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FOOD FANATICS SUMMER 2023

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At Hobnob locations in Atlanta, a quality burger with ingredients such as a fried green tomato, bacon, cheese and garlic aioli unites trendy and familiar.

The spice is right and so are dipping sauces for all things crispy. See page 10.

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RAISING THE BAR

Welcome to the summer edition of Food Fanatics® Magazine!

Long summer days and warm, sunny weather welcome cocktails, handhelds and patios – the perfect recipe for bar and grills to heat up. In our cover story, **Bar and Grills Reign On**, we examine how this culture has grown since the inception of Applebee's 43 years ago, while maintaining the tenets of its appeal – affordable fares that now embrace technology and America's changing palate. Meanwhile, the season premieres impressive sidecars – those meals on a stick that come with your Bloody Marys or cocktails that cause a stir, and perhaps a healthy bit of FOMO.

In **Menu Must-haves**, we dive into dips, seeing old-school recipes like spinach, artichoke or sour cream and onion getting remade into new, shareable, low-cost and low-labor apps that patrons crave. Meanwhile, fried foods remain hot, with twists on classics with toppings, condiments, – sauces and of course, heat. Lastly, with the growing competition amongst regional BBQ joints, adopting a spinoff like global flavors can secure and create new customers.

In **Money Moves**, we talk portions – specifically, the science and secrets of how chefs can shrink volume and still present value. And speaking of volume, Boba finally finds its way to non-alcoholic drink menus, flaunting its tapioca pearls in tea-based drinks. Lastly, numbers reveal how consumers really feel about no-booze and low-booze beverages, so that operators can take advantage of these opportunities.

Finally, in **Meeting the Moment**, we take a road trip to the Mile High City to share pro tips on how Denver concepts their bar and grills to appeal to customers and rise in success. Bringing more tips, we share how three successful businesses show customers “behind the curtain” to connect the back-of-house in more ways than one.

As always, please enjoy our carefully curated stories, beautiful photography and insightful advice, to raise the bar on your business' bottom line.

Thanks for reading,

Jim Sturgell
Executive Vice President,
Chief Commercial Officer
US Foods®



**MENU
MUST-
HAVES**

Dips are crowd and kitchen favorites, from creamy clam, left, to carrot and a revised take on classic spinach.

TAKE A DIP

They're seasonal and easy to riff on. What's not to like?



Pureed carrots with mascarpone, creme fraiche and lemon stand in for parsnips with housemade beet and potato chips, a dip inspired by "Kristen Kish Cooking: Recipes and Techniques."

By Kristin Eddy
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Tamasin Reid

Even the word **"DIP"**

is so brief and basic that it's hard to picture it as a powerhouse on the menu. But chefs who know better understand its appeal to both customers and the culinary team.

"It's creamy. It's luscious. It's satisfying," says Chef B Adamo at Hog Island Oyster Co., in Larkspur, California.

Dips hit all the high notes: salty, savory—a sneaky sweet streak sometimes to balance flavors—with innumerable ways to insert umami and seasonal elements into the mix. They play well with cocktails, beer and nonalcoholic beverages too. They're a no-brainer bar and grill food that's shareable and typically avoids the veto vote.

Adamo, whose smoked trout dip has proved impossible to pull off the menu thanks to customer protests, also points out that dips are

"a little bit interactive" in the way you build it onto that crunchy carb raft.

For the back of the house, the positives are plentiful. At a functional level, dip recipes are easy to scale and hard to mess up. A bit less or more of one ingredient won't knock the flavor profile sideways. And there is little precision expected in the presentation; it's supposed to look smoochy. For the kitchen staff, this is a low-effort process with a high payoff.

But if you've been looking down on dips, think about how creative they can be. Here's an opportunity to do rotations throughout the year using ingredients in peak season and in temperatures—cool or sizzling, whatever the calendar calls for—that slide onto the menu easily.



DIVE IN FOR MORE DIP INSPLO

- **Smoked Onion Dip and Chips, \$8**
Devil Moon Barbecue, New Orleans
- **"Delicatessen" Herbed Fish Dip with Saltines, \$14**
Lingua Franca, Los Angeles
- **Creme Fraiche Onion Dip with Chives, Caviar and Surfboard Chips, \$34**
Graffiti Raw, Houston
- **Potato chips with creamy/spicy togarashi, \$6**
Bar Goto, New York City
- **Bacon and Onion Dip, \$12**
George & the Dragon, Minneapolis

"Delicatessen" herbed fish dip with housemade saltines is a fan favorite at Lingua Franca in Los Angeles.

