

MONEY MOVES
THE BANE OF
YOUR EXISTENCE

Make delivery apps work for you
page 24

MENU MUST-HAVES
RISE AND SHINE

Breakfast sales for the taking,
page 30

MEETING THE MOMENT
HIT RESET

Build stronger teams,
page 64

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MONEY MOVES

BACK TO BETTER BASICS

Reexamine essential business practices to ensure success.

4

THE NEW ART OF UPSELLING

Putting everything on the table.

9

CRACK THE CODE

Unlock what a QR code can do for you.

16

TAKE A BREATH

Cleaner air brings peace of mind.

20

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

Make delivery apps work more for you.

24

TREND TRACKER

What to expect as mass vaccinations bring diners back to a new normal.

28

MENU MUST-HAVES

WAKE UP BREAKFAST

How to move morning meal options for remote and on-site workers.

30

LIGHT AND BRIGHT

The Vietnamese pantry shines on the familiar to inspire new favorites.

38

ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL

How prix-fixe, family-style meals can pay off now and later.

44

COVER STORY

PICTURE OF HEALTH

Immune boosters can draw diners.

52

SELLING WINE ONLINE

Check in here to check out more bottles.

60

MEETING THE MOMENT

THE HIRING UNFREEZE

How to build stronger teams in a post-pandemic world.

64

LET'S GO

Chef Edward Lee on the recovery of independent restaurants.

68

BY THE NUMBERS

Get sweet on sweets.

72

ON THE COVER

Calling out the benefits of nutrient-rich, immune-boosting foods, such as dark leafy greens, blueberries and mushrooms can increase the bottom line. See story on page 52.



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NEW YEAR, FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Welcome to the New Year. Even as our industry still struggles to right itself and recover from the pandemic, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

We are still an industry in transition so in this issue, you'll find business and tech trends to help you increase revenue, fresh food trends to meet diner demand, and spotlights on those who are working to make the future of the restaurant industry brighter.

We kick things off with *Money Moves* – stories that get you up to speed on revenue generating technology trends and operational best practices. Get 'Back to Better Basics' on your P&L, scheduling practices and more, and build a hands-off upselling strategy that boosts the bottom line.

Next, in *Menu Must Haves*, it's time to 'Wake Up Breakfast,' lighten up menus with fresh ingredients and learn how to make the profitable, family-style meal last post-pandemic. Breakfast, once the morning money-maker for many operations, is poised for a shake-up as diners once again seek convenient options.

Our cover story, 'The Picture of Health' highlights a worldwide diner trend, using food to boost the immune system. The story shows you how to build and promote a menu that caters to diners seeking health-minded fare.

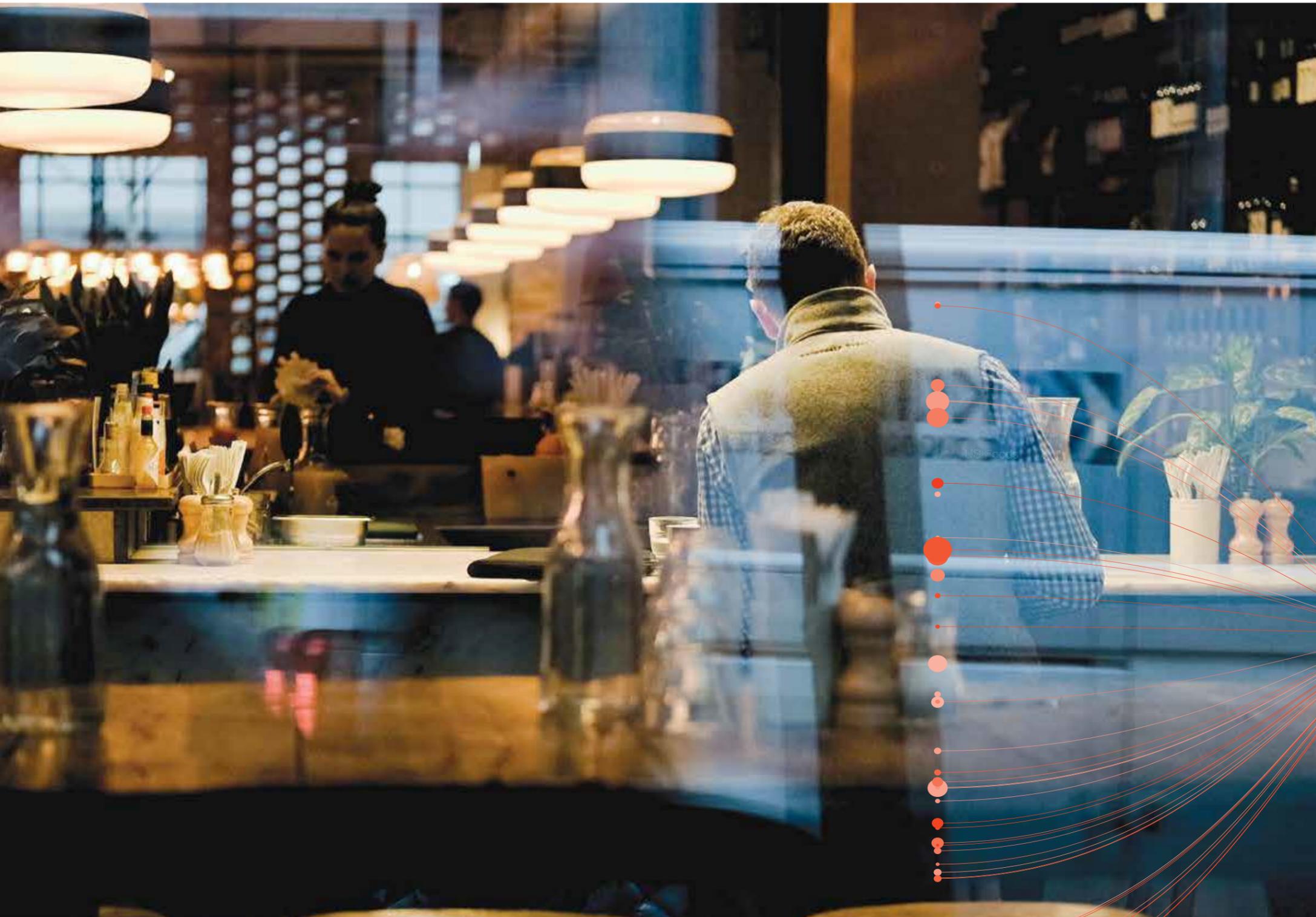
We close the book with our *Meeting the Moment* section, to get you thinking of the future. Staffing has been a roller coaster over the last year, but it's time to think about nurturing your team again. 'The Hiring Un-Freeze' helps you build a strong team for a post-pandemic world. Chef/Owner Edward Lee, founder of The Lee Initiative, gives us a fresh perspective on how the restaurant community has changed for the better, and what that means for our industry's bright future.

We're proud to bring this issue to our resilient community, and hope it leaves you feeling ready to take on this next phase.

Thanks for reading and stay safe,

Andrew Iacobucci
Chief Commercial Officer, US Foods





Back to Better **Basics**

Reexamine essential business practices to ensure success

By Novid Parsi



Pre-order options such as an egg salad survival kit, above, and prix fixe menu options like the fried chicken dinner, left, allow Bell's to better predict food and labor costs.

More than great food

keeps Bell's in business. To be sure, Food & Wine anointed its chef, Daisy Ryan, a Best New Chef this past year.

But the 60-seat bistro in the small town of Los Alamos, California, is thriving because the owners made sure it had a strong business foundation when the restaurant launched in 2018. When the economic crisis hit two years later, they could pinpoint exactly how to adjust their business to keep it going.

"We manage our labor, our food and our costs," says Gregory Ryan, who co-owns Bell's with his wife, Daisy.

During the pandemic, the Ryans leaned into that management. In light of the shutdown and periods of reduced capacity, they had to **predict sales and costs with greater certainty**. They stopped playing the usual restaurant game of guessing how many guests might come in and what dishes they might order. Bell's switched from industry-standard a la carte offerings to a prix fixe menu that changed daily. It also stopped taking walk-ins and accepted reservations only.

As a result, the owners purchased only the amount of food needed for the number of people they would serve.

"Prix fixe allowed us to have zero waste

and be in control of our restaurant's financials," Ryan says.

Bell's also added a 20% service fee to all bills, allowing the business to keep its seven-member staff.

Unfortunately, Bell's ability to look clearly at its business model and adjust isn't common. The pandemic has exposed a regrettable reality: **Too many independent operators do not have essential business practices in place**. Those practices include, for instance, **profit-and-loss (P&L) statements, food-cost formulas, inventory controls, marketing calendars and up-to-date point-of-sale (POS) systems**.

"Pre-COVID, one primary reason that independent restaurants struggled is they did not have a number of operational and accounting systems," says Michael Kaufman, a restaurant industry expert and senior lecturer of business administration at Harvard Business School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "Many times people come into the restaurant world and focus on the food, ambiance and the aesthetics but not the underlying financial reality."

The pandemic has only heightened the need to focus on the business. That's especially critical in the low-margin

restaurant industry, where the old cliché holds true: Cash is king. "There isn't a lot of room to make mistakes," says Dean Small, founder and CEO, Synergy Restaurant Consultants, a national consultancy based in Newport Beach, California.

A business focus begins with a sober projection of the traffic that might come in the door. Many restaurateurs start off with high and perhaps unrealistic hopes. "You want to be quite conservative in projecting the business," Kaufman says. **That conservative outlook affects how much you spend on a kitchen renovation, how many people you hire and how many seats you have** (Ryan predicts fewer eateries will seat over a hundred, post-pandemic).

Restaurants need to **put a solid business structure in place**, industry experts say. **That starts with a clear understanding of both the profits that owners want to make and the costs they have to meet**. Owners should establish benchmarks toward their target profits and then evaluate and adjust those benchmarks during P&L reviews that happen monthly or, better yet, weekly.

Every restaurant has three main expenses: food and beverage, labor, and

administrative. The P&L statement sheds light on the costs that remain fixed and those that can be reduced. For example, renegotiating terms with takeout and delivery apps or maximizing labor with cross-training.

Look at sales of the past several weeks to help project sales in the coming week—and to help cut out the excess in your menu. Plenty of software programs are available to calculate and track food costs so adjustments on the menu mix can be made.

A firmer handle on sales helps with labor projections, too: **When you know the amount being sold, you know the number of workers required**.

"Decide what to you is success, then use your data to determine if you're meeting it," says Elizabeth Tilton, founder and CEO, Oyster Sunday, a company based in New York and New Orleans that provides business services to independent restaurants, including Bell's.

It's hard to overestimate the importance of data. "Data allows restaurateurs to think about what's working versus what they feel is the right thing for their restaurants," Tilton says. "Data removes the emotions."

Good data underpins good decisions. Gathered through a variety of means—an email database, reservations, online reviews, social media and third-party delivery apps—data reveals who your customers are and what they want.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARTER HIYAMA

Lessons from a pandemic Ask yourself these 5 questions:

- 1 What can I take from operating at various capacities to run tighter operations? Reduce food costs, labor costs, menu options?
- 2 How will I diversify my menu to stimulate people's interest in my restaurant?
- 3 How will I communicate with my customers to find out what they want?
- 4 Do I have a communications and social media plan to get the word out internally and externally about what my restaurant is doing?
- 5 What can I gather from my staff to better support them so that everyone benefits?

"DATA ALLOWS RESTAURATEURS TO THINK ABOUT WHAT'S WORKING VERSUS WHAT THEY FEEL IS THE RIGHT THING FOR THEIR RESTAURANTS. DATA REMOVES THE EMOTIONS."

—Elizabeth Tilton, founder and CEO, Oyster Sunday

"Unfortunately," Small says, **"a lot of independents have data but they don't think it's relevant to their day-to-day business."**

An up-to-date POS system—one that integrates with scheduling and tracks inventory—is a key part of the data equation. **"POS allows you to build your database so you know who your customers are, what they want and how to market to them,"** Small says.

In addition to identifying their target goals, owners should ask themselves what happens if they don't meet them—and then have a plan for each scenario. That plan might include, for example, introducing more repetition in ingredients to control food costs. You also need a communications plan to let both staff and customers know what to expect.

"Restaurants need a very thoughtful projection of what business they might generate and also the downside: What if business is not quite as good as they hoped?" Kaufman says.

Also, take a tip from restaurants like Bell's, and vary up the menu. People might love the food you sell today, but there are only so many times they'll want to eat the same thing. **"Menu innovations drive sales,"** Small says. A menu refresh should be ongoing, not something that happens just once or twice a year.

Lastly, there's no getting around one fundamental business reality: **If you haven't updated your website in the past few years, now's the time**. A clunky, static website that makes online ordering difficult isn't doing you or your customers any favors. **Update to a dynamic site that's integrated with the POS system so customers can order on it**. And make sure it includes plenty of high-quality food photos.

Running a strong restaurant business is like steering a ship, Small says: **"If you don't have good coordinates and you don't know where you're going, you get blown all over."** ■

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The New Art of Upselling
 Putting everything on the table
 By Maggie Hennessy



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL STRABBING



Avec Rotisserie in Chicago is upselling by offering classics from the Avec menu.

► **When the pandemic abruptly closed**

Chicago restaurants last March, Mediterranean restaurant Avec and its chef Perry Hendrix already had a prescient spinoff in the works: a delivery-only rotisserie chicken concept dubbed Avec Rotisserie.

Initially, parent group One Off Hospitality kept the brands separate, but quickly learned that combining them on its online-ordering platform created space for upselling Avec's classics, such

as chorizo-stuffed medjool dates and "deluxe" focaccia with taleggio cheese. On a busy night, Rotisserie sells 80 chickens (in quarter, half or full portions) with hummus, pita and vegetable mezze. Pre-pandemic, Avec offered half-rotisserie chickens, selling 12 to 20 a day.

"Very few people just order chicken dinner," says Hendrix. He estimates over 90% add something from Avec's classics menu.

Without servers to wax poetic about seasonal soft-shell crabs or seeing tempting dishes on neighboring tables, old-school upselling is basically lost with online ordering. But operators rethinking menu strategy—namely how and what they sell—are eking out new revenue streams. They're offering just about anything that can be sold, whether it's special occasion menu packages, beloved signature items or raw ingredients not easily available to consumers. Check out how some operators are trying new ways of upselling.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ONE OFF

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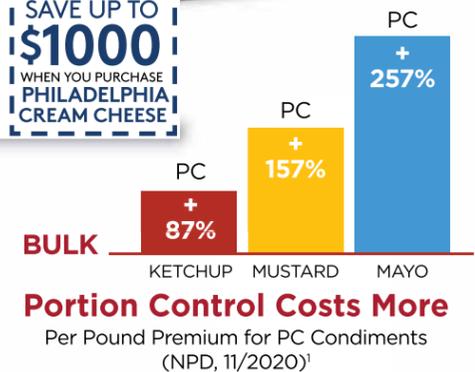


¹NPD SupplyTrack: Manufacturer branded bulk formats vs. PC in restaurants with fewer than 20 outlets (6 months ending 10/2020)
²Comparison of HEINZ Ketchup 1.5 gal dispenser pack with biodegradable paper ramekin vs. HEINZ Ketchup 9g sachet
³Based on Bulk vs. PC per-pound price differential for national brands; assuming 1.5oz of ketchup, mayonnaise, and mustard per serving; NPD SupplyTrack, October 2020

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“WE’RE SEEKING DIFFERENT WAYS TO ENHANCE OUR REVENUE ... WITH OUR SALSAS, IT’S UNBELIEVABLE HOW MUCH IT’S REQUESTED.”

