

Designing new plant-forward African cuisine with Selassie Atadika

By  Angie White

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Ghanaian experiential chef, Selassie Atadika, started her Design Indaba presentation by asking the audience to close their eyes and think of food they enjoy. Next, she asked everyone to try and identify the ingredients that make up those dishes, commenting that most people would not know where those ingredients come from.

Atadika, named one of the EAT Foundation and Culinary Institute of America Global Top 50 Plant-Forward chefs and founding member of Trio Toque, the first nomadic restaurant in Dakar, moved to the US with her family due to the political unrest in Ghana when she was very young. She explained that, although it was frowned upon by her family, she always had the desire to become a chef. Instead of embarrassing her family, Atadika decided to study geography and later joined the Unicef to fulfil her desire to do humanitarian work. It was during her many travels that she tasted many delicious dishes and fell in love with local cuisine across different African countries.



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If you know me, you know I always get animated when talking about food! 💎💎 □

□ While designing #newafricancuisine, I look forward to a day where culture, cuisine and community intersect with sustainability, economy and environment to create vibrant and resilient societies. □ □ Who's with me?!?!? □ . □ . □ . □

"Ghanaian chef Selassie Atadika shares some of her favourite dishes from the African continent - but these are not as widely appreciated as they should be.

#designindaba #DI2020 #selassieatadika #chef #culinaryexperience □

#culinaryarts #flavours #culture #food <https://t.co/uSZef1X9nt>" □ □ 💎💎

Reposted from @designindaba

A post shared by [Selassie Atadika \(@satadika\)](#) on Feb 27, 2020 at 2:48am PST

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The where, when, what of African cuisine

Travelling to many different African countries afforded Atadika the opportunity to note four distinct factors that influence the elements used in African cuisine:

1. Ingredients used in food are affected by geographical and regional boundaries in terms of what grows where and is readily available.
2. Cultural practices, traditions and lifestyle preferences affect food choices in terms of what people allow themselves to eat.
3. Preservation techniques in Africa are limited, but also creative, due to the absence of electricity.
4. Sustainability of food sources is determined by accessibility, affordability and profitability.

In 2014, she returned to Ghana and launched her food enterprise Midunu. This unique platform brings food, culture and community together through its nomadic and private dining experiences – and her ‘New African Cuisine’ is at the centre of the enterprise.

This plant-forward chef admits to having a love for plantains (savoury, starchy banana-like fruit), and focusses on creating dishes mainly consisting of fruit and vegetable, explaining that meat is often considered a luxury in many African countries. Atadika also believes in no-waste cooking, explaining the concept that she’s seen many times throughout her travels whereby all aspects of food sources are used, including cow skin being used as a food product instead of leather.

Bold flavour over fat

The audience was presented with and taken through a tasting experience, with Atadika explaining that various items presented, like sugar cane (sweet), smoked water (smoked), dune spinach (salt) and injera (sour), can be used as alternatives to flavour dishes.

