



FAT CAT

[CLAYTON HAUCK PHOTO FOR METROMIX]

Stop hitting the bottle! Your favorite condiment has gone haute cuisine

By Jesse Reeves

Notice something missing from your table, Chicago? Yes, your once-ubiquitous bottle of ketchup is nowhere to be seen. But don't worry: It's not the victim of another city council ban. It's just that chefs have deemed your plain ol' bottle of Heinz positively passe—and now they're creating haute cuisine versions of the classic condiment.

"Part of a chef's job is taking something you see everyday and [making] it more imaginative," says Sam Burman, chef at

Blueprint (222 Merchandise Mart Plaza, Suite 135. 312-410-9800). Trendy dishes make a splash inside a sleek minimalist setting at this new Loop spot, but there's nothing minimal about the pull-out-all-the-stops approach Burman takes with his uber-gourmet Wagyu burger (\$13). He serves the high-end burger with an equally classy condiment: bloody mary ketchup. The ketchup requires a full day of prep before it makes the way to the table. Burman infuses it ketchup with horseradish, celery salt, Tabasco and black pepper—

but, sorry, no vodka.

The executive chef at **Between Boutique and Lounge** (1324 N. Milwaukee Ave. 773-292-0585), Radhika Desai, also likes to mix things up. You get two classic condiments in one on her burger (\$12); it's served with a tomato-mustard jam. Between's lush, velvety decor looks like a Valentine's Day card come to life, and the passion spills over into reviews for the jam. "People are loving it," Desai says.

Though tomato-mustard jam might seem a bit of stretch as a ketchup, **Kit Kat Lounge and Supper Club** (3700 N. Halsted St. 773-525-1111) executive chef Matt Stovey says there are few rules when it comes to what can be considered ketchup.

"Ketchup is a method," Stovey says. "It isn't exclusively a tomato dish—you just take vinegar, sugar, salt and make anything you want." At Kit Kat, that includes pineapple and mango. Stovey's pineapple-mango ketchup, served with crab cakes (\$9), employs mango chunks, vinegar, pineapple juice and sugar for a sweet-tangy combo.

If you're looking for a little zip, Uptown's new **Fat Cat** (4840 N. Broadway. 773-506-

3100) offers a spicy chipotle-and-ancho ketchup. It's paired with corndogs (\$7.95) on the menu, but now that it's caught on, customers usually ask for it on the side with other dishes, says Fat Cat co-owner Cy Oldham. The stuff's particularly popular with Fat Cat's hand-cut fries.

"Palates are becoming more sophisticated, and people [want] more spice," says Oldham. "We want to try different types of foods from all over the world."

Paul Johnston, food and beverage director at **The Bluebird Bistro and Winebar** (1749 N. Damen Ave. 773-486-2473) agrees. He first tried curry ketchup as a military brat in—who would've guessed it?—Germany. After re-discovering his childhood treat on a recent visit to Europe, he decided it would make a great addition to Bluebird's Euro-pub menu. The condiment, which mixes traditional ketchup with cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and peppercorns, is right at home with Bluebird's *frites* (\$5).

Now, that's what we call fancy ketchup.

[JESSE REEVES IN A METROMIX SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR.] METROMIX@TRIBUNE.COM

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