

# HOW TO SPEND IT

29 MAY  
2021

## AN *ELEGANT* SUMMER

THE TUX REDUX

TADAO ANDO'S  
STYLE SECRETS

A UNICORN FERRARI -  
UNVEILED

MEET THE FARMER  
FLORISTS

JO NESBØ'S  
ROCK-STAR ALTER EGO



**S**ome pieces of equipment you acquire for your kitchen, try once and never use again. I'm thinking here of the fish kettle I bought on a whim some years ago in order to make Cantonese-style steamed fish. Now it languishes at the back of a cupboard gathering dust. Other pieces of equipment you bring into your kitchen and they change the way you cook. They change you. They open up possibilities, spark ideas. Now you have them, you realise there is no going back. You are a different person. You are a person, in my case, who loves to deep-fat fry.

A few issues ago, I wrote a piece about making chips at home. For that column, I borrowed a deep-fat fryer from Tefal, its Oleoclean Pro model, which I liked because it filters the oil between sessions for easy reuse. Chips, as I discovered, don't shed that much during frying, so the same oil was good (with some topping up) for several fries. I made a lot of chips. But the chips were just the gateway.

I moved on to vegetable tempura: baby courgettes, broccoli, aubergine, mushrooms. After a few uneven attempts where the batter failed to stick (possibly because the recipe I was using didn't include egg), I consulted Taiji Maruyama, executive chef of Taka Maruyama, one of last autumn's most exciting new restaurants and the soon-to-open Maru in Shepherd's Market, London, who shared his batter recipe: 100g strong flour, 15g potato starch, 135g cold water, 17g cold sparkling water, 1 egg. The CO<sub>2</sub> in the fizzy water, he explained, helps speed up the deep frying and expel water from whatever you're frying, so you get a crisper batter. Also, to minimise gluten formation and guarantee a lighter crust, he suggested using ice-cold water, chilling the flour in the fridge and mixing the batter as little as possible. I ended up with something much more tempura-like, this time using prawns. And, really, is there any better kind of tempura? Encased in hot,



EATING

## Fry harder

It started with an experiment in how to cook the perfect chip. It became an obsession. *Ajesh Patalay* shares his adventures in hot oil

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDER COGGIN

crispy batter, the prawns had a plump, springy texture and sweet juiciness that I loved. I was popping them like M&Ms. I also deep-fried some coriander, following a tip I'd got from countless chefs about using up leftover herbs. The frying deepened the coriander's already pungent flavour, turning its feathery leaves into intense, crunchy wisps.

**KEEN TO UP THE ANTE.** I turned next to perhaps the most prized food in the frying pantheon: fried chicken. First, I wanted some pointers from Andrew D'Ambrosi, the American-born chef behind D'Ambrosi Fine Foods in Stow-on-the-Wold. His southern fried chicken has garnered such a cult following that he's planning to open a fried chicken boutique in west London this summer. His top tip was about how to dredge the buttermilk-marinated chicken before frying: "First, you want lots of flour so it remains dry and doesn't clump. Second, when you drop the chicken into the flour, give it a little squeeze so it exudes some of its marinade. That liquid will bond with the flour and create these delicious crispy ripples on your fried chicken."

I tried a few recipes. Nigella's (from *Cook, Eat, Repeat*) called for a marinade of buttermilk, maple syrup, Dijon mustard, hot-smoked paprika, lemon juice and garlic, before dredging the chicken in paprika-spiked flour. The end result was fine but tame for my tastes, though hers is meant as part of a fried chicken sandwich where pickles, red onion and garlic mayonnaise add oomph. James Martin's buttermilk chicken (from his website), which I prefer, requires an arsenal of dried spices to season the flour, including oregano, thyme, nutmeg, celery salt, garlic

salt and onion salt. The flour was so headily scented I couldn't stop myself from inhaling deep pungent breaths of it like aromatherapy. Once deep-fried, the strong flavour was tempered but still pleasingly zingy.

But my craving wasn't satisfied. I got my taste for fried chicken early, eating KFC, which means I know what I like (a richly flavoured, almost crumbly breading) while accepting there are probably "better" versions. So when the internet brought me to "Grace's Perfect Blend", a fried chicken mix from County Limerick based on Colonel Sanders' original recipe, I was keen to try it. According to its instructions, there was no need to marinate the chicken first. I coated each drumstick in milk and egg, dredged it in the pepper-flecked powder and lowered it into the hot oil. Fifteen minutes later, I had the kind of strongly seasoned, crisp-crumbed fried chicken I'd been after. I binge-ate some with brown sauce, indulging my very worst teenage proclivities.

But why judge? D'Ambrosi serves his fried chicken with a homemade BBQ sauce based on the fast-food versions he grew up dunking his nuggets into. My point is, we like what we like. Deep-fried foods are implicitly a treat, an indulgence. If we're going to have them, we might as well have them just the way we want them. Guilt-free.

