MERIDIAN

The Table Remembers

Food, memory and migration

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June's issue sits down with cooks, farmers and fermenters who keep culinary memory alive. It pairs rich reportage with recipes passed across borders and generations.

Food | Leila Haddad

Grandmothers' Recipes in Exile

How displaced families keep a homeland alive one dish at a time

The kitchen smells of cardamom and slow-cooked lamb. Nadia Khoury stirs a pot with the patience of someone who learned the recipe by watching, not reading. She has never written it down. She doesn't need to.

Khoury arrived in Hamburg nine years ago, carrying little more than a suitcase and her grandmother's methods. Today she runs a supper club for twenty guests every Friday, serving the dishes of a city she can no longer visit.

Taste as archive

Food historians describe migrant cooking as a living archive. Recipes shift with available ingredients, yet their structure, the order of spices and the rhythm of the simmer, travels intact, carrying memory across borders.

For many cooks, the act is also a form of resistance. To keep making a dish is to insist that a culture endures, even when its streets and markets have vanished.

> *“When I cook, my grandmother is standing next to me. The kitchen becomes the whole country.”*

Her guests, mostly local, arrive curious and leave as regulars. Between courses they trade stories, and the long table fills with something no menu can list: the feeling of being, for an evening, at home.

Food | Leila Haddad

Fermentation and the Future

Ancient microbes are inspiring a new generation of chefs and food scientists

In a cellar outside Jeonju, rows of earthenware jars line the walls, each holding a different stage of kimchi. Master fermenter Park Soon-ja checks them by smell and sound, tilting an ear to listen for the gentle fizz of life inside.

Her methods are centuries old, yet they have drawn the attention of scientists. At a research kitchen in Copenhagen, microbiologist Dr. Elin Aaberg is cataloguing the bacteria in traditional ferments, searching for strains that could preserve food with less energy and waste.

Old microbes, new problems

Fermentation offers a rare combination of benefits. It extends shelf life without refrigeration, enhances nutrition and generates flavours that cannot be made any other way. Chefs have embraced it with an almost religious zeal.

The challenge is scale. Traditional ferments depend on local microbes, climate and human intuition, all of which resist standardisation. Researchers hope to learn from the craft rather than replace it.

> *“These jars hold a library. Every culture we lose is a book we will never read.”*

At the end of her tour, Park lifts a lid and offers a spoonful. It is sharp, bright and alive. The future of food, it seems, may taste a great deal like the past.

Thank you for reading Meridian.