



Culinary Institute  
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# Vi Living Retreat June 2025





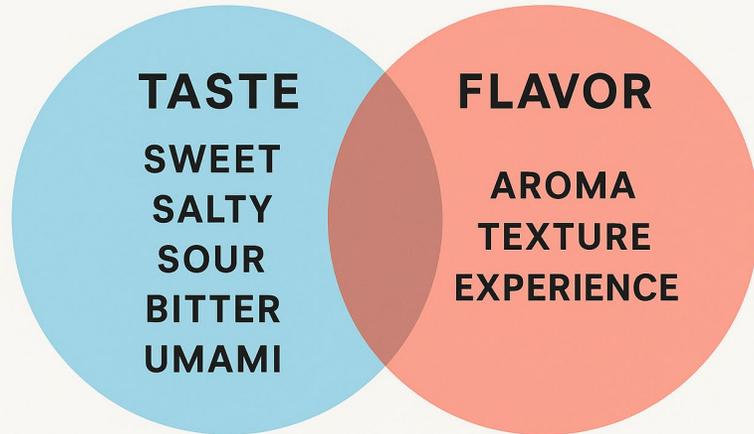
# Welcome & Why

- Elevated Fast Casual: Flavor Forward, Experience Driven
- 2-day Innovation Retreat
  - Day 1: Group Discussion/Lecture, Sauce Tasting, Asian-Forward Recipe Production, Innovation Planning
  - Day 2: Group Discussion/Lecture, Innovation Production, Wrap-up, Vi Living Internal Meetings
- What “elevated fast-casual” means at Vi Living
- Goals: innovation, collaboration, exploration

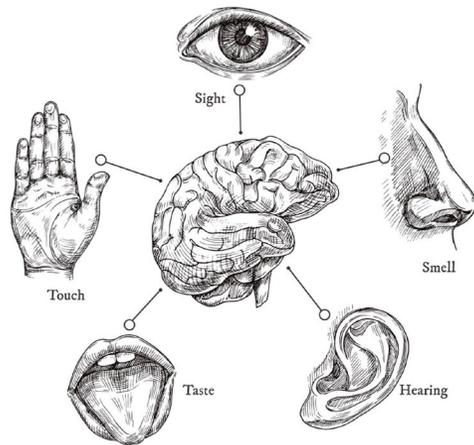
# Group Discussion

- What does “Elevated Fast-Casual” Look like to you?
- What are you currently serving?
- Where do you feel limited? Where do you see potential for innovation?
- What excites your team or residents about your food?
- What trends have you noticed do well in your setting? (cuisine specific, style of food (fried vs fresh) etc.)

# Taste, Flavor, & the Aging Population.



How do we perceive flavor?



Client factors that impact the kitchen: Cooking for an aging population

- Aging can reduce taste bud sensitivity and smell
- Common medications can dull flavors
- Dry mouth = decreased flavor release
- Dental issues, digestion changes, etc.



# Flavor Fatigue: Are Your Menus Tired?

- Reptation dulls excitement – even with great dishes
- Low contrast = Low impact
- Signs of flavor fatigue:
  - Decreased diner engagement
  - More condiments or salt being added
  - Lack of enthusiasm from client

**What feedback have you received?**

# Taste Reinvigoration Strategies

- Balance = salt, acid, fat, umami
- Add bright elements (citrus, vinegar, pickles)
- Use texture : crunchy, creamy, crisp
- Amplify aromas with herbs, spices, and finishers
- Umami bombs: miso, mushrooms, aged cheese, seaweed
  
- What are you currently doing? How can we draw more inspiration from local, seasonal flavors?



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# Exploring Asian Flavor Systems

Chef Sky Hanka, MS, NBC-HWC, 12'





Brief overview of:

- China
- Thailand
- Vietnam
- Japan
- India
- South Korea



Based on:

