

Global CHICKEN

Takes Flight

The humble, friendly protein is stepping out with fresh global flavors — and diners are clucking with delight

PAY ATTENTION TO CONCEPTS like Kokoriko, Richard Sandoval's Colombian rotisserie restaurant in Miami; Pollo Campero, a Latin concept with 50 units stateside; and Nando's Peri-Peri, a Portuguese flame-grilled chicken house with 10 units in the Washington, D.C., area. All three offer global chicken menus, and all three are imports from successful overseas markets. Why have they staked their flags here with all signs that expansion is deliciously inevitable? The answer points to the larger trend that continues its reach into mainstream menus: authentic, casual, global flavor. And chicken is a safe launching pad for all three.

"Chicken is a universally known protein that takes well to all kinds of flavor play and cooking methods," says Kara Nielsen, trendologist with CCD Innovation.

Indeed, we've seen how the acronym "KFC" now holds a different promise for adventurous poultry fans. Korean Fried Chicken, double fried for a delicate, crispy, crackling skin, is popping up everywhere. At New York's Momofuku Noodle Bar, diners are treated to sweet and spicy Korean fried chicken. In Brooklyn, chef-owner Dale Talde serves

Korean fried chicken at his eponymous restaurant, where the chicken is sliced and tucked into a kimchi yogurt sauce and finished with fresh mint and grapes. In Portland, Ore., Boke Bowl hosts a weekly Korean fried chicken night, where it serves whole or half chickens that are first brined, then par-smoked, chilled, fried and finally tossed with garlic-ginger-soy-vinegar sauce.

Kristine Subido, chef/owner of the Filipino chicken-centric Pecking Order in Chicago adds: "Why chicken? It's a fun, not-too-intimidating way I can introduce diners to Filipino cooking."

One important link that binds together all of these diverse chicken-centric global concepts is a promise of good quality chicken. As many trends with legs today show, provenance and transparency are critical to consumers. Think of the global chicken trend as the evolution of the "better burger" trend, which shows no signs of slowing down. Now, we have the "better chicken" trend.

"I think consumers are underserved in choices of good quality poultry," says Shaun Doty, chef/owner at Bantam + Bidy, a new rotisserie/Southern diner in Atlanta. "You either get the platinum-level chicken that's really

“Consumers crave chicken with peppery citrus fruits, spiked with chile and spice combinations, or the juicy fire-charred thigh that's been marinated and grilled.”

ANDREW HUNTER

Chef Richard Sandoval has partnered with Colombia-based Kokoriko Natural Rotisserie to bring this global chicken concept stateside. The signature-seasoned Churrasco de Pollo is a focal point of the fast-casual menu.



KOKORIKO

Why Now One of the reasons chicken has earned the interest and momentum to become the new star is the result of the sustainability movement to bring real chickens with pedigree and taste back to the American diner. Not only is it about great quality chicken, but also about international inspiration for chicken. As chicken is eaten around the world and is more highly regarded than in the U.S., as of late, there is plenty of inspiration.

– CHRISTOPHER KOETKE

expensive or you get the not-so-great kind. I think there's a market for well-raised, regional, fresh chicken that falls somewhere in the middle."

What thrusts this trend into all foodservice segments is the formidable combination of "better" with — wait for it — "sexier." Global chicken thrills with Latin spice rubs, sticky Korean glazes, penetrating Filipino marinades. And chefs can rejoice that chicken recipe development can be fun. Rather than a must-have "safe" protein, it can now be racy and intriguing — a winning combination for today's diner.

FRYING AWAY

It's hard to think about fried chicken without conjuring up the Southern classic of thick, crunchy, golden-brown coating, but other cultures fry differently. And American diners are cluing into the wonders of global fried chicken. At Pecking Order, Subido adapts a Filipino fried chicken recipe. She marinates the chicken in soy sauce, sugar,

Chef/owner Kristine Subido introduces diners to Filipino fried chicken at Pecking Order in Chicago.



PECKING ORDER

“While traveling in Peru, I fell in love with the national chicken dish, aji de gallina: yellow aji chiles in a cream-based sauce smothering braised chicken over white rice. The flavor of aji chile is sublime and the dish is simple and cost effective to boot.”

TODD DOWNS

black vinegar, garlic, black pepper and bay leaf, then poaches the chicken in the same liquid. To order, she adds a step not traditional to the Philippines by lightly flouring the chicken to preserve moisture. She then deep-fries the chicken for five minutes. “The poaching cuts down cook time,” says Subido. “If we didn’t poach, the chicken would be in the fryer for 13 minutes.”

Korean wings are giving Buffalo a run for its money. Take a look at 19-unit Bon Chon, a Korean chicken concept, for its take on double-fried lightly battered wings. Or the flavorful soy-garlic wing sauce at Unidentified Flying Chickens, with units in New York and New Jersey. At Pollo Campero, the hand-battered fried chicken stands out with Latin spices.

“Chicken can easily play the lead role or co-star. It has risen to glory via chicken and waffles, and is delicious fried, baked, roasted, grilled or confit. Both chefs and consumers have a comfort with chicken. Add to this the excitement and intrigue with global flavors, and you have a new layer to add to this old friend. Chicken is poised to garner abundant reviews in 2013.”

ROB CORLISS

A “better chicken” movement is fueling this flavor-driven trend. Nando’s Peri-Peri uses whole, all-natural chickens for its flame-grilled chicken offerings.



