

CONTEMPORARY CUISINE COPENHAGEN

How New Nordic paved the way to
a more diverse culinary landscape

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY
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CONTENTS

PREFACE	9
FROM NEW NORDIC TO CONTEMPORARY CUISINE	12
Auren’s Deli & Cornerstore	19
Kødbyens Fiskebar	33
Alouette	45
Amator	57
Sommer Canteen	71
Sushi Anaba	83
Akmē	95
Apotek 57 - Lido - Riviera	107
Esse	125
Graziano	139
Gro Spiseri	151
Andersen Bakery	161
Popl	179
Admiralgade 26	189
Boutique Emilia	203
Ark	223
Bar Vitrine	235
Et Cetera	245
COFFEE	66
DESIGN AT THE TABLE	120
BAKERIES	168
FOOD TO GO	214
ABOUT THE MAKER	255





Contemporary Cuisine Copenhagen is a tribute to the chefs, bakers, farmers, fishermen, and everyone else who is a part of Copenhagen's food culture. A city that, twenty years ago, was turned upside down by a group of chefs who wanted to cook in a radically new way. They said goodbye to the kitchens they were trained in and knew so well, instead paying attention to what was close to home. Copenhagen grew into an international food destination, where one restaurant after another opened its doors.

In the midst of this revolution, New Nordic Cuisine, known for its minimalism and sometimes austerity, unexpectedly paved the way for its opposite: diversity. Chefs from all over the world travelled to Denmark to work in the capital of gastronomy. While quite a few of them felt at home in the world of fine dining, others decided to leave it behind after some time – opening neighbourhood cafés, small eateries, coffee shops, or bakeries in Copenhagen instead. Places that reflected their heritage or simply allowed them to cook the food they loved.

With it, quality was no longer limited to those with stars. Slowly but surely, the white tablecloths disappeared, as did the beige walls. The city's food culture became more colourful, in every sense of the word. Even the city's best restaurants embraced the movement, bringing the story full circle. Some shifted their focus, bringing East Asian flavours to Scandinavia. Others went even further down the rabbit hole than before, finding new ways to inspire guests to eat more sustainably.

While kitchens became more international, the ingredients increasingly came from closer to home.

Nordic slowly made way to Danish – exceptions aside, of course. Producers from across the country have become brands in their own right. Søtofte Gårdmejeri, Vild Hvede, Toftegaard: names that appear not only on the menus of Michelin-starred restaurants, but all over the city. On a blackboard at the coffee shop Det Vide Hus, at the café in Statens Museum for Kunst, and on the shelves of Auren's Deli, Lille Bakery, and Flere Fugle, to name a few.

Twenty years after the rise of New Nordic Cuisine, the Danish capital feels more alive than ever before. It's a city full of passionate chefs and bakers, curious locals, and enthusiastic visitors. In this book, I will introduce you to the people who are writing the next chapter of Copenhagen's food culture. Some have been around for a while and have witnessed the city change. Others have seen their careers evolve in much the same way as the food culture itself. And then there are those who came to Copenhagen from abroad, inspired by what they saw what was happening.

Don't expect a complete overview. That's simply impossible in a city like Copenhagen. But it isn't a random selection of places either. Each of them adds something unique to Copenhagen's food culture. And all of them run their businesses with an unwavering dedication to their ingredients, their craft, and their guests, making sure that we, their guests, are served a meal that might just stay with us for a very long time. That is their language. Here in the north, too, the way to the heart is through the stomach.

Ingrid Hofstra

FROM NEW NORDIC TO CONTEMPORARY CUISINE

In the past two decades, Copenhagen has gone through one of the biggest culinary transformations in the world. After the turn of the century, the focus, which had been on Mediterranean cuisine for years, shifted to what was closer to home. New Nordic Cuisine, with Noma as its driving force, put the city on the map. Within a few years, chefs were rethinking how to use what grew, lived, and was made in the north, applying age-old techniques in new ways. It resulted in a culinary philosophy that garnered global attention. Today, the city's food culture has once again entered a new chapter. Mikkel Karstad spent years working as a chef in restaurants and canteens while also hosting dinners and writing cookbooks. He witnessed first-hand how the way that chefs cook and guests dine have gradually changed. 'People still want to eat really well, but in a different setting.'

