
Icing Sugar	10g
Egg White	8g
Melted Butter	4g

Method

- ◆ Mix all ingredients and keep aside.
- ◆ Spread in the mold and bake at 160 for 5 minutes.
- ◆ Remove from the oven and keep aside.

Mango Caviar

Mango Puree	170g
Water	10g
Agar - Agar	2g
Sugar	10g
Oil for Dipping	500g

Method

- ◆ Chilled the oil in the chiller for 4 hours.
- ◆ Bring all ingredients to a boil.
- ◆ Pour into a piping bag and cut a small hole. Push out drips of the hot mixtures into the cold oil. Rest for 20 minutes before straining in the chiller.

Assembly

- ◆ Fresh Mango Cubes.

Plating

- ◆ Cut around the mango veil and place it in the center of the plates.
- ◆ Put the cheesecake on top of it. Followed by fresh mango cube and coconut sago.
- ◆ Cover with almond tuiles.
- ◆ Finishing with mango caviar and raspberry gel.

June-July 2025 **Gulf Gourmet**



Rise Wise like Thirumalai

Chef **Thirumalai Murugan** knows how to keep food costs in check, handle kitchen chaos, and think green while bringing joy to the guests. Shreya Asopa chats with the Cluster Executive Chef to learn how he pulls it off. Turns out, his story goes beyond the stove

"If you want to improve yourself, make it a goal to learn at least one new skill daily. This way, a year down the line, you will end up knowing 365 things more than before," advises Chef Thirumalai Murugan, the Cluster Executive Chef at Movenpick Hotel JLT and Riva Beach Club.

With nearly three decades of experience in the hospitality industry, his career is as inspiring as the dishes he creates. The story goes that every chef has a tipping point and moments that define their passion, and for Chef Thirumalai, it was no different.

Born in Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India, Chef Thirumalai would assist his cousin, who was already involved in the restaurant business. He would work on the presentation, mise en place to chisel his foundational skills to perfection. Being part of the launch of three restaurants gave him a big picture. "It was a great way of experiential learning and knowing more about culture, and food."

After completing his diploma in catering and hotel management from the Oxford College of Education, he joined Ambassador Pallava Hotel in Chennai as a commis de cuisine. This formative period set the foundation for his growth.

The move to Dubai came as part of his strategic career advancement. At Emirates Tower Hotel, he spent two years with the pre-opening team where he worked on his foundational skills, before joining the Hilton brand. In the



If you want to improve yourself, make it a goal to learn at least one new skill daily

ensuing 17-year relationship with the brand, a platform to develop inaccessible skills, a sleight of hand that balanced flavors and textures.

His ironclad rectitude was tested during some of the most challenging periods of his career. This included the shiller moments of 2003 when he was working at a Hilton property in Kuwait amid the Gulf War.

"It may sound like a great story to tell now, but it was a tough situation," he pauses, remembering the geopolitical situation that created a choppy market.

"The kitchen was staffed with around 41 chefs. As war broke out, a lot of people started to worry about their safety and security. On days when missiles flew overhead, we would rush to the basement for safety and then resume cooking once it was safe as per the protocols. Those who stayed understood their responsibility to feed those in need and kept the operation running with tight security protocols."

These episodes coalesced into a lesson of calm in chaos. "When you see the

worst, there is nothing left to fear. In such situations, you shall only think clearly, and move forward."

In his current role as Cluster Executive Chef, he leads with collaboration and nurturing talent. He strongly believes that to have a great team, members need to communicate with integrity, trust, and a shared vision. "I have an excellent team. Whatever we achieve as leaders is because of our team's hard work." His approach is cut from the same cloth as many legendary chefs who believe a great chef is backed by an even greater team.

The operation he oversees involves serving around two thousand guests a day. The pressure is constant and a high-stakes environment where one wrong move can ripple through the entire operation. "Keeping everyone happy and smiling is a big task, and of course, it cannot be done alone. For that reason, the team needs to develop effectively. In fact, we also learn from each other. I may not know everything; I learn from them as well."

Tackling tasks with a balance between high-octane efforts and placid courage requires the support of family and mentors. "We are lost if we do not have a teacher. Bosses or coworkers, everyone contributes to our understanding of the world."

He credits much of who he is today to the lessons learned from talented chefs. "Family support is important. A lot

of sacrifices were made by my family. Once, my three-year-old daughter was battling a fever while I was in the middle of a competition, and my wife was there, tending to her needs. There was also the time when my wife had to quit her job when we decided to move," he says, adding that his family has always understood the pressures.

Despite being a multiple award-winning chef, recognized as the Executive Chef of the Year at the prestigious Hotelier Middle East Awards, and recently won the 2024 Middle East Hospitality Culinary Champion of the Year, the win has not given him any bragging bravado.

