IT’S GLOBAL

CHEFS ARE CALLING ON ETHNIC DISHES AND FLAVORS TO STAMP OUT BORING FROM THE MORNING DAY PART.

BY JODY SHEE

If ethnic cuisine is showing up on more menus, double that for breakfast and brunch fare. Ethnic breakfast items ranks sixth on the hottest-trends list, according to the National Restaurant Association’s 2017 Culinary Forecast. The trend does not surprise Scott Adair, corporate executive chef for SupHerb Farms, Turlock, California, which provides flavor solutions for foodservice operators and food manufacturers. He sees a “been there, done that” attitude toward the long-held eggs, toast, bacon and sausage menu standard.

“I travel a lot, and everywhere you go, it’s the same breakfast,” he says. “Americans in general are looking for flavor—for something new, constantly.” Right now, he sees Middle Eastern flavors giving the crave-for heat with flavor, as in chermoula (Moroccan), s’chug (Middle Eastern) and harissa (Moroccan and North African).

SAVORY REPLACES SWEET

Meanwhile, today’s more culturally diverse population brings its version of breakfast comfort food to the table, opening everyone’s palate to other nations’ more savory sensibilities. Chefs are drawing from those global cuisines for inspiration to feed adventurous diners, says John Howeth, senior vice president, market development, for the American Egg Board, Chicago.

The proliferation of bowl meals helps the breakfast cause as a way to capture the culture of global cuisine in a trendier version of platters, Howeth says. “Instead of building out, chefs are going up and ‘in.’” Bowls are operationally easier, and allow chefs to change ingredients and cuisines from the same platform, he adds.

He notes that an operator can menu a quinoa bowl with Mediterranean ingredients, a rice bowl with Asian ingredients or a hash brown or potato bowl with ingredients such as cheese curds, eggs and sausage gravy (think, Canadian poutine).

Eggs, a standard American breakfast affair, also fit squarely in the center of Asian cultures. “Korean food, where eggs are a part of virtually every dish, is proliferating,” Howeth says. “Ramen, where eggs are a basic part of the build, is on trend.” He adds that banh mi (Vietnamese), bao (Chinese) and kimchi (Korean) are also appearing on breakfast menus.

The No. 2 selling item on the weekend brunch menu at République, a Los Angeles French bistro, isn’t French at all but is Kimchi Fried Rice with beef short ribs and soft farm eggs, says chef/owner Walter Manzke. “It’s what Koreans do for breakfast with leftovers from the night before.”

Peking Duck Bing with crispy chili paste is the top-selling bing sold at Mr Bing.
That French/Asian anomaly may not happen in other cities, but LA’s growing Asian population is mixing in with the American culture and having a huge influence. “LA is very in touch with Asia, especially this restaurant. I’m right next to Koreatown,” Manzke says. His wife Margarita is from the Philippines, and together they have several Wildflour Café + Bakery restaurants in Manila. What works on the breakfast menu at Wildflour also sells well in Los Angeles, and vice versa.

The staff at République come from such countries as Korea, Thailand, Japan, Mexico and Guatemala, and each of those cuisines is represented on the restaurant’s breakfast menu. This includes pork adobo fried rice with pickled scallions, fried egg and fresno chili, and pupusa with blue corn masa, roasted poblano, Oaxaca cheese, black beans, avocado, chirmol and fried egg. Also featured is chia seed pudding with coconut cream, almond milk, stone fruit, berries, wildflower honey and almonds. Manzke is currently working up a Japanese grain bowl that will include dashi.

He recently opened Sari Sari, a Filipino restaurant at LA’s Grand Central Market based on silog, what one eats for breakfast in the Philippines, featuring a small menu of items that include rice, a protein and an egg. One item is Sisig Fried Rice with crispy pig’s head, onions, chilies, garlic rice and a fried egg.

ONE AUTHENTIC THING

Some operators define their ethnic niche by offering one popular iconic breakfast dish from its native country.

Brian Goldberg’s passion for Chinese jianbing started when he lived and worked in China and ordered the egg-based crêpe-like breakfast item every morning from a street cart. He developed a dream and the drive to open a jianbing restaurant in China, and eventually realized that dream, opening an operation in Hong Kong.

In 2014, Goldberg closed it and moved to New York with a mission, stated on his website, “to introduce America to traditional Northern Chinese street crêpes (jianbing). For those already familiar with jianbing, we aim to instill a vibrant sense of nostalgia for the China street culture they remember.”

He is founder/CEO of Mr Bing, which he launched as a food festival pop-up that won several awards. In January 2017, he opened a Mr Bing at the Vanderbilt Food Hall next to New York’s Grand Central Station. He also has a cart and a store in Chelsea, with plans to expand.

