

Mix and match

Anna Hansen tells *Rachel Walker* why fusion food is best



Most chefs are doing it now,” points out chef, Anna Hansen. “Only they call it ‘Modern British’ instead of ‘fusion’ — but if you look closely you’ll see that they’re whipping a tonka bean into their custard or sneaking lemongrass into their salsa.”

The New Zealand chef is aware that the term “fusion” is a loaded one. But rather than shirking from the label, she embraces it. Forget shy twists-on-a-classic, Hansen goes the whole fusion hog. It defines her dishes at the Modern Pantry, her two London-based restaurants (Clerkenwell, Finsbury Square), and has hungry Londoners queuing round the corner for her cult brunches, which feature dishes like tea smoked salmon with yuzu hollandaise, or prawn omelettes with smoked chilli sambal.

In her native New Zealand, fusion is a well-established genre. “It’s a product of immigrant nations,” Hansen explains. “It started with people trying to recreate dishes from home, but having to work with what was available.”

Her formative food memories were centred around just that — she was taught to cook by her Danish grandmother who grew her own ingredients, and found Antipodean substitutes that allowed her to recreate favourite Scandinavian dishes.

She did something right. “All of my grandmother’s kids are great cooks,” Hansen grins, adding that two brothers are professional chefs as well. So when she arrived in Britain in the early 1990s, it was no surprise that Hansen found herself gravitating toward the restaurant industry, learning her craft at Fergus and Margot Henderson’s first kitchen, the legendary French House dining room in Soho.

Hansen had spent a year travelling the world before setting in Britain, though. Broad dining trends at the time were rooted in ragu and ratatouille, but she sought inspiration in ramen or rendang, using native manuka honey or macadamia nuts, and splashes of shiso or yuzu. After honing her cheffing skills, Hansen’s second job was

in pioneering fusion restaurant, the Sugar Club, where she worked under fellow New Zealander Peter Gordon, and immediately found her niche.

“If I didn’t do fusion, I wouldn’t be a chef any more” she insists. “I love cooking, don’t get me wrong, but it’s the creativity which fusion allows that drives me.” A quick glance at the Modern Pantry menu confirms this. Forget steak and chips. Think onget marinated in tamarind and miso, with cassava chips and tomatillo chutney instead.

It isn’t a case of pulling ingredients out of a hat, though. The flavour pairings are driven by logic. “Even though I use a plethora of different things, they’re limited to a number of flavour profiles, and that’s what dictates the approach.” Hansen explains. “Tarragon, star anise, liquorice, fennel — all these ingredients come from a similar family, so it stands to reason that something that tastes great with liquorice will probably taste great with fennel too.

“Table salt, rock salt, sea salt — they all have different

properties — so you start there, then look further afield to other ingredients which are used to salt dishes, like miso, soy, fish sauce,” Hansen explains.

The results may seem unconventional when listed on the Modern Pantry menu, but the approach is not dissimilar to any other chef’s. It’s about finding flavours which marry together. “Only I’m not limited to using things from the UK, I can go wherever I want.

“My pastry chef found a cherimoya the other day. I was like, ‘What the hell is this?’” Hansen laughs, describing its date-like texture and banana-like taste. “We made a cherimoya and rum sorbet, which was quite funky. So there you go. Even in my own restaurant, I can always find something new.”

Hers is a world of endless possibilities, endless experimentation. You can share in it with her recipes for fusion home-cooking on the following pages ■

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Pink peppercorn chicken with pomegranate and blood orange

Pomegranate and blood oranges might be winter fruits, but the pinks and purples evoke the colours of a tropical sunset, bringing much-needed warmth and colour to a chilly evening meal.

Serves: 4

*4 free-range, corn-fed chicken breasts
4 tsp pink peppercorns, coarsely ground*

*2 tsp fennel seeds, coarsely ground
2 tbsp vegetable oil
100ml + 2 tsp pomegranate molasses*

*500g sprout tops or winter greens
25g butter
15g dill, roughly chopped
1 pomegranate, opened and seeds knocked out
3 blood oranges, peeled and cut into 6 rounds
1 tbsp sherry vinegar*

1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1. Heat the oven to 180C (non-fan 200C). Season the chicken breasts with the pink peppercorns, fennel seeds and salt.

2. Heat the vegetable oil in an ovenproof frying pan or skillet, and cook the chicken breasts, skin side down, at a moderate temperature for three or four minutes until they start to turn golden.

3. Turn them over and roughly divide the 100ml of pomegranate molasses, drizzling it over each chicken breast. Place the pan in the oven and roast for 8 to 10 minutes until the breasts are just cooked

through. They should be tender, juicy and just-pink.

4. While the chicken is cooking, bring a pan of water to the boil, and blanch the sprout tops or winter greens. Toss with a little butter and the dill, then season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper.

5. Carefully mix the pomegranate seeds and blood orange with two additional teaspoons of the molasses, the sherry vinegar and the extra-virgin olive oil.

6. To serve, place some of the greens on each plate, then top with a chicken breast. Scatter the pomegranate and orange garnish over the chicken and serve immediately.



NEED PIC EXTENDED

Mushroom, fennel and feta filo snail

Everything in this transportive dish can be found on supermarket shelves, but the anise flavours from the fennel seeds, alongside sharp feta and flakey filo, help create an exotic dish from a few simple ingredients.

