

childhood, revisited!

From Parle G Cheesecake to cotton candy, from masala chai lollipops to ice cream sandwich sundaes and the famous Chicken Tikka Maggi, we look at how restaurants across India are letting you relive your precious childhood moments... again!



ParleG Cheesecake



Paan-flavoured
Cotton Candy



Mobar Sundae
Sandwich

PHOTO COURTESY: KUNAL CHANDRA

burp! madhulika dash

German novelist Franz Kafka once said, “So long as you have food in your mouth, you have solved all questions for the time being.” Make that ‘food’, a childhood favourite, and even *The Metamorphosis* author would have agreed, that it will make all problems vanish for a good meal time.

Let’s face it; when it comes to an instant connect, nothing teleports you back in time like food. Then if the dish has something that has been a constant of your childhood, then it just makes the whole experience much sweeter. This perhaps explains the frenzy that the paan-flavoured cotton candy introduced by Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra, two years ago, created.

A year later, Farzi Café, the first Indian bistro in Delhi, upped the ante by introducing in yet another childhood winner—the Parle G Cheesecake and the Posh Maggi. Such was the ‘food joy’ around these universal childhood connect that the Posh Maggi became the highest instagrammed picture of the year closely followed by the cheesecake. The instant connect was evident, and the Indian culinary world suddenly burst into this whole new fad of putting nostalgia/childhood on plate.

However, it wasn’t the first time such an innovation was trending. Hotels and standalones have been using chaats and gola to satiate palates for eons now. So what made this so different? The ‘difference’, says Sabysachi Gorai, “was the presentation. Dishes were being designed differently. It was not just about bringing back a flavour but also creating something equally addictive.”

“It was,” says corporate Chef Vikas Seth of Mumbai-based Dish Hospitality, “a case of serving the old wine in a new, classy bottle. In this case, a carefully thought, paired, presented dish.”

Just like that diners lapped up the new trend with every restaurant bringing out something that was unique yet had one element in common: it was childhood on the plate. But it wasn’t just about anything. “The deal,” says Massive Restaurant’s managing director, Zorawar Kalra, “was to bring in something that had a wider connect and then create the flavour to perfection and on that throw in a twist that would etch it in the diner’s memory. So the selection to which childhood memory to choose was as important, or rather more, than the idea on what twist that would make it befitting a restaurant’s menu.”



Guava Tan-ta-ta



Chilli Mango Popsicles

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Childhood Memories on Plate

A classic example of this has been Farzi Café's Parle G Cheesecake. While the idea of cheesecake could be categorized as contemporary, the Parle G biscuit, which has been presented as a sandwich rather than how one used to have back in time, is a culmination of two distinct favourite of the time: Parle G Biscuit and ice cream sandwich. Then, adds Kalra, "the addition of Gems on it literally brings childhood on a plate."

The success of such initial dishes eventually prompted more chefs to try their hand at taking something old, mixing it with new and creating something stunning – and equally addicting. The Noir Blanc Bread Pudding of Byblos Kitchen and Bar, Mumbai, for example, which gives the ordinary bread pudding an haute twist. Or the Guava Tan-ta-tan of Bombay Canteen, where the simple snack of pink guava sprinkled with chilli powder gets a French twist in form of a tart and spicy caramel. Likewise is the case of Mobar Sundae Sandwich served at the Monkey Bar in Delhi that recreates Jughead's favourite sundae for adults! Nope, we don't mean alcohol, but decadently close. Think layers of cake, ice-cream, assorted nuts, nutella, tutti-frutti, jelly and praline!

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So what really prompted the chefs to ring in such childhood memories? Aside the fact, adds Chef Seth, "that these dishes have the potential to be best sellers, it is also the challenge. If recreating the flavours that once dominated your childhood through sheer memory is tough, pairing it with something that would only enhance its flavours and make it more memorable is creatively demanding."

Agrees Chef Gorai. "While working with such known flavours, the pairing is all important else it may leave a bad taste for the guest who ordered it merely to relive the moment. So you cannot just pair Maggi with popcorn or bread with Marie biscuit just because you had it that way as a child."

"In fact," concurs Kainaz Messman Harchandrai, Theobroma Foods Pvt Ltd, Mumbai, "it is more important that the element of each of the dishes is in sync with the flavour you want to bring forth. Like for the Ginger and Green Mango tea cake I created, the idea was to get the same flavours that one had while eating raw mango doused in red chilli and salt from a newspaper masquerading as plate but with the softness of a nice ginger tea cake."

At the end, adds Chef Manu Chandra, Executive Chef & Partner Monkey Bar (Delhi and Bangalore), "the idea is to have something that was considered 'cool' then and now is super cool to introduce to yourself and your friends."

While that could have been the thought behind creating the Masala Chai Popsicle in Bombay Canteen, or designing the Sunday special Ripe Mango Lollipops at Nido in Mumbai not all childhood-inspired dishes come with the haute makeover. Some like the Chicken Tikka Maggi are sheer case of hit experiments. Says Rahul Singh, founder and CEO, The Beer Café in Delhi, "The concept of the dish was to mix two favourites: Maggi and chicken tikka, and see how things work. The result was so amazing that we had to re-introduce it in our menu again on popular demand."

Another example of 'keeping it as it is' is of Childhood Memories on Plate at Masala Library By Jiggs Kalra in Mumbai. Essentially a dessert that has the Parle G, Phantom Cigarette, the cerelac, caramel banana split, the mud pie – which actually looks like the mud pie – and more, it brings childhood literally on the plate by, as Kalra said, "Cleverly choosing things that each has a story with."

