

# MARTOR



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## The 90s or the arrival of fruit yoghurt into our lives

Despina Bădescu

The years before fruit yoghurt had been dark. I remember an empty fridge, which seemed determined to remain empty, standing across the way from the shelves loaded with rare preserve jars (green nuts, rose, wild strawberries, blackberries, orange peels cut in rose-like shapes) which bored me stiff. Only our guests from abroad were in awe of them. What fascinated us was rather a Nutella jar we would receive for Christmas or at Easter. We had even developed a technique of leaking the jar little by little and using a teaspoon. Thus it lasted at least one and a half months. We were also fascinated by instant pudding, that Western magic powder which turned into a flavoured, sweet and a little jelly paste. Well, I admit we didn't really know what artificial food flavour was back then. And Its Royal Majesty the Packing was even more fascinating than the taste. There were tinfoil, glossy, beautifully drawn labels, small boxes, tubes and all the other contraptions that I was collecting and storing in silent rows.

Fruit yoghurt came to our doorstep during the 90s. When I had heard about the Revolution and of people gathering in street meetings, I made a quick assessment of things and asked

whether all groceries would turn into what we called "shops"<sup>1</sup> where we could go and do our shopping in more humane conditions. I can't recall the answer but I distinctly remember that in January 1990, in a supermarket on Magheru Boulevard, I bought a small bar of chocolate shaped like an umbrella that cost me a fortune: 15 lei. And it was an awful kind of chocolate which tasted dusty and too sweet and looked suspiciously light brown. But it was shaped like an umbrella and that was what really mattered. Then Mr. Fruit Yoghurt came along. It was small, expensive, imported, light, sweet, with a lot of chemicals in it, and bottled in beautiful, cosmopolitan-looking packs. And it was a lot tastier than the poor piece of fruit on the label, which, in its natural state, would have been completely ignored. Its first visits to our fridge were timid and only on special occasions, namely when we got visitors from abroad. At the sight of the yoghurt, they would immediately become tense and asked what had happened to those old and boring fruit preserves.

Then one sweet day, the big thing happened: four packs of fruit yoghurt suddenly appeared in our fridge. It was the kind of Western looking

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<sup>1</sup> Stores in communist Romania called "shop" where goods were sold only for foreign currency and which were destined mainly for foreign people.

packs, stuck together in fours which you could buy and bring home and place in the fridge in full formation. I took a couple of looks at them, arranged them on the shelf, then opened the fridge again to see what they were doing, all four of them. My mother threw a careless remark, “I took more of them because we might run out of yoghurt soon!” Four packs of yoghurt in one shot. My head was spinning. It was so Western. That was it: my family had fruit yoghurt in the fridge!

Time passed by and we got over the Y2K. One day, in the supermarket, I realized that I was ignoring Mr. Fruit Yoghurt altogether. I thought it was obsolete, that it contained artificial food flavours, sugar or saccharine and its colours were almost fluorescent. I said to myself that I would buy either yoghurt, or fruit. I still care about fruit yoghurt but it is history now. I put it on my mental shelf, next to the tape cassettes.

*Translated by Alina Popescu*

