

Crème de la Kremlin

Travel back to Tsarist Russia with a taste of stroganoff, available on select flights this month. Here, chef Bonnie Morales shares her elevated take on the classic.

Stroganoff—that rich mélange of beef, mushrooms, and cream served over noodles or rice—began its culinary life as a regal dish in 19th-century Russia. It was named in honor of the Stroganovs, one of the wealthiest upper-class families under the Tsars, and when it finally reached America in the 1930s, it was served on fine china at New York’s Russian Tea Room or aflame at the Moscow Café in San Francisco. But by the 1960s, it had become maligned in America as school-cafeteria fare or an easy weeknight budget meal. Indeed, those raised in the United States are probably familiar with stroganoff as a dinner made of canned cream-of-mushroom soup and ground beef.

Bonnie Morales, the chef behind Portland, Oregon’s Kachka (a 2015 James Beard Award semifinalist), has a version that restores the dish to its former glory, even if her inspiration isn’t exactly traditional. Morales, a first-generation American with parents from Belarus, says, “I do try to honor how my mom makes things as often as possible, but my own life experience gets peppered in there naturally. Growing up



here, what I knew about stroganoff came from Hamburger Helper and not really what my mom ever did.” What she serves at the restaurant is a take on that Americanized version—albeit a highly elevated one.

She begins by making a rich mushroom stock, which she mixes with house-cultured

From top: Bonnie Morales serves her stroganoff over buttered egg noodles; the chef adds mushrooms to the gravy



smetana (Russian sour cream, which Morales says is similar to crème fraîche but not as sweet) to create a gravy. Next, she whisks confit beef tongue into the gravy, along with some Cognac—and more mushrooms. All told, she estimates that each serving might have half a pound of locally foraged mushrooms. This is all served atop buttered egg noodles, although in Russia you’d more likely find a base of potatoes or rice. Finally, the plate is topped with a hit of black pepper. It’s a popular order at Kachka, though it’s not always available. “It gets ordered so much that we have to take it off, because it’s boring for the kitchen to make the same thing over and over,” Morales says. But, she adds, “it’s a good problem to have.”