Tweaks to a classic can be made with splashes of hot sauce and salsa, or a New England crab dip can be framed with roasted tomatoes, housemade paprika potato chips and caviar, like the way Barbara Lynch approaches dips at Drink restaurant in Boston.

Rose's Luxury in Washington, D.C. does its dip with brown butter celery root puree and celery root chips. Communion Restaurant and Bar in Seattle offers a presentation of black-eyed pea hummus served with roasted collard green dip and buttery hoe cakes.

Or you could stick with the best version of onion dip you can come up with; it's been working for Tom Colicchio for years at the Temple Court Bar Room in New York City—which means no one is complaining.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MOLLY CASEY

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Ginger-garlic puree adds a wow factor to Creamy Clam Dip.

Creamy Clam Dip

*Chef Cameron Myers
Fish. Restaurant, Sausalito, California*

- 4 quarts Atlantic surf clams
- Juice of 8 lemons
- 5 pounds cream cheese
- 1 quart sour cream
- ½ cup Worcestershire sauce
- ½ cup Tabasco
- ½ cup ginger garlic puree
- 3 bunches dill, chopped
- 2 bunches tarragon, chopped
- ¼ cup black pepper
- Seasoned potato chips, as needed
- Parsley, chopped, as needed

Combine clams, lemon juice, cream cheese and sour cream until the cream cheese has broken down. Add remaining ingredients, except chips and parsley. Mix until smooth. Garnish with parsley.

New School Spinach Dip

*Chef/owner Chris Collins
Neighborly Public House, Phoenix*

- 6 ounces butter
- ½ medium onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon garlic
- 45 grams flour
- 3 cups whole milk
- 8 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano
- ¾ cup sour cream, plus more for garnish
- 1 teaspoon Sriracha
- 1½ cups frozen spinach, thawed and drained well
- ¾ cup cooked artichoke hearts, roughly chopped
- ¼ cup cream cheese, at room temperature
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- Scallions, finely chopped, as needed
- Pico de gallo, as needed
- Tortilla chips

Heat butter and saute onions until soft and translucent, about 5 to 8 minutes. Add garlic and cook an additional 2 to 3 minutes. Add flour and whisk until smooth; cook 10 minutes.



Spinach dip gets an update with Sriracha, Parmigiano-Reggiano and pico de gallo at Neighborly Public House.

Add milk in 3 batches, bringing to a boil each time. Reduce heat and simmer to cook out flour, about 10 minutes.

Remove from heat. Fold in cheese, sour cream and Sriracha; cool and gently fold in spinach, artichokes, cream cheese, salt and pepper.

Scoop portion into an oven-safe dish and portion desired amount of spinach dip. Broil for 3 to 6 minutes until top is golden brown and bubbling. Top with proportionally appropriate amounts of sour cream, scallions and pico de gallo. Serve with tortilla chips. ■

Waffle fries are a vehicle for flavor, whether it's a spice like togarashi or mapo tofu at Nine Bar in Chicago.

NO SMALL

FRY

Crispy, crunchy
and shareable
never fails

By Bret Thorn
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Tamasin Reid



Crispy fried chicken wings tossed in a spicy, umami-forward sauce like gochujang, is growing on bar and grill menus.

Consumers everywhere have figured out how to feed and entertain themselves at home, leaving restaurants working harder than ever to entice them off the sofa.

While there's no magic wand, the desire to socialize in a convivial setting with food that can be shared may be just enough to leave delivery in the dust, at least for an evening. Make it fried and it's likely to crush sales. This is true because most fried food tastes better hot out of a fryer on a plate instead of in a container where it's turned soggy from the steam. Here's some back of the house intel on what sells best for some chefs.

► Fried Olives with Labneh

Olives are a decent bar snack, but if you want to keep guests' attention, give them more texture by breading and frying them. Add some tangy seasoned yogurt or labneh with spicy oil, such as harissa, and you have something that will likely keep guests hanging out, drinking and asking for more. The appetizer turned out to be so popular that Einat Admony, chef of Balaboosta in New York City, included it in her cookbook titled after the restaurant.