In recent years, the elaborate and sometimes abstract tasting menus of New Nordic Cuisine have made way for a more straightforward approach: Danish ingredients are used wherever possible, often to create international flavours. Japanese and Korean techniques, Asian influences, and Italian passion are found at almost every street corner. The world discovered Copenhagen, and Copenhagen discovered the world. For years, the fine-dining atmosphere had been very formal with concepts that were sometimes hard to grasp, but all that's in the past now. Restaurants have become more intimate, kitchens more open, and the barrier between chefs and guests has been taken down. As a result, the lines between fine and ca-

sual dining have started to blur. And the food? Still exceptional, but also accessible, honest, and — yes — a little more affordable.

Mikkel Karstad became a part of this transformation while working in various kitchens throughout the city. He began his career at the renowned Krogs Fiskerestaurant, one of Copenhagen's oldest fish restaurants, and later moved to London to work under Gordon Ramsay and Pierre Koffmann. Back in Denmark, he became head chef at Christiansborg, home to the Danish parliament, and adviser to Claus Meyer, co-founder of Noma and a founding father of New Nordic Cuisine. Together, they created the television series *New Scandinavian Cooking*, which was broadcast in forty countries.

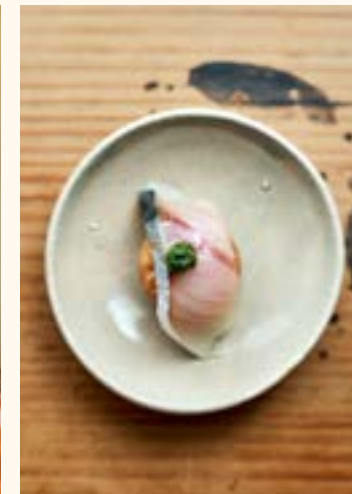
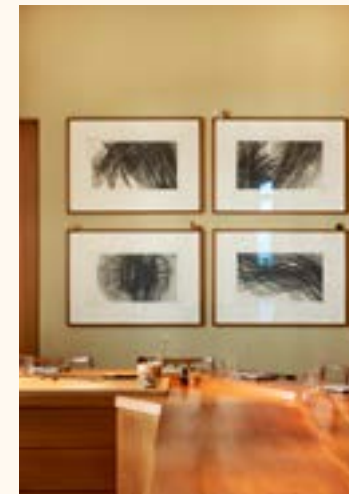
His collaboration with Claus also marked the end of his career as a traditional restaurant chef. Mikkel wanted to spend more time with his family and started cooking in his own way: simpler, closer to nature, and with a focus on local vegetables and fish. In some ways, he was ahead of what was happening in the city. He cooked at events, ran large corporate canteens and wrote several cookbooks teaching people how easy it can be to cook seasonally using local produce.

It came naturally to him to work with products from his own country in a different setting from what he was used to. 'I wanted this part of the food culture to change as well. To inspire people to cook like that in their own kitchens.' Today, he is Head of Food at the popular coffee chain Original Coffee and runs Bohrs in the Carlsberg Byen district.

MIKKEL KARSTAD



Of course, Mikkel has his own favourites. Bar Vitrine, where Indian flavours are combined with Danish ingredients. Sushi Anaba and Akmē for Japanese food. And Koan, where he had one of his best dinners ever: 'The dishes were so alive, yet so precise.'





A culinary style that suits him — at a place where people can simply stop by for a good meal, a cup of coffee, and do some grocery shopping.

Mikkel saw how New Nordic cuisine brought chefs from all over the world to Copenhagen. People who came to work in Michelin-starred restaurants. Some of them eventually went home and took what they had learned to countries like Italy, Spain, or Slovenia. They started working in line with the same ideology, using old techniques from their own countries, and turned New Nordic into a global movement. At the same time, it was a very dogmatic philosophy that didn't allow for a lot of creativity. 'You have to do food in a certain way. Danish chefs got a little tired of it. They needed new inspiration and a break from New Nordic.'

