

DOWN THE WING

CHICKEN WINGS ARE A BLANK CANVAS FOR FLAVOR, PREP.

.....BY ROB BENES

Legend has it that the birthplace of buffalo chicken wings was the Anchor Bar in Buffalo, New York, in 1964. There are two versions of the story. Frank Bellissimo, who founded the bar with his wife Teresa in 1939, said the invention involved a mistake—the delivery of chicken wings instead of necks, which the family typically used when making spaghetti sauce. To avoid wasting the wings, Bellissimo asked Teresa to concoct a bar appetizer.

The other story is told by their son Dominic, who asked his mother to make something special to pass around. Teresa picked up some chicken wings, deep-fried them and added a hot sauce. She thought the sauce might be too spicy, so she cut up celery sticks and poured blue cheese sauce for dipping. No matter which story is true, wings were an instant hit.

Traditionally, wings were deep-fried without breading and tossed in buffalo sauce, but that's not the case today. Wings are being marinated, brined, poached, baked, stir-fried, smoked, fried, and deboned and stuffed, and prepared with myriad spices and sauces. Here are 10 takes on chicken wings—in no particular order—that demonstrate their versatility.

1. GOCHUJANG-SMOKED WINGS

“Chicken wings have been imprisoned to a quick deep-fry, coated with a hot or sweet sauce, and served with celery sticks and blue cheese poured from a bottle,” says Edward Lee, executive chef/owner, 610 Magnolia, Louisville, Kentucky. “It’s high time we free them and do justice to a wonderful piece of meat.”

His gochujang wings are prepared with a rub, a marinade, hot smoke and deep-frying. Gochujang is a spicy fermented red chili sauce common in Korean cuisine and used in rice dishes such as bibimbap or melted into soups and stews. Lee slips it into a tangy marinade that delivers the perfect sweet/heat with a smoky bite. The sauce is a funkier alternative to the average buffalo sauce, because gochujang adds an umami-rich twist.

On pickup, the wings are slathered with Alabama white barbecue sauce, which provides a creamy, vinegary, sharp bite of flavor.

2. PIRI PIRI WINGS

“Chicken wings allow chefs to express their creativity,” says Shaun Doty, executive chef/owner, Chick-a-Biddy, Atlanta.

His recipe involves massaging jumbo wings with hot piri piri sauce, which is Portuguese in origin. It’s made from crushed African bird’s eye chilies and/or Thai chilies, olive oil, red bell pepper, minced onion, minced garlic, red wine vinegar, lemon juice, kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, then allowed to rest overnight.

The wings are grilled to order until caramelized and a crust forms, and served in a pool of cilantro and garlic sauce. “The piri piri sauce caramelizes nicely on the skin and provides an herbaceous, bright and fresh taste,” Doty says.

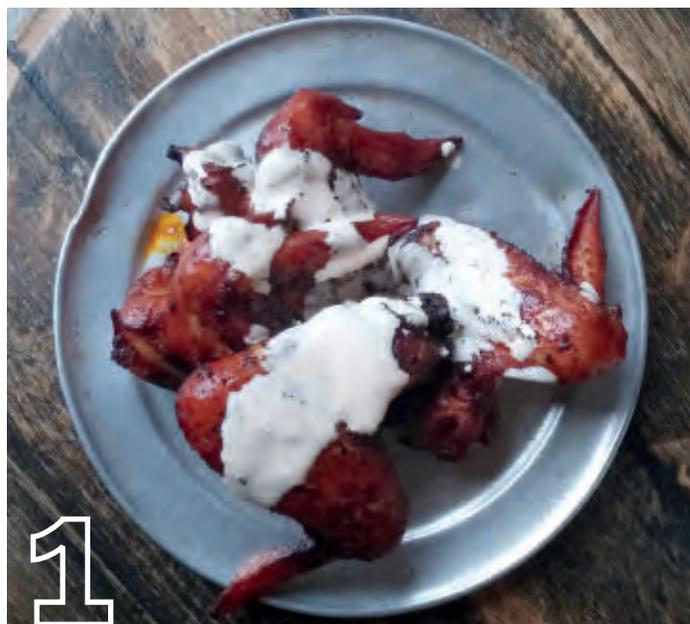


PHOTO CREDITS Left, Edward Lee; opposite, Chick-a-Biddy



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APPETIZERS on the wing



3 MISS HAY'S STUFFED CHICKEN WINGS

“Cooking wings is actually a challenge. It’s easy for someone to buy wings, drop them in a fryer, season them with salt or a bottled sauce, and serve,” says Brian Mottola, chef de cuisine, NOLA, New Orleans.

At NOLA, jumbo wings are deboned and stuffed with a mixture of ground pork, chopped shrimp, chopped wood ear black mushrooms, chopped white onions, chopped green onions, chopped celery, chopped cilantro and fish sauce. They’re baked, then dredged in seasoned flour and fried, and served with a garlicky housemade hoisin dipping sauce.

When guests bite or cut into the wings, they see the different layers of full chicken meat on the outside and the stuffing on the inside. There’s not a high fat content in the chicken or the shrimp, so the pork keeps it moist. “It resembles a pork and shrimp dumpling,” Mottola says, “but looks more like a crab claw.”

4 MOJO-GLAZED WINGS

The Local Craft Food & Drink, Coral Gables, Florida, is a gastropub with a Southern twist that brines jumbo wings overnight in an assertive mixture of garlic, brown sugar, honey, salt and spices—similar to what’s used to brine corned beef. The wings are then poached in the same mixture with fresh water and mirepoix to further infuse flavor and tenderize the meat.

