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When chicken wings are in short supply, boneless alternatives can stand in. See page 30.



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CONTRIBUTORS

David Eschler
Liz Howe
Tom Querry
Lance Reynolds
Frankie Ruiz

PUBLISHING PARTNER

BITE THIS MEDIA

Content Chief
Laura Yee

Creative Director
Joline Rivera

Contributing Editor
Sophie Lee

Contributing Writers
Kate Bernot
Kristin Eddy
Peter Ganovsky
Amber Gibson
Diana Hubbell
Sophie Lee
Jacqueline Raposo

Copy Editor
Natalie Jew

Cover Photography
Matt Armendariz

Photographers
Matt Armendariz
Sean T. McGill

Food Stylist
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Prop Stylist
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A SEASON OF CHANGE

Welcome to the fall edition of Food Fanatics® magazine!

The restaurant boom is here, but many of us are enduring a new set of unique challenges as business returns. Many foodservice operators are short on staff, in high diner demand and experiencing nationwide supply challenges. Flexibility is key right now, so we hope this book helps you build a menu that's low on labor and big on flavor.

The *Menu Must Haves* section is up first, because managing your menu has never been more important. Sports bars are poised for an epic comeback this football season, and you'll find many bar-and-grill-centric recipes and tips, but there is something here for everyone.

The cover story, on page 30, is all about wings and what to do if they are hard to come by this fall. Find out what's trending, and wow diners with something new and shortage-proof.

The *Money Moves* section has two stories to help you adapt on the fly. The first, '*The Smarter Way to LTO*,' shows you how to treat your regular menu like a limited time offer, as national supply shortages continue to impact our industry. The second, '*Flex Your Menu Muscle*,' helps you understand the impact of inflation on your bottom line and shows you how to adopt a flexible pricing model. On page 69, our US Foods® Restaurant Operations Consultant leader, Lance Reynolds, shares lessons he learned from the pandemic and tips to create a successful ops strategy in 2022.

Best wishes for a successful fall season.

Thanks for reading,



Andrew Iacobucci
Chief Commercial Officer, US Foods

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Surf (lobster) meets turf (steak) for an outrageous take on the iconic cheese steak sub.

LOBSTER

CHEESE

STEAK

MENU
MUST-HAVES

PILE IT ON

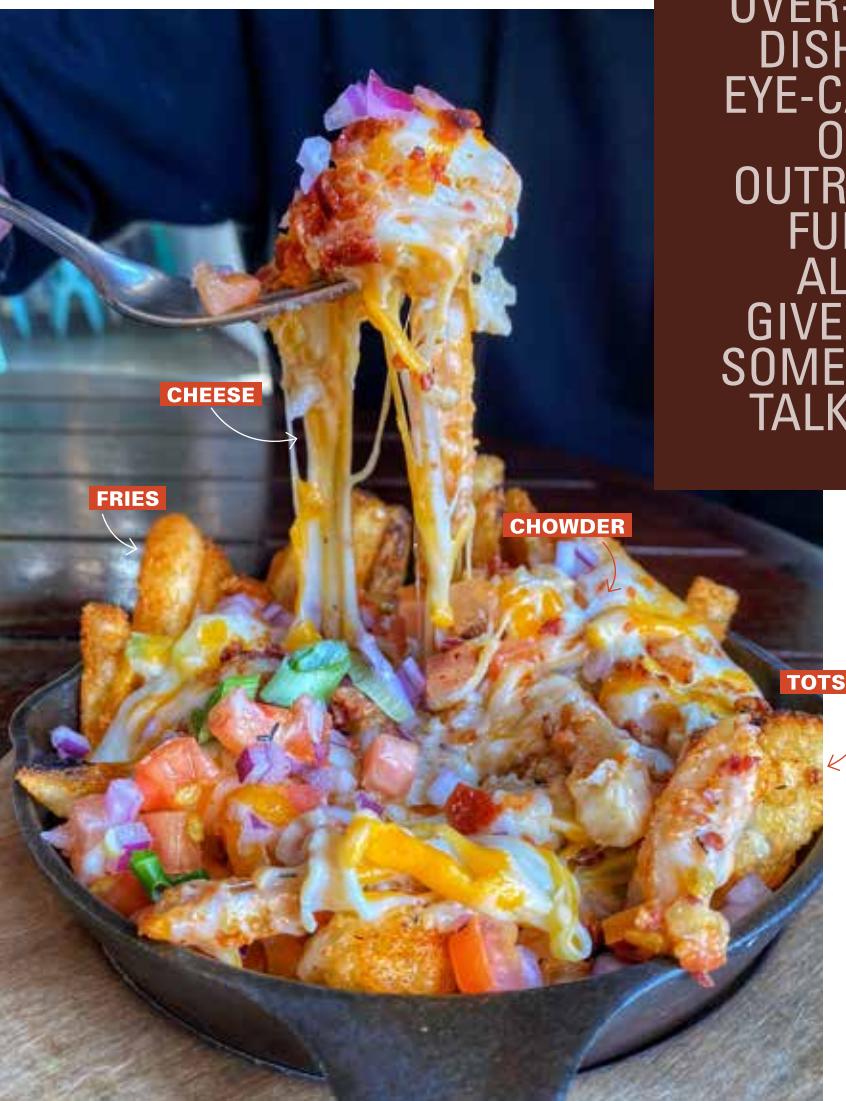
From sports bars to fast casuals, over-the-top dishes score big

To grab a diner's attention,

more is better, especially when you're catering to a crowd of fun-loving sports fans or tables joyful that they're gathering in person. Compelling ingredient and flavor combinations can be found in bowls, burgers, and anything in a bun, as long as it stacks up and sticks out.

Whether portions are breaking big or the inspiration was a fever dream (or both), nothing is dainty.

Over-the-top dishes are eye-catching, often outrageous, fun and always give guests something to talk about. They transcend concepts, working just as well in sports bars as they do in fine dining. When everything and everyone is competing for your customers' attention, they're needed more than ever. Check out these examples:



CHEESY, SAUCY YUM

Chowder Frots feature Cajun fries and tater tots smothered with chunky housemade clam chowder, melted cheddar cheese, bacon bits, red onion and diced tomatoes, \$12.

» **Creator:** Chef and co-founder Johnny Nguyen at The Dive Steam Kettle Cooking, Temple City, California

» **Inspiration:** "We had an item like this that was only using french fries, but I really like tater tots, so we mashed this whole thing in and the flavor profile was ridiculous."

» **Popular among:** "Our demographic is really diverse, so we have all ages and ethnicities, but this is a hit across the board," Nguyen says.

» **Money maker or loss leader?** Money maker.

OVER-THE-TOP
DISHES ARE
EYE-CATCHING,
OFTEN
OUTRAGEOUS,
FUN AND
ALWAYS
GIVE GUESTS
SOMETHING TO
TALK ABOUT.

MORE IS BETTER

Porterhouse steak from Clark's Farm in Howard County, Maryland, is topped with caramelized shallots, artichoke hearts, chunky garlic, Asher Blue cheese, honey and furikake.

» **Creator:** Edward Lee, chef-owner of 610 Magnolia and other restaurants, Louisville, Kentucky

» **Inspiration:** "I love the classic blue cheese and steak pairing but wanted a little more adventure. Everything is cut chunky so that each bite is a little bit different and makes you keep coming back for more," Lee says on his Instagram post.

» **Popular among:** Lee created the dish for a client, but if the 1,996 likes are any indication, the dish would be a hit at the restaurant.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAPPY HOURS GROUP



Porterhouse Steak, Caramelized Shallots, Chunky Garlic, Blue Cheese, Honey and Furikake

Inspired by Chef/owner Edward Lee
610 Magnolia, Louisville, Kentucky

3 tablespoons olive oil
½ pound shallots, sliced thick
1 porterhouse steak
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 ounces blue cheese
1 head garlic, roasted
2 artichoke hearts, roasted and sliced
Furikake, for sprinkling
Honey, for drizzling

In a medium saute pan, heat 2 tablespoons of oil and slowly cook shallots until caramelized; set aside.

In a cast-iron skillet, heat remaining oil over high heat. Season steak with salt and pepper and sear. Cook 3 to 5 minutes, depending on the thickness of the steak, turn and cook until desired doneness is almost reached.

Top generously with blue cheese, shallots, some garlic cloves (keep in tact) and artichokes; cover and remove from heat. Allow to rest for 2 minutes while the cheese melts and the ingredients meld. Sprinkle with furikake and drizzle with honey. Makes 1 serving.



MAKE IT WEIRD

The Tentacle Dog showcases octopus with sauerkraut, fish roe, sliced apple and mustard, \$15.

» **Creator:** Justin Fallon, executive chef at Ivory Pearl, Brookline, Massachusetts
 » **Inspiration:** "I like to cook with flair and whimsy. It feels reminiscent of a classic hot dog, with the octopus having a fried exterior but a soft interior," Fallon says. "The condiments are flavors that work well with octopus, and when you're in uncharted territory, it's good to have familiar flavors."
 » **Popular among:** "Not everyone is adventurous, but the novelty is a factor."
 » **Money maker or loss leader?** "Somewhere in the middle in sales," he says.

Tentacle Dog

*Executive Chef Justin Fallon
Ivory Pearl, Brookline, Massachusetts*

**1 3-ounce octopus tentacle or squid
Seasoned fish stock, as needed
2 teaspoons dijonnaise
1 split-top hot dog bun, buttered and lightly griddled
1 tablespoon sauerkraut
1 teaspoon pickled mustard seed, recipe follows
1 small green apple, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon trout roe**

Slowly braise octopus or squid in fish stock; keep warm. Spread dijonaise on the bun, add layer of sauerkraut and top with tentacle. Add pickled seeds to the bottom side and line with sliced apple on the other side followed by roe nearest the tentacle.

To make pickled mustard seeds: Toast 1 cup mustard seeds until fragrant. Simmer in 1 cup rice vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mirin. Cool and add 2 tablespoons chopped chives. Refrigerate until ready to use.

PILE ON THE MEAT

A biscuit unites Southern fried chicken, a burger patty, ham, turkey, pulled pork, crispy bacon, potato tots, cheddar and housemade sausage gravy, aka Rough Night, \$13.10.

» **Creators:** Owners Jake and Janie Burkett, The Biscuit Bar, multiple locations, Texas

» **Inspiration:** "We obviously wanted to have something over the top, and we also kid around that our philosophy is you've either had a rough night or are about to have a rough night. This is our hangover biscuit."

» **Popular among:** "Kids all the way to 90-year-olds."

» **Money maker or loss leader?** "Money-maker. We throw in everything but the kitchen sink but are very intentional about our pricing. We don't do loss-leaders except for maybe a few kids' menu items."



WHETHER PORTIONS ARE BREAKING BIG OR THE INSPIRATION WAS A FEVER DREAM (OR BOTH), RESTAURANTS ARE NOT FEELING DAINTY THESE DAYS.

FLAVOR BOMBS

Seoul Train Sub aka *buldak* fried chicken or cauliflower brings together three melted cheeses, kimchi slaw, sesame seeds and scallions on a sesame seed roll, \$14.

» **Creator:** Mike Hauke, founder of Tony Boloney's, multiple cities, New Jersey

» **Inspiration:** Fried chicken and mild cheese takes on classic Korean condiments. "Many people are getting familiar with Korean-style food, and they aren't afraid of trying it a new way," Hauke says.

» **Popular among:** "People come here because they are not getting a traditional sandwich. There is no set demographic. It's people who want something different."

» **Money maker or loss leader?** "Money maker!"

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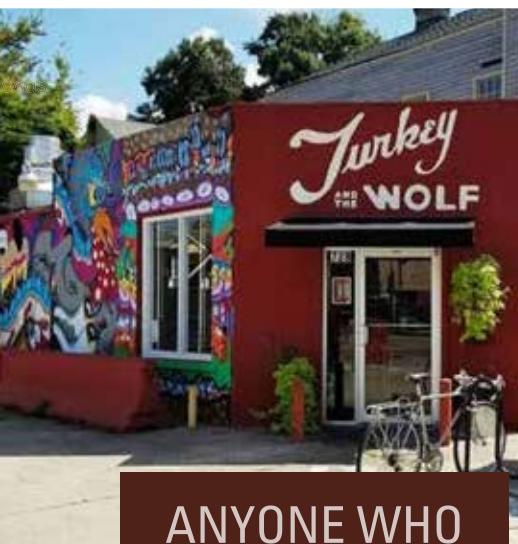
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN TROYELL



ANYONE WHO COMES TO THE TURKEY AND THE WOLF KNOWS TO EXPECT SOMETHING WILD

RIDICULOUSLY BIG

Three deeply seasoned, slow smoked, bone-in, foot-long prime rib beef bones about 3 to 4 pounds wows, \$100.

- » **Creator:** Daniel Castillo, co-owner of Heritage Barbecue in San Juan Capistrano, California
- » **Inspiration:** A higher-end offering at this classic Texas barbecue restaurant, which gained a cult following over the last year.
- » **Popular among:** Diners seeking a challenge and special occasions.

Miso Dog

A foot long hot dog with miso mayo, chili crunch ketchup, crispy brown rice, tiny shrimp and onion rings reels in diners, \$12.

- » **Creator:** Phil Cenac, Turkey and the Wolf, New Orleans
- » **Inspiration:** Chef Cenac loves Japadog, a Japanese hot dog stand in Vancouver, BC. He based this dish on his time spent there.
- » **Popular among:** Anyone who comes to Turkey and the Wolf knows to expect something wild.
- » **Money maker or loss leader?** "It was a regular priced item and we had a 30% food cost, so neither a high-end or low-end money maker situation," Cenac says.

OUTRAGEOUS PAIRINGS

Slapfish Surf 'N Turf/Nathan's Lobster Cheesesteak combines ribeye, lobster, caramelized onions, American cheese, steak sauce and melted butter and chives on a baguette, \$19.99

» **Creator:** Executive chef Andrew Gruel, Slapfish Restaurant Group

» **Inspiration:** "The Senior VP of Nathan's is a friend of mine and we were talking about approachable food with high-end ingredients. This is a mash-up of their Pat LaFrieda New York Cheesesteak and our Laguna Beach seafood."

» **Popular among:** "Given that it is very 'Instagrammable,' we are seeing a lot of requests directly from social posts."

» **Money maker or loss leader?** "Massive loss leader," he says.

Slapfish and Nathan's Lobster Cheesesteak

Executive Chef Andrew Gruel
Slapfish Restaurant Group, multiple locations, California

2 1/4 pound lobsters

Butter, as needed

Flavorless oil, as needed

1 pound boneless ribeye steak, sliced

Salt and pepper, as needed

2 large onions, caramelized

Steak sauce, as needed

2 slices American cheese

2 wide baguettes, 3/4-split

Chives, chopped, to garnish

Boil lobsters for about 6 to 8 minutes and cool in an ice bath. Remove meat, keeping claws and knuckles intact but chopping tail into large chunks. Toss in butter; keep warm.

Season steak with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large cast-iron skillet until smoky hot, add beef and sear; cook to medium rare. Remove from heat, add steak sauce to taste and combine with onions.

Pile meat and lobster into baguettes, top with cheese and place under broiler to just melt. Sprinkle with chives and serve immediately. Makes 2 servings. ■

TAKE THAT

UMAMI IS THE PUNCH DINERS WELCOME

By Jacqueline Raposo
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

Umami boosters, clockwise, black garlic, seaweed, konbu seasoning, anchovies, blue cheese, mushroom powder, assorted dried mushrooms, and center, kelp and nutritional yeast.

When it comes to building craveable, must-order dishes, no ingredients allure chefs and diners more than those wrapped up in the word “umami.”

“I like to punch people in the mouth with flavor, and umami is the knuckles of that punch,” says chef Shane Lyons, a consultant who re-energizes restaurant kitchens nationwide.

