

# TURKEY STEPS INTO THE CULINARY LIMELIGHT

by James Brennan

September 2011

**THE CHANGING CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS COOKING ARE PLAYING A MAJOR PART IN TURKEY'S NEW RESTAURANT RENAISSANCE**



It can be difficult to convince food critics that the cuisines of the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East are as sophisticated as, say, French, Japanese or Italian food.

And the same challenges face even Turkish cuisine, which has struggled to get beyond the stereotype of *kebabs* and *baklava*. But according to chef **Mehmet Gurs**, Turkish food is undergoing a process of reinvention, and it could easily become the next big thing.

«I compare the future of this region very much to what happened in Scandinavia,» says Gurs. «Cooking and eating in Scandinavia wasn't this big thing, they were not all foodies. It was perceived as herring and open-faced sandwiches. But the cooking schools got good and the young creative chefs got good training. They went abroad and got their feet wet, then they went back and did what Rene (Redzepi) is doing.»

For two years running, [Redzepi's Noma has been voted the world's best restaurant by the S.Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurant awards](#). The *New Nordic Cuisine* now has a worldwide reputation for its innovative use of excellent local ingredients. And Gurs feels the tide could very soon be turning Turkey's way.

«Now you've got all these new cooking schools springing up in Turkey, and some of them are very good.» It's a sign, says Gurs, that being a chef is slowly becoming recognised as a respectable profession in Turkish society. And that can only be good news for the future of Turkish food.

But despite Gurs' hard work in rediscovering traditional Turkish ingredients and reinventing them in a modern context, he feels it will be the next generation of chefs who'll make the breakthrough. «These young kids, they'll probably be the ones that are pushing the borders, and I'm in full support of it. That's why I'm opening up my research to everybody.»