► Asparagus Cigars with Sweet Chili Sauce

The bestselling appetizer at Midgley's Public House in Stockton, California, includes asparagus spears individually wrapped in wonton wrappers with cream cheese, which are fried and served with a sweet chili sauce. "It's a take on crab rangoon," says chef/owner Michael Midgley. Also popular: Avocado fries, which are cut into eighths and fried. For extra crunch, Midgley coats the wedges with panko after dipping them into a tempura batter. They're served with a Sriracha ranch sauce.

Fried Olives with Labneh

*Chef/owner Einat Admony
Balaboosta, New York City*

2 cups pitted Kalamata olives
½ cup flour
2 large eggs, beaten
3 cups fine panko breadcrumbs
Canola oil for frying, as needed
Labneh, recipe follows
Harissa oil, recipe follows

Toss the olives in flour and shake off excess. Dip the olives in the eggs, then into breadcrumbs. Shake off excess and put olives back into the egg mixture and coat in breadcrumbs one last time. Place inside an airtight container until ready to use.

Fry in oil heated to 375 F a handful at a time until golden brown, about one minute. Drain.

Spread a dollop of labneh on the bottom of a shallow serving bowl, add olives and pour the harissa oil around them.

To make labneh: Combine 4 cups plain yogurt with 1 tablespoon kosher salt and drain in a large-mesh sieve lined with 3 layers of cheesecloth overnight refrigerated. Add za'atar seasoning and olive oil to taste.

To make harissa oil: Combine 10 garlic cloves with 1 large roasted red bell pepper (peeled, cored, and seeded) in a food processor to make paste. Pulse until the mixture is almost pureed. Add ½ cup ground cumin, ⅓ cup cayenne, ⅓ cup paprika, ¼ cup caraway seeds, and 2 tablespoons kosher salt. Slowly drizzle ¼ cup canola oil while the machine is running to emulsify. Combine ¾ cup harissa paste with 1 cup of canola oil in a saucepan, bring to a very low simmer and cook for 30 minutes. Cool and strain it through a fine-mesh sieve lined with cheesecloth.

Recipe adapted from "Balaboosta" by Einat Admony, Artisan Books.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAIN BAGWELL



Olives get crunchy, creamy and spicy via Fried Olives with Labneh. See recipe, opposite page.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CLIQUE HOSPITALITY

“When you’re drinking, especially after the first one, you want something salty and fatty with a little acidity. It balances out everything. And with the tempura batter, you’ve got texture too.”

—Patrick Balcom, chef of Farow restaurant in Niwot, Colorado

Fried Pickle Chips with Fancy Sauce

*Chef Patrick Balcom
Farow, Niwot, Colorado*

- 2 cups flour, plus extra for dusting**
- 2 cups cornstarch**
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt**
- 1 cup soda water, more if needed**
- 16 ounces thick sliced bread and butter crinkle-cut pickle chips**
- Fancy sauce, recipe follows**

Combine dry ingredients and whisk in soda water to create a thin batter. Dust pickles in flour and dip in batter. Fry at 350 F until golden brown, around 3 to 4 minutes. Serve with Fancy Sauce.

To make Fancy Sauce: Combine equal parts Dijon mustard, mayonnaise and ketchup.



Fried peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with marshmallow and chocolate hazelnut dipping sauces? Yes, please, say customers.

► **Fried Pickle Chips**

“When you’re drinking, especially after the first one, you want something salty and fatty with a little acidity,” says Patrick Balcom, chef of Farow restaurant in Niwot, Colorado. “It balances out everything. And with the tempura batter, you’ve got texture too.”

Balcom thickly slices kosher dill pickles into chips and dips them in a batter of equal parts flour and cornstarch and whisks in enough soda water to achieve a thin batter. The pickles are dipped into the batter and fried at 350 F until golden brown, around 3 to 4 minutes. “Fancy sauce”—equal parts housemade mayonnaise, Dijon mustard and ketchup—accompanies the crunchy pickles.

► **Fried PB&J**

The Still Crafts, Drafts & Eats, located in the Mirage in Las Vegas, serves this fried version of a childhood classic as a dessert. The sandwich is griddled until crispy, sliced into quarters, skewered and dusted with powdered sugar. The dessert is served with warm chocolate

hazelnut and marshmallow dipping sauces. With the help of nostalgia and curiosity, the dessert has become a huge favorite.

