

Culinary

Entrepreneurs

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A Magazine for the food, hospitality
and tourism entrepreneurs by



New York's Star
of South Indian
Cuisines

The World's Best
Female Chef

The award-winning
Iraqi Food Writer

The Thai-Chinese
Restaurant

The Vegan
Cookbook Author

Asian Chefs
and culinary
professionals

Special
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The Armenia Restaurateur

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Tsaghkunk Restaurant & Gikhatun promotes the ingredients, traditions and culinary heritage of Armenia serving progressive regional cuisines and seasonal dishes.

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Anil Mulchandani

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Respective restaurants

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Editorial



From over a century, the recognised gastronomic masters of the world were the European chefs. The culinary world talked about French sophistication and haute cuisine, the Italian emphasis on flavour and bringing out the best from natural ingredients, the British roast, the vibrant food culture and social dining experiences of Spain, the Mediterranean food of Greece, Nordic minimalism, the rich baking traditions of Austria, the breads and processed foods of Germany, etc.

Today, chefs of Asian origins are increasingly receiving Michelin stars and other prestigious accolades, indicating a shift in the global culinary landscape.

The cover story of this magazine features an interview with Chef Pichaya “Pam” Soontornyanakij, also known as Chef Pam, chef and owner of the Michelin-starred restaurant Potong in Bangkok, who is named **The World’s Best Female Chef by The World’s 50 Best Restaurants** in 2025. The editor also interviewed Chef Vijay Kumar who has brought cuisines of Tamil Nadu to life at Semma, the first Indian eatery to top the best restaurants in the city list by The New York Times. In an interview with our editor, **food writer** and historian Nawal Nasrallah talks about Delights from the Garden of Eden which features recipes from Iraq.

Sardinia-born and London-based vegan chef influencer Tomaso Mannu known as the Mensch Chef, also talks about the use of Asian ingredients like kimchi and matcha in his recipes.

Wishing all of you for the coming festive season.



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THE CHAMPION OF THAI - CHINESE CUISINE

Anil Mulchandani



The World's Best Female Chef 2025, Chef Pam, as Pichaya Soontornyanakij is well-known, has opened a string of successful restaurants and bars. Chef Pam is the first ever Asian Chef to receive The World's Best Female Chef status,. She has also earned a Michelin Star and "Opening of the Year" awards from the Michelin Guide. She is also the first and only Thai female chef who achieved status of 3 Knives from the World Best Chef Award. Known for Progressive Thai-Chinese Cuisine, her POTONG restaurant is in a 120 years old building passed down from her ancestor as 4th generation POTONG's Traditional Medicine House situated in the heart of Yaowaraj (Chinatown), Thailand. POTONG is also voted #1 in Bangkok by TOP25 Bangkok Restaurants.



What inspired you to become a chef and food entrepreneur?

Since as far back as I can remember, I was already cooking with my mom. It wasn't just about preparing food—it was about connection. Those early moments in the kitchen shaped how I see food today: not as a product, but as a way to care for others, to preserve memories, and to create joy. As I grew, this passion became something I couldn't ignore. I just knew that I want to be in the kitchen, somehow those memories grew attached with

me and led me to today. But being a food entrepreneur came from a different drive— me and my husband would like to push boundaries and create something new for the industry. Every project we've launched—POTONG, Khao Sarn Sek, SMOKED, and more—was born from passion. They weren't planned as "concepts" but as extensions of my curiosity and a commitment to making Thai cuisine seen, respected, and evolved in ways it hadn't been before.

aromas of dried herbs, simmering broths, and preserved roots. These memories shaped my palate long before I ever stepped into a professional kitchen.

At POTONG, I bring these roots to life in a contemporary way. Take our Pad Thai, for example. While many see it as Thailand's most famous street food, its origins run deeper. Created during World War II to unify Thai identity, Pad Thai became a symbol of resilience and adaptability. At POTONG, we

What are your childhood memories of Thai-Chinese cuisine, and have they inspired your menus?

I was born Thai-Chinese, the 4th generation of my family, and grew up surrounded by layers of cultural and culinary heritage. My family's Chinese medicine shop—now home to POTONG—was a place where food and healing felt intertwined. The air was filled with the earthy



reinterpret it with refined technique, presenting it alongside a vintage WWII military box and with its Thai noodle flag to honor its historical roots.

It's a dish that carries history, but at POTONG, it's also about craft, precision, and respect for its origins.

Have you faced any challenges setting up your restaurants? If yes, how did you overcome them?

The journey to opening POTONG was filled with challenges I couldn't have anticipated. Restoring a 120-year-old heritage building in the heart of Chinatown was a monumental task—every beam and brick carried history, and we felt a responsibility to preserve its soul while transforming it into a fine dining restaurant. On top



of that, I was pregnant with my daughter and prepare for delivery at the time, and COVID-19 created a layer of uncertainty for the entire industry. We were doing something no one else had attempted before: bringing progressive Thai-Chinese cuisine into a district better known for wholesale markets than high gastronomy.

There were moments when it felt impossible, but I kept reminding myself why we started. Step by step, with my team and family's support, we navigated every obstacle. Today, seeing guests walk through POTONG's five floors, experiencing both heritage and innovation, I know every struggle was worth it.

Which are your most exciting achievements?

Earning a Michelin Star was one of my life's dreams—something I imagined since my first day in a professional kitchen. That moment was a reminder of how far we have come and how much care and precision goes into every plate.

Being named The World's Best Female Chef 2025 was equally humbling. It wasn't just about the award—it represented visibility for women in professional kitchens and proved to younger chefs, especially women, that leadership and creativity are possible on their own terms.

Seeing POTONG debut at #13 on The World's 50 Best Restaurants and receiving the Highest New





Entry award added another layer of pride—not just for me but for our entire team and for Thai-Chinese cuisine as a whole.

But I remind myself every day: these accolades are not the final destination. My focus remains on improving, refining, and taking POTONG to the next level for our guests. Awards come and go, but the ultimate reward is creating an experience that stays in someone’s memory long after they leave.

