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New Nordic Cuisine Comes Into Fashion



By Laura Stadler-Jensen

A 10 point manifesto published in 2006 set the agenda for those willing to subscribe. Is there really such a thing as a “Nordic” kitchen? If so, what is it and what does the future hold?

The famed chef Ferran Adriá of the world's best restaurant El Bulli set out to evolve the kitchen with 23 principles he calls a, “Synthesis of elBulli cuisine.” Point number 16 states: “Regional cuisine as a style is an expression of its own geographical and cultural context as well as its culinary traditions. Its bond with nature complements and enriches this relationship with its environment.” Perhaps this is what set the stage for New Nordic maverick Claus Meyer to lead the charge and become the driving force for the New Nordic Kitchen Manifesto.

Not long after the manifesto was published the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted it and it became the foundation programs that have given wings to the initiative with its aim to, “inspire people and companies to develop Nordic food products and culture and increase their visibility.” Efforts span across the industry and it's already shaping the way kitchens prepare and present dishes, how suppliers produce and market their goods, and how consumers view, purchase and consume them.

What is New Nordic Food?

The Nordic countries have long been associated with concepts like purity (think Norwegian fjords and Greenlandic glaciers), nature (Icelandic geothermal hot springs and volcanoes), and simplicity (Danish design). Age-old food preparations such as salting, curing, pickling and smoking have never really gone out of fashion, and are experiencing a sort of renaissance, like traditional fare from “mormors” (grandma's) kitchen is. Other important pillars include



the use of seasonal raw materials, and a focus on health and well-being, animal welfare, and sound production and cultivation practices.

"The movement's real achievement is that it will make deep impressions in the shifting values and process we are witnessing in society," said Claus Meyer. "There is a clear move in the food industry (including policy, agriculture, and food science), that is deemphasizing industrialized manufacturing and focusing more towards crafted, authentic and natural products."

They say that food in this region is unique due to the cold climate and light-filled summer days. I have to say that as an immigrant, I can taste the difference. There is a special kind of rustic yet simple mineral-rich flavor that can only be experienced when tasting a Danish apple, potato, carrot, or red beet. Claus Meyer refers to a distinct Nordic terroir (how the local environment affects a product). He says, "Temperature conditions create a very unique environment for plant growth. Red wines from Burgundy, peppers from Espelette in the Basque region, Faroese early turnips, and so on, differ because they are affected by the terroir in which they are grown."

Two-star Michelin restaurant noma is often seen as the de facto restaurant epitomizing New Nordic. Since being named the 10th best in the world in 2008 according to Restaurant magazine, noma is doing a lot to raise the profile of the Nordic kitchen internationally. They are unique in the sense that they only use Nordic ingredients and don't use olive oil, for example, because it's not Nordic. What they do work with are items such as langoustines from the Faeroe Islands; halibut and cod from Iceland; and lamb, musk ox, and cloud berries from Greenland and other delicacies unique to the region.

"Why not make New Nordic Food a concept as strong and substantial as French cuisine? Or Japanese?," said Halldór Ásgrimsson, secretary general for the Nordic Council of Ministers. "Although Nordic cuisine spans a range of food cultures – Danish, Icelandic, Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish – the different cuisines intersect at many points."

Where Are Things Headed?

Efforts to promote this new ideology have reached international audiences with the "New Scandinavian Cooking," TV series where Claus Meyer of Denmark, Andreas Viestad from Norway, and Tina Nordström from Sweden are shot on location at exotic locals illustrating the essence of the Nordic kitchen. But are exhibitions, TV shows and assemblies (alongside the list of principles), enough to infiltrate an industry and change the way people do things?

Apparently the answer is, yes. In my research as a writer for an upcoming guidebook on Scandinavia, I've had the opportunity to visit several restaurants and cafes in Copenhagen. To my surprise almost all of the places I visited have in some degree or another highlighted their use of local and seasonal Nordic ingredients. What seems to be the case is that many of the top gourmet restaurants in particular are adopting the New Nordic manifesto in their own way.

Many choose the best ingredients (those with the most taste and gastronomic value), and continue to source from other origins while staying true to their own philosophies. Paul Cunningham from The Paul who focuses on more classic continental cuisine and Thomas Herman from Nimb Herman who reinvents traditional Danish dishes, both in Tivoli Gardens, and Jakob Mielcke from Mielcke & Hurtigkarl, a new international contemporary restaurant, share this view.

"I use Danish products and endorse its use, but I'm also very inspired by different spices, which often get left out of the idea of what the Nordic kitchen is," said Jakob Mielcke, head chef and partner of Mielcke & Hurtigkarl. As Jakob points out, "Spices like cardamom, bay leaf, black pepper-corn, juniper berries and cinnamon have been used in the Danish kitchen for centuries and how they are combined





with the raw materials themselves are another important aspect in defining the Nordic kitchen.”

Take Restaurant Kiin Kiin, a gourmet Thai kitchen (and one of only two with a Michelin star in the world). It has a farm in Denmark growing produce especially for the restaurant, and imports ingredients directly from Thailand. Formel B also has its own farmer in Lammefjorden and states that it's “rooted in the classic French kitchen but based on Danish raw materials.”

Some see Nordic as a growing trend. Partner and chef of Restaurant Geranium Søren Ledet, also a modern Northern European kitchen, sees the Nordic kitchen concept making its way into the international food scene in years to come. “In five to six years, you will see more restaurants around the world with a Nordic kitchen. Restaurants like Aquavit in New York will become more common,” he said.

While the leading restaurants have their own interpretations, a great majority is moving in a broader direction towards creating and defining New Nordic. Even though the lines are blurred between what one might consider an authentic Nordic kitchen and those that morph international influences with the best of what the Nordic region has to offer, there is clearly a movement taking place.

“What's important to understand is that there is a distinction between the Nordic cuisine movement based on the

manifesto and the restaurant noma with its own unique approach to Nordic cuisine,” Meyer clarifies. “The manifesto is a guiding light, an ideology and is not imperialistic. It's open for interpretation and since it is based partially on the Slow Food idea of 'good, clean and fair food', its values serve as the building blocks for creating a broadly acknowledged regional cuisine that represents the Nordic society as a whole – one that it rightly deserves.”

According to Ferran Adrià, “Nordic cuisine is expected to become the world's next great cuisine.” Whether or not it will become a staple kitchen like the French, Italian or Spanish only time will tell.

Learn About New Nordic Food

www.norden.org/nynordiskmad
www.nordiskkoekken.dk
www.scandcook.com

Restaurants mentioned in the article:

Noma – www.noma.dk

Strandgade 93
1401 Copenhagen K
Tel: +45 3296 3297

The Paul – www.thepaul.dk

Tivoli Gardens
Vesterbrogade 3
Tel. +45 3375 0775

Mielcke & Hurtigkarl - www.mielcke-hurtigkarl.dk

Frederiksberg Runddel 1
Tel. +45 36 34 84 36

Nimb Herman – www.nimb.dk

Bernstorffsgade 5
Tel. +45 88 70 00 00

Kiin Kiin – www.kiin.dk

Guldbergsgad 21
Tel. +45 35 35 75 55

Formel B - www.formel-b.dk

Vesterbrogade 182
Tel. +45 33 25 10 66

Geranium – www.restaurantgeranium.dk

Kronprinsessegade 13
Tel. +45 33 11 13 04

Meyer's Deli – www.meyersdeli.dk

Kgs. Nytorv 13 (Inside Magasin department store)
Or Gl. Kongevej 107 in Frederiksberg