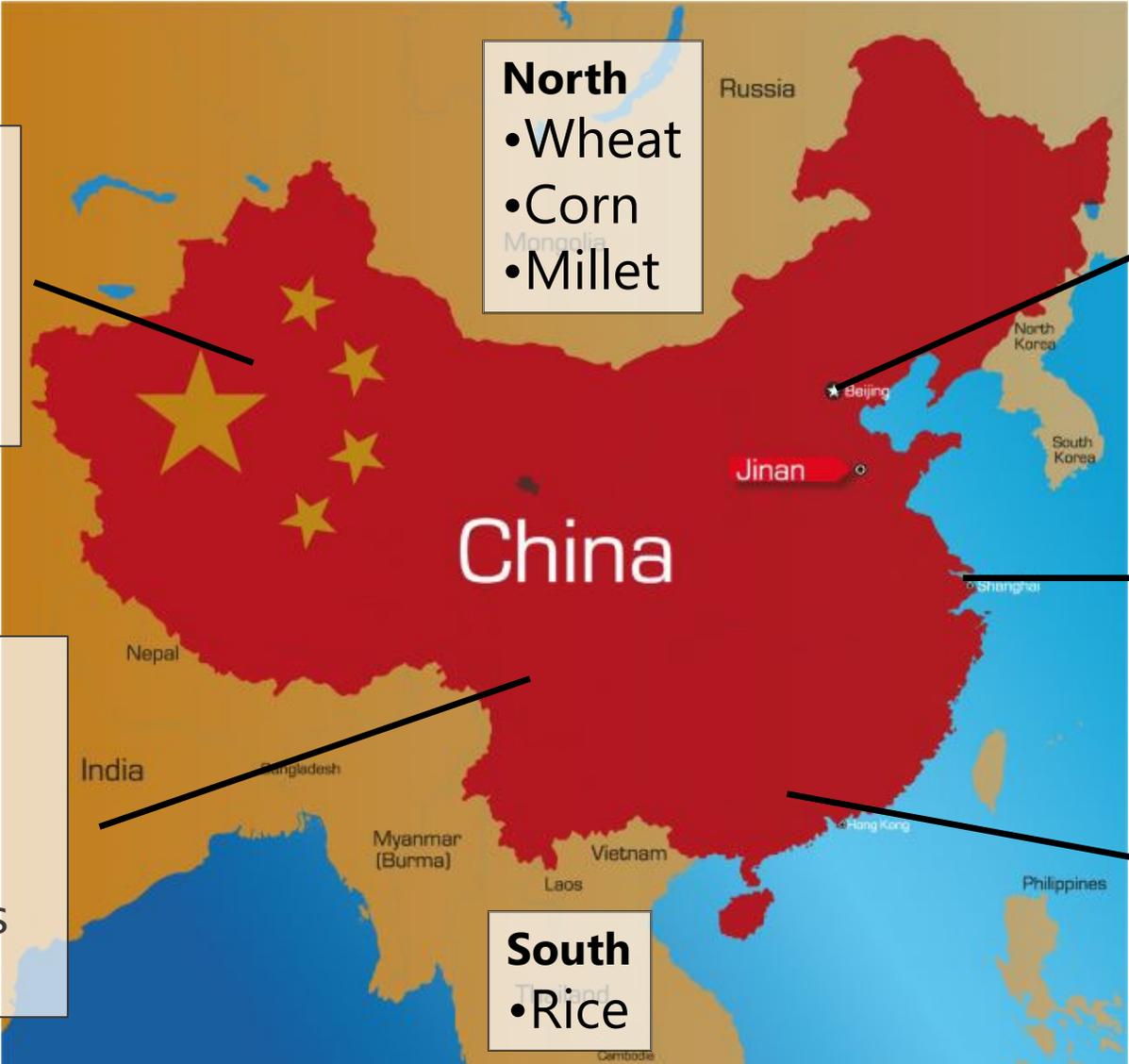
Elements of  
Taste/Flavor  
Systems

Key Ingredients

Cooking  
Techniques

Popular Dishes

# China: Culinary Regions



- Xin Jiang**
- Muslim influence
  - Stewed lamb dishes
  - Kebabs
  - Millet

- North**
- Wheat
  - Corn
  - Millet

- Beijing**
- Steamed buns
  - Peking duck
  - Table bbq
  - Mongolian fire-pot

- Sichuan**
- Hot/spicy food
  - Szechwan “fagara” peppercorns
  - Foo Young-Hibiscus Egg

- Shanghai**
- Red cooking
  - Bird’s nest soup
  - Chingkiang vinegar

- GuangDon (Canton)**
- Lacquer roasting
  - Cha shiu “cha shao”
  - Fruits in cooking “Sweet and sour”
  - Black bean sauces

- South**
- Rice

# Elements of Taste

**Aroma:** 4 key ingredients: green onions, ginger, garlic, wine

## **Key aromatic pairings:**

- Ginger + garlic + green onion
- Green & red chiles
- Hot chili paste + fermented soybeans
- Five spice powder: star anise, Szechwan pepper, cinnamon, clove, fennel
- Fermented black beans

**Flavors:** sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent/spicy

**Textures:** each dish offers one or several



# Key Ingredients

**Tofu:** can be fresh or processed; varying softness levels

**Vegetables:** bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, string beans, water spinach, Chrysanthemum leaves (*Tong hao*), shitake mushrooms, dried lily buds, pickled vegetables

**Noodles:** various types/uses, enjoyed at all meals

**Spices:** Sichuan peppercorns, white pepper

**Condiments:** soy, oyster, hoisin sauces

**Other:** sesame oil, sesame seeds, peanut oil, black vinegar, Shaoxing rice wine



# Cooking Techniques

**Stir-frying:** quick cooking, food cut into small uniform pieces

**Velveting:** marinating & gentle cooking, tenderizes proteins

**Steaming:** delicate foods, no stirring, locks in flavor/moisture

- Types: bamboo & wok

**Hot pot:** cooking various ingredients in a pot of broth at the dining table

**Common daily techniques:** deep-frying, simmering, boiling, smoking, roasting



# Popular Dishes



**Biang Biang noodles:**  
thick, broad, hand-pulled noodles seasoned with chili, garlic, Sichuan pepper



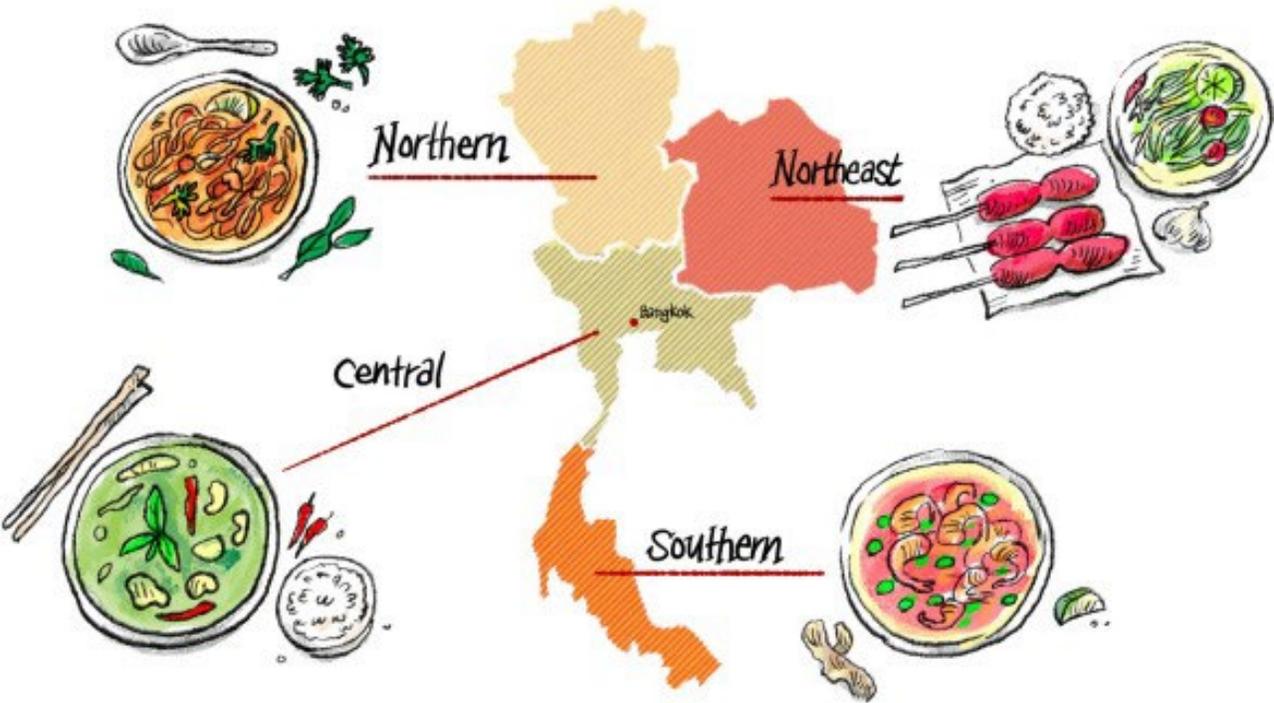
**Dim Sum:**  
a variety of small, steamed or fried dishes, including dumplings, buns, pastries