He follows the traditional method of making jianbing using a batter of mung bean, rice and wheat flours mixed with herbs and spices. As it cooks similar to a crêpe, he spreads it on cream, crucks and spreads an egg on top, and adds black and white sesame seeds and scallions. After flipping it, he paints on a hoisin or house sauce, sprinkles with cilantro, and adds won tons and whatever protein is called for. After it cooks, he folds it up into a sandwich, cuts and plates. The most popular item is Peking Duck Bing. He also offers BBQ Pork Bing, Drunken Chicken Bing and Classic Vegetarian Bing.

Hong Kong waffles also are a popular ubiquitous street food in their namesake Asian region, and Jeff Pond made them a part of the brunch menu at Area Four Boston when he opened it as chef/partner in 2016. Rather than indents from a regular waffle iron mold, Hong Kong waffles have protrusions to resemble small eggs. The dish fits squarely as a brunch dessert, described as rolled egg waffle, pistachio ice cream and blackberry sauce.

Pond admits that it was difficult to find the mold, which he ended up ordering from a supplier in China. With only two molds, he decided not to sell the waffles by the stack, but to make them
into a composed dish in which he folds the waffle in half with ice cream and toasted pistachios in the middle and drizzles with a fruit sauce.

For fall and winter, he likely will fill the waffles with French vanilla ice cream and top with a caramel/apple sauce. Pond estimates that three-fourths of tables at brunch order the Hong Kong waffle.

At Animale in Chicago, chef/owner Cameron Grant, who also operates Osteria Langhe, developed a twist on his native country’s Scotch egg. The traditional dish features a hard-boiled egg wrapped in sausage, coated with breadcrumbs and baked or deep-fried. In his version, Grant wraps a soft-to-medium-boiled egg in raw shrimp meat, then breads and fries. For its special-occasion use, he serves it over a bitter green and tomato salad with a pink peppercorn dressing and a hint of curry.

**TWEAK AMERICAN FAVORITES**

Adding ethnic flavors to traditional American breakfast items is part of the “chef it up” strategy at Denver-based Snooze, an a.m. Eatery, with more than 20 units. For example, its quinoa breakfast bowl features quinoa with baby kale, carrots and green tomato chutney—topped with crispy prosciutto and an egg. The chutney is sweeter than would be found in India, but the point is to “introduce aspects of ethnic cuisines to enhance the dish, so customers still get a traditional American breakfast but with a twist or nuance that will help them start to enjoy those flavors,” says Jon Schwartz, regional chef and part of the menu development team.

The chain’s spring quinoa bowl featured the popular Japanese seven-spice *shichimi togarashi* blend sprinkled on top of the egg. “We add salt to everything in the West as a flavor enhancer, but we found this enhancer that adds a little depth to the dish,” he says. The units also used the spice as a rimmer on some of the bar drinks. Next, Schwartz plans to call on Italian flavors and garnish a steak and eggs Benedict with gremolata.

Adair with SupHerb farms believes that Snooze is doing breakfast right. “They are capturing flavors, and capturing young people’s attention by being creative and making breakfast more interesting,” he says.

He works with chains on menu development and is a fan of bringing trendy ethnic flavors to eggs Benedict. “You can take hollandaise sauce and spin it into so many different flavors using some of our herb pastes,” he says. He recommends aji pesto for a taste of Peru and chermoula for Moroccan flavor, as well as Moroccan harissa.

“I did a breakfast bowl with a group I work with that had eggs and potatoes along with seared pieces of filet mignon and a poached egg on top with chimichurri (Argentinian) hollandaise sauce,” he says.

“Everyone is caught in the world of wanting spice and flavors,” Adair says. “They all went with Sriracha. Everyone is tired of that. Now they are looking at Middle Eastern, Israeli and North African flavors.”

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**AJI PEPPER & PERUVIAN SAUSAGE EGG SOUFFLÉ**

Scott Adair, Corporate Executive Chef

SupHerb Farms | Turlock, California

**Yield:** 9 servings

1 sheet puff pastry from 1 (17.3-oz.) package, thawed

3 large eggs

¼ cup finely grated manchego cheese

2 T. Greek full-fat yogurt

½ t. baking powder

¼ t. salt

4 T. SupHerb Farms Aji Pepper Pesto

¼ cup frozen chopped spinach, thawed, drained

½ cup Peruvian sausage (*salchipacha criolla*)

4 T. grated Asiago cheese


2. In medium bowl, whisk together eggs, manchego cheese, yogurt, baking powder, salt and pesto until blended. Stir in spinach and sausage.

3. Divide filling evenly among pastry-lined cups. Sprinkle Asiago cheese on each lar. Gently and loosely fold four corner points over filling.

4. Bake at 400°F for 25 minutes, until pastry is browned and eggs are puffy. Cool completely; remove from pans. Serve immediately, or refrigerate in covered container up to four days or freeze up to two months.

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**TOP LEFT:** The Hong Kong waffle is popular at Area Four Boston. **TOP RIGHT:** Aji Pepper and Peruvian Sausage Egg Soufflés