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PRABALIKA M BORAH

Every Indian family has that one tableware joke – this 'dinner set' is only for guests. Whether it is ever brought out or not is a mystery. For years, I have used the excuse: 'I am yet to find the ideal plates' to explain why I avoid inviting friends home for a meal. Then, when the dinner set of my dreams finally reached home, I realised I had spent too much time deciding.

I unpacked my delicate, gold-rimmed tableware, then logged on to Instagram, thinking up of ways to spam my handful of followers with pictures of it. I was crest-fallen to see that my purchase was, in retrospect, rather foolish. Because, ironically, what is trending now is my grandmother's tableware: traditional *kansa* plates, *longi* pottery and copper pans.

Looking back

Remember the pots, pans and plates you inherited? The ones you shoved into the loft, locked in storage trunks or ignored, allowing time and weather take its toll on their once shiny surfaces. It is time to bring them out, and let them shine in all their glory.

Copper is gleaming on bar counters; clay pots are trendy; bell metal utensils ring a bell and cast iron has cast a stylish spell. With the world switching to healthy alternatives, farm-to-table dining taking a big leap forward and chefs stressing on slow

The season of cast iron

Plastic? Nay. Chinaware? Yawn! If you want to make a statement, sneak some pans out of your grandmother's kitchen



cooking, serving food the old-fashioned way is making a comeback.

"Copper is a beautiful metal that allows the body to take in its goodness. This revival is new, and it goes against the trend that made us a slave to plastic, steel, melamine etc. In the late 90s and early 2000s we embraced the microwavable kitchen tools of the West, and almost forgot our traditional collection. There is now a serious talk about reviving the *longi* pottery of the North-

east," says Sudakshina Sinha Banerjee, one of the four co-founders of Studio Coppre.

Studio Coppre aims at making copper an everyday metal. "While we recommend good-quality copper to drink water, we also want to caution users. Except water and dry food, nothing should be served in copperware," adds Sudakshina.

The revival is strong, and online stores like Indiantique and Baarique are making heads turn. Chefs, home cooks and food

WHEN IN ROME
The ancient Romans used special boilers, called *autopsae*, to heat water specifically to be poured in wine before serving it at feasts.

stylists, are all looking at traditional utensils to cook, serve, plate and style food. Copper has succeeded in mak-

ing a comeback. Mugs, jars, bottles, water storage filters, are replacing their ungainly plastic counterparts in many homes. Non-stick pans are being traded for clay and reassuringly heavy cast iron.

"Our effort is to make these metals desirable. The hand-painted *kansa* table is exported to the West as well," says Surkhi Matharu, co-founder of Baarique.

Food-travel writer and author Marryam Reshii, who says she always picks markets over malls when travelling says, "Thirty years ago, when I went to Ahmedabad, I visited the Utensils Museum. One of the vessels I spotted had a wide mouth, narrow neck

so tends to allow some unhealthy material into the food, little by little according to utensil revivalists. *Kansa* or bell metal is one traditional metal popularly used to make utensils.

Dinner *thals* weigh about 500 grams, and it is a pleasant surprise to see food stylists using them. "I love to shoot traditional food in *kansa* or copper utensils; it connects with our culture and represents that old era instantly in the eyes of the viewers. A hand-etched brass plate on top of a *kansa* glass makes a head-turner DIY cake stand at a high tea and keeps all those fancy bone china cake stands at bay," says Chandrima, food writer and stylist, adding, "I grew up seeing food served to my grandfather in *kansa* utensils every day; he was very particular about it. The reason was the health benefits. He believed it could increase red blood cells and boost his immune system."

Nostalgia plays a big part in the comeback of these handcrafted utensils. Do make an effort to learn how to use them. Cast iron, for example, needs to be seasoned, which requires scrubbing, baking and patience. However it is worth making the effort, since the pan can last generations.

Food writer Swayampurna Mishra cautions, "As beautiful as they look, people should be careful while using *kansa*. Dairy and anything acidic isn't supposed to be served in these utensils."

She adds, "I like cooking with heritage copper or *kansa* vessels that my granny used, and my parents gifted me on my wedding. For me, it's just a way to revisit my childhood, keep those memories alive and reinvent those traditions for the next generation."

Copper has succeeded in making a stylish comeback. Mugs, jars, bottles, water storage filters, are at last replacing their dreaded plastic counterparts

Staying true to one's roots

Returning to the small screen as a judge, Sanjeev Kapoor talks about modern Indian cuisine and what it takes to make one stand out in the cut-throat culinary world

VASUNDHARA RATHI

Remember the iconic show *Khana Khazana*, that won a million hearts and filled many a homecook's recipe pages? The show also made Sanjeev Kapoor a household name, one to reckon with in the Indian culinary scene.

By 2011, the chef launched his channel FoodFood, which went a step further, by creating shows catering to the evolving needs of its audience. With shows such as *Health Maange More*, *K For Kids*, *Firangi Tadka* and *Healthy Fridge*, the channel presents an assortment of shows for varied demographics.