**Peking duck:**  
crispy-skinned duck served with thin pancakes, scallions, and a sweet bean sauce

# Thailand: Culinary Regions

## Thailand's Regional Cuisines



Regional variations correlate to neighboring countries, climate, geography

**Northern:** cool valleys/ forested mountains; shares dishes with Burma, Laos, Yunnan China

**Northeast:** arid plateau; influenced by Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam

**Central:** flat, wet, rice-growing plains; coconut milk

**Southern:** bordered by seas; curries, chiles, spices; elements of India, Malaysia, Indonesia



# Elements of Taste

## Flavors

- **Sweet:** mild contrast to bold flavors (palm sugar, coconut milk, fruit)
- **Sour:** tangy, adds depth (lime, unripe fruit)
- **Salty:** balances sweetness, acidity (fish/soy sauce)
- **Spicy:** adds intensity; Thai chilies

**Textures:** varied; crispy, soft, chewy

**Colors:** vibrant, from chilies, basil, turmeric

**Aroma:** lemongrass, galangal, garlic, coriander, basil, cardamom, nutmeg



# Key Ingredients

**Noodles:** egg (*bah mee*), glass (*woon sen*), rice

**Rice:** basmati, Jasmine, long/short, broken, black, sticky

**Proteins:** tofu, chicken, shrimp

**Thai Bird's Eye Chili:** fruity taste, mellow, lasting heat (50k-100k Scoville)

**Galangal:** peppery, spicy rhizome with a zesty bite and hint of pine

**Herbs:** lemongrass, cilantro, chives, Makrut lime leaves

**Spices:** tamarind

**Condiments:** fish/shrimp paste



# Cooking Techniques

**Stir-frying:** in a wok, quick cooking

**Grilling:** charcoal fired

**Steaming:** often wrapped in banana/bamboo leaves, locks in moisture/flavors

**Simmering:** soups, develops flavors

**Common daily techniques:** deep frying, pan-frying



# Popular Dishes



## **Pad Thai:**

Stir fry with rice noodles, eggs, tofu (or other protein) and a sweet and savory sauce



## **Thai Curry:**

Spiced coconut milk-based sauce with vegetables and meat



## **Mee Krob:**

Deep fried rice noodles with sweet and sour sauce

# Vietnam: Culinary Regions

## Northern

- Less spicy, sour flavors: tamarind, limes
- Light + balanced flavors highlight natural taste of ingredients

## Central

- Intensely spicy: chili peppers, shrimp sauces

## Southern/ Mekong Delta

- Pronounced sweetness: palm sugar, coconut milk
- Melting pot of regional, foreign flavors



# Elements of Taste

## Flavors

- **Sweet:** balance sour/bitter (sugar, fruits, certain vegetables)
- **Sour:** tangy (vinegar, tamarind, unripe mangoes)
- **Salty:** depth, enhances flavors; fish/soy sauce
- **Spicy:** pungency (chili peppers, ginger, garlic)
- **Bitter:** cleanses the palate (cilantro, bitter melon, dark chocolate)

**Textures:** contrasting in a single dish

**Colors:** vibrant hues from turmeric, pandan, beetroot, ramie leaves



# Key Ingredients

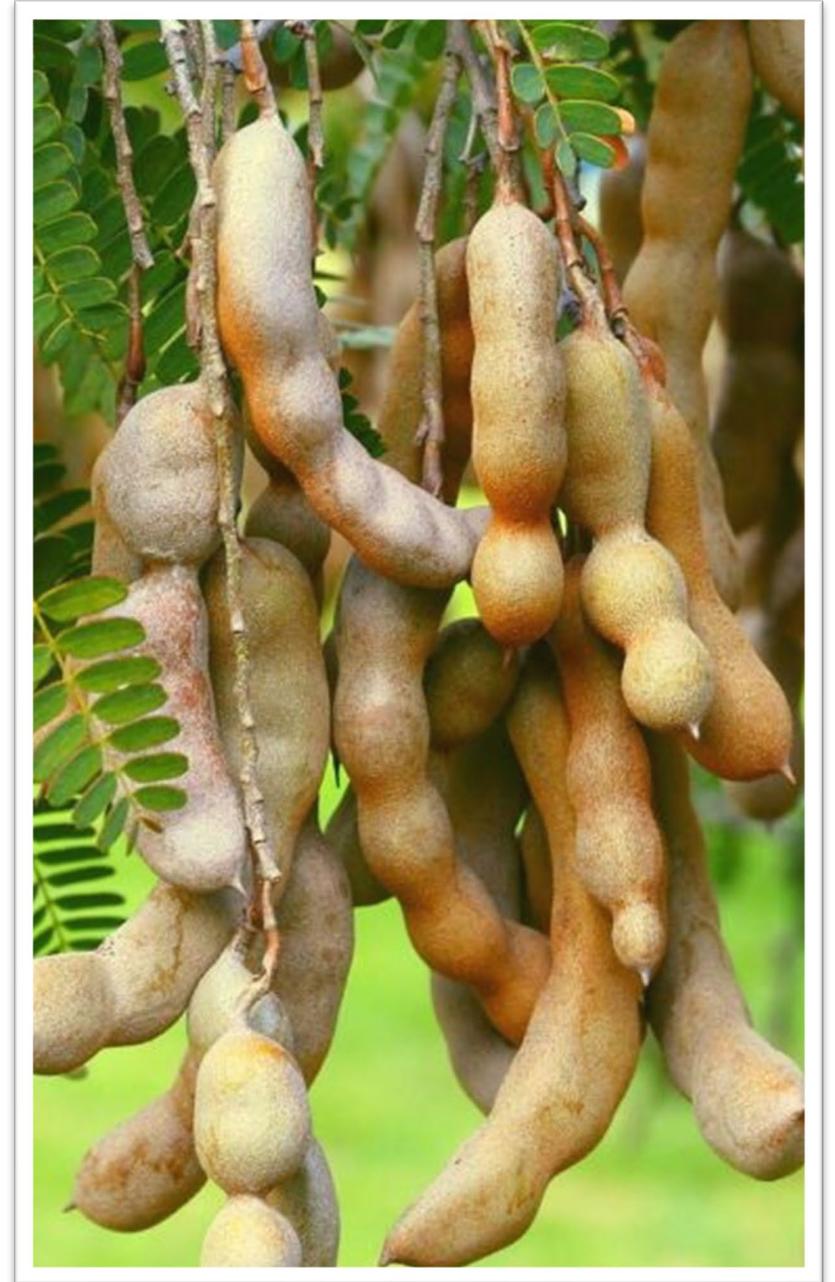
- Banana blossoms
- Tamarind fruit
- Salted black beans
- Peanuts