His culinary philosophy guides him. "I always focus on laying a solid foundation before attempting to build something greater. Keep it simple and do whatever you are doing with one hundred percent effort," he says.

Mining the wellspring of his competition experiences, he reveals. "Do a lot of research, spend time reading and discussing ideas with chefs and supervisors. Participate in competitions, not for recognition or to wear that medal around your neck, but for testing your knowledge." He further remarks that putting full effort into preparing for a culinary competition can teach as much as working in a kitchen for three to six months. These simple strategies, he feels, could be the golden key to achieving the zenith of competition.

Sustainability is a responsibility that falls on everyone's shoulders. "We have to act now. As we move forward, we face consequences of only spoiling the planet, and it is important to minimize that damage," says Chef Thirumalai.

Over two decades ago, the concept of sustainability was not as integrated into business practices as it is today. Fast forward to the present, the desert has transformed. Hydroponic setups are gaining traction like never before.



Whatever we achieve as leaders is because of our team's hard work

"Sustainability is a coordinated effort. Through the corporate social responsibility of hotel chains, government initiatives, and individual efforts, we can integrate sustainability. Recently, I visited a farm and witnessed local producers. There, I saw blueberries, strawberries, cucumbers, and tomatoes thriving. These initiatives and tech simplify access to fresh produce and inspire us to support local farms using their products across our menus."

The question of balancing guest demands with service efficiency looms large. He points to timing, a small detail, that holds everything together.

"If you are preparing for big numbers, it is wise to plan ahead, to have ingredients prepped before you take orders. If preparations are left until after items have run out, it creates unnecessary stress for both guests and staff and also undermines the quality of service."

Number two, he explains, not every day is the same. Trends change, and so do customers. Tech and globalization are the old chestnuts that come and go in headlines and debates, but he does not drone on about trends. Instead, he keeps a sharp peripheral vision. "In this ever-changing environment, it is more important to control the program production."

Contrary to traditional kitchen culture, Chef Thirumalai advocates for front-of-house engagement by chefs. He reckons the measure of hospitality lies also in how the kitchen team interacts

with guests. "I do not consider myself a back-of-house person, where we are just in the kitchen and not interacting with the guests. I speak to guests directly, understand what they like, and take their feedback."

Hospitality is a melange of connection, where if it is not the flavor, it is the texture; if not the aroma, then the story is shared between guest and chef. Chef Thirumalai stands by this belief.

"Dialogue is even more important in large-scale settings. Say, at a breakfast buffet for 500 people, not everyone's expectations will be met. Someone might be looking for something that is not there, and unless we speak with them, we will never know."

Another important point he raises is that feedback leads to meaningful improvements, helping to prevent guest dissatisfaction. By breaking down complex issues into manageable bites, the team can address them, even in grey areas where the right course of action is not immediately obvious.

Also worth noting, he says, is how his team has started leveraging social media to bring the kitchen into the spotlight. He chuckled that the kitchen team is now in friendly competition with other departments for social media mentions. "They interact with guests, presenting the dish beautifully, and introducing themselves. When guests see the person behind the plate, they feel a connection. The guests even name the chefs in their feedback."

He believes this kind of visibility is a strong way to champion a cause that has long been sidelined in the industry.

However, this cultural shift was not easy for his team. In the beginning, some team members were hesitant. "Why should I speak to the guest? I can cook," they would say during training. Achieving this level of building connection took time and patience," he explains.



When guests see the person behind the plate, they feel a connection

All these initiatives, he says, succeed when paired with informed decision-making. He explains that attending meetings like the Emirates Culinary Guild's monthly sessions helps him update on market trends and product options. "We see different suppliers, and demos which help us choose the best quality without compromising affordability. Many producers offer similar quality products, so with these sessions, we can source at better prices from different suppliers."

But it is not just about cutting costs. "I do not see it as just saving money," he stresses. "If switching to another product can improve quality, then why not invest thoughtfully? Improving quality bit by bit will pay off in the long run."

Another important aspect of cost efficiency, he notes, is testing the yield of each recipe with every product. "I am not sure how many chefs actually do yield testing," he admits. "Without proper yield calculations, we miss a key component. Clearly document it because it directly affects the final selling price and the product's market value."

The last five years at his current workplace have been a steep learning curve. Enamored with the challenges of the hospitality industry during the COVID crisis, he led his team through managing bio bubble operations for IPL cricket teams to opening multiple restaurants, including launching a new property on a picturesque farm. Balancing his existing role with these new demands, his time at Accor has been full of pivotal learning moments.



