

IN LOS ANGELES, PERHAPS THE MOST CAR-ORIENTED CITY ON THE EARTH, FOOD TRUCKS ARE ENABLING CURIOUS DINERS TO RECLAIM THE SIDEWALKS.



wheel FOOD

Nothing demonstrates the demand for 'real' fine dining more than the proliferation of innovative and inexpensive food trucks roaming America's cities.



UNTIL RECENTLY, EATING at a food truck was a clear indication that you were either recently immigrated or massively inebriated. Set off freeways, in vacant lots and beside construction sites in struggling neighbourhoods across the United States, food trucks have always provided a source of cheap food of dubious quality. Recently, a confluence of social pressures has rapidly, somewhat surprisingly, breathed new life into these once maligned mobile kitchens and is resulting in a reinvention of American street food.

When the economy imploded in 2009, President Obama's then-chief-of-staff Rahm Emanuel said: "Never waste a crisis. It can become a joyful transition." It is likely Emanuel was thinking of change in the financial system, but the economic crisis has had a dramatic and positive impact on the way many Americans eat.

When Roy Choi, a veteran LA chef who had worked at various high-end restaurants, was refused the capital to establish his own bricks-and-mortar establishment, he bought a shabby taco truck, painted it in a vivid design and started to create 'Korean tacos'. Inspired by his heritage and the legacy of the taco truck, he began to sell tortillas piled with slow-cooked short ribs and *kimchi* (a traditional Korean dish of fermented vegetables). With his inventive cuisine and hyperactive Twitter account, Choi struck a chord with young people across LA who craved creative, affordable food.

In less than two years, dozens of young chefs across the country have followed Choi's lead in pursuit of their individual vision in this newly democratised culinary landscape. While the trucks still inhabit car parks and sidewalks, they are equally at home shepherding parties for the hipper-than-thou set in up-and-coming neighbourhoods.

The ingenuity and energy on display is as entertaining as it is widespread. Some outlets, such as San Francisco's Crème Brûlée Truck, are focused on one product; others, such as The Peached Tortilla in Austin, Texas, serve food that mixes the immigrant cuisines surrounding them into something entirely new. Every week, hopeful teams hit the road posting their changing locations and fare on Twitter. While some misfire and others strike it big, every truck is part of a counter-culture transforming the way we eat. DAVID PRIOR

ABOVE: THE FOOD SHARK VAN IN MARFA, TEXAS, OFFERS LOCALS SUCH FARE AS PAPRIKA CHICKEN STEW WITH HERBED DUMPLINGS. AT THE COOLHAUS VAN, RIGHT, LOS ANGELENOS MIX TWO ALL-AMERICAN FAVOURITES, ICE-CREAM AND COOKIES. BELOW: THE TREND-SAVVY LOCALS OF SANTA MONICA HELPED PIONEER THE FOOD TRUCK RENAISSANCE. MANY HEAD TO THE BEACHFRONT AFTER RETRO COCKTAILS AT THE PART-DIVE/PART A-LIST HANGOUT THE BRIG, HANDILY LOCATED NEXT DOOR. >



PHOTOGRAPHERS: AMANDA MARSAUS, TONNY VALIANTE; TEXT: DAVID PRIOR



FOOD TRUCKS *around the globe*
 THE RENAISSANCE OF THE FOOD TRUCK IS INSPIRING MANY AROUND THE WORLD: HOLLAND HAS PRODUCED A RASH OF CLEVER VENDORS INCLUDING PUBLIC PIE, WHO WHEELED THEIR FRUIT PIES AND CONFECTIONS AROUND LAST YEAR'S IL SALONE DEL MOBILE FURNITURE FAIR IN MILAN. THERE'S ALSO AMARO, A MOBILE 'SLOW FOOD KITCHEN' HAULED AROUND EUROPE'S FESTIVAL CIRCUIT VIA TRACTOR. THE CUTEST OF THE DUTCH BRIGADE IS HEET BROOD, AN ECCENTRIC LITTLE BLUE CARAVAN THAT SERVES UP GOOD FOOD AND CHEER IN EQUAL MEASURE. SIMILARLY, YOUNG BRITISH CHEFS HAVE BEGUN TO EMBRACE THE MOVEMENT, WITH MEAT WAGON, WHICH PRODUCES QUALITY BURGERS, AND THE ESTABLISHED CHOC STAR VAN ATTRACTING A STRONG FOLLOWING AMONG LONDONERS WITH AN APPETITE FOR SOMETHING AFFORDABLE, ADVENTUROUS AND DIFFERENT.