► **Chicken Bites with Honey Mustard Sauce**

Chicken nuggets are a crowd pleaser—among grownups and kids alike—so it’s not surprising that they’ve been a hit at Blue Smoke in New York City. The version that chef Bret Lunsford makes, however, skews more toward the adult palate. The buttermilk marinade includes hot sauce while the flour that coats the bites has cayenne. The heat is tempered by a sweet-savory dipping sauce, which features yellow, Dijon and Creole mustard, honey and mayonnaise.

► **Fries (with aioli, sauce or spice)**

The easiest upsell are fries, whether they’re waffle cut, shoestring or batons. Shake on a spice, such as togarashi, and pair with a curry mayo like chef Bill Kim at Urban Belly in Chicago, and you’ve just added \$7 to the check.



Chicken-filled spring rolls get a spicy mayo and a soy dipping sauce.

► **Country Captain Spring Rolls**

Robert Newton, the chef of Fleeting restaurant at the Thompson Savannah Hotel in Savannah, Georgia, takes a chicken curry dish that's popular in the South called Country Captain, and makes it a craveable appetizer by encasing it in spring roll wrappers and frying it. It's plated with a sauce made with cilantro and mayonnaise mixed with Sriracha as well as soy sauce.

Country Captain Spring Rolls

*Creative culinary director Robert Newton
Fleeting restaurant, Thompson Savannah Hotel
Savannah, Georgia*

- 1½ pounds ground chicken, preferably thighs
- ½ cup carrots, grated
- 3 tablespoons cilantro, leaves only chopped
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce, plus extra for serving
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 egg
- 1 package of lumpia or egg roll wrappers
- Oil, as needed
- Sriracha mayonnaise, your recipe
- Soy sauce, if desired

Combine all ingredients except wrappers, oil and accompaniments. Place 2 to 4 tablespoons filling in each wrapper, depending on size, spreading evenly end to end. Brush the edges with a dab of water and roll, gently sealing with the water.

Fry at 350 F until golden brown and an internal temperature reads 160 F. Drain and serve with sauces. ■

THE HEAT IS ON

Fastest growing ingredients on bar and grill menus over the next four years:

GOCHUJANG	245%
HATCH CHILI	228%
NASHVILLE HOT	228%
KOREAN BARBECUE	146%

Source: Datassential



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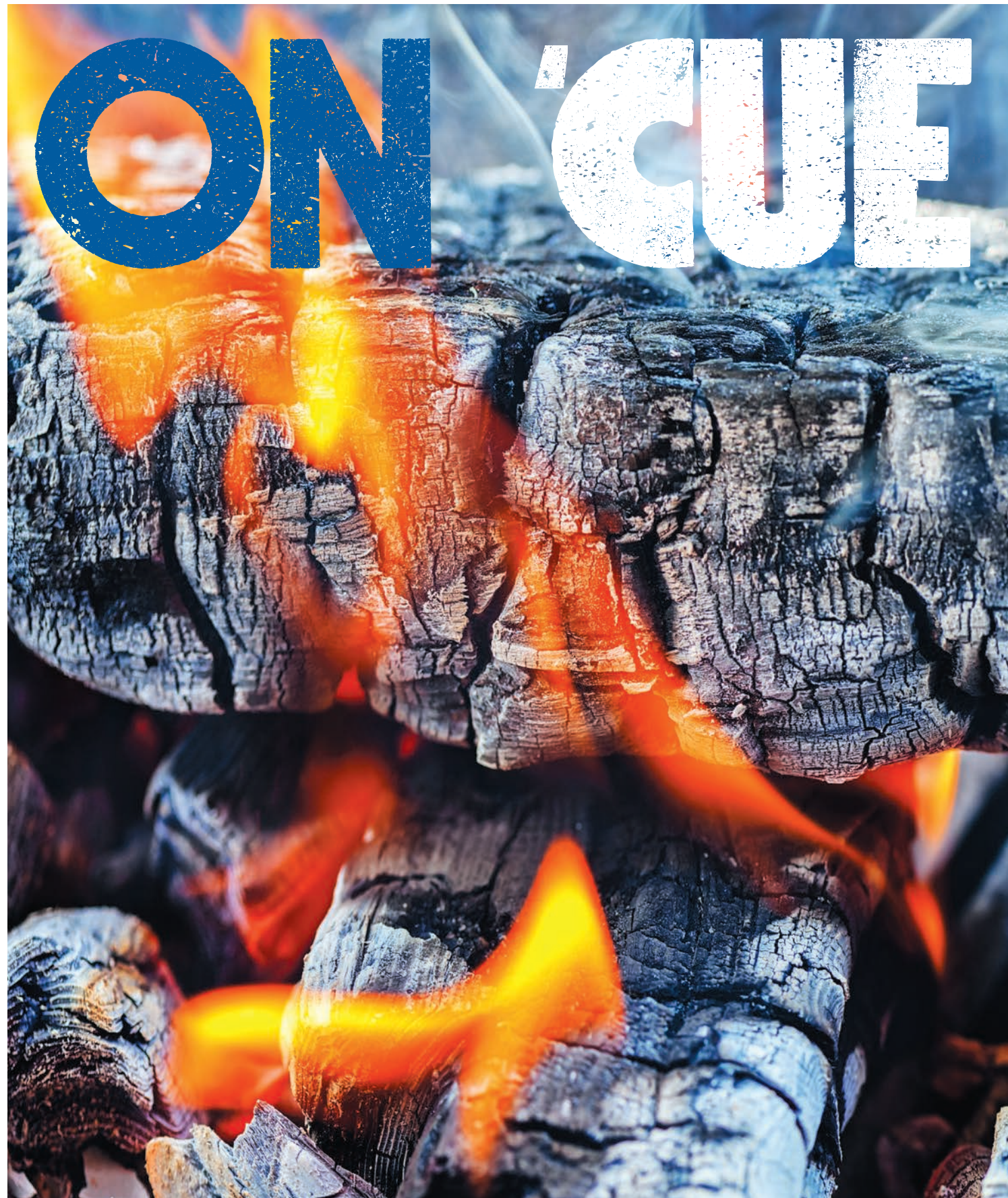
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Chief Adam Stephens
of The Hope Farm in
Fairhope, Alabama,
adds Sichuan
peppercorns to
brisket for a floral
and spicy edge.

Regional barbecue goes global

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Tamasin Reid



Barbecue ribs are crossing regional and cultural borders.

At one time,

only regional barbecue styles were considered legit, be it Kansas City, Texas or North Carolina. But over the years, that's changed as chefs meld the flavors of their background and international travels into tomato, mustard and vinegar bases, giving ribs, brisket and chicken a different twist. There's central-Texas barbecue meets Mexican in Charleston, Middle Eastern and Indian barbecue in New York, and Laotian in Texas, just to name a few.

Follow along to discover how different cultures are redefining American barbecue, from picnic bench storefronts to bar and grill concepts.

Hitting the Spice Trade

"Harissa is like ketchup in the Middle East," says chef Ari Bokovza. "We use it on everything."

The Tunisian staple is the hero ingredient in Bokovza's barbecue chicken at Dagon in New

York, served with fresh baby romaine hearts and polenta. After an overnight brine and slow roast over hickory wood chips, the chicken is brushed with housemade harissa barbecue sauce and blasted in the stone oven for a spicy and crispy skin.

During his time living in Houston, chef Adam Stephens of The Hope Farm in Fairhope, Alabama, found inspiration in Latin and Cantonese flavors, which play a role in his prep for brisket.

Stephens cures his brisket with a Sichuan peppercorn, brown sugar rub overnight before smoking it for 12 hours over pecan wood and serving it in corn tortillas topped with jalapeño hot sauce aioli, pickled onions and shredded cabbage. "It's Tex-Mex meets Hong Kong," he says. "The Sichuan peppercorn adds a subtle floral note and light numbing sensation."

Linked by Sausage

Texas is home to the second-largest population of Laotian Americans in the country behind California, including Nupohn Inthanousay, one of the co-owners of Goldee's Barbecue in Fort Worth, Texas. His heritage is expressed through a Lao sausage cured with lemongrass, lime leaves, Thai chili and garlic cold-smoked over post oak wood. "Cold-smoking helps cook the casing without cooking out any fat," Inthanousay says.

"Usually, Lao sausage is made with just pork, but we use beef at the restaurant because we are in Texas." Cold meat and even cold equipment make it easier to make the sausage, Inthanousay says.