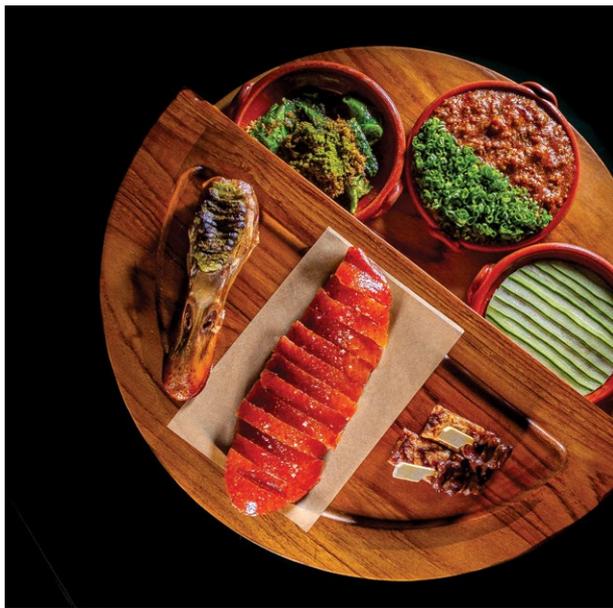
Which are your top dishes and why are they special?

Our Dry Age Duck is always on our menu since day 1. It draws inspiration from traditional Thai-Chinese roast duck but is reimaged with modern techniques like dry-aging for 14 days, precise humidity

control, and careful roasting to achieve perfect caramelization on the skin. The result is a dish that carries the nostalgic aroma of Chinatown but delivers new textures and depth, making it feel both familiar and entirely new.

Another is our award-winning Pad Thai, which won the Black Pearl Dish of the Year 2025. Beyond its global reputation, this dish represents resilience and innovation. Born during WWII as a symbol of national unity, it’s reinterpreted at





POTONG with meticulous technique and presentation that connects guests to its history while delivering a refined, layered experience.

Both dishes reflect my philosophy: honor heritage, explore technique, and create something that moves people.

Which are your favourite ingredients?

Palm sugar is one of my favorite ingredients. We source it from

K.Narong (Suan Than Lung

Narong), a small-batch farmer in Phetchaburi who produces it using traditional methods passed down

through generations. His palm sugar is nothing like commercial versions—it's smoky, caramel-like, and incredibly complex.

At POTONG, we use it everywhere—from glazing fish to balancing the layers of a sauce—because food



is all about taste. Working with artisans like Khun Narong not only supports local producers but also ensures our guests experience flavors that are deeply rooted in Thailand's culinary identity.

What are your future aspirations?

My aspiration is simple yet ambitious: to continue evolving POTONG and push it to the next level. I want to refine every detail, making it not just a restaurant but an immersive experience that stays with guests long after they leave. I also hope to inspire and grow with my team. For me, leadership is about showing what's possible when passion and discipline meet. I want POTONG to be a place where

young chefs feel empowered to dream big and develop their craft.

Beyond POTONG, I'm committed to supporting women in professional kitchens through mentorship and platforms like our Women-for-Women Scholarship. But right now, my heart is in this



building, and I feel there's still so much more to create.

Thai - Chinese Food

Thai-Chinese food is really a story of migration, adaptation, and how flavours blend when people settle in new places.

Large numbers of Chinese, especially Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese, migrated to Siam (now Thailand) between the 18th and 20th centuries. Many became traders, cooks, and street food vendors, settling in Bangkok's Yaowarat (Chinatown) and in port cities.

Food became one of the most natural areas of cultural mixing.

Unapologetically South Indian

Anil Mulchandani

“

Chef Vijay Kumar has presented a variety of food from the southern states of India at Semma in New York. From Dindigul biryani to snail pirattal, Chef Vijay Kumar is changing how the western world sees South Indian food.

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Photos: Will Ellis, Paul McDonough, Huge Galdones, Jeff Schear and Erin Lettera



Chef Vijay Kumar has presented a variety of food from the southern states of India at Semma in New York.. From Dindigul biryani to snail pirattal, Chef Vijay Kumar is changing how the western world sees Indian food.

Semma is the first South Indian specialty restaurant of New York to win a Michelin star and top The New York Times's list for top 100 restaurants. Chef Vijay Kumar of Semma achieved another milestone when he won the James Beard Award.

Growing up in Natham, Vijay Kumar was inspired by the rural cooking of Tamil Nadu. He visited his grandparents in Arasampatti, where he was part of the f

amily's fishing, hunting and foraging activities. He remembers hunting for snails in the paddy fields of the village and the cooking in mud vessels.

After a stint at the Taj Connemara in Chennai, Vijay moved to the US where he worked as a sous chef in Virginia, cooked at the popular

Dosa in San Francisco, and then worked with Rasa, a contemporary Indian restaurant in California with one Michelin star. "Roni Mazumdar and Chintan Pandya approached me to cook the food that lives in my bones, the fiery, loud, soulful food I grew up eating. We wanted to serve the kind of food that rarely made it onto restaurant menus, let





alone the pages of the New York Times or the James Beard stage. That's what we wanted Semma to be, a space without compromise, without apology. Just real", he states.

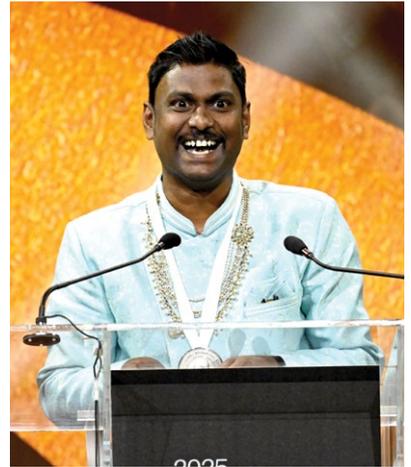
When Semma launched in 2021, his grandmother's nathai pirattal, snails spiked with ginger and tamarind, served with kal dosa was one of the star items on the menu, a dish that you would be hard-pressed to find even in Tamil restaurants. He also makes Kudal Varuval using goat's intestines and Dindigul Biryani. "We didn't chase

trends or try to make the food bend to a certain palate, we just cooked it the way it's meant to be. I really feel that the word spread because people felt that honesty. The team at Unapologetic Foods has always believed that if you tell a story with conviction and back it up with flavor, people will listen. It can take time, but it's worth it to go one plate, one story, and one conversation at a time", he says.