That inspiration came from elsewhere. It was Noma itself that started doing pop-ups, travelling to Tokyo, Kyoto, and later Mexico. Others collaborated with restaurants and colleagues from all over the world. And chefs who had moved to Copenhagen for a job later opened restaurants of their own. It was the start of a new chapter, with room for other techniques and flavours. Kristian Baumann of Koan drew inspiration from his mixed background using Danish ingredients, which he paired with South Korean flavours and cooking techniques. American chef Matt Orlando introduced his innovative, outside-the-box approach to both guests and fellow chefs.

'Ten to fifteen years ago, everything here was very New Nordic,' Mikkel explains. 'Around five to seven years ago, that began to shift. Local ingredients were used as a base to create foreign flavours.' Some restaurants even take it a step further: chefs who aren't using fusion as a way of cooking but instead stay very true to one specific cuisine. One such example is Sushi Anaba. The chef-owner, Mads Battefeld, is from Jutland, worked in Tokyo, and — according to Mikkel — makes some of the



best Japanese food outside of Japan. ‘While still using Danish ingredients and fish from around here, too.’ The reason Asian cuisine has become very strong in Copenhagen is that there are many similarities in how Asian and Danish chefs work, according to Mikkel. They handle the ingredients in the same way, with respect for the products and the people who grow them, while the flavours, on the other hand, are contrasting. The spices, a certain kind of freshness, and acidity. ‘We needed that here. Nordic cuisine can sometimes be a bit flat. We have our vinegars, but it’s not the same.’

According to the chef, Copenhagen’s contemporary food scene is stronger than it has ever been. ‘It’s comfort food – but refined. Like street food in a restaurant setting.’ Before New Nordic, it was normal to have closed kitchens in high-end restaurants. These days, chefs are really proud of what they do and there’s much more interaction with guests. ‘A few years ago, it was more about showing off techniques and what you were able to do with ingredients; now chefs simply want to show what quality products we have here and tell guests about the people who grow them.’

Mikkel sees these developments as beneficial to the food culture rather than the end of what New Nordic has brought. ‘Perhaps I myself have stayed truer to New Nordic than some other chefs. But I too am inspired by Japanese and Korean techniques and flavours. I make my own kimchi and work with different types of miso, for example.’ In the end, Mikkel’s mindset has not changed a lot over his years as a chef, though. ‘I stay close to nature, close to myself. But after ten years of preparing carrots with rosehip and elderflower, I needed some new inspiration as well.’





AUREN'S DELI & CORNERSTORE

Local products, a focus on seasonality, and a love for craftsmanship are no longer confined to fine dining. In Copenhagen, they increasingly show up in neighbourhood shops, lunch cafés, and small eateries. Like at Auren's Deli and Cornerstore, where you simply drop in for some groceries and a hearty meal.

When Pernille Rosenbæk and Henry Stevens worked at restaurant Amass, they had access to the best local products available. 'But only at work. When we were off on our weekends and wanted to cook a nice meal, we had to get our vegetables from the supermarket,' Pernille says. 'Previously, smaller farms worked directly with fine-dining restaurants but did not sell to private consumers. Then Covid happened and the restaurants had to shut down. The farmers had nowhere to take their produce until they realised there was a need among regular people.' It kickstarted a new way of grocery shopping.

Around that time, Pernille and Henry were looking for a change, too. They had plans to take over a farm with friends, but the pandemic put an end to it. That summer, they did grow their own vegetables. 'It gave us a taste of the dream that had already started to build in our heads.' The following year, they found a plot of their own. The harvest soon turned out to be larger than they could consume themselves, so they started giving vegetables away. Some of it they sold to wine bar Pompette, where Henry was now working as a sommelier. At the same time, the idea of starting their own business began to take shape.