—Tom Hutchinson, co-owner of La Posta de Mesilla, Mesilla, New Mexico

1 TAKE A CUE FROM STEAKHOUSES

Steakhouse-type selling—just meat on a plate and extra for everything else—can increase the check average, especially for special occasion packages such as Mother’s Day and birthdays. Menu stalwarts like mac and cheese, biscuits and jam and desserts can be offered separately. Operators say the strategy works best when the upsell is a family meal or special. For example, customers can choose the \$5 Parker House rolls or the \$18 seared portobello with soy glaze, pickled carrot and herb salad in addition to the Wednesday dinner for two special at Puritan & Company in Boston.

2 BECOME MORE AVAILABLE

Restaurants can expand their audience by shipping products, like Myers + Chang, which sells housemade spices through its website. Online retailers, such as Goldbelly, can also broaden and thus upsell for restaurants. The third-party online food retailer has doubled the number of restaurants it represents nationwide to over 700 since the pandemic began. 5-8 Club in Minneapolis sells its “Juicy Lucy” stuffed cheeseburgers on the site and The Pine Club in Dayton, Ohio, offers steaks and signature salad dressing while One Off Hospital lists Avec’s paella and its Publican Quality Meats charcuterie kits.

3 BE DESCRIPTIVE

One thing the pandemic hasn’t changed: the high profit-margin of the bar. As long as it’s allowed, operators believe customers will continue to purchase alcohol online, especially cocktails.

“People are ordering, and what they’re ordering is lot of cocktails,” says Sara Bradley, chef/proprietor of Freight House in Paducah, Kentucky. Drinks, however, need descriptions. Freight House’s Ruby’s Caboose is described as “Wheatley vodka, grapefruit, ginger beer and sage” for \$11 while the High Fashion is listed as featuring Old Grand Dad 114 bourbon, peach and ginger at \$13.

4 CONDENSING AND RETHINKING MENUS

After experiencing success with smaller and lower-priced tasting menus, Lazy Betty in Atlanta added five-course menus for takeout for \$95 in addition to its new four-course dine-in \$85 menu, which included personalized messages and instructions to reach audiences beyond typical dine-in customers “while still hitting those points of service,” says chef/owner Aaron Phillips. The condensed menus as well as wine pairings showcasing sparklers and pours from Slovenia, Mexico, India and Morocco are performing well.

Cocktails to-go can boost check averages as well as signature items like the Parker House rolls from Puritan & Company in Boston.



Soul Shack co-owner Keisha Rucker resized popular dinner items to capture the lunch crowd.

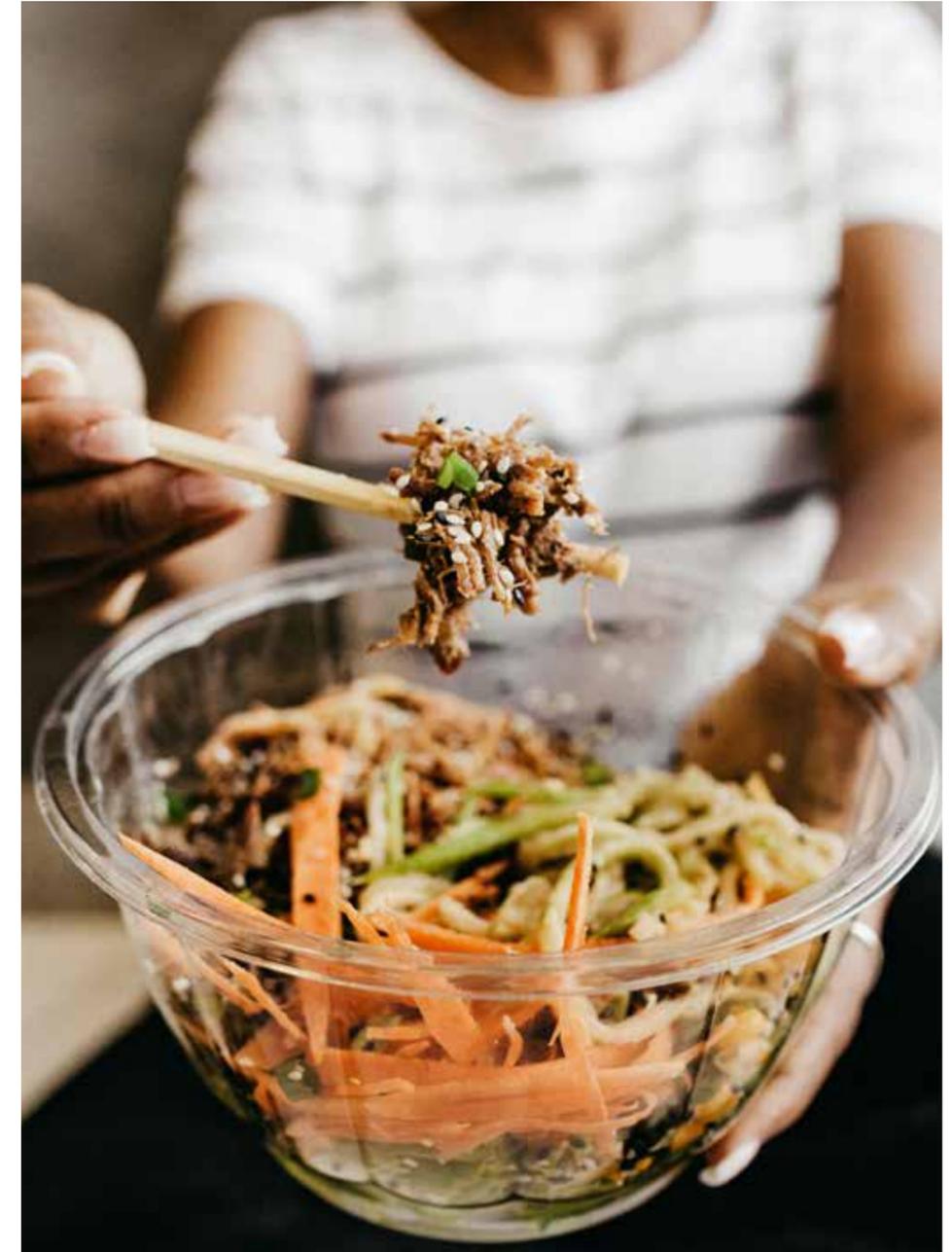
5 GO BULK

Eighty-one-year-old, Mexican restaurant La Posta de Mesilla in Mesilla, New Mexico, got smarter on the menu side since the pandemic shifted its business model to 30% takeout and 70% patio dining, says co-owner Tom Hutchinson. La Posta dialed back the steaks and seafood for which it’s known, upselling with meal packages with bulk-friendly, reheatable items like enchilada casseroles. To entice returning customers, the restaurant rotates daily specials ranging from \$9 to \$11.

6 PACKAGE FAVORITES

Star chefs aren’t the only ones who can put their name on a sauce, condiment or spice mix. Just about every menu contains a signature flavor that customers could use at home. For La Posta that meant upselling its salsa for retail. The menu’s red and green hatch chili sauces are expected to follow.

“We’re all seeking different ways to enhance revenue and bring staff back,” Hutchinson says. “With our salsas, it’s unbelievable how much that is requested.”



7 MAKE PLATES INTO BOWLS

Chicago’s Soul Shack expanded into lunch service by reworking its dinner plates into bowls. Salmon and short rib dinners became bowls for \$5 to \$6 less, with three sides instead of two that accompany dinner. “It’s softer for finances for people. They can get the same meal at a smaller scale or smaller price point,” says co-owner Keisha Rucker. It’s working, too. “They are placing orders; our lunchtime is doing well.”

Lunch shores up revenue Rucker’s lost from not raising prices and from making family meals permanent, which she did this winter after their successful (albeit not profitable) holiday run. “It’s more about demand than revenue; it’s easier, especially for families,” she says.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM TAYLOR



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Many restaurants, such as The Clam in Manhattan, are offering seafood that's not available at retail.



8 OFFER WHAT CUSTOMERS CAN'T GET

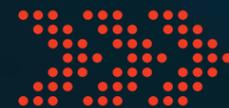
Many restaurants began selling pantry items online, but oftentimes the items can still be purchased at grocery or specialty food stores. Consider upselling difficult-to-acquire goods, such as seasonal seafood and foraged mushrooms, as well as time-consuming or challenging to make items, such as croissant dough, charcuterie and complex sauces. The Clam in New York City has found an audience selling fish and seafood to consumers, including seasonal raw oysters and wild Gulf shrimp. ■



Crack the Code

Unlock what a QR code can do for you

By Lisa Arnett



▼ **A year into** the COVID-19 pandemic, the QR code has become an unlikely hero for streamlining operations and solving business challenges. “At first there was skepticism, as QR codes have been around for quite some time, but never really gained mass adoption,” says Kris Linney, director of brand development and partner success at Ritual, which creates digital ordering tools and marketing programs for restaurants. But “as restaurants rolled them out (during the pandemic) they started to see adoption and ease of use, there has been extremely positive feedback.”

The need for operators to build trust so that workers and diners would feel safe at restaurants quickly led to renewed usefulness and mass adoption of QR codes. Most notably, they enabled touchless menus and payment without a server to perform the tasks. Operators, however, are learning that they can do much more while software companies are finding that QR codes can serve as a tool for gathering and sharing just about any kind of data.

QR codes may also play a leading role in the rise of digital health passports that could benefit restaurants. Clear, a secure identification company, has partnered with lab test provider Quest Diagnostics to launch Health Pass, a mobile app that links an individual’s identity with health-related info, such as a recent COVID-19 test result or vaccination status. Union Square Hospitality Group, Dos Toros and Chop’t are among the partners set to use Health Pass in their restaurants.

“We will continue to see QR codes play a larger role within restaurants as they continue to adapt their businesses to best serve their guests,” Linney says.

Consider these ways QR codes can be instrumental in running your restaurant.



Improve Operations

- Ordering and paying through a QR code means guests do not need to wait for servers or cashiers, which can lead to faster service and table turns as well as lower labor costs.
- Digital menus allows for a more agile menu mix. Removing items that don’t perform, adjustments to accommodate inventory, seasonality or specials can be made without the time investment and expense of printing new menus. Menus can be updated online and generate new QR codes.
- Changes in design, perhaps refocusing from weekday to weekend approaches can be made online and reflected with a new QR code.
- Contactless QR code apps can integrate with point of sales systems (POS) that can unlock a wealth of insights about diners and preferences, from what they order dining-in to takeout choices.

Step up marketing

- Linking a QR code to Facebook, Instagram and other social media channels can increase your following, reaching new and current customers to build loyalty.
- A QR code can display photos of your food but also provide an experience. Think of videos of your chef offering a cooking demonstration, a back-of-the-house tour of operations, discussions with purveyors on how product is caught, grown or produced.
- Promotions and special offers can be offered and redeemed through a QR code.
- A QR code be a call to action (see following page) or a simple thank you for patronage.

QUICK TIP

QR codes can be generated for free online or by subscribing to a service. Know that a static code can’t be changed while a dynamic one can be altered and provide analytics. Be sure that the service has experience meeting the needs of restaurants.



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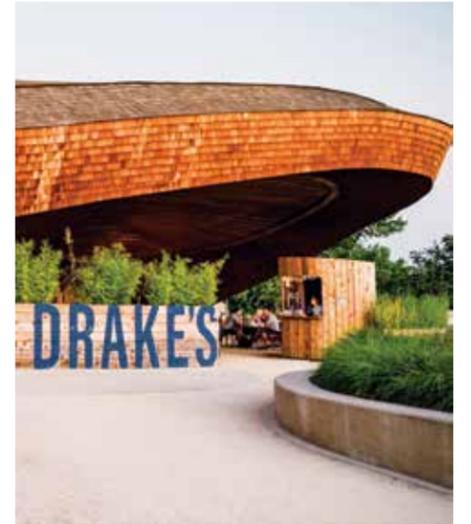
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QR Codes at Work

Think of QR codes beyond calling up a menu or displaying a payment method for the check. They can improve operations as well as engage customers on a deeper level. For example, a QR code can link to a positive review of your restaurant, media mentions or even a page of feedback. More than ever, customers see restaurants as an extension of their community. Two more examples:

WHO: [Nando's Peri-Peri Chicken, a restaurant with locations in Maryland, Virginia, Illinois and Washington, D.C.](#)

WHAT THEY DID: Used QR codes to help employees and customers register to vote in advance for the 2020 general election, proving that it can work with any cause. "We wanted to enable our own people and our customers to participate and get off the sidelines of democracy," says Sepanta Bagherpour, chief brand officer.

HOW IT WORKED: Staffers set up a virtual voting registration table at every location. "It would take you straight to your local voter registration resources," Bagherpour says.



QR codes can lead diners to any online site for marketing and promotional purposes.

RESULTS: Press coverage and positive engagement on social media. "It worked for us from a marketing perspective because people appreciate brands that stand up and stand out," Bagherpour says. It also gave employees a much-needed morale boost. "We gave our people another kind of focus, something bigger than them to concentrate on to get through this time," he says.

WHO: [Drake's: The Barn, a pizzeria and brewery in West Sacramento, California](#)

WHAT THEY DID: Rolled out self-serve ordering using QR codes integrated with their POS system. With a sprawling 2.5-acre property with multiple outdoor spaces, including a lawn and beer garden, "the goal was to enable people to order from any part of the space as well as be able to go up to the bar and order to alleviate that pressure," says Amanda Martin, assistant general manager. "Long lines are never fun when you're just trying to get a beer."

HOW IT WORKED: They printed, laminated and affixed the QR codes to each outdoor table, which worked well for a week until they bleached in the sun (making them often unreadable) and the laminate peeled (making them hard to properly sanitize). Switching to easy-to-clean, fade-resistant vinyl stickers fixed both issues.

RESULTS: Customers appreciate the option for contactless ordering and payment and an uptick in sales. "Because you can just grab your phone and add another beer whenever you're ready, it avoids that feeling of, 'My server took too long and I don't feel like having another one,'" Martin says. ■

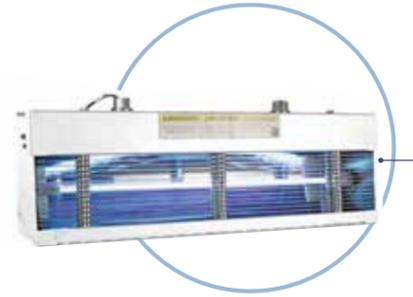
TAKE A BREATH



Cleaner air brings peace of mind

By Samantha Nelson

Air purification and filtration systems failed to stop restaurant closures but they are perceived as a good safety measure among diners. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hasn't issued a stand on them but many restaurateurs say peace of mind among customers and staff has been worth the investment.