In the early days of his career, he would never have dreamt of helming a Michelin star restaurant (the only Indian eatery in New York

to get this star), or being named 'Best Chef: New York State' by the James Beard Foundation (The James Beard Awards are famously referred to as the 'Oscars of the food world'). "I am grateful for every recognition, but the moments that stay with me aren't always the big headlines. It's when a guest from a small town in Tamil Nadu says a dish brought them home, or when one of our line cooks beams with pride over a plate they've poured a piece of their heart into. Those are the moments that matter most, because they remind me why





I started cooking in the first place," he says.

with each other around the dinner table."

In his acceptance speech at the James Beard Awards, Vijay said, "The food I grew up on, the food made with care, with fire, with soul is now taking the mainstage. There is no such thing as a poor person's food, or a rich person's food. It's food. It's powerful. And the real luxury is to be able to connect

He said, "Tonight, Indian cuisine stands tall. Tamil food stands tall. My own food and my heritage stand tall, and it all matters. I stand here for everyone who never thought their story belongs on a stage like this."



Semma, which literally means Awe-

some, has indeed opened a new chapter in South Indian cuisine to the western world.



The Iraqi Kitchen



Iraqi author, Nawal Nasrallah is an award-winning food writer, food historian, English literature scholar, and translator from Arabic into English. She is best known for her cookbook featuring Iraqi cuisines, entitled *Delights from the Garden of Eden*, and for editions of medieval Arabic cookbooks. Her books based on medieval Arabic cookbooks include *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens*, an annotated translation of the tenth-century Abbasid-era cookbook *Kitab al-Tabikh* by Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq. In *Smorgasbords of Andalus and Mahgribi Dishes*, Arab food historian Nawal Nasrallah revives *Anwa al-saydala*, a chaotic, anonymously compiled cookbook from around 1220 CE.

Anil Mulchandani interviewed her about her work.

AM: What inspired you to write *Delights from the Garden of Eden*?

NN: It all began when I moved to the US in 1990 with my kids to join my husband who was on a Doctorate scholarship at Indiana University. Our new American friends loved the traditional dishes I cooked for them and were interested in recipes. It was then that I became aware of an empty space that needed to be filled. On the shelves

of libraries and bookstores I would see all kinds of beautiful international cookbooks but none on Iraq. That made me feel kind of jealous. Besides, ever since the invasion of Kuwait, Iraq was on the news practically all the time, and whenever people knew I came from that region, they would ask me about my dishes, and if I knew of any Iraqi cookbooks for recipes. It was then that I started to seriously think of

putting together an Iraqi recipe book. What was at first planned to be a collection of recipes expanded into a full-blown project, in which these recipes were interwoven with whatever was related to Iraqi food, of history, folklore, art, culture, stories, etc. I wrote the kind of cookbook that I myself would have liked to read of any given culture. And this was how *Delights from the Garden of Eden* was born.



DELIGHTS FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN

A Cookbook and History of the Iraqi Cuisine

Abridged Second Edition

NAWAL NASRALLAH

The increasing number of Iraqis fleeing the country and settling in exile was a factor that inspired me to write *Delights from the Garden of Eden*. Many were quite young when they had to leave. Sadly, they lacked the time or opportunity to learn about our culinary heritage. The book, encompassing Iraqi cuisine's recipes, stories, history, culture, songs, and folktales, was seen as a key to preserving it for posterity.

AM: What are your best memories of Iraqi cuisine from your childhood and youth that are part of the book?

NN: All kinds of memories, family, friends, food-related jokes, and so many more; all I value and cherish.

Just to give you a taste, here is what happened while still in Iraq when I 'dared' make our familiar delicate fine noodle halwa a bit heathier: I once replaced the white-flour noodles with a variety made with whole wheat, and my dear little kids ate it silently, so I asked, well, how is it? I remember how they diplomatically discouraged me from ever trying to 'spoil' their beloved noodle halva, they said, "It was good, Mom, but don't make anymore."

AM: Did you face any challenges in writing and publishing the book? If yes, how did you overcome them?

NN: Oh yes, I did, lots of them. First, there were the recipes of course, lots of them. To write them down I first had to cook them at least three times to make sure that I got the right amounts of the ingredients, including salt, and cooking times. I had no budget to speak of at the time for such activities, so I had to space the dishes so that we consume them for our daily meals. Lack of budget also necessitated that I had to be the styler and the photographer of the dishes—I had to consult library borrowed books on styling

and photography of food, because I wanted to include some photos in the published book. And of course there was the research aspect of it, and that was at a time when google was not even born yet. I used the well-stocked Indiana university library, it was time-consuming, but I enjoyed working on it given my background as a professor of English Literature and Language at the universities of Baghdad and Mosul in Iraq before I came to the States.

But the toughest hurdle of all was having it published. I contacted a lot of publishing houses specializing in cookbooks, they responded but only to let me know that though they found my project very interesting they had no plans for it. In the end I had to self-publish

it cheaply as a print-on-demand book, with b/w photos. That was in 2003. Luckily, I managed to catch the attention of the editor of *The New York Times*, they dedicated a whole page for it in their food section. And the book caught up from there.

AM. Which are the top dishes of Iraqi cuisine? What makes them distinctive from other west Asian dishes?

NN: While Iraq inevitably shares many similarities with the rest of the west Asian culinary traditions on account of the similarities of the basic ingredients available in the region, such as rice, lamb, wheat, beans like chickpeas and lentils and many more, it is indeed unique among them in the varieties it offers that developed there. It is a cuisine that was shaped by the



land's rich history going all the way back to the Sumerian and Akkadian times, where the first documented culinary recipes were written on clay cuneiform tablets (today kept at the Babylonian Collection of the Museum of Yale University).

For one thing, and irrespective of differences in ethnicity or religion, or even social status, the Iraqi daily staple revolves around the dishes of rice and stew, in Iraqi *timman wa marga*. White rice is usually served with a tomato-based stew cooked with chunks of lamb on the bone and a seasonal vegetable, one day it would be okra - the most popular of all - and another day, it would be spinach, or white beans, or eggplant, or zucchini, and so on. Therefore, it is never boring as it

might sound at first. Another thing typically Iraqi, is having pickles with such meals, especially pickled mango, called 'amba. It is usually imported from India, and I have not seen any other people fonder of 'amba than Iraqis, perhaps not even the Indians themselves who manufacture it for them. One reason could be that these daily staples are usually spiced sparingly.