Makes two “snails”, which serve 2-4 people

2 fennel bulbs, cut into 1cm dice

1 lemon, zested and juiced

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

3 shallots, finely diced

2 garlic, finely chopped

20g ginger, minced

2 tsp chopped thyme

100g wild mushrooms (eg, chanterelles, girolles or chestnut mushrooms), thoroughly cleaned

3 spring onions, finely sliced

½ bunch parsley, chopped

80g feta, crumbled

4 filo sheets

100g butter, melted

1 tbsp poppy seeds



1. Heat the oven to 180C (non-fan 200C).

2. Toss the fennel with the lemon zest and juice, 1 tbsp of olive oil and season. Tip into a parchment-lined baking tray and cover with foil. Roast for 10 minutes. Remove the foil then continue to cook for an additional 10 minutes until the

fennel becomes tender, and starts to caramelize.

3. Heat another tablespoon of olive oil in a pan and gently cook the shallots, garlic, ginger and thyme on a moderate heat until soft. Add the mushrooms and cook until tender. Remove from the heat and, once the mixture has cooled, gently stir in the

fennel, spring onion, parsley and feta. Check for seasoning and add a pinch of sea salt or lemon juice, if needed.

4. Lay a sheet of filo flat on the work surface, brush with butter, then lay another sheet on top. Spoon half of the mixture along one side of the pastry, then loosely roll into a log. Coil the

log into a snail-like shape. Brush with butter, then sprinkle over half of the poppy seeds. Repeat, to make a second coil-shape.

5. Slide both onto a parchment-lined baking tray, and cook at 170C (non-fan 190C) for 20 minutes, until golden. Serve immediately.



Warm salad: roasted pears and winter roots with lentils and watercress

Seasonal British ingredients get a makeover in this dish, which uses salty miso and a dash of fragrant spices to transform root vegetables into a real centrepiece.

Serves: two as a main, four as a starter

700g mixed winter roots (such as kohlrabi, Jerusalem artichoke, carrot, beetroot, parsnip, celeriac), peeled and cut into bite-sized chunks

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

Optional: fennel, cumin, ground coriander seeds, fresh turmeric

3 conference pears, quartered lengthways and cored

2 tbsp chardonnay vinegar

6 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

¼ tsp ground cardamom

1 small leek, quartered lengthways and sliced

1 red onion, finely diced

2 garlic cloves, minced

250g puy lentils

1 tbsp each of chopped rosemary, thyme and sage

50g white miso

100ml mirin

100ml light soy sauce

120g salad (such as watercress or mustard greens)

FOR THE BUTTERMILK DRESSING

200ml buttermilk

60ml sour cream

1tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

1 lemon, juiced

2tbsp poppy seeds, toasted and ground

1. Heat the oven to 200C (non-fan 220C). Toss the chunks of root vegetables in 2 tbsp of oil and season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper. Roast for 15 minutes, until tender and golden around the edges. As you remove them from the oven, add a sprinkle of any spices you have to hand — perhaps a pinch of fennel, cumin, ground coriander seeds or grated fresh turmeric.

2. Reduce oven to 170C (non-fan 190C).

3. Toss the pear quarters in a bowl with the chardonnay vinegar, the next 2tbsp of extra-virgin olive oil and the ground cardamom, then season with a pinch of sea salt and freshly ground pepper.

4. Place the pears on a baking parchment and cook for 15 minutes until tender and a little caramelised. Set aside to cool.

5. Heat the remaining 2tbsp of extra-virgin olive oil in a heavy-bottomed pan and fry the

leek and onion on a high heat, until caramelised. Add the garlic, lentils, herbs, miso and mirin and cook for another four minutes, stirring occasionally.

6. Pour enough water over the lentils to cover them, plus an extra inch. Simmer for 20 minutes or until the lentils are tender (if the lentils start to look dry, add more water as you go).

7. Once the lentils are cooked, remove them from the heat and stir in the soy sauce. Check the seasoning, and add more soy if needed. Leave to cool.

8. Meanwhile, whisk together the ingredients for the buttermilk dressing.

9. Scatter a layer of lentils on a serving platter, then a layer of the roast roots and the salad greens then slosh over some of the buttermilk dressing on top. Repeat the process to create a layered salad, and arrange the place the pear quarters on top. Serve immediately.

Beetroot, parsnip and potato hash cake with poached eggs

It's often assumed that fusion food requires cupboards filled with esoteric ingredients, but this recipe goes to show how the simple addition of garam masala can transform a dish that is otherwise based around British root vegetables and an egg.

300g potatoes, peeled
200g parsnips, peeled
100g beetroot, peeled
2 tsp garam masala
4 spring onions, sliced
25g fresh coriander, chopped
2 tbsp rice flour
1 egg, beaten
2tbsp vegetable oil
30g butter
500g winter greens
½ lemon
4 eggs



1. Coarsely grate the potato, parsnip and beetroot. Place in a clean tea towel and wring out as much moisture as possible. Stir in the garam masala, spring onions, coriander, rice flour and egg. Season with sea salt and freshly ground pepper. Mix well.

2. Divide the mix into four and shape firmly into patties.

3. Heat the vegetable oil in a large frying pan. Add half the butter and when it starts sizzling, gently place the patties

in the pan, one by one. Fry for 3-4 minutes on both sides on a medium heat until golden brown all over and cooked throughout.

4. Remove the cooked patties from the pan and rest on a wad of paper towels to absorb excess oil.

5. When the patties are almost done, heat the remaining butter in a separate pan and wilt the greens, seasoning with a generous squeeze of lemon juice and a pinch of sea salt.

6. Bring some water to the boil in a small pan and poach the eggs. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on a wad of kitchen paper.

7. Put one hash cake in the centre of each plate, arrange some greens on top, then place a poached egg on top. Serve immediately with mango chutney or lime pickle.