

The rise of British cuisine

from fish & chips to gourmet



Molecular 10

British cuisine has changed considerably over the past few decades. It has evolved from the post-war era of classic, yet somewhat stodgy dishes, to innovative cuisine, at the heart of which is London, a city that is now considered to be one of the major players in the international restaurant scene. As recently as the 1990s, it was difficult to find olives or even olive oil in rural supermarkets, whereas now everywhere one turns, there is a new pop up restaurant or food trend, whether it's fast or slow, global or modern, British or international. Homes all over the UK now have copies of *Deliciously Ella*, or *Hemsley-Hemsley* or *Honestly Healthy* on their bookshelves, and the latest food

trends are enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds. So what has brought about this change?

Post-war rationing had a huge impact on the options available, and this led to simple dishes such as pies, pasties and Yorkshire puddings, which were cheap and easy to make—as well as our beloved fish and chips. The shortage of meat and dairy meant that food needed to be plain in flavour and also simple in making. Food was indicative of class and money, and it was only in the houses of the very rich that more exotic flavours could be found. Today, more disposable income, more availability of different ingredients, and a range of dining options for different bud-

gets, ensures that diverse cuisine is much more accessible. The advent of worldwide travel has also meant that people could sample and bring back flavours and ideas from abroad, all of which has influenced British cuisine. This has been helped by the rise of the celebrity chefs and the popularity of culinary documentaries, which show them cooking all over the world. In addition, Britain is now a multi-cultural nation with ingredients once considered exotic now seen as store-cupboard essentials. In most supermarkets there are aisles dedicated to foods from around the world, and ingredients such as miso and pierogi are just as available as British strawberries and cream.

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Modern British food has embraced fusion. So the classic British dish of slow cooked shin of beef, served alongside mashed potato and vegetables, has become Asian infused slow cooked shin of beef, with wasabi mashed potatoes and Pak Choi. There are so many different restaurants serving specific foods, and the choices for people, particularly in London, are huge. This has a knock-on effect of increasing demand for this type of cooking. We see this more and more with our 'My Chef' private dining service, where customers want themed menus or request chefs that specialise in a particular type of international or fusion cuisine.

Food trends have also come full-circle with restaurants now producing classic British food with a twist. In particular, using alternative cooking and presentation techniques, such as molecular gastronomy, made famous by Heston Blumenthal's restaurants The Fat Duck, Hinds Head and Dinner. In fact, the menu at Dinner, recently voted one of the world's best, goes back past classic post-war cuisine to Tudor

times. Similarly, Fergus Henderson at St John, is famous for taking the classic British concept of nose-to-tail eating, and bringing it into the 21st century. Never has offal tasted so good, or been so popular.

Although food can be bought from around the world, chefs have also led a trend for seasonal and local produce. Diners want to know the source of their food, and this has inspired a renewed enthusiasm for foraging. Our private chefs are increasingly asked by clients to produce menus that not only tell them what they are about to eat, but exactly where it came from and how it was cooked. Simon Rogan, Executive Chef of Fera at Claridges, has his own farm and many ingredients used at Fera and at his other restaurant, L'Enclume, are sourced from there. On Fera's website, it says that its menu "captures the true essence of nature through its textures, tastes and sense of perpetual evolution," which ensures a "creative and natural take on modern British cuisine".

Healthy eating plays a significant part in British cuisine today, and the phrase "eating clean" is on many peoples' lips. Even during a quick browse through social media, it's hard to miss the many posts about this phenomenon. There are now many recipe books designed for people who don't eat lactose, dairy, gluten or sugar, as well as those for vegetarians and vegans.

The rise of the celebrity chef in the 1990s brought food to the forefront of the British public's mind, and the continuing evidence of this is to be found on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram where people post pictures of their plates for all to see. Cooking programmes on television continue and there is something for every viewer—from MasterChef to the Great British Bake Off, Saturday Kitchen Live and old favourites such as Ready, Steady, Cook.

Classic British cuisine is still a hot favourite, with traditional fish and chips often topping the charts as a British dish. The classics are however, now combined with modern flavours wherever you eat, and this makes dining all the more interesting. Restaurant bookings continue to boom and everyone talks about food. There are pop-up restaurants and supper clubs happening all over the UK. The dizzying evolution of British Cuisine—and the trends surrounding it—shows no sign of slowing. It's a very exciting time to be involved in the catering industry, and who knows where it will go next.

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