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BRUNCH!



THE NEW INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER THE WORLD IS TALKING ABOUT

AJ FINN ON PAGE 22

AN INDIA EXCLUSIVE

[THE FOOD ISSUE!]

INDIA'S BEST FOOD BLOGS

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[THE FOOD ISSUE: ESSAY]

PRETTY PLATES, PRETTY PLEASE...

Sure, taste matters. But there's a new investment chefs are making: ensuring their dishes have 'instagrammability'!

By Saumyaa Vohra



FUN ON A PLATTER
Quirky stuffed mushroom canapés

Photo courtesy: RAKHEE JAIN

In a world where self-worth is judged by followers, and a 'like' is a saleable commodity, it's no surprise that food has fallen prey to the Insta-diktat. Pretty pastel hues on the plate come alive with a quick click on the Gingham filter. Foods that involve a minute of at-the-table-prep need that quirky little Boomerang. Face it: 'Instagrammability' has fast become non-negotiable for a deluge of diners. Which means that for chefs, there's pressure to get their food aesthetics up to a nine on the Richter scale.

SHOOT AND EAT

Instagram is now more of a factor in dining than ever before. Chef Kelvin Cheung of Bastian, Mumbai, thinks it hasn't affected the way a chef's creative process plays out, but it has changed the way they propel their dishes.

"When I started out, the thought of taking out my phone in the kitchen would have been unfathomable. But now..." –chef Kelvin Cheung



Photo courtesy: LE 15 PATISSERIE

SWEET HUES
A jar full of colourful macarons

"I plate dishes the way I want them to be eaten; if they end up looking Instagrammable, or picturesque, that's a bonus," he says. "But there has been a massive change in terms of how chefs promote their food. When I started out, the thought of even taking out my phone in the kitchen would have been unfathomable. Now..."

Most restaurateurs seem to have gotten the hang of shooting for Instagram, says Gunjan Sawhney, the face behind the food blog Gluttony Goddess. "Stark, minimal plating that brings the word 'clean' to mind works best, photographs wise. The core thought behind taking a photograph of a dish is to highlight the ingredients, and to make it look appetising to someone scrolling past. Strawberries, chocolate or cheese-laden dishes invariably make for great photographs," she says.

Adds food stylist Rakhee Jain, "It's how bewitchingly food is presented that attracts us to pay for it. The more visible you are on Instagram, the more likely it is that people will come and experience the menu," she says. "Aesthetics are where it all starts and, often, ends. Food can be beyond banal, but with the right elements – and particularly the right lighting – it can be made to look supremely desirable."

PICTURE PERFECT

Lighting is the key to a good photograph, and Kelvin admits that it can be a constraint in the kitchen. "Sadly, the lighting at Bastian is terrible, save for the sunlight that streams in and works beautifully for brunch and lunch photos," he says.

Pooja Dhingra, head chef at Le 15 Patisserie, says daylight is her Insta-saviour. "We have large French windows in the restaurant, so the whole space is naturally well-lit," she says. "Luckily, I work around really beautiful desserts that are just organically photographable."

Pooja has noticed a bit of an upsurge in the demand for 'prettier' food, because they just look so good on an Insta story. "I see that a lot with food like avocado toast etc. Basically, foods that pop with colour, or have a touch of the bizarre."

People also embellish their dishes with edible flowers, or add a tinge of liquid nitrogen to a cocktail to give it very Boomerang-able sizzle, says Gunjan. "This kind of thing has started happening to add to the aesthetic value of the image, though in some (specific) cases it does raise the taste bar as well," she says.

And contrasts really work, says Rakhee. "If you see something painstakingly plated, it often looks a little like a piece of art," she says.

ONLINE / OFFLINE

A recent survey by *The Independent*, UK, showed that Instagrammability is the number one reason for choosing a holiday spot, with 40 per cent of millennials claiming it was a higher priority than cost or availability of alcohol (24) or opportunities for sightseeing (3.9). This is a clear indicator of how social media cred counts to a millennial. Food is no exception.

So are we looking at a food future where visuals matter more than taste? Never, says Pooja. "People care a lot about how their food looks, but I don't think they would keep going back to a place just because the food is pretty if it didn't taste good enough to match the way it looks," she says.

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RAKHEE JAIN
Food stylist



KELVIN CHEUNG
Head chef at Bastian, Mumbai



POOJA DHINGRA
Head chef at Le 15 Patisserie



GUNJAN SAWHNEY
Blogger at Gluttony Goddess





RAISE A TOAST
(Clockwise from top) Toasties with curd, orange and black grapes; strawberry and chocolate; mint mayo and bell peppers

Photos courtesy: GUNJAN SAWHNEY

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