

FAB OR FAD?

Our new food columnist gives you the lowdown on her favourite food trends and the ones she hopes will fade away

Food trends can be fickle. Expect the cronut craze to follow the hundred-buck “haute” hot dog into oblivion. As for sriracha sauce, enough already.

Chefs generally lead the charge in trends. I’ve been around chefs and restaurant kitchens for many years and experienced first-hand the ideas that flopped and the few that stuck.

I landed my first job when I was 17, slinging souvlaki at Yanni’s Taverna in Greece. A couple of decades later, I ran a film-catering company called Reel Appetites and had to deal with my share of fad diets. Actors’ handlers would call from L.A. with explicit requests, some of which turned out to be largely for show. I was told one actress was vegan, but she ate bacon with her fruit plate. *X-Files* star David Duchovny allegedly needed wheat grass for breakfast, but he drank it maybe twice in five years.

Cooking continues to be my passion, but thankfully I found another career as a writer. I recently edited the second *Ocean Wise* cookbook, which will be out next month, and I’m thrilled to be writing this food column.

Here are some of the food trends that I hope will stick around, and a couple that I would happily bid good riddance.

Jane’s pick

Pok Pok, the wildly popular Thai restaurant in Portland, started making drinking vinegars (sweet and tart vinegar-based concentrates) for their customers, which they served with club soda. Pok Pok Som vinegars were soon bottled for the retail market. Thai basil is the best seller, with ginger running a close second. But my favourite is tamarind — it makes a refreshing and delicious cocktail muddled with tequila, lime juice and cilantro. \$15.99 for a 473 mL bottle at Gourmet Warehouse



PHOTO: JENELLE SCHNEIDER/PNG

Tacofino’s ling cod taco with cabbage slaw.

I love seeing **vegetables as entrées and desserts**. Food expert and author Michael Pollan’s advice has caught on: Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants. Award-winning vegetarian restaurants like Vancouver’s Acorn are being frequented by carnivores turned omnivores. And veggie desserts are about more than carrot cake — I make a mean parsnip cake and squash ice cream, for example.

Cookbooks also set trends. *Jerusalem: A Cookbook* by Yotam Ottolenghi fast became a best-seller and **Middle Eastern cuisine** goes way beyond hummus. Think harissa (a North African paste) and freekeh (a bulgur-like grain). And coming soon to a restaurant near you (already trending in Toronto) is Mediterranean, where Middle Eastern meets the Mediterranean.

I hope we embrace **pop-up restaurants** like we have food trucks. They give free rein to innovative chefs who lack permanent restaurants, and diners get to rub shoulders with chefs and fellow foodies. Everyone has fun. They’re the polar opposite of fine-dining eateries with linens and water sommeliers, which have seen better days.

Tacos are the new sushi. I’m talking about restaurants like Tacofino and La Taqueria, not Taco Bell. They offer mini gourmet tacos filled with ingredients like pork confit and spot prawns. If you own a cupcake shop (another so-over-that trend), consider turning it into a taco bar.

I acquired a thirst for **drinking vinegars** after dining at Pok Pok in Portland. The menu had about a dozen choices, from celery to

Cauliflower Popcorn

You might crave cauliflower after trying this recipe. Serves two as an entrée, more as a snack.

- One large cauliflower
- ¼ cup (60 mL) extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp (5 mL) salt, or to taste
- ½ tsp (2 mL) cumin
- ½ tsp (2 mL) garlic powder
- ½ tsp (2 mL) red chili flakes
- ¼ cup (60 mL) bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit (200 Celsius). Break cauliflower into bite-size florets. In a large bowl, whisk together olive oil, salt, cumin, garlic powder and chili flakes. Add cauliflower and toss until well coated.

Spread florets on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and bake until golden, about 12 minutes. Toss with bread crumbs and return to the oven for another five to 10 minutes, turning once.

tamarind. Mixed with soda water, they toned down the fiery Thai food and since then, I’ve tried them in cocktails, often with **cocktail bitters**, which come in an endless variety of flavours. Both vinegars and bitters feed into cocktail culture.

Juice bars have been around for years, but **blending** is beyond juicing. Drinking pulverized handfuls of greens with fruits and healthy proteins (seeds, nuts, soy) lets you avoid processed and refined foods. It’s also easier and faster. I’d rather drink a cup of kale than plough through piles of salad.

Lastly, at the risk of angering some readers, I wish the **gluten-free** trend would go away. Only a small fraction of the population is truly gluten-intolerant; the rest are just on yet another food-fad bandwagon.

There, I said it. Now hand me a baguette.