In 2022, they opened Auren's Deli: a café, restaurant, and grocery shop with both local products and delicacies from abroad. 'If we can give people easy access to local products, let them experience what quality can do for flavour, and get them excited about food, then I'm happy.' The couple wanted Auren's to become a welcoming place for customers visiting regularly. 'We've taken the things we truly related to in the world of fine dining and transferred them to something that's a lot more like the everyday. That's the beauty of seeing Copenhagen now, compared to ten, fifteen years ago. Where everything had to be extremely polished, fine-dining material, to get attention. Now, we're starting to translate some of those trends into independently owned places that anyone can visit.'

A concept that sounds foolproof in theory but proves far more complicated in reality. 'Even now that the deli has grown, the actual fresh produce still accounts for a tiny percentage of our daily sales. We are battling the same problems as elsewhere in Denmark, where people want quantity over quality and go for cheap.' They sometimes let farmers sell directly through the shop, without taking a cut themselves. That way, they hope to introduce as many people as possible to quality products. They also try to minimise waste by turning overripe fruit into compote, for example, which is then added to the yoghurt in the café.

Because the deli is no longer a deli. The shop has moved to Auren's Cornerstore, further down the street. Auren's Deli became too popular to provide the personal service the couple values so much. 'We were trying to take orders while also helping people who came in with a large shopping bag.'

The shelves in the deli, now a place for lunch, aperitifs, and dinner, are lined with wine bottles and vinyl records. Both sites have a warm, homely feel – a deliberate choice. 'We wanted everything to feel organic and tactile. Clay-based paint on the walls, and lots of wood.' Pernille's background in design and interior styling helped a lot. Her initial sketches became the basis for what the deli would eventually look like. Henry's British background is reflected in the character and names of the two places: 'That farm-pub vibe definitely comes from him.'

They no longer grow their own vegetables. 'A lot of small farms started popping up and suddenly we had access to people who do this full-time. We figured we'd rather support them by selling their products. And perhaps for the best, because I actually had no idea what I was doing,' she laughs.






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KØDBYENS FISKEBAR

If you ask chefs in Copenhagen where they go to eat, chances are you'll hear them say Kødbyens Fiskebar. During the summer, the restaurant, located in the Meatpacking District, serves sustainably caught fish and seafood to up to four hundred guests a day. Fiskebar offers a relaxed setting where the ambience is always good and the quality is unmatched. That's precisely why their British chef, Jamie Lee, has also stuck around for years. 'It's simply the appeal of Fiskebaren,' as the restaurant is known colloquially.

In 2009, the restaurant opened in a former slaughterhouse and has since become a household name in the city's culinary scene. Every day, they put together a fresh, new menu. It's Copenhagen's location that makes this possible, with coastal fisheries nearby. At the same time, there's no other way: working sustainably means they often only receive small quantities of each product. 'We create a menu based on what is available and catch fish and seafood in a way that has the least possible impact on the environment. Every day, we get together, examine the catch and come up with the dishes.' For as many as four hundred people. 'It's almost a lifestyle,' the Brit says. 'The sea is our pantry, so we really have an incentive to look after it.'

Though the dishes resemble true works of art, Jamie wants to let the seafood speak for itself and not manipulate it too much. To do so, he needs to understand the product inside and out. 'Take seaweed, for example. We use around 25 different types at Fiskebaren, and they behave very differently. Some need long cooking, others have to be lightly blanched, dried, or can even be used fresh. As for the fish, we are aware of what's coming in season and know exactly when it's at its peak.'

His job never gets boring, despite having been the chef at Fiskebar for thirteen years. There are plenty of challenges to keep his days interesting. 'By working closely with small coastal fisheries and maintaining quality rather than focusing on volume, we don't dive into a pool of easy fish: fish caught with large nets that drag along the bottom of the ocean, where they catch three tonnes a day. Our fishermen use nets that remain stationary in the water. If any fish swim in that we don't want or need, they'll go straight back into the ocean.'

We can have a dish on the menu, but there's only fifteen fish, that means when it's gone, it's gone.'