Umami-rich foods are trending, the word itself appearing across all concepts more commonly now than ever. But cooks have long understood that ingredients like aged cheese, dried meat, fermented fish and soy sauce amplify the savory satisfaction of other ingredients. “Our ancestors acted instinctively,” says chef Antonio Morichini of Via Vai in Astoria, New York, of this intuitive understanding of the “fifth sense.”

Such ingredients can be an obvious umami bomb, a layer upon layer method of building a dish. But they can also take a “less is more” style, whether the venue is fine dining or sports-bar casual.

“Minimalism rooted in high-quality ingredients with fantastic technique is the most impactful approach for both,” Lyons says. “How you use umami within that should be considerate and deliberate.”

Plow ahead and consider eight underutilized umami bombs that deliver a savory punch.



Dried mushrooms simmered in stock can amp up the umami flavor in any dish.

ANCHOVIES

Anchovies (and their sardine cousins) are delicious on their own. “But when used as an element of a recipe, they add savoriness but do not overpower,” says Morichini. He notes how their saltiness helps boost the sweeter umami in other ingredients like cheese or tomatoes while remaining subtle. For a pasta that satisfies in cooler fall months without weighing the body down, he goes for a pasta pesto with broccoli rabe, pecorino, parmesan, pine nuts and anchovies. “Without the anchovies, the pesto becomes less flavorful and more timid,” he says. “With the anchovies, the broccoli rabe pops.”

BLACK GARLIC

When aged for around two months, garlic develops a jet-black hue, sticky texture and earthy-sweet umami akin to dark molasses or a plummy red wine. And the bite of raw garlic completely disappears. But Lyons warns its umami overwhelms if used with a heavy hand and should be used as unadulterated as possible. Warm to smear on a steak. Or blend into the sauce of a vegetarian pasta for an earthy funk and luxurious mouthfeel. For fall, chef Guy Meikle of Heritage in Chicago blends black garlic with apples in a finishing sauce for his lamb shiitake mandu. Against a pickled ramp aioli, the black garlic offers “a rich and satisfying umami base that pairs perfectly with the iron-rich lamb and is the anchor around which all of the other flavors are built,” Meikle says.

BLUE CHEESE

The longer a cheese ages, the more proteolysis breaks down the milk protein into free amino acids that deepen in umami notes. When it comes to blue cheese, the umami covers sweet, salty and funky all together. Rather than simply add to a cheese plate, try a dollop over braised meats, add to mac and cheese or whisk a little into dressings for roasted vegetable salads. Nicole O’Brien, chef/owner of The Pandering Pig in New York, adds a hefty



WHAT'S UMAMI?

Defining umami isn't easy, even for chefs. “It's almost like something that your mouth understands but your brain can't understand,” says chef Katie Button of Curate in Asheville, North Carolina. Most cooks can't define umami beyond the words “savory” and “delicious.” But a definitive, scientific answer exists. And it has everything to do with the brain.

In 1908, the Japanese chemist Kikunae Ikeda wondered why his bowl of (vegetarian) dashi contained a gastronomic allure beyond the known flavors of salty, sweet, sour and bitter. Ikeda separated dashi's main ingredient— kombu—into its scientific components and tested them until he concluded that the amino acid glutamate specifically exploded and amplified the body-happy satisfaction of the overall dish. He named this fifth sense umami and patented the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate (MSG).

Since his discovery, it's been understood that foods high in glutamate (or glutamic acid) are not only particularly satisfying on their own, but they also boost the overall intensity of other ingredients. A 2012 paper in the “Journal of Oral Biosciences” explains:

Glutamate stimulates the insular cortex, limbic system, and hypothalamus in the brain, activating our autonomic reflexes and flooding us with happy feelings. Not only that, but receptors in our mouths, on our tongue, and in our gut are designed to specifically react when so hit with glutamic acid—we're built and wired to feel pleasure when an heirloom tomato, raw cheese, or perfectly manufactured seasoning product hits just right.

To be clear, however, umami transcends its Asian roots. So don't hesitate to point it out. Allure is everything.

I LIKE TO PUNCH PEOPLE IN THE MOUTH WITH FLAVOR, AND UMAMI IS THE KNUCKLES OF THAT PUNCH.

—Chef Shane Lyons, a consultant who re-energizes restaurant kitchens nationwide

DRIED MUSHROOMS

Fresh mushrooms rank high among umami-packing ingredients. Drying them further concentrates their flavor and expands the versatility of their texture. Grind dried mushrooms and use wherever you need a powerful, savory spice: as a meat or fish rub, whisked into dressings, or infused into mayo for sandwich spreads or dipping sauces. At Curate in Asheville, North Carolina, chef Katie Button relies on whole dried mushrooms to fortify her chicken stock: “It tastes like umami squared,” she promises of how charred chicken bones, caramelized alliums and the mushrooms come together when slowly simmered. That stock then becomes the cooking liquid for her rice dishes and vegetables, and the base for soups. “The richer, more umami-based your base flavor is, the better that final dish is going to come out,” she says.

KOMBU POWDER

Kombu is the umami ingredient that started it all (see umami sidebar). High in glutamate, kombu is also an excellent source of magnesium, folate and vitamin K1 and is low in sodium while tasting like the sea. Because of this mineral-packing combo, it's a superb swap for salt in general when dried and powdered. Sprinkle it in broths, rice dishes and porridges for a quick, subtle, salty boost. For fall, kombu powder adds that craveable sweet-and-salty umami to root vegetable soups, hearty roasts and barbecue dishes. And let us not forget french fries or anything fried, for that matter.

MAGGI SEASONING

Maggi is the Swiss' contribution to the world of salty seasoning sauce. Invented in 1888, the fermented wheat protein comes in liquid or dehydrated cube form, dispersing to massively boost umami (and sometimes literal MSG). While saltier and a bit funkier than soy or tamari, use similarly in soups, stews, braises, noodles and rice dishes when desiring those deep, dark, salty umami notes. But be warned;

Maggi products differ by market region, so the same seasoning sold in France tastes different than the one sold in Vietnam. With several available at international markets in the United States and via the internet, enjoy and explore which best suits your cuisine.

NUTRITIONAL YEAST

A deactivated form of yeast, this yellow flake or powder is beloved by vegetarians for its cheesy, nutty flavor and high nutrient value. Shake it over mashed potatoes, swirl it into pasta or stir it into dressings for a quick boost of can't-get-enough flavor. Lyons grew up with the “hippy, crunchy thing” of eating umami-dusted popcorn and put the snack to good use when he was the chef of Distilled in New York. “We gave out salt, sugar and umami-dusted popcorn because we understood that the more popcorn people eat, the more beer they drink—it was a way to increase the check average,” he admits. “The yeast is the umami-rich protein that causes a mouth-coating effect and a rich, meaty taste—while being vegan/vegetarian. It creates these intermittent moments of robust umami flavor that are irreplaceable for palate joy.”

TOMATOES

High in glutamic acid, sweet-and-savory tomatoes deepen with umami as they ripen, dehydrate or cook down. Diners might be familiar with tomatoes used for umami in Italian cuisine. But chef Felipe Donnelly of Colonia Verde and Disco Tacos in Brooklyn, New York, points out that they're native to South America and therefore are an essential ingredient in Mexican dishes. “The tomato brings acid and savory notes and provides that amazing meaty deliciousness,” he says of incorporating charred tomatoes into salsas, soups and stews. In his sikil pak dip, Donnelly blends the charred tomatoes with toasted pepitas, onions and peppers to “fill the dish with umami.” For fall, pair alongside root vegetable crudite or use as a sauce for roasted fish or chicken.

Umami-packed sikil pak as a spread or to complement other dishes, such as crispy celery root, opposite page.



Sikil Pak with Crispy Celery Root Steaks

Chef Felipe Donnelly
Colonia Verde and Disco Tacos, Brooklyn, New York

2 pounds celery root, peeled
Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper,
as needed
1 cup flour
1 egg, beaten
1½ cups panko
½ teaspoon ground coriander
Sikil Pak, recipe follows
½ cup lightly packed flat-leaf parsley leaves,
roughly chopped
Cotija cheese, as needed

Cut celery root into ¼-inch-thick disks and brush with olive oil, season with salt and spread onto a sheet pan to roast in a 400 F heated oven until slightly tender; cool.

Dredge each steak with flour, then egg and finally panko to fully coat. Fry in oil heated to 375 F until golden brown; drain.

To serve, layer steaks in a cascade, garnish with sikil pak, cheese and parsley. Makes 2 to 4 servings.

To make sikil pak: In a hot saute pan, dry roast 1 pint pepitas; set aside. Heat some oil in the pan and saute 1 chopped yellow onion over high heat; set aside. Blister 4 plum tomatoes and 1 habanero chili in a 450 F heated oven. Place all ingredients in a blender along with 1 scant cup oil, 1 bunch parsley, ½ cup lime juice and kosher salt to taste. Blend until smooth. Correct seasonings. Makes about 3 cups.



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Magic Dust Popcorn

Chef consultant Shane Lyons

1 cup popping corn
2 cups neutral oil
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brewer's yeast
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup nutritional yeast
1 tablespoon garlic powder
1 tablespoon cumin, toasted and ground
1½ teaspoons fine sea salt
1½ teaspoons sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons gochugaru

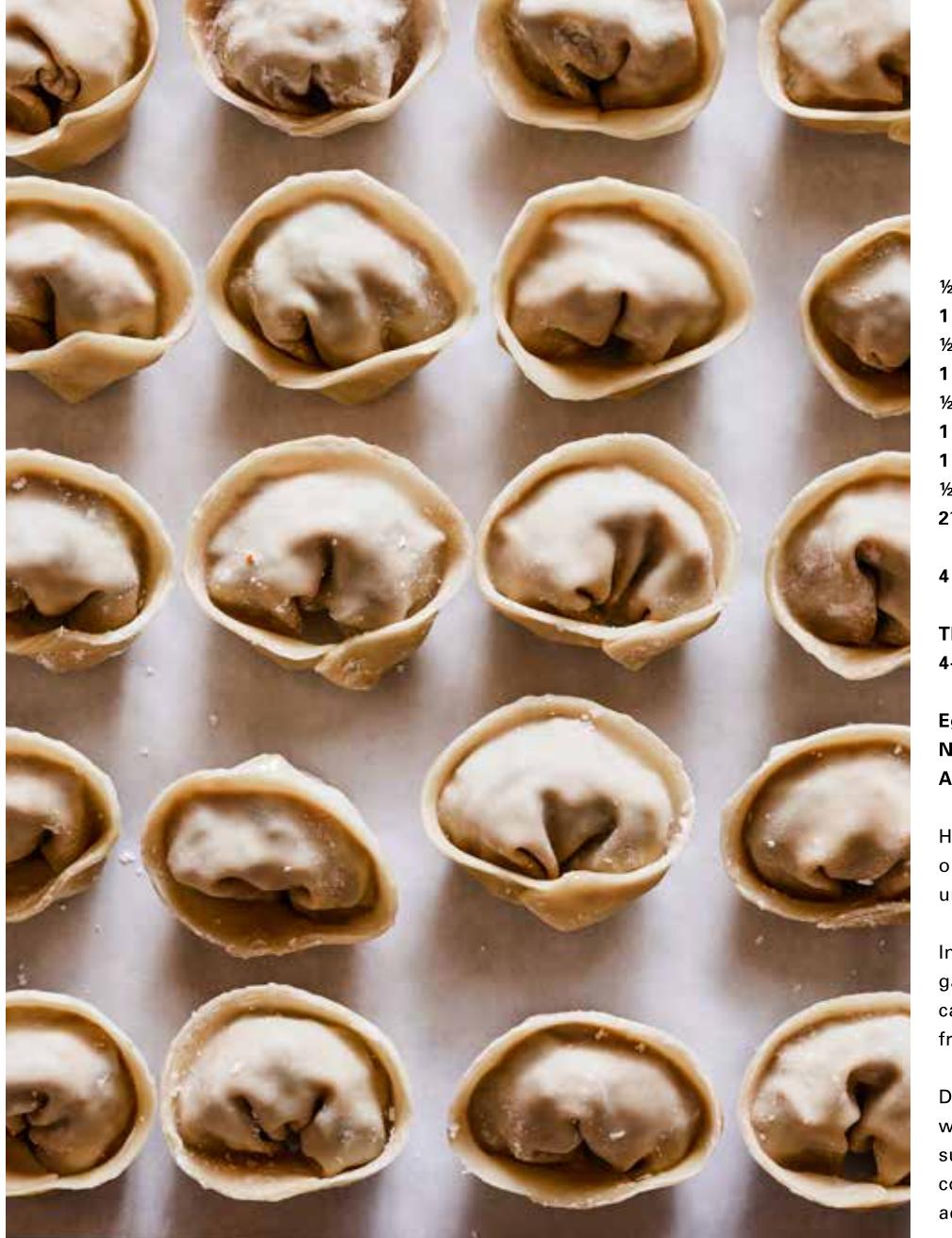
Heat the oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat and pop the corn. Pour into a wide, shallow bowl; set aside.

In a separate bowl, combine remaining ingredients and toss with the popcorn. Makes about 8 quarts.

"WE GAVE OUT SALT,
SUGAR AND UMAMI-
DUSTED (NUTRITIONAL
YEAST) POPCORN
BECAUSE WE
UNDERSTOOD THAT THE
MORE POPCORN PEOPLE
EAT, THE MORE BEER
THEY DRINK—IT WAS
A WAY TO INCREASE
THE CHECK AVERAGE."

—Consultant chef Shane Lyons,
formerly of Distilled NYC





Beef and Shiitake Mandu with Apple Black Garlic

Chef Guy Miekle

Heritage Restaurant and Bar, Chicago

1 tablespoon cumin seeds
1 star anise
1 teaspoon coriander seeds
1 teaspoon Korean chili flakes
1 teaspoon onion powder
½ teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns
½ teaspoon white pepper
2 teaspoons sesame oil
2 teaspoons garlic oil
1 large red onion, medium dice

½ cup garlic puree
1 small thumb ginger, peeled and minced
½ cup tamari
1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
½ cup water
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 tablespoon kosher salt
½ tablespoon sugar
2½ cups braised beef or lamb, diced small, your recipe
4 cups dried shiitake mushrooms, hydrated and chopped
Thai chile paste, to taste
4-inch square or round gyoza wrappers, as needed
Egg wash, as needed
Neutral oil for frying, as needed
Apple black garlic puree, recipe follows

Heat oven to 365 F. Place all the dried spices onto a sheet tray and toast for 5 minutes or until fragrant. Cool and grind.

In a large cast-iron pot, heat sesame oil and garlic oil over medium heat. Add onion and caramelize. Add garlic and ginger, sauté until fragrant; add spice blend.

Deglaze with tamari and sherry vinegar. Mix water and cornstarch and stir in. Add salt and sugar. Add beef or lamb and mushrooms and cook until heated through. Add chili paste and adjust seasonings.

To make mandu, place 2 tablespoons filling in the center of each wrapper, brush sides with egg wash, fold into a triangle and join corners; pinch close.