True, like the cooking in the rest of west Asian region, the elaborate stuffed dishes like *dolma* and *kibbe* (or *kubba* as Iraqis call it) are favored. The Iraqi cuisine, nonetheless, offers many more varieties that characterize its cooking, such as the Iraqi *dolma* prepared with many vegetables, unlike the rest where it usually one type of

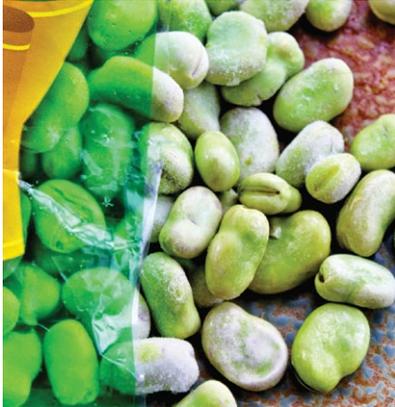
vegetables is used. Or take the stuffed bulgur *kibbe*, where in Iraqi it is distinctly shaped into flat discs, impressively large and thin. Other grains are used in making other varieties of it, such as the delicate *kubbat timman*, also called *Halab*, which is dough made with boiled rice and shaped into meat-filled discs and fried. Also particular to the Iraqi cuisine are the beloved stuffed rice dough dumplings simmered in cream of turnip and swiss chard soup, *Kummat Hamud Shagam*.

Using the New World vegetable, potatoes to make the stuffed food of *kibbe* is unique to the Iraqi cuisine, called *poteta chap*, not sure of the origin of the name but it sounds more like Hindi to me, my guess is that the name was developed when Indian soldiers were still in Iraq during the First World War.

Another Iraqi specialty, particularly in Baghdad, is the *masgūf* fish dish, not found anywhere else, and for the preparing of which there is archeological evidence of its long



history in the region. Whole river fishes, typically of the carp family, *Shabut* and *bunnī*, are slit-open from the back and hung on two sticks and barbecued on camp-like



fire along the banks of the river Tigris.

All these dishes, even those with rice, come accompanied with the characteristic breads of Iraq, namely, *khubuz tannūr*, which is flat bread baked in the clay oven, as well as the ubiquitous Diamond-shaped Sammun, baked in the brick ovens of the commercial bakeries.

AM: What led to your working on other books covering Egypt and Spain heritage?

NN: I mentioned earlier that given the kind of cookbook I had in mind to write, I had to do a lot of research, including history and culture. Within the course of my research I was thrilled to discover that the oldest

documented recipes in human history were actually written by my ancestors the Babylonians in Iraq in 1700 BC and that of several medieval Arabic cookbooks from Egypt, the Levant, North Africa and from Southern Spain when it was ruled by Muslims that survived the ravages of time. Remarkably two of them were written in Baghdad. I was so much enthralled by these precious culinary sources that immediately after the publication of my cookbook

Delights from the Garden of Eden

in 2003, I embarked on a self-appointed project, that of translating them into English, and supplementing the translated texts with introductions, extensive glossaries, and illustrations to initiate their readers to the remarkable world of medieval cooking.

AM: What are your future aspirations as a researcher of Middle-Eastern food history?

NN: The journey researching the Arab food history particularly the medieval ages is not over yet, there is still so much work including translations and research to be done in the field.

Vegetarian Recipes of the Arab World

Nawal Nasrallah

Himma Kassa (mashed boiled chickpeas with tahini):

This is an intriguing condiment included in the 14th century Egyptian cookbook *Kanz al-Fawāid* (I translated the book into English, *Treasure Trove of Benefits and Variety at the Table*), because it is the ancestor of today's ubiquitous hummus bi tahini (chickpeas mashed with tahini paste): (Makes 4 servings):

- 1 cup boiled chickpeas

I have chosen for you two vegetarian dishes that hailed from the medieval era to illustrate that Arab food is not about meat only and that the medieval dishes we find in cookbooks are still relevant today.

Various varieties of vegetables and beans were valued and relished as delicious side dishes, they were offered, as we say today as appetizers, served with bread.

- 2 tablespoons tahini, stirred with water and wine vinegar, 2 tablespoons of each
- ¼ cup finely ground walnut, stirred with 2 tablespoons lemon juice, and 1 teaspoon wine vinegar
- ½ cup chopped parsley
- ¼ cup chopped mint
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon of each of caraway, coriander, black pepper, ginger, and cinnamon, all crushed
- ½ teaspoon salt

A quarter of a salted lemon, cut into small pieces

For garnish: olive oil, chopped pistachio, chopped parsley, cinnamon, and rose petals (optional)



1. Put all the ingredients, except for the salted lemon, in a food processor, and pulse the mix until it looks smooth. The mix should look green. Add more of the herbs if needed. The consistency of the mix should be thick enough to pick up with a piece of bread. Add a bit more lemon juice if needed.

2. Fold in the chopped salted lemon, and use. To serve a dish, spread the condiment on a plate, drizzle a generous amount of olive oil all over its face, garnish it with chopped parsley, and give it a light sprinkle of cinnamon and crushed rose petals if used.

Baqilla Khadra Mahrusa (Pureed fresh fava-bean dip):

This is the other vegetarian dish I chose as I found it in the 10th c. Baghdadi cookbook *Kitab al Tawhid* (I translated into English as *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens*).

Makes 4 servings

You can prepare this dip year round using frozen green fava beans. If using fresh fava beans, blanching them in hot water first will make shelling them a breeze.

- 2 cups (12 oz) skinned fresh or frozen fava beans (= 1 pound or 3 cups, with skin still on)
 - 3 tablespoons olive oil
 - 1 medium onion, finely chopped
 - ½ teaspoon crushed coriander seeds
 - ½ cup, finely chopped cilantro
 - 2 garlic cloves, grated
 - ½ teaspoon salt
 - ¼ teaspoon black pepper
 - 1 teaspoon ground cumin
 - ¼ cup lemon juice
 - ½ cup (2 oz) ground pistachios
- For garnish: olive oil, olives, and basil or parsley

1. Put the skinned fava beans in a medium pot and cover with cold water. Bring to a boil, then lower heat to medium, and let them boil gently for about 15 minutes, or until tender. Drain beans and

reserve some of the liquid, in case you need it. When beans are cool enough to handle, mash them with a fork.

2. Sauté the onion in oil until it starts to brown. Add coriander and cilantro and stir briefly. Set aside 2 tablespoons of it for garnish, add the rest to the mashed beans along with garlic, salt, pepper, cumin, lemon juice, and ground pistachios. If mixture looks dry, add a little of the drained liquid in which beans were cooked or some extra lemon juice, to taste.