NANDO'S

The chicken-and-waffles trend has widened the path for more innovations. Here, it's Adobo Chicken with Red Jasmine Rice and Coconut-Ginger Waffles.



INDIAN HARVEST

“For decades, white meat has been the focus of the American diner. But eventually, we will take our cue from other international cuisines where dark meat is more revered than white. The reason is simple — it tastes better and is more moist. The first operator to make this a successful focus of their menu will also benefit from dark meat’s lower prices.”

CHRISTOPHER KOETKE

HOST A ROAST

Flame-grilled, rotisserie, fire-roasted — these methods are hot with global chicken presentations. At Bantam + Bidy, rotisserie chicken takes center stage. Doty rubs all-natural, fresh chickens with fennel seed, garlic powder and salt. For menu distinction, he offers four dipping sauces: peri peri, wasakaka, beer mustard and bourbon barbecue.

“We elevate the rotisserie experience with the more exotic dipping sauces,” he says. And in Atlanta, guess which sauces are the most popular? Surprisingly, it’s his take on the Portuguese peri peri (a.k.a. piri piri) and on the Dominican Republic’s wasakaka sauce (lime juice, garlic, oregano, olive oil) that diners clamor for. Unlike some rotisseries, Doty doesn’t baste the chickens while on the spit. “When you’re making dinner for 500, putting the sauce on the side is the way to go,” he says.

Nando’s Peri-Peri features flame-grilled chicken marinated in its proprietary peri-peri sauce, starring the fiery African Bird’s Eye chile. The chain uses all-natural,



NATIONAL PEANUT BOARD

In Portland, Ore., Nong's Khao Man Gai food cart has a big following, with a simple menu of traditional Thai chicken dishes like chicken and rice with housemade peanut sauce.

fresh chickens. It spatch-cocks the chickens (backs cracked, spines removed, wings clipped) so it can lay them flat on the grill. "It's how the Portuguese prepared the chicken," says Burton Heiss, CEO of this brand that's been around internationally for 25 years. "Our competitors cook the chicken in parts. We get the whole bird on the flame grill for that great flavor." The chicken is basted to order, depending on the spiciness requested.

Back at Pecking Order, Subido serves Filipino chicken three ways: fried, roasted and grilled, and reports that the roasted chicken is the most popular. She brines the chicken for six hours, marinates it overnight (tamari, black vinegar, garlic, annatto, calamansi, sugar, black pepper, bay leaf), then rubs butter over the bird and stuffs it with lemon grass, ginger and garlic.

“Chicken is a menu must, as it helps offset items that run a higher food cost and is something that most every palate loves. High profit, readily available, neutral in flavor and popular with a majority of diners — chicken will be an ongoing trend.”

CHRIS CASSON

How to Work It Fire up the fryer, rotisserie, barbecue or braising pan – chicken is no longer the lowest common denominator, but rich with flavor, big with tang and seasoned with global spice. From once-niche Hispanic and Caribbean character, to homey Southern fries, to Asian-inspired hot pots or African-Portuguese prompted peri peri, the bird has rebounded.

– ROBIN SCHEMP

“Chicken is normally considered the safe choice. Why do we need to up our chicken game? Flavor, flavor, flavor. We have seen simple chicken piccata make great headway for years, but let’s take it a step further and stuff a breast with chorizo, grated queso and a sauce made from a sofrito base, or maybe just a simple half-baked chicken with a freshly made rub or pesto.”

RICK PEREZ

THE VALUE EQUATION

Aside from the promise of culinary adventure, the “better chicken” movement seems to be propelling the trend forward. Trussing chicken items with “quality” values is the way to go. Subido researched different types of chicken before landing on a purveyor that provides hormone-free, natural chicken for her independent concept. She also looked for consistent size (3 ½ to 3 ¾ lbs.) for even, matched cooking times and great quality of the skin.

“I manage my food costs by charging a bit more,” she says. She charges \$18.95 for a whole chicken and \$12.95 for a half-chicken order. “Knowing where it comes from is important to my customers, but there’s only so much I can charge for chicken.”

Bantam + Bidy, also an independent and chef-driven restaurant, runs a 33 percent cost on chicken dishes. “I settled on that number and know that it’s as low as I can go while still offering the good quality chicken that I’m happy with,” says Doty. He points out that the accompanying sides offer a good profit margin. Diners choose from sides like Anson Mills speckled grits, Carolina red peas and rice, and aged-cheddar mac and cheese.

Pecking Order follows a similar model, but pulling from a Filipino pantry, where diners can order from sides like green beans with tomato sofrito, fried sweet plantains with sweet jackfruit chutney and fried rice with toasted garlic.

Because of Nando’s purchasing power as a multi unit, it sells its one-quarter chicken breast and wing combination for \$5.25, and sells a leg and thigh combination for \$4.95. “The quality has to be there,” says Heiss. “I don’t believe the value proposition is solely related to cost. If it were, we would be losing. It’s flavor driven. It’s experiential dining.” Although Nando’s can’t do free range because of supply limitations, its “fall back” is hormone-free, natural chicken.

“We won’t settle for less than that,” says Heiss. “You have to be sensitive to pricing because this type of casual, good food is not special-occasion. It’s frequent meal replacement. There’s huge opportunity here.” ☺