



SAUCE OF INSPIRATION

From a rich hollandaise to a punchy salsa, condiments and sauces pack flavour into your menu. As consumers broaden their culinary horizons, even the classics are being freshened up, Lauren Fitchett finds

In a modern pub, a handful of ketchup and mayonnaise sachets is unlikely to cut the mustard. From infusions of global flavours to a focus on making the most of the local larder, there has never been more room – and demand – for creativity.

After all, most dishes aren't complete without that finishing touch. Sauces and condiments add texture and punches of flavour, bringing together everything else on the plate. And trying something new doesn't have to mean a complete menu rethink – both provide easy ways to refresh

your menu, introduce trending flavours and experiment with new ingredients. Trying a Korean barbecue glaze on chicken wings or adding a chilli mayonnaise to burgers unlocks new dishes, for example, while including what's seasonal and local taps into the increasing consumer demand for provenance on menus.

Ben Handley, chef patron at The Duck Inn on the north Norfolk coast, has long made the bulk of his sauces and condiments in-house, a focus which is beginning to yield unexpected benefits. He now sells

sauces, including his Mr H Mustard, Holy Cluck sauce and wild garlic and walnut pesto, to customers, and is exploring doing so with local delicatessens and farm shops, launching nationwide delivery and opening an on-site farm shop.

"What we have found is that by promoting our sauces and condiments in-house there has been an interest from our customer base which started pre-pandemic but has really grown," he says. "We're also seeing that local delis and farm shops are really keen to stock them. One customer ➔



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Sauces and condiments have always been the gateway to new cuisines and flavours



Steak baguette with Oasis Mayonnaise

had a taste of our Mr H Mustard with his roast beef and ordered four jars alone.”

Handley says his menu has evolved over the last two years to incorporate ‘takeaway-style’ elements and reflect demand, including dishes such as Stanhoe Fried Chicken (SFC), served with his Holy Cluck sauce, and pie and mash with liquor, in this case a traditional sauce blanquette made with two types of stock, but given a contemporary touch through the inclusion of wild garlic. Elsewhere on the menu, classic sauces are mixed with Asian flavours such as soy or, in particular, fish sauce. “Sauces have a huge impact on a dish,” he says. “With the pie, mash and liquor, the liquor is key. They can be the most exciting part of a dish.”

The secret to a good sauce is in its foundations, says Luke Payne, head chef and co-owner of The Pack Horse in the Peak District, which was featured in this year’s Michelin Guide. “The key with a sauce is to start off with a good base. Whether it’s a fish sauce or a meat sauce, we start with a classic mirepoix with thyme and bay leaves,” he explains. “A good sauce can transform a sauce and it’s one of those classic kitchen skills that’s difficult to master. It can transform a dish – with our gravy, for example, it can take two days to get it right.”

He agrees that classic techniques are increasingly being blended with modern twists and fresh flavours when it comes to sauces and condiments. “We have started to incorporate those flavours into some of our sauces. I lean towards classical cooking, but we have adapted a French classical sauce and serve it a lot with fish.” In that, Payne adds seaweed dashi stock and soy sauce to a traditional Madeira sauce, before using cream to finish.

CLASSIC VERSUS CONTEMPORARY

The travel restrictions and hospitality shutdowns of the last two years saw



Loaded nachos from Santa Maria

consumers recreate flavours from abroad and restaurant-quality food in their own kitchens. According to a 2021 report into the quick service restaurant and fast casual markets from The Food People, guacamole, aioli, teriyaki sauce and Korean barbecue have become popular choices when it comes to sauces.

The legacy of the renewed interest in scratch cooking is that people’s expectations while eating out are higher than ever before, says James Lewin, marketing manager at Tiger Foodservice. “Condiments play a key role in elevating flavour and whether you offer a spicy mayonnaise to pep up a burger or use a tangy chilli sauce as a marinade, they will give your menus a shot of extra flavour and keep your customers coming back for more,” he explains. Lewin advises pub and bar operators to stock up on a range of

globally inspired sauces and condiments which not only serve as table sauces, but can also be used at the prep stage to enhance existing dishes. “Sauces and condiments have always been the gateway to new cuisines and flavours and are a very effective way to give dishes a contemporary twist which you can then charge a premium for, but caterers should also be aware that traditional flavours – and the comfort factor they deliver – are still very much in demand,” he says.

As Lewin says, operators are wise not to forget the classics. Insights agency Perspectus Global last year ranked Brits’ top 20 condiments, with ketchup winning a resounding 50% of the vote, followed by mayonnaise at 43% and barbecue sauce at 36%. The same survey found 44% of Brits say they enjoy a condiment with every single meal. More modern entries also ➔

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AT A GLANCE: TOP TRENDS

Being aware of what's in demand makes it easier to tweak your menus and introduce new flavours quickly. Shoosmith has given us a rundown of sauce and condiment opportunities identified by Creative Foods.