"We learned lessons on how to handle the situation, how to keep your team running, and how to stay motivated. When challenges are absent, you drop, you feel bored, and you quit. I always look for a positive challenge to keep motivated and moving forward."

He is poised to begin a fresh chapter of elevating the culinary journey at the Voco Bonnington JLT venue. "Last year, I worked on the launch of Rohini by Little Miss India restaurant which was a great experience in developing a concept from scratch. The

priority now is how we take the culinary journey to the next level. It is going to be challenging but challenges are what keep us alive," he says with conviction.

Einstein believed wisdom is gained not in classrooms but through effort over time. This powerful message hits with clarity throughout Chef Thirumalai's career, as hard-earned lessons have made him into a wiser and stronger version of himself. It is no surprise, his mantle as a champion of culinary wisdom is one no one can take away. ■

June-July 2025 **Gulf Gourmet**

The Guild Meet

The May guild meeting guild meeting was held at the Radisson Blu Yas Island in Abu Dhabi. Many thanks to Chef **Chamil Sanjeewa** for hosting the event, which attracted a large audience of chefs and corporate members alike.





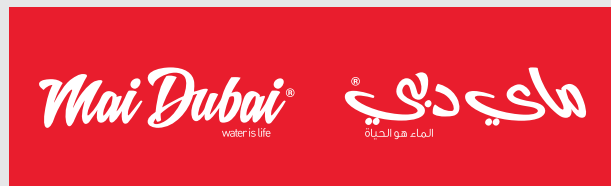
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Culture Eats Strategy

Why Psychological Safety Should Be a Staple in Every Kitchen

By **The Burnt Chef Project**

Behind every exceptional service is a team operating under immense pressure, moving quickly, thinking fast, and adapting in the moment. Kitchens demand excellence, but for too long, they have also demanded silence.

Many of us were trained in environments where fear and intimidation were the norm. Shouting, blame, and ridicule were brushed off as “just part of the job.” But when people are afraid to speak up, ask for help, or admit mistakes, it does not build better chefs it builds burned-out ones.

At The Burnt Chef Project, we are working to change that. We believe that the health of any hospitality team is rooted not only in skill or output but also in psychological safety. It is the feeling that you can be yourself at work without fear of humiliation, punishment, or rejection.

What is psychological safety?

Coined by researcher Amy Edmondson, psychological safety is the belief that your team is a safe space for interpersonal risk-taking. In hospitality, that could mean asking a question mid-service, raising a concern, or admitting when you are struggling. It sounds easy but in high-pressure kitchens, it is often missing.

When psychological safety is low, people stay quiet. Mistakes get hidden, innovation stalls, and stress builds up in silence. Over time, this erodes confidence and increases the risk of burnout.

When psychological safety is high, teams thrive. People support each other, work collaboratively, and have the confidence to grow because they know their voice is valued.

Creating safer spaces without lowering standards.

Fostering psychological safety does not mean compromising on quality or

losing discipline. It means leading with empathy, communicating with respect, and showing that it is okay to be human.

Chefs are tough. We can handle pressure, but nobody thrives in an environment where they are constantly on edge. Leaders play a key role here. Ask yourself: Does your team feel they can speak openly? Do you role model healthy behavior? A quick check-in, a calm correction instead of a sharp word, or simply thanking someone for their honesty can go a long way.

What can you do today?

- ♦ **Start small.** Encourage feedback and ideas from every level of the team. Make space for people to speak and listen without judgment.
- ♦ **Lead by example.** Share when you're having a tough day or made a mistake. It shows that it is safe for others to do the same.
- ♦ **Educate yourself and your team.** Training in mental health awareness, stress management, and communication is a powerful way to improve the culture.
- ♦ **Use the tools available.** The Burnt Chef Project's free support services, online training app, and ambassador programme are designed to help hospitality teams build safer, stronger environments.

In a kitchen where people feel psychologically safe, performance does not suffer; it soars. More importantly, people stay in the industry they love with their passion intact and their well-being protected. ■

Let us build kitchens where it is not just the food that is world-class but the culture too. For more information on The Burnt Chef Project and how you can get involved, visit www.theburntchefproject.com.



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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.

The WCC is in collaboration with the Emirates Culinary Guild, which is a member of the World Association of Chef's Societies

newmembers



Ranin Bakhitt, Marketing Manager, and Tehzib Rahman, Head of Sales, AI Chef, received the membership certificate from Chef Harald Oberender, VP of Corporate ECG, and Alan Orreal, President of the ECG.

AI Chef

Filling the Gap Between High Standards and Modern Kitchen Requirements

The necessity for high-quality, trusted, and ready to cook meat has become obvious in the fast-paced UAE culinary sector of today, as home cooks balance daily demands and professional kitchens operate on strict schedules. That's where AI Chef comes in.