» **TYPE OF SYSTEM:** Steril-Aire UVC lighting system

» **WHO'S USING IT:** Prairie Grass Cafe, Northbrook, Illinois

» **ATTRIBUTES:** Deploys UVC light through HVAC to kill germs in the air and on surfaces. Prairie Grass Cafe co-chef/owner Sarah Stegner installed the system in her condo five years ago and it made a difference for her family members who have issues with pet dander. When COVID-19 hit, she installed four units in the restaurant to cover the dining room and kitchen. "I know that it works because I've physically felt the difference," she said.

» **EFFECTIVENESS:** The device destroys 99.86% of airborne bacteria, 99% of viruses, and 96% of spores in a single filtration pass.



WORTH IT? "I'm very happy with it," Stegner said. "We leave the system on all the time. Even though we don't have any people in right now, it's also for my employees and myself. We want to have safe air."

"I know that it works because I've physically felt the difference."

—Sarah Stegner, co-chef/owner of Prairie Grass Cafe

» **TYPE OF SYSTEM:** Veteran LED germicidal lighting

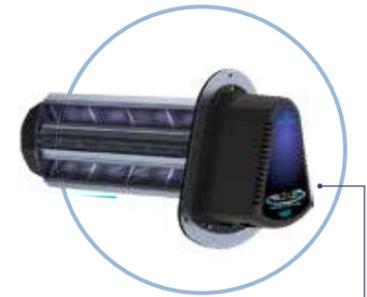
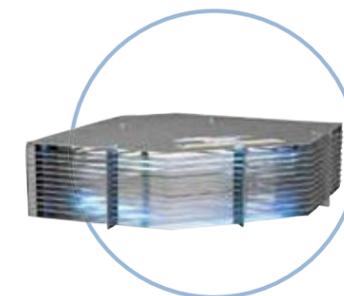
» **WHO'S USING IT:** Silver Diner in Virginia, New Jersey and Maryland

» **ATTRIBUTES:** The system uses ultraviolet light on all air traveling through the HVAC system to kill viruses and bacteria. Air purifiers are also installed on each restaurant's walls that use HEPA filtration to trap airborne particles and enhance air quality while ionization cleans the air.

» **EFFECTIVENESS:** Ultraviolet light kills 99.9% of exposed pathogens.



WORTH IT? Silver Diner executive chef and co-founder Ype Von Hengst said he advertised the system with posters and cards given to customers when the restaurant reopened, which made them feel more comfortable. Even though he was forced to close for indoor dining again, he still thinks the system was a good investment. "When people build new buildings, some of these things might be a requirement," he said. "A year from now, hopefully we'll be out of the woods, but who knows when something like this will pop up again."



» **TYPE OF SYSTEM:** Global Plasma Solutions needlepoint bipolar ionization

» **WHO'S USING IT:** Red Phone Booth and Amalfi Pizza in Atlanta and Francesca's Restaurant Group in California and Illinois

» **ATTRIBUTES:** Francesca's Restaurant Group executive director Robyn Jones said she chose the technology because it's embedded in HVAC systems, making it among the most streamlined options, and it also covers plenty of square footage. Red Phone Booth founder and CEO Stephen de Haan said he was impressed that the technology was used at the Mayo Clinic.

» **EFFECTIVENESS:** The ionization technology reduces the rate of COVID-19 on surfaces by 99.4% after 30 minutes of use.



WORTH IT? "It's quite a monetary investment, but we needed to do this for our employees to come to work every day and for our customers," Jones said. "We want them to feel safe and know that we've made the investment in providing this clean air solution." Even with the vaccine, de Haan is installing the technology in his new locations opening early this year. "I think there's going to be long-term benefits to having this system, whether it be for COVID-19 or the common cold."



The CDC hasn't recommended purification systems but restaurants say they're worthwhile.



» **TYPE OF SYSTEM:** AirFree Iris 3000 filterless air purifier

» **WHO'S USING IT:** The Bristol, Formento's and Nonna's, Chicago

» **ATTRIBUTES:** The devices, which B. Hospitality Co. co-owner Philip Walters said look like R2 units from Star Wars, are positioned throughout the restaurants and cook the air like an autoclave to kill viruses and bacteria before shooting the sterilized air into a chamber that cools and releases it. They are paired with MERV 13 air filters, chosen based on CDC and ASHRAE recommendations, and Ionkini Technology ozone ionic air purifiers that can be placed at individual tables by customer request to provide additional safety when dining with people from different households.

» **EFFECTIVENESS:** The AirFree Iris 3000 eliminates 99.99% of microorganisms and allergens silently, with each unit covering up to 650 square feet.



WORTH IT? "We do believe that it is the proper path to make sure that the guests are safe," Walters said.



» **TYPE OF SYSTEM:** Integrated Viral Protection biodefense indoor air protection system

» **WHO'S USING IT:** Boudro, San Antonio, Texas

» **ATTRIBUTES:** Scientists from the Texas Center of Superconductivity at the University of Houston, Galveston National Laboratory and Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station worked with the Houston-based company to develop its system, which uses a nickel-foam-based air filter to catch and kill microorganisms. While the system can be integrated into existing AC units, Boudro's general manager and partner Andreas Esparza said he opted for two big and one medium portable units because, "We wanted to have something that the customer would see."

» **EFFECTIVENESS:** The device kills 99.8% of coronavirus and 99.9% of anthrax spores and other pathogens including legionella bacteria.



WORTH IT? Esparza said he plans to keep the system in place to clean the restaurant's air even once the pandemic ends. "It gives us all a sense of safety," he said. "It was the best strategic investment that we did." ■

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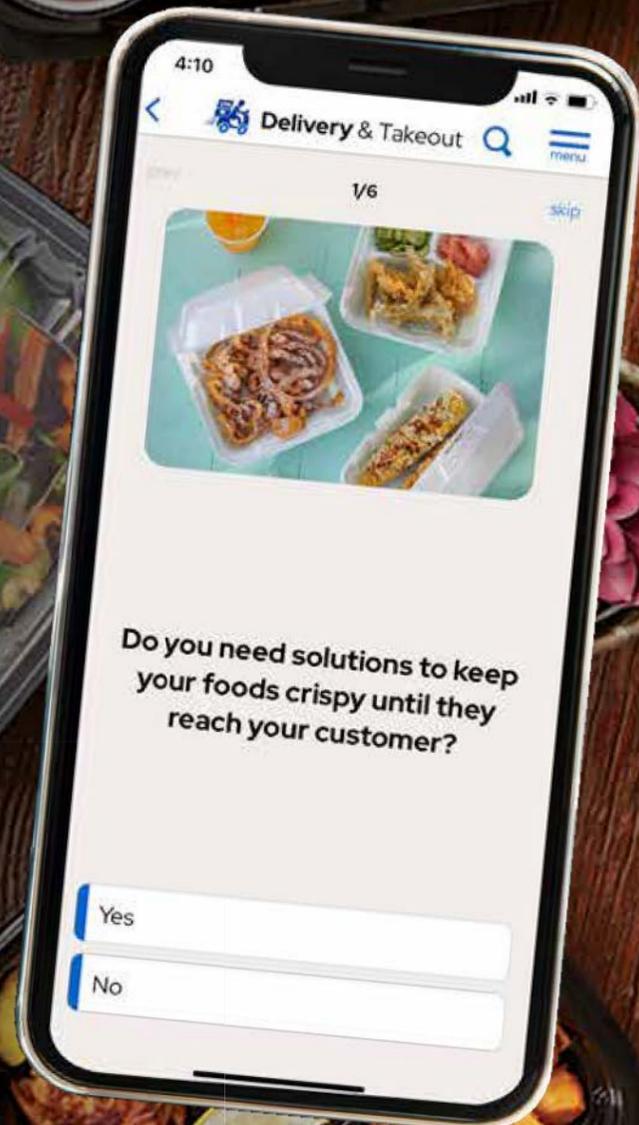
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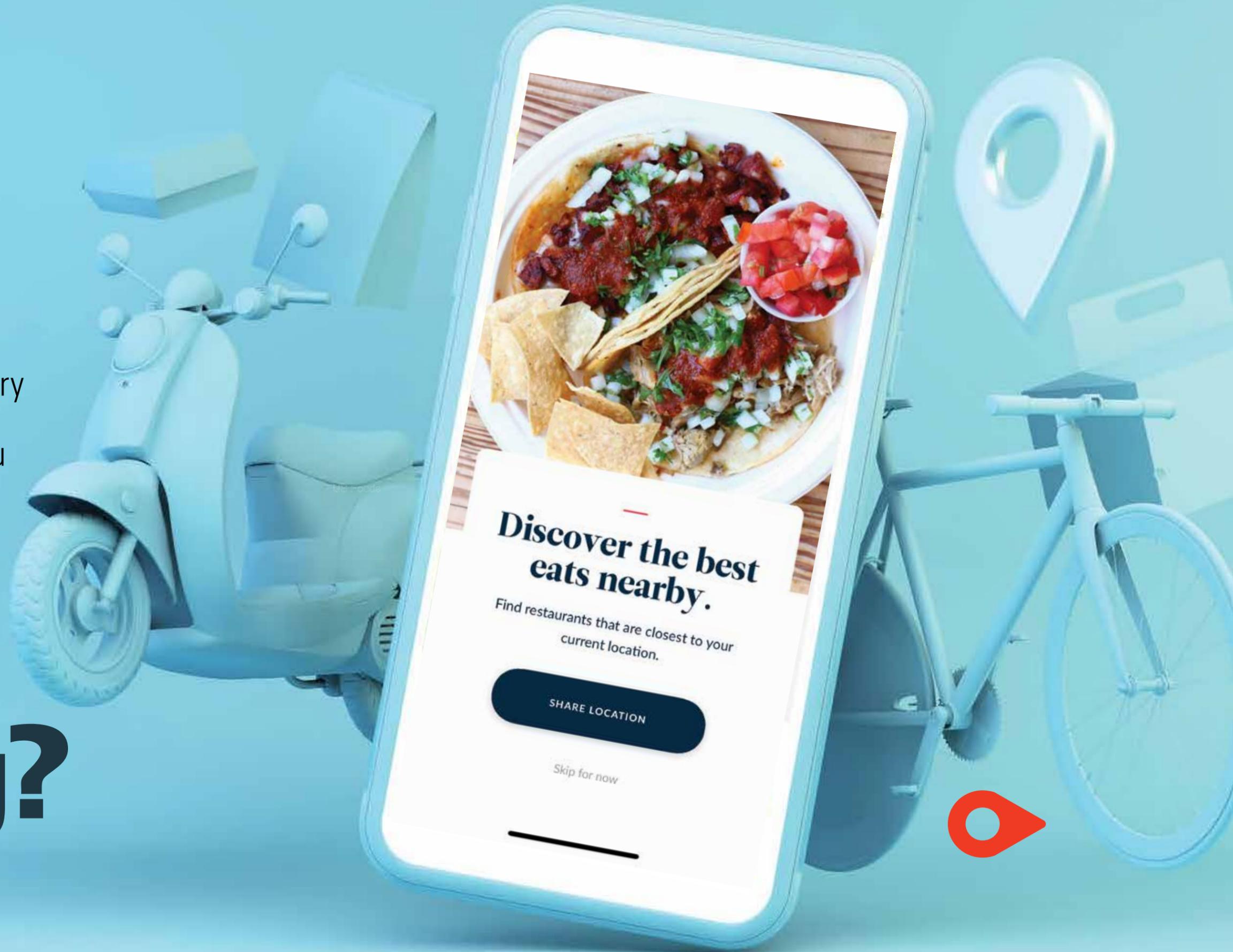
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Can't We All Just Get Along?

Make delivery
apps work
more for you

By Novid Parsi





Grubhub, Uber Eats,

Postmates and other third-party delivery services can be likened to the sitcom trope where a resigned partner sighs and says, “You can’t live with them; you can’t live without them.”

“The exposure and the revenue are necessary, particularly during the pandemic,” says Holly Fox, founder and partner of Last Word Hospitality (LWH), a Los Angeles-based consulting and hospitality management company that owns three restaurants in Southern California. However, “it’s very hard to pull through with the bottom line if you rely on third-party delivery apps as a core source of revenue.”

But even as restaurants emerge from the devastation of COVID-19, the larger reality cannot be avoided. “Customers order everything digitally,” says Ivan Vasquez,

owner of Madre, an Oaxacan restaurant also in Los Angeles.

Madre doesn’t make a profit on deliveries with apps that charge rates as high as 25 to 30%, Vasquez says. Still, he adds: “We can’t survive without them.” Almost 40% of restaurant operators agree with him, according to a study by Raydiant, a company specializing in digital signage platforms.

Some cities, such as San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C., have passed ordinances to help restaurants by capping fees at 15%. But at least one company, specifically DoorDash, in response, tacked on a special \$1.50 fee to Chicago consumers after that city passed the cap.

While the takeout and delivery companies have offered discounts and temporarily waived some fees, such as 30

days of zero commission from DoorDash, restaurateurs say these services can work more to your advantage. Some ideas:

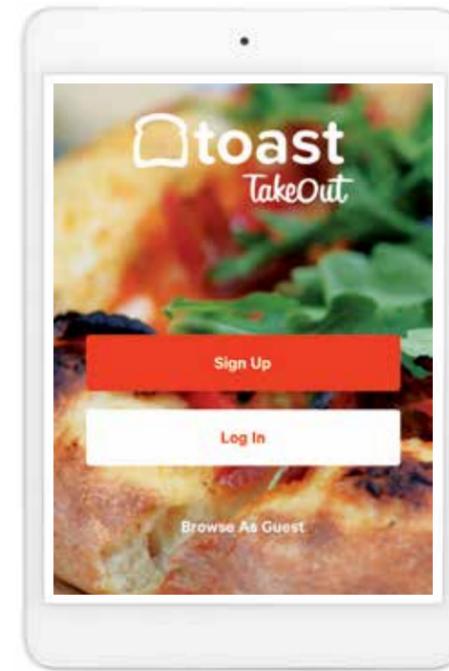
▶ Look at exclusivity, which could pay.

A lower commission rate can be secured through an exclusive agreement with just one app, rather than partnering with several. That happened for a restaurant under Chicago’s Fifty/50 Restaurant Group, says Scott Weiner, principal and co-founder.

▶ **Play hard to get.** “If you use all the delivery services, cut one or two of them off, and wait for them to call you back,” Weiner says. “Ask for a better deal. They’ll probably be inclined to give you one.”

Vasquez got a 5% discount with this tactic, lowering the commission to 25%.

▶ **Read the fine print.** An app might take



Several companies offer lower fees for online ordering, such as Ordrsliip, Toast and ChowNow.

a 15% commission but also add 3.5% for credit card transactions. Make sure the fees include credit card processing costs. “That’s the biggest thing people don’t look for,” Weiner says.

▶ Entice customers to order directly from you.

If your website isn’t equipped for online ordering, getting it up to snuff should be a priority. Delivery apps often charge lower commissions if orders come to them from your restaurant’s site. That brings the commission down to around 12% for Fifty/50’s restaurants, Weiner says. To be successful, however, you’ll need to up your marketing game. Fifty/50 drives traffic with striking food photography on social media, especially Instagram, as well as flyers and coupons placed in delivery and takeout bags.