After six to eight minutes of poaching, the wings are removed and kept in the cooler until an order is placed, at which time they are deep-fried. They are tossed with kosher salt, granulated sugar, ground cumin and black pepper, and then tossed in mojo glaze. The wings are garnished with thick slices of sweet onion and served with a housemade tomato-based smoked hot sauce for dipping.

“The guest experiences a tender and salty chicken wing with an acidic and assertive garlic flavor on the back end, as well as the mojo,” says Phil Bryant, executive chef.

5 EVERYTHING WINGS

“Just imagine an everything bagel, and that’s our version of a chicken wing,” says Edward Kim, executive chef/owner, Mott St, Chicago.

Jumbo wings are poached in vegetable oil on low heat for about an hour—similar to confit—to tenderize the meat. The wings are allowed to rest in the cooler until an order is placed, then, they’re deep-fried until crispy. They are tossed in a mixture of soy sauce, jaggery, fish sauce, ginger juice, molasses, chili oil and rice wine vinegar. Then, they’re plated and garnished with toasted sesame seeds, toasted poppy seeds and fried shallots. A housemade tzatziki sauce is served for dipping.

6 FAUX WINGS—BUFFALO SWEETBREADS

Todd Kelly, executive chef, Orchids at Palm Court, Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza, Cincinnati, wanted to present a more refined and updated approach to chicken wings while keeping the traditional wing flavor profile. He thought about how sweetbreads are cooked by searing and deglazing with vinegar. That acid helps cut through the richness and balances the sweetbreads.

The main ingredient in a wing hot sauce is pepper, but also there’s a lot of vinegar, so it makes sense that sweetbreads and wings go hand in hand. “Texturally, they’re a bit apart, but when you cut sweetbreads into smaller clusters, flour them, fry them and toss them in hot sauce, they’re close in texture and consistency,” Kelly says.

The hot sweetbreads are served on a cold blue-cheese panna cotta that melts slightly, becoming a blue-cheese dressing. The dish

PHOTO CREDITS: Above, clockwise from top left: NOLA, Ernie Rodriguez; Mott St, Orchids at Palm Court; opposite, clockwise from top left: Jake Melnick's, E.P., Kristin Teig; Slice House



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also includes a celery salad tossed with buttermilk and vinegar with frisee and a lemon vinaigrette, as well as housemade hot sauce that includes smoked butter to impart a smoky flavor and an element of grilled or smoked wings.

7. PB&J WINGS

Nick Santangelo, executive chef, Jake Melnick's Corner Tap, Chicago, has 3,000 pounds of fresh whole jumbo wings delivered each week. First, he splits them and removes the tips. Next, they're dredged in seasoned flour, blanched in the fryer for six minutes, and kept in the cooler until an order is placed.

Finally, the wings are fried, and tossed in a Thai peanut sauce. They're served with raspberry jam and a chipotle dipping sauce. "The sweetness with a little heat of the dipping sauce works well with the peanut sauce," Santangelo says. "The flavor tastes like a childhood sandwich on a wing."

8. STIR-FRIED SHISHITO PEPPERS AND WINGS

"Any cut of meat with a bone has the most flavor, so with chicken wings, the bone adds tremendous flavor and acts as a utensil or cutlery," says Louis Tikaram, executive chef/owner, E.P & L.P., a restaurant and rooftop bar in West Hollywood, California.

At E.P., the wings appetizer is a simple dish to start the meal or serve as an icebreaker for family meals, Tikaram says. Jumbo wings are flash-fried and set aside. Shishito peppers are stir-fried at high heat in a little oil, then the wings are added back and seasoned with housemade five-spice powder (clove, cumin seed, Szechuan pepper, white pepper and dried chili) and salt. They are cooked until the spices are toasted and the wings are warmed through. A housemade sriracha is smeared around a bowl, and the wings and peppers are added. The dish is garnished with dehydrated Thai basil.

9. SMOKED CHICKEN WINGS

John Delpha, executive chef/partner, Rosebud American Kitchen & Bar, Somerville, Massachusetts, rubs jumbo wings with brown cane sugar, roasted garlic powder, cayenne pepper, citric acid, cumin, black pepper and other secret ingredients, and smokes them over American hardwood with cherry accents at 225°F for an hour. When finished, the wings are brushed with agave and sprinkled with a proprietary rub. On pickup, they're dropped in the fryer to heat through and crisp the skin. No sauce is added or dipping sauce served.

"This method delivers a good flavor from the rub that isn't masked with sauces," Delpha says. "It's pure smoke and chicken with a hint of sweetness from the agave. People lick the plates."

10. WINGS WITH ST. GERMAIN SAUCE

Tony Gemignani, executive chef/owner, Slice House, San Francisco, prefers to use only the drumette, because "it delivers on flavor and provides more meat," he says.

Drumettes are brined in sugar water for two days. Then, they're seasoned with salt and pepper, baked in a 350°F oven, drizzled with olive oil and put in the cooler. They're fried to order and tossed with housemade sweet/hot barbecue sauce flavored with St. Germain, which imparts a subtle floral note that elevates the dish in taste and aroma. A blue-cheese dipping sauce is served with the wings.

"Wings are universal," Gemignani, says. "They're a great all-around food that can be served at the bar, in the dining room, for carryout, for catered events and everywhere in between." ■

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