

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

EATING & DRINKING

## Please, Sir, I Want Some More

Oliver Twist was ahead of his time. Embracing humble porridge as a canvas for creativity, chefs are pushing the limits, too

BY ELIZABETH G. DUNN

**O**VER THE last decade-plus, Danish food entrepreneur Claus Meyer has done a very good job of promoting New Nordic Cuisine around the world. Who knew porridge would be the next big thing?

Mr. Meyer himself has been surprised to see the number of New Yorkers lining up at Grain Bar, his market stall in Grand Central Terminal, for bowls of sprouted and cracked rye, barley and freekeh, bolstered with chicken and cabbage, or tender greens and Havagus cheese. "They come for lunch and dinner even more than they do for breakfast!" Mr. Meyer said. It makes perfect sense to me. Few foods are as undeniably appealing as a warm, brothy porridge.

Simmered until soothing and spoonable, porridge is essentially a Stone Age dish, an easy way of softening cereal grains in order to access their calories. Many Americans think of it as a sweet, somewhat stodgy breakfast, but chefs across the country are liberating porridge from that pigeonhole, looking way beyond oatmeal and coming up with savory, indulgent spins.

For the heirloom grain porridge on the breakfast menu at Little Park in New York City, Chef Andrew Carmellini trades the old brown sugar and cinnamon treatment for hen of the woods mushrooms, poached eggs and pine nuts. Porridge defies its homely roots at the Morris, a bistro in San Francisco, where Gavin Schmidt

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folds Dungeness crab meat and carrot-lemongrass sauce into a creamy broken-rice cereal for a winter starter.

Savory broken-rice porridges known as congees or jooks (among many names) have long been a dietary staple throughout Asia, and chefs at restaurants all over the American culinary spectrum have taken particular inspiration from that tradition. In Cambridge, Mass., Tracy Chang updates her grandmother's congee with local grains at her Japanese tapas restaurant, Paga. At Blackbird in Chicago, Ryan Pfeiffer includes a lobster congee with trout roe, lime, and chestnut broth as a course on his \$125 tasting menu. Jenn Louis sometimes serves savory porridges at Ray, her Israeli-inspired restaurant in Portland, Ore., and she includes a Thai-style coconut-milk rice congee in her latest cookbook, "The Book of Greens."

The surge of interest fits into a broad dietary trend embracing fiber- and antioxidant-loaded whole grains. Think of these porridges as soupy cousins to the more salad-y grain bowls that have become a staple of better-for-you cafés and fast-casual menus.

Jesse Schenker, chef-partner of 2 Spring in Oyster Bay, New York, further situates the porridge trend within what he sees as a prevailing appetite for simple foods. "It's becoming glaringly obvious to me that what sells is really good French fries, great pasta, pieces of good fish, pot pies and grain dishes," he said. "Trying to do more with humble ingredients like oats has really worked for me."



### Coconut Milk Rice Porridge With Tatsoi

ACTIVE TIME: 35 minutes TOTAL TIME: 2 hours SERVES: 4-6

- 1 (3-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 lemongrass stalk, tough outer layers removed
- 1 jalapeño, stemmed
- 2 cloves garlic
- Juice of 1 lime
- 2 tablespoons palm sugar or light brown sugar
- Fine sea salt
- 1 cup jasmine rice
- ½ (13.5-ounce) can coconut milk, shaken before opening
- 3 quarts chicken or vegetable stock,
- plus more as needed
- 2 bird's eye or cayenne chiles, stemmed and halved lengthwise without separating halves (optional)
- 5 kaffir lime leaves (optional)
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 4 ounces young tatsoi, mache or celery leaves
- ½ cup chopped roasted peanuts
- 2 teaspoons toasted white sesame seeds

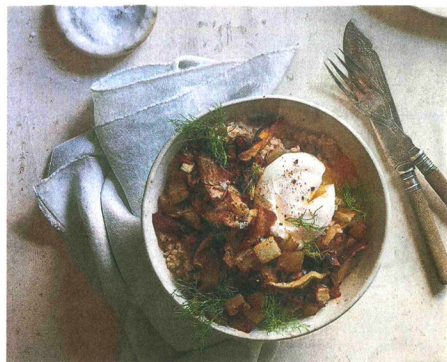
1. Using a mortar and pestle or food processor, pulverize ginger, lemongrass, jalapeño and garlic to a chunky paste. Stir in lime juice.
2. In a 5-6 quart pot over medium-high heat, combine paste with palm sugar, rice, coconut milk, chicken stock, bird's eye chiles and kaffir lime leaves, if using. Bring to a gentle simmer then reduce heat and cook, stirring occasionally to prevent rice from sticking to bottom of pan, until rice is extremely soft, tender and breaking apart, 1½-2 hours. Add water or stock to thin to desired consistency as needed. Discard chiles and kaffir lime leaves. Stir in fish sauce. Season with salt and more fish sauce to taste.
3. To serve, ladle porridge into bowls and top with tatsoi, peanuts and sesame seeds. Porridge can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator up to 1 week. Warm over medium-low heat and add enough water or stock to thin to original consistency. —Adapted from "The Book of Greens" by Jenn Louis with Kathleen Squires

### Savory Oats

TOTAL TIME: 40 minutes SERVES: 2

- 2 cups vegetable stock
- 1 cup steel-cut oats
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced
- 1 fennel bulb, cored and finely diced
- 1 tablespoon red-wine vinegar
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cups water
- 2 large eggs

1. Add stock to a medium saucepan over medium heat, and bring to a simmer. Add oats and simmer, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until oats are thick and creamy but still hold their shape, about 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a medium skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat until shimmering. Add mushrooms and fennel and cook until soft and golden, about 10 minutes. Stir in vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat.
3. In a small saucepan, heat water over high heat until simmering, 3-4 minutes. Reduce heat to maintain a bare simmer. Crack each egg into a small bowl and gently tip into saucepan. Turn heat off and cover. Let eggs cook until whites are firm and yolks are still soft, about 4 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to lift egg from water and transfer to a plate.
4. To serve, divide oats between 2 bowls. Spoon mushrooms and fennel over porridge and top each bowl with a poached egg. Season with salt and pepper to taste. —Adapted from Jesse Schenker of 2 Spring, Oyster Bay, N.Y.



### Barley Porridge With Chanterelles, Baby Onions and Pork

TOTAL TIME: 40 minutes SERVES: 4

- ½ cup pearl barley
- 2 cups chicken stock or water
- 1 cup beer
- 1½ teaspoons flaky sea salt, plus more for seasoning
- ½ cup grated hard cheese such as aged Gouda or Grana Padano
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 4 pearl onions, quartered
- 3 tablespoons water
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pork sausages, casings removed
- 3½ ounces chanterelle or maitake mushrooms, cleaned and trimmed
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- Chopped flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

1. In a food processor or blender, pulse the pearl barley just until grains are reduced in size by a quarter to a half.
2. In a large saucepan over high heat, combine chicken stock, beer and salt, and bring to a boil. Add barley. Reduce heat to medium and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thick and creamy, about 40 minutes. Add grated cheese and 1 tablespoon butter, and stir until smooth.
3. While porridge cooks, in a small saucepan over medium heat, combine onions, 1 tablespoon butter and water. Season with salt and pepper. Cook until onions are tender, 4-5 minutes.
4. Heat olive oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add sausage, breaking up meat into small pieces with a wooden spoon. Add mushrooms and cook until browned, 3-4 minutes. Add sausage and mushrooms to saucepan with onions. Cook, stirring, until well combined, 1 minute. Season with vinegar, salt and pepper to taste.
5. To serve, divide porridge evenly among 4 bowls. Spoon sausage and pork mixture over porridge and top with chopped parsley. Sprinkle flaky salt over top to finish. —Adapted from "The Nordic Kitchen" by Claus Meyer



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