▶ **Offer incentives for ordering from your restaurant.** Customers aren’t a fan of the fees either and will likely appreciate deals. Consider discounts on slower nights and for first-time users to drive sales as well as complimentary appetizers or desserts for higher amount orders.

▶ **Hire your own drivers.** Fifty/50 also has its own app for direct ordering and

delivery, employing its own drivers for about two-thirds of its deliveries. That’s made a big difference, Weiner says.

▶ Consider companies such as ChowNow, Ordrsliip, and Toast which offer commission-free apps or Tock, which has low commission fees that let restaurants process delivery orders and payments while using the main third party apps for drivers only, not their ordering and payment platforms or their marketing services.

ChowNow and Ordrsliip create white-label, customer-branded apps that work with a restaurant’s point-of-sale system, and use Postmates drivers for a flat fee (about \$7 for deliveries within 3 miles) that the restaurants can split with their customers.

“Restaurants save money by having a delivery fee that’s reasonable for them and for their customers,” says Jordan Sanchez, director of revenue, Ordrsliip.

Madre encourages its customers to order via ChowNow, which partners with Postmates’ delivery. While the service tacks on credit card processing fees, Vasquez says, “that’s minimal compared to the apps that charge 25 to 30%.” ■



For Newbies, and In Case You Forgot

The love-hate relationship between restaurateurs and third-party takeout and delivery apps lies in the high commission rates the apps charge them—generally 15 to 30%. (That’s aside from the delivery and service fees that customers pay.) The rate depends on the app and on the combination of services a restaurant uses: the app’s platform, marketing and/or drivers. The “Big Four”—DoorDash, Grubhub, Postmates and Uber Eats— together make up 99% of third-party delivery business, according to Second Measure. (Soon, it could be the “Big Three”: In July, Uber announced plans to purchase Postmates.)

Beware of the Pass-Off

Many restaurants offset the costs of third-party delivery services by tacking on an extra \$1 or more to menu items. While businesses rightfully can justify the higher prices as the cost of convenience, beware of blow back and a loss of trust.

To avoid potential issues, consider being transparent about passing off the loss of income from the fees. Be upfront with the costs of the service and use it as a way to encourage customers to order directly from you.

ON THE RADAR



AI ups the IQ.

Expect smarter robots in the back of the house, ones that aren't just flipping burgers but actually cooking complex recipes.



A cut above the rest.

The cult following of Taiwan-based bake shops and U.S.-grown counterparts are expanding beyond the East and West coasts with their Instagram appeal of European and Asian baked goods and pastries that look as pretty as they taste.

HIGH ALERT



Party like it's 2021.

As states lift dining bans and warm weather spreads, diners will be back in droves craving social interaction that ties in experiences, menus with more adventurous flavors and celebratory cocktails. Be ready.



SPEAK LESS, TEXT MORE.

Now that customers are accustomed to touchless menus and payments, here come services, such as Oh Waiter, that allow them to text servers for whatever they need. C-h-e-c-k!



Indulgence with an order of healthy.

Burgers, pizza and fried chicken are stalwarts, but diners also want to eat healthier by way of creative dishes with nutrition-packed ingredients.

See story on page 52.



Leave well enough alone.

The latest surveys and data show that takeout and delivery will continue their dominance. They also support pandemic-response changes that restaurants made, from selling provisions and meal kits to family meals and duo daypart concepts.

FADING OUT



One hit wonders.

The pandemic proved the industry is indeed essential but needs more than crisis response donations from customers to help ailing staff.

- ▶ **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Earmark a small percentage of sales, tip pool or outside sponsored events to an employee-in-need fund. Check out Southern Smoke, a fund started by Underbelly Hospitality's Chris Shepherd of Houston for inspiration.



Not everyone wants a gut grenade. Bigger-than-your-head concoctions of ice cream, doughnuts, fudge sauce and candy piled as high as an Instagram pic can capture have their place, but lighter and brighter desserts can also feed the bottom line.

- ▶ **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Milk custard with a layer of Champagne and rose jelly from Maydan in Washington, D.C., fits the bill.



Out with the old.

Diner needs and expectations have changed, which means pre-COVID-19 restaurant marketing efforts should adjust accordingly.

- ▶ **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** A recent study by Hunter, a food and beverage marketing firm, found that 60% of respondents look for simple and practical meal solutions. Help by offering online cooking videos and recipes as well as prepared meal components so participants can follow along.



THE END.

Don't let desserts end you. Ignoring ways to amp up sweets for takeout and delivery is akin to leaving money on the table.

- ▶ **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Diners love to share desserts so offer larger, low-cost, higher-profit portions like the Mango Carliota on page 51, as well as raw cookie dough or cake and sauce components for customers to make desserts at home. See which desserts are trending on page 72.

MENU MUST-HAVES /



Get the recipe for Maple Miso Morning Buns with Maple Glaze and Toasted Sesame on page 35.

WAKE UP BREAKFAST

How to move morning meal options for remote and on-site office workers

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

NO MATTER

what shape the American workforce takes this year, one certainty remains even as coronavirus vaccines become widely available: the opportunity to capitalize on breakfast.

Restaurants that have successfully transitioned to takeout-mode can add breakfast to their offerings, whether that's opening for breakfast pickup and delivery, or tacking on breakfast items at dinner that customers can easily compile or heat the next morning.

Innovative operators have also had success with subscription boxes, breakfast sandwiches and healthier options. A strategic menu mix can lower overall food costs, reduce waste, maximize labor and most importantly, boost the bottom line.

The Morning After

About a third of consumers surveyed by foodservice research firm Datassential say they would like the option of including breakfast items with dinner bundles. Restaurants can upsell carryout dinner orders by offering breakfast that falls in line with their concept. For example, a breakfast bao would make more sense at an Asian-themed concept than biscuits and gravy.

Along with its weekend takeaway dinners, Pasjoli in Santa Monica, California, has been selling sweet bread boxes, including chocolate croissants, cinnamon rolls and coffee cake for \$22. In Chicago, French Quiche customers tack on the restaurant's namesake quiche to their boeuf bourguignon and cassoulet dinners for breakfast the next day. The prep for quiche, such as vegetarian Provencal or a classic quiche Lorraine, is simple, using ingredients the restaurant already has for sandwiches, salads and crepes. "The flavor possibilities are only limited by your creativity," says chef Dominique Tougne. "Quiche is one of those preparations that you can eat cold, just warm or very hot. It travels very well as long as you keep it cold."



Rye Deli & Drink fills its breakfast brik with ingredients from the prior service to help control costs.

Retool Existing Inventory

Rye Deli & Drink opened in Chicago at the height of the pandemic as an atypical Jewish deli. It's known for bagels, smoked salmon and pastrami, but the brik, a Tunisian egg pastry and popular Israeli street food, has become a sleeper hit and a way to avoid food waste. A thin brik shell is filled with potatoes, pastrami trimmings and leftover vegetable trimmings before an egg is cracked in it. The shell is folded like an envelope and dropped into the fryer. "It looks like a spring roll wrapper mixed with crepe, but it's not greasy because the dough is porous," says chef Billy Caruso. "It's crispy but the inside has a perfectly soft-poached egg."

At Counterpart Vegan, an all-day restaurant in Los Angeles, chef Mimi Williams' popular vegan breakfast sandwich features a "runny egg yolk," carrots, onion, garlic, turmeric, mustard powder, black salt and xanthan gum—ingredients already existing on her menu.

"Our plant-based ingredients are very versatile," Williams says. "We can utilize ingredients in many different ways across our menu and reduce food waste."

Batch and Offer Healthier Options

Better-for-your breakfast options have resonated with diners as the pandemic wears on because health is top of mind, Williams says. At Uncooked, a plant-based grab-and-go restaurant in Chicago, overnight oats and chia pudding have been breakfast hits. Both items can be made in large batches with no technical skills required, last up to a week, and have sound profit margins. They're also protein- and fiber-rich, making them reliable bases for a wide array of experimental toppings and flavors. "I can have the person who washes the dishes make chia pudding," says co-founder Jeremy Jones. He recommends avoiding matcha as a flavoring, since it oxidizes and turns an unappetizing brown color after just one

Cast-Iron Chickpea Quiche with Toasted Almond Romesco and Cashew Ricotta

Cafe Gratitude

Newport Beach, California

- 3 cups filtered water
- 2 cups garbanzo bean flour
- 5 tablespoons olive oil, divided use
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- ¼ cup red onion, finely chopped
- 3 cups baby spinach, lightly chopped
- ½ cup Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 6 Kalamata olives, pitted and chopped
- 2 tablespoons gremolata, recipe follows
- 2 medium red bell peppers, charred with juices
- ¼ cup almonds, toasted
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 teaspoon garlic, chopped
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon smoked salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- Cayenne pepper, to taste
- Cashew ricotta, recipe follows

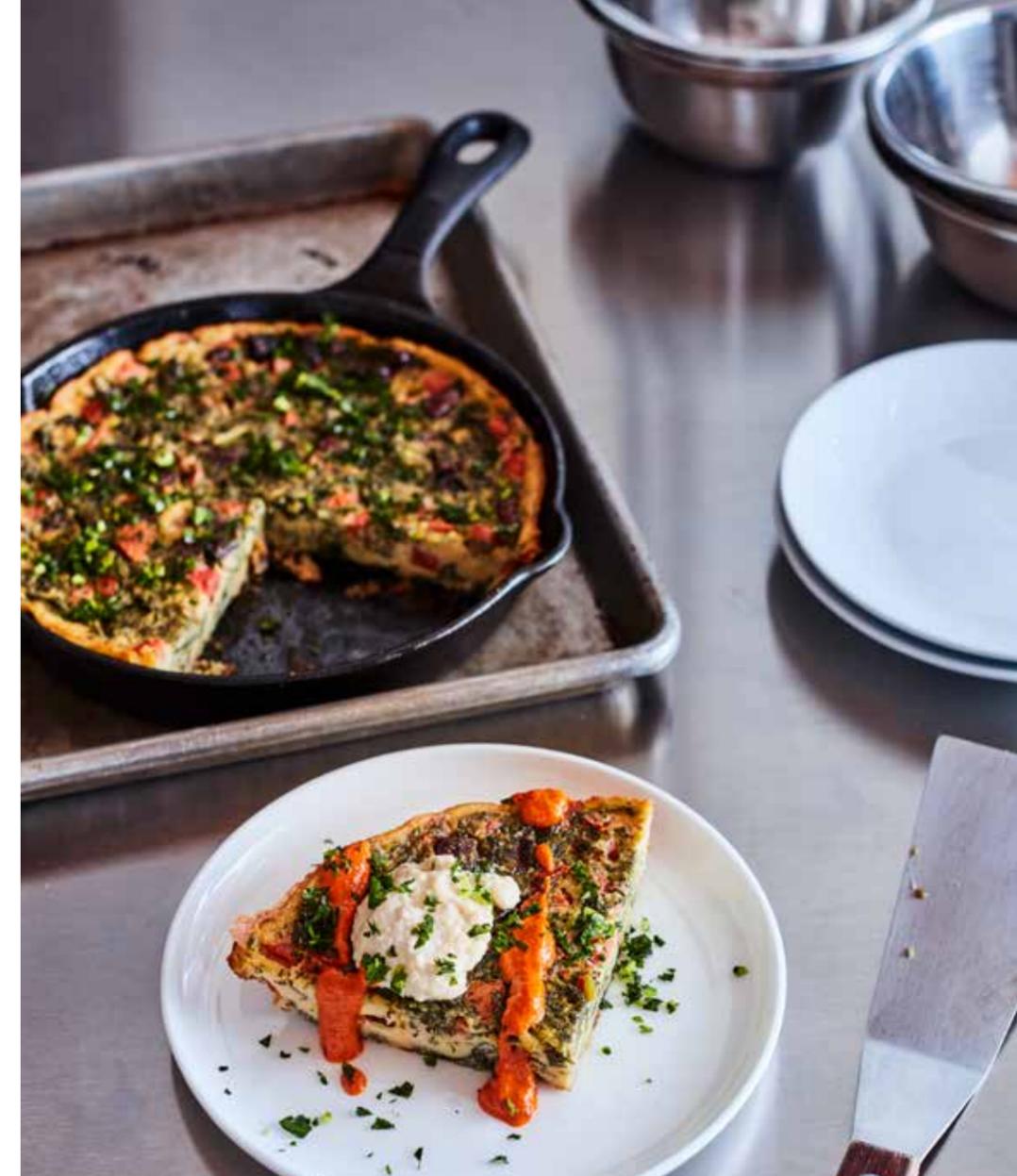
Whisk together the filtered water and garbanzo bean flour. Cover and let sit overnight or for at least 6 hours. The next day, skim off any foam that has accumulated and whisk in 1 tablespoon olive oil and salt.

Add 2 tablespoons olive oil to an 8-inch cast-iron skillet and set on medium heat. Saute onion 3 minutes until softened and lightly browned.

Add half of the chickpea batter and spinach. Cook 2 to 3 minutes until spinach is slightly wilted; add tomatoes and olives followed by the remaining batter. Top with gremolata.

Cook for about 5 minutes until the edges begin to solidify. Transfer to oven heated to 350 F and bake for 35 minutes or until dark golden brown and the center is firm. It will set up a little more as it cools. Rest 5 to 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, make romesco by blending peppers, almonds, remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, water, garlic, paprika, smoked salt, black pepper and cayenne until smooth.



To serve, drizzle romesco and ricotta on top of the quiche along with a finishing sprinkle of gremolata. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

To make gremolata: Chop together 1 bunch flat-leaf parsley, 1 garlic clove and a 2-inch strip lemon peel. Season with kosher salt.

To make cashew ricotta cheese: Soak ½ cup raw cashews in cold water for at least 2 hours. Drain and add to a blender with 2 tablespoons lemon juice, ½ cup filtered water and ¼ teaspoon kosher salt and process until smooth.

**"THE FLAVOR
POSSIBILITIES
ARE ONLY
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BY YOUR
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—Chef Dominique Tougne,
French Quiche, Chicago

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Away From Home



day. But blue spirulina, turmeric, cold brew and freeze-dried raspberries have all been successes.

For a savory healthy breakfast that can be batched, chef/owner Salima Saunders makes a mezze platter at Uplifters Kitchen in Santa Monica, California, that includes house-baked focaccia with a fried egg, two scoops of za'atar hummus, fattoush salad and a few triangles of fresh feta. "Each component can be prepped ahead of time and assembled when the order comes through, which makes for a timely delivery," she says.

Adapt for At-Home

Alfred Coffee in Los Angeles depended on a busy morning rush to sustain the business, so during the pandemic, they debuted an app that made mobile ordering easy and efficient by allowing customers to customize their orders and skip waiting in line. They also launched new items like a 96-ounce cold brew coffee box and DIY vanilla latte kits, which have become their best-selling items online. "We wanted to help our customers recreate their Alfred experience at home," says business development manager Natalie Swain. "The new cold brew format has an extended shelf life as it is packaged

without ice in the box and designed for delayed consumption." For additional food choices, Alfred offers freshly made breakfast burritos and has expanded its bagel menu at multiple locations to help capture revenue per transaction during the pandemic.

