

Melting pot relationships

One of the best things about getting together with someone from a different culture is discovering a whole new, authentic food tradition. James Ramsden meets three couples who fell for each other's dishes almost as much as they did for each other

PHOTOGRAPHS **LAURA EDWARDS** FOOD STYLING **LIZZIE KAMENETZKY AND ROSIE RAMSDEN** STYLING **TAMZIN FERDINANDO**





“The flavours of Jina’s food were so new and exciting”

INTO THE MELTING POT: IRISH AND SOUTH KOREAN

It was a beetroot burger that Irishman Jordan Bourke used to woo South Korean Jina Pyo. “I’d never eaten beetroot before, but I loved it!” says Jina. When roles were reversed, Jordan fell for Jina’s spicy Korean bibimbap. “It was sublime – the flavours were new and exciting,” he says. And so food became a foundation of their relationship. “You get to know a person by their food,” says Jina. Now man and wife, their cooking is mainly Korean, though Jina has developed a taste for her husband’s pancakes. The yin and yang of a happy relationship lie, it seems, in our bellies.

Cooking is most engaging and exciting when we’re trying new things, taking risks and going off-piste. Eating novel dishes – be it an unfamiliar pasta shape or an esoteric South American guinea pig casserole – beats having the same grub night after night. It’s no wonder, then, that food so often brings couples from different cultural backgrounds together. That first date must be so promising with the added crackle of exotic spices, intriguing flavours or mysterious aromas. These act as ice-breakers, of course, but it’s more than that. A person’s approach to food tells us so much about them, and even more so when that person is from a background different from our own. Food provides insight, history and intrigue. There is romance in the unfamiliar, as these three couples’ recipes show.

Jina’s bibimbap

SERVES 4. TAKES 30 MINUTES TO MAKE, 30 MINUTES TO COOK

“This should be punchy and full of flavour. If it’s not, add more sauce.”

delicious. KNOW-HOW

Gochujang is a fiery Korean paste made from fermented

soybeans, glutinous rice and red chilli. It’s key to many Korean dishes and is available to buy from Asian shops or online (souschef.co.uk).

DELICIOUS TIP Serve with Korean kimchi pickle (from Asian grocers or online from melburyandappleton.co.uk) and chopped cucumber.

400g boneless pork belly, skin removed, chopped into 2cm cubes
1-2 tbsp vegetable oil, plus extra for frying the eggs
2 carrots, cut into thin sticks
1 tbsp toasted sesame oil
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp agave syrup or honey
3 medium onions, sliced
150g beansprouts
150g oyster mushrooms or shiitake mushrooms, sliced
200g spinach
400g short-grain rice
4 medium free-range eggs
2 spring onions, chopped diagonally
Sesame seeds to serve

FOR THE GOCHUJANG SAUCE

4 tbsp gochujang (see Know-how)
4 tbsp toasted sesame oil

4 tbsp soy sauce
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tbsp agave syrup or honey

1. Mix together the gochujang sauce ingredients in a small bowl, then put half into a large bowl. Add the pork, stir to coat, then cover with cling film and leave to marinate. Set the remaining sauce aside.

2. Meanwhile, heat 1 tbsp of the oil in a large pan or wok. Stir-fry the carrots until they begin to soften. Add about ½ tsp each of the toasted sesame oil, soy sauce and agave syrup/honey. Cook for 1 minute over a high heat, then transfer to a plate using a slotted spoon. Cook the onions, beansprouts, mushrooms and spinach, one vegetable at a time, for 1 minute each, each time adding ½ tsp of the sesame oil, soy sauce and agave syrup/honey (add more oil if needed). Season, then set aside to cool to room temperature.

3. In the same pan/wok, stir-fry the pork and its sauce for 20 minutes or until cooked through. The gochujang sauce should reduce and caramelise a little to intensify the flavour.

