

Timeless staple gives us taste of global cultures

By Karen Fernau
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Greeks have their avgolemono, Russians their borscht. France takes credit for bouillabaisse and Mexico for menudo.

Every country, every culture has its specialty, but soup as a category belongs to the world.

"It's one of the few truly universal foods," said Gregory Casale, executive

chef at Paradise Bakery & Cafe, a chain that recently expanded its international offerings with such soups as posole.

More than ever before, Americans are spooning up soups from far-flung continents. Today's customers want their soups authentic, not an Americanized version, Casale said.

Food industry experts trace the draw to global soups to two basic factors: Our increasing interest in all foods ethnic and an unwavering desire for comfort foods.

The U.S. ethnic foods market racks up an estimated \$75 billion in annual sales, according to the Agricultural Marketing Research Center. It is the equivalent of \$1 out of every \$7 spent on food.

And when it comes to comfort food, 20 percent of those participating in a recent survey by Allrecipes.com listed soup as their favorite. The closest competitor was mashed potatoes, the favorite of 14 percent.

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The world in a soup spoon

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FROM THE COVER

Soups bring world to our taste buds

SOUPS

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"Soup has wonderful flavors and soothing powers at the same time," Casale said. "That's a hard combination to beat."

According to food historians, soup is as old as the history of cooking. Ancient civilizations combined vegetables, meats, fruits, grains, legumes and whatever else was available to create filling, nutritious meals to survive.

"Soup stock was not created by a bunch of French chefs trying to find more ways to use more mirepoix. Stocks were a way to use the scraps from the masters, and to stay alive," said David Ansel, author of *The Soup Peddler's Slow & Difficult Soups* and owner of a soup delivery company in Austin, Texas.

Along with exotic ingredients and unfamiliar flavors, ethnic soups are attracting converts for their medicinal reputations. In Thailand, for example, herbs believed to possess healing powers, such as the galangal group, are tossed into many soup pots.

Virtually every cuisine in the world has its version of a cold-fighting chicken soup.

And scientists confirm what ancient cooks long believed. Chicken, like most protein foods, contains a natural amino acid called cystine, which is released when you make soup. Cystine bears a remarkable chemical similarity to a drug called acetylcysteine, prescribed for patients with bronchitis and respiratory infections.

Home cooks should not be intimidated by ethnic soups. The key is finding quality and often unfamiliar ingredients, many of which are available in ethnic food markets or specialty food sections of mainstream grocers.

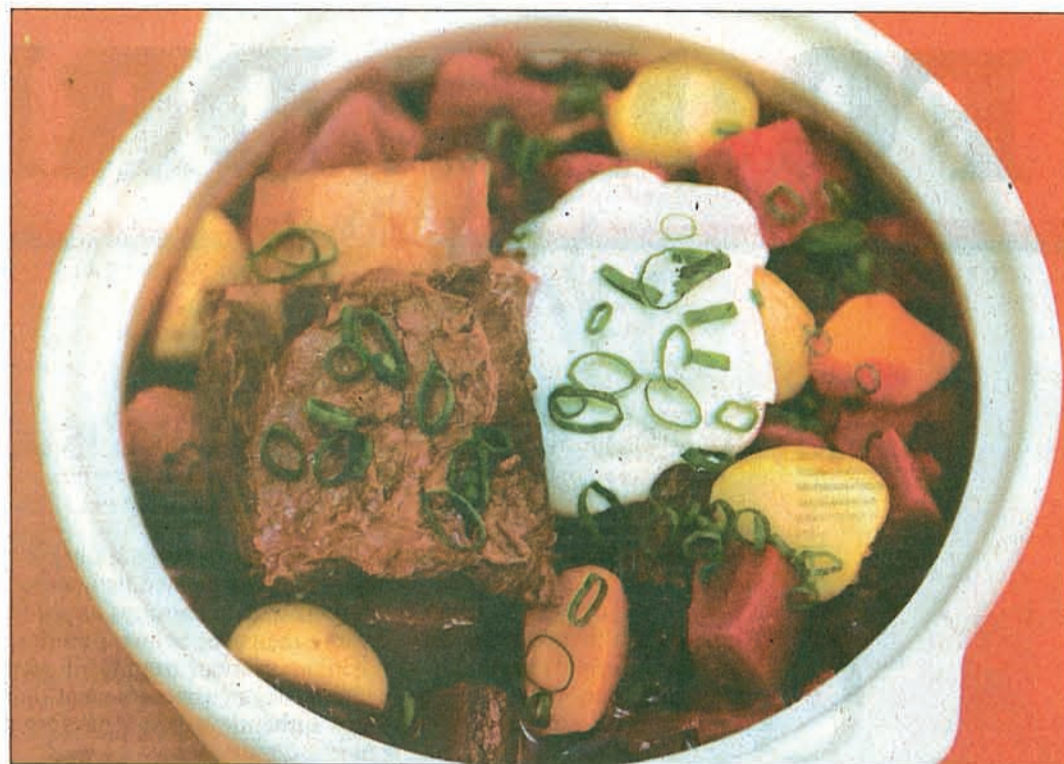
"Soups are a very forgiving medium. You really can't screw up a soup beyond recognition," Ansel said.