Go with Boxed Assortments

Sixteen Bricks in Cincinnati made up revenue by selling pastry boxes for pick-up and advertising the new offering via Instagram. Customers pay in advance and are surprised by new sweet and savory breakfast pastries each week. Streamlining pickup to just one day each week minimizes the disruption to workflow and allows the bakery to avoid dealing with third-party delivery platforms. Perhaps most importantly, the assorted pastry boxes have been a morale boost, allowing the team to stay creative and experiment with trial runs of new flavors like dark chocolate chai brioche, sunflower seed jam bars and orange blossom rhubarb twists. A few new pastries like the maple miso cream morning buns glazed with maple and topped with toasted sesame seeds became so popular that they are now on the permanent menu. ■

Maple Miso Morning Buns with Maple Glaze and Toasted Sesame

Sixteen Bricks, Cincinnati

- 300 grams whole milk
- 80 grams maple syrup
- 24 grams cornstarch
- 60 grams sugar
- 60 grams egg yolk
- 38 grams butter
- 35 grams shiro miso
- 2 grams salt
- 250 grams heavy cream, whipped to soft peaks
- Croissant dough, prepared
- Miso syrup glaze, recipe follows
- Sesame seeds, lightly toasted, as needed

In a large pot, combine whole milk and maple syrup and bring to a simmer. Whisk cornstarch and sugar in a small bowl, add yolks, continue whisking and temper with hot milk mixture. Boil for at least 1 minute whisking constantly. Remove from heat, mount in butter, miso and salt.

Using an immersion stick, blend pastry cream until smooth; chill. Beat cream and gently fold in whipped cream. Hold refrigerated until ready to use.

Meanwhile, bring dough to room temperature so it's pliable and roll into a rectangle with an approximate thickness of 3 mm. Cut 6-by-3-inch rectangles.

With each rectangle, make two vertical cuts starting ½-inch from the top. Braid the pieces, then roll the bottom of the braid up to the top. Place seam-side down in non-greased muffin cups. Proof for approximately an hour or until puffy. Bake in a heated 360 F oven until golden brown.

To assemble, brush warm morning buns with warm maple syrup glaze and generously top with toasted sesame seeds. Once cool, make a small hole in the bottom of the bun. Pipe 25 grams maple miso cream into the center of the bun.

To make maple syrup glaze: Boil 150 grams water with 150 grams maple syrup. Keep warm until ready to use.



Brake for Breakfast

Who can benefit?

Coffee shops, bakeries, restaurants near high-rises or in densely populated residential areas and restaurants with a strong millennial following.

Why: To adjunct or create a new revenue stream, bring employees back to work and expand your customer base.

How: Clearly communicate on your website and social media that breakfast is offered. Use mobile-friendly web platforms to make ordering easier. Consider collaborating with local partners for a more robust offering and for cross-promotion or setting up a subscription box.



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Did you know?

More than three quarters (68%) of Americans are more tempted to buy baked goods when dining out if they are baked fresh onsite than if they are prepared offsite¹



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This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll, a market research and global consulting firm, on behalf of General Mills Foodservice from September 16-18, 2020 among 2,053 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact General Mills Foodservice.



Raspberry Chia Pudding

*Co-founder Jeremy Jones
Uncooked, Chicago*

- 4 tablespoons monk fruit or other sweetener**
- 1 teaspoon frozen raspberry powder**
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt**
- 13½ ounces light coconut milk**
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon white chia seeds**
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 tablespoons granola, your recipe**
- Raspberries to garnish**

In a bowl, whisk together monk fruit, raspberry powder and salt. Slowly whisk in coconut milk. Add chia seeds and vanilla, whisking until combined. Let sit for 10 minutes and then whisk once more before mixture sets.

Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight. At service, add ½ cup pudding to a shallow glass jar and top with granola and garnish with a raspberries. Makes four ½-cup servings.

LIGHT & BRIGHT



Get the recipe for Gluten-Free Crepe Cake with Pandan Pastry Cream, Kiwi and Lime Leaf on page 40 and learn more about perilla leaves, opposite page, on page 42.

The Vietnamese pantry shines on the familiar to inspire new favorites

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

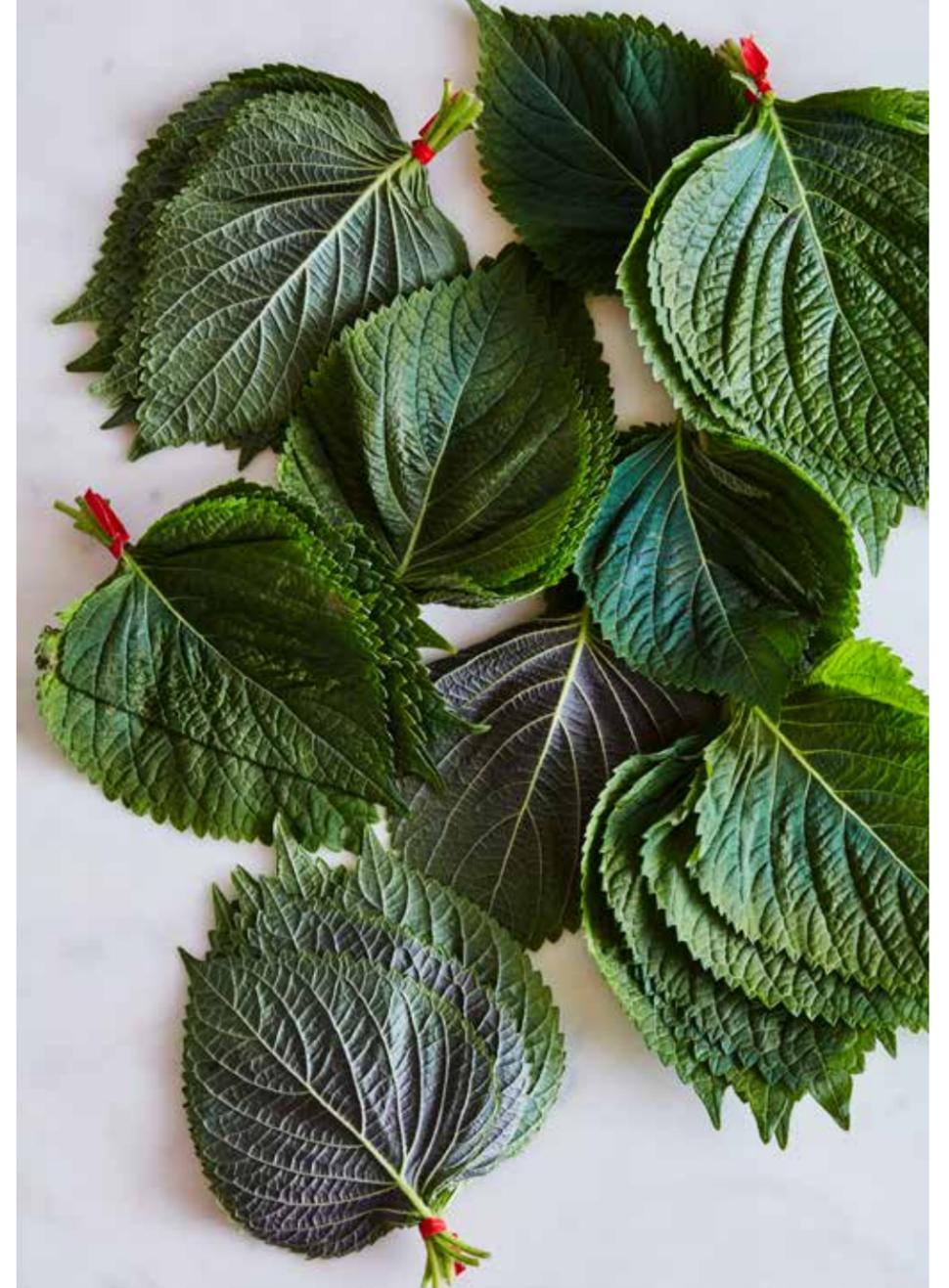
The timing is prime.

As restaurants emerge this spring with hope of fully operating, chefs are eager to flip the switch from survival to creativity mode in ways that appeal to all guests. Diners want better-for-you foods and flavors that match the excitement of a renewed normal.

The Vietnamese pantry stands at the intersection where basic proteins, from chicken to seafood and desserts of all kinds, could use a boost of excitement. Southeast Asian ingredients deftly balance salty, sweet, spicy, bitter and sour components with varying textures and contrasting temperatures—all of which result in lighter and healthier dishes.

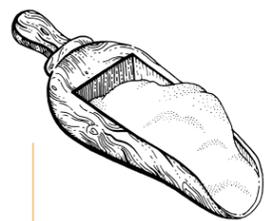
“Vietnamese is the most refined cuisine of Southeast Asia,” says chef Thai Dang of HaiSous in Chicago. Incorporating influences from neighboring Laotian, Chinese, and Hmong cuisines with techniques learned under French colonization, the dizzying variety of Vietnamese dishes fall in line with the big and bold flavors American diners crave, but they have yet to recognize them wholeheartedly beyond pho or bahn mi.

Dang updates tradition with modern back of the house techniques. In Vietnamese homes, *ga kho gung*—chicken braised with fish sauce, ginger, chilies and sugar—is cooked by instinct. Dang replicates this familial nuance by



instructing cooks to measure ingredients and cooking time by weight ratio. At Bricolage in Brooklyn, chef Lien Lin’s Vietnamese and Chinese heritages combine in a gastropub menu that highlights local ingredients. Her Vietnamese bouillabaisse melds fragrant lemongrass, pungent fish sauce, local fish and French technique. For chef Vince Nguyen of Berlu in Portland, Oregon, tasting menus help him create an eating perception he’ll then thwart entirely by shifting textures, flavors or temperatures.

As their operation shifts post pandemic, these chefs will use the lessons learned, such as the need for comfort foods and affordability, to innovate tradition. Nyugen transformed almost entirely, opening a traditional Vietnamese bakery. His chewy crepe cake with pandan pastry cream and seasonal fruit might be new to some Americans, but the composition is solidly Vietnamese. Such ingredients—ginger, chilies, fish sauce, lime leaves—serve as the cornerstones of Vietnamese dishes. **Here’s how to bring 15 classic Vietnamese ingredients into your kitchen to meld the new with the familiar.** ▶



STAPLES

» **Rice paper:** This gluten-free wrapper is malleable when fresh or after a quick dip in water. Use to make cold summer rolls or to wrap the quintessential combination of hot grilled meats, noodles, raw vegetables and fresh herbs. Fry into crunchy rolls, advises Lin. Fry plain papers for tortillas or salad topper chips, suggests Dang.

» **Tapioca flour:** Tapioca flour lends that classic chewy texture and mild flavor to Vietnamese pastries. Incorporate with rice and potato flour for pastries—it's too heavy and sticky on its own, warns Nguyen—or use to thicken gluten-free sauces and gravies.

» **Thin rice noodles:** To cook the thin rice noodles commonly found in the U.S., shock them under cold water, rinse with warm water and cover with a dampened towel, Lin says. They'll stay pliable for cold noodle salads, rolls and quick soups. Fry dry noodles for salad and soup garnishes.

SALTY

» **Hoisin sauce:** "The ketchup of Asian cuisine," according to Lin. This soy sauce, black bean paste, molasses, vinegar, sesame and garlic blend make a beloved pho condiment and base for other sauces. Add peanut butter and garlic for dipping rolls, noodles and stir-fried rice, Dang suggests.

» **Oyster sauce:** Made from boiled oysters reduced with sugar and water and thickened with cornstarch, the luscious texture emulsifies beautifully into marinades and sauces. It lends rich, sweet, salty brininess that enhances other ingredients.



Combine with soy sauce, sugar, garlic and ginger for a meat marinade.

» **Fermented shrimp paste:** This pungent paste of blended fermented whole shrimp and salt is a favorite because it packs in the umami. To mellow the funky aroma, cook a little into dipping and stir-fry sauces (like the oyster combo above). Lin adds a dab to her pasta Bolognese sauce too. "It adds another layer of flavor that people can't put their finger on," she says.



SOUR

» **Limes and lime leaf:** More native to Vietnam than lemons, lime's concentrated citrus flavor and aroma best complement other intense Vietnamese ingredients. "Lime leaf is incredibly fragrant, bright and acidic," Nguyen says. "I love to slice it thin and sprinkle over pastries or fold into coconut pastry creams."

» **Pickled vegetables:** A Vietnamese staple,

quick-pickled daikon and carrots "add crunch, acidity, and sweetness," says Lin. Add to salads, noodles and rolls to contrast soft textures and hot temperatures. Dang uses pickled mustard greens in soups and braises so the lactic acids tenderize meat while also seasoning. "Or toss raw with spices into your cooked roasted vegetables for a different texture and flavor profile to stimulate your palette," he suggests.

Gluten-Free Crepe Cake with Pandan Pastry Cream, Kiwi and Lime Leaf

*Chef Vince Nguyen
Berlu, Portland, Oregon*

64 ounces coconut milk
200 grams pandan leaves
8 eggs
320 grams sugar
32 grams gluten-free flour
64 grams cornstarch
16 grams salt
113½ grams butter
Crepe batter, recipe follows
Green kiwis, peeled and sliced
Lime leaf, chiffonade

In a large saucepan, bring coconut milk with pandan leaves to a simmer. Whisk together eggs, sugar, flour, cornstarch and salt and add a third of the coconut milk mixture. Whisk to combine and return to the saucepan with the remaining mixture. Bring to a boil, lower heat and whisk in butter. Once thickened, remove from heat, cool and refrigerate.

Make crepes to desired width and assemble by layering up to 10 crepes with pandan pastry cream, fresh lime leaf and slices of kiwi. Layers of cream should be noticeable.

To make crepe batter: Combine 392½ grams gluten-free flour, 103 grams sugar and 15 grams salt. Whisk together 10 eggs with 1,150 grams almond milk and fold in dry ingredients.

Ga Kho Gung (Ginger-braised Chicken)

*Chef/owner Thai Dang
HaiSous, Chicago*

1 small organic chicken, cut into medium pieces
5% shallots, sliced
5% fish sauce, plus more if needed
2.5% sugar
2.5% ginger, sliced
1 gram whole dried chili, 4 to 5 pieces
Canola oil, as needed
2 cups chicken stock
Green onion, as needed

Weigh chicken to determine ingredient amounts based on percentages. Add shallots, fish sauce, sugar, ginger and chiles; marinate for 1 to 2 hours.

Heat a heavy-duty pot on medium heat and add oil to thinly coat. Add chicken and stock; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer with lid cracked open for 30 minutes.

Stir occasionally and taste. Season with more fish sauce if desired. Cook for another 10 to 15 minutes if needed. Garnish with green onion.





SPICY

» Sambal oelek:

The garlic-free version of this spicy chili condiment also makes a versatile cooking paste. Add to marinades and dressings for kick. Or, cook it down with palm sugar, shallots and garlic for a sweet chili sauce that Dang uses as a “mother sauce” in other dishes.