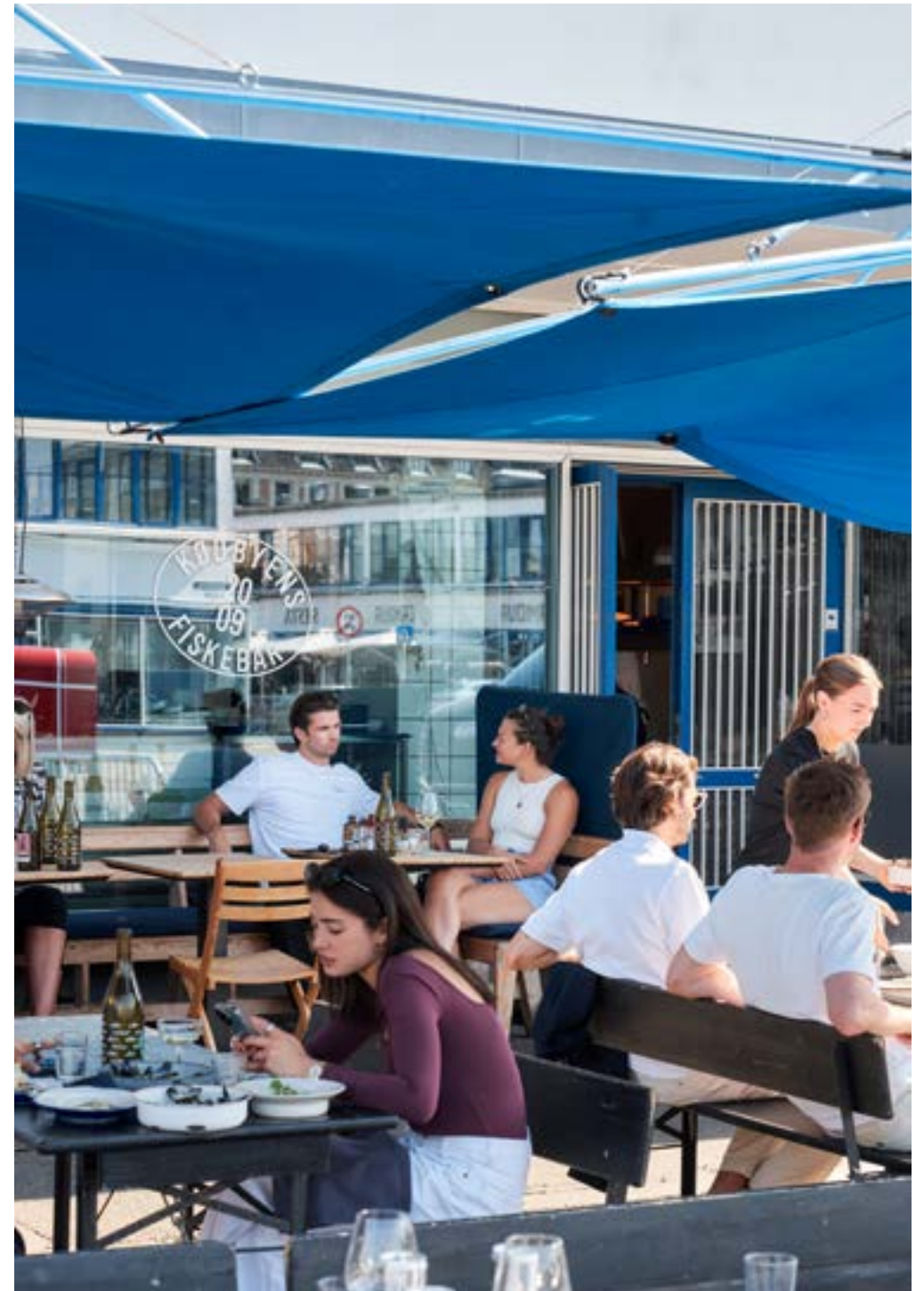
The fish that ends up in the restaurant is handled with the utmost care. 'It's then up to me to guide the direction, set the bar and make sure the team has what they need to deliver consistency every day, because we don't want to undo the fishermen's hard work in the kitchen. It's a standard we uphold together.' According to Jamie, few restaurants build their menus entirely around what the water provides. 'Not many choose to work in this way; it's a rare style of cooking.'