**Herbs:** Vietnamese coriander, Thai basil, perilla leaf, lemongrass, sawtooth, fish mint

**Rice:** Jasmine, sticky, brown, purple, red cargo

**Noodles:** rice vermicelli, rice sticks, yellow/wheat/egg, glass, tapioca

**Sauce:** fish (*Nước Mắm*), oyster, hoisin, soybean, light soy



# Cooking Techniques

**Grilling:** over open flame; adds smoky flavors, creates crispy edges

- Grilled pork with rice noodles (*bun cha*)

**Stir-frying:** quick cooking of vegetables, seafood, meat

**Simmering:** cooked in broth to develop flavors

- Noodle soup (*Pho*)

**Pan-frying:** common for meats and vegetables

**Blanching:** quick cooking of vegetables; preserves color and texture



# Popular Dishes



## **Pho:**

salty broth with rice noodles, herbs, meat



## **Cha Ca:**

Firm white fish marinated in galangal, turmeric, fish sauce, lemon juice



## **Summer Rolls**

(*Gỏi cuốn, Nem cuốn*): rice paper wrappers filled with fresh herbs, vegetables, protein, vermicelli noodles

# South Korea: Culinary Regions

**Gyeonggi:** balance of sweet, salty, spicy flavors

- *Bibimbap*, noodles with Korean black bean sauce (*jajangmyeon*)

**Jeolla:** rich, savory, earthy flavors

- *Jeon*, *kimchi*, *banchan*

**Gyeongsang:** bold, spicy, seafood-centric

- Cabbage soup (*Haejangguk*), *Milmyeon* (from Busan)

**Chungcheong:** light, mild, clean flavors

- Pond loach soup (*Chueotang*)

**Jeju:** smoky, savory, slightly sweet flavors

- Black pork, fresh seafood



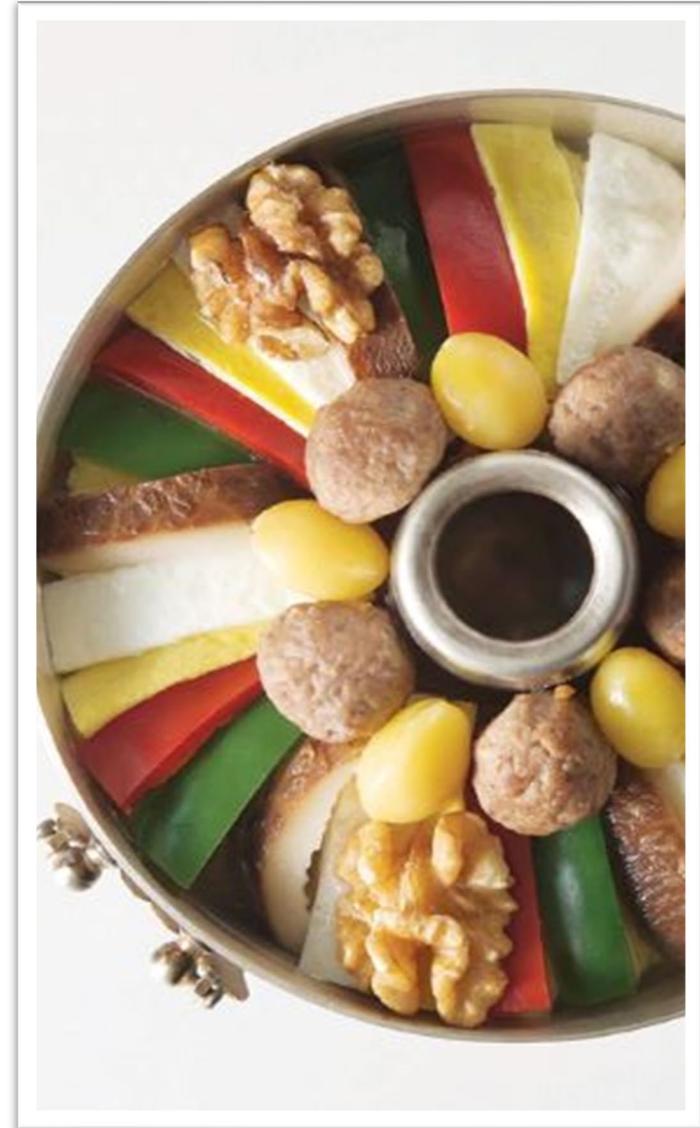
# Elements of Taste

## Flavors

- **Savory:** provides depth (fermented ingredients)
- **Spicy:** bold heat (chili pepper flakes & paste)
- **Subtly sweet:** balance/enhances savory flavors (honey, Asian pear, Mirin)
- **Sour:** cleanses the palate (vinegar)
- **Salty:** enhances flavors (soy sauce, fermented paste (*doenjang*))
- **Aroma:** ginger, garlic, scallions

**Textures:** diverse range

**Colors:** 5 directions (red, yellow, white, green, black)





# Key Ingredients

- Red chili powder (*gochugaru*)
- Sesame seeds, ginkgo nuts (*eunhaeng*)

**Starch:** glass noodles, rice

**Protein:** beef, pork, seafood, eggs

**Vegetables:** cabbage, radishes, spinach, mushrooms, carrots, onions, bell peppers, bean sprouts

- Kimchi: fermented vegetables

**Condiments:** soy sauce (*ganjang*), fermented red pepper paste (*gochujang*), fermented soybean paste (*doenjang*), fermented fish paste (*jeot*), rice wine (*mirin*), sesame oil