3. Spread mixture in a shallow bowl, and garnish with the browned onion, olive oil, olives, and basil or parsley. Serve with warm bread.





The Iraqi halwa Dihiniyya:

Here is a typically Iraqi halwa, ancient in its conception. It is called dihiniyya, derived from the name of the clarified butter, ghee (dihin hurr) traditionally used in making it, which gives it its characteristic enticing aroma.

Here is how to make it (Makes about 15 generous squares):

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup fat (I use 1/2 cup butter and

- 1/2 cup canola oil)
 - 2 cups sugar
 - 2 tablespoons date syrup (may be substituted with honey)
 - 2 cups all-purpose flour
 - 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
 - 1½ cups unsweetened shredded coconut
 - 1 cup walnut halves
- Preheat oven to 340 degrees F.

1. Put milk, fat, sugar and date

syrup (or honey) in a small heavy pot. Stir and let the mix boil until bubbly, over medium heat (about 10 minutes). Then take the pot away from heat and right away start adding flour, gradually, using electric mixer, like you do with cakes. Mix in cardamom.

2. Grease a 12x7x2-inch pan (or approximate size) and spread the bottom with half of the coconut. Scatter the walnut halves all over it. Then, pour the batter, and cover its surface with the rest of the coconut.

3. Put the pan on the middle shelf, drape it loosely with a piece of aluminum foil, and let it bake slowly for 40 to 45 minutes.

4. Take it out of the oven and let it cool completely on a cooling rack. Cut it into 15 squares and serve. Store the leftovers in a plastic container and keep it in the refrigerator, where it will stay good to eat for several weeks (if you can resist the temptation).

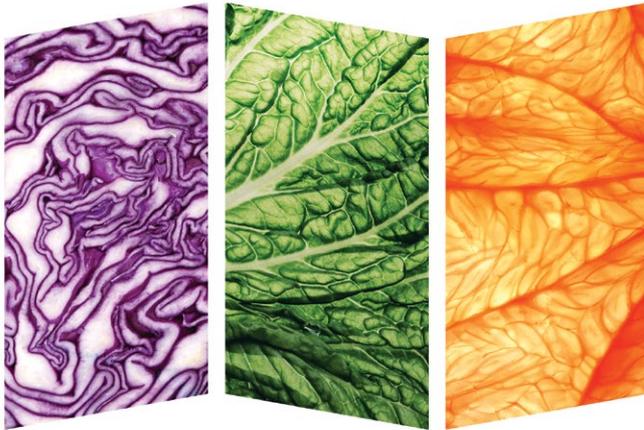
Enjoy!



The Mindful Kitchen Map innovative cookbook, written by vegan chef influencer Tomaso Mannu known as the Mensch Chef, rewrites the kitchen rulebook, using neurodiversity-friendly techniques, mapping your journey to an entirely sustainable kitchen oasis. We spoke to him about his cook book.

THE VEGAN FOOD INNOVATOR

THE MINDFUL KITCHEN MAP



The New System for Ethical Veganism
and Neurodiverse Wellbeing

TOMASO MANNU
The Mensch Chef

What inspired you to become a chef?

Cooking found me during those chaotic summers working in kitchens when school finished in Sardinia. I needed money to be a rebel teenager, then flew to Tenerife at 18, then London at 19, chasing something bigger than small island life. But what really inspired me wasn't the glamour—Chef's Table and The Bear weren't a thing back then. The real inspiration came from

understanding that food is the most fundamental technology for creating your reality. My grandmother in Sardinia embodied this instinctively; she fed our family with intention, love, and a system more efficient than lots of professional kitchens I've seen. She showed me something profound: when you control what nourishes you, you remember you're the creator of your own experience, and you can greatly impact those around you.

For 20+ years, I was an angry person working 60-80 hour weeks, running on espressos and cigarettes, living the "standard chef life." I was exhausted at being angry and had forgotten my true essence. The mission shifted when I realized most people have forgotten this power; they're consumers, lobotomized by convenience, dependent on systems that keep them weak.

Making your own food is the gateway to taking control of your entire life. That's what inspired me to strip myself of all labels, chef being one, and become simply someone who helps people remember their power through "food as freedom technology."

Why are you known as the Mensch Chef?

"Mensch" is a Yiddish word meaning a person of integrity and honor who acts with transparency and fairness, someone who does the right thing. That perfectly captures my philosophy: cooking with consciousness.

I'm not here just creating food; I would have pursued only my restaurant career if I wanted that.

I'm building a community of conscious humans who want to make ethical choices without sacrificing flavor or enjoyment. Food happens to be the medium.

The name represents my approach to everything, from ingredient sourcing and cooking to social and business relationships. It's about being authentic, responsible, and creating food that nourishes both body and spirit. When you're a "mensch", you operate with intention, respect, and love.

It represents everything I believe: we are creators of our own reality, but we've fallen asleep to our power. I help people wake up by questioning why systems want us dependent, making our own alternatives, and realizing we can create better than what corporations sell us.

What are your top experiences of working with chefs?

Working with world-class chefs like David Munoz taught me precision and innovation, but the real highlight was learning to question everything. These kitchens showed me what's

possible when you don't accept limitations.

The biggest highlight was realizing I could flip the script entirely— understanding my vision as much as my anti-vision. Who I didn't want to be, the life I didn't want to live.

After more than 15 years in professional kitchens, I was exhausted from being dependent on the restaurant system, waiting for someone else to give me opportunities: a never-ending ladder.

I was consulting from the start while working full-time, then left fine dining to hit London streets with a van making vegan fish and chips, opened the first vegan pasta bar, and launched a Brixton speakeasy simultaneously.

I created more brands than I can remember for clients and corporations, generating millions in revenue, but it became clear that traditional hospitality, and food dev wasn't aligned with my values or vision.

Working with the best taught me

that my highest career points were my lowest life points. I swore that any future restaurant (might open one again sooner than later) would implement my culture first— before induction, before training.

This led to **"The Mindful Kitchen Map,"** capturing systems born from years of learning, shaped by neurodivergence, creativity, and mindfulness.

What made you specialise in vegan cooking?

It wasn't some spiritual awakening— it was practical rebellion against broken systems.

When I realized food industries profit from keeping people dependent and unhealthy, I started asking: who benefits from you not being in control?