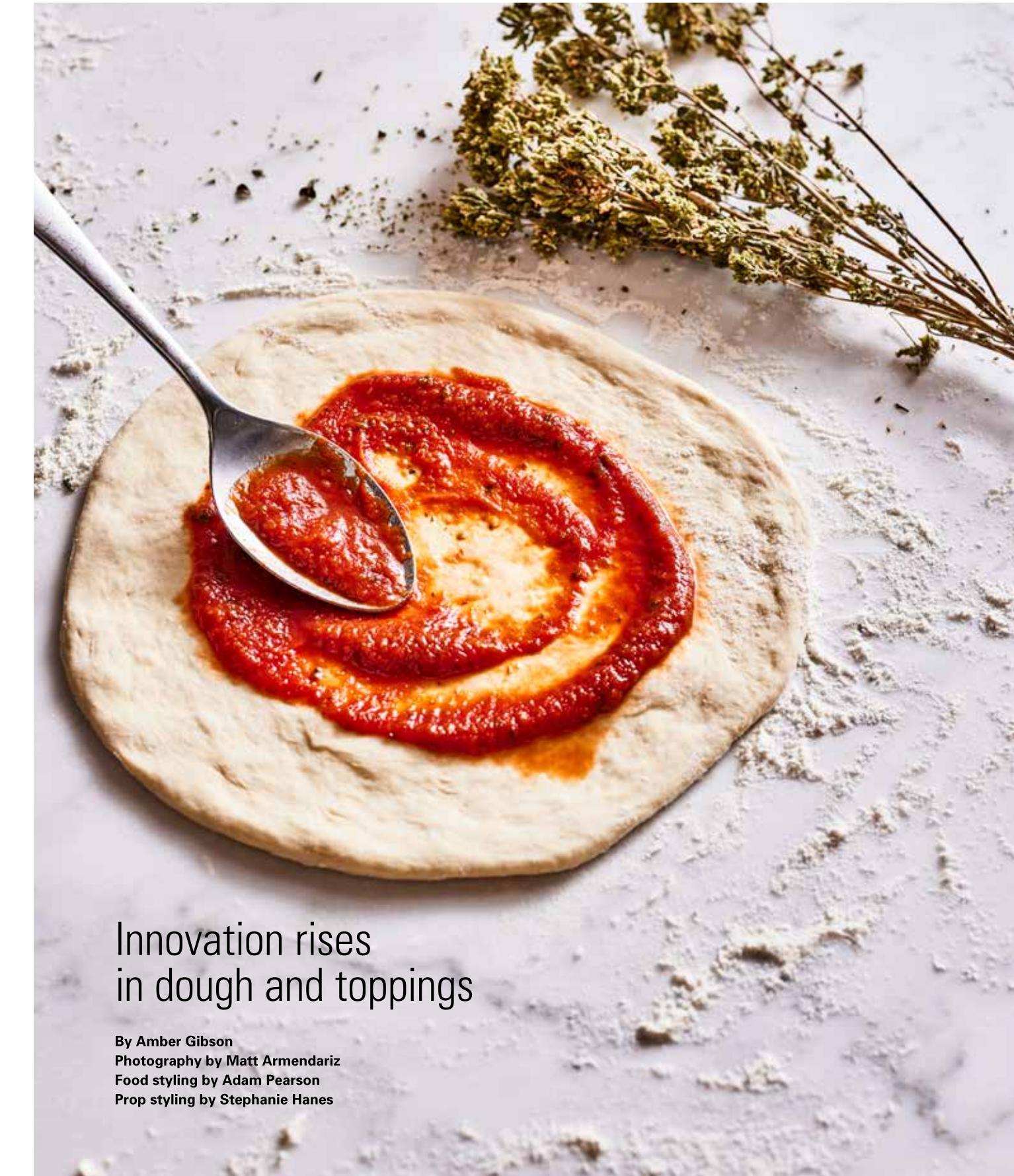
Fry in oil heated to 375 F until golden brown. Create a generous amount of apple black garlic puree on a plate, arrange 3 mandu on top and serve.

To make apple black garlic puree: Roast 2 pounds apples, peeled, cored and thickly sliced, until tender. Combine in a blender with 4 ounces black garlic, 2½ tablespoons sesame oil, and salt and black pepper to taste. Adjust with water if needed. ■



KNEAD- TO-KNOW PIZZA

A lower carbohydrate crust is differentiating the pizza category.



Innovation rises
in dough and toppings

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

When business slows or grinds to a halt, innovation doesn't stop. It kicks into overdrive. Just look at pizza.

Its low-cost foundation (flour and water) and its standing as America's favorite comfort food converged as a wake-up call to the potential of sales and profitability. As restaurants emerged from the pandemic this year, dough and pizza toppings crossed culinary borders and became more adventurous while picking up healthier and meatless options.

For many chefs, like restaurateur Marc Forgione, the youngest winner of the Food Network's "The Next Iron Chef," ideas bubbled up from experimenting at home. Other fine dining chefs from David Kinch to Wylie Dufresne opened creative new pizzerias across the country, re-imagining and refining what pizza can be.

The New 'P' In Pizza

For years, the industry has been looking for ways to innovate through the dough, from working in herbs and seasonings to stuffing the rim with crust. The innovation to date, however, is all about flavor and texture.

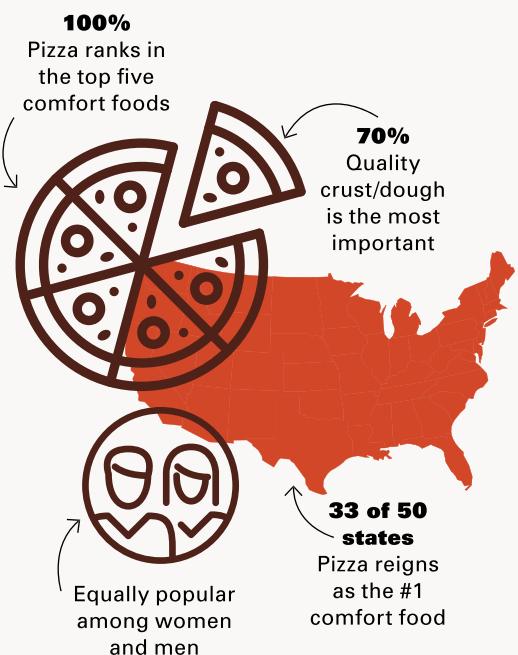
Pinsa is a lower carbohydrate crust that began picking up steam just prior to the pandemic. The dough consists of rice, soy and wheat flours—unlike its traditional counterpart, which typically uses solely wheat flour. Pinsa dough is also more hydrated at nearly 80% water and rises during a long, cold 72-hour fermentation. This process makes the pinsa dough less caloric (compared to traditional pizza dough), and easier to digest, all while yielding a light, airy pizza with a crunchy crust.

At Civico By the Park in San Diego, chef/owner Pietro Gallo uses the Di Marco flour blend imported from Italy. After a 72-hour fermentation (the dough is shaped into balls on the second day), Gallo takes the pizza balls out of the walk-in four hours before service and lets the balls rise at room temperature. Pinsa flour is extremely sensitive to humidity and change in temperature.



Chef Pietro Gallo cuts pinsa dough that cradles fior di latte cheese, rapini, Calabrian sausage and burrata.

SLICE OF LIFE



Sources: Technomic, PMQ and Treadmill.net.



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Worth the Dough

A born and bred New Yorker faithful to the city's iconic big slice, thin crust style, Forgione wanted to combine that heartiness with Neapolitan pizza, a thinner pizza, but less supportive of toppings. He made an at-home starter to experiment with bread, which led to playing with it as a pizza dough. In addition to his other restaurants, he had recently acquired restaurant, Peasant, in New York City just before the pandemic. The menu currently features a seasonal pizza from the wood-burning oven.

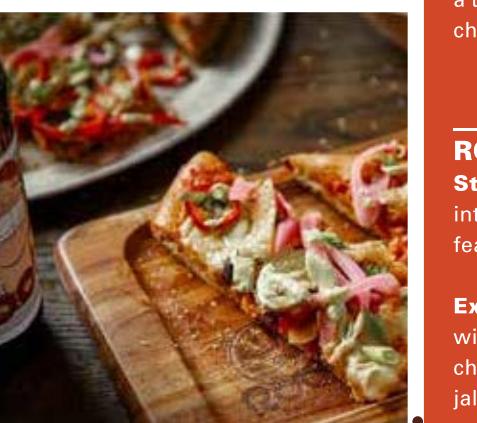
Forgione says he was already working on a pinsa dough with his legendary restaurateur and father, Larry Forgione of American Place. The younger Forgione incorporated the sourdough to the pinsa and introduced it when Peasant reopened over the summer. It features the sourdough starter, olive oil, salt and the ancient grains rice, soy and wheat flours.

The result, he says, is a crust that's crispy, light and flavorful in addition to adequately supporting toppings without flopping like Neapolitan pizza.

Topping It Off

Chef Jason Neroni first encountered Tokyo-style pizza last year at Savoy, the Italian restaurant in Japan. Most memorable was a bluefin tuna and corn puree pizza topped with grated wasabi, which inspired him to begin experimenting more with Asian ingredients atop his pizzas back home at The Rose in Venice, California. His newest creation and current bestseller is the over-the-top Godzilla, a pizza in the style of okonomiyaki with green garlic sausage, pepperoni and bacon flavored with oyster sauce, miso aioli and finished with a shower of bonito flakes.

"I've always had a proclivity for Asian flavors and cooking Italian food so why not mash them together?" he says. While the pizza he tried in Japan was similar to a Neapolitan-style dough, Neroni prefers more structure to his pizza so he adds baker's flour for a sturdier texture, which holds up to heartier toppings.



STRETCHING CREATIVITY

The latest on pizza

MOTO, SEATTLE

Style: Square-shaped Detroit from chef Lee Kindell's Filipino background. Takeout-only concept opened in February that's sold out months in advance, turning out only 150 Detroit-style pies a night.

Examples: Dungeness crab with butter, dill, thyme and lemon; and lechon kawali (Filipino pork belly) with Sriracha sausage, calamansi, pineapple chimichurri and sweet liver sauce.

STRETCH PIZZA FROM BREADS BAKERY, NEW YORK

Style: Modernist chef Wylie Dufresne of WD-50 taught himself how to make pizza during the pandemic after rediscovering a pizza oven in his basement. He teamed up with longtime friend Jean-George Vongerichten to open Stretch, an indefinite popup at Breads Bakery that sells only takeout by reservation.

Examples: Everything Bagel Pizza with a thin layer of cream cheese, mozzarella, chives and everything bagel spice.

ROOTS, CHICAGO

Style: Quad-cities style pizza (round, cut into squares) created a collaborative series featuring the styles of local chefs.

Examples: Korean fried chicken pizza with kimchi and smoked Gouda and a chili cheese curd pizza topped with pickled jalapenos, chorizo chili and tortilla strips.

Japanese pies inspired big eye tuna on pizza at The Rose Venice.



From Boxcar
Pizza, top: Oh
Baby I like it Slaw
with barbecue
sauce and
jackfruit.

From Vitalist
Food, left:
Mediterranean:
paleo pizza
cracker topped
with red pepper
harissa hummus,
cucumbers, sun-
dried tomato,
mint, parsley,
tomato, harissa
sesame spice and
green hummus.

Also, macadamia
mushroom pizza
cracker with mac
and cheese sauce,
mushrooms,
zucchini, basil,
sun-dried tomato
and pesto.



"I don't like doughy pizzas and I firmly believe that you should be able to pick a pizza up and eat it without the ingredients falling off," he says. He's still working on the dough for his forthcoming pizzeria, which will be themed like a Tokyo pizzeria with neon rock 'n' roll vibes.

Gallo also has his share of untraditional toppings on his pinsa. For the Mortazza pinsa, he begins with a fior di latte base and a pistachio emulsion. It's then topped with mortadella and crunchy pistachios for contrast and texture. Vegan pinsa is also represented: creamy rice mozzarella and vegan prosciutto made from legume flour that's imported from Italy.

Pie For All Palates

Gluten-free and paleo options are increasingly the norm, often playing off of the strength of ingredients and venturing beyond a low-carb or gluten-free crust.

Vitalist Food in Santa Monica offers a paleo pizza crust topped with pesto and a cashew sauce drizzle, one of its most popular menu items. Boxcar Pizza in Portland, Oregon, specializes in vegan Detroit-style pizza with hearty toppings like marinated seitan steak, Nashville hot fried "chicken" and housemade tofu blue cheese.

Housemade cashew mozzarella has led Purgatory in Los Angeles to hone in on the crowd reducing dairy as a lifestyle choice. The menu features combinations such as housemade barbecue sauce, braised jackfruit, red onion and grilled pineapple as well as buffalo cream sauce, marinated cauliflower, red onion, scallions and red pepper flakes as well as a version with a garlic and olive oil base, almond ricotta, sesame seed crust, black pepper and almond parmesan.

"What we've noticed is that people just want healthier and they want their pizza," says Alex Koons who, works on the Purgatory menu. "We can satisfy both." ■



+113% growth
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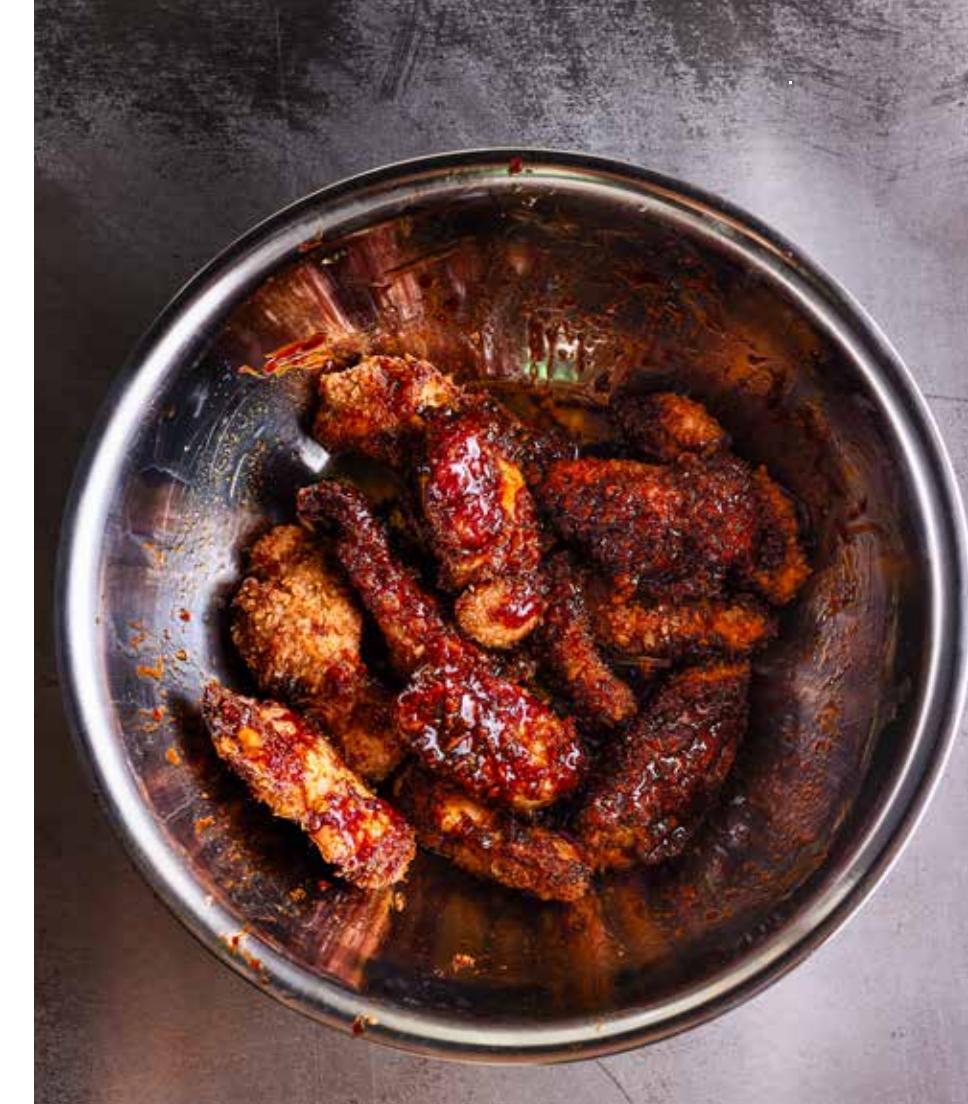
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LAUNCHING A
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THAT SATISFIES
WING EATERS AND
THE POSSIBILITY
OF BECOMING A
SOUGHT-AFTER ITEM
IS THE GOAL

— Thighstop

Heihei Moa "Wings"

Adapted from Salty Cargo, Austin, Texas

2 cups water
¼ cup sake or mirin
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon salt
2 garlic cloves, zested
1 small knob peeled ginger, zested
2 pounds chicken thighs, cut into rectangular thick strips, about 2- to 3-inches

¾ cup rendered pork fat or unsalted butter
½ cup soy sauce

1 tablespoon sugar
2 cups panko

Neutral oil, as needed for frying
Green onion, chopped, as needed

Cilantro, leaves chopped, as needed

Toasted sesame seeds

Combine water, mirin, sugar, salt, garlic and ginger with the chicken and allow to brine for at least a few hours. Meanwhile, heat soy with fat/butter and sugar and simmer until syrupy.