# Cooking Techniques

**Fermenting:** preserves vegetables, develops depth

**Simmering:** for stews, soups, broths

**Steaming** (*jjim*): seals in flavor, nutrients

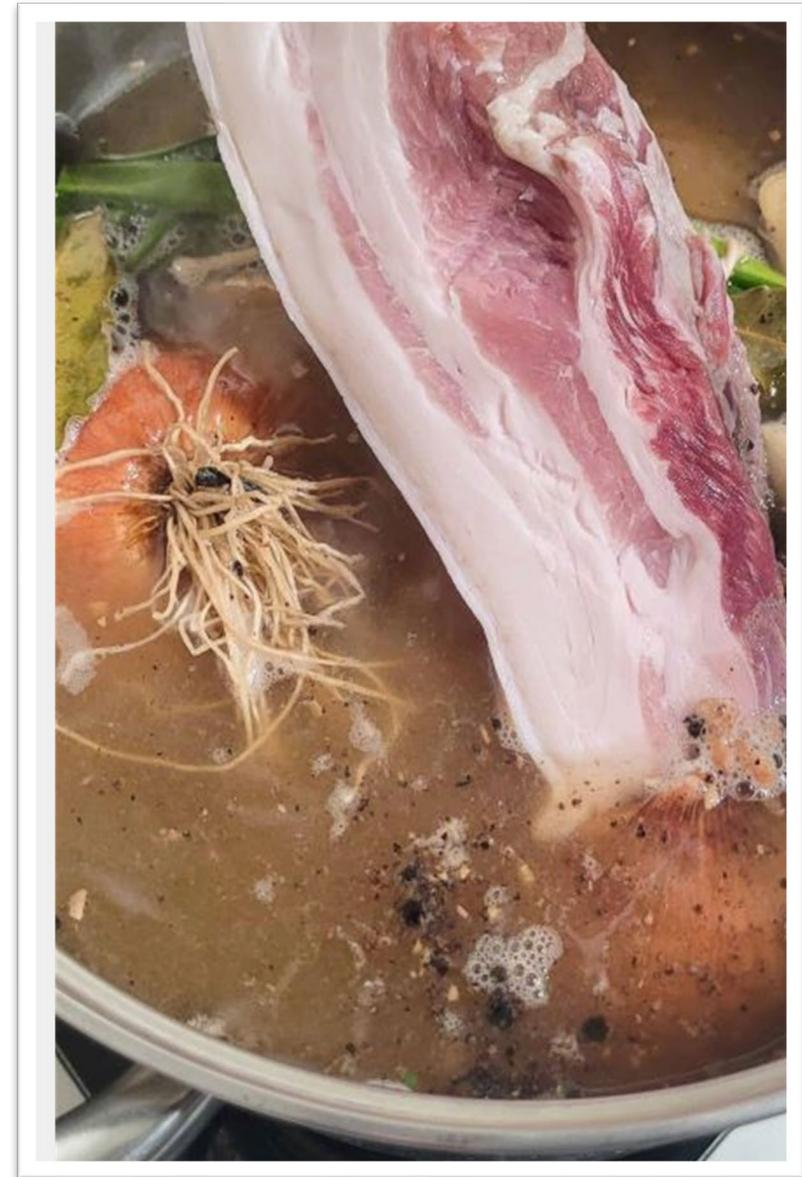
**Braising:** slow-cooks tough meats, veggies

**Stir-frying:** quick, high heat for tender ingredients

**Roasting:** gentle heat for large/tough cuts

**Grilling:** flame-cooked, ideal for thin, tender cuts

**Boiling** (*suyuk*): tenderizes meat in seasoned brine



# Popular Dishes



**Bibimbap:**  
rice topped with  
vegetables, meat,  
*gochujang* sauce



**Kalbi:**  
grilled beef short-  
ribs in a sweet soy  
sauce marinade



**Jap Chae:**  
sweet potato-based  
glass noodles stir-fried  
with meat and  
vegetables

# Japan: Culinary Regions

**Northern regions:** hearty, seafood dishes

- Hokkaido: sapporo ramen, crab, uni
- Tohoku: rice skewers, sweet edamame paste

**Central regions:** light, savory dishes

- Kanto: sushi, tempura
- Chubu: misu, soba
- Shikoku: udon

**Southern regions:** bold, umami-rich dishes

- Kansai: kobe beef
- Kyushu: tonkotsu ramen
- Okinawa: tropical flavors with goya, rafute



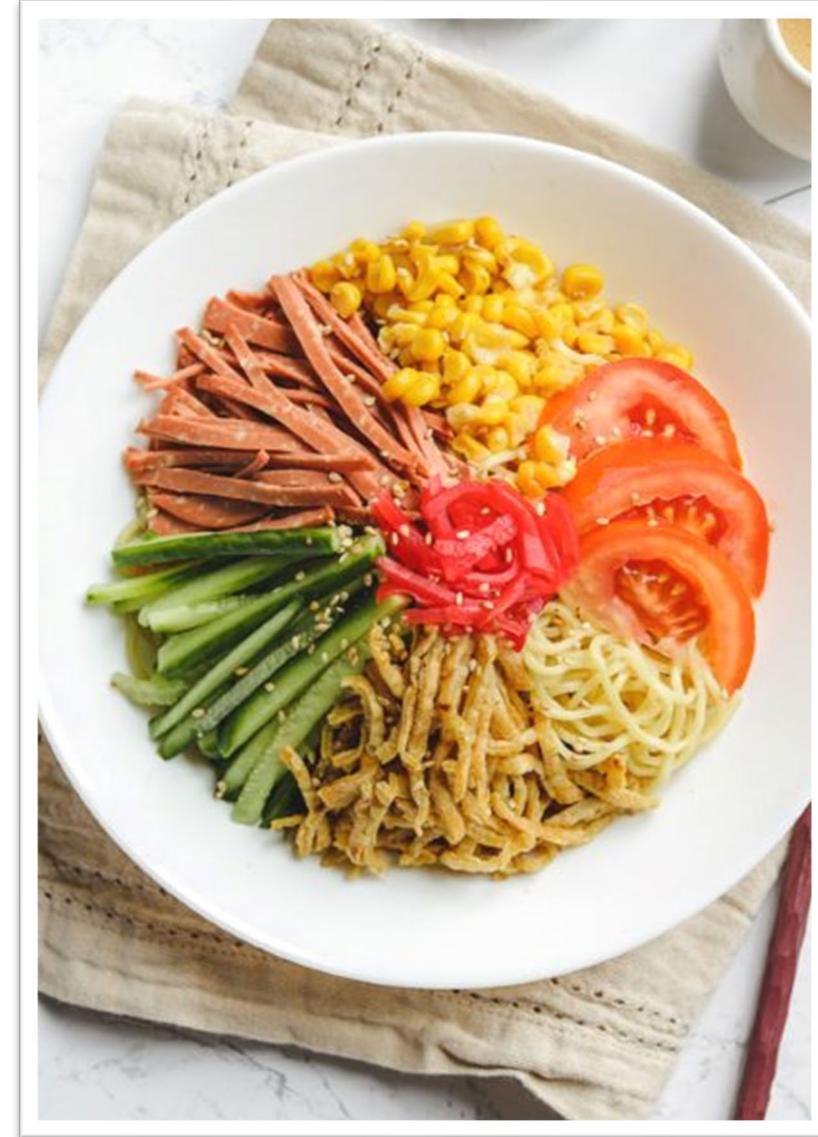
# Elements of Taste

## Favors

- **Savory:** adds richness, depth (fermented ingredients)
- **Subtly sweet:** balances savory, salty; (honey, fruits, sugar)
- **Sour:** refreshing tanginess; contrasts rich flavors (vinegar, yuzu, ponzu)
- **Salty:** enhances flavor in broths, dressings, pickled vegetables (soy sauce, miso)
- **Bitter:** earthy notes (herbs, vegetables)

