



Flavor Bites: Flavor Creation in the UK

A closer look at the flavors found to be popular in the United Kingdom

John Wright; johnwrightflavorist@gmail.com

Sadly, the United Kingdom had, for many years, a truly dismal culinary reputation. So bad, in fact, that it was the source of a significant vein of self-deprecating humor, though some of that reputation was richly deserved. It was derived from the twin influences of the unusually early onset of the Industrial Revolution and, later, the Victorian-era fad for simplicity and blandness in everything.

However, the United Kingdom is not especially resistant to change, and its culinary reputation is really no longer as valid as it once was. Home cooking is now uniquely popular, creative and diverse, and culinary influences range from the rich history of British culture to many different cuisines experienced from immigrants and foreign vacations. Chicken korma is now the most popular dish in the United Kingdom, thanks to a wide swath of Indian restaurants, and many UK citizens have experienced a variety of different cuisines thanks to travel.

The Main UK Flavor Preferences

In my experience, the most popular flavors in the UK market are, in descending order: lemon, strawberry, vanilla, orange, cream, mint, chocolate, raspberry, apple, butter, grapefruit, chicken, onion, cheese, blackcurrant, ginger, tomato, banana, cherry and peach.

Lemon: Citral is unusually prominent in all the main styles of lemon flavors in the United Kingdom. Many years ago the main source of citral

was lemongrass oil, usually somewhat purified but still retaining much of the odor character of the original essential oil. That character became popular, especially in carbonated lemonadelike beverages, and many drinks in that category today contain a deliberate addition of lemongrass oil to recreate the historical flavor profile. Traditional lemonade drinks are highly dependent on the character of methyl dihydrojasmonate, usually added to give a jasmine character far higher than that found in nature in lemons. Also, confectionery lemon flavors are predominantly cold-pressed lemon oil in character, with much higher citral levels than would be acceptable in the United States.

Strawberry: Strawberry is a universally popular flavor in the United Kingdom and is used in a variety of end products. The dominant character is fresh, green, slightly unripe and highly authentic. Some more traditional and jammy flavors can still be found, especially in sugar confectionery.

Vanilla: Historically, most quality vanilla ice cream in the United Kingdom was manufactured with butter as the primary dairy ingredient. This preference is now widespread, and most vanilla flavors, irrespective of the end product, contain a significant buttery component. Genuine vanilla bean extract is enjoyed, but it is most often a secondary note in blends that owe most of their character to vanillin.



Orange: Most orange flavors owe the bulk of their character to cold-pressed orange oil. Freshness can be added using simple esters and acetaldehyde, and some flavors still have a modest sweet, cooked character. Additionally, some orange flavors, especially in the confectionery area, have a quite noticeable fragrant violet note, which is fairly unique to this market.

Cream: Cream and other dairy flavors are unusually popular in the United Kingdom. They are not generally particularly buttery, but instead combine dominant lactone characters with sweet notes, such as vanillin and maltol.

Mint. Mint flavors, both peppermint and spearmint, are widely used in the United Kingdom, especially in confectionery. Blending tends to emphasize the mellower, high-boiling characters, and harsh notes are not liked. The unusual popularity of real mint in cooking means some spearmint flavors can have a subtle leafy note and many peppermint flavors have a noticeable buttery, creamy aspect.

Chocolate: In the United Kingdom, both milk and dark chocolate flavors are popular. Milk flavors often have a strong cooked milk character, in line with the most popular brand of milk chocolate. Dark chocolate flavors are never taken to the extreme of being exclusively cocoa in character, but always have a subtle element of milk character.

Raspberry: Fresh raspberries are widely grown and consumed in the United Kingdom, and consequently, most raspberry flavors are highly authentic.

As is the case with strawberry flavors, the character is often slightly green and unripe, reflecting the profile most commonly found in the fruit on supermarket shelves.

Apple: Once again, the profile of this fruit flavor type tends towards authentic and slightly unripe. *trans*-2-Hexenal is usually the dominant character rather than ethyl 2-methyl butyrate.

Butter: Butter flavors are popular in the United Kingdom, and they are widely used, particularly in bakery applications. Diacetyl is rarely the dominant note, as it is in the United States, and many flavors owe most of their character to creamy δ -lactones.

Grapefruit: Bland and orange peel oil-orientated grapefruit flavors are much less popular in the United Kingdom than those containing more characteristic, juicy, catty flavors. UK consumers especially seem to like sulfur notes, and grapefruit is a prime example of this.

Chicken: Chicken flavors are unusually popular with UK citizens, and particularly in snacks and stock cubes. A white meat character is preferred, together with overt roasted and fatty notes.

Onion: Onion flavors come a close second to chicken in the savory popularity list, with fried notes seen as especially attractive.

Cheese: Mature cheddar cheese is the preferred character in snacks and other savory applications in the United Kingdom. Often this character is far from subtle.

Blackcurrant: For many years, this fruit has enjoyed unusual popularity with UK residents. Historically, many blackcurrant flavors derived their key catty character from buchu

oil, and strongly buchu-dominated flavors are still popular, together with more modern, authentic alternatives.

Ginger: Ginger flavors are also exceptionally popular in the confectionery, bakery and beverage markets. Most exhibit a notable degree of pungency.

Tomato: The most successful tomato flavors in the United Kingdom



have a moderate degree of cooked character, rather akin to canned tomatoes. Green notes may be present, but they are relatively restrained.

Banana: Some banana flavors, particularly in confectionery products, can be old-fashioned, simplistic and estery, but most favored flavors in dairy and other applications are complex and realistic.

Cherry: Realism is also dominant in cherry flavors, with very few simplistic fruity, benzaldehyde-based anachronisms.

Peach: Similar to grapefruit flavors, catty notes can be quite dominant in the United Kingdom's preferred peach flavors, and they often have the character of fresh fruit and skin.

Other interesting flavors: Tropical flavors, especially passion fruit and mango, are enjoying increased popularity in the United Kingdom, often in combination with more established

flavors. Elderflower flavors, with their unusual and attractive catty, floral character, are quite specific to the UK market and are modestly popular in beverages. Other unusual floral flavors include highly perfumed rose and violet flavors, which have a niche position in the high-end confectionery market.

Interpersonal Factors

The Brits are often regarded as uniquely reserved and aloof, and this reputation often strikes one most forcefully when traveling on the tube in London. Conversations are rare and most facial expressions are rather fixed. This level of built-in reserve makes it especially important to establish a good level of personal contact with customers. That is nowhere near as difficult as it might seem, but it has to be approached with care. The Anglo-Saxon work ethic now completely dominates most business

in the UK, and consequently, most people work long hours and do not have either the time or the inclination to be entertained at, for example, long lunches.

Conversations are relatively free from taboos, and it is perfectly acceptable to discuss politics or virtually any other subject. Surreal satirical humor and parody are widely enjoyed, and most Brits are critical of those in authority, and politicians of any shade are especially suspect.

UK customers, similarly to many others around the world, like to be given choices and involved as far as possible in the process of flavor creation. Additionally, they are particularly amenable to direct contact between flavorists and customer technical staff, and it is sensible to take maximum advantage of this openness.

To purchase a copy of this article or others, visit www.PerfumerFlavorist.com/magazine. 