

A taste of what's to come

Insects, immersive dining and 3D-printed food: the future is here – and it's coming to a table near you



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'Boy, Mom, you sure can hydrate a pizza,' says Michael J Fox's character to his elderly mother in *Back to the Future Part II*. And if you were one of the trilogy's many fans who re-watched it on 21 October 2015 (the then-future day it was set in), you'll no doubt have enjoyed some of those late-1980s ideas for tomorrow's domestic technologies. Because if director Robert Zemeckis's predictions were on the money, not only should we now be hydrating our dinner via countertop units, but summoning our side dishes ('Fruit!') via voice-recognition technology at the dinner table.

While the latter is still a way off, the idea of a countertop cooking unit that does more than microwave is, in fact, almost here. At Enoteca in the Hotel Arts Barcelona, chef Paco Pérez has been busy trialling a new 3D printer. Foodini, by Natural Machines, resembles an oversized microwave and is capable of printing intricate food designs using fresh ingredients. Using it to create dishes such as 'Sea Coral' – a doily-shaped bed of seafood purée topped with sea-urchins, caviar and carrot foam – Pérez was so impressed with the machine that he has moved it to his Miramar restaurant in Llançà to further develop his ideas.

'For me, it is another working tool,' he says. 'Now we have to study the possibilities it can give us. We want the printer not only to technically draw with strokes, but to create structures, too.'

Though currently reserved for professional kitchens, Foodini is designed with the home user in mind. 'We've taken a food-machine facility and shrunk it down to a kitchen appliance that sits on a counter,' says Natural Machines co-founder Lynette Kucsma. 'I can do things like crackers in 20 seconds, ravioli in three minutes, or a personalised pizza in five minutes.' It's also optimised as an 'internet of things' appliance, meaning the user can program it remotely.

An early-access version of Foodini is available now, but it's worth holding out for the next-

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generation machines, which have the added function of cooking the meal as well as preparing it. It's due for wider release in 2017 and is expected to cost around US\$2,000.

As to what exactly it will be cooking depends on whether current food trends are here to stay. With the global population set to increase by two billion people by 2050, the market for new products widens each day, which might explain the arrival of the latest 'superfood' on dinner and cocktail menus in major Western cities. Yes, Europe is finally getting over its revulsion for eating insects, with converts diving in to packets of Thai-chilli and smoky-barbecue-flavoured mealworms, crickets and locusts with self-righteous gusto.

At Pembrokeshire's new Grub Kitchen (grubkitchen.co.uk), Britain's first restaurant devoted to the little critters, you can try toasted cumin mealworm hummus, sweetcorn chowder with a grasshopper crumb, and bamboo worm in pad Thais and creamy dips. Think you could handle that? Try Archipelago on Cleveland Street, London (archipelago-restaurant.co.uk), where treats include chocolate-covered locusts and caramelised mealworms. If that screams 'gimmick' to you, put your name down at the two-Michelin-starred Noma in Copenhagen (noma.dk) – four-time winner of the World's Best Restaurant award – to try its steak tartare, served with a generous helping of ants.

While food technologists look to reinvent meat, Hampton Creek Foods, a five-year-old San

Francisco start-up, has focused on reinventing the egg with dairy-free mayo, dressings and cookies that use ground-down Canadian yellow peas and emulsifying agents. While this might seem like yet another health-food product, it has so far been wildly successful – in fact, Hampton Creek is one of the world's fastest-growing food companies, with hundreds of new products in the pipeline. It also has the backing of one of Asia's richest men, Li Ka-Shing, as well as Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang and Paypal co-founder Peter Thiel.

But in some areas of gastronomy, it's the presentation that is advancing rather than the food itself. Indeed, anyone looking to give clients a more novel experience than a box at the O2 will be pleased to know art and theatre have found their way into corporate entertaining.

When caterer Bubble (bubblefood.com) puts on a do, you can expect the unconventional. Events are bespoke and bring together all the elements of a concept to create a fully immersive experience. At a recent soirée for the Royal Horticultural Society, guests were seated at a long table in the main hall. Cream of mushroom soup was served in a fur-lined cup, accompanied by the soundtrack of a crackling fire and cat purrs. A main dish of beef loin, with sweet potato and ox-cheek dumpling, came out to a heartbeat backdrop with the room cast in crimson, in a not-so-subtle attempt to place the diner inside a vascular chamber.

'There is a growing trend for immersive experiences,' says Samantha Welstead-Wood, Bubble's business development manager. 'Guests can engage with the food and other elements on a more emotional level – resonating with memories of childhood, perhaps, or a favourite holiday.'

So there's a back-to-the-future concept for your next event: squeezing clients into a genuine, unheated 1980s caravan, complete with orange curtains and white-veneered furniture. Fried-cricket and cream cheese vol-au-vent, anyone? ●