4. Meanwhile, cook the rice according to the packet instructions, then drain.

5. In a clean frying pan, heat a little oil and fry the eggs to your liking.

6. Divide the warm rice among 4 bowls, then add piles of the meat and vegetables, topping with a fried egg. Sprinkle over spring onions and sesame seeds, then serve. >>



KOREA AND IRELAND
ENTWINED Jina’s
bibimbap and
Jordan’s beetroot
burger with mustard
mayo and slaw (p30)

PER SERVING 942kcal, 44.1g fat (11g saturated), 31.6g protein, 96.2g carbs (13.8g sugars), 4.9g salt, 6.1g fibre

AND TO DRINK... The apple and lime of South African chenin blanc go beautifully with the pork belly.

***Jordan's beetroot burgers with mustard mayo and slaw [v]**

MAKES ABOUT 5. TAKES 1½ HOURS TO MAKE, 20 MINUTES TO COOK

DELICIOUS. TIP You could speed things up here by using a food processor to grate the vegetables.

JORDAN'S TIP When making mayo, I have a cup of ice-cold water ready, as a few drops can bring it together when it flows like it might split.

FREEZE ...the cooled, cooked burgers for up to 3 months. Cook from frozen for 30 minutes.

FOR THE BEETROOT BURGERS

- Handful of fresh dill
- Handful of fresh flatleaf parsley
- 2 fresh thyme sprigs, leaves picked
- 175g beetroot, coarsely grated (wear rubber gloves)
- 75g carrot, finely grated
- 60g oatmeal
- 2 medium free-range eggs
- ½ small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 4 crusty bread rolls to serve
- Rocket leaves to serve
- Cherry tomatoes, halved, to serve

FOR THE MUSTARD MAYO

- 50ml extra-virgin olive oil
- 250ml sunflower oil
- 2 medium free-range egg yolks
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard

FOR THE SLAW

- ¼ small celeriac, cut into matchsticks
- ¼ red cabbage, very thinly sliced
- 1 carrot, shredded
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- Small handful of hazelnuts, toasted and chopped
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh flatleaf parsley

- 1 eating apple
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon, plus juice of ½
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp salt

1. To make the mustard mayo, use a food processor or an electric hand whisk. Combine the oils in a jug. Put the egg yolks, Dijon mustard, lemon juice and a pinch of salt in the food processor or a mixing bowl. As you start to process/beat, very slowly add the oils until the mixture begins to emulsify and thicken. Once this happens you can add the oil a bit faster, but never be tempted to fire it all in otherwise the mayo will split. Once you've added all the oil, stir in the mustard, then refrigerate until needed.

2. Next make the burgers. Finely chop the herbs. Mix well with the beetroot, carrot, oatmeal, eggs, onion and garlic in a large bowl. Stir in the 1 tsp salt and some black pepper. Set aside for 15 minutes.

3. Preheat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/gas 4. To make the slaw, mix the celeriac, cabbage, carrot, onion, hazelnuts and parsley in a bowl. Just before serving, quarter and core the apple, then slice and add to the slaw.

4. Add 3 tbsp of the mustard mayo, the lemon zest and juice, 1 tbsp olive oil, ½ tsp salt and a pinch of pepper, then mix well with your hands. Taste and, if needed, add extra salt, olive oil or wholegrain mustard.

5. Form the burger mix into 5 patties with your hands. Gently heat the 1 tbsp vegetable oil in a frying pan, then fry the patties for 2-3 minutes on each side until just browned. Put in an ovenproof dish and cook in the oven for 20 minutes.

6. Warm the bread rolls, split them and spread with mustard mayo. Add a burger to each, along with some rocket, halved tomatoes and slaw.