Drain chicken, dredge with panko, ensuring pieces are well coated and fry in 350 F oil until cooked and crispy. Toss with pork fat soy.

Serve as-is or over steamed rice garnished with green onion, cilantro and sesame seeds. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

The wing shortage

that's hampering availability and driving up costs couldn't happen at a worse time as the most popular sellers—sports bars, casual concepts with giant televisions—enter an in-person fall game season for the first time since 2019.

To keep profitability up and diners happy, concepts are recreating the experience: nailing the deep-fried, crispy, fatty skin-to-meat-to-sauce ratio that makes eating wings with beer and cocktails so incredibly satisfying. In other cases, it's simply relying on the craveability of fried food and matching wing replacement with explosive flavor or renditions that scrap chicken altogether.

Mauro Cruz, who opened brick-and-mortar restaurant Chef Smokey's in the Atlanta area earlier this year after a successful 2020 pandemic pop-up serving

birria tacos, is up front with guests. He suggests alternatives.

Thanks to the pop-up, Cruz has become accustomed to communicating with his 21,000 followers on Instagram, which allows him to reach his audience fast and to set expectations. In April, a post read: "Due to the chicken wing shortage, we have started selling boneless wings! Come by and try out all of our favorite flavors and watch the new soccer channels we added!"

Sauces for wings that he now uses for the boneless ones aren't uber creative—barbecue, mango habanero and teriyaki—but they are solid. Feedback from customers are thumbs up, telling him he's on track.

Launching a replacement that satisfies wing eaters and the possibility of becoming a sought-after item is the goal



Red Zoug

Bavel, Los Angeles

1 cup grapeseed oil
2 large red bell peppers, stemmed and seeded,
 cut into 8 pieces
8 Fresno chiles,* stemmed, seeded and halved
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon ground paprika
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
1 teaspoon ground green cardamom
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
2 teaspoons kosher salt
3 garlic cloves, grated
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon freshly
 squeezed lemon juice
2 tablespoons cilantro leaves, packed
 and chopped

Add the oil to a large saute pan and place on the stove over high heat. Once the oil is hot, add the bell peppers and chilies and fry while continuously stirring for about 10 minutes, until the peppers start to blister and darken in color. If at any time the peppers start to burn, decrease the heat slightly. Remove the peppers and chilies from the oil, set aside, and let cool.

Add the cooled fried peppers and chilies and the paprika, turmeric, cloves, cardamom, cumin, salt, garlic and lemon juice to a food processor and blend, stopping to scrape down the sides of the bowl with a spatula when necessary, until the mixture is the consistency of a chunky puree, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and set aside to cool, then add the cilantro and stir to combine. Makes 1 cup.

Adapted from "Bavel: Modern Recipes inspired by the Middle East," by Ori Menashe and Genevieve Gergis.

Bok A Bok Chicken sauces range from left to right: Four alarm; spiced honey and garlic; jalapeno powder; Chinese honey mustard; sea salt & vinegar; fish sauce caramel; coconut brown butter and 4-chili hot sauce.



Vegan Thai Basil Ranch

1 cup vegan mayonnaise
1/2 cup creamy soy milk
2 tablespoons shallot, minced
2 tablespoons Thai basil, chopped
2 tablespoons chives, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons lemon juice or white
 wine vinegar
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 tablespoons almond yogurt
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black
 pepper, to taste
1/4 teaspoon chili flakes
Honey, as needed

Combine all ingredients in a blender.
 Adjust seasonings for balance. Makes about 2 cups.

Kimchi Cheese Sauce

Bok A Bok Chicken, Seattle and Burien, Washington

1 cup milk
1/2 cup cabbage kimchi plus **1/4 cup** kimchi
 juice, store bought
1/4 cup Korean chili powder
1/4 cup gochujang
1 tablespoon sodium citrate, or substitute
1 teaspoon granulated garlic
1 teaspoon granulated onion
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
2 cups cheddar, shredded

Combine milk, kimchi, kimchi juice, chili powder, gochujang, sodium citrate, garlic, onion, salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water in a small pot and bring to simmer over medium heat.

Add cheddar gradually, whisking until melted and smooth. Chill or use immediately.

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The fried chicken at Jeju in New York City.



of Thighstop, an online-only effort by the Wingstop chain, making it the largest ghost kitchen in the country. Over the summer, Thighstop recently began selling crispy bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs and boneless thighs (think nuggets) in the style of its wings replete with the option of its 11 sauces for the same price through a dedicated site and third-party Doordash. Wingstop's 1,440-plus locations worldwide are fulfilling the orders.

"The demand for thighs and dark meat is not as high as white meat and wings but we believe that younger generations are more accustomed to and more welcoming of the meat's juicier and more flavorful attributes," says Wingstop spokesperson Megan Sprague. "Plus, our sauces that have helped build our brand have a very strong and loyal following."

In other words, if a protein fried in fat is righteously seasoned and/or accompanied by a bold sauce that contrasts and complements, a winner is highly likely. Take a look at the following concepts known for wings, some of which have already gone boneless.

Bok A Bok, Seattle

If wings become unavailable or price prohibitive, the menu structure gives customers plenty of options at this five-unit fast casual by offering "brined, battered, twice-fried chicken plus sauce" for thighs, wings and chicken strips. Each choice can be customized with five possible "dry" wing seasonings, such as a smoky barbecue rub; coconut brown butter powder with toasted coconut; and four-alarm Carolina reaper chili powder and spice mix that's accompanied by a carton of milk. Or customers can opt for "wet" wings tossed with the choice of four sauces including fish sauce caramel; spiced honey garlic or jalapeno cheddar. An additional seven sauces, from sesame miso vinaigrette and ginger aioli to umami barbecue sauce and kimchi cheese sauce, can be purchased for 65 cents each.

Jeju Noodle Bar, New York

This \$15 signature at chef Douglas Kim's Michelin-star West Village Korean concept typically features five marinated crispy-fried wings tossed in umami salt and served with a deeply satisfying gochujang sauce and seasonal crudites. But as a result of the shortage, a two-piece fried chicken appetizer (thigh and leg) is standing in at \$29. It's dusted with onion powder and accompanied by a yogurt dip and caviar.

Diners are ordering the parts and if the replacement continues to sell, Jeju may have a new signature on its hands. And the wings? No decision as of press time.

Sauced Tap Room and Kitchen, Cleveland

The Monday night five whole wings for \$5 promotion might need to be curtailed to meet any supply chain constraints, but the restaurant is in good shape to pivot. Owners Brent Pease and Geoff Mathias offer vegan chicken bites and boneless wings, which can easily step up and can be accompanied by any of the 16 prep method/wing sauces, such as cereal crust, Mountain Dew margarita or Nashville hot. If the price is right, they could also try smaller drumsticks as an alternative.

ICYMI

Chicken wing attributes, from its satisfying meat to fatty, crispy-skin ratio to its portability and myriad sauces and seasonings that cross culinary borders, kept the appetizer in higher than usual demand during the pandemic.

But then came labor and supply chain issues followed by a storm earlier this year in Texas that devastated the chicken population. Prices for all chicken parts have been impacted but nothing like the shortages in the wing category. As simple as it sounds, remind your customers that each bird only has two wings, a fact that always makes them laugh, operators say.

While that explanation may fail to alleviate dismay among all guests, perhaps knowing when their favorite food will be in ample supply again might. As supply chain issues are ironed out, chicken wing availability will remain constrained until the end of the year, according to the National Chicken Council, but that relief will come eventually.



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The restaurant promotes its 50 beers on tap to pair with food built on the belief that deliciousness goes hand-in-hand with suds. While they have a loyal wing following, a menu with a wide array of on-trend favorites, from bowls and pizzas to plant-based options and empanadas, will help allay any no-wing disappointment. It also challenges staff to hone their selling skills and allows for any undiscovered menu items to surface as favorites.

Spicy Boys, Austin, Texas

Owner Teddy Bricker and chef Dillon Misonznick also are aware of the undeniable fried chicken and beer attraction, setting up shop outside of Zilker Brewing earlier this year to offer chicken, wings and sides. They're available with seven sauces, from Korean buffalo to citrus miso, but they can also be paired with boneless wings and cauliflower bites.

Misonznick is well aware that fried anything isn't always the answer but they can stand in when wings aren't available, and the cauliflower appeals to non-meat-eaters. ■

Cauliflower Vegan Bites

Inspired by Spicy Boys, Austin, Texas

1 cup flour
1 cup rice flour or cornstarch
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 cup cold sparkling water, as needed
1 head cauliflower, cored and separated into nugget-like florets
Neutral-flavored oil, as needed
Green onion, chopped, for garnish
Lime wedges, for garnish

Combine dry ingredients and slowly whisk in water to desired consistency.

Dip florets into the batter and fry in oil heated to 350 F to 375 F until golden brown; drain. Sprinkle with green onion and serve with a lime wedge. Makes 4 to 6 servings.



COLD BEERS



for **HOT FLAVORS**

Beer styles
that match
complex
menus for a
sum greater
than its parts

By Kate Bernot

The American palate has never been more diverse, which means even comfort food needs to up its game.

To keep pace, burgers are not just draped with cheese but topped with spicy kimchi; french fries are sprinkled with furikake and served with smoky aioli; and roasted cauliflower bites provide a flavorful, plant-based bar snack when dipped in a side of muhammara.

For beer drinkers, such big and bold flavors demand thoughtful pairings. To ensure beers' nuances don't get lost amid the complexity—or worse, clash with assertive flavors—beverage programs need to carefully consider all facets of a beer, including not just flavor and aroma but body and carbonation.

"I would argue beer is more versatile than wine, which I know is a bold statement," says Jen Blair, beer quality and education manager at Orpheus Brewing in Atlanta. "But you have more ingredients in beer and within those ingredients, different varieties, so there are all sorts of components that you can mix and match and seek out to complement food."

Blair is an advanced cicerone, a title that designates an expert hospitality professional with proven experience in selecting, acquiring and serving a wide range of beers. She's seen firsthand that today's savvy customers expect more from beer menus than the same five tap handles they could find in an airport bar.

"There is demand out there from customers who are just as knowledgeable and passionate about beer as others are about wine, cocktails and spirits," Blair says.

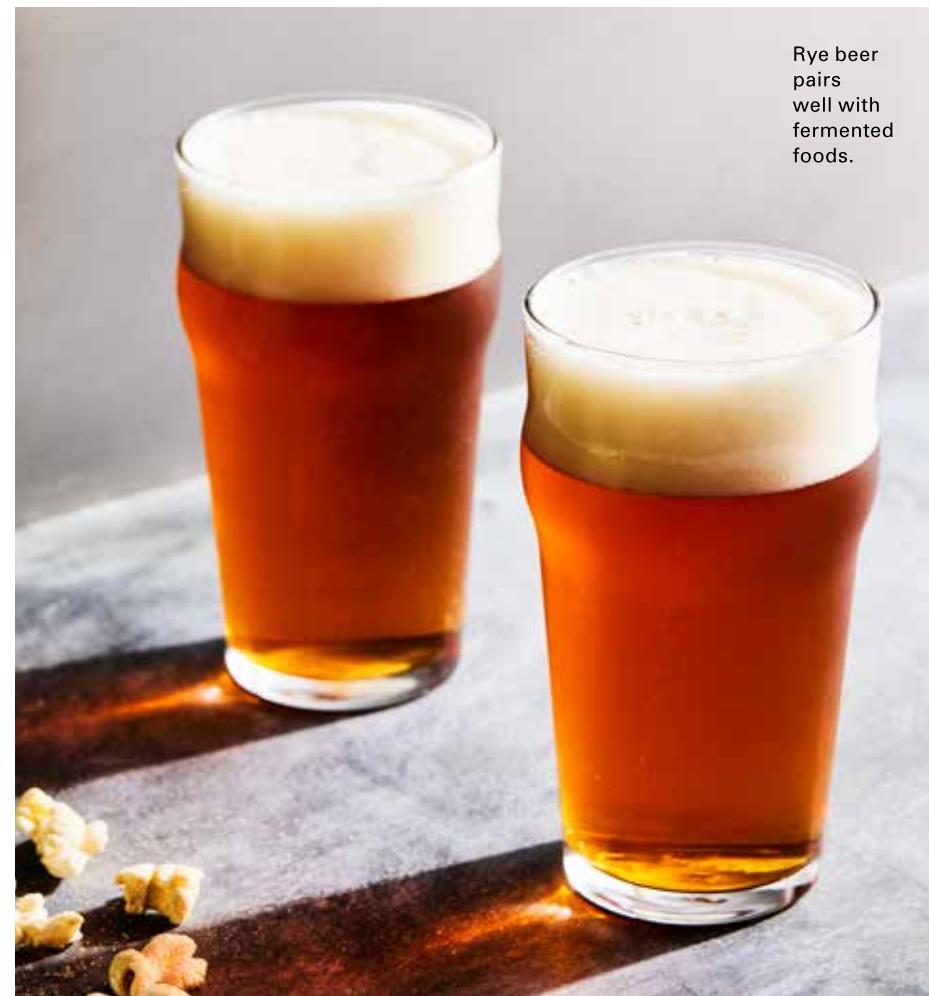
How to make sense of today's myriad beer styles and menu flavors? Turn the page for a cheat sheet and get to pairing.

TYPE OF BEER: Dark lager

BEST WITH: Roasted root vegetables, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, sausage

WHY: Dark lagers' color comes from their kilned malts, which impart toasty, biscuity or roasty flavors, all thanks to the same Maillard reaction that caramelizes vegetables and meats. Their clean fermentation profiles mean the beer's flavor doesn't linger after the sip, leaving drinkers refreshed.

EXAMPLES: Whether Czech or German in origin, dark lagers deliver rich malt flavors without the heavy texture of a stout. Pair a dark Mexican lager to enhance the char on roasted cauliflower tacos, or a German schwarzbiere to temper the heat of Thai sausage or chorizo.



TYPE OF BEER: Fruited gose

BEST WITH: Funky cheeses, rich breakfasts, barbecue

WHY: Goses' high carbonation, gentle acidity and delicate salinity make them function almost like Assyrtiko or Vermentino wines. Add fruit to the mix—a growing trend in craft beer—and you have a bright, quenching pairing that cuts through fatty food.

EXAMPLES: Fruit in these beers can amplify already existing flavors, or can introduce new, complementary layers. At brunch, suggest a raspberry gose with mascarpone French toast. Later in the day, a watermelon gose is an all-American classic alongside barbecue ribs.

TYPE OF BEER: Rye beer

BEST WITH: Fermented foods, Scandinavian fare, smoked fish

WHY: Beers brewed with rye—usually IPAs, pale ales or stouts—use the same grain as rye breads and crackers. Foods that taste great on a slice of rye bread also benefit from rye beers' earthiness and hint of spice.

EXAMPLES: Try rye beers with kimchi, fish cakes with remoulade, creamy seafood dips and dishes that include pickled vegetables or sauerkraut garnishes. A rye beer alongside smoked fish adds layers of spice and malt intrigue.

TYPE OF BEER: American IPA

BEST WITH: Thai food or flavors, Hawaiian-style meats, blue cheese, hearty greens

WHY: IPA is the most popular style of craft beer in the U.S., thanks to drinkers' affinity for hops. Hop varieties vary widely and can impart flavors that range from tealike and herbal to tropical and fruity to grapefruit and pithy—even vinous and melony. Most IPAs are strong enough to stand up to assertive spices and sulfurous vegetables.