Prior to AI Chef, choices were often a compromise. Raw meat required time and effort to prepare, while processed options lacked the freshness and flavor that professionals and families expect. AI Chef was created to solve



this issue by providing premium meat products that are time-saving without compromising quality.

From vacuum-sealed raw cut parts to marinated slices, AI Chef offers a large selection of chicken, beef, and lamb that are made with consistency, speed, and

safety in mind. Freshness, taste, and tenderness are the only ingredients in each pack; all products are manufactured in hygienic, licensed facilities that follow strict Halal standards and don't contain artificial additives.

Whether a parent prepares dinner after a hard day or a chef handles the lunch rush, AI Chef guarantees kitchen-ready solutions that add confidence and comfort to every cooking situation.

AI Chef is more than just a meat supplier; AI Chef is shaping a smarter, more efficient way to source meat in the UAE—bridging the gap between convenience and quality at every level. ■

Culinary Trends Express

Simon Martin, Executive Chef at Kerry Taste & Nutrition (Food Service), has been sharing trends for our region since 2016

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

They're not complicated, but just a few simple ingredients will rock your culinary planet

Looking back over the past 20 articles, there is one thing that keeps appearing in many guises!! Yes, amplified heat; this has gone beyond a noticeable culinary trend and is now becoming a staple of our region. The fact is that it is a nuanced heat versus that overwhelming spiciness we love. This encapsulates **ZESTY SPICE**, bringing together citrus notes with spice, a fusion of goodness; **SWICEY** is a mix of combinations of named chilis combined with sweet elements such as honey or maple syrup. Finally, **COMPLEX SPICES** such as crunchy chili oils, Harissa, Zhoug, and Shatta.

However, let us not forget heat is not only from capsicum chillies but can be driven by peppercorns, cumin, Sichuan pepper, nasturtium flowers, Italian rocket leaves, horseradish, and even ginger.... In fact, the list is endless. My favourite is watercress, with its hot, peppery notes combined with creamed horseradish in a sourdough beef sandwich. Think about what is hot that you like and how it fits into the trends?

Cheese Cheese Cheese...what more can I say, whether it's ewes, goat, buffalo, camel, dairy cow. There is a Siberian cheese called Pule from donkey milk... Milbenkase from Germany contains live mites and Casu Marzu from Sardinia



is served with maggots..... Wow! But it is not these cheeses that are on trend here, it's the salty feta's, Akkawi, Shanklish and Jibneh Arabieh that are winning in the trends here. Not on their own but served with hot honey or fruit jams. Local cheeses are really becoming in vogue, served from casual dining to Michelin-bibbed eateries. Used in savoury cheesecakes and even whipped to add saltiness to top off mocktails. There are officially over 2,000 cheese types in the world, giving different textures, flavors, and aromas. European cheeses are hot on the heels of local cheeses, bringing provenance from generations of cheesemakers to the Middle East. Personally, I love lactose-free Cheddar and strawberry jam on salty sky crackers.....MMMMMM. Go on, give it a try. It might surprise you.

Finally, the craze in our region for "Minjaro Diets," which are actually GLP-1 receptor agonists, makes people feel fuller and eat less, resulting in weight loss. However, to avoid muscle wastage, users need high-protein foods, and the market is seeing GLP-1 pizzas branded

for retail alongside snacks and drinks. This is how outside influences can affect food trends; fashion and popular music also have their effects, as they all create a sense of lifestyle and aspiration. This began in 1937 with Elsa Schiaparelli's famous Lobster dress...Move over, Lady Gaga. After all, Marie-Antoine Carême is the famous celebrity chef from the 1800s credited with our current chef's whites.... Now, even Disney has made his story as a chef into a mini-series....TIME TO GET THE POPCORN OUT, SIT ON THE SOFA AND WATCH A FEW EPISODES....

This month, I've been reflecting on past and new trends, exploring tastes like white chocolate and curry powder lollies, as well as scallops on semi-sweet vanilla mascarpone. I even tried the new trend of eating my desserts first and finishing my meal with the starters as pioneered by Heston Blumenthal. A unique way to eat, and sensually very different. **HOWEVER**, my problem is this way: I never move off the first course due to my sweet tooth@...GO ON TRY IT, IT MIGHT SURPRISE YOU@

Finally, looking at trends, our corporate partners at the Emirates Culinary Guild are also helping define the landscape of trends with their visions. Their foresight to avail their latest products 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. ■

Kerry Foodservice provides custom-made solutions (coatings, sauces, beverages, etc.) and branded solutions such as Chefs Palette and DaVinci Gourmet to global and regional chains, QSRs, and casual diners across the region.

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