



Go Bold

Ethnic chicken adds spice to menus nationwide.

By Amelia Levin

If fried chicken was the literal golden child of the last two years, ethnic chicken—prepared in authentic ways from cuisines around the globe—is this year’s exciting newcomer.

As other meat protein prices rise, chefs are once again turning to chicken as a strong meat-based alternative. But they’re choosing to elevate what would otherwise be a simply roasted or grilled piece of meat by going back to their roots and investigating how different cuisines prepare chicken in various ways, with bolder spices, sauces and other ingredients.

Peruvian

Peruvian is all the rage these days. A staple in Peruvian cuisine, *pollo a la brasa*, or spit-roasted chicken, can be seen showcased at Limon Rotisserie in San Francisco’s Mission District, where whole chickens turn over in a rotisserie-style grill.

At newcomer Chicken + Whiskey, a quick-serve restaurant in Washington, D.C., Venezuelan chef Enrique Limardo makes a Peruvian-style chicken by brining 2¾-pound whole birds for 12-14 hours. “Traditional ‘Peruvian-style’ chicken uses dark beer, rosemary, cumin and oregano in the marinade,” he says. “My background in cooking includes several years in certain parts of South America and the Caribbean islands and countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Aruba and Barbados. So I use additional South American flavors—raw sugarcane, fresh garlic, fresh onions, bay leaves, vinegar and a touch of chilies for spice.”

In terms of cooking, “You need to have the right rotisserie oven with high-quality natural charcoal to get that crispy texture of skin that Peruvian chicken is known for,” says Limardo, who uses specialty ovens made in Peru.



At Llama Inn in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, former Eleven Madison Park chef/owner Erik Ramirez showcases Peruvian-style chicken from his roots in the form of *anticuchos*, or skewers. He marinates chicken thighs in a fermented soybean paste before grilling the skewers on a plancha and topping them with aji verde, his take on a salsa verde with different types of aji chilies (aji amarillo, aji panca, aji limone), which are staples in Peru.

Eileen Andrade, chef/co-owner of FINKA Table & Tap in Miami, has experimented with Peruvian-style chicken in the form of *causa*, a classic dish with creamy potatoes. She cooks the chicken in a flavorful broth with ginger, garlic and red bell pepper, cools and chops the meat, and mixes it into a salad with more bell pepper, celery, lime juice and an aji amarillo aioli. The chicken salad is then layered with creamy mashed potatoes for a stacked presentation.

Caribbean

Jerk chicken, the quintessential spicy dish of the Caribbean, seems to be heating up, literally. Packed with super-hot scotch bonnet peppers and loads of spices, this marinated chicken plays well with consumers' growing desire for bolder, authentic flavors.

At ZEST in Miami, chef Cindy Hutson redefines Caribbean cuisine with a twist, pairing jerk chicken with pappardelle pasta.

Chef/owner Adam Schop of Miss Lily's 7A Café in Manhattan has found new uses for jerk chicken. He uses leftovers—bones and all—for a rich, spicy stock for next-day ramen layered with pork belly and fermented scotch bonnet paste.

Asian-inspired

As Filipino food finally gets more recognition in the U.S., chefs are experimenting with classic ingredients from that cuisine paired with chicken.

OPPOSITE: Honey sesame biscuit with honey-hot Korean barbecue chicken.
ABOVE: Chicken Causa from Eileen Andrade, chef/co-owner of FINKA Table & Tap, Miami.



Kristine Subido of Chicago's Pecking Order Catering (formerly, chef/owner of Pecking Order, a high-end fast-casual) swaps fish for chicken in a classic *sarsiado* dish. *Sarsiado* in the Tagalog language means "cooked with a thick sauce." Here, she sears and braises chicken thighs in a thick chicken stock-based gravy with leftover chicken bones, garlic, white onion and tomato paste, and a touch of soy sauce or tamari.

Michael Gulotta, award-winning chef/co-owner of Maypop in New Orleans, showcases the flavors of Southeast Asia with his brick-pressed spring chicken glazed in turmeric yogurt and served with ginger-infused smashed peas, rice and a lemongrass vinaigrette.

And while Korean fried chicken has become a common sight on menus around the country, Juliet Greene, senior corporate chef for Charlie Baggs Culinary Innovations, Chicago, has invented a mashup dish with Nashville Hot Chicken. She coats the fried chicken in a syrupy glaze made from sauteed ginger, garlic, red chili flakes, soy sauce, rice vinegar, mustard powder, and a touch of brown sugar and honey for sweetness to balance out the spice. She serves the chicken atop spiced biscuits, sprinkled with sesame seeds and honey mustard pickles.

"Both Nashville and Korean-style chicken have a great heat and spice to them, so I blended them into a craveable 'sweet heat' with the honey," Greene says.

African

As Nando's PERi PERi, the fast-casual chicken chain, continues to expand on the East Coast and in Chicago, diners are getting more aware of a South African staple infused with Portuguese influences.

The chain's signature *peri-peri* sauce is a staple in South Africa, where legend has it that Swahili tribes introduced Portuguese travelers on the spice trade route to their beloved piri piri pepper, according to Keri Ann Meslar, North America director of marketing—grocery for Nando's.

"Our peri-peri sauce differs from other hot sauces because it is its own genre," she says. "The sauce is thicker and has more lemon, garlic, herbs and onions versus straight chilies, so you can really taste those other flavors coming through."

In South Africa, the sauce is served with everything from rice to vegetables and prawns. But at Nando's, it's used as the base for 24-hour-marinated whole chickens that are flame-grilled and served with more of the sauce on the side.

At Area Four Boston, chef/owner Jeff Pond puts his own spin on classic chicken wings with North African flavors. Unlike most messy, sauce-infused wing dishes, Pond's chicken wings marinate in a lighter and slightly sweeter housemade Moroccan *ras el hanout* dry rub with a variety of spices—cumin, ginger, cinnamon, coriander, cayenne, allspice and cloves. The wings are pan-fried and served with a splash of lime and topping of mint.

America's most prized meat—the glorious chicken—has met its match when it comes to bolder flavors and new culinary avenues. ■

ABOVE, LEFT: Peruvian-style rotisserie chicken from Chicken + Whiskey, Washington, D.C.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Turmeric/yogurt-glazed, brick-pressed spring chicken is on the menu at Maypop, New Orleans.

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PHOTO CREDITS Above, left to right: Chicken + Whiskey; Maypop