EXAMPLES: Given their variety, it's important to consider a particular IPA's characteristics when pairing. A clean, citrus or fruit-forward IPA would enhance the tang of pad Thai (but be cognizant of its bitterness levels, as bitterness enhances capsaicin heat). On the earthier side, an IPA with an herbal, chive-like hop profile might dovetail with rich fall salads of Brussels sprouts or kale. A New England or hazy IPA with tropical hop flavors makes sense alongside Hawaiian pork.



TYPE OF BEER: Witbier

BEST WITH: Middle Eastern and Mediterranean appetizers, light salads, seafood

WHY: Witbier's citrus and coriander notes sync with bright herbs, earthy spice and lemon. High carbonation, a light body and a moderate alcohol content allow it to function as an aperitif.

EXAMPLES: Witbier is exceedingly versatile with both delicate dishes and those with a blend of complex spices; paired with herb-flecked seafood like mussels or crusted salmon, it's an instant palate refresher. Other Belgian styles such as saison and tripel share many of witbier's same characteristics but with elevated alcohol content. ■

TRENDS TRACKER



ON THE RADAR



The Next Big Social Media Channel?

Third-party food apps watch your back. Focused on expansion and gaining traction, Snackpass is an online ordering platform developed by and for college students with a Venmo-type functionality ("People, look at what I just ordered!"). A recent \$70 million raise, including investment from Postmates founder Bastian Lehmann, has world domination written all over it.



Play Chicken.

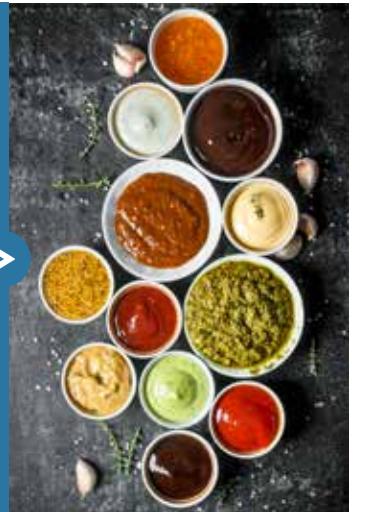
The crispy-fried chicken sandwich has become as iconic as the burger but don't think of it as an either or option. They can coexist as money-makers. See page 72.

SMELLING LIKE A ROSE.

Inspired by the pink English Isphahan rose, famed pastry chef Pierre Hermé's '90s dessert is turning on a new generation of mixologists and pastry chefs. Kinda hard to resist Isphahan's sweet, floral, fruity and lychee notes in cocktails and desserts.



HIGH ALERT



FADING OUT

On Demand.

Just because customers want wings doesn't mean they'll get them or will pay the higher costs. Accept that the supply chain will be wonky at least until the end of the year.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Get creative with sauces to pair with boneless and plant-based wings. See page 30.

FAKE GUESTS.

...

Maybe it was novel and fun when restaurants filled seats with mannequins, but now it's just downright creepy.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** If labor is the reason indoor dining remains closed, change the format to self-serve until more staff can be hired.

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS.

...

Pairing up with a brand—whether it's a product or another concept—has never been more beneficial to both parties. See story on page 54.



Just Can't Get Enough.

Our love for Japanese cuisine is seemingly insatiable. Of the moment: *washoku*. This simple concept—harmoniously blending nutrition and presentation—focuses on a healthy, seasonal and balanced approach with plenty of umami (see story, page 12).

LAST SEEN: Restaurateur Philip Camino recently opened Imari in Los Angeles with chef David Schlosser's interpretation of traditional Japanese fare heavy on seafood and vegetables.



A ghost kitchen doesn't make you invisible.

Just because there's no direct customer contact with online-only concepts, good service and satisfaction are still important for everyone.

► **LAST SEEN:** The Italian chain Fazoli's offers drivers unlimited free bread sticks.



Wait and See.

Developing additional revenue streams is more important than ever. Stop thinking, start doing.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Extend your brand with a virtual kitchen, prepared meals or ingredients to-go. Even actor and Goop founder Gwyneth Paltrow is doing it, launching Goop Kitchen, a virtual, delivery-only concept in Los Angeles.

While you may not want a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with a 12-month shelf life, the recently launched Canwich (pizza pockets and a barbecue chicken sandwich) are to follow) dispensed from a vending machine like the Farmer's Fridge, says one thing to chefs who should extend their brand: anything is possible.



Wait and See.

Developing additional revenue streams is more important than ever. Stop thinking, start doing.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Extend your brand with a virtual kitchen, prepared meals or ingredients to-go. Even actor and Goop founder Gwyneth Paltrow is doing it, launching Goop Kitchen, a virtual, delivery-only concept in Los Angeles.

SUPER PRO CONDIMENTS

Ready for any menu challenge

Photography by Sean T. McGill

US Foods



Vanilla and the tang from cream cheese adds complexity to pound cake French toast.



Certain condiments are so solid, they could score in numerous ways, yet they often don't. That's changing as chefs recognize their potential for diversifying the menu and solving operational issues.

Take strongholds like ketchup for fries and burgers, mayonnaise for sandwiches and cream cheese for bagels. As a base for innovation, they add excitement to menus for all concepts while easing labor, controlling inventory and side-stepping supply chain constraints.

"When you don't have the staff that you need, you must be more innovative with SKUs (stock keeping unit)," says Jim Messinger, a chef and graduate of the Culinary Institute of America who has owned restaurants and worked with multi-unit restaurants developing menus.

By using traditional condiments as a foundation, chefs can explore and capitalize on trends to build more complex flavors. Better yet, the familiarity of core condiments comes with a trust level among diners so that operators can innovate and appeal to all palates, adventuresome or not. Some ideas:

▼ KETCHUP

The tomato in this favorite condiment gives it an edge: It packs umami, the savory fifth sense that amps up flavors.

Messinger recommends ketchup as the base for developing a house sauce that can be used for just about any protein, from ribs and chops to shrimp and chicken as well as sturdy vegetables such as whole roasted cauliflower, squash steaks or beefy portobello mushrooms.

The flavor directions are seemingly endless and can amplify any cuisine, American or global. To get it right, Messinger recommends following a matrix (see sidebar on page 48). Start with four parts ketchup, one part sweet, one part acidic and one part contrasting flavor or seasoning. For example, ketchup, *sanonto* (Japanese brown sugar), mirin, rice vinegar and *shichimi togarashi*, a chili seasoning for a sauce with an Asian spin. Or ketchup, figs, vinegar and harissa for a spicy, botanical Middle Eastern take.

"You can really jump around and have fun with it," says Messinger, who works with operators on menu development through his role with Kraft Heinz as culinary expert.

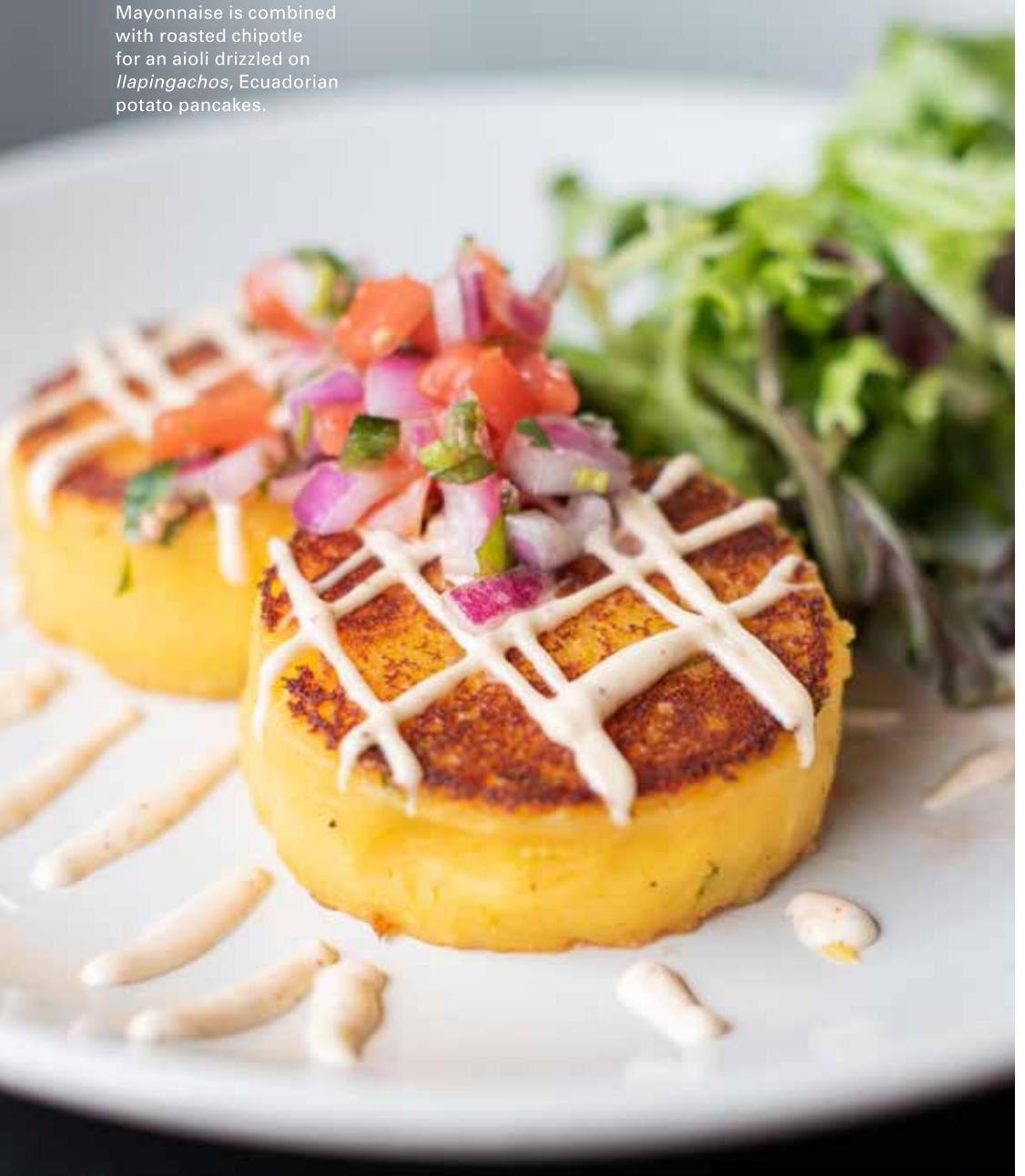
▼ CREAM CHEESE

The condiment that's synonymous with bagels has arguably been underutilized as an ingredient. For chefs, particularly pastry chefs and loyalists of PHILADELPHIA® cream cheese (which enjoys 99% brand awareness among consumers, according to food research firm Datassential), the product is indispensable for its creaminess and signature tang from fermentation. It doesn't break sauces and adds chew to ice cream, for example.

Such attributes are ideal for rounding out sauces when more personality than butter is needed, making it easy to stir into any pasta sauce, dip or filling, says Holly Johnson, head of culinary for foodservice at Kraft Heinz.

"With a brand as well known and beloved as PHILADELPHIA®, it makes sense to call it out on the menu," Johnson says. "But in so many applications where

Mayonnaise is combined with roasted chipotle for an aioli drizzled on *llapingachos*, Ecuadorian potato pancakes.



99% Brand awareness of PHILADELPHIA® Cream Cheese, America's No. 1 branded foodservice cream cheese, according to NPD.

To leverage consumers' love of PHILADELPHIA® cream cheese on your menu, contact your local Kraft Heinz sales representative or visit kraftheinz-foodservice.com.

it's not visible, you can use it as a tool for building flavor in the background. It's a tool in your tool belt and your business of cooking."

At the two-location Savanna in Chicago, vanilla-infused cream cheese tops grilled pound cake French toast, strawberry

compote and a balsamic reduction. It also accompanies blueberry banana crepes.

The cream cheese adds another dimension to the flavor profile of both breakfast options, bringing all the components together in a crescendo of something extra special. ■

Getting Sauced

Ketchup can be the base for barbecue sauce but it's also a solid start for a sauce or finishing ingredient. Some possibilities:

KETCHUP: 4 parts
SWEET: 1 part honey, molasses, mirin, rock sugar, dried figs or dates
ACIDIC: 1 part citrus (any kind with zest), passion fruit, rice vinegar, cane vinegar, black lime or yogurt
SEASONING: 1 part liquor (bourbon or dark tequila), chiles (any kind) smoked paprika, sumac, garam masala, herbs (fresh or dried)

MAYONNAISE

The mix of eggs, oil and acid make this condiment a strong base that crosses borders for any sauce or dip by incorporating indigenous spice. Aioli works the same way for hot and cold applications. Powered by garlic, aioli has become ubiquitous, but it can go further as a spread and finishing sauce with the help of contrasting heat or a punch of flavor.

Mayonnaise is the base for chipotle aioli that complements a variety of dishes at Savanna, such as the turkey burger and *llapingachos*, Ecuadorean potato pancakes.

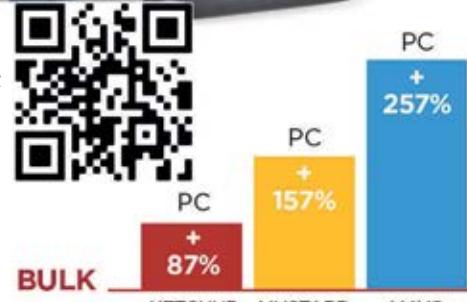
At the Clam in Manhattan, harissa aioli accents crispy skate wing with pea shoots and radish while Meyer lemon aioli and pepper cress is served with lobster arancini. Masala aioli can be found in sandwiches at American Tandoor in Tysons, Virginia, while lemon habanero aioli accompanies jerk chicken lettuce wraps at San Pedro Cafe in Hudson, Wisconsin.

"Really, it's limitless," Messinger says. "Once you have a matrix for any base ingredient, you can be innovative, control costs and inventory, and keep customers coming back for more." ■

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Portion Control Costs More

Per Pound Premium for PC Condiments (NPD, 11/2020)¹



5:1

Just one 1.5oz ramekin provides the same amount of ketchup as five 9g sachets²



POTENTIAL

.49¢

**PER SERVING
FOOD COST SAVINGS**
by switching from PC to
bulk condiments³

¹NPD SupplyTrack: Manufacturer branded bulk formats vs. PC in restaurants with fewer than 20 outlets (6 months ending 10/2020)

²Comparison of HEINZ Ketchup 1.5 gal dispenser pack with biodegradable paper ramekin vs. HEINZ Ketchup 9g sachet

³Based on Bulk vs. PC per-pound price differential for national brands; assuming 1.5oz of ketchup, mayonnaise, and mustard per serving; NPD SupplyTrack, October 2020

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THE SMARTER WAY
TO LTO



Make bank with limited-time-only 2.0

By Amber Gibson

The old school practice of limited-time menu offerings is enjoying newfound practice and popularity.

To out-maneuver supply chain bottlenecks from the pandemic, chefs and restaurateurs are forging ahead with menus that change weekly. They're promoting these new offerings on social media and email newsletters to a fan base of regular diners, driving repeat traffic and staying top of mind. The menus are also smaller and easier to execute, a change that is also easing the labor crunch.

"People don't travel like they used to, so we're making a bigger appeal to locals for the moment," says James Beard Award-winning chef Vitaly Paley of Portland, Oregon. "They're loyal locals, but they can only eat the same thing so many times. It became apparent to us that we needed to get creative."

At his eponymous restaurant Paley's Place—the only one of four that he's keeping open—Paley offers a three-course, themed prix fixe menu that completely changes every three weeks with three choices per course. Contemporary Japanese restaurant Mifune in Manhattan also has nixed its tasting menu for a daily changing omakase menu, which has been easier to execute with a smaller team.

No matter the concept, operators are finding more than ever that balancing creativity with running a business and staying nimble is both an art and a science that fits the LTO approach. Here are ways it's positively impacting the business.