PHOTOGRAPHERS: BOUDEWIJN BOLLMANN/TWISTEDSTREETS.NL, JONNY VALLANT TEXT: DAVID PRIOR



LOS ANGELES, CA
www.findlafoodtrucks.com

KOGI (@KOGIBBQ)
 With nearly 90,000 followers on Twitter, five trucks stalking the streets and bragging rights as the spiritual birthplace of the 'Korean taco', Kogi is the standard against which others will be measured.

THE GRILLED CHEESE TRUCK (@GRLLDCHEESETRUK)
 Grilled cheese sandwiches. What's not to like?

EAT COOLHAUS (@COOLHAUS)
 Two bored architects bought a postal van, painted it pink and now hand out artisan ice-cream sandwiches named after architectural legends. Ask for a Tea-dao Ando and you will receive a matcha green tea ice-cream between two ginger cookies.

NOM NOM (@NOMNOMTRUCK)
 A happy by-product of French colonialism in Vietnam must certainly be *bahn mi*, a crunchy fresh baguette slathered with pâté or mayonnaise and then piled high with chilli, coriander, cucumber and pickled carrots.

DOSA (@DOSATRUCK)
 Named for the stuffed lentil and rice flour pancakes which are ubiquitous on the streets of southern India, this truck is demystifying what is a daily snack for millions. Try the 'Slumdog' filled with indian 'pesto', paneer, spinach and marsala potatoes.

LET'S BE FRANK (@LETSBEFRANK)
 Sue Moore, the former 'meat forager' at Berkeley's seminal Chez Panisse restaurant, sources only grass-fed beef and organic ingredients for her politically correct hot dogs served with relish.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

CHAIRMAN BAO (@CHAIRMANTRUCK)
 Steamed Bao buns, especially the red sesame chicken, march from this flag bearer of a new culinary revolution.

THE CREME BRULEE CART (@CREMEBRULEECART)
 This pony only turns one trick but when the trick is Nutella crème brûlée with a slow-roasted balsamic strawberry, the line is around the block.

SPENCER-ON-THE-GO (@CHEZSPENCERGO)
 The cute boxes and twinkling cafe lights that decorate this truck aren't enough to transport you from the gritty auto parts car park to rural Provence. The smartly presented lobster and citrus salad, foie gras torchon and escargot puff lollipops, on the other hand...

AUSTIN, TX

THE PEACHED TORTILLA (@PEACHEDTORTILLA)
 Splicing Mexican and South-East Asian flavours should not work in theory but by breaking all the rules, The Peached Tortilla has taken cues from Momofuku bad boy Dave Chang's big-on-flavour, stoner-satisfying style to create the likes of crunchy catfish and Vietnamese braised pork belly.

MARFA, TX

FOOD SHARK TRUCK (@FOODSHARK)
 In this tiny bohemian desert enclave, Food Shark serves up food with a Mediterranean-by-the-way-of-West Texas flavour like the marfalafel, a falafel wrapped in tortilla.

NEW YORK, NY

BIG GAY ICE CREAM TRUCK (@BIGGAYICECREAM)
 The faces of hardened New Yorkers melt when this fabulous Mr Whippy rolls through Manhattan in summer.

NYC CRAVINGS (@BIANDANGNYC)
 A more-ish Taiwanese take on fried chicken.

KOGI VANS, ABOVE LEFT, HAVE CEMENTED A DEVOTED FOLLOWING WITH MEXICAN-KOREAN BARBECUE OFFERINGS SUCH AS THE KIMCHI QUESADILLA AND THE CALAMARI TACO. POP-UP KITCHEN PUBLIC PIE, ABOVE, TRAVELS HOLLAND WHIPPING UP LUSCIOUS PIES IN SITU AND BRINGING NEW MEANING TO THE TERM "DUTCH TREAT". AMARO INDUSTRIES' "THE HULK" FOOD TRUCK, BELOW, IS A FIGURE AT THE DUTCH FESTIVAL CIRCUIT.

