

Craving Satisfied

These days, comfort food is just as good as a warm embrace

By MARELLA RICKETTS

The days go by, some more confusing than the others. During these frustrating times, sometimes all you need to do to feel a little better is to tiptoe into the kitchen, open your fridge, and pick out whatever calls your name.

There is no shame in turning to comfort food from time to time—since the beginning of this pandemic, many of our favorites from the F&B industry have pivoted, catering to this very need. Three professionals—Richie Manapat, Enrique Moreno and Tara Lane—talk to us about how life has been a few months in, and share a little treat to inspire us: their comfort food of choice.

The situation has forced us to see with even clearer eyes what truly matters to us: human connection. And because we are not able to give much hugs these days, we figured that their comforting meals would be a nice replacement.

APPETIZER: SOURDOUGH PIZZA

For many, bread has become an integral part of our everyday lives. Knowing this, Richie Manapat has had one goal in mind since he had entered the industry: to stop bad bread. He elevates the quality of every batch he touches and takes the time to take people under his wing, working with names such as Hapag, Lagrima, Manu Mano, and Masa Bakehouse in La Union.

It comes as no surprise that Manapat's comfort food, homemade pizza, has dough as its core ingredient. His version, of course, is naturally leavened and uses unbleached flour. "This actually takes two days to make," he shares. "The first day is to make the sourdough starter and the second is for actually making the pizza."

To him, pizza comes to mind because it was his go-to meal as a kid who played video games. "I would always order it because it didn't require much work. I know this recipe seems like a long time to produce, but there's actually very little waiting time. Since it requires more waiting around, the starter can actually be made the night before," he says. "As adults, work can take up most of our time. This whole situation has reminded me to take breaks every now and then to rest, spend time with the family—maybe even play some games."

These days, Manapat is reminded of what matters the most to him. "Now, more than ever, people are reminded of the importance of family. I don't know how things will be for F&B over the next few months, but I'm just taking it day by day and am grateful for my family. There's nothing better than splitting pizza with them," he shares.



DOUGH GOOD

The simplest dishes are often the ones we miss the most. Here, a childhood pizza is made better by using leavened bread and fresh ingredients

MAIN: ALIGUE GAMBAS

Just last year, reviews of Mijo Comfort Food, tucked in the trendy Poblacion, Makati, spread like wildfire. Without a doubt, it was going to be one of the restaurants to be in this 2020. When the pandemic happened, the team behind Mijo knew what needed to be done: pivot. "When the lockdown was lifted, we held a drive for hospital frontliners for almost two months, giving them around 3500 meals in total. After this, we decided to open for delivery and takeout," shares chef Enrique Moreno. "We're currently working towards opening our doors for private dining, but we're waiting for things to stabilize a bit before doing this."

Staying true to the theme of his restaurant, the chef has a keen understanding of dishes that hit close to home. When he thinks of his personal favorite comfort food, the restaurant's Aligue Gambas comes to mind—pan seared prawns tossed in aligue (crab fat), garlic and spices and homemade bonete bread. Who wouldn't want to indulge in that?

Moreno reveals that the inspiration for his recipe—and his restaurant as a whole—came from his heritage. "I'm lucky that I grew up with grandmothers from both sides who were amazing cooks. For this recipe, all I had to do was elevate the ingredients and update certain cooking techniques," shares Moreno.

"Nostalgia can make a dish so powerful. It's comforting and familiar, and you feel like you are being hugged when you take a bite," he adds.



SEE FOOD

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CHOCOLATE KISS —The kitchen is often the place for many good memories, some of them as sweet and universally loved as chocolate chip cookies



DESSERT: CLASSIC CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

Tara Lane, a pastry chef who grew up in the Philippines and is now based in London, is slowly adjusting to life during the pandemic. "It was difficult at first. I was doing anything to keep myself busy: cooking meals for my flat makes, working out, trying to learn a new language... After about a month, I found a routine that worked for me. I've learned to appreciate the time I have for myself and the opportunities to stay in touch with loved ones," she says.

As a sweet tooth, the dessert that brings her the most comfort are the classic chocolate chip cookies that remind her of her childhood. "When I was a kid, I fell in love with the classic Nestle Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookies, the one you find on the back of the bag of chocolate chips. Since then, I've tweaked the recipe to create my own version," she enthuses. Chewy and made with ingredients such as dark chocolate chunks and sea salt flakes, her cookies are as classic as it can get.

When asked about what makes a dish from a childhood memory so powerful, she answers, "Childhood memories may be fuzzy, but so many years later, when you combine them with one of your sense like taste, you relive it in a totally different way. You can't help but want to share it with other people, too." ■

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