**Textures:** contrasting combinations

**Colors (*Goshiki*):** red, yellow, green, white, black



# Key Ingredients

**Dashi:** basic soup stock; rich, savory flavor

**Miso:** fermented soybean paste (up to 3 years); used in soups, dressings, sauces, marinades

**Noodles:** *Soba, Udon, Somen, Ramen*

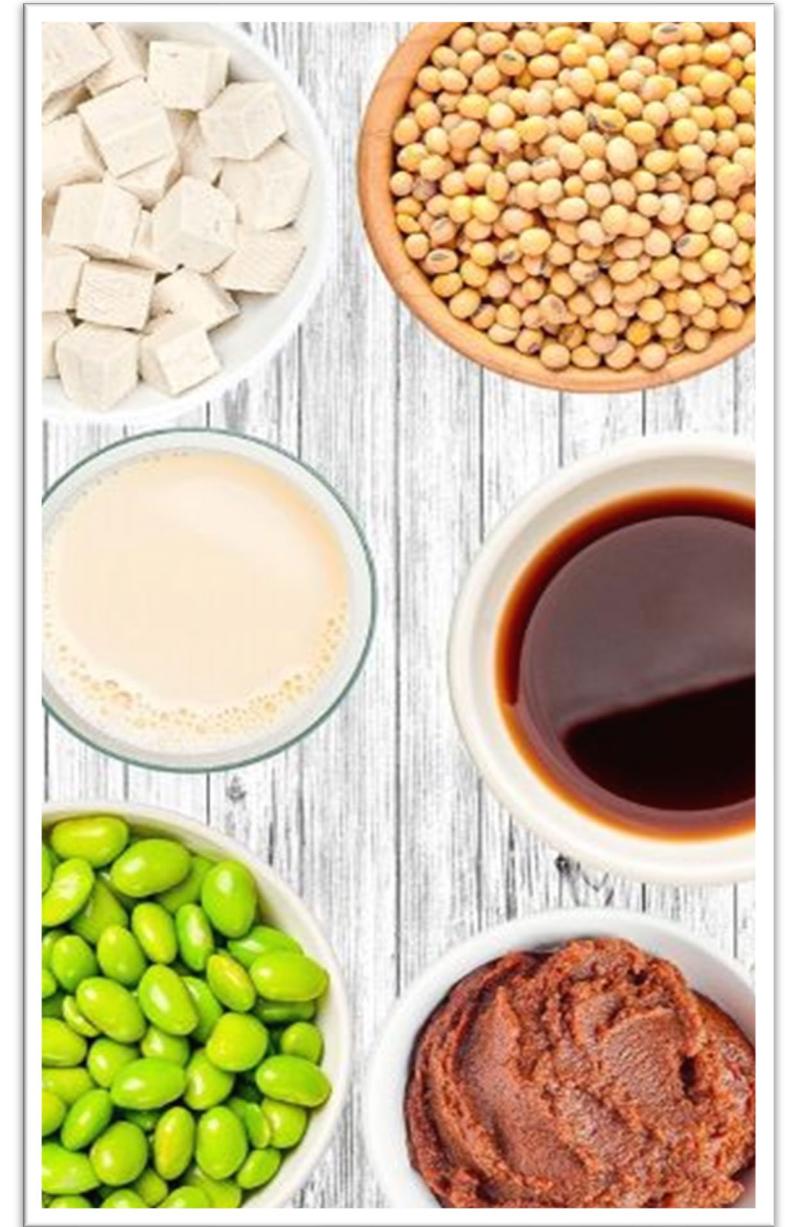
**Seaweed:** *Hijiki, Kombu, Nori, Wakame*