SWEET

» Vietnamese

cinnamon: With a bigger bark that’s hard to grind down, this particularly fragrant cinnamon is both sweet and spicy, classically added to simmering soup broths.

» **Cardamom:** Grassy, lemony, and citrusy, green cardamom’s herbal and minty notes balance out rich and fatty flavors, and black cardamom adds a touch of smoke to the palette. Combine with Vietnamese cinnamon in pho broth, infuse into sugar syrups, or cook into tropical fruit jams.

» **Rock sugar:** With a natural and gentle sweetness, rock sugar balances the salty, meaty notes of soups and braises. Because it doesn’t dissolve in cold applications, it’s a challenge to grind and takes time to melt, stick to hot applications that cook low and slow.

FRESH

» Lettuce, cilantro

and mint: Use lettuce as a wrap for cooked meats, noodles, and herbs. Fold the trio into rice paper summer rolls. Or, toss into noodle salad.

» **Lemongrass:** Floral and fragrant, lemongrass stalks crushed into stocks or marinades add an underlying brightness to particularly meaty dishes. Buy fresh or frozen—dehydrated lemongrass is stripped of the essential oils and moisture that pack the flavor.

» Perilla leaves:

“Vietnamese cooking in one herb” is how Dang describes the collectively sharp, sweet, herbal, and anise-like notes of perilla leaves. “It’s the one herb that’s delicate but also strong enough to withstand broths or grilled meats.” Use raw in rolls or add to salads.

Vietnamese Bouillabaisse

Chef Lien Lin

Bricolage, Brooklyn, New York

Grapeseed oil, as needed

8 ounces leeks, sliced

8 ounces shallots, thinly sliced

8 ounces fennel, thinly sliced

1 ounce lemongrass, thinly sliced

2 teaspoons garlic, minced

½ teaspoon saffron

½ dried chile, crushed

¼ cup Pernod

¼ cup tamarind paste

1 teaspoon shrimp paste and more to taste

4 quarts fish stock, recipe follows

Fish sauce, to taste

Lime juice, to taste

3 to 4 littleneck clams

3 to 4 mussels

3 pieces firm fish, cut into 1- to 2-inch cubes

3 to 5 bird’s-eye chilies, sliced into rings

1 small Roma tomato, peeled and quartered

2 shrimp, 16/20, deveined and halved lengthwise

Sprigs of Vietnamese Thai basil and cilantro

1 tablespoon fried shallots

1 baguette

Rouille, recipe follows

Heat oil in a Dutch oven and saute leeks, shallots, fennel, lemongrass, garlic, saffron and dried chile. Add Pernod, tamarind, shrimp paste and fish stock. Bring soup to a boil and adjust seasoning with tamarind paste, shrimp paste, fish sauce and lime juice.

At service, bring soup to a boil, add clams and cook for 3 minutes. Add mussels, fish, chilies, and tomato and cook 1 minute. Add shrimp and cook 1 more minute. Garnish with 1 sprig basil, 3 sprigs cilantro and fried shallots.

Serve with toasted baguette cut in half on bias and 2 tablespoons rouille in ramekin. Makes 1 serving with leftover stock to make more.

To make fish stock: Combine 2 quarts fish stock and simmer with ½ chopped small onion, small knob ginger, 1 stalk lemongrass, 2 Makrut lime leaf and a few black peppercorns and simmer for 30 minutes.

To make rouille: Combine 1 large crushed garlic clove, ½ roasted and peeled red bell pepper, 1 egg yolk, 1 teaspoon lemon juice and small pinch of saffron threads in a food processor. With motor on, slowly add 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil and season with salt and pepper.



All for one, One for all

How prix-fixe, family-style meals can pay off as a menu strategy

By Kate Bernot
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

▼ **Family-style, set price**

menus born out of the pandemic became a lifeline for independent restaurants. The model allowed for more predictability during an unpredictable time, controlling and reducing food costs, labor and waste. Success, however, hinged on balancing those variables with value. If customers felt they got their money's worth for multiple dishes eaten on premise or to-go, they'd come back again—the operator's Holy Grail.

“We have been able to really show what the Mama Meal experience is all about: Add on a nice bottle of Lebanese wine, and you have a similar experience to the restaurant, at home,” says chef Nicco Muratore of Mamnoon, a contemporary Middle Eastern restaurant in Seattle.

Operators who nailed it like Muratore see no reason to scrap the practice. They'll determine whether the prix-fixe, family-style option continues to sell daily or switch to its biggest performing nights. What they do know for certain is that there's always room for a strategy that works for customers and the bottom line.

Here's how Muratore and other operators make it work.

MAMNOON SEATTLE

APPROACH: Four shareable plates for two people (\$40 total): seasonal salad, vegetarian or meat entree, side dish, and labneh. A la carte items, including alcohol, are also available. Offered for in-person dining as well as to-go. Mama Meals can be preordered via Tock, or customers can call to order during dinner service. Meat entrees change daily, vegetarian entrees change once per week; some dishes recur on the same day every week (Thursdays are fried chicken and shish taouk returns once a week).

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Spring Tabbouleh with Beets, Sugar Snap Peas, Cucumber, Walnut and Pomegranate

*Chef Nicco Muratore
Mamnoon, Seattle*

1 cup cucumber, small diced
1 cup beets, roasted and diced
1 cup sugar snap peas, finely sliced
1 cup cooked bulgur, quinoa, farro or barley
1 cup chopped parsley
Seeds from 1 pomegranate

½ cup walnuts, crushed
¼ cup mint, chopped
¼ cup dill, chopped
1 teaspoon cinnamon
2 tablespoons olive oil
Kosher salt, as needed
Lemon juice, freshly squeezed, as needed

Mix all ingredients in a large mixing bowl, season with salt and lemon juice. Taste and adjust acidity and seasoning as needed.

FOOD COSTS: Goal is to keep them below 25%. Offering lower-priced proteins such as chicken, helps. Proteins like lamb are limited to once per week or the price may increase to \$45. Oftentimes, the kitchen finds a way to stretch the more expensive protein. For example, when serving crispy lamb shawarma, Mamnoon portions 10 ounces of lamb for two people, but breading and frying “bulks it up,” according to Muratore, and makes it look more substantial. Proteins and other ingredients from a previous shift become seasonal salads or sandwiches on the next day’s menu. The kitchen chooses hardy vegetables like sunchoke, baby turnips, carrots and radishes, which can become seasonal salads or pickles.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES: Sides and salads are prepped in advance. All sides, salads and entrees are packaged for two people, which makes prep easy (no checking to see how many items per order); pickup times are staggered every 30 minutes so the kitchen can assemble the next batch of proteins without getting overwhelmed. Muratore says the whole process is “really prep heavy.”

BEST FOR: Any restaurant already offering small plates, Muratore says. Prep those into portions for two or four.

MENU HIGHLIGHTS: Harra fried chicken and crispy lamb shawarma (braised lamb shoulder pressed overnight and deep fried).

CHILAM BALAM **CHICAGO**

APPROACH: Family-style, four-dish menu available to-go for \$35 per person, which includes a starter (such as guacamole or posole), salad or vegetable (such as a green salad, esquites or Brussels sprouts), main dish (meat, vegetarian, vegan choices—recent hits have included carnitas with rice and beans; brisket mole de olla; carnitas tamales), and dessert. It must be ordered at least an hour in advance.



Get the recipe for Smoked and Braised Brisket with Morels and English Peas on page 51.

Menu changes weekly. Additional add-ons include margarita and sangria mixes.

FOOD COSTS: Keeping a tight menu helps owner Soraya Rendon control food costs. One menu is offered per week, and the only choices are meat, vegetarian or vegan dishes. This means the kitchen is generally prepping only one type of meat entree, so the kitchen can choose a meat on sale or offered at a good price. The restaurant is also conservative with estimating demand. It's better to sell out than have extras, Rendon advises.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES: Currently, only Rendon and chef Natalie Oswald, are working, handling all duties to control labor costs. Guests are asked to bring their own containers for margarita and sangria mixes. Anticipating demand week to week is a challenge. Rendon is using last week's sales to estimate orders for the following week but says there's still great variation in traffic depending on weather and if other restaurants are open for in-person dining.

BEST FOR: Restaurants with a regular customer base willing to return every week for a new menu as well as restaurants that don't cater to many guests with dietary restrictions.

MENU HIGHLIGHTS: Carnitas with beans and rice, posole, esquites, peanut butter and Oaxacan chocolate mousse cake

**DRIFTHOUSE BY DAVID BURKE
SEA BRIGHT, NEW JERSEY**

APPROACH: Sunday Suppa menu is available Sundays, dine-in only. The three-course menu is \$45 per person and includes two starters, two entrees (usually a protein and a pasta) and one dessert. Additional courses are \$12. Sides are available a la carte. Upgrades (for filet mignon or lobster) cost \$20 to \$24. Menu changes monthly.

FOOD COSTS: "It's really all about the upsell," says Carmine Di Giovanni,



Thoughtful packaging, Raccolto's cocktails, left, and Chilam Balam are important for value.

that communal experience, and they're more willing to accept limited menus during this time.

MENU HIGHLIGHTS: Wood-fired pork chop, Sunday fish specials and housemade burrata.



**RACCOLTO
SEATTLE**

APPROACH: Chef's tasting menu to-go offers guests a choice of a starter, pasta and protein plus dessert at \$28 per person. A family meal for two is offered at a fixed price, which varies (it recently featured brisket with marble potatoes, salsa rossa, Brussels sprouts and Calabrian chili for \$30 per person). Other family meal entrees have included prime rib and miso-marinated black cod. Menus change daily or near-daily.

FOOD COSTS: "We want to get by, pay our bills, keep people employed safely and the only way I think we can do that and feel good is by offering a ton of value," says owner and executive chef Brian Clevenger, noting that his food costs are perhaps "a little high" right now. Quality ingredients and fair portions are part of what makes Raccolto's (and his other restaurants') family meals popular. "Volume cures everything, it allows your food cost to be higher."

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES: Besides controlling food costs, pivoting from a dine-in to a takeout menu was a challenge. "Our food historically hasn't traveled well," Clevenger says. "That was a bit of humble pie for me: Start cooking food that people want to-go." He made small tweaks, like changing pasta sauces so they're not emulsified a la minute, choosing thicker pasta shapes that hold their chew and subbing in hardier greens that don't wilt in transit. He also introduced new dishes, like Nashville hot fried chicken, that the restaurant never would have served before the pandemic. Labor savings also are a benefit: Because the family-style dishes are so prep heavy, kitchen staff arrives an

corporate chef and partner. Lobster and dry-aged beef are popular upsell choices, as well as focaccia with Calabrian chili oil. "There are also tons of benefits as far as utilizing some product in the box," because it's served on Sundays—maybe there's salmon or branzino left over from Saturday service; either could become the market fish on the Sunday Suppa menu. "It's a very price-point driven menu." Wines are specially priced at \$30 but higher-priced ones are also promoted as well as more expensive entrees and additional a la carte sides.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES: Labor savings are significant because instead of prepping four entrees, a cook can prep a single, large dish. Because guests are happy about returning to restaurants, they tend to linger and order more wine or cocktails.

BEST FOR: Applicable to almost any style of cuisine, says Di Giovanni. It harkens back to the "beef steak dinner" of decades past, with large roasts and vegetable platters served to a table family-style. He's seen a resurgence of guests looking for

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hour earlier than they had pre-COVID-19, but they're able to leave two hours earlier.

BEST FOR: Slightly higher-end operations. Clevenger says the to-go tasting menu was a logical way to extend the restaurant's in-person tasting menu, with aforementioned modifications that make it travel more easily. It gives a special occasion feel to customers looking for something more elevated than standard takeout offers.

MENU HIGHLIGHTS: Nashville hot fried chicken, fresh pasta and prime rib. ■

Smoked and Braised Brisket with Morels and English Peas

Chef/owner Brian Clevenger
Rocolto, Seattle

5 pounds brisket, trimmed
33 grams kosher salt, plus extra to taste
33 grams Italian espresso
2 cups red wine
4 cups beef or chicken stock
1 tablespoon grapeseed oil
1 small shallot, diced small
4 to 6 ounces morels, halved if large
¾ cup English peas, blanched
Splash white wine
Splash chicken stock
1 tablespoon butter
Lemon thyme, leaves only, to garnish
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Pea shoots to garnish

Rub brisket with salt and espresso 24 hours prior to smoking. Smoke for 20 minutes at 190 F until medium-rare.

Transfer to a roasting pan. Add red wine and stock and bring to a boil. Cover and braise at 300 F for 2 to 2½ hours until fork tender without tearing the meat. Cool in liquid.

At service, portion meat for two people and warm in its natural ju. Heat oil until hot and saute shallot. Add morels and saute over high heat for a minute, add white wine, chicken stock and peas. Finish with butter, thyme and season with salt and pepper. Include garnish in a separate takeout container.



Mango Carlota

Chef Natalie Oswald
Chilam Balam, Chicago

1 quart heavy cream
1 can sweetened condensed milk
Pinch of salt
1 tablespoon vanilla
1 box or 4 sleeves Maria cookies
1 box ataulfo mangos, medium dice
Fresh mint, torn, as needed

Whip cream with sweetened condensed milk, salt and vanilla.

In a 9-by-13-inch baking dish, layer cookies, spread cream and layer mangos on top. Continue with the layers until the dish is full. Top with diced mangos. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Slice and top with mint leaves.



High-nutritional ingredients are increasingly important to diners.

PICTURE OF HEALTH

Immune boosters can draw diners

By Lesley Balla
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

When the coronavirus

hit, most food-conscious Americans fell into two camps: They stuffed themselves with comfort food like fried chicken, pizza and burgers, or they made a mad dash to find turmeric smoothies, grain bowls and healthy dishes to help combat any ailment. Sometimes it was both in one day because, you know, balance.

This wasn't lost on foodservice. For years, consumer packaged goods brands have been flooding the market with products that promised better health and sales skyrocketed during the pandemic. As consumers looked for ways to get extra vitamin C and D, zinc, potassium and magnesium into their bodies, chefs around the country took notice. They answered the call for immune boosting foods with more creative menus.

"It's more than just being conscious of different eating choices or dietary considerations," says Mee McCormick, chef and co-owner of Pinewood Kitchen & Mercantile just outside of Nashville. "Instead of trying to tell people what not to eat, we're providing them with something to eat."

The pandemic hastened what Americans had already been looking for in food, so buzzwords like immune-boosting, functional foods and antioxidant are more common on menus than ever. Elixirs and tonics, bone broth, blueberries, pomegranate, dark leafy greens, reishi and other mushrooms are becoming front and center. Chefs pivoting to takeout now offer meal kits that promote health and wellness. Others have turned to leading a cleaner lifestyle

themselves, which inspires staff and customers, and in turn means longevity for their business.

For McCormick, learning about microbiome-friendly foods helped her survive several autoimmune disorders that left her gut ravaged. She worked with a macrobiotic counselor to understand the best foods to eat, and went to culinary school to make it. She knew she wasn't alone in this journey, so she created Pinewood Kitchen to offer down-home favorites for others like her.