Improves Inventory

"I write the menu pretty vaguely so we can take advantage of what comes in," Paley says. He often doesn't know exactly what his long-standing local farm partners have sent

until he opens the box. Using a phrase like "local vegetables" on the menu allows for flexibility to complement menu items with whatever is stocked in the walk-in.

At Mifune, co-executive chefs Yuu Shimano and Tomohiro Urata visit farmers markets daily to select ingredients for the days' meals, which add up to a win for them and the diner.

"We decided on the omakase tasting menu to avoid food waste and cut labor costs," Urata says. "The omakase format affords our chefs the ability to change the menu daily and create a different experience for each customer's visit."

At fast casual Fields Good Chicken, LTOs can help with inventory, create FOMO and reinforce the brand. For example, a limited number of tacos at each of its five Manhattan locations use rotisserie chicken from the previous service that's pulled and simmered in achiote sauce and served on locally sourced corn tortillas with housemade guacamole, cotija cheese, onions and cilantro. The tacos were created to reduce food waste daily. The zero-waste tacos are also carbon neutral because Fields purchases carbon credits to offset the environmental impact of the tacos.

Make Pricing Holistic

Paley approaches pricing from a blended cost perspective, basing the price of the three-course prix fixe on the choice of entree. A recent menu ranged from \$75 for a 6-ounce salmon fillet or smoked pork porterhouse to \$85 for a 10-ounce salmon bone-in steak or 10-ounce dry-aged pepper-crusted prime rib.

"That gives us a nice cushion to make sure that the pricing structure works," he says. "I stopped zeroing in on particular dishes. At the end of the month, we reconcile and adjust accordingly."

Mifune's eight-course tasting menu is priced at \$125 with an optional \$40 upgrade for premium ingredients like Japanese wagyu beef or Hokkaido uni.



PHOTOGRAPH © LOCAL HAVEN

One Restaurant's LTO Journey

"Tuesday every week, we sit down and recap the week prior, plan for the week upcoming (and) if there are any product changes. One Tuesday out of every menu cycle, all of us come to the table with ideas and hammer them out. I take home those ideas, put my thinking hat on, and put it all together. We always have three different appetizers and three different main courses. Two desserts stay on the menu and one is seasonal. Flourless chocolate cake and creme brulee are always on. Right now with cherry season, it's cherry pie. Not too fancy but delicious. We have another section of the menu that's Paley's favorites: steak and fries, burger, charcuterie/cheese plate. If somebody doesn't feel like a 3-course meal, they can have a nice little semblance of things."

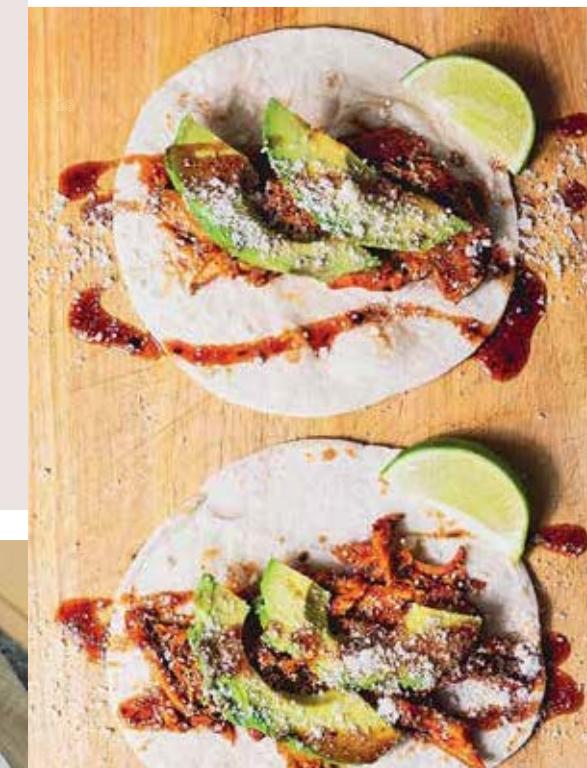
—Vitaly Paley of Paley's Place on his LTO menu approach



A limited number of Fields Good Chicken's chicken based tacos are available daily, above. The omakase format at Mifune, left, takes an LTO approach.

That pricing is in line with tasting menus at other New York fine dining restaurants serving contemporary Asian cuisine like Jua and Kajitsu. Even without mandated capacity restrictions, the restaurant continues to maintain 6 feet of distance between tables because not all diners feel comfortable in closer quarters.

Fields' pulled chicken tacos are \$4.50 each or three for \$12. "The margins on the tacos are roughly the same as our other menu items, however our overall food waste has gone down, which has saved on costs," founder and CEO Field Failing explains. "If anything, the tacos have improved the margin on our rotisserie chicken category by reducing the waste of those items."



Adjust Labor Accordingly

With labor in short supply, Paley's Place is only open four days, from Wednesday through Sunday. They often turn each table three times, taking reservations as early as 4 p.m. to maximize revenue. Paley says that he has a full house almost daily and is booking out months in advance, reflecting Portlanders enthusiasm for a pampered fine dining experience.

When they first reopened, Paley brought back a small crew of long-term employees who knew each other well and felt safe working together. Failing says that Fields has been lucky, too, in retaining many staff members during the pandemic.

Mifune has less than half the kitchen staff compared with pre-pandemic so they no longer serve lunch or an a la carte menu at dinner. Streamlining the menu allows the kitchen to continue achieving a high level of intricate, elegant dishes with fewer cooks. Plus, labor costs are higher now, and so they've had to work harder at reducing food costs to make up for that.

Prep

Tuesday and Friday are big delivery days at Paley's Place and Tuesday is a full day for the core back of house team, with six to eight hours of prep. A full day of prep is key to allow the kitchen to feel confident and organized heading into four busy service nights in a row.

Prep for the new limited zero-waste tacos at Fields Good Chicken is minimal as most ingredients, from tacos to toppings, are cross-utilized. The only extra step for this menu item is hand-pulling the meat from the rotisserie chickens.

Knowing the exact number of reservations and the exact dishes that will be served has helped Mifune prep precisely and minimize food waste. They accommodate pescatarian and gluten-free diets with advanced notice but cannot prepare a vegan menu, nor adapt for dietary restrictions on the fly. ■

IS AN LTO MENU RIGHT FOR YOU?

In the before times, a limited time only approach helped control costs and gauge diner interest, especially for chains or multi-unit restaurants. They also worked well for cleaning out the walk-in and promoting uber seasonal items. An LTO approach can also ease current supply chain issues. Five points to consider:

① Are the bulk of your customers locals and regulars? If they are, an LTO menu could work well. Determine a theme for each menu. Figure out how long the menu holds interest and adjust accordingly.

② Do you have a strong social media presence? Social media and your website (see SEO story on page 61) remains the most effective way to communicate with diners. Offer advance reservations for upcoming themes.

③ Are you posting daily on social media and engaging with customers? Never underestimate the loyalty you'll gain by interacting genuinely on social. Reacting with a "like" or an emoji goes a long way.

④ Do you have the time? It's not easy changing the menu weekly or twice a month. See "One Restaurant's LTO Journey" for inspiration, previous page.

⑤ Data doesn't lie. Do you have a POS system or the technology to help track sales and inventory? Certain software services/programs can track sales according to weather, holidays, seasons and the impact of local events to help you with an LTO menu.

THE POWER OF TWO

How restaurants can use brands to their advantage

By Diana Hubbell



▼ When the Texan sparkling water brand Topo Chico announced a partnership

with Molson Coors to break into the hard seltzer market, the consumer response was immediate. According to market research firm IRI, in the first four weeks after launch earlier this year, it racked up \$6.2 million in sales and secured 3.1% of the booming national hard seltzer market.

Topo Chico is far from the first label to capitalize on its branding power in the beverage space. From Harpoon Brewery's annual Dunkin' Donuts-branded Dunkin' Coffee Porter, which comes in cans decorated with the East Coast chain's design, to Yuengling Brewery's Hershey's Chocolate Porter, plenty of breweries have leveraged brand recognition for hype.

While restaurants have traditionally been less inclined to lean on big-name brands, an increasing number are doing so, with impressive results. With the meteoric rise of delivery apps during the pandemic, restaurant owners can no longer rely on a trendy location or eye-catching interior design to lure new customers. Familiar brand names with robust followings can help a restaurant's menu stand out on Caviar, Grubhub and Uber Eats. When choosing which brands to place on a menu, however, it's important to be selective. By aligning themselves with brands that embody the restaurant's ethos, chefs and owners can strengthen their image and boost business.

For Paul Giannone, owner of the Brooklyn-based pizzeria Paulie Gee's, bolstering a local brand helped raise the profile of his whole business. In 2010,

when Giannone first met Mike Kurtz, the young entrepreneur was trying to sell his new chili-infused honey at a neighborhood market. After Kurz started picking up shifts at the pizzeria, Giannone allowed him to hone his product in the restaurant's kitchen. A few trial batches later, Mike's Hot Honey ended up on the menu and the rest is history.

"We put Mike's Hot Honey on a pie called the 'Hellboy' and it became a cult favorite," Giannone says. "It wasn't long before we were selling twice as many of those pies as any other."

Fast forward a decade and Mike's Hot Honey is a household name with shelf space in Whole Foods and other high-end retailers around the country.

It also appears at Paulie Gee's pizzerias in New York, Baltimore, Chicago, New Orleans and Columbus, Ohio, on multiple pies. At one point, Giannone even had a special ice cream sundae drizzled with Mike's Hot Honey on the dessert menu.

"We definitely helped each other out," Giannone says.

Another New York restaurant that proudly lists Mike's Hot Honey on the menu is Harlem Shake, a retro burger joint. Not long after the restaurant opened, chef and journalist J. Kenji López-Alt threw a pop-up event featuring a double-fried dark meat chicken sandwich drizzled in Mike's Hot Honey. Jelena Pasic, Harlem Shake founder and CEO, decided to keep the sandwich on the menu permanently, because of the taste and because the concept's brand identity is rooted in its local surroundings.

From the Blue Marble ice cream in the milkshakes to the Mama's One Sauce on



"WE PUT MIKE'S HOT HONEY ON A PIE CALLED THE 'HELLBOY' AND IT BECAME A CULT FAVORITE. IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE WE WERE SELLING TWICE AS MANY OF THOSE PIES AS ANY OTHER."

—Paul Giannone, owner of Paulie Gee's, multiple locations

IMPOSSIBLE MEATBALLS

Warm quinoa, shredded kale, carrots, purple cabbage, roasted beets, pickled onions, sliced avo, impossible meatballs, mixed seeds and chipotle dressing



avocaderia



Avocaderia partnered with Impossible because their ethos align.



another fried chicken sandwich, Pasic strives to highlight brands by local food entrepreneurs like herself. Vy “Mama” Higginsen is the force of nature behind the Mama Foundation for the Performing Arts, which teaches gospel, jazz and R&B vocals to local youth, and a portion of all sales from Mama’s One Sauce go toward the foundation. Pasic had been friends with Higginsen for years and felt that **the partnership was a win-win—she could support a product that she believed in on her restaurant menu, while at the same time emphasizing Harlem Shake’s ties to the community.**

“Mama Higginsen is a local matron in Harlem because she brought so many children into gospel singing,” Pasic says. She is quick to point out that she would never showcase a brand if she did not believe in the quality of the product. For the smash burgers at Harlem Shake, for instance, she knew she needed richly flavored beef that had never been frozen to attain the desired crispy exteriors, but she didn’t want a brand that would force her to charge \$25 to turn a profit.

“I envisioned a simple approach, but with top-quality ingredients,” Pasic says. In the end, she opted for a well-known brand found at steakhouses across Manhattan. “We didn’t want to use organic beef or anything that would be prohibitive price-wise for our neighborhood of Harlem. We decided to use Pat LaFrieda because that’s a butcher where you know you’re getting good quality meat.”

Alessandro Biggi, founder of Avocaderia, a fast-casual restaurant in Brooklyn, also thinks that quality has to carry just as much weight as a brand’s name recognition. When he was looking for a meat alternative, he and his staff conducted a taste test before settling on Impossible Foods. The faux-beef now appears as meatballs in a branded Impossi-Bowl and in the vegan chorizo Impossible Tacos. So far, both items have been a success.

“It’s not our top seller, but it definitely performs very well, especially on delivery,” Biggi says. “It’s difficult to prove, of course, but I think it’s likely

that people see those items on our menu, connect it to the Impossible Burger, and are more inclined to buy that product.”

Given the media frenzy surrounding the Impossible Burger since 2019, the brand carries serious clout. **For Biggi, it also felt like a good match for Avocaderia because it aligned with the health-conscious, environmentally conscious values that he associates with his restaurant.** “We really admired the vision of Impossible as a company,” Biggi says. “They’re having a big impact on sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint, which I believe is really important.”

Ultimately, the brands that a restaurant features on its menu are an extension of its own. If a brand mirrors a restaurant’s reputation and projected values, it can help cement those concepts in the minds of prospective customers. While it might be tempting for owners to reach for whatever products are trending at the moment, the best long-term strategy is to find ones that fit organically into a broader identity. ■



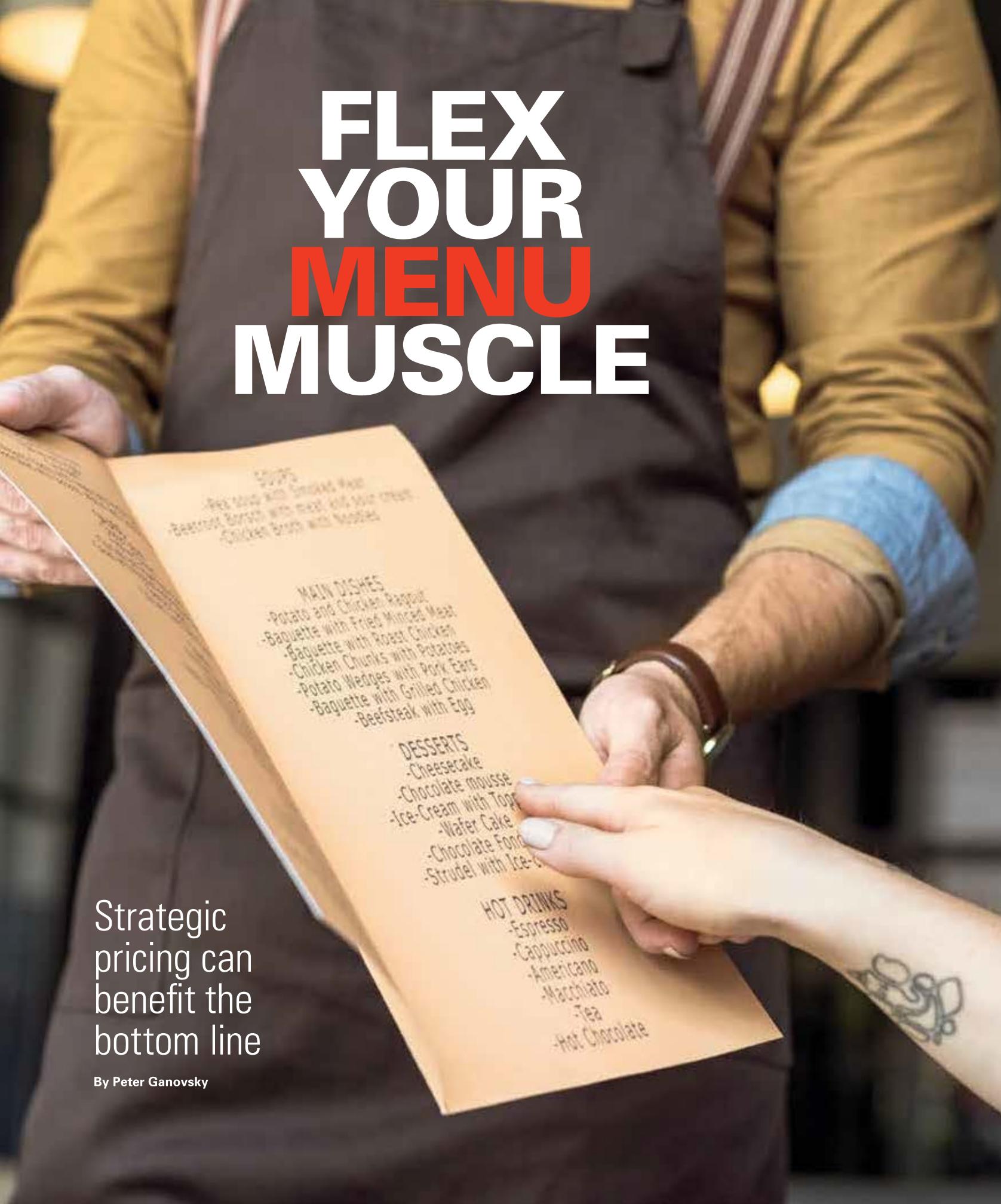
PAIRING UP: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Similar ethos
- Connection to the community
- Quality
- Relevancy, potential to excel and grow

FLEX YOUR MENU MUSCLE

Strategic pricing can benefit the bottom line

By Peter Ganovsky



VARIABLE PRICING OR LIMITED-TIME-ONLY MENUS?