**Roots:** lotus root, white radish, burdock root

**Soy:** beans, sauce, tofu, milk, paste

**Herbs:** perilla leaf (*Shiso*), parsley (*Mistuba*)

**Other:** Sichuan pepper (*Sansho*)



# Cooking Techniques

**Grilling** (*yakimono*): used for beef, fish, chicken, vinegar-soaked vegetables

**Steaming** (*mushimono*): used for egg custards, meats, vegetables

**Simmering** (*nimono*): used for stews

**Deep-frying** (*agemono*): used for tempura, croquettes

**One-pot cooking** (*nabemono*): also known as Japanese hotpot

**Slicing, serving** (*sashimi*): used for sushi, raw fish



# Popular Dishes

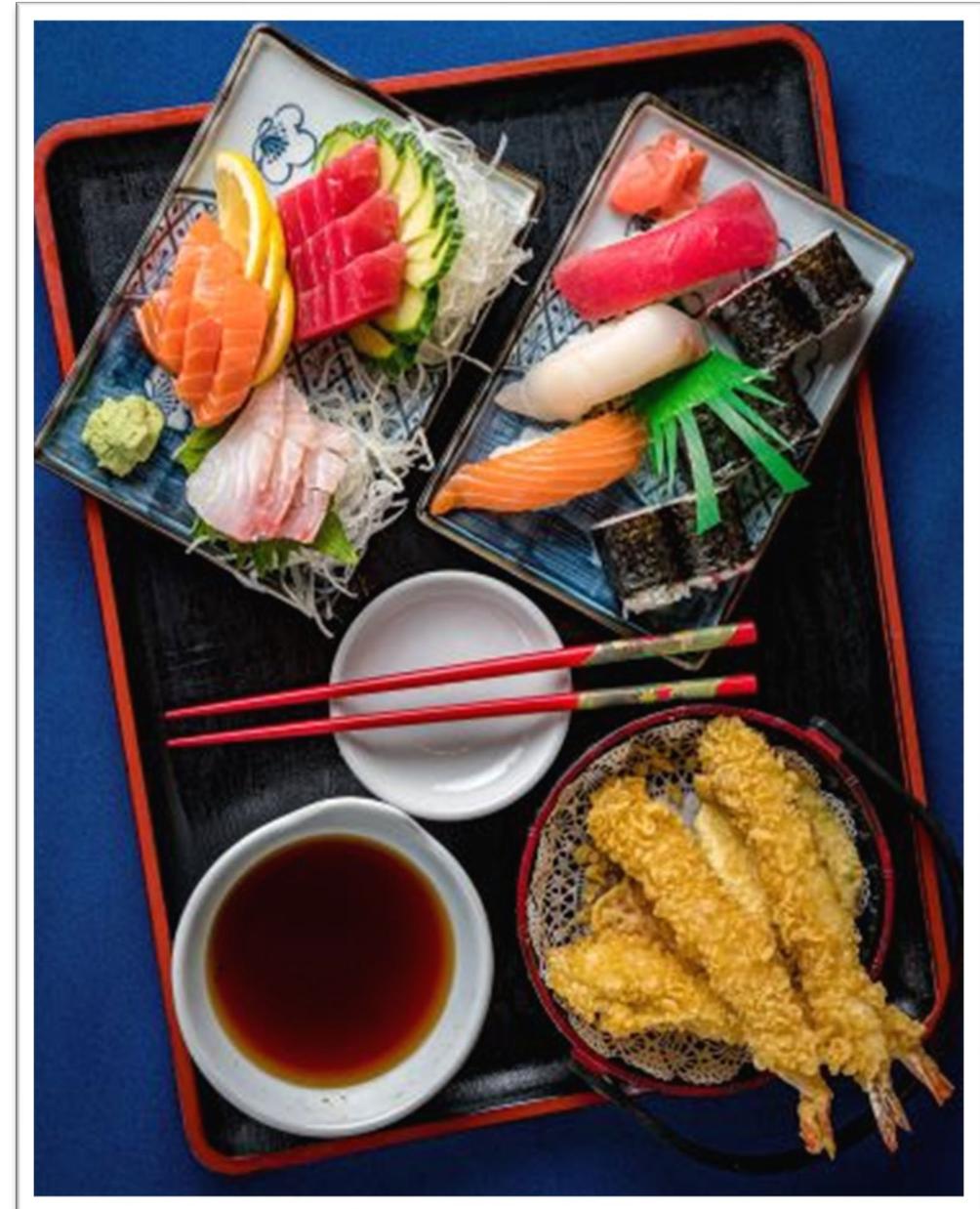
**Sushi:** cold rice dressed with vinegar, garnished especially with bits of raw seafood or vegetables

- **Shapes:** rolled (*Maki*), finger (*Nigiri*), pressed (*Battera*), scattered (*Chirashi*)

**Sashimi:** sliced, raw seafood

- **Slicing styles:** rectangles (*Hira-zukuri*), thin strips (*Usu-zukuri*), squares (*Kaku-zukuri*), triangles (*Sogi-sukuri*)

**Tempura:** deep-fried seafood/vegetable with a thin, crispy crust



# India: Culinary Regions

## North

- Central Asian Influence
- Dairy
- Tandoor breads
- Creamy curries
- Meat
- Garam masala
- Amchoor (dried unripe mango)

## West

- Wheat Breads
- Legumes
- Fiery hot curries
- Coconut milk



## East

- Rice
- Seafood
- White wheat flour

## South

- Portuguese influence (Goa)
- Tropical appearance
- Oil not ghee
- Steamed food
- Rice
- Lentils
- Stews

# Elements of Taste

## Flavors

- **Sweet:** natural (jaggery, palm sugars, honey, rose)
- **Salty:** balances bitter/sour, enhances sweet/savory
- **Sour:** acidity (tamarind, lime, palm vinegar)
- **Spicy:** heat/intensity (chiles, garam masala)
- **Savory:** complex/rich (onions, garlic, turmeric)
- **Bitter:** dimension (fenugreek, mustard greens)

**Textures:** creamy, rich (North); drier, stews (South)

**Colors:** vibrant; from turmeric, saffron, spinach, annatto



# Key Ingredients

**Flatbread:** North—milled wheat; South—fermented rice & dal

- **Naan:** milk/yogurt-based flatbread

**Curry:** vibrant, spiced sauce base for many dishes

**Basmati rice:** white, brown; pairs with curries

**Dal:** lentils, peas, beans—dried, split, cooked

- **Forms:** unhulled, split & hulled, split & unhulled

**Condiments:** raita (yogurt + herbs), chutney

**Spices:** *ajowan, amchur, asafoetida, fenugreek, anardana*

- **Masalas:** mix of dried spices, herbs



# Cooking Techniques

## For Dishes

- **Tandoor oven:** flatbreads slapped to sides, meats on skewers
- **Bhuna:** sautéing at low heat to reduce moisture/caramelize
- **Dum:** slow cooking with steam in sealed vessel
- **Dhungar:** smoking with live coal and ghee
- **Bhapa:** pot-in-pot steaming
- **Balchao:** pickling in vinegar and spices
- **Talna:** deep-frying

## For Spices

- **Toasting:** cooked gently over medium-low heat until fragrant
- **Popping:** whole spices will “pop” after heat is applied
- **Tempering (*Tadka*):** whole or ground spices heated in hot oil or ghee



# Popular Dishes



**Butter chicken:**  
chicken in a creamy,  
tomato-based sauce  
with butter and cream



**Chicken tikka masala:**  
yogurt and spice  
marinated chicken in a  
spicy tomato sauce



**Malai kofta:**  
vegetable dumplings  
cooked in creamy  
gravy



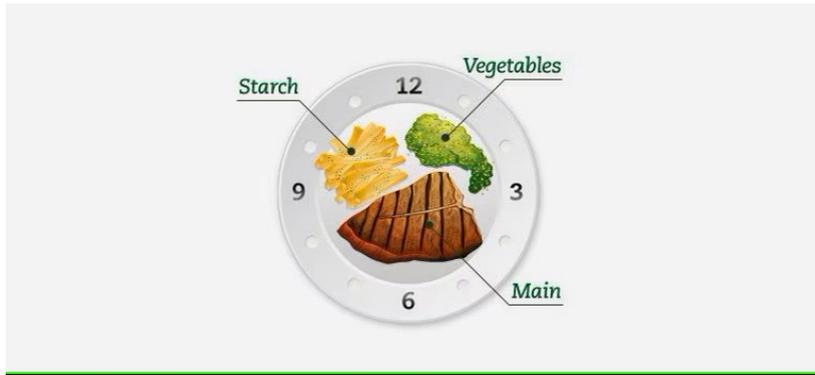


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# Rethinking Traditional Plating into Composed Dishes

