

CONDIMENTS housemade

HOUSEMADE

ADD POP
TO YOUR
CONDIMENTS,
AND TAKE THESE
TRUSTY STALWARTS
TO A NEW LEVEL.

BY KAREN WEISBERG

With today's edgy premium placed on artisan, boutique, nose-to-tail and made-from-scratch, preparing condiments in-house is a logical area of focus, ripe for tasty new iterations. The goal is to differentiate your operation from others by offering unique flavors and concepts.

OLD IDEA, MADE NEW

Buying condiments is a relatively modern concept, as Chris Koetke, CEC, CCE, vice president, category management culinary arts, Laureate International Universities, Chicago, points out. "It's funny to think that 25 years ago I was making mustards to go with my charcuterie plates for Les Nomades." Koetke spent five years as the Chicago restaurant's executive chef, and it was there that he also started making pickles.

"Chefs are rediscovering what people used to do, such as making pickles and relishes and ketchup," he says. "It's taking a step backward, but creatively, forward."

Koetke suggests using condiments to sell—and upsell—items. There's also the local element, in addition to a desire among chefs to have more control over ingredients. "So, making their own condiments is part of the same thing—the desire for individualism and independence," he says. "Plus, the strategic use of condiments can take 'vanilla' and make it interesting."

If you and your guests are enthusiastic about a condiment you've created, you could have it professionally packaged. However, there's a caveat. "It's a whole other business, and not easy," Koetke says. "There's a lot involved, and you've got to do the research to mass-produce and have it consistently taste the same."

MUSTARD

Tony Nogales, associate professor of culinary arts at The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, New York, aims to educate students to not only be great chefs, but to learn how to increase profitability and revenue through innovation. With more than 30 years' experience in the foodservice field, he realizes that chefs have long prepared condiments themselves. "But now, most of us associate ketchup, for example, with one or two national brands," he says. "Preparing these items from scratch, or not, has gone in waves."

When Nogales covers the subject of condiments in class, he often refers to an 1882 cookbook he inherited that has recipes for walnut catsup, cucumber/currant catsup, gooseberry catsup and tomato catsup. Because it's generally more challenging for



a guest to accept something totally unknown, he suggests to students, "When you do try something new, you'll want to try something recognizable, perhaps cucumber catsup."

He aims to use seasonal ingredients when they're not only at their best, flavor-wise, but also less expensive. He also encourages preserving them by making condiments for later use. "We look for balance—sour always awakens the taste buds, so more-subtle flavors are not perceived," he says. "We need to balance sour tamarind, for example, with sweetness such as honey or sugar."

James Heywood, the longest-tenured faculty member in the CIA's history, died in 2012, but his legend—and legendary mustard recipes—live on, Nogales says. "Chef Heywood was a big barbecue expert, and we do one of his mustards here. It's a bit on the spicy side, perfect for hot dogs, hamburgers and pretzels."

Most other variations on the mustard theme will include eggs and dry mustard, plus a liquid. For example, to prepare dried cranberry mustard, the liquid is cranberry juice. After it's thickened in a double boiler, add chopped dried cranberries for color and texture, Nogales suggests.

RÉMOULADE

Four years ago, two experienced restaurateurs who love the diverse flavors of New Orleans cuisine brought their well-researched versions of NOLA standards to Huntington, New York. At Storyville American Table, executive chef Brian Finn and partner Tom Curry feature authentic Cajun/Creole cuisine, including standards such as jambalaya, barbecued shrimp and veal grillades.

During research into New Orleans eateries before opening, Finn talked with Chad Penedo, executive chef at The Court of Two Sisters. "Basically, our



OPPOSITE: Momotaro's chicken skewers with yuzu kosho on the side.
ABOVE RIGHT: A student makes cherry tomato vinaigrette in a condiments class at The Culinary Institute of America.



house version of rémoulade—a glorified tartar sauce—is his,” Finn says. “We use Hellman’s mayo, because I’ve found that people don’t particularly like homemade mayonnaise, plus, it’s a more consistent and more stable product.”

Finn’s rémoulade includes green onions, parsley, horseradish, grain mustard, Worcestershire sauce, a trio of red, black and white pepper, Tabasco or Crystal hot sauce, lemon juice, salt and a pinch of paprika for color. “Some chefs put a bit of celery in it, but I don’t,” he says. “So here, it’s not quite as spicy, because we backed off on the Tabasco and pepper.”