Today, soups also are gaining popularity as a main course for a dinner party.

"Soup has an aboriginal draw, especially when the weather is cool," Ansel said.

"Their presence on the entertaining table shows that their journey from scrap food to haute cuisine is complete."

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Beef Short Rib Borscht

(Pictured at left)
From chef Gregory Casale

- 1/2 cup canola oil, divided use
- 1 1/2 pounds beef short ribs
- 8 cups low-sodium chicken broth, divided use
- 2 pounds medium beets, about 4
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 3 large carrots, peeled and diced
- 3 stalks celery, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1/2 medium red cabbage, shredded
- 6 medium cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (12 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Garnish (optional)

- 1 bunch fresh dill, chopped
- 1 tablespoon sour cream for each serving

Place a medium stockpot on high heat. Add half the canola oil. When hot, add short ribs and cook until all sides of the ribs are browned. Reduce heat to medium low and add 4 cups chicken broth. Bring broth to slow simmer, cover and cook ribs for 1 hour and 45 minutes.

While the ribs are cooking, place beets in a medium saucepan. Cover with water and, on high heat, bring water to a boil. Boil about 25 minutes until a fork can pierce the flesh to the center of the beets easily. Let the beets cool. Peel and dice the beets. Set aside.

In a large stockpot add the remaining canola oil and heat on medium-high heat. Add onions, carrots and celery. Saute for 3 minutes or until the onions become translucent. Add the cabbage and saute until it begins to wilt. Add garlic and canned tomatoes, bay leaf, red wine vinegar and sugar.

Next, add short ribs and cooking liquid to the pot. Add remaining 4 cups chicken stock. Bring the soup to a slow simmer and allow to simmer uncovered for about 20 minutes. Add the diced beets and season with salt and pepper. Continue simmering for 5 minutes, or until the beets release their color into the broth.

Assemble garnishes and serve.

Makes 6 servings.
Approximate values per serving: 765 calories, 63 g fat, 86 mg cholesterol, 34 g protein, 33 g carbohydrates, 5 g fiber, 660 mg sodium, 68 percent calories from fat.

Fiesta Posole

(Pictured at left)
From chef Gregory Casale

- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 1/2 pound pork stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/2 pound chicken, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 large onion, peeled and diced
- 2 large carrots, cut in half lengthwise, then diced into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 celery stalks, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 quarts low-sodium chicken stock
- 2 cups white hominy, canned
- 2 cups cabbage, shredded
- 1 can (12 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 1 cup zucchini, diced
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- Pico de gallo
- 1 lime, cut into wedges

Place a large stockpot on medium-high heat. Add canola oil. When hot, add pork and chicken. Cook, stirring occasionally, until chicken and pork are browned on all sides. Add onion, carrots and celery. Saute for about 3 minutes, or until the onions are translucent. Add the cumin and chili powder, and saute for 1 minute to release the flavor and aroma of the spices. Add the chicken stock and bring to a slow simmer.

Add hominy, cabbage and diced tomatoes. Cover and simmer for 45 minutes. Add zucchini and simmer for another 15 minutes. Just before serving, add the fresh cilantro and lime juice. Serve with a garnish plate of pico de gallo and fresh lime wedges.