Going plant-based was taking the harder path on purpose. Making alternatives, sourcing locally, questioning why we're told we need animal products—it's about remembering you can create better solutions than what the system provides.

The gut-brain connection became

clear through my natural medicine studies. For neurodivergent individuals, inflammatory foods worsen symptoms like impulsivity and brain fog, while anti-inflammatory plant foods bring balance. Eighty percent of serotonin is produced in the gut.

Being vegan became a natural by-product of every other conscious choice I made. Animals play a huge part in my life—I have five cats and a dog, and I've had furry companions traveling the world with me since I was 15. I simply can't eat anything that resembles them or where I recognize consciousness.

I still remember the last time I was given venison to butcher, and I knew I didn't want to experience that disconnect again.

But I accept that I evolve. Like everything in life, I change, so this isn't dogma and I don't impose it on anyone. The book reflects my ethos around food—no judgment, just an open-source approach that anyone can use to empower their life.

I took 15 years of professional kitchen experience and applied it to

proving that plant-based food could be more satisfying and innovative than anything from factory farms. From creating my own flours, barista-quality oat milk using enzymes to fermenting my dairy free cheeses, every technique becomes an act of food sovereignty.

Plant-based cooking opened my mind to possibilities I never saw before. What looks like constraint becomes your first inspiration.

How did you develop the recipes for the book?

Every recipe goes through what I call "the reality creation test": does this empower people to take control, or does it keep them dependent?

"The Mindful Kitchen Map" isn't just another cookbook. It's a guide, a tool, and a map designed to help navigate the overwhelming complexities of your kitchen and, by extension, your life.

I wanted to break the cookbook norm where people typically cook fewer than five percent of the recipes.

Each recipe combines classical

techniques with the philosophy that you are the creator of your own experience. I test everything multiple times, not just for taste, but for whether it builds confidence, saves money, uses sourceable ingredients, and proves you can create better than corporations.

The book is organized around kitchen zones—The Pantry, Cabinets, Bin, Refrigerator, Freezer, and Homegrown Haven. Each zone teaches specific skills while building toward food sovereignty, creating a scalable system for any kitchen size or skill level. My journey across different cultures deeply shaped this philosophy. Each place and person I've encountered taught me alternative approaches to the same problems.

I don't treat traditional recipes as sacred, they're starting points for innovation guided by sustainability, mindfulness, and what actually works in modern kitchens for actual people, not just chefs.

Which cuisines are covered in this book?

The book it's not about recreating traditional cuisines, it's about

creating "freedom cuisine" that builds independence and challenges assumptions.

You'll find techniques for making everything from scratch: flours, instant foods for busy schedules, zero-waste staples and condiments, stock powder and cubes, activated butters, passata or super-concentrated tomato puree, Mediterranean preserved lemons, Korean-inspired kimchi using garden vegetables, and much more.

The real cuisine I'm teaching transcends borders. It's about food sovereignty and accessibility without dumbing down, innovation without pretension. Each recipe connects ancient wisdom with modern wellness and business sustainability.

How does this book stand out vis-a-vis other cookbooks?

Most cookbooks keep you in consumer mode, buy this ingredient, follow this recipe, depend on this system. Mine flips you into creator mode.

"The Mindful Kitchen Map" is designed with neurodivergent

readers in mind because I've walked that path. Traditional cookbooks feel cluttered and overwhelming. Mine uses specific fonts, spacing, and layout to reduce cognitive strain, with recipes broken into small, digestible steps.

This isn't guilt-free clean eating bullshit. These are recipes that prove you can have everything you want while questioning systems that profit from your dependence.

It's about abundance through creation, not restriction through consumption.

The book includes three core principles: Photography that speaks without words, Structure that works for your brain, and Accessibility that respects neurodivergent needs. Every image shows the transformation of ingredients so you can imagine yourself cooking before reading instructions.

More importantly, it includes the philosophy and mindset shifts that actually matter—how to flip from consumer to creator in every area of life. It's not just recipes; it's

a system for remembering your power through food.

Which are your top dishes and why are they your signatures?

My fermented vegan cheeses represent ancient wisdom and modern innovation— food science and flavour development at its best using fermentation and probiotics that also support the gut-brain connection crucial for neurodivergent minds.

From the book, the seamoss gummies demonstrate how to transform ocean superfoods into accessible nutrition— 92 of the 102 minerals human bodies need, supporting everything from thyroid function to mental clarity, and sneaking them into the young ones



with a familiar format.

The "Mang-um" shows how we make something commercially available but more nutritious. And my zero-waste approach, making apple cider vinegar from scraps, date seed coffee, coconut flour from milk pulp, proves that every ingredient has potential when you refuse to accept waste as inevitable.

Each signature dish teaches a principle: make something you could buy and make something that was never made before. Again, awakening the creator within.

Your top tips for aspiring vegan chefs?

• Stop asking for permission.

You don't need credentials, approval, or the "right" background. I started with zero qualifications, no formal background. Be intentional with your goals and pick your mentors strategically.

• Question everything.

Who benefits from you staying dependent? Why are you told you need expensive ingredients, special equipment, formal training? Most

of it is designed to keep you consuming instead of creating.

• Master fundamentals through understanding, not imitation.

Learn why activation reduces phytic acid in nuts, how fermentation creates probiotics, why certain ingredients behave differently. Knowledge gives you power to innovate. That is the real alchemy.

• Build systems, not just skills.

Create frameworks that work for your brain and business model. We perform directly proportional to our level of preparation. Mise en place everywhere. Embrace it!

• Use technology to create, not consume.

Don't be lobotomized by platforms— use them to build an audience, share your innovations, and create opportunities.

Never stop learning and questioning assumptions.

Continuous education keeps you connected to food as freedom technology.

What are your future aspirations?

I want to keep walking the talk: helping people remember they are creators of their own reality. Food is just the gateway.

My vision is building a global community of people who refuse to stay asleep. People who take control of their health, income, location, and time. People who build the life they want instead of accepting what they're told they should want.

"The Mindful Kitchen Map" is just the beginning. I'm expanding the community, courses, and consulting, but always with the same core message: you have more power than you've been told.

I want to prove that food sovereignty and personal sovereignty - geographical freedom and economic freedom - are possible when you stop being a consumer and start being a creator.

From functional to intentional.

From dependence to sovereignty.

That's the real recipe for change- not just in food, but in life.