The housemade rémoulade is used on all cold seafood, as well as with hot po’boys (shrimp, oysters and catfish), spread cold on the bread and also served on the side with fried pickles or fried green tomatoes

Among several barbecue sauces that Finn has created, his favorite is Smokey BBQ, he says. “We do a dry rub on all our barbecue, then it goes into the smoker. After removing from the smoker, whole racks get dipped into the Smoky BBQ sauce. It’s not brushed on, but, rather, dipped in. Then, into the oven for 10-15 minutes to finish.”

Finn and Curry hope to have it bottled and labeled to use on the tables at Storyville. Proud of his barbecue sauces and mayo-based rémoulades, Finn hopes to offer all his sauces—and maybe his housemade pickles—for retail.

DRESSINGS, DIPS, SPREADS

“The timing is perfect this year, with the recent trend of housemade condiments, to show chefs how to be creative with dressings, dips and spreads, and to demonstrate how versatile avocados are,” says Mark Garcia, head of marketing—foodservice/culinary for Avocados From Mexico, Irving, Texas. “You can even use them in an avocado rémoulade.”

Pickled avocados, either sweet or savory, can make a stellar appearance pressed in a grilled cheese sandwich. “I’m super-proud of our pickled avocados,” Garcia says. “Some chefs prepare them to use on a pickle board or in chutneys, with pickled avocados for crunch and depth.” Pickling can be overnight or for use the same evening for dinner.

For a twist on the traditional, Garcia suggests offering bloody mary avocado salsa. “We wanted to make diced avocado one of the components combined with rough-chopped cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, celery, radishes, white onion and a bit of jalapeño for

heat. Use a smoky barbecue mix or a housemade bloody mary mix. It’s a little chunky, real fun salsa similar to pico de gallo to use in breakfast sandwiches, tortillas or a breakfast bun.”

YUZU KOSHO

Mark Hellyar, executive chef of Momotaro, Chicago, the Japanese concept opened in 2014 by Boka Restaurant Group, became a Japanese cuisine aficionado when he was recruited by New York designer Tony Chi to head up The Oak Door in the Grand Hyatt Tokyo. “It was there that I decided Japanese cooking was where it’s at,” Hellyar says.

At Momotaro, the most popular condiment and the one Hellyar and his staff rely on is yuzu kosho, a paste of chili peppers, yuzu peel and salt. The yuzu peels are blended with raw shishito chili peppers, Japanese green peppers, and red and green Anaheim peppers to go with a seafood dish, or used as a condiment for meat. “It marinates from two weeks to a year,” Hellyar says. “Fermented after a year, all the sharpness and bitterness of the peel is removed and the flavor is bright. This salty condiment pairs well with meat.”

Fermented soybean paste can be one of three types: barley miso, rice miso or soybean miso. All are injected with mold, or koji, but the mold has been treated, Hellyar says. “We make koji. We get it already treated and prepared for fermentation. We add salt to that, massage with water, then it sits for 10 days.”

The result is shio (salt) koji, which can be mixed with anything, he adds, garlic or lemon or soy or wasabi. It looks like a mushy green rice porridge. “We marinate meats in it or turn it into sauces by running it through a high-speed blender to emulsify to sauce consistency,” Hellyar says. “Our fatty tuna goes with wasabi shio koji. To serve, it’s dotted around the plate.”

He urges chefs who aim to prepare Japanese condiments to visit Japan first. “Ingredients are easier to come by in the U.S. for a soybean miso, but chefs need to go to Japan to know what ingredients taste like. Shio koji is new to the American pantry—it’s not there commercially yet. You can ask for ‘koji’ in the market, but you’d have to ferment it yourself.” ■



OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: 1) Condiments can make other condiments and sauces through combinations. 2) A CIA student measures temperatures with a digital thermometer to begin the fermentation process. 3) An 1882 cookbook includes a chapter on catsups and sauces. 4) & 5) A burger, right, and a hot dog are enhanced with avocado. 6) Brian Finn’s Mac Daddy BBQ Baby Back Ribs at Storyville American Table.

NEW YORK-BASED AWARD-WINNING JOURNALIST KAREN WEISBERG HAS COVERED THE ISSUES AND LUMINARIES OF THE FOOD-AND-BEVERAGE WORLD—BOTH COMMERCIAL AND NONCOMMERCIAL—FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS.