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## INDUSTRY NEWS



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ACF Windy City Professional Culinarians, founded in Chicago in 2003, is one of the fastest-growing chapters of the American Culinary Federation (ACF). Click [here](#) for more information.

## Six Flavors

I am contemplating going vegetarian for a while. It's not about giving up steak, good sausages and bacon - it's about trying to understand the cuisine of India. It is highly complex and regional. It is personal, as food is a facet of the culture of the Indian subcontinent and a huge part of a holistic approach to health and well-being across many social and religious groups. In doing my research, I came across the Hindu concept of Ayurveda. This is an ancient system of medicine, and some in the modern world consider its teachings to be an alternative form of healthcare. The most interesting part is the concept of six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent. The Western world accepted the five tastes of umami, so why haven't we accepted this idea of the six? Is it a conspiracy?

Some may argue, and I will say it too - we really need to consider seven flavors. The big four (sweet, sour, salty and bitter) ruled the league for many years, and then expansion brought umami to challenge the establishment. We had to throw away all the teachings derived from those pictures of colored tongues. It must have thrown a few culinary schools for a loop. Then we had to discuss MSG and glutamates. How could we! We have all admitted to ordering Chinese food over the holidays because we are too tired to cook. MSG was the cause of "[Chinese Restaurant Syndrom](#)." The savory taste of soy, shiitake and seaweed were a whole level of flavor that we couldn't wrap our head around for years, but we liked it. It was the presence of these natural glutamates that allowed Kikunae Ikeda to figure out the processing of MSG in 1909. It is not surprising we love pizza in this country. Parmesan cheese, tomatoes and aged pepperoni all have a huge amount of glutamate that helps to make pizza addictive. Have you ever just eaten one slice?

Now we get to the other two players, pungent and astringent. Even Escoffier discussed having pungent items

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# Trib Food

Recipes, reviews and resources for everything food and dining in the Chicago area. [Check out](#) what's happening this week.

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Check out this great magazine, [Four](#).

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Eater is the source for people who care about dining and drinking in the nation's most important food cities, like Chicago. A favorite of industry pros and amateurs alike, Eater has an uncanny knack for finding out what's opening where, who's serving what, and how it's all going down. Find out [what's new](#) in Chicago.

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as part of your normal mise en place. He discussed the need to include this and other flavor components for balancing the taste of finished dishes. Why aren't these additions listed in his recipes? Escoffier was such a stringent proponent of following precise recipes and processes, after all. It is because he followed the "time and place" mentality of the ingredients, and even then, he knew seasonality had an effect on the final outcome of a recipe. He needed to adjust.

In Western cooking and recipe development, we are now following a trend called the Flavor Pairing Theory, where chefs are analyzing foods to isolate **flavor compounds** and match them with other foods that have the same compounds. The theory allows chefs to combine ingredients that we perceive as incompatible, such as blue cheese and chocolate. My fear is that this method will lead to a lot of similar-tasting foods, as mass producers will follow the most common flavor pairings. I like to call it "the vanilla effect"; everything tastes the same.

This is where Indian cuisine takes a left turn and makes everything so interesting. In a recent article by **National Geographic**, writers point out that Indian food doesn't follow this convention. Flavors are all over the place and don't make sense. However, the balance and complexity of the numerous regional dishes works. There is no singular vein of Indian cuisine - only a time and place cooking style that understands that there is more to flavor than sweet, salty and the occasional hints of bitter and sour that we associate with in this country.

However, there are some particular ingredients that are widespread across India, such as Asafoetida. This astringent condiment is used as a flavor enhancer or substitute for alliums (garlic, leek, onion etc.) for those religions that prohibit allium consumption. Asafoetida is that kick in the face you get from Indian pickles and the balancing act in lentil dishes.

The flavor of pungency is not limited to India either - think of kimchi. Everyone is getting on the pickled and fermented foods bandwagon, and kimchi has been a darling of the food trends world for a while. Why does a stinky food left to ferment in the sun work? It is full of flavor, and the U.S. culinary world will say it is an umami thing, really it's because astringent and pungent flavors come out to play. Umami takes all the credit. BS!

If you go anywhere these days, you'll find pickles or some kind of fiery condiment based on the latest chili inferno.

Chefs are throwing down on these important flavors. Before we let scientists decide that "fattiness" is a flavor, we need to put astringency and pungency on the roster and finally field the Fab Seven!

- Chef John Reed, CEC, CCA

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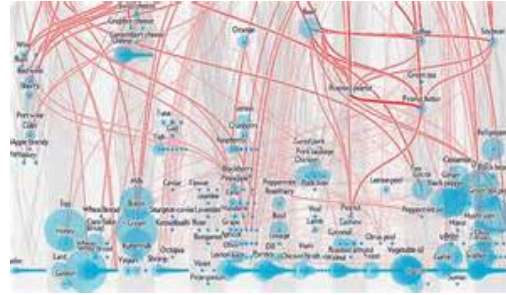
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with Indian Food



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**Gatecrasher.**

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