

NEW YORK POST

'80S FAVORITES GROW UP

By CARLA SPARTOS

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LIKE, what comes around totally goes around.

Take the '80s, for instance.

This summer saw Reagan-era rockers Bon Jovi, George Michael and the Police perform sold-out concerts, while Tretorn - the Swedish tennis sneaker adored by '80s preps - staked out SoHo, and neon colors emblazoned fingers and toes citywide.

PHOTO GALLERY: '80s-inspired Food

But it isn't just the worlds of music and fashion that are influenced by the Decade of Greed: Food is also taking a cue from its yuppie forebears. Here are eight dishes that hearken back to the golden days of exotic gourmet ingredients, low-fat diet fads and carb-heavy Cal-Med cuisine. Leg warmers and Jane Fonda aerobics video are not included.

THEN: Pasta primavera with pesto, sun-dried tomatoes and raspberry vinegar

NOW: Pasta primavera without pesto, sun-dried tomatoes and raspberry vinegar

Though pasta primavera was actually invented at Le Cirque in the late '70s, it rose to prominence in the shoulder pad-clad decade that followed, when it was gussied up with trendy ingredients such as sun-dried tomatoes, pesto and raspberry vinegar.

The latter was a signature of the era's quintessential culinary manifesto, "The Silver Palate Cookbook," which influenced a generation of cooks, including Abigail Hitchcock, chef-owner of Prospect Height's new Abigail Café (807 Classon Ave., Brooklyn; 718-399-3200). Hitchcock's pasta primavera - studded with shrimp, zucchini, garlic, basil and parsley and finished with a touch of cream and ricotta - trades green fettuccine for orecchiette and sun-dried tomatoes for roasted ones. After all, there are some things that just don't need resurrecting.

THEN: The Dairy Queen Blizzard

NOW: Pro-biotic frozen yogurt with mix-ins

"It's definitely '80s," Eskimix partner Dominic Venton says of his new frozen yogurt shop (318 Bleecker St.; 212-206-6828), which couples the live-culture frozen yogurt craze with the mix-in fad of the Valley Girl years (Dairy Queen debuted its Blizzard in 1985).



Add a handful of Reese's Pieces for a classic "E.T."-era confection, or go modern with sugar-free probiotic yogurt blended with acai berry, which is giving pomegranate a run for its money as this decade's kiwi fruit.

THEN: Food court baked-potato bars

NOW: New York's first gourmet baked-potato bar

The carb-happy days of the '80s saw the introduction of Keebler Tato Skins, Wendy's baked potatoes and countless food court baked-potato bars. Not surprisingly, it was also the decade when Jason Apfelbaum came up with Commander Spuds - a street-cart concept that became the eventual blueprint for Totally Baked (8 W. 18th St.; 646-336-6118).

His new "gourmet baked-potato bar" goes beyond the classic broccoli-cheddar combo with luxe additions such as wild mushrooms and truffles. "Everything comes back again," says Apfelbaum, who plans to roll out branches on college campuses throughout the country. "The time of the potato is now."

THEN: Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers

NOW: Wine-tails

The popular TV commercials for Bartles & Jaymes wine coolers featured two old white dudes who signed off their exhortations of malt beverages by thanking the audience - presumably wasted teenage girls with big hair - for their support. Similarly female-friendly are the new "wine-tails" - basically, cocktails made with wine - popping up at bars as varied as Midtown's Madison & Vine, Carroll Garden's Jakewalk and Alphabet City's new Mercadito Cantina (172 Avenue B; 212-388-1750), where the house specialty is "Tric-quila," a sake blended to taste like tequila.

Unlike their screw-cap predecessors, today's wine coolers emphasize fresh ingredients and tend to be lower in alcohol. "They're a great gateway cocktail for people who don't generally drink alcohol, much like the wine cooler of the '80s," says mixologist Tad Carducci, who created the new wine-focused cocktail list at Mercadito Cantina. "People then move on to either white zinfandel or the Manhattan."

THEN: White cheddar popcorn

NOW: Blended gourmet popcorn

American popcorn consumption skyrocketed in the '80s thanks to the invention of microwave popcorn and the craze for "healthy" or "smart" flavors such as white cheddar. Of course, popcorn never went away, but fancy tubs of the stuff are now, um, popping up at a rate not seen since Alex P. Keaton won the hearts and minds of America.

Chicago-based Garrett Popcorn - whose signature flavor is a mix of caramel and cheese - now counts three New York branches, including a new outpost at 30 Rockefeller Center (212-4-POPCORN). And know what? As weird as it sounds, the salty-sweet combination of "The Mix" actually tastes pretty darned good.

THEN: Jell-O Pudding Pops

NOW: Pudding pop at Allen & Delancey

If '80s TV was defined by "The Cosby Show," then '80s food as defined by Bill Cosby had to be Jell-O Pudding Pops - icy, creamy "frozen pudding on a stick." Though the original has long disappeared, you can still find an imitation made by Popsicle brands in supermarket freezers, as well as a richer, denser, far more adult version at downtown hot spot Allen & Delancey (115 Allen St.; 212-253-5400).

Part of pastry chef Tiffany MacIsaac's retro dessert plate, it's made from heavy cream, coconut milk, chocolate, gelatin and egg yolk, then dipped in dark chocolate. So, would Cosby approve? "Absolutely," laughs MacIsaac. "If he didn't, we wouldn't be the friends I always thought we would be."

THEN: Belgian waffle sundaes

NOW: Liege waffle sundaes

First popularized in the '60s, Belgian waffles experienced a surge in status during the Reagan years, when the waffle cone became as common as alligators on collared shirts. Now waffles are back - especially those of the Belgian "liege" variety boasting a caramelized coating.

At Union Square newcomer Le Petit Belge (22 E. 14th St.; 212-807-7027), you can enjoy your liege waffle plain or - paging the Brat Pack! - with frozen yogurt and kiwi-strawberry toppings.

THEN: SizzleLean

NOW: Designer bacon

New Yorkers are as fat-obsessed now as they were in the '80s, though these days they can't seem to get enough of the stuff. Take bacon, for instance. In the era of aerobicizing, carnivores were captivated with the "leaner," "meatier" bacon alternative known as SizzleLean.

Nowadays, it's designer bacon from artisanal purveyors such as Benton's that have them salivating. At Jimmy's No. 43 (43 E. Seventh St.; 212-982-3006), you can get a giant slab of the stuff. And on Sept. 8, Jimmy's is hosting a Bacon Night pairing the meaty strips with Six Point beers. For more information, go to jimmysno43.com.

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[Home](#)

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