PER SERVING 891kcal, 72.3g fat (9.3g saturated), 15.8g protein, 44.4g carbs (12.5g sugars), 2.4g salt, 10.2g fibre

AND TO DRINK... A soft white with nutty or creamy flavours, such as a white Rhône or Mâcon chardonnay. >>



Jason (left) and Simon

“We were a Brit and Australian in Hong Kong: a three-way mix of cuisines”

INTO THE MELTING POT: AUSTRALIAN AND BRITISH

Ice cream was the clincher at the start of Brit Simon Page and Aussie chef Jason King's relationship. "We were a Brit and Australian abroad in Hong Kong, so it was a three-way mix of cultures," says Simon. "Jason was running a restaurant and I was a music teacher. He'd leave work early to meet me, bringing velvety homemade ice cream. I'd never tasted anything like it." Fast forward 15 years and Simon and Jason now run the much-garlanded Wellington Arms in Hampshire. And has there been further cultural crossover? Simon says he's now pretty good at that Aussie favourite, the barbecue, and "Jason is fab at stodgy pud". Barbecues and bread and butter pudding? Sounds like the recipe for a happy relationship.



THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW Simon's pot roast chicken and Jason's caramel ice cream (p32)



Chris and Sama

“I was excited to learn more about her culture”

INTO THE MELTING POT: BRITISH AND SYRIAN

“Food was the reason we met in the first place,” says Syrian Sama Meibar. “I was eating a slice of lime and he looked at me strangely, so I told him he should try one. He hated it, but it got us talking.” An interest in food cultures was, and still is, core to Sama and Christopher Keeling’s relationship. “I wanted to learn more about her culture and food seemed a good place to start. We explored London’s Arabic food scene with Sama saying, ‘This isn’t as good as my mum’s,’” Chris says. Sama was also keen to learn Chris’s recipes, despite her initial scepticism about men in the kitchen. “She was surprised by how much I cook,” says Chris. “You know the adage that the way to a man’s heart is via his stomach? It works both ways.”

“Simon’s good at Aussie barbecue now and Jason loves British ‘stodgy puds’”

Simon’s pot roast chicken

SERVES 4-6. TAKES 20 MINUTES TO MAKE, 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES TO COOK
“This takes 1½-2 hours in the oven – enough time for Jason to walk the dogs. It’s ideal for a Sunday lunch.”

DELICIOUS. TIP For an easy way to peel shallots, blanch them in a pan of boiling water for 5 minutes first to loosen the skins.

- 1 lemon
- 2kg free-range chicken
- 4 fresh rosemary sprigs
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 300g pancetta lardons
- 12 new potatoes, scrubbed not peeled
- Bunch of young carrots, scrubbed not peeled
- 10 garlic cloves, peeled
- 6 fresh thyme sprigs
- 20 shallots, peeled (see tip)
- ½ bottle good-quality dry white wine
- ½ tsp wholegrain mustard
- 100g fresh flatleaf parsley, chopped

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/fan 160°C/gas 4. Make several incisions in the lemon with a sharp knife, then put it into the chicken cavity with the rosemary sprigs. Rub the chicken with a little olive oil and season well.
2. Put a large casserole on a low-medium heat, add the remaining olive oil, then add the pancetta lardons and cook until crisp. Stir in the potatoes, carrots, garlic, thyme and shallots to coat them in the oil. Turn the heat to high, add the white wine and bring to the boil. When boiling, turn off the heat, put the chicken on top of the veg, cover and transfer to the oven for 1 hour. Take off the lid, then cook for another 30-45 minutes so the skin browns.
3. Remove the chicken from the pot (carefully tip back any juices from the cavity into the pot) on to a board. Lift the vegetables out with a slotted spoon on to a serving platter, top with the chicken and keep warm

to carve at the table. Put the casserole on the hob on a high heat, bring to the boil, then bubble vigorously until the liquid is reduced and quite thick. Stir in the mustard, taste, season with salt and pepper, then add the chopped parsley. Tip into a gravy jug, then serve with the chicken and vegetables.

PER SERVING [BASED ON 6]
486kcal, 20.3g fat (5.9g saturated), 41.1g protein, 25.1g carbs (8.8g sugars), 2g salt, 5.4g fibre
AND TO DRINK... A crisp, buttery Chablis is a treat here and provides the right balance for the dish.