CHECK OUT THE LTO STORY ON PAGE 51 TO DETERMINE WHICH STRATEGIES WORK BEST FOR YOU.

▼ Dynamic pricing

is getting renewed attention as restaurateurs look for ways to strengthen the business after the fallout of COVID-19.

Also known as flexible and variable pricing, the method of changing prices, like lowering costs of prix fixe meals on slow evenings, bumping up prices during weekends or simply charging a higher deposit for a Friday and Saturday night reservation, has been practiced for years. But given the revenue loss from the pandemic, could flexible pricing be a way to recover and bank on ongoing profitability?

To some, dynamic pricing may initially seem bittersweet. Contrary to opinions that it only benefits the customer or the

business, those who use the practice say the goal is to place customer pleasure hand-in-hand with restaurant profit. Nick Kokonas, co-owner and co-founder of The Alinea Group in Chicago, says that the two work in tandem.

"When restaurants employ variable pricing, the two tranches that are booked first are the least and most expensive experiences. Then the middle sells out. Consumers who are price conscious buy up the less expensive seats and those who really want prime times or premium experiences also buy those up. Both are happy," he says. These models also allow for "better margins, less food waste, more efficient labor and fewer no shows,"

Kokonas says, suggesting flexible pricing as an environmentally conscious option as well.

Jason Bond, chef/owner of Bondir in Cambridge, Massachusetts, echoes both sentiments. Using higher price points brings in more customers who are open to a particular dining experience and that the restaurants' ability to craft a specially priced menu allows for the "use of products that they may have had too few of to offer on a regular menu. Customer satisfaction and minimal waste are both achieved."

Other industries have been practicing dynamic pricing, like a rise in airline tickets over the holidays or costlier tickets for front-row seats on Broadway.



Perhaps it's a matter of shifting expectations. To make up for the cut taken by third-party delivery apps, many operators price all or many items up to \$2 higher, a price that began in earnest during the pandemic. Like any service, it's justified as the price to pay if customers want it badly enough. The window for reshaping the industry is still open, making the remainder of the year an opportune time for operators to make changes, such as dynamic pricing.

"There's been discussions about models to even things out (post-pandemic), just like they do in airlines," Bond says. "Most of us want even pacing from 5 to 9 p.m., and nothing going to waste."

To execute, establishing consistency and expectations are essential. "There's only so much mystery we can ask customers to accept and still go out ... they usually want to know what they are going to pay before they commit," Bond says. There's a difference between beneficial variations in pricing and annoying inconsistencies with menu pricing, often leading a customer to question the quality of a product.

Be careful to not accidentally agitate a customer with the intention of increasing the quality of their experience, Bond adds.

The customer needs to feel comfortable knowing what they will be paying. ■

whether it's a to-go order, a prix fixe meal or dining in. The price of food is only one part of the experience. Stating on the website the restaurants' pledge for safety, for example, is still relevant, as well as a renewed promise of customer satisfaction and remedying any concerns or complaints.

Tracking sales daily and reviewing seasonally will help with adjustments to accommodate unexpected slower dayparts or in-demand weeks. Lowering menu prices during slow times can be pitched as seasonal specials or a way of showing customer appreciation. Few diners will complain if deposit requirements disappear for weekend reservations.

For restaurateurs hesitant about flexible pricing, Kokonas and others suggest equating a night out at a restaurant to a sports game or a concert. Reframe a dining experience as something capable of providing entertainment, allowing strategies of one industry to work for another.

Regard pleasure and profit as two parallel lines running alongside each other. Kokonas pointedly views restaurants as a "part of our cultural fabric," something that has taken on a new importance to the world, transcending pricing strategies entirely. ■

30 Second Synopsis to Dynamic Pricing

Changing prices—whether it's a takeout menu, reservation deposits, prix fixe experiences or certain dishes—is like any other strategy to better margins.

Consider the season. Higher demand times can mean lowering prices when a seat won't go empty or staying the course. It depends on your goals. Track the results of your price changes and adjust seasonally.

Be consistent. Keeping menus simple and easy to predict will enhance a customer's dining experience.

Allow supply and demand to drive pricing. If supply is greater than demand, offer free reservations via text messages, which also encourages communication. If supply is equal to demand, decrease your no-show rate by charging nominal deposits equal to your margins. If demand is greater than supply, consider full prepayment of certain experiences.

A composite image featuring a person in a suit working on a laptop. In the background, there's a chalkboard menu board. Overlaid on the image are several text boxes and search icons. One box contains the text "Five Ways to Step Up Your SEO". Another box at the bottom right contains the text "It begins with loving your website". A small caption "By Diana Hubbell" is visible in the bottom right corner of the main image area.

One of the simplest approaches to improving the bottom line is often the most overlooked: Maximizing your website's SEO, short for search engine optimization.

"It sounds obvious, but it's so important to remember that SEO for restaurants means money," says Pierre Drescher, co-founder of BentoBox, the agency behind dozens of restaurant websites. "Your business really does correlate to traffic. It's all about taking advantage of a restaurant's digital presence, which represents long-term value."

Even a 10% boost in visitors to a restaurant's website can translate to meaningful gains. "The margins are so thin with restaurants that the difference between a good month and a bad month can be a few thousand dollars," he says. "In a small business, you have to pull all the levers."

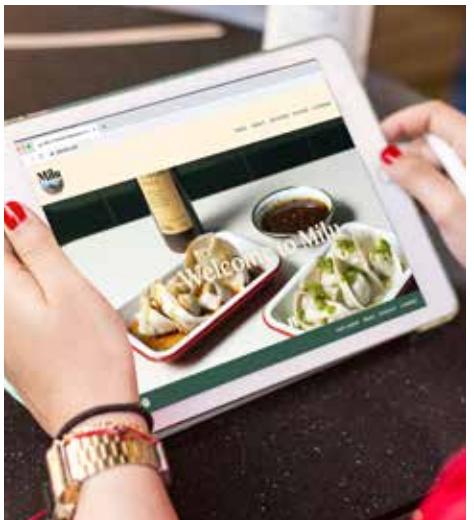
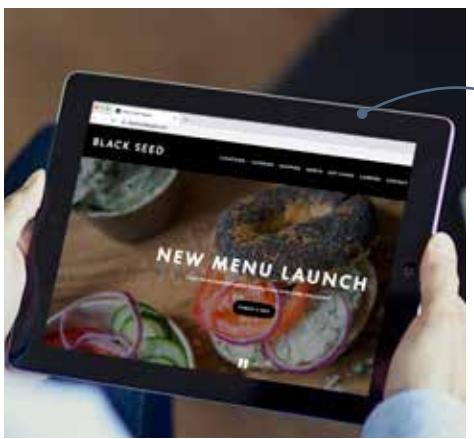
Fortunately, improving SEO is not difficult and even minor tweaks can yield results. Here are a few simple strategies that can make a lasting impact.

① Pay attention to keywords but don't overdo it.

Google Trends, a free service which can identify popular search terms in your city or region, is the first step for any business-owner in building an SEO strategy. Still, Boris Zilberman, an SEO consultant, cautions operators to resist the urge to cram the phrase "Italian restaurant" into every other sentence. "That's called keyword stuffing. It's like you're trying to get as many clowns in the car as you can," he says. "It's not very effective for SEO, since Google sees through that, and it doesn't make for a good user experience." Instead of trying to game the system, incorporate a few keywords here and there, but make sure your content feels authentic.

"THE FOOD IS DELICIOUS, BUT PEOPLE WOULDN'T BE TALKING ABOUT IT WITHOUT THE DESIGN. THAT LEADS TO GREAT SEO."

—Alex Ostroff, founder and creative director at Saint Urbain



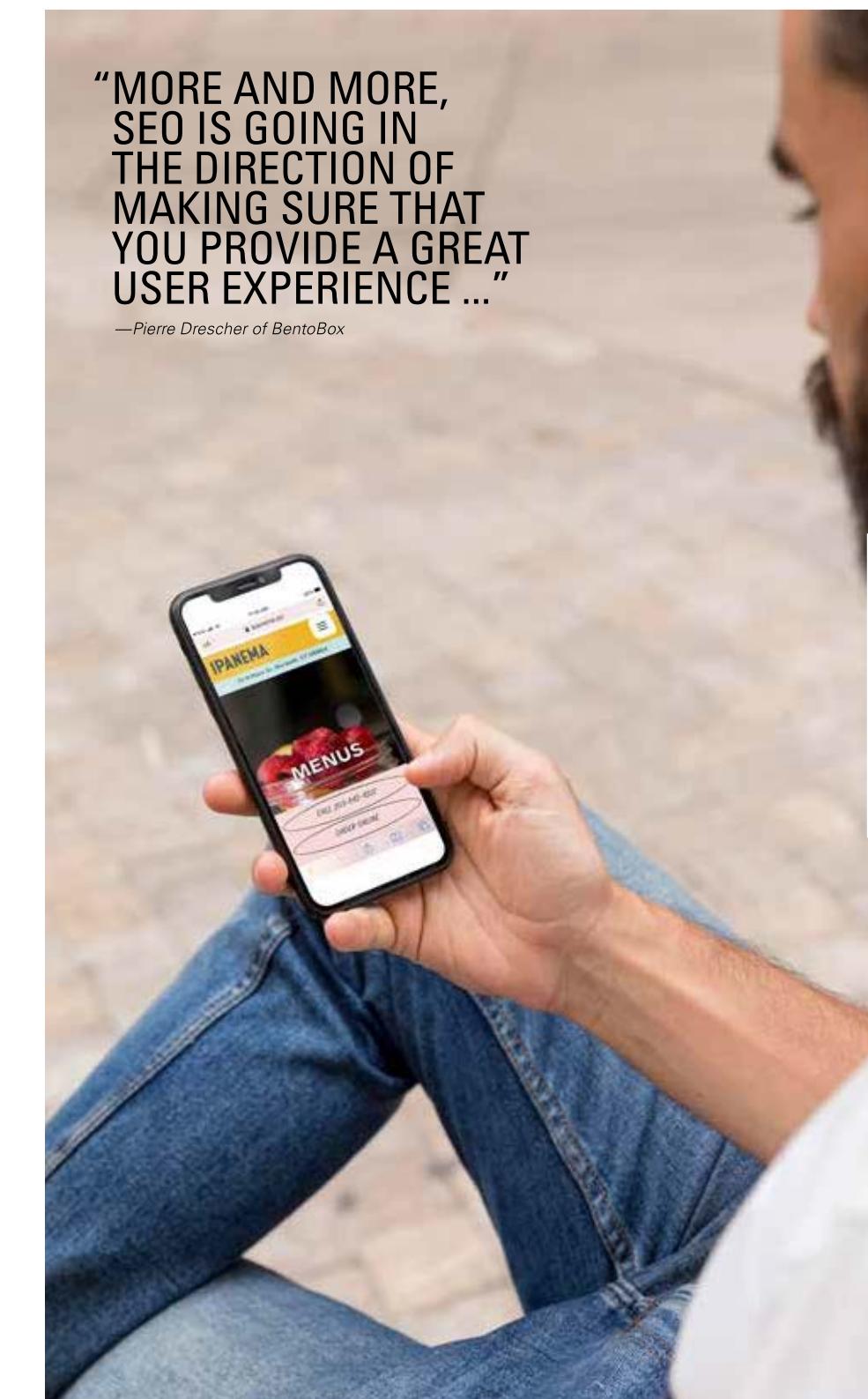
Strong visuals matter even though SEO is driven mostly by text.

② Don't sleep on Google My Business.

"Google My Business is gaining importance all the time. For local SEO, which every restaurant is concerned with, it's as or more important than the website itself," Zilberman says. With Google My Business, operators can let customers know if their restaurant is wheelchair-accessible, say, or Black-owned, which can help it rank for those search terms. "I've never seen a client in the restaurant industry that doesn't have room for some optimization in the Google My Business area," Zilberman says.

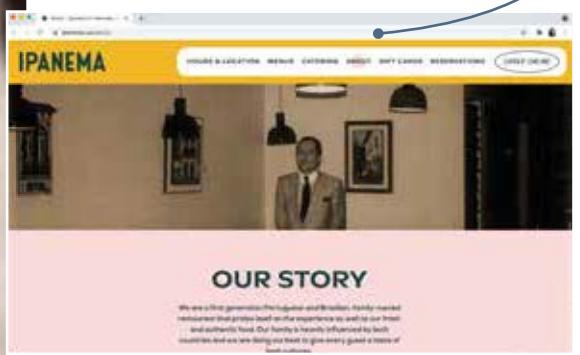
"MORE AND MORE, SEO IS GOING IN THE DIRECTION OF MAKING SURE THAT YOU PROVIDE A GREAT USER EXPERIENCE ..."

—Pierre Drescher of BentoBox



④ Think local.

With rare exceptions, most diners are searching for restaurants within their immediate area, which is why it's important to let search engines know your location. "Google is not going to show your result outside of your service area, which means you want to make your restaurant copy as local as possible," Zilberman says. "On the 'About' page, talk about the neighborhood, your roots in the city or the region, and try to make it feel like part of the community. Not only will your users like that, but also it will yield better Google results."



⑤ Give the people the information they want.

"More and more, SEO is going in the direction of making sure that you provide a great user experience because Google's algorithm is increasingly paying attention to that," says Drescher. That means the search engine will favor websites that are intuitive to navigate and make it easy to locate a restaurant's opening hours, menu, phone number and address. "If you go to a restaurant website and it asks you to download a PDF of the menu, that's not an ideal user experience for modern phone users," Zilberman says. "It's inorganic. It's an extra step. If you have the content of your menu as text on your page, then Google can read it." ■

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THE
MOMENT

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EARTH MATTERS

Should menus have a role in fighting climate change?

By Sophie Lee

PHOTOGRAPHY © NEIL BURGER



It's about balance, Joe Frillman of Daisies, says about the menu and climate change.



A meat-free option of roasted bean toast from Overthrow Hospitality.

Restaurants branding themselves as plant-based, vegetable-forward

or animal-free is a sign of the times but it's also a seismic shift in hospitality: a response to the increased demand for ecologically sound, moral options with straight-from-the-ground food.

Ravi DeRossi, the founder of New York City's Overthrow Hospitality, could be seen as the poster child for championing sustainability as a self-proclaimed "mission-driven vegan restaurant group." Overthrow is responsible for a host of vegan spots across Manhattan, with concepts spanning style and global cuisines, from cocktail bars to beer joints. Yet, all the restaurants stick to a plant-based philosophy. His cat, Simon, who was diagnosed eight years ago with a terminal illness, was the impetus.