Makes 6 servings.
Approximate values per serving: 374 calories, 21 g fat, 51 mg cholesterol, 17 g protein, 27 g carbohydrates, 6 g fiber, 326 mg sodium, 51 percent calories from fat.



Chicken Pho

From chef Gregory Casale

- 2 quarts low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 medium onion, cut in half
- 4 slices of ginger, 1 by 1/4 inch
- 2 whole star anise seeds
- 2 whole cloves
- 6 whole black peppercorns
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 6 cilantro stems
- 2 Thai basil stems
- 2 boneless chicken breasts
- 1/2 cup fish sauce, or nuoc mam
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 pound wide rice stick noodles, soaked in warm water for 20 minutes
- 1/2 cup sliced green onions

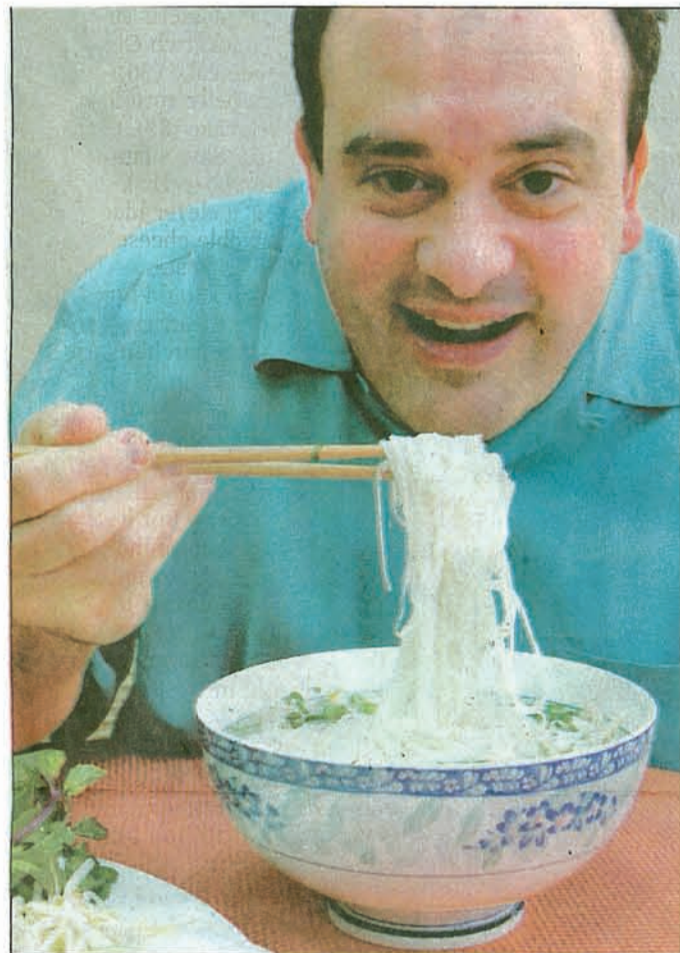
Garnish
1/2 onion, thinly sliced
1/2 bunch cilantro
1/2 bunch Thai basil
2 limes, cut into wedges
1 jalapeño, sliced
1/2 pound fresh mung bean sprouts

Place a medium-size stockpot on medium-high heat. Add chicken broth. Just before broth begins to simmer, add onion halves, ginger, star anise, clove, black peppercorns, garlic, cilantro stems and Thai basil stems. Reduce heat to low and allow the herbs and spices



to steep for about 10 minutes. Add chicken breasts and poach for about 20 minutes. Remove and set aside to cool slightly. Shred chicken by hand into thin strips. Use a slotted spoon to remove herbs and spices from the broth so all that remains is broth. Increase heat to medium high and add fish sauce, sugar and salt. Add shredded chicken. Drain noodles, and add to broth. Top with green onions. Assemble garnishes on the plate and serve immediately with soup.

Makes 6 servings.
Approximate values per serving: 513 calories, 9 g fat, 51 mg cholesterol, 35 g protein, 88 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber, 427 mg sodium, 21 percent calories from fat.



CATHERINE J. JUN/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Chef Gregory Casale samples a noodle soup at Paradise Bakery & Cafe in Scottsdale, which has expanded its international offerings.