

# Match-making in big kitchens

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**WHETHER it be cheese and onion, fish and chips or champagne and strawberries; food fans generally know tastes that go well together . . . and those that don't.**

But increasingly weird and wonderful combinations of flavours have been spotted on menus and deli counters, as retailers battle to be noticed.

One example is Morrisons, which has launched a limited edition cappuccino cheese, created by blending white stilton with Colombian coffee to produce a dark base and white stilton with vanilla on top.

Vanessa Johnson, Morrisons' cheese trading manager, said: "Over recent years, we have seen an increase in consumer demand for unusual and flavour-rich cheeses. We have launched cappuccino cheese as an innovative after-dinner delicacy. Its unique flavour also makes it a delicious snack for coffee and cheese lovers alike."

Carlsberg, which has a brewery in Northampton, has launched two new beers: Jacobsen Saaz Blonde and Bramley Wit. While Bramley Wit is an unfiltered wheat beer with a hint of apple, Saaz Blonde is a light fermented beer which contains slight flavours of fruit, clove and coriander.

But why are so many chefs, manufacturers and retailers attempting to branch out? Food expert Charles Banks is director of The Food People, based in Woodford Halse. The firm works with clients worldwide to develop new products and concepts. Its role includes spotting food trends.

Mr Banks said: "There is a trend for what we call shock food, which is being practised by some of the leading chefs in the food industry. It is about deconstructing food and traditional recipes and reconstructing them in a different and unusual way for a heightened taste experience.

"For example, I have seen fishfinger ice-cream and smoked bacon ice-cream, pea and ham lollipops and snail porridge. Some chefs might take something like a caesar salad and reconstruct it.

"The lettuce might be pulverised and the anchovies might be crystallised. But it is as much for the taste experience, not just for shock value. When you get to understand these people you see that they really understand taste."

Fleur Hulme set up the Geranium House, making and selling jams, chutneys and cakes in Northamptonshire. And the 24-year-old is not afraid to experiment with flavours.

New products include papaya, celery and orange relish and roasted pepper, orange and almond chutney.

She said: "There is a huge amount of competition in the food market and the only way to make headlines and grab people's attention is to be different. With the rise of the celebrity chef, a lot of these guys have done a really good job of opening people's eyes to new things. Even on the Sainsbury's adverts with Jamie Oliver, it shows him sprinkling nutmeg on to a bolognese."

But how does Fleur dream up her imaginative flavour combinations?

She said: "I always make a batch and give a jar to all my friends and family and say I want their opinion. They are not afraid to say if something is not very good."

Catering students at Northampton College run a restaurant at the Booth Lane campus and are encouraged to develop meals which offer different taste sensations. They have made a garlic and black pepper ice-cream and black pudding ice-cream, which is a starter.

Lecturer Richard Curtis said: "That is what they are going to have to do in the industry in the long run. When you have a job, there are skills you need and one of their skills should be the understanding of flavours."