"When the immune system is overactive, we have to find a way to balance it, and that's with gut health," she says. "So I learned to soak grains to remove irritants, add sea vegetables to a broth for soups, and find alternatives to wheat and dairy."



Prebiotic Creamy Blueberry Dressing

*Chef/Owner Mee McCormick
Pinewood Kitchen & Mercantile
Nunnally, Tennessee*

½ cup fresh blueberries
¼ cup rice vinegar
1 teaspoon lemon zest
4 tablespoons lemon juice
3 tablespoons local honey
¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Sea salt to taste
Fresh ground black pepper to taste

Place items in a blender or food processor, except honey, and puree. Slowly add oil to emulsify and season with salt and pepper to taste.

McCormick admits her customer base wasn't always the first to clamor for "health" food. But people are drawn to the familiar dishes made with better-for-you ingredients. This sort of inclusivity has only gained steam since the pandemic started. It's why she now reaches beyond the restaurant walls with weekly farm box deliveries for locals, and antioxidant-packed soups like sweet potato lentil for nationwide shipping. And she penned two cookbooks, including 2020's "My Pinewood Kitchen, A Southern Culinary Cure," that celebrates down-home cooking with a healthful spin.

Studies have shown that a strong immune system is the first line of defense against COVID-19, and nutrient-rich foods can help boost immunity. McCormick

emphasizes plants and plant-based products in her innovative dishes, but also biodynamic vegetables, grass-fed beef and pasture-raised pork from her own farm. Her fried chicken is grain-free, and comforting soups have chickpea miso for added flavor. *Hijiki* in quinoa might garner a few raised eyebrows, but the dish with seaweed is still a big seller.

Sometimes it's about incorporating familiar ingredients that still pack a wholesome punch. Diners might not be familiar with lion's mane mushrooms, an anti-inflammatory powerhouse, but they probably know shiitake, which have just as many benefits. She tops a white bean salad, a Southern staple, with probiotic-rich pickles to up the healthy quotient. Superfood blueberries aren't just the star of a protein-packed salad; they're the base of the vinaigrette, too.

"It's all about, how do we reach regular people? It's the common things that work," she adds. "I love the idea of comfort food. But it should add comfort to our lives, not wreck it."

Herbs are among the most underrated way to incorporate immune-boosting benefits. Promoting health and well-being at Calabash Tea & Tonic in Washington, D.C., Sunyatta Amen offered spice packs and tea boxes specifically geared towards wellness. But it's not just about elixirs and drinks. She includes recipes for unique ways to use herbs and spices, outlining the benefits of each ingredient, like the North African/Mediterranean pesto made with almonds (rich in protein), garlic (anti-fungal), rosemary and basil (high in antioxidants), sun-dried tomatoes (super rich in vitamin C) and black olives (increases heart health). It's full of healthy fats, plus vitamin A and C, calcium and iron, an immunity boost ready for pasta.

Inspired by the healing aspect of food, Deborah Williamson weaves it into her Brooklyn bistro James. Black vinegar

gives roasted Brussels sprouts a hit of flavor and a dose of essential amino acids. Plenty of greens and turmeric populate the menu. Organic hot cocoa made with a reishi mushroom elixir packs a wallop of immunity-boosting qualities, antioxidants and anti-inflammatory benefits.

Williamson sells weekly farm boxes and kits geared toward boosting immunity. When the annual flu season compounded coronavirus worries, she sold a kit stocked with bone broth and squash soup, turmeric tonic, calendula salt, matcha bitters and more. There's even a "wellness" tab on the restaurant website for easy ordering.

For Jeanne Cheng, opening her restaurant Kye's in Santa Monica, California, was the product of finding dishes her son would eat. Diagnosed with several food sensitivities since he was a toddler, his kid-friendly options were limited, so she tapped into her ayurvedic and Chinese medicine background to come up with items such as the Kyerito, a wrap that uses a fresh collard, nori or romaine lettuce leaves instead of a flour tortilla or flatbread.

Believing that food can destroy our immune systems as much as help it, Cheng encourages well-being with every dish, taking into account allergies or sensitivities to gluten, dairy, nuts, egg and soy. By design, all ingredients used for the handheld meals — nutrient-rich greens, brown rice, wild salmon, raw sprouted sunflower seeds — offer something other than flavor.

Having a dietitian help balance vibrancy and taste with health benefits is useful. When Wildseed opened in San Francisco, Alejandro Morgan, head of culinary for Back of the House restaurant group, and consulting chef Blair Warsham, worked with registered dietitian Alexandra Rothwell Kelly for menu development.

Health-boosting powerhouses that add flavor and flair.

Calendula aka Pot Marigold

The petals of these bright orange flowers are edible, adding a peppery bite to soups or salads. Also used as an extract or powder, it's high in antioxidants, including flavonoids, polyphenols and carotenoids.

Chinese Yam

In Mandarin, the name means "mountain medicine," the first giveaway to the healing properties of this root vegetable. Chock-full of vitamins B-1 and C, plus amino acids that help aid digestion and promote good gut health. It's good in soups, stews and stir-fries.

Cranberries

The antioxidant-rich and vitamin-charged fruit should not be relegated to the holiday table. Considered a superfood, a handful a day can help boost immunity, keep urinary tract infections in check and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Ramps

Spring's favorite special ingredient, this allium is rich in vitamin C—twice as much as in the same quantity of oranges—which aids immune health.

Reishi Mushroom

The benefits of these once-rare mushrooms have been known in Eastern cultures for centuries. Packed with molecules like polysaccharides, fiber, peptides, minerals like zinc and iron, plus numerous vitamins, it's practically a wonder drug designed by nature.

Kiwi

The fuzzy fruit with green flesh has more potassium than bananas, and is an excellent source of immunity-boosting vitamin C.



Romaine Wrapped Reuben

*Owner Jeanne Cheng
Kye's, Santa Monica, California*

113 grams vegan avocado mayo
56½ grams ketchup
30 grams kosher baby dill pickles, chopped small
21 grams shallots, chopped small
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
2 romaine lettuce leaves
1 cup brown rice, cooked
1 teaspoon nutritional yeast
1 or 2 slices pastrami, thinly sliced
4 ounces portobello mushroom, roasted and thinly sliced
2 ounces sauerkraut, your recipe
½ teaspoon caraway seeds, chopped

Combine mayo, ketchup, pickles and shallots to make Reuben sauce; season with salt and pepper and set aside.

Place 2 romaine lettuce leaves down, overlapping. Spread brown rice on top, sprinkle nutritional yeast all over the rice followed by the pastrami and portobello longitudinally, Reuben sauce, then sauerkraut and caraway seeds. Roll and wrap and halve. Makes 1 serving.

The Donburi

*Chef Alejandro Morgan
Wildseed, San Francisco*

12 ounces beech/shimeji mushrooms

Ponzu, recipe follows

2 tablespoons vegan mayonnaise

1 tablespoon tamari

Lemon juice, to taste

½ bunch rainbow chard, torn into large pieces, blanched and cooled

4 cups super grains, such as quinoa, brown rice and millet, cooked

1½ cups kimchi, your recipe

2 small yams, roasted, peeled and halved

2 Persian or Japanese cucumbers, thinly sliced and pickled, recipe follows

2 small semi-ripe avocados, halved

Sesame seeds, as needed

Green onion, thinly sliced

Cilantro leaves, as needed

Remove bottoms from the mushrooms and pull apart into small bunches. Bring enough ponzu to boil to cover mushrooms. Let them soak for at least an hour; refrigerate.

Mix mayo with tamari and lemon juice to taste. Toss with chard.

To assemble, place 1 cup of hot super grains in the middle of a bowl and place mushrooms, chard, yams, kimchi, cucumbers and avocados around it. Drizzle ponzu over all the ingredients, just enough to marry all together. Garnish with sesame seeds, green onions and cilantro. Makes 4 servings.

To make ponzu: Combine ½ quart water, ½ quart tamari, ½ quart unseasoned rice wine vinegar, ¼ lime juice. Bring to a boil and remove from heat.

To make pickles: Season cucumbers with salt and let sit for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, bring ½ quart water, ½ quart unseasoned rice wine vinegar and 2 tablespoons sugar to boil and cool slightly. Add pickles and cool.

North African Mediterranean Pesto

*Chefs Sunyatta Amen and Greg Marzullo
Calabash Tea & Tonic, Washington, D.C.*

½ cup almonds, toasted

4 cloves garlic

2 tablespoons rosemary, minced

½ teaspoon paprika

10 sun-dried tomatoes packed in oil

2 teaspoons balsamic

2 teaspoons agave or turbinado sugar

Celtic or Himalayan salt, to taste

Olive oil, as needed

Black pepper, to taste

1½ cups basil leaves, lightly packed

Place all ingredients except oil and basil into a food processor and pulse to combine ingredients. Add basil, pulse to combine and add oil to pulse to desired consistency. Use as a sauce for fish or chicken or as a condiment for sandwiches and sauteed vegetables.

78%

Consumers who believe their diet has a major impact on how well their body fights disease.

— Datassential 2020



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Mushrooms are turning heads for their antioxidant properties and possibly mitigating the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Mushroom Hot Cocoa

*Inspired by Co-owner/founder Deborah Williamson
James, Brooklyn, New York*

- 10 ounces dairy-free milk**
- 1 packet Four Sigmatic Reishi Mushroom Elixir**
- 1 tablespoon cacao**
- 1 teaspoon tocos**
- Local honey or other sweetener, to taste**
- Few dashes cherry or regular bitters**
- Pinch cinnamon, ginger or cayenne**

Bring milk to a boil. Whisk in reishi mushroom elixir, cocoa, tocos, honey to taste and bitters until frothy. Sprinkle seasonings on top. Makes 1 serving.

“Our thoughts are first to identify ingredients that are healthy to our bodies, like lowering cholesterol, providing natural probiotics for our gut, antioxidants to help our brain functions, anti-inflammatory ingredients,” Morgan says. “In some cases we can develop a dish that revolves around a specific ingredient that provides some of these qualities; in others we add an ingredient to a dish.”

Using seasonal, organic, fresh ingredients has been the backbone of Wildseed's menu, and “eating the rainbow” is one way to help customers (and the chefs) understand what's best for them. A color wheel on the website guides customers: Yellow and orange, like turmeric, squash and corn, improves immune functions and your skin; blue and purple, like berries, potatoes and cabbage, are rich in vitamins C and K; black, like olives and lentils, help battle congestion and allergies.

“As cooks, we almost never look at colors on our food in terms of health benefits, but rather in terms of visual effect,” Morgan says. “But it's interesting how specific colors do specific things to our bodies. To me, this is the power of nature.”

Wildseed's donburi bowl — replete with super grains like quinoa, millet and brown rice; probiotic-rich kimchi; potassium-loaded avocado; inflammation-reducing yam; shimeji mushrooms; and dark leafy greens — is just one example of how super-charged ingredients cohesively come together to do some good.

“We're all catching on now,” McCormick says. “We're really starting to wake up and realize we need to take care of ourselves and our communities. We're using ingredients in different ways, thinking of people with allergies from a place of empathy, looking to boost immunity, and it's influencing people. It's changing because we have to change. As long as we set the table, they'll come eat at it.” ■



Selling Wine Online

Check in here to check out more bottles

By Blair Hopkins
Photography by Paul Strabbing



▼ **Most diners need more information** than the vintner, varietal and year to order wine for carryout or delivery, making it the most challenging sell for a restaurant.

Yet in states that allow liquor sales for off-premise consumption, selling bottles online, as a part of dinner packages or virtual tasting events has become indispensable. Operators are succeeding with limited and oftentimes zero direct customer contact—the antithesis of wine sales—by stretching their creativity to guide guests’ palates. With processes in place and the kinks worked out, they say there’s no reason to stop their online efforts. Here’s how it worked:

▶ ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE

With locations in the Midwest and Southeast, Cooper’s Hawk Winery and Restaurants launched its first online tasting events with an advantage: an established wine club membership. Customers in states that allowed takeout alcohol sales could pick up wine kits, some that included charcuterie, for \$25 to \$60 and log onto Zoom for a live tasting and educational session led by a chef or winemaker. “So far, more than 2,000 people have participated,” says tasting room expert Jordan Sotelo.

But the new effort wasn’t void of hiccups.

“The staff at Cooper’s Hawk had to familiarize themselves with Zoom, which they’d never previously given thought, and learn on-the-fly to navigate IT issues for themselves as well as online tasting participants,” he says.

Any restaurant can do this but start with a plan, Sotelo stresses, and poll customers to narrow options and gauge interest before investing too much time putting together online programming. Rehearse the presentation to avoid problems, such as inadequate lighting, background and spacing of bottles and glasses.

“Now that we’ve learned what people are interested in and what translates well to online, we are able to still make it a unique experience,” Sotelo says.

▶ VARY THE CONTENT

To reach more customers, New York City’s La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels launched an online wine boot camp, each one focusing on a region, such as South Africa, Greece and Southern Italy. The \$120 price includes three bottles of wine, tasting grids, pairing suggestions and a class via Zoom. The price of delivery is included.

▶ OFFER A SUBSCRIPTION

Monthly subscription can help with existing inventory and projecting sales but like online tasting events, planning and knowing your audience is as important as the promotion.

At Dave Beran’s Pasjoli in Santa Monica, California, two types of online subscriptions are offered that align with the chef-driven French bistro. The “standard” is an “entry-level glimpse into some of the unique French wine producers, grapes and regions” while the “premium” is “an elevated deep dive into our more vintage and harder-to-find French cellar.” The standard starts at \$65 for two bottles and up to six for \$182; the premium is \$65 and \$250 for the respective same amount, both of which is a savings from dine-in.

The subscription is accompanied by a variety of items, such as housemade bread, duck rilette or pate and curated



Cooper’s Hawk, top, engaged customers through Zoom tastings while La Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels offered educational online boot camps to sell more wine online.



CREATE A DISH THEY'LL REMEMBER

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cheeses. Subscribers have access to educational content created by the Pasjoli team, showcasing the stories, origins, and tasting notes from the month's selections.

▶ PRICE IT RIGHT

While curating a focused but interesting list, take a hard look at pricing. At the start of the pandemic, many restaurants cut prices, often in half, for cash flow. But for wine sales post pandemic, be sure to include a variety of prices that balance retail with restaurant costs for read-to-drink bottles and even the occasional “sleeper”—the exceptional value and quality for the price.

Spruce in San Francisco offers a range of prices, from \$16 for Pinot Grigio Marco Felluga to \$74 Pinot Noir Archery Summit Arcus Estate. The restaurant, which has a 3,500 bottle list, converted part of the restaurant into a wine shop with staff who have helped customers expand their knowledge. While Spruce hasn't determined how it will proceed later in the year, wine and spirits director Andrew Green says the restaurant will continue offering selections online as long as they sell.

▶ DESCRIBE FLAVORS

The online ordering platform that Fausto in New York uses allows for descriptions of the wines and tasting notes as well as the producer, origin and grape. For example, the Rodaro Ribolla Gialla 2014, is described as a “clear, light straw yellow with scents of fresh flowers and ripe fruit with exotic hints: pineapple, yellow melon, peach and pear, finishing with high acidity.