Jason’s caramel ice cream

MAKES 2 LITRES. TAKES 40 MINUTES TO MAKE, 40 MINUTES TO COOK, PLUS 2 HOURS OF COOLING AND CHURNING
“We have our own chickens at home, so we use their fresh-laid eggs – which have rich, yellow yolks – to make this recipe. Use the best free-range eggs you can find.”

- 3 vanilla pods
- 1 litre whole milk
- 750ml double cream
- 2 bay leaves
- 350g golden caster sugar
- 9 free-range eggs
- 150g caster sugar

1. Split the vanilla pods lengthways, then scrape out the tiny black seeds with the tip of a small knife and set aside. Put the milk, cream, scraped vanilla pods and bay leaves in a large pan and bring to the boil. When boiling, take the pan off the heat, then cover with cling film and leave to infuse for at least 30 minutes.
2. Put the 350g golden caster sugar in a mixing bowl, then stir in the vanilla seeds. Crack the eggs into a large stainless steel bowl, then beat in the sugar and vanilla mixture.
3. Carefully add ladlefuls of the infused milk to the egg/sugar mixture, stirring, until it’s all added.

4. Return the custard mixture to a clean saucepan and cook over a low heat, stirring constantly, until thick enough just to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Remove the pan from the heat and keep stirring the mixture for 5 minutes as it cools, then it pour into a large bowl through a fine sieve. Remove and discard the bay leaves. Wash the vanilla pods lightly, then add back to the strained mixture. Cover with cling film and set aside.
5. Make a caramel by combining the 150g caster sugar with 100ml water in a small pan and cooking on a low heat until it turns a rich, chestnut brown colour. Wearing oven gloves, carefully stir a little of the custard into the caramel to stop it from seizing (turning solid). The mixture will spit violently and is very hot, so be careful.
6. When the remaining caramel has cooled slightly, stir it into the custard and chill in the fridge for 2 hours. When the custard is completely cold, take out of the fridge. Remove and discard the vanilla pods. Churn the custard in an ice cream machine according to the manufacturer’s instructions. (Alternatively, pour the custard into a shallow tray or container and freeze for 1 hour. When ice crystals start to form, stir briefly with a fork to break them up. Repeat 5-6 times until the mixture is smooth.)
7. When ready to serve, remove the ice cream from the freezer and scoop it into bowls or tall glasses. Top with crumbled ginger biscuits and summer fruits, if you like.

PER SERVING [BASED ON 20]
396kcal, 25.1g fat (14.6g saturated), 5.7g protein, 36.9g carbs (37.8g sugars), 0.2g salt, no fibre
AND TO DRINK... Pour the treacly, dark, hugely sweet and sexy Pedro Ximénez sherry over the ice cream, or sip a shot with it. »



MIDDLE EAST MEETS WEST Sama’s ful medames (top) and Chris’s duck ragù with tagliatelle (p34)

CHRIS AND SAMAS PORTRAIT: TOM KEEN

Sama's ful medames [v]

SERVES 4. TAKES 20 MINUTES TO MAKE,
10 MINUTES TO COOK

DELICIOUS. TIPS This dish is usually made with tinned ful medames (fava beans), available from Middle Eastern grocers. We used tinned broad beans, which are easier to find in the UK. To be really authentic, use 150g dried broad beans (fava beans) and soak them overnight, then boil for 30 minutes. You can buy British-grown dried fava beans from Hodmedod's (hodmedods.co.uk).

2 x 300g tins broad beans or ful medames (see tip)

1 small onion, finely chopped

5 large vine tomatoes, finely chopped, deseeded

1 garlic clove, finely chopped

Large bunch of fresh flatleaf parsley, leaves chopped

Juice of 2 lemons

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

1 tbsp red pepper paste or ajvar (available in Middle Eastern shops and some supermarkets. We used Luteniza pepper paste from Pelagonia – pelagonia.co.uk)

Toasted pitta bread to serve

1. Tip the beans and their liquid into a pan and heat gently for about 10 minutes until warm (don't boil). When warmed through, strain the beans, reserving a small splash of the liquid and discarding the rest.