Now, I'm thinking about doughnuts. ■HTSI  
@ajesh34



TEFAL  
OLEOCLEAN  
PRO DEEP-FAT  
FRYER, £130





Opposite and this page: the author deep-fries chicken drumsticks dredged in Grace's Perfect Blend seasoned flour from County Limerick, based on Colonel Sanders' original recipe



I BINGE-ATE THE STRONGLY SEASONED, CRISP-CRUMBED FRIED CHICKEN WITH BROWN SAUCE



**A** spritz, a dash, a drop – it's amazing what a difference bitters can make to a drink. They are the original quick fix, capable of bringing a whole new accent to cocktails, tonic, soda. Even a mug of hot water can be improved by a piquant hit of bitters. Barely a day goes by that I don't add them to something.

Angostura Bitters are a mainstay around the world – but they are by no means the only riff on the formula. Sticklers for tradition often prefer Dr Adam Elmegirab's Boker's Bitters (9), a reformulation of a widely used 19th-century brand. Intensely woody and spicy, with notes of eucalyptus, cardamom and orange peel, they're strictly for cocktails of the old school.

Peychaud's Bitters (2) are another essential in any well-equipped bar. Born in an apothecary in the French Quarter of New Orleans around 1830, these bitters are the signature ingredient of the Sazerac whisky cocktail with their unique minty/caraway profile.

Bitters have their roots in medicinal elixirs – brands like Peychaud's and Angostura started life as health tonics that were then mixed with booze to sweeten the pill. In line with that tradition, the St James's pharmacist DR Harris & Co recently teamed up with Bob's Bitters to create a new cocktail-friendly formulation of its famous "Pick-me-Up" – a botanical restorative that was favoured by Oscar Wilde. The new bitters layer up the original notes of gentian, clove and cardamom with warming ginger, liquorice, honey and a hint of bergamot. Try a few dashes in a Manhattan, or the morning after with soda, ice and a double measure of remorse (from £6.50, drharris.co.uk).

I can't make any medical claims for Fee's paper-wrapped Black Walnut Bitters (7), but they're a revelation in an Old Fashioned – nutty, chocolatey, with a backbone of bitter spice. Angostura's new Cocoa Bitters (3) are also excellent for giving whisky and rum drinks more depth.

I collect bitters like some people collect shoes – if I could only have one, though, it would be a bottle of orange bitters. They have the spice of aromatic bitters, but with a slightly sunnier disposition that works well with white spirits as well as brown. Up until Prohibition, martinis were made with a dash of orange bitters as a matter of course. Three varieties I have on heavy rotation are Bitter Truth Orange Bitters (juicy and zesty; £14.75, thewhiskyexchange.com), Angostura Orange Bitters (spicier; £7.95, thewhiskyexchange.com) and Regans' Orange Bitters (8, bittersweet in a more Campari-like way).

For a pithier citric bite try Bittermens Hopped Grapefruit Bitters (5) – a couple of dashes gives a Margarita or a Daiquiri real edge. Or freshen up your tonic with an anise-y blast of Bitter Bastards Fennel Bitters (10).

If you don't like the astringent spice notes of traditional bitters, try one of the burgeoning number of cocktail sprays. The natural essences from Tuscany's Santa Bianca (£31.95, thewhiskyexchange.com) are so good I'm not sure whether to spritz them on myself or on my drink – flavours include grapefruit, cedarwood, jasmine and damask rose. Linden Leaf also does an excellent quintet of Cocktail Elements sprays (4) including lime and yuzu.

This summer, I'll be droppering The Japanese Bitters' Shiso Bitters (1) into lemonade and making G&Ts scented with Meadowsweet Tincture from the Isle of Harris (6). A tonic for body and soul. ■HTS

@alicescelles

- 1. THE JAPANESE BITTERS Shiso Bitters, £29.95, masterofmalt.com.
- 2. PEYCHAUD'S Bitters, £9.50, gerrys.uk.com.
- 3. ANGOSTURA Cocoa Bitters, £8.95, thewhiskyexchange.com.
- 4. LINDEN LEAF Cocktail Elements sprays, £27 for three.
- 5. BITTERMENS Hopped Grapefruit Bitters, £13.45, masterofmalt.com.
- 6. ISLE OF HARRIS Meadowsweet Tincture, £20, harrisdistillery.com.
- 7. FEE BROTHERS Black Walnut Bitters, £12.98, masterofmalt.com.
- 8. REGANS' Orange Bitters, £9.95, thewhiskyexchange.com.
- 9. DR ADAM ELMGIRAB'S Boker's Bitters, £10.67, masterofmalt.com.
- 10. BITTER BASTARDS Fennel Bitters, £14.95, masterofmalt.com



DRINKING

## A bitter what you fancy

Spike your cocktails with a dash of botanical magic.  
By Alice Lascelles