"We keep one ear to the ground and do our research. We try to be mindful of what people want and then provide it on our channel. There are shows on healthy food options and even quick, easy recipes for urban Indians, who may not have the time or resources to prepare an elaborate meal," says Kapoor, in a freewheeling chat.

The channel also recently launched a new show, *Veeba CookOff*, a face-off between trainee chefs from India's top catering colleges and hospitality schools. Kapoor dons the role of a judge here, and will be testing contestants in the 30-minute episodes on creativity, technique, taste and presentation. The show will also see top chefs from the best hotels and restaurants in the country, judging dishes created from the mystery box, a *la MasterChef*. Winners of the show stand the chance to further their careers by impressing the chefs on the show.

The new show is a 11-episode series, which is touted to be of professionals, by professionals, and for professionals. The activity on the show is



Final touches Sanjeev Kapoor judges hospitality and catering trainees in his new show • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

said to be similar to what restaurants do every day, but much quicker and more dramatic. Some of the other judges on the show are Amrita Rajchand, Vikramjit Roy, Himanshu Taneja and Rakhee Vaswani, among others.

With a strong belief in sharing his knowledge, the chef advises contestants on the show to be themselves. "Create your own identity, look at the

food around you, and add your touch to it. Along with your skill and knowledge, make sure that your food reflects the Indian value system that we have. Your food should reflect humility, passion and compassion. That Indian-ness is what will make you stand apart wherever you go in the world."

Kapoor, who has often spoken about the low salaries and long work hours put in by hotel staff, believes

The new show is a 11-episode series which is touted to be of professionals, by professionals, and for professionals

that the scenario might improve. "Change within the hospitality industry has to start from the intake level itself. We need better talent coming in to this field. There's a mismatch in the expectations – everyone wants to become a manager on Day 1," says Kapoor.

He also states that the industry is stuck in a Catch-22 situation, "Unless better talent comes in, hotels will not increase pay scales, and unless the pay is increased, better talent won't come in."

On the other hand, the way modern Indian cuisine is taking centre stage is rather encouraging, especially with restaurants such as Indian Accent by Chef Manish Mehrotra in New Delhi and Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra in Mumbai giving Indian food a new twist.

He says, "The restaurants may be small in their scale, but they have been able to capture the mind space of their customers. It's definitely a good thing. All cuisines have to grow. There are a few things we should consider when adapting Indian food to the global palate, like our core values and techniques. These restaurants have been able to do that. They're serving Indian food that the world can understand."

Veeba CookOff airs every Friday on FoodFood at 2.30 pm and 8 pm.

AROUND THE WORLD

Drink the blues

Why drink the same boring red, black or green tea? Have you ever thought of trying blue tea? Blue tea gets its colour from the dried flower which the tea is made of. Blue Tea India is getting blue *Clitoria ternatea* with highest concentrated sun-dried flowers to India. *Clitoria ternatea*, commonly known as Asian pigeon wings, bluebell vine, blue pea, butterfly pea, cordo fan pea and Darwin pea, is known as Aparajita in most Indian languages, and is an integral part of many religious rituals. Apparently, the tea made from the dried flowers is the healthiest, and is found among top five naturally occurring substances which can change colour. Unlike green tea, blue tea is not bitter, and the manufacturers claims that it works beautifully. It comes with a flavour that is mild and naturally sweet, filled with earthiness.



Drunken cheese

Cheese and wine are often enjoyed together. So one Italian cheesemaker decided to combine both. The factory La Caseria Carpenedo, in northern Treviso, soaks its cheese in wine for up to five months, so that the wheels infuse the flavour. It's called *Ubricaco* – meaning 'drunken' cheese. About 15 cheeses are all soaked in different wines, including some that are made with Prosecco. They can cost up to €200 a wheel. It's thought that the process dates back to the First World War. The factory makes *Ubricaco* with a pasteurised cow's milk cheese wheel that has been aged for a year, which is made specifically for the factory, to be soaked in wine. The cheesemakers then soak entire wheels in wine, and then leave it to age for up to 150 days.



Tremor spoon

This tremor countering spoon allows people with hand tremors to eat independently. Liftware is equipped with microprocessors and motion sensors. The spoon measures the shaking of the hand and produces a counteraction. This is the problem that engineer Anupam Pathak wanted to solve. He couldn't cure *Bremerhorst's tremor*. But he could develop a spoon that would cancel out its effects. He calls the spoon *Lifeware*. There's no 'on' switch; the spoon starts up automatically when it's lifted from the table. The chunky handle vibrates a little in the user's hand. The technology is similar to the image stabilisation technology in digital cameras. A clinical trial revealed that *Lifeware* was capable of reducing shakes by 70%. *Lift Labs* is currently developing other utensils for its users. The *Lifeware* spoon can be yours for \$195