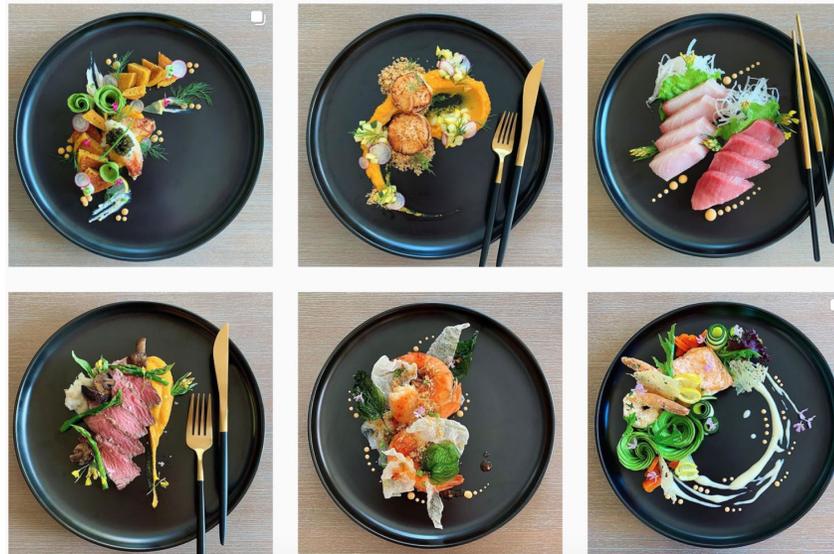


# Traditional Vs Composed Plating – What’s the Difference?



Traditional plating follows a clock-face layout: the protein is placed between 4 and 8 o'clock, the starch between 9 and 10, and the vegetables between 2 and 3. Sauce can be served under or over the protein. For visual appeal, use the rule of thirds, allow elements to overlap, and create height by resting the protein on the starch. The plate serves as a frame, and the sauce ties all components together.

Formula: Starch + Protein + Veg + Sauce



Composed plates arrange each ingredient intentionally to highlight its unique texture, color, and flavor. Unlike traditional plating, they avoid rigid structure in favor of visual variety and balance.

- **Individual Elements Shine** – Each component is prepped and placed with purpose
- **Layered Textures & Colors** – Mix of greens, fruits, proteins, nuts, cheeses, etc.
- **Flexible Presentation** – Works on plates, platters, or bowls
- **Versatile Appeal** – Common in both fast-casual and fine dining settings



# Elements of Composed Plates: S.C.H.I.F.T

## •S – Shape

Use a natural mix of sliced, molded, loose, or whole items. Avoid over-styled, forced shapes.

## •C – Color

Balance earthy tones with vibrant hues. Let naturally compatible flavors guide the color story — even the plate color matters.

## •H – Height

Vary natural food heights. Lean items or stack strategically to create dimension without being extreme.

## •I – Items

Choose elements based on portion size, seasonality, plate size, and execution practicality.

## •F – Flavor

Focus on fresh, harmonious flavors. A strong flavor profile makes presentation pop. (Resource: *The Flavor Bible*)

## •T – Texture & Temperature

Mix cooking methods and cuts to layer crunch, creaminess, warmth, or chill — contrast keeps the diner engaged.

# Advanced Considerations for Composed Plates

- **Story/Concept** – Gives coherence to the plate, dinners connect emotionally or culturally. Is it global? Local? A nod to tradition or innovation?
- **Seasonality/Sourcing** – Using local, in-season ingredients enhances flavor, nutrition, and sustainability. Integrate in sauces, garnishes, salads: Spring pea tendrils, heirloom tomatoes, etc.
- **Sauce & Drizzle strategy** – sauce isn't just flavor, it's a visual anchor. Layer sauces (base swipe + final drizzle), use reductions, purees, vinaigrettes as "design elements"
- **Contrast & Surprise:** a composed plate that plays with expectation keeps diners interested. Add a pickle, candied nut, crispy shallot, chilled element on a warm plate.
- **Functionality (for service):** even the best design fails if it doesn't work on the line. Think about reheating, holding quality, plating speed. What could be pre-plated.
- **Nutritional Balance:** plates can be craveable and meet health standards – use sauces or purees to add healthy fats, fermented items, or phytonutrients. Using more herbs and spices and less salt.

# Examples of Composed Plates



## Traditional Plate

## Elevated Fast-Casual/Composed

B.L.T. Sandwich

Chinese BBQ Club: Char siu pork, roasted turkey, ginger scallion mayo, crispy wontons, pickled cucumber on club bread or deconstructed on composed plate.

Grilled Chicken & Rice with Veg

Korean-Inspired Bowl: Gochujang Glazed chicken, Furikake Rice Cake, quick-pickled veggies, scallion slaw, ssamjang drizzle

Beef Stroganoff

Modern: Braised short rib over horseradish spiked yogurt, roasted mushroom ragout, toasted rye crumbs and crispy onions

Turkey wrap with hummus

Shawarma – Inspired grain plate: Za’atar turkey, beet hummus, pickled onion, tabbouleh, tahini drizzle

Poke Bowl

Elevated Bento Boxes:  
Coastal Cali: citrus chicken, farro tabbouleh, charred broccolini, avocado mash, watermelon radish slaw

# Where can we start?

- What dishes in your current menu could be deconstructed and rebuilt?
- What cuisine/flavors could you explore that might be accepted by your audience?

# Day 2 Innovation Challenge

- Working in teams, participants will create:
  - Two fast-casual, elevated, globally inspired, composed dishes
  - one 2-ounce dessert
- Teams will be assigned their **proteins** and other **key ingredients**.
- Teams will use the provided worksheets and templates to **conceptualize and design the menu**.
- All recipes must yield **6 portions**. Teams will **produce and present** one portion for the show plate and five additional plates on appropriate platters or chafing dishes.
- Teams will be prepared to **discuss** each of their menu items.

**TEAM ONE– INDIA**

- Tofu, Firm
- Chicken, Breast
- Lentils
- Mangos
- Limes
- Tomatoes
- Yogurt
- Garam Masala

**TEAM TWO- CHINESE**

- Pork Belly
- Eggs
- Hoisin Sauce
- Sesame oil
- Baby Bok Choy
- Scallions
- Rice Noodles
- Ginger
- Garlic

**TEAM THREE- JAPAN**

- Beef, Sirloin
- Tuna
- Cloud Ear Mushrooms
- Miso
- Rice Wine Vinegar
- Daikon
- Shiitake Mushrooms
- Shiso
- Short-grain rice

**TEAM FOUR- KOREA**

- Pork Belly
- Shrimp
- Napa Cabbage
- Gochujang
- Kimchi
- Pear
- Garlic
- Sesame Seeds

**TEAM FIVE – THAI**

- Beef (Flank)
- Chicken Thigh
- Tamarind
- Galangal
- Coconut milk
- Thai Basil
- Kaffir lime leaves
- Corn



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Any Questions?