The Dakota Cafe, a local institution in Ellensburg, Washington, offers tasting notes as well but also includes food pairing suggestions on the takeaway menu. ■



Tips for Online Sales

Know your state's regulations: Not all areas allow online alcohol sales or delivery, and there may be limitations in the ones that do, including how online sales should be taxed. Check your city and state's guidelines frequently to be sure you're in compliance as circumstances change.

Vary your offerings: Creating different tiers when selling packages, such as bundles and kits for online tasting events, has the dual function of allowing customers to participate in the customization of their experience as well as being inclusive by offering a lower price point option.

Make online sales special: Offer sales prices and inventory online that would not otherwise be available.

Encourage membership: Online member infrastructure builds community and customer loyalty and requires very little overhead to establish.



The Hiring Un-Freeze

How to build stronger teams in a post-pandemic world

By Lesley Balla



The emotional and financial

impact of COVID-19 led restaurateur Matt Brewer and his partners to rethink strategies for hiring.

Early in the pandemic, their San Francisco restaurants Che Fico and Che Fico Alimentari raised money to serve free meals to first responders and out-of-work hospitality workers, which kept almost everyone employed. But the fluctuating government rules, changing seating capacity and the last shutdown of outdoor dining, meant layoffs. While the majority of their staff did return, it couldn't be business as usual.

"Between myself and my partners, we spent an incredible amount of time, especially in the summer, having long talks with the general manager, chef de cuisine, and others," he says. "We had to figure out what the future would look like for us as a business, for our team, our guests and our profit margins."

Restaurant owners around the world have been engaged in the same conversations. A reckoning in the restaurant industry had been well underway before the pandemic shook it all to the ground. Racial and gender diversity, pay equity and affordable healthcare could no longer be ignored. Some changes are in place but the pandemic has allowed for reevaluating priorities, especially in rehiring staff. In the end, it's going back to basics but doing it better. Treat your staff right, and they'll stick around.

ESTABLISH NEW STANDARDS

With so many people out of work, developing or reviewing established standards will help with retention. They will allow you to sift through people who just want a job versus those who are looking for a quality-of-life work environment.

"Putting values out there right away

"WITH THE RIGHT LEADERSHIP, EMPLOYEES CAN HAVE THEIR VOICE HEARD AND THERE CAN BE AN OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT WHAT IS POSSIBLE."

—Dina Samson, *Rossoblu, Los Angeles*

shows what we expect from our staff, both new and old hires," says Brewer. "And then it goes back to what they can expect from us, like benefits, a respectful environment and a safe space. That's more important now than ever."

SET CORE VALUES

Determine which work values are important, essential and even non-negotiable that touch every aspect of the business. When Dina Samson and chef and husband Steve Samson opened *Rossoblu* in downtown Los Angeles, they introduced four core values to build a robust and dedicated team: integrity, work ethic, commitment to excellence and compassion. They used them as a measuring stick to enlist and retain workers, and it's the same approach they'll take to hire and rehire staff after the pandemic.

"Everyone had to sign an agreement to uphold these core values, and then we could hold people accountable," says Dina Samson. "Say someone wasn't nice to a guest, they lacked compassion. If someone was consistently late to work, they lacked work ethic. After coaching, if a team member couldn't adhere to these values, they parted ways with us. Because of this approach, our long-term employees are the ones we'll bring back from furlough."

GET BUY-IN

Alongside the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, conversations about racial diversity, gender equality and pay equity in the restaurant industry have been front and center. But the pandemic cracked open an opportunity to quicken the pace.

To create a safe and equitable space, the Samsons included staff input. They discussed tip sharing with the employees, resulting in the front of house staff splitting tips with the back of house team. They also created a diversity and inclusion committee to focus on better hiring practices and purveyor selection.

"With the right leadership, employees can have their voice heard and there can be an open dialogue about what is possible," says Dina Samson. "Not everything has to have a monetary value. There is much satisfaction that can be gained from being part of the solution."

IMPROVE BENEFITS

The federal government left the hospitality industry without proper resources to secure pay and benefits for furloughed restaurant workers. As a result, benefits and compensation will play a much bigger part in the next wave of hiring; how that will look depends on the restaurant.

At *Che Fico*, the owners paid for healthcare through much of the pandemic because the business could sustain it. Looking forward, they're considering sick days and vacation time. In California, companies with more than 50 employees are now required to offer some sort of retirement plan. All of this is added expense but doable, Brewer says.

"We want to be able to pay what we consider a living wage in San Francisco," Brewer adds. "We also want to create an



"IF YOU DON'T TAKE CARE OF YOUR PEOPLE WHO ARE TAKING CARE OF YOUR GUESTS, IT WON'T WORK ... WE SHOULD BE IN TUNE WITH THE STAFF'S NEEDS, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE PANDEMIC."

—Hunter Evans, *chef/owner of Elvie's in Jackson, Mississippi*

opportunity for growth in the company. We need to figure out the most equitable way to compensate everyone. Our biggest goal is to figure out how we restructure to achieve all of this."

ADD INCENTIVES

Incentives don't always need to be financial. Hunter Evans, chef/owner of *Elvie's* in Jackson, Mississippi, takes a holistic approach to his staff's well-being. He's offered free meals for furloughed workers, paid for gym memberships, sourced affordable mental health care, and held morning yoga classes at the restaurant. These should be more common, he says, not just an added bonus.

"If you don't take care of your people who are taking care of your guests, it won't work," Evans says. But if employers take care of their staff, "it can only drive productivity and morale up. I wouldn't work for a company that doesn't care for me outside of the building. We should be in tune with the staff's needs, especially after the pandemic."

Operators everywhere agree. For all the downsides of the pandemic, the small upside is that it provided an opportunity to reassess how to manage and retain staff. In the end, that's what will make a stronger business.

"It's time for us as operators to draw the line and say this is how we're going to reopen," says Brewer. "We have a new opportunity to tell our story." ■

LET'S GO

Chef Edward Lee on the recovery of independent restaurants

By Laura Yee



Take a breath, celebrate. But don't forget that the pandemic decimated the hospitality industry, especially independent restaurants. Edward Lee, the Korean-born, New York City-raised chef who skyrocketed to fame by cooking Southern food through an Asian lens, says a long haul lies ahead.

The public has never been so eager to dine at restaurants and businesses couldn't be happier to receive them, he says. But variants of COVID-19 could upend the new normal at any time despite vaccines. Human nature is such that people will not always follow the rules and recovery could come to a chilling stop, he warns.

Lee isn't a naysayer but a realist. The fallout from the pandemic has been as gut-wrenching for him as every restaurateur, he says. Furloughing staff and temporarily closing restaurants also meant cutting the livelihood of farmers and other small-business purveyors. No one needs that hell again, so how can it be prevented? Here are some points from Lee that surfaced from the downtime of not running restaurants in Louisville, Kentucky, and Washington, D.C., at full tilt.

Q. You've said the pandemic may be the end of independent restaurants. Do you still see it that way?

A. There's a lot going on; some of it is too little too late. We've already seen tons of restaurants close. Most independent restaurants will spend the next couple of years climbing out of the tunnel but it's a dim light. A lot of work is still left to be done.

Q. What's top on the list?

A. Regaining trust. Without sounding too drastic or extreme, media had done a lot of damage, creating and reinforcing this false narrative of customers being irresponsible for dining in and restaurants aren't safe. (But) restaurants have taken incredible measures to keep staff and customers safe creating the best environment where there have been zero outbreaks. Our currency is not amazing food and great service—it's the trust patrons put on us to create a delicious meal and a safe, comforting environment for them.

Q. What can be done?

A. If we can rearrange the narrative that restaurants can be on the frontline

of safety, we can help control problems versus the unrealistic stay at home and don't gather. Vaccinations are happening but we aren't in the clear. There will be more outbreaks, variants, people won't listen. So instead of portraying restaurants as the enemy, allow us to help keep a sense of normalcy.

Q. You're saying to avoid draconian measures like full shutdowns but allowing controlled capacity and continuing the practice of wearing masks, social distancing, contact tracing, air flow and such?

A. We know we can safely monitor people. When we can give people some semblance of normal—food, entertainment and not vilify them for the human need for interaction, people will follow the rules. Being responsible is the safest option. People would rather have the option of dining out than gathering under cloak and dagger in a friend's basement with six people.

Q. Humans tend to have short memories. Busy restaurants mean everything is OK?



CHEF AT A GLANCE

Edward Lee, 48

- » Chef/owner of 610 Magnolia and Whiskey Dry in Louisville, Kentucky. Culinary director for Succotash in National Harbor, Maryland and Washington, D.C.
- » Author of two cookbooks, including "Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover America's New Melting Pot Cuisine," which won a James Beard Foundation Award.
- » Six-time finalist for the James Beard Foundation Award for Best Chef: Southeast.
- » Nominated for a daytime Emmy for his role as host of the Emmy-winning series, "Mind of Chef" on PBS.
- » Launched The LEE (Let's Empower Employment) Initiative in 2018 to bring more diversity and equality to the restaurant industry. The nonprofit has donated over a million meals from restaurants across the country closed by the pandemic. Programs includes Smoke and Soul, Women Chefs in Kentucky and the recently launched Restaurant Relief Reboot Program.

A. Farmers are working on tighter margins than we are. I can create flavors but I can't create pork, chicken, beef, grains or produce. If we abandon that now, all the hard work we as a food nation built—farm to table—the next generation can be lost so quickly, including this season. Small farmers work season to season. We can't come back in 2022 and say, 'I'm ready to buy local again.' They won't be there. Restaurants are in such dire straits; we can't forget who's in the worse state and it's the farmers.

Q. Ideas to help?

A. We're relaunching the (Restaurant Relief) Reboot Program that we began last year but bigger this year. We've bought over \$1 million from local farms and donated product to restaurants. Basically, we set out to say so many of us are hurting financially and will make the tough choices. Maybe they won't buy organic pork from the local farmer because it's \$1 more a pound. We don't want them to make that choice.

Q. The pandemic exposed the industry's shortcomings like never before. Will we see meaningful change?

A. There is an opportunity now for momentous change. Grassroots movement and top down movement need to collide. If the \$15 minimum wage passes, that creates a momentum where we can take a hard look at eliminating tipping and more equitable wages. We (independent restaurants) need to be unified. That's something the chains do well—they have lobbying power and talk—and independents don't do well. Hopefully, this is an opportunity to create strong voices in Boston, Chicago, Oakland and the Austins everywhere where we start to discuss matters to create a collective voice and economically unified force for millions so we are not left out in the cold again. ■



The LEE Initiative has served more than a million meals for restaurant workers in need.

EDWARD LEE ON LEADERSHIP:

"I don't see myself as a leader. Every single chef and everyone who has a small business has had to step up to be a leader. My hat's off to them. I shed tears for every single person who has had to fire or furlough people, look someone in the eye, people who have done nothing wrong and have provided so much loyalty and say, 'You don't deserve to lose your job. But I don't have a job and a paycheck for you anymore.'"

PHOTOGRAPHY ABOVE LEFT BY JOSH MERIDETH

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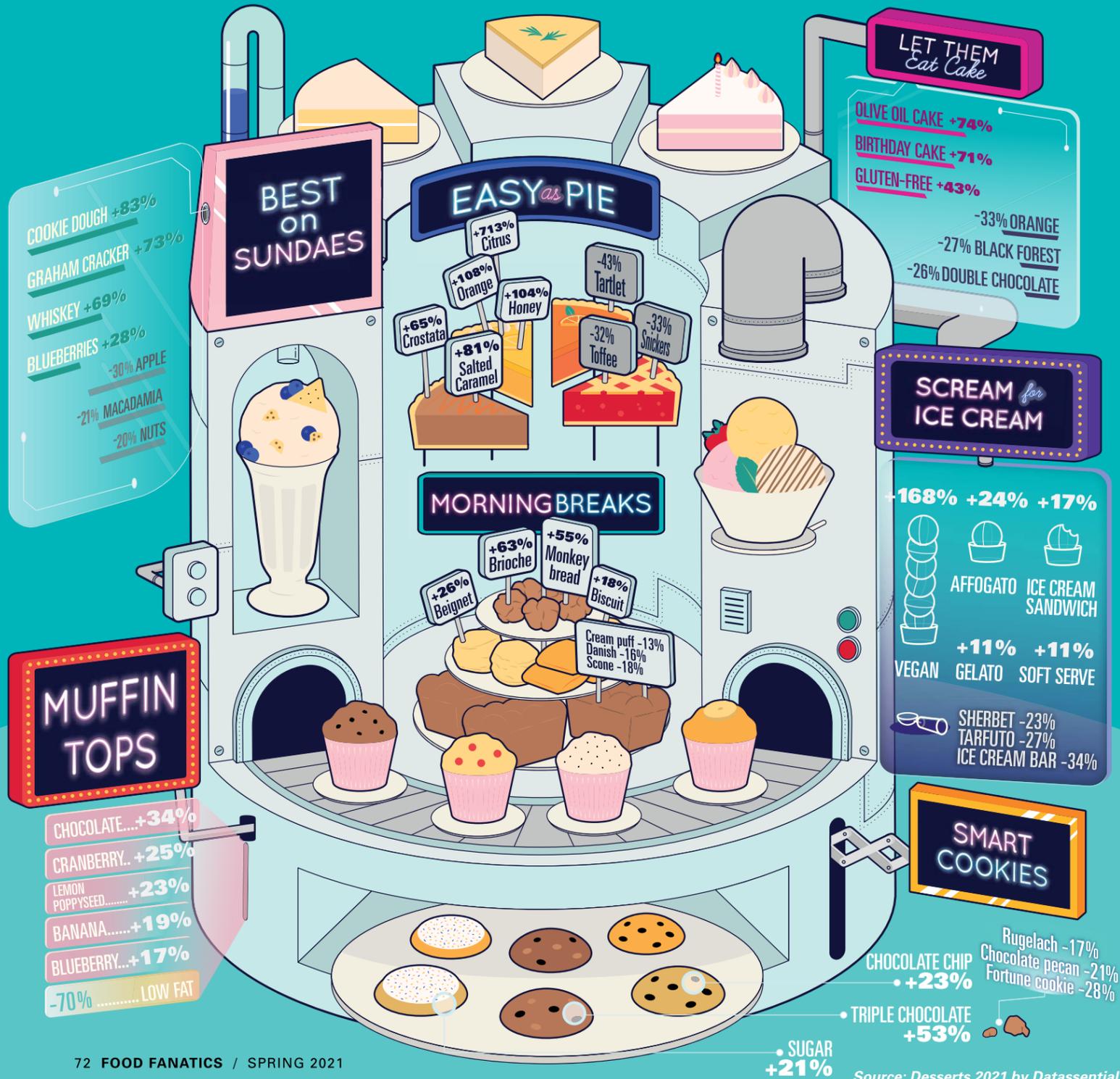
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BY THE NUMBERS

▶ PLAY THESE NUMBERS FOR A BIGGER PAYOUT

Sweet on Sweets

If past is prologue, an upward or downward trend can provide valuable insight into diner preferences. So instead of guessing what's relevant, consider these numbers showing steady growth (or decline) over the last four years to shape the sweeter side of the menu.



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