He attributes Fiskebar's popularity to that rock-solid philosophy and relentless pursuit of quality. 'To do what we do daily, it's very important to be consistent, so people always sit down knowing they're getting the best seafood possible. But also, you want to give people a great experience. And that's what we're hearing, that our guests have a fantastic time. It's a very lively place.'

Besides daily phone calls with the fishermen, a few times a year, the chef steps aboard himself to see how things are going and what's happening at sea. Some of the small-boat fishermen even bring their catch straight from the ocean to Fiskebar themselves. 'They land at the harbour beside us.' A relationship that illustrates how the restaurant operates: what comes from the sea determines what ends up on the plate, and not the other way around. It requires expertise, adaptability, and respect for the product. A reputation Kødbyens Fiskebar has maintained for nearly two decades. No grand statements about the ocean, just treating it in such a way that there's still something left to catch tomorrow. And that just might be why so many chefs like to eat here.







 **KØBYENS FISKEBAR**
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ALOUETTE

How do you bring the people behind the products together with guests around the table? And how do you ensure that connection lasts, long after they've left the restaurant? These are the questions Nick Curtin and Camilla Hansen have been exploring for the past eight years. Each season brings them closer to the answers. At Alouette, guests go on a journey through Danish terroirs: from Rokkedysse's strawberries and Søtofte's dairy products to black-spotted Landrace pigs from Trolldgaarden in Jutland.



Twelve years ago, when American chef Nick Curtin traded New York for Copenhagen, he was surprised by the lack of local produce in Danish supermarkets. ‘In the US, farm-to-table is something you can see on a consumer level, not just in restaurants. The fact that most fresh produce in Denmark comes from France or Italy came as a culture shock. It was very hard to buy local, and the selection was anything but diverse.’ Together with co-owner and wife Camilla Hansen, he decided to change that. At Alouette, they searched for suppliers whose philosophy aligned with their own. It started with trying to find great produce and meat from Denmark, but over time, they began to focus on single farmers.

They created a menu based on terroirs, with each terroir revolving around a single farm. So the menu that guests receive is more than a mere list of courses: it provides information about each terroir and the corresponding farm, and all the dishes associated with it. Soon, farmers reported back that guests from Alouette had visited their farm shops. Camilla: ‘How wonderful. That benefits everyone, right? They eat local products that have been grown the right way, and the farmers get the income. It means that the experience isn’t done when they leave us. Instead, it becomes this beautiful full-circle moment.’

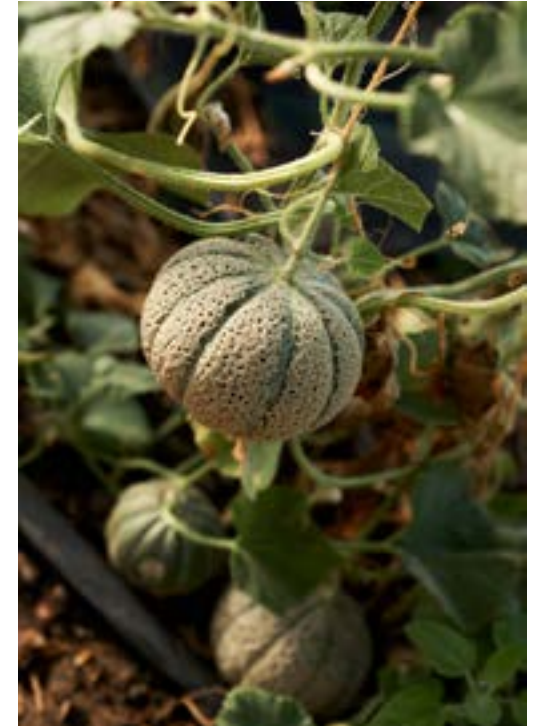
At Alouette, the ingredients of each dish come from a single farm. This way, Nick and the team not only dig into a farm’s produce but also research their ideals and methods. ‘When you leave after a meal, you not only understand what the farmer does and what they grow, but also why they grow it. We think that’s the contemporary understanding of what makes agriculture important.’ It’s a strict philosophy, but a necessary one, according to the chef. ‘If we want to tell the full story, we have to be dogmatic. At the beginning of the year, we say: we’ll take however much you can grow from this or that. And when it’s done, it’s done.