THE MANGUM



INGREDIENTS:

- 200g/7oz cashews (soaked for 4 hours or overnight to soften)
- 125g/42oz/½ cup homemade cream (blend soaked cashews with water until thick and creamy; add a pinch of salt and a dash of vanilla extract for a gourmet touch)
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- 2 tbsp coconut oil or butter

- 2 or 3 ripe mangos
- 200g/7oz 54% dark chocolate

MINDFUL BENEFITS

Cashews provide healthy fats and magnesium and mangos are packed with vitamins A and C, essential for immune and skin health, while dark chocolate contains antioxidants and promotes mental clarity.

This homemade "Mangum" is a delightful twist on the classic ice cream, combining the creaminess of cashew cream with the tropical sweetness of mango purée, all encased in a crisp chocolate shell. A mini vacation on a stick!

Prepare the Cashew Cream:

Step 1: Drain the soaked cashews and blend with the homemade cream, maple syrup, and coconut oil or butter until smooth and creamy.

Make the Mango Purée:

Step 2: Peel and purée the mangos until smooth.

Assemble the Ice Cream:

Step 3: In your moulds, layer the creamy cashew mixture first, followed by the mango purée. Freeze until firm.

Prepare the Chocolate Coating:

Step 4: Melt the dark chocolate using a double boiler or in the microwave, being careful not to burn it.

Coat the Ice Creams:

Step 5: Dip or drizzle the frozen Mangums with melted chocolate, allowing them to harden. For an extra touch, sprinkle with nuts, coconut flakes or sea salt before the chocolate sets.

CREATIVE TIP:

Experiment with other fruit purées, such as strawberries or passionfruit, for different Flavour profiles - you're allowed to change the name then!

INGREDIENTS

- 40g/120g/1½ cups nasturtium flowers
- 700ml/24fl oz/3 cups water
- 120g/4oz/½ cup granulated sugar
- 85g/3oz/1/3 cup homemade pectin (see page 140)

CULINARY APPLICATIONS AND COMPANIC PLANTING:

- Nasturtium flowers bring vibrant colour and pepper flavour to the

NASTURTIUM JELLY



Nasturtium jelly is a unique and vibrant spread that captures the essence of edible flowers. It's a versatile addition to breakfast, desserts or savoury dishes.

table. Their leaves and seeds can also be used in salads, while the jelly serves as a topping for toast, a glaze for tempeh and tofu or an ingredient in desserts.

- In the garden, nasturtiums deter pests and attract pollinators, making them a valuable addition to any garden ecosystem.

Infuse the Flowers:

Step 1: Soak the nasturtium flowers in warm water overnight to extract their flavour and colour.

Prepare the Jelly:

Step 2: Strain the infusion and dissolve the sugar into the liquid.

Step 3: Add the homemade pectin and bring the mixture to a gentle

boil, ensuring it doesn't overheat to maintain the pectin's effectiveness.

Jar and Cool:

Step 4: Pour the hot jelly into sterilized jars, leaving some headspace. Seal and allow to cool completely.

Storage:

Sealed jars can be stored in a pantry for up to 12 months. Once opened, refrigerate and consume within 3-4 weeks.

For longer storage, freeze in airtight containers for up to 6 months.

GARDENING TIPS

FOR GROWING NASTURTIIUMS:

PLANTING:

Directly sow seeds in well-drained soil. They can also be started indoors a few weeks before the last frost and transplanted outside.

SPACING:

Space seeds about 25-30cm/10-12 inches apart to allow for growth and airflow.

MAINTENANCE:

Nasturtiums require minimal maintenance. Deadhead spent flowers to encourage more blooms.

HARVESTING:

Harvest flowers and seeds regularly to keep the plants productive. Use the flowers in salads, and pickle the seeds for capers.

NO-CHURN ICE CREAMS

AVO AND MATCHA ICE CREAM

This creamy, refreshing ice cream combines the richness of avocado with the earthy notes of matcha for a satisfying and nutritious dessert.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 ripe avocados
- 1 can (400ml/13.2fl oz) full-fat coconut milk
- 120ml/4fl oz/½ cup maple syrup or agave nectar
- 2 tsp matcha powder
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Blend:

Step 1: In a blender or food processor, combine the avocados, coconut milk, maple syrup, matcha powder and vanilla extract. Blend until smooth and creamy.

**Freeze:**

Step 2: Pour the mixture into a loaf pan or container. Cover with cling film/plastic wrap or a lid and freeze for at least 4 hours or until firm.

Serve:

Step 3: Scoop and serve. For extra flavour, sprinkle with matcha powder.

Creating your own no-churn ice creams at home is simple and very cost-effective.

These recipes are perfect for hot summer days or whenever you're craving a quick and delicious dessert.

With no need for an ice cream maker, these recipes are easy to prepare and can be customized with your favourite flavours and toppings.

Enjoy these no-churn ice creams as a refreshing dessert. They pair beautifully with fresh fruit, nuts or your favorite toppings.

If there's any leftover ice cream (unlikely!) that has crystalized, you can then blitz it again for a softer texture.

BANANA AND CACAO ICE CREAM

Rich, chocolatey and naturally sweet, this ice cream pairs beautifully with a drizzle of syrup or cacao nibs for added texture.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 ripe bananas or plantains
- 50g/1½oz/½ cup cacao powder
- 60ml/2fl oz/¼ cup almond milk or any plant-based milk
- 88ml/3fl oz/½ cup honey or maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

Slice and Freeze:

Step 1:

Slice the bananas or plantains and freeze for at least 2 hours or until solid.

Blend:

Step 2:

Combine the frozen banana slices, cacao powder, almond milk, honey or maple syrup, and vanilla extract in a blender. Blend until smooth and creamy.

Freeze:

Step 3:

Pour the mixture into a loaf pan or

container. Cover and freeze for 1 hour for a firmer texture.

Serve:

Step 4: Scoop and enjoy with a drizzle of chocolate syrup or a sprinkle of cacao nibs.

COCONUT AND BISCOFF ICE CREAM

Decadent and creamy, this ice cream combines the richness of coconut milk with the sweet, spiced flavour of Biscoff for an indulgent dessert.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cans (400ml/13fl oz each) full-fat coconut milk
- 160g/5oz/ cup Biscoff spread
- 60ml/2fl. oz/¼ cup maple syrup or agave nectar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 55g/2oz/½ cup crushed Biscoff cookies

MINDFUL BENEFITS:

These dairy-free ice creams are free from artificial additives and preservatives and are low in refined sugars. They provide healthy fats from avocados and coconut milk, antioxidants from

matcha and cacao, and natural sweetness from the fruit.