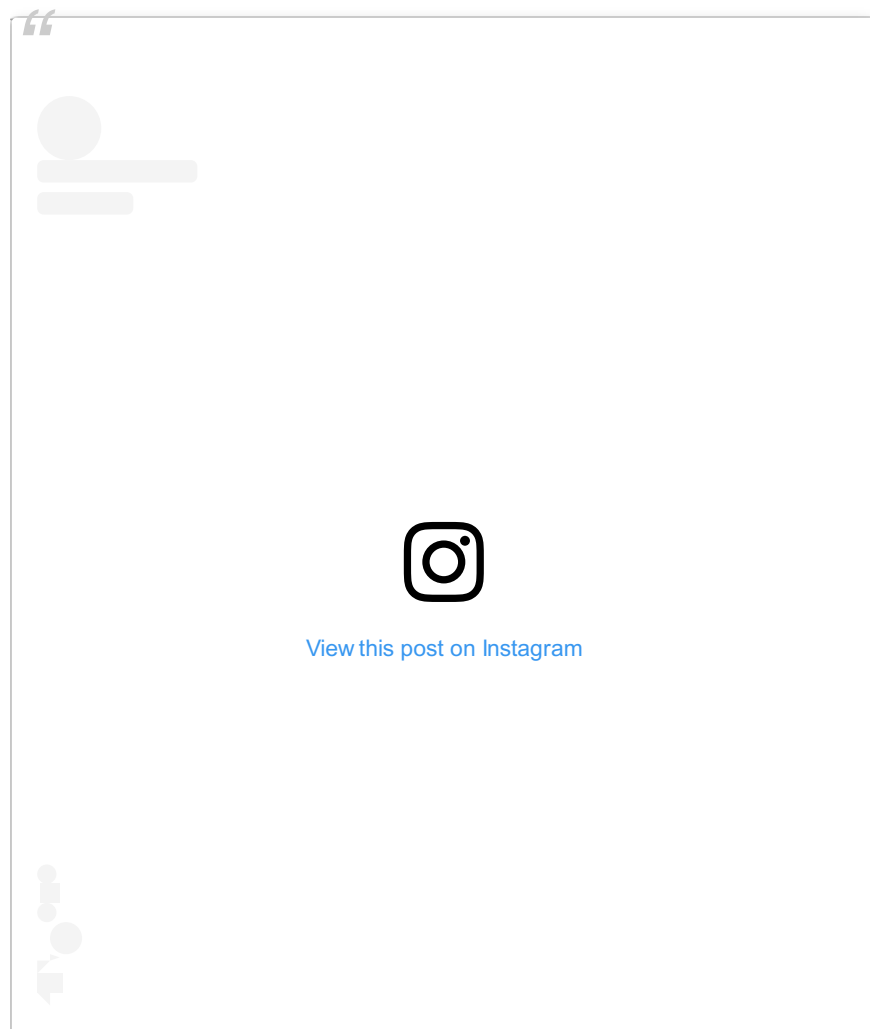
“ Ghanaian chef Selassie Atadika has a tasting lined up for us...she's renowned for her handmade artisanal chocolates and her NewAfrican cuisine is a bold exploration of flavour. [#selassieatadika #designindaba #DI2020 pic.twitter.com/eZhl3kyR9V](#)— Design Indaba (@designindaba) [February 27, 2020](#) ”

Atadika's style of cooking promotes the use of wild and foraged foods and features sustainable, seasonal, climate-friendly ingredients, in order to save valuable resources. She also describes Ghanaian dining as a communal experience and that host families sometimes even feed guests.

On that note, Atadika comments on the fact that African countries are losing their cultural cuisine and traditions to commercial fast-food restaurants, noting Africa's exorbitant food import bill of \$35bn is set to rise to \$110bn by the year 2025.

The chef's biggest aim is to bring African cuisine to the wider market, making it more accessible to more people. Atadika enjoys refreshing old favourites like the Ghanaian dish called the Kofi Broke Man (street food consisting of groundnuts and roasted plantain) which is a decent whole meal that anyone can afford, creating the Kofi Rich Man made up of Liberian plantain cake, layered with a peanut-flavoured cream based on something she tasted in Ghana's Volta region.

Atadika is also well-known for her chocolates, which she creates with the addition of five Ghanaian spices.



Our take on classic Ghanaian street food "Kofi brokeman" □ We had to have "Kofi Richman" on this season's tasting menu, rich with textures of plantain and groundnut. Make sure you try it before it takes a hiatus from our menu!

A post shared by [Midunu \(@midunu\)](#) on Feb 18, 2020 at 2:27am PST

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Creating new African cuisine

Describing what she considers when creating a dish, Atadika provides six lenses:

1. Economy and trade – Does obtaining the ingredients affect the economy positively or negatively? Can the ingredients be sourced locally?
2. Environment – Are the ingredients sourced responsibly and how does it affect the environment?
3. Health and nutrition – What are the health benefits of the ingredients/dishes?
4. Arts and culture – Are the dishes representative of the culture they represent and do they carry an artistic flair?
5. Agriculture and biodiversity – How does production of the dishes affect local agriculture? Ingredients need to be in season and they should not negatively impact biodiversity.
6. Politics and policy – Native cuisine and locally-sourced and produced ingredients should be considered when policies on food are created, for example, when national dishes are established, the ingredients should come from within the country. “How can you have a national dish with no ingredients from the actual country?” Atadika asks.

She ends off by challenging all creatives to apply this same concept to what they do – Use local, sustainable sources for all the work that is done and shine the spotlight on that which is native to where you find yourself.

Follow [@midunu](#), [@midunuchocolates](#) and [@satadika](#) on Instagram.

Visit www.midunu.com for more about Atadika's unique lifestyle company.

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