They know what to expect from us. We never run from the commitment,’ he explains. The restaurant collaborates with twenty to thirty farms in total, rotating between them throughout the year. Camilla: ‘Right now, we have tomatoes from Toftegaard. If those run out and they have something else we can work with, then we stay with them.’

Their journey through Denmark’s landscape starts as soon as the guests enter Alouette. ‘We welcome them with a little broth, a way to wash the city off. Then they move into the prologue: an introduction to the farm. It can be a product or something from the entrance as you drive into the farm. We work with a trout farm where you drive along a winding road through a pine forest. The team can use the pines there as a first introduction.’ The menu consists of four terroirs in total and always ends with an epilogue where you exit the farm. With four petit fours, the guests say goodbye to each terroir.

Every now and then, Nick and Camilla visit the farmers and challenge them to grow new products. To reduce the risk, the Michelin restaurant promises to buy whatever they order at the beginning of the season, and when they ask one of their producers to develop something experimental, the restaurant pays for the seeds. Last year, they went even further and started growing products themselves, half an hour outside the city. Alouette Fields came to be after the farmer at Seerupgaard injured her knee and could no longer harvest. The restaurant took over a piece of their land. At the end of that summer, the fields were filled with produce, with the first Danish honeydew melons almost ripe.

Nick believes Danish agriculture has much to offer but lacks the pride that countries like France and Italy have. ‘Black-spotted Landrace pigs were almost extinct because Danish farmers felt it took too long to breed them. The meat is bursting with





ALOUETTE

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restaurantalouette.dk

DESIGN AT THE TABLE

Now that Copenhagen’s food and drink scene is more diverse and more multicultural than ever, the question that remains is: what sets the gastronomy in the Danish capital apart from cities such as London or New York? There are several possible answers, depending on how you look at it. There’s the short distance between the city, countryside, and the sea. There’s Noma, a catalyst that influenced almost every layer of the industry. Or there’s Copenhagen’s strong sense of community. But there is another explanation that is at least as interesting: its long design history.

In Copenhagen, design is everywhere. At home, in the streets, and also at the table. The city has long been known for its minimalist yet warm cafés and restaurants – from Atelier September to Høst and Kadeau, as well as Sushi Anaba and, of course, Noma. When the latter moved to Refshaleøen in 2018, for the first time in Copenhagen, architecture, interior, landscape, and gastronomy came

together as one. Chef and founder René Redzepi asked David Thulstrup to design the interior and furniture, while the architecture firm BIG was responsible for the buildings and Dutch landscape architect Piet Oudolf designed the garden. The end result needed to feel homely, with a focus on natural materials. Scandinavian without the clichés: honest, simple, and not overly polished. Thulstrup designed the chairs and tables, which were then produced by Denmark’s oldest family-owned furniture company, Brdr. Krüger. The lounge was inspired by 1970s Danish living rooms, with a lot of stone and wood, a low ceiling, and furniture that reminded guests of home.

In the years after, more and more restaurants hired renowned designers to give their establishments an identity that reflected their culinary philosophy. Interiors were no longer simply a part of the business, but almost calling cards in their own right. While at first chefs and entrepreneurs were the ones bringing in designers, an increasing



NIELS STRØYER CHRISTOPHERSEN

number of design brands themselves are now opening their own restaurants, cafés, and bars. One example is Audo House in Nordhavn, the culture hub of design brand Audo Copenhagen, where popular brunch chain Wulff & Konstali opened a location in 2025. Hotel Petra in the city centre, with its adjoining restaurant and bar, was the result of a collaboration between Copenhagen Design Hotels and furniture brand &Tradition.

