

Mezze

AN ASSORTMENT OF FLAVOURS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

SPICE OF LIFE

CHEFS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE TELL SAMANTHA WOOD ABOUT
THEIR HERO INGREDIENT – AND HOW IT ENHANCES THEIR COOKING



PHOTOGRAPH: WESTEND61/DORIS.H/GETTY IMAGES



VLADIMIR MUKHIN

dill seeds

Fifth-generation Russian chef Vladimir Mukhin's cooking at his award-winning restaurant White Rabbit in Moscow led to an episode on Netflix's *Chef's Table* – and, more recently, to Krasota in Dubai, where he hosted a tasting menu experience. Fresh dill as a herb is used prolifically in Russian cuisine, but Mukhin favours the more unusual dill seed spice. It's one he grew up with – his mother used to give him water infused with dill seeds as a digestive. The pungent flavour and pleasant, underlying bitterness bears a resemblance to anise and caraway, and he grinds or toasts the fresh seeds to release essential oils of carvone and limonene, with their respective scents of mint and citrus. Mukhin incorporates dill seeds into his marinades, all kinds of seafood dishes and baking, including his signature bread course of dark brown sourdough rye “Borodinsky” bread with dill seeds, dill-infused coconut lard and caviar.

Clockwise from left: chef Vladimir Mukhin; his signature “Borodinsky” bread; Krasota in Dubai; dill seeds; aged eggplant miso dish at Krasota. Previous page: a bowl of saffron



LIAM TOMLIN

coriander

Dublin-born chef Liam Tomlin has called South Africa home for the past two decades, after stints in Europe, Asia and Australia. At the eight restaurants in his Chefs Warehouse portfolio, two of which opened recently in Cape Town – Chefs Warehouse & Canteen, and Merchant Bar & Grill – Tomlin marries the local produce found on his doorstep with classic French techniques to create uniquely South African dishes. Coriander, which elicits a global love-hate reaction, is an ingredient he uses prolifically. The seeds are dry-roasted, ground and mixed into spice blends, rubs and sauces – or crushed for marinades. Its citrus notes, and sweet, woody, peppery aroma add a delicate but distinct flavour; he weaves the chopped herb into dishes, leaves it whole for garnishing or briefly simmers the root in Thai-style curries. Coriander works particularly well in Tomlin's confit salt recipe to give any kind of meat a gentle Middle Eastern flavouring.

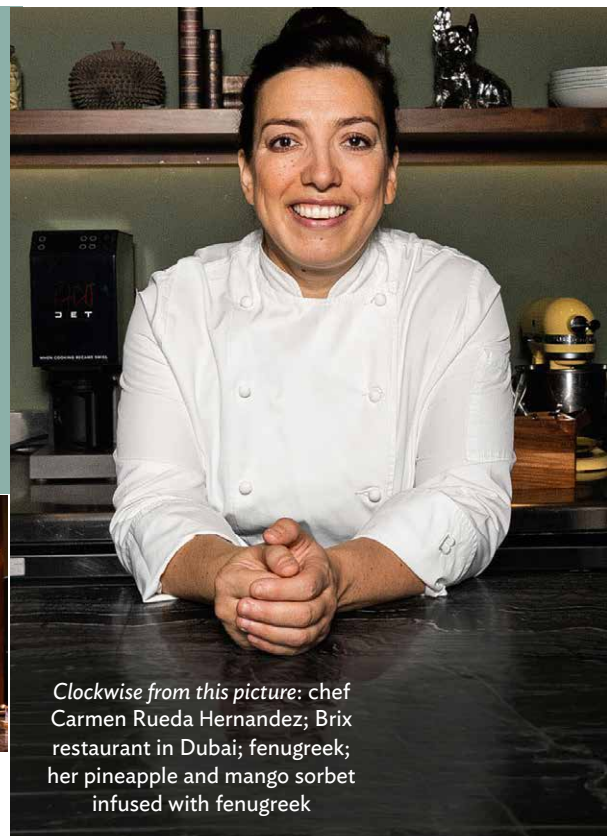


Clockwise from this picture: chef Liam Tomlin; daikon radish cake with Hoisin barbecue sauce at The Red Room; Chefs Warehouse & Canteen; chicken wontons with hot and sour tamarind dressing at The Red Room; that restaurant's interiors; oysters with nuoc cham, ginger and spring onion at Chefs Warehouse & Canteen; fresh coriander

