



FLAVOUR HUNTER

THIS MONTH'S TASTE BUZZ THE HAUTE DOG

THE TREND

Hot dogs were sold at an American baseball game for the first time in 1893. After that, Mickey Mouse uttered his earliest on-screen words – 'Hot dogs!' – and president Franklin D Roosevelt served them to King George VI during a state visit. Now the to-go classics, always squirted with squiggles of mustard and ketchup, are found on most street corners in the USA. But recently, top chefs around the world have been giving them a new spin.

TRY IT

Bubbledogs in London may have started the zhuzhed-up hot-dogs trend, pairing them with Champagne and ingredients such as foie gras and truffle mayonnaise. But it was Tom Kerridge who decided to batter and serve them with curry sauce at London's **Corinthia** hotel, creating a hybrid of the American corn dog and German currywurst. At swanky Sydney restaurant **Bennelong**, its flakier cousin, the sausage roll, is filled with suckling pig and served with elegant blobs of black garlic. Meanwhile, in New York City, master chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's cart outside **The Mark Hotel** sells organic-chicken and grass-fed-beef hot dogs with kimchi and yuzu. Speakeasy caviar bar **Hüso** on nearby Madison Avenue tops its \$45 king crab version, pictured, with caviar, avocado and sour cream. And at **Pica Pica** in Hong Kong, the Jospir-grilled-prawn-head one has been an overnight hit. But it's at two-Michelin-starred **La Cime** in Osaka that the street food has had a proper Willy Wonka transformation: the boudin dog, a simple black orb containing blood sausage, is dusted with a thin layer of bamboo charcoal. Hot diggity. CHLOE SACHDEV



SIP TRIP

LAO KHAO

THAILAND'S RICE WHISKY PACKS AN EXTREME PUNCH

Apparently there is no direct translation of *lao khao* from Thai to English. It's usually given as 'rice whisky', which is fair enough, since it is a spirit distilled from fermented rice, but too bland to capture anything of the robust and rustic personality of the drink. Hooch might be better. Moonshine. Firewater. Rocket fuel. Maybe even bathtub gin. The stuff is said to have been produced for millennia, not always to the most exacting standards. Blindness has been a side effect. And yet *lao khao* remains as prized today for its cheapness and potency as it has ever been. It has also played a significant role in the development of Thai cooking. Its very harshness has given impetus to a sophisticated culture of *saap kap klaem*, or 'drinking food' – punchy side dishes that are salty, sour or spicy enough to compete with the taste of the booze, if not to kill it completely. An American chef, Andy Ricker, who has written a book on the subject, describes *lao khao* as a 'cruel' spirit and characterises its flavour as 'marginally more delicious than gasoline'. Though you can, as I did, find *lao khao* in certain fashionable Bangkok bars, it appears to be admirably resistant to trendification, and likely to remain so. It is still the drink it has always been – predominantly rural, occasionally urban and remarkably good with zingy finger food. STEVE KING