But the biggest name is multidisciplinary design brand Frama, which has co-owned several establishments from 2020. With an emphasis on natural materials, quality, and craftsmanship, Frama's collections are known for their timeless aesthetic. The products are a mix of in-house work and collaborations with external designers. From hand soaps and fragrances to lighting, tableware, and furniture, Frama has become a household name in the last fifteen years, far beyond Denmark. The decision to become active in the hospitality industry stemmed from founder and creative director Niels Strøyer Christophersen's passion for connecting people, preferably in inspiring spaces, which he, in turn, furnishes with Frama pieces. And so, opening a restaurant or bar only made sense.

The desire to combine food, design, and interior arose in their studio shop on Fredericiagade, a former 19th-century pharmacy – which over the years became more than just a showroom. In 2016, Frama's founder began organising long-table dinners in the space. Every once in a while, chef Mikkel Karstad would come to cook intimate dinners for small groups of people over several evenings. At one of these dinners, Chiara Barlasat next to Niels. He told her about his dream of opening a café at the back of the building. And that was how Apotek 57 was born. 'I am very

social and enjoy interacting with people, meeting those coming from different industries and disciplines.' With the success of Apotek 57, more collaborations followed. Frama is now also co-owner of coffee shop Cabin and Bar Vitrine.

In 2027, a new restaurant with space for 150 guests is set to open. He is also considering opening a deli. None of the venues are alike. 'It really depends on what the space offers in terms of architecture, layout, and light. For us, the materiality is quite important. Is it warm or cold, metal versus wood? That's why Apotek 57 is so different from Bar Vitrine: the spaces differ so much. We are not trying to copy and paste a concept. We want the interior experience to be personal.'

Niels attributes the success of Apotek 57, Bar Vitrine, and Cabin to enthusiasm and energy. 'I think people can sense that every space has guts and character. Another key thing is that we have very invested chefs like Dhriti and Chiara, who believe in these projects. It comes down to not compromising on the quality of the ingredients, and making sure the staff wants to stay as well.' A comparison with Scandinavian design comes to mind. 'When we build something, we build it for longevity. We're not just going to change the interior or rename the place.'

In Copenhagen, design and gastronomy are increasingly intertwined, with designers turning into restaurant owners and chefs getting access to an even wider audience as a result. Design no longer serves merely as décor for interiors. Instead, it plays an undeniable role in the city's unique culinary identity. And sometimes, whether intentionally or not, it is even where a new idea for an eatery begins.





ABOUT THE MAKER

Ingrid Hofstra is a food photographer, journalist, and recipe developer with a deep love for Scandinavian culinary traditions. She documents food cultures around the world and works closely with chefs, farmers, fishermen, and brewers to showcase the produce, the craftsmanship, and the people behind the food. She has previously written extensively about the Faroe Islands and created a cookbook celebrating the finest dishes from Sweden.

She grew up in the Dutch province of Friesland, spent much of her professional life in Copenhagen, and now lives in southern Sweden with her husband and two children. This book is her tribute to the diverse, exciting culinary scene of Copenhagen and the people behind it.

THANK YOU

This book would not exist without the help of a number of people whom I would like to acknowledge here. Many thanks to Petra and René. As my publishers, they placed an extraordinary amount of trust in me and gave me the freedom to tell this story as I envisaged it – both literally and figuratively. That may sound obvious, but it is anything but.

Thanks to Mikkel Karstad. Years after we first met, he made the time to tell me about his city, giving me the starting point I needed to develop the story and find my own way, cycling through Copenhagen.

Also thanks to Marius van Bruggen. With a newborn and a toddler at home, he had his hands full, yet he still found a way to translate this book with me, while making sure I could work uninterrupted.



And of course, my thanks to everyone who took the time to be interviewed. Each and every one of you brings so much flavour and colour to Copenhagen's contemporary cuisine, and I hope this book does it justice.