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Fine-Dining Chefs Are Pivoting to Comfort Food During the Pandemic

Some of the world's finest restaurants are finding new niches—and new customers—amid the coronavirus pandemic.

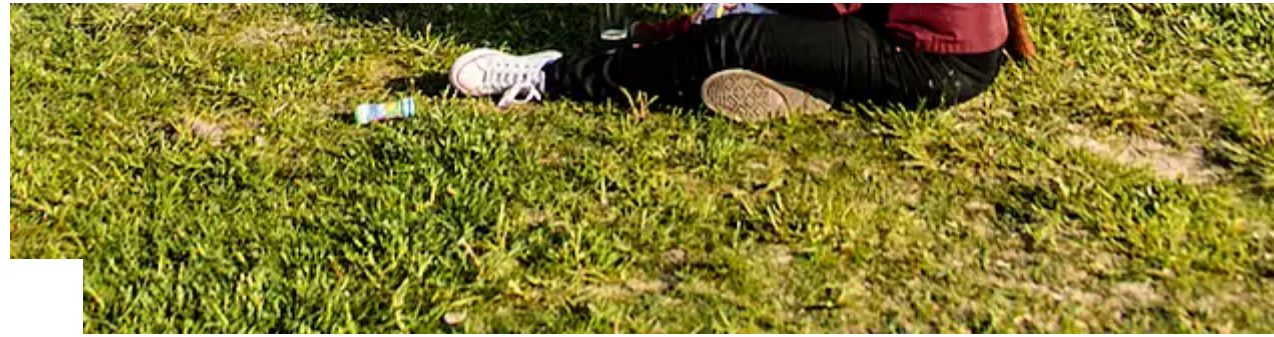
By Katie Lockhart

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During these uncertain times, a little comfort food can go a long way, and that hasn't been lost on the fine dining world.

A slew of famous chefs around the world have pivoted their fine dining focus to menus meant to soothe the soul in the wake of COVID-19, and the venture's been surprisingly successful—both for the restaurants and the customers.

Just look to [Noma](#), the Denmark restaurant consistently ranked one of the best in the world. In May, it announced it was reopening as a burger and wine bar. Instead of serving 20 immaculate courses of ingredient-focused Nordic food, juicy burgers hit customers' plates. The announcement turned heads around the world and earned major media attention. Although Noma has recently closed its outdoor burger joint and is now serving its "Summer Season" menu, the burger stint allowed a new set of customers the opportunity to dine at the world-famous Noma.

The same is true just down the street from Noma, at [Amass](#). The restaurant paused its multi-course Nordic menu during the pandemic and created a fried chicken and wine bar. "Fried chicken has always been our side

obsession," says chef and owner Matthew Orlando. "We have pop-ups in our garden and around town. It's kind of been our alter ego. Over the years, it developed a bit of a cult following."

With 250 portions of chicken being sold every day, the dish became a hit in Copenhagen—such a hit that the team at Amass decided to make it a permanent fixture of their restaurant. "It is separate in the fact that it operates with its own hours and menu," Orlando says. "That's it, though. It exists in the same space, only separated by a wall of bookshelves. I love seeing a dining room full of people eating tasting menus, and in the background, outside, there are 80 people eating fried chicken."

Across the world in Bali, Will Goldfarb (you may remember him from Netflix's *Chef's Table*) stopped his 21-course dessert tasting menu at

Boom4Dessert near the end of March. At the beginning of April, he and his

Room4Dessert near the end of March. At the beginning of April, he and his

team started a takeout and delivery menu with just three items: their signature chicken sandwich, a loaf of fresh-baked sourdough bread, and their staff meal. "Our staff meal changes every day and is a complete meal built around the Balinese tradition of Nasi Campur, or mixed rice," Goldfarb says.

"When we opened Room4Dessert six years ago, we didn't have any savory offerings, and we would offer our staff meal to hungry drinkers and those

looking for a pre-dessert snack," Goldfarb says. "When we evolved to tasting-only by demand about two years ago, we had to axe our savory offerings, but we had been hoping to bring them back next year. The 'Rona just gave us a little jumpstart to do the things that we have always been focused on—feeding hungry people."

R4D has since expanded by creating a grocery store at its Ubud location and opening a second pop-up store in Canggu. The team plans to continue their savory dishes as part of their dining experience. Goldfarb hopes Season 11 of the restaurant's tasting menu will begin again in early August.

Down Under in Melbourne, Australia, Attica, one of the country's best restaurants—famous for its creative use of native Australian ingredients like an ant-covered take on Lamington—is now serving lasagna, garlic bread, and salad. Chef and owner Ben Shewry went back to his roots when COVID brought on a desire for comfort. "Lasagna is a dish close to my heart," he says. "It's my family's special-occasion dish—we eat it every birthday and Christmas. I wanted to launch Attica At Home with a comforting dish at a cost that people could afford."

Attica has also expanded its takeout menu to include limited multi-course menu options celebrating Australia's heritage, like a a Greek souvlaki preparation, fresh-baked cheesecake and Jelly Bean ice cream. But once the

restaurant reopens, Shewry says, "I don't see us stopping serving lasagna at any point. We still want to offer that menu to the people who supported us through this immensely tough time."

Lasagna has been making the rounds at other restaurants around the world, too. At Au Courant Regional Kitchen in Omaha, Nebraska, chef and owner Benjamin Maides also served this cheesy, layered dish. "We based everything off of our favorite staff meals and decided to turn them into to-go meals," Maides says. "For some reason, the lasagna and the brisket enchiladas have been super popular." The restaurants sold anywhere from 100 to 120 per

week

week.

Since reopening, Au Courant Regional Kitchen has been serving its tasting menu three times per week. "We did add a small to-go menu, but it has not been nearly as successful as the staff meal to-go," Maides says. "I think we will always have to do to-go in some capacity from here on out. What exactly that will be is TBD, but we are still open!"

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