



Choux Questionnaire: Joshna Maharaj

A riff on [the well-riffed Proust Questionnaire](#), the CFS Choux Questionnaire is meant to elicit a tasty and perhaps surprising experience, framed within a seemingly humble exterior. (And yes, some questions have a bit more *craquelin* than others.) Straightforward on their own, the queries combined start to form a celebratory pyramid of extravagance. How that composite croquembouche is assembled and taken apart, however, is up to the respondents and readers to determine. Respondents are invited to answer as many questions as they choose.

The final question posed—*What question would you add to this questionnaire?*—prompts each respondent to incorporate their own inquisitive biome into the mix, feeding a forever renewed starter culture for future participants.

Our Choux Questionnaire respondent for this issue is [Joshna Maharaj](#). Joshna is a chef, activist, and speaker dedicated to reimagining institutional food systems to prioritize health, sustainability, and dignity. She is a sought-after speaker and author of [Take Back the Tray](#), which describes her work building new models for hospital, school, and institutional food procurement, production and service. The book won the World Gourmand Cookbook Award in 2020. She is also an MA student in Gastronomy and Food Studies at TU Dublin.

What is your idea of a perfect food?

For me, a perfect food hits on all notes: It's got big flavour that develops as you eat it, and it has texture that keeps the mouthfuls interesting.

Of what food or food context are you afraid?

Inside bits, eyeballs, things like this.... I haven't been able to fully cross this threshold yet.

What word or concept describes an admirable food system?

A truly admirable food system will actually feed everyone in its community well in a consistent way.

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What word or concept prevents many food systems from becoming admirable?

Capitalist priorities and corporate greed

Which food innovation do you try to ignore?

Lab-grown meat

What is your greatest gastronomic extravagance?

I will spend an extraordinary amount of money on good salt.

What is your current state of hunger?

Nonexistent, just ate a delicious bowl of miso butter chili rice.

What do you consider to be the most overrated food or food context?

The pulled pork sandwich

On what occasion do you feign satiety?

When I don't want to eat the food that I know is on offer.

What do you most dislike about dinner tables?

When there's too much decorative nonsense on them that there's not enough space for the food, and when they're not big enough to hold the dishes that need to go on them.

What is the quality you most like in a fruit?

It's a tie between deep flavour and juiciness.

What is the quality you most like in a cut of meat?

Flavour that develops as you chew it.

Which condiments do you most overuse?

These days, it's brown sauce and chili crisp.

What kinds of gardens make you happiest?

Gardens that are well tended and full of good, organic food.

Which culinary skill would you most like to have?

The ability to expedite a dinner service

If you could change one thing about nutrition, what would it be?

I would like nutrition, REAL, wholesome, honest, soil-based nutrition to get taken more seriously.

What do you consider your greatest edible achievement?

I once made this roasted masala pork belly that I still think about in a quiet moment.

If you were to die and come back as an (edible) animal, vegetable, or mineral, what would you like it to be?

I'd like to come back as salt... helping everything be the best version of itself

Where (and/or when) would you most like to dine?

I would have LOVED to attend one of those lavish Roman banquets where all of the senses of the guests were teased and tickled.

When do you have no appetite?

Never. I think maybe it's happened twice, once when I had strep throat, and in some deep grief after my father's death.

What is your most treasured kitchen implement?

I have this one angled wooden spoon. It gets into the corners of a pan perfectly and is so nice to hold. It feels like an extension of my hand.

What do you consider to be the most processed kind of food?

Food that is created specifically for kids, in a sort of tragic irony.

What is your favourite aroma?

When I could smell, I loved the smell of a bakery in the morning.

What spice, kitchen implement, or cookbook do you use most rarely?

There are only a few times a year when I pull out the brown cardamom.

What do you most value in your friends?

What I most value in my friends is that each of them sees (and values) me in a slightly different way, and they all love to tuck into a great meal.

Who are your favourite food scholars?

Vandana Shiva, Michael Pollan

Who is your hero of food media?

Jamie Oliver

With which cuisine do you most identify?

Indian food.... It's the food of my people, and where the ancestors are for me.

What is your most powerful sense?

Sight

What are your favourite agricultural, culinary, or gastronomic words?

Gusto, caramelization, hospitality

What is it about composting that you most dislike?

It's quite a lot of work to keep it up. Worth it, but still, a LOT.

What would you eat as your last meal?

I want two bites of a list of twenty of my favourite things, including: my mom's chicken curry with roti, a

soft Époisses on a crusty baguette, a chocolate layer cake, flank steak with chimichurri, pepperoni pizza, chicken shawarma, a BLT, the *socarrat* from a paella, tacos *al pastor*, and the first good sip of a pint of Guinness.

What foodish epitaph would you assign to yourself?

She lived the way she ate, with generosity and gusto.

What question would you add to this questionnaire?

What's something that is misunderstood about food and cooking?