Whisk:

Step 1: In a large bowl, whisk together the coconut milk, Biscoff spread, maple syrup and vanilla extract until well combined.

Fold in the Cookies:

Step 2: Gently fold in the crushed Biscoff cookies.

Freeze:

Step 3: Pour the mixture into a loaf pan or container. Cover and freeze for at least 2 hours or until firm.

Serve:

Step 4: Scoop and enjoy, garnished with extra crushed Biscoff cookies if desired.

CREATIVE TIP:

Experiment with different flavours and textures, like a pinch of cinnamon, a swirl of nut butter or a handful of chocolate chips.

Serve your ice cream in decorative bowls or cones, garnished with fresh fruit or a drizzle of syrup, for a visually appealing treat.

THE ARMENIAN RESTAURATEUR

Armenia, officially the Republic of Armenia, is situated in the highlands of West Asia. Tsaghkunk Restaurant & Glkhatun was once a lunch stop for local growers and cattle farmers.

The building is now a dining room for progressive takes on Armenian culinary heritage, using local produce like aveluk (a uniquely Armenian type of wild sorrel), wild chamomile, bulgur and lentils. Irina Ghazaryan, Tsaghkunk's Restaurant Manager, tells us about the distinctive charm of this restaurant.





Hrachya Aghajanyan was inspired during his time as an ambassador in Denmark and Norway by the revolutionary approach of New Nordic Cuisine. He dreamed of creating a similar concept in Armenia, drawing on our country's rich variety of products and traditional dishes. Thus, he founded Tsaghkunk Restaurant.

Tsaghkunk Restaurant & Gikhatun, established in 2021 as a part of Gagarin Project is located in the heart of Tsaghkunk village, just an hour's drive from Yerevan. Our location reflects our mission: to support Armenian rural



communities while offering a culinary and cultural experience deeply rooted in the traditions and heritage of the region. Surrounded by the beauty of Armenia's natural landscapes, we invite our guests to

discover the flavours and stories of Armenian cuisine in an environment that is genuine and grounded.

At the core of our philosophy is a





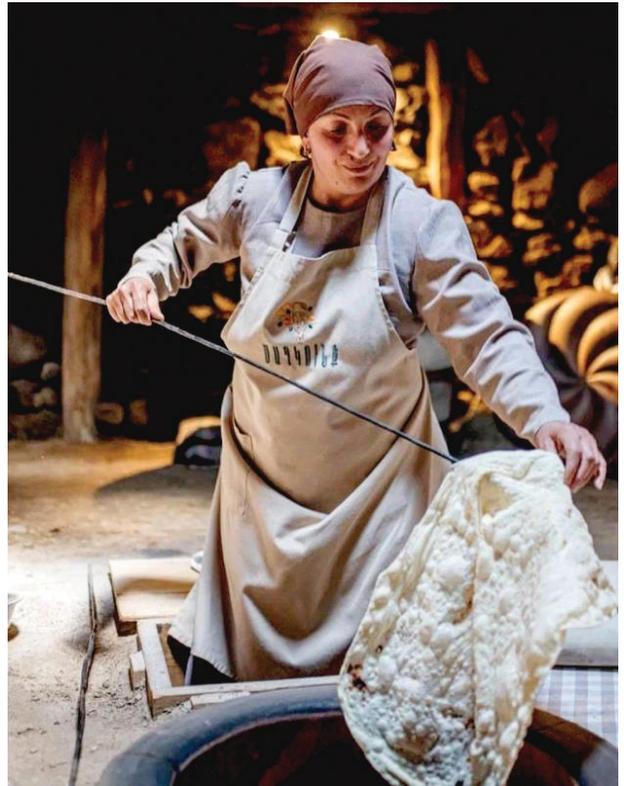
commitment to celebrating Armenian ingredients, local produce and recipes. We work closely with local organic farmers and suppliers to ensure that every dish highlights the authenticity,

quality, and seasonality of the region.

Our Gikhatun – which translates as “a head house” was originally built as early as in 11th century



and gained its final shape in 18th century. After an archeological excavation it was meticulously restored by DAR Foundation, utilizing exclusively original materials and techniques such as





clay, straw, and wood. To our delight, the excavations revealed the 11th-century wall and two old tonirs (the Armenian equivalent of the tandoor) in the ground. Our guests still can see them preserved under the glass with new tonirs built aside to make our own lavash, and cook selected vegetarian dishes.

Some of our signature dishes include Lavash – known as the “mother of breads,” lavash is a traditional Armenian flatbread, inscribed in 2014 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It can be preserved



for up to six months and plays an important role in Armenian rituals, such as weddings, where it symbolizes fertility and prosperity. Amich is a dish dating back to pre-medieval times, originating from the Armenian royal court of late antiquity. It is first attested in the 5th-century text Epic



Histories by the scribe Faustus of Byzantium. Traditional, old Armenian dishes like Panrkhach and Vanakhach have been given a contemporary touch- crispy smoked Chechil cheese with buttermilk sauce, and wild sorrel wrapped in fruit lavash with walnuts.

We are fortunate to see growing interest from people worldwide. Your magazine’s interest is another sign that we are on the right track, and we are entirely grateful for it.

We strive to discover and showcase new recipes, products, and ingredients that celebrate Armenia’s culinary heritage.



Rooted in Tradition, Rising with Time



Founded in 1947 by Shri Jumromal Rochwani in the year of independence, Azad Mithai was named to reflect the spirit of freedom. Later expanded by his son Prakash Rochwani, the business diversified into sweets, industrial catering, frozen foods, and restaurant services. Now led by Kunal Rochwani, the third generation, Azad Mithai continues to thrive. Our outlet on Relief Road, Ahmedabad, is known for Gujarati snacks, Puri-Sabji, platters, Dal Pakwan and the Sindhi Sweet Majun. We are developing a 21,000 sq. ft. facility at Sanand GIDC, which will produce up to 2,000 kg of sweets and serve over 5,000 industrial catering meals daily. Azad stands for quality, quantity, and affordability using the best ingredients and modern techniques.

Beginning



Growing



Leading



Expansion



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