2. Meanwhile, mix the onion, tomatoes and garlic in a salad bowl. Add the chopped parsley leaves and toss through.

3. Add the warmed beans and the reserved liquid to the bowl and mix well. Add the lemon juice, olive oil and red pepper paste and mix well. Taste, season and serve while still warm, scooping them up on pieces of toasted pitta bread.

PER SERVING 195kcal, 6.7g fat (1g saturated), 13.1g protein, 20.4g carbs (3.1g sugars), 1.1g salt, 11.4g fibre

AND TO DRINK... Sama's dish meets its match in a cool, fruity Spanish rosado. Navarra or Rioja are the best regions for rosé.

“ We explored London's Arabic food scene with Sama saying 'It's not as good as Mum's' ”

*Chris's duck ragù with tagliatelle

SERVES 4. TAKES 40 MINUTES TO MAKE,
4 HOURS TO COOK

delicious.
KNOW-HOW

A cartouche is a disc of baking paper that rests on the surface of a dish like a stew while it cooks gently. It helps trap steam, preventing the dish drying out. To make a cartouche, cut a disc of baking paper to fit snugly inside the pan. Scrunch it up, wet it slightly, then open it out and lay it on the dish. **FREEZE** ...the cooked, cooled ragù in a sealed plastic container for up to 3 months. Defrost before reheating.

1 whole free-range duck (about 2kg), jointed into 6 pieces, legs trimmed of excess fat

120g pancetta or thick bacon, cubed

Vegetable oil for frying

2 onions or 5 shallots, very finely chopped

1 star anise

1 celery stick, very finely chopped

2 medium carrots, very finely chopped

4 garlic cloves, crushed

1 duck liver (optional), chopped

1 bay leaf

3 fresh thyme sprigs, leaves picked

200ml red wine

100g tomato purée

2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes

500ml good-quality fresh duck/chicken stock

2 tbsp finely chopped fresh parsley

400g tagliatelle

Grated parmesan to serve

Extra-virgin olive oil to serve

1. Score the skin of the duck breasts and legs with a sharp knife and season with salt. Put them, skin-side down, into a cold dry frying pan over a medium heat. As the pan heats up the fat will begin to render out (don't turn the breasts over onto the meat side, but you can turn the legs). Once the fat has rendered and

the skin has crisped up – about 8-10 minutes – remove the duck from the pan and set aside.

2. Add the pancetta to the same pan and cook in the duck fat until crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on kitchen paper. Remove the duck fat (reserve for another use, such as roasting potatoes).

3. Heat a little vegetable oil in a clean frying pan on a medium-low heat. Add the onions/shallots and the star anise and fry until soft, then add the celery, carrot and garlic and fry for a further 10 minutes. Add the chopped liver, if using, and cook until browned. Turn the heat up to high, then add the bay leaf, thyme and the red wine. Boil until the liquid has reduced by half, then add the tomato purée and cook for 2-3 minutes. It will turn a darker red and give the ragù a caramelised flavour.

4. Add the chopped tomatoes and duck/chicken stock along with the duck pieces and the pancetta. Cover with a cartouche (see Know-how) and a lid, then leave to simmer gently over a low heat for 2 hours. Remove the lid and cartouche, then simmer for a further ½ hour.

5. Remove the duck pieces and set aside to cool slightly. Shred the meat, discarding the bones, then stir it through the sauce. Add the finely chopped parsley. Cook the tagliatelle according to the packet instructions and serve with the ragù. Grate parmesan over the top and drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil to finish.

PER SERVING 977kcal, 33.4g fat (9.9g saturated), 68.7g protein, 84.6g carbs (17.7g sugars), 2.4g salt, 9.6g fibre

AND TO DRINK... A ripe, rounded, juicy pinot noir from Chile is the perfect partner for the delectable long-simmered duck ragù. **a**

NEXT MONTH

Meet the people around the UK who are putting food back into the heart of their communities