CARMEN RUEDA HERNANDEZ

fenugreek

Spanish pastry chef Carmen Rueda Hernandez's career has taken her to France, Singapore, South Africa and the UK, where her experience at Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck inspired her unconventional cooking. She now runs the UAE's only dessert tasting menu concept, Brix, in Dubai, as well as the pastry for 3 Fils, which topped the inaugural Mena's 50 Best Restaurants awards in 2022. Her current menu at Brix is themed around the Silk Road, each course celebrating a different spice, including one of her favourites, fenugreek. She uses it for subtle bitterness and its earthy depth as an antidote to sweetness, its complexity adding layers of umami without overpowering other ingredients. Fenugreek features in two ways in her star dish: its seeds are cold-compressed with pineapple to create a rose; the dried leaves infused into a mango sorbet.



Clockwise from this picture: chef Carmen Rueda Hernandez; Brix restaurant in Dubai; fenugreek; her pineapple and mango sorbet infused with fenugreek

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TALA BASHMI *black lime*

Often considered the voice of modern Khaleeji cuisine, Tala Bashmi adores black lime, otherwise known as lumi, an indigenous Bahraini spice she fell in love with as a child visiting the local market with her father. Black lime's versatility allows the citrusy, slightly smoky spice to be used whole, ground or as a powder in both savoury and sweet recipes. One of Bashmi's signature plates at her Fusions restaurant in Manama, Bahrain, is shrimp jireesh, butter-basted prawns on a rich, creamy cracked-wheat base, finished with a hint of orange butter and the unmistakable tang of lumi. The spice's slightly fermented taste profile acts as a natural flavour enhancer, bringing complexity to scores of dishes, including Bashmi's stews, soups, and marinades for both seafood and meat.



Clockwise from top left: chef Tala Bashmi; muhammar; dried black limes, or lumi; crab saloona; faskar sea bream



JASON ATHERTON *sea arrowgrass*

British chef and restaurateur Jason Atherton, one of Gordon Ramsay's most successful protégés, has a knack for experimenting with unusual and rare ingredients, including sea arrowgrass, a coastal plant found in the UK's salt marshes. Its taste profile resembles the more common parsley and coriander, but is distinguished by a briny, slightly tangy edge and hints of cucumber. Sea arrowgrass's depth of flavour, aromatic flair and visual appeal add a fresh, oceanic note to Atherton's dishes, making it a compelling addition to seafood and salad recipes, such as Atherton's signature roasted Orkney sea scallops and razor clams with a brown butter and sea arrowgrass sauce.



Clockwise from above: chef Jason Atherton; Hokkaido scallops; Saroma wagyu; sea arrowgrass



Clockwise from top right: Pichaya Soontornyanakij; her restaurant Potong; makhwaen; the chef's trademark duck course

PICHAYA SOONTORNYANAKIJ *makhwaen*

Affectionately known as chef Pam, Pichaya Soontornyanakij is the youngest female Thai chef to lead a Michelin-starred restaurant, Potong, which sits in a striking 120-year-old heritage building (once her family's pharmacy and home) towering over Bangkok's Chinatown. Here, she serves progressive Thai-Chinese cuisine centred on the five-element philosophy of salt, acid, spice, texture and Maillard reaction – the latter so important for an umami taste. The chef is drawn to spices that carry the soul of Thai cuisine, especially lesser-known varieties like makhwaen from northern Thailand, where it's been used for generations to add complexity and a vibrant, peppery kick to traditional dishes like curries and sausages. It's not the easiest spice to work with, but when balanced well, adds a distinct citrusy zing that often surprises the palate, as in Soontornyanakij's trademark duck course with black bean sauce.



VINEET BHATIA *saffron*

The celebrated Mumbai-born and bred chef, best-selling cookbook author and Netflix star grew up with an understanding of saffron's value – his mother would only unlock her cupboard and unearth this much-coveted ingredient for special occasions, like for a halwa "prasad" made in offering to the gods. But when he started cooking, he began to truly appreciate saffron's chameleon ability to transform any dish with its vibrant colour, distinctive aroma, and subtle yet complex flavour. Bhatia likes to describe his cooking as "evolved Indian food", and saffron is integral in infusing depth into his biryanis, pilaus and seafood stews, and in enhancing desserts such as his signature saffron "shrikhand" yoghurt domes perched on cumin chocolate brownies, topped with a dark chocolate cardamom kulfi cigar.



Clockwise from this picture: chef Vineet Bhatia; Indya by Vineet in Dubai; saffron shrikhand domes dessert on cumin chocolate brownies; saffron

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