

# CELEBRATING THE AFRICAN DIASPORA ON THE COOP'S SHELVES

March 22, 2022



*By Zoe Singer*

Above, from left to right: Fonio, an ancient, gluten-free grain from West Africa (image by Adam Bartos); Moroccan shakshuka (photo courtesy of Mina); Caribbean-inspired ice cream (photo courtesy of Crème & Cocoa).

The aisles of the Coop reflect a commitment to local, artisanal foods and diverse, global influences. During Black History Month this February, I wanted to learn more about the African diasporic (see definition, below) flavors I found while shopping, from Caribbean ice cream to Moroccan condiments and a West African grain I'd never tried before. So I reached out to the producers to ask about their stories and how these flavors, which reflect the African diaspora, landed on Coop shelves.

## **Tropical Sunshine in the Freezer**

Friends of mine had been rhapsodizing about Crème and Cocoa's Caribbean Queen soursop ice cream, and I was thrilled to discover there's also a non-dairy version. Indeed, this traditional Caribbean ice cream flavor is uniquely refreshing and indulgent.

Crème and Cocoa co-owner Omar Thorpe described the flavor as mango-like and lemony. He and Astrid Thorpe (they are partners in business and marriage) purée sweet, well-ripened soursop, known as *guanabana* in Central American countries, into their dairy and non-dairy coconut bases for this celebrated flavor.



Crème and Cocoa owners Omar & Astrid Thorpe.

Omar is Panamanian and Astrid is Haitian-American. The couple met and live in Brook-

lyn with their three children. In addition to running the Crème and Cocoa scoop shop in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, they stock stores, including the Coop, and offer national and local delivery. In the warmer months, their ice cream bike can be booked for anything from corporate events to block parties. The shop also makes a fabulous place to host a party. In addition to the more familiar ice cream flavors, the couple churn fresh, local ingredients into flavors that pay homage to their tropical, Caribbean upbringing, from grapenut soursop to rum raisin, sorrel sorbet, and a fantastic non-dairy peanut punch. And they're always trying out something new, from bourbon vanilla with a hibiscus swirl to dark chocolate stout. For Mother's Day last year, Coop shoppers were treated to a special run of Roses and Pearls, made with rose petals and edible chocolate pearls. We can't wait to see what they come up with this year!

## **A Little Grain With Big Impact**

Pierre Thiam and Phil Teverow also met on the streets of Brooklyn, back in the early 2000s. Pierre, born and raised in Senegal, is a celebrated chef, restaurateur, author, entrepreneur, and environmental activist whose innovative cooking is rooted in the traditions of West Africa. Phil is a food industry veteran who pioneered the introduction of unusual ingredients (including quinoa, in the 1980s). The friends founded Yolélé in 2017 to change conditions for rural West African smallholder farmers and distribute African food products including fonio, a climate-friendly, nutritious ancient grain from the Sahel region. Yolélé is a Fulani term of exuberance used throughout West and Central Africa. It roughly translates to "let the good times roll." People shout out "yolélé!" to get parties started and people dancing. The Fulani people are the world's largest nomadic group, living across government-drawn country lines.



PHOTO BY EVANSUNG, COURTESY OF YOLÉ

Raw fonio.



Fonio pilaf is available at the Coop, in aisle 6.

Fonio is a tiny, nutritious gluten-free grain that grows in West Africa and cooks similarly to couscous, with a nutty flavor. This climate-smart ancient grain is grown exclusively by smallholder family farmers across the Sahel region in West Africa. Yolélé sources their fonio from Mali, Senegal and Guinea. Back in Brooklyn, the grain is transformed into delightful chips and quick-cooking, pre-seasoned pilafs in flavors including Afro-Funk, made with fermented locust beans; Greens, made with moringa and spinach; Yassa, with chile, onion and lime; Jollof, with tomato and bell pepper; and plain. Plain fonio is a nice gluten-free base for everything from sweet potato pie to crisp coated fried okra.

## Elegant Flavors of North Africa



Mina Kallamni, the founder of Mina, at the market.

Mina Kallamni grew up in Casablanca, which is on the Atlantic Coast of the Chaouia plain, in central-western Morocco, and is the country's chief port. When Mina first tasted harissa, the spicy red chile pepper condiment originally from Tunisia, she loved it and made it her own, developing a fresh-tasting, spicy recipe that drew raves. Mina went on to study cooking in Paris, then ran a successful high-end catering business in New York City.



The jars of Mina Harissa are available at the Coop, in aisle 6.

After she retired, her children worked with her to launch Mina in 2010, a line of authentic Moroccan pantry staples including preserved lemons, shakshuka sauce and bright-tasting tagine sauces. They source natural, non-GMO ingredients from family farms in Morocco. The flagship harissa is intensely spicy and savory—try it with eggs, blended into a dip or anywhere you might use a hot flavorful condiment. The products make Mina’s fantastic recipes easily accessible, from chicken tagine with preserved lemons and olives to a complex-tasting shakshuka that simply entails simmering eggs in the flavorful sauce.



PHOTO COURTESY MINA

Coconut curry chicken.

## **Note**

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “African diaspora refers to the long-term historical process by which people of African descent have been scattered from their ancestral homelands to other parts of the world.” And per Oldways: “African Diaspora is the term commonly used to describe the mass dispersion of peoples from Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trades, from the 1500s to the 1800s. This Diaspora took millions of people from Western and Central Africa to different regions throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. These African ancestors landed in regions that featured different local foods and cuisines, as well as other cultural influences, that shaped their unique cooking styles.”

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