He transitioned the company to be fully vegan and has since noticed an uptick in customers, crediting plant-based options

for the increase. "Eat. Drink. Start A Revolution" is Overthrow's tagline.

"It has been proven that meat agriculture is one of the leading causes of methane, and in turn climate change...The simplest and easiest way for any individual to contribute to bettering the health of the planet is to stop eating meat," DeRossi says.

According to the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization, meat and dairy production accounts for 7.1 gigatons of greenhouse gases annually, 14.5% of all human-made emissions. As climate change awareness has increased, so has the number of individuals cutting back on animal consumption.

Earlier this year, Daniel Humm of acclaimed 11 Madison Park in New York City removed all meat and seafood from the menu. Saying it was an environmental statement, Michelin-starred chef Dominique Crenn announced in the

"A FLEXITARIAN DIET IS DEFINITELY A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND A WAY TO INTRODUCE ... EATING LESS MEAT AND MORE VEGETABLES..."

—Ravi DeRossi of Overthrow Hospitality

fall of 2019 that all of her San Francisco restaurants would be meat-free. During the pandemic, Crenn, who says she is not a vegetarian, opened Vitabowl, a vegan to-go concept in Los Angeles.

For Joe Frillman, chef/owner of Daisies in Chicago, tackling climate change is about balancing business sense with his approach to cooking and personal views.

"We do use animal proteins in the restaurant, but more as a garnish or accompanying flavor to let the produce

and plant-based options be elevated by the use of animal fats or dairy," he says.

While certain dishes include anchovies or lamb, the array of plant-based options make the menu workable for customers with a variety of dietary needs. Frillman says Daisies is sought out as an "accommodating" spot for vegan customers, as well as their "meat-eating friends."

"I feel like food tastes better with animal products in it. But it doesn't have to be a giant hunk of meat," he says. "Using animal fats and byproducts to satiate and bring out the flavors in vegetables excites me. It's hard to convince someone to give up meat or animal products altogether, but even reducing the amount consumed can make a lasting impact on the world's current environmental trajectory."

Florian Pfahler, owner of Hannah's Bretzel, a chain of sandwich shops in Chicago, has increased its meatless options since launching in 2005.

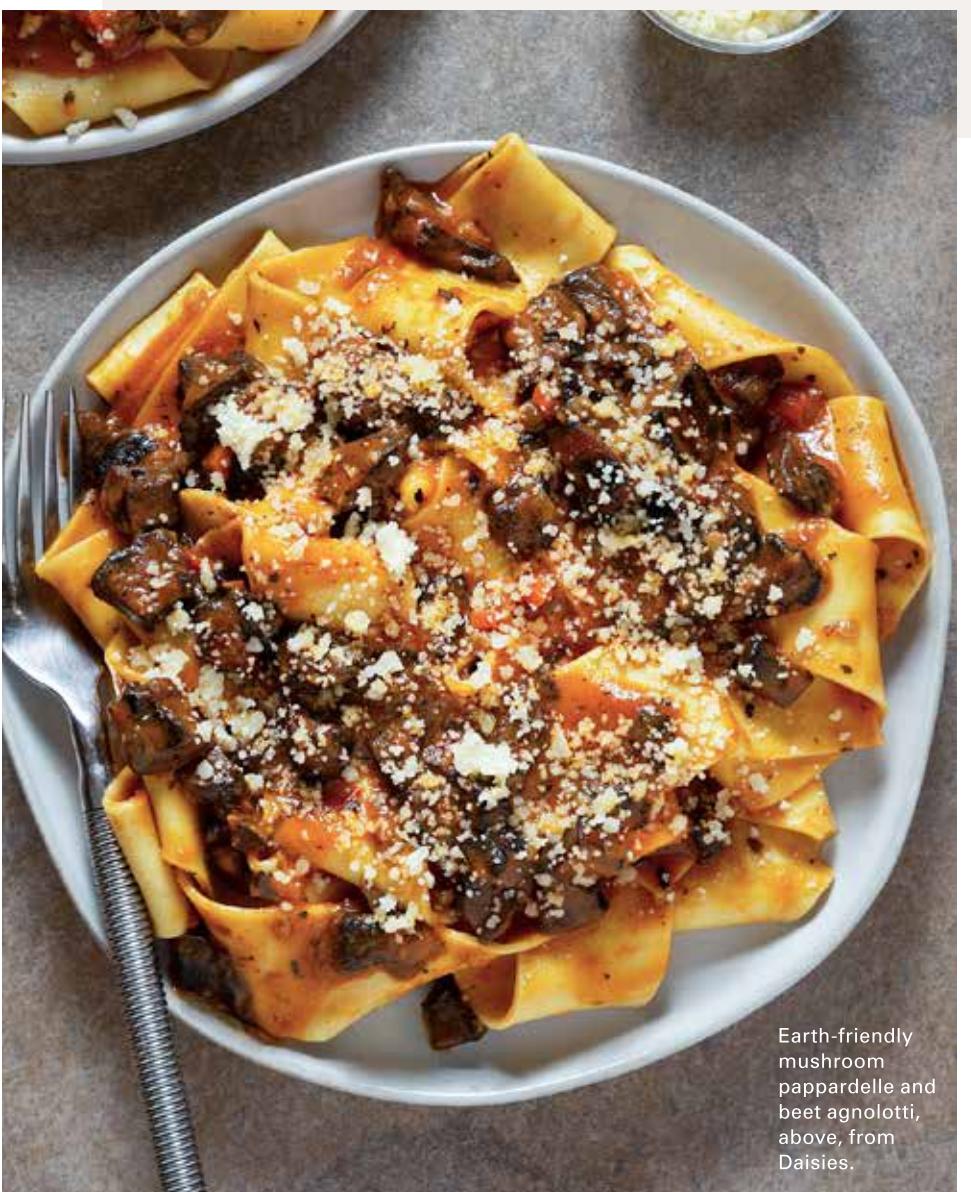
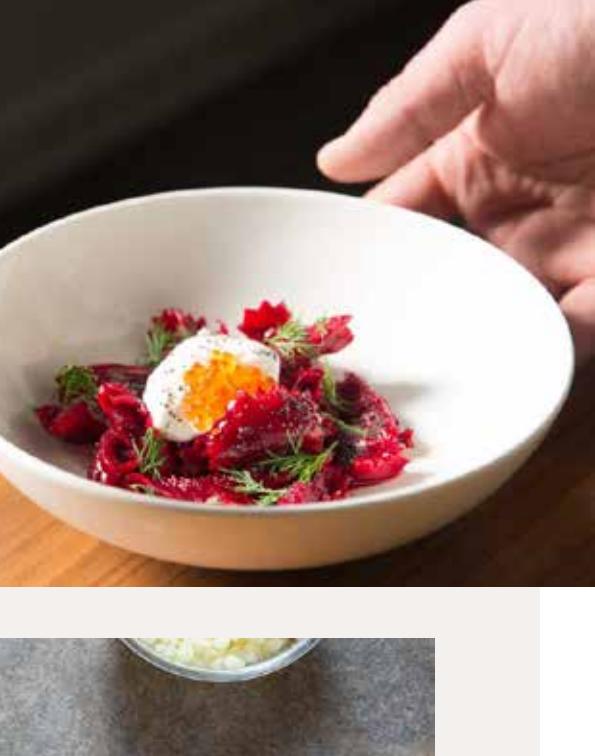
Plant-based options are available, about a 70/30 split between meat and veggie, part of what he says is their "bigger responsibility" to the environment. But the choice also closely aligns with Pfahler's personal support of the "Mediterranean diet," which focuses on plant-based options with a moderate consumption of animal products.

"The Mediterranean diet is one of the oldest. It grew naturally from what was/is available in the Mediterranean region," Pfahler says. "Healthy balance is what we propose with a heavier emphasis on vegetables and fruit, whole grains if possible, healthy oils like olive or avocado, hard cheeses over soft, and animal protein to enhance the meal but not to be the main character."

With that in mind, Pfahler doesn't see an entirely plant-based future. Since Hannah's Bretzel opened, he hasn't noted an increase in demand for plant-based sandwiches, and the ones already on the menu don't tend to sell any better than their meat-filled counterparts.

"WE HAVE SEEN AN EVER-INCREASING DEMAND FOR VEG ITEMS."

—Joe Frillman of Daisies



Earth-friendly mushroom pappardelle and beet agnolotti, above, from Daisies.

"HEALTHY BALANCE IS WHAT WE PROPOSE ..."

—Florian Pfahler of Hannah's Bretzel

"Why does it always have to be extreme?" he asked. "We do not believe in meat-free. We support keeping it real. If you want meat, eat a grass-fed, responsibly raised and well-treated ribeye from a happy cow, or a wild-caught whole red snapper, and pay accordingly."

DeRossi cites veganism as the biggest trend of his 17 years in the business. Frillman also heard differently from his customers.

"We have seen an ever-increasing demand for cleaner veg items, especially ones that taste good. It used to be 'Oh I'm a vegetarian, I'll take whatever the chef can whip up,' and that usually would be a hastily made option. People are looking for food geared toward them, toward flavor," Frillman says.

Says DeRossi: "A 'flexitarian' diet is definitely a step in the right direction and a way to introduce one's mind and body to the idea of eating less meat and more vegetables, but unfortunately this planet is on fire and I do not know if we have the luxury anymore of slowly easing into a vegan diet or just cutting back on meat," he argues. "If we do not make the change now to a vegan diet we will be forced to in the near future."

But how does that affect the bottom line? Pfahler says vegan and vegetarian options are less expensive while Frillman says "the cost of quality produce far exceeds many of the proteins we use."

DeRossi agrees that vegetables could be just as expensive as meat but says



the costs have been offset by the increase in visitors since the company went entirely vegan.

All three restaurateurs are also making efforts outside the menu to lessen their environmental footprint. Both Pfahler's and DeRossi's restaurants have a compost program. At Daisies, the staff practices "trash cooking," where food scraps are routinely fermented.

Hannah's Bretzel restaurants are powered 100% by wind and solar energy, with food prepared in biodegradable packaging. DeRossi is working on installing systems in his restaurants to monitor and control water usage.

Today, consumers are more conscious than ever about the impact their food and spending is making on the planet. Regardless of how far they go, the forward-thinking businessperson puts customers' minds at ease by making environmentally grounded decisions on and off the dinner plate. ■



Ravi DeRossi's belief that plant-based is better for humans and the environment drives the menu at Avant Garden with items such as merguez mushroom paella and red pepper cream, above, and "scorched" cauliflower with toasted garlic, fried capers and cauliflower puree.





A positive team culture at Tourist Home, one of Kevin Heinonen's restaurants, helps attract and retain attract employees, Reynolds says.

to communicate with the restaurant in every way possible. Due to the pressures of March 2020, they were forced to utilize technology and spent an entire year doubling down on online orders without customers in the restaurant asking for their attention. Restaurants now have customers who want to continue with just online ordering and those who are back to in-restaurant dining. These are two businesses and you have to support both."

Q. Are you seeing optimism or panic?

"I see both optimism and panic. But that's a mindset. If you came into the pandemic with one mindset, you came out with an even more enhanced view of that. I am incredibly optimistic. I think even with inflation and supply chain issues and staffing issues, people can make a lot of money. Not just a nice, sustainable gig, but with help, they can become wealthy."

Q. Is the labor shortage real?

"Where owners or operators are falling down right now is in how they attract employees. You have to be creative. Craigslist and Indeed are not going to get you the employees you want. I'm working with a restaurant group in Flagstaff (Arizona) and suggested they create a marketing video, sort of a tourism video. Minimum wage is higher there than in the rest of the state. So, half of the video is about what it's like to live in Flagstaff, hiking, biking, snowboarding. The other half is the staff working, cooking, at the bar. That restaurant group now has more applications and people wanting to work for them than at any time in their 12-year

Q. Will the restaurant experience now go back to what it was?

"The biggest thing that I think doesn't get talked about enough is the evolving stages of not just how the operator looks at the business but also how the consumer does. The consumer evolved a lot during the pandemic, using the phone

PHOTOGRAPHY © ERIC HAYS

Applause to those who adjusted when the pandemic blew inefficiencies in the industry wide open. Many restaurateurs and operators emerged from the lockdown trials of last year with a new perspective on the business and the scars to prove it.

Lance Reynolds, who leads the restaurant operations consulting program at US Foods, was on the ground with operators before and during the crisis. He's advised thousands of restaurants over the last eight years and has seen first-hand why they succeed or fail, regardless of a pandemic. Some observations over the last 18 months follow on where the industry is heading:

Q. Have you found it easier to get clients to take your advice?

"I just listened to a podcast about blind spots. Restaurateurs were operating not

just with blind spots but putting blinders on. Pre-pandemic, the biggest obstacle was to get them to think in new directions, to open their minds and start making decisions anticipating labor shortages, increased food costs and basics like offering online ordering. You'd think that would be an easy conversation but it was daunting. Going from, 'Nah, my customers aren't that into tech and my staff don't want schedules on their phones.' The pandemic blew that thinking away."

Q. Will the restaurant experience now go back to what it was?

"The biggest thing that I think doesn't get talked about enough is the evolving stages of not just how the operator looks at the business but also how the consumer does. The consumer evolved a lot during the pandemic, using the phone

history. The message to operators: Think about them as human beings, not just applicants."

Q. What might never return?

"Difficult, temperamental chefs. I think that's gone. People being OK with just a paycheck. Bible menus: massive menus that cater to everyone. Burn your clipboards; there's an app for that. Technology and automation should be replacing paper and pencil."

Q. Any predictions?

"The next huge shakeup? Robotics. Chopping, cooking and even delivering food to the table. There's a really great

"THE BIGGEST THING THAT I THINK DOESN'T GET TALKED ABOUT ENOUGH IS THE EVOLVING STAGES OF NOT JUST HOW THE OPERATOR LOOKS AT THE BUSINESS BUT ALSO HOW THE CONSUMER DOES."

Simplifying the menu at Heinonen's Annex Cocktail Lounge helps with labor and profitability.



Who is Lance Reynolds?

▪ Restaurant Operations Consultant, director strategy and process, for US Foods

▪ Owned and operated four restaurants, catering company and commissary

about it? Lean in hard on social media. People are looking for restaurants on their phones, they're not walking down the street looking for menus in windows. Use all technology available. And if you provide a really great place to work, build a really great culture, then message that out to the community." ■

BY THE NUMBERS

► PLAY THESE NUMBERS FOR A BIGGER PAYOUT

CRUNCH TIME

The love for all things fried, particularly crispy chicken sandwiches, remains strong. Don't miss the chance to satisfy cravings by building crunchy on the outside, juicy on the inside chicken sandos with dressings, sauces and other on-trend ingredients.

DEPENDABLE DRESSINGS

Growth of the most common flavors

HONEY	▲ 12%
RANCH	▲ 20%
BUFFALO	▲ 4%
BARBECUE	▲ 13%
MUSTARD	▲ 9%
MAYO	▲ 41%

25%

Predicted growth of fried chicken sandwiches

78%

Percentage that fried food is predicted to outperform all other foods, beverages and ingredients

PAIRING UP

Increase of top trending flavor pairings

HABANERO PEPPER	▲ 303%
PICKLED RED ONION	▲ 179%
DILL PICKLE	▲ 170%
GARLIC PARMESAN	▲ 160%
CHERRY PEPPER	▲ 160%
KALAMATA OLIVE	▲ 142%
PEACH	▲ 104%

GETTING SAUCY

Growth of top trending dipping sauces

NASHVILLE HOT	▲ 792%
GOCHUJANG	▲ 504%
CHIMICHURRI	▲ 365%
SIRIRACHA AIOLI	▲ 272%
SPICY MAYO	▲ 256%

HUMMUS	▲ 235%
HONEY BUTTER	▲ 219%
LIME DRESSING	▲ 210%
BACON RANCH	▲ 189%
CREMA	▲ 187%
YOGURT	▲ 132%

Source: Datassential, ranked by growth over four years, from 2021 to 2025.

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