



The Lower Depths Taza Mac & Cheese

6 Ways to Mac ‘n Cheese

SEE HOW CHEFS ARE TWISTING UP A COMFORT CLASSIC WITH SURPRISING ELEMENTS.

Beyond what mom made, chefs are transforming this creamy, gooey dish into something imaginative. Here are a few thought-provoking mac ingredients crafting comforting, cheesy bites.

1. Chocolate

Mixing in international influence, chef and owner of Boston’s The Lower Depths, Brian Poe, creates depth through Taza: a Massachusetts-made chocolate with

Mexican ingredients. “As we combined components with chocolate, it hit the right notes,” Poe says. “It’s spicy, chocolatey, and savory like a mole, but in mac and cheese.” For his Taza Mac & Cheese dish, chocolate is grated over elbow macaroni coated in a creamy sauce of Oaxaca cheese, queso fresco, and reduced heavy cream, garlic, and shallots, plus touches of bacon and smoked Fresno chiles. Garnishes of green onion and cilantro add freshness and contrast.

2. Duck Confit

Though typically on fine dining menus, duck confit boosts the mac and cheese richness in the Duck, Duck, Goat version at executive chef Kevin Templeton’s Barleymash in San Diego. Cured duck legs are braised in duck fat and crisped up on the flat top then rested on cavatappi pasta mixed with a sauce of two different beers, roasted poblanos, and pepper jack plus melted Monterey Jack, white cheddar, and mozzarella. Goat cheese crumbles add more creaminess while arugula and house-made breadcrumbs offer spice and crispness. For sweet, tart notes, a balsamic and Jägermeister reduction is drizzled over the garnish of crunchy duck skin chicharrónes.

3. Kasseri

Aleko Achtipis, culinary director and partner of San Diego’s GBOD Hospitality Group, including Mezé Greek Fusion, goes Greek with kasseri. “Kasseri is a versatile, semi-hard Greek cheese that melts well, sustains the melted cheese texture, and isn’t as salty as other aged Greek cheeses,” Achtipis says. Penne is stirred with a thick, fiery feta dip (roasted red peppers, feta, olive oil, garlic) then for melty-ness, kasseri and feta are added plus a final decoration of pita crumbs for texture.

4. Charcuterie

For salty, meaty bites with texture, manager and chef Matt Hutchins at Alpharetta, Georgia’s Barleygarden Kitchen and Craft Bar, relies on charcuterie like chicken cheddarwurst, pastrami, hot links, and a blended knockwurst/bratwurst. The luxurious sauce served over cavatappi pasta amps

up richness with cream and egg yolks, a blend of rotating cheeses like Gruyere, smoked cheddar, and havarti, plus warm, spicy nutmeg. A crust of herbed sourdough breadcrumbs and cheese sit below the cornucopia topping of charcuterie.

5. Baby Shrimp

Getting the spotlight in executive chef Javier Montoya's gourmet mac dish at Bistango in Irvine, California is baby shrimp, which sweetens and texturizes the roux-less elbow macaroni baked mac. A spicy, luscious cheese sauce mixed in the mac is composed of cheddar, pepper jack, fontina, onions, paprika, heavy cream, green onions, bacon, and roasted peppers.

6. Mexican-Style Lager

At The Smoking Gun in San Diego, chef Andy Weiss utilizes Mexican-style lagers to give flavor and complexity to his mac's poblano beer cheese sauce. Over elbow macaroni, roasted garlic puree, roasted poblanos, Mexican-style lager, aged and yellow cheddars, and American cheese create a velvety sauce, with white, aged, and yellow cheddars forming the oven-baked crust. "We do a throwback to what mom made, but with an elevated sauce of good things like beer, and roasted garlic, and poblanos," Weiss says.