- Go wild – consumers are looking for products containing wild ingredients, which they see as being better for both themselves and the planet, such as wild garlic, which Shoosmith says we can expect to see in more condiments.
- Using 'wonky' fruit and vegetables means ingredients are sourced locally and food miles reduced, both positive messages for customers.
- Shoosmith agrees that flavoured mayonnaise is likely to be popular, suggesting operators add chilli for heat and colour, or yuzu and lemon for acidity. She says using herbs can hint at freshness, and points to Creative Foods' range of ideas centring around using its Tabasco hot sauce.
- We can expect to see ketchup with a twist, including the use of umami-packed black garlic and the tomatoes used being listed for provenance. Other produce, including beetroot and bananas, will also join the ketchup stage.
- Dressings and vinaigrettes, usually at home on salads, are being added to roasted or steamed vegetables or potatoes. Miso and black garlic are being included for umami and fermented vegetables for spiciness.
- Sweet sauces are being used on savoury dishes, such as chocolate or miso caramel on barbecue chicken wings, and vice versa, with savoury options drizzled on ice cream and fruit.
- More vegan options are on the way – from April to September last year, vegan and vegetarian table sauces represented 13% and 19% of product launches, according to Innova, reflecting the ongoing move towards a plant-based diet.

Hot and spicy sauces, such as sriracha and chimichurri, are now store cupboard staples

featured, though, with sriracha at number 19 and soy sauce at number eight. In 2020, ketchup sales were up in the UK, proving the staple sauces are here to stay.

Variety, as they say, is the spice of life, and infusing classics with contemporary additions is a straightforward way to bridge

the gap. Try adding chipotle or sriracha to ketchup for a kick, or miso or roasted garlic to mayonnaise. The number of flavoured condiments available is on the up – Tiger's Stokes sauces has options including a Bloody Mary ketchup and a Sicilian lemon and dill mayonnaise, while Unilever-owned Hellmann's announced last month that it is set to release coronation chicken, gravy and chilli-flavoured mayonnaises in UK supermarkets.

While chefs may be keen to make sauces from scratch, using ready-made options can save time and ensure consistency in a busy pub kitchen. Sauces can double up as marinades, while rubs can be used in butters and to infuse oil. Nick Minchin, marketing manager for UK and Ireland at Santa Maria, says caterers should stock up on sauces which work in multiple dishes, using cheese sauce as an example – chefs can include it in macaroni cheese, cheese

toasties, fajitas, nachos and on burgers. Having a range of options, which may not always be possible to provide from scratch, also means operators can offer customers add-ons and options to personalise their dishes.

“For Mexican, Vietnamese, Thai and, in fact, most cuisines, self-serve condiments are an easy way for operators to accommodate different tastes using one dish, allowing customers to customise both the flavour and spice in their meal,” he explains. “Consumer interest in Mexican cuisine has grown consistently over past years, and demand spiked as more people added it to the lunchtime occasion during lockdown. Ideal for meal personalisation, the cuisine allows consumers to have their meal, their way – dialling dishes up (or down) using sides that add flavour, indulgence and spice. Mexican sauces and

CONDIMENTS AND SAUCES



Habanero cheeseburger from Santa Maria

condiments are ideal for these – jalapeños add extra kick, while guacamole and sour cream temper spice.”

When it comes to heat, Rachel Shoosmith, marketing manager at Creative Foods, agrees that consumers are increasingly seeking out spicy sauces. According to Innova, from April to September 2021 chilli made up 16% of all new table sauce product development. Garlic accounted for 6%, jalapeño chilli 3%, habanero chilli 3% and sweet chilli 2%. “With many consumers prevented from taking a holiday abroad, or choosing not to, they have been travelling globally through condiments, and they like it hot,” she says. “Hot and spicy sauces, such as sriracha and chimichurri, are now store cupboard staples. They are also looking further afield

to products such as American regional sauces, especially less common vinegary barbecue options from North Carolina, as well as African cuisines.”

Whether you give a classic ketchup an umami twist, mix up a fresh mayonnaise infusion or tap into global cuisines through ready-made sauces, it has never been easier to reinvigorate dishes with simple sauce and condiment upgrades. ^{P&B}

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It's all gravy

A staple of the beloved Sunday lunch, a good gravy sits alongside fluffy Yorkshire puddings and crispy roast potatoes when it comes to making the difference between repeat trade and a one-off visit. At The Pack Horse, Payne's beef bone gravy often takes 48 hours to make. He says an abundance of local suppliers and an abattoir on the doorstep means the pub's gravy must be special to go down well with diners. “It's so important,” he says. “Given where we are and what we are known for, we have to have a good Sunday offering and it's really important the gravy is right – it's the star of the show.”

His gravy starts with a mirepoix and includes equal ratios of port and red wine. It's reduced down for hours (and hours) before redcurrant jelly, which Payne says balances the savoury with a touch of sweet, and rich beef stock are added.

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