



# Soul food

Tipp von Esther Kern





As a food critic and “leaf to root” expert I eat at a lot of restaurants which serve unusual food, like beetroot in its entirety, including the leaves, or sous vide lamb tongue, or even mackerel with dried egg yolk. All these dishes taste fantastic. And I also sometimes recreate them at home - at least to a certain extent.



However: What does my son say when I ask him what his favourite meal is? Lasagne. Lentil stew. Spare ribs. He has been eating these dishes for years, they are what he knows, and he would love it if they were on the menu every day. In other words: Soul food is not necessarily the food that I call “fantastic”, “innovative” and “complex” when I have my food critic’s hat on. So ... what is soul food then?

It seems that in terms of sensory attraction, soul food is often very simple. Ideally the dish will be full of flavour, with ingredients that appeal to umami (the fifth sense) such as slow-cooked tomatoes, extra mature cheese and meat that has been slow-braised for several hours. And of course when we think of soul food we often think of dishes that conjure up good memories and a feeling of security. In other words: People living on the other side of the world don’t eat the same soul food as we do.

One quintessential type of soul food is Italian cooking. I imagine lots of people would say that pasta is their favourite food, something they cook when they really want a hearty meal. Born in Basel of Italian descent, Claudio Del Principe is an expert in flavoursome Italian cuisine. His book “A Casa” is currently enjoying an enthusiastic welcome, and in the autumn of 2018 a follow-up entitled “Al Forno” is due for release. Both books focus on traditional Italian dishes that are 100% home-made.

So why does he think so many people fall in love with Italian cuisine? “Originally the term soul food was used to describe African-American dishes from the southern states, like rice and beans, grits, sweet potatoes, pig’s trotters, spare ribs and chicken wings,” explains Del Principe. This original soul food cuisine simply used the few ingredients that were available. “There are real parallels with Italian soul food, because the Italian dishes have their roots in *cucina povera*, traditional peasant cooking, which made the best of a few simple ingredients and kept everything very basic.” Essentially, he continues, it’s all about knowing and loving a certain flavour. “And that could equally be grandma’s minced meat loaf and mashed potato with a gravy lake in the middle.”

Del Principe’s new cookbook is all about dishes that are cooked in the oven. In other words: By the very nature of how they are cooked, these dishes already meet the prerequisites for soul food, as many people associate oven-cooked food with warmth and comfort. Why is that? The author suggests that our sense of smell may have a lot to do with it. “Whatever is in the oven, be it pastries, gratin or a Sunday roast – you always associate the enticing smell with a promise of happiness, good food and comfort. The dishes are generally simple, you just put a baking tray into the magic box and hey presto, it turns into a delicious meal for a whole group of people, who then also sit down and eat it together.” In his book “Al Forno”, he has compiled dozens of recipes that not only have culinary appeal but also comfort the soul.

And of course lasagne is one of them. Because whether you are a seven-year-old boy or an experienced cookbook author, lasagne is somehow always something special, especially if it is 100% home-made like the one in Claudio Del Principe’s book.

Book recommendations:

“A Casa” and “Al Forno” by Claudio Del Principe are available in bookshops (“Al Forno” is available from mid-October 2018)