Smoke Signals

James Beard-nominated chef Ayesha Nurdjaja relies on her charcoal grill for much of her



Scan the QR code to get the recipe for Goldee's Lao Sausage with Sticky Rice and Jeow Sum (garlic, chilies, lime and fish sauce).



A vindaloo paste takes ribs to another level.

Light it up: Try different woods to add nuance to barbecue. See sidebar, bottom right.

Charcoal Smoked Baby Back Vindaloo Pork Ribs

Executive chef Akshay Bhardwaj
Junoon, New York City

- 3 tablespoons garlic, chopped
- 3 tablespoons ginger, chopped
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
- 1 tablespoon oregano, chopped
- 1 tablespoon cilantro, chopped
- 1 tablespoon vindaloo paste, recipe follows
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 3 slabs baby back ribs
- Hardwood charcoal and hickory chips
- Apple cider vinegar, as needed
- Honey vindaloo sauce, recipe follows

Combine garlic, ginger, salt, sugar, herbs, vindaloo paste and vinegar. Massage onto pork and marinate overnight for 12 to 14 hours.

Meanwhile, soak equal amounts charcoal and hickory chips in apple cider vinegar. Place into a deep hotel pan and place a perforated pan on top. Layer with ribs, cover with foil and cook in a preheated 250 F oven for 3 hours.

Glaze with honey vindaloo sauce, cover again and cook 2 more hours. Slice and glaze with more honey vindaloo sauce.

To make vindaloo paste: Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a pan and add 10 grams whole black pepper, 10 grams cloves, 10 grams cumin and 10 grams coriander. As the spices start crackling, saute 1 tablespoon chopped red onion. Add 50 grams Kashmiri red chili powder. Once the spices begin crackling, add onions and saute until browned. Add 1 tablespoon vinegar and blend into a paste.

To make honey vindaloo sauce: Heat 3 tablespoons oil in a pot and sweat 1 tablespoon minced ginger and 1 tablespoon minced garlic. Add 1 medium diced Spanish onion and saute 5 minutes. Add 1 pint ketchup, 3 tablespoons honey and 1 tablespoon vindaloo paste. Simmer gently for 10 minutes.



menu at Mediterranean restaurant Shukette in New York. One of her most iconic dishes is “fish in a cage,” a whole porgy marinated in smoked paprika, ground cumin, turmeric and chili flakes to get a boldly flavored, crispy, caramelized skin that Nurdjaja serves with charred seasonal vegetables. “The cage ensures that the fish will not stick to the grill and keeps it juicy and moist,” Nurdjaja says. “Plus, it doubles as a cool serving platter.”

Spice is Right

When the Portuguese colonized Goa, India, they reportedly rubbed garlic and wine into the pork slabs for their journey to prevent the meat from spoiling. Later, Indian cooks swapped the wine for vinegar and added local chili peppers. At Junoon in New York City, executive chef Akshay Bhardwaj pays homage to that history by marinating spare rib slabs with a vindaloo paste. They’re smoked for 3 hours over applewood chips for a mild, fruity aroma and basted with a honey vindaloo barbecue sauce. Servers unveil the ribs with a smoky flair by removing a glass cloche at the table.

“We get a little last second smoke flavor imparted on the ribs, plus the guest gets an interesting experience,” Bhardwaj says. “Smelling the smoking charcoal brings the tandoor oven tableside.”

WOODS OF WISDOM

A rundown on the fuel for fire

Shannon Bingham, executive chef at Devil Moon BBQ in New Orleans, uses thin pieces of locally-grown white oak and pecan woods, both native to Louisiana, for a hot, fast burn and clean smoke.

Says chef Jonathan Sawyer of Kindling in Cleveland: “Oak has a lot of smoke and a quick burn. It’s aggressive and for us; it’s perfect.”

At Leku in Miami, chef Carlos Garcia uses hard woods on the grill like red and white quebracho and holm oak. “Their quality, durability and high temperatures make them very useful woods for roasts,” he says.

Akshay Bhardwaj of Junoon in New York City opts for applewood chips to impart a mild, sweet and fruity flavor profile. “We smoke for such a long time and don’t want to overwhelm the ribs.”

Pitmaster John Lewis favors mesquite at Rancho Lewis in Charleston, South Carolina, for its intense smoky flavor. “Mesquite has the hottest burning coals, which makes it perfect for quickly searing meats,” he says.



Layering Flavors

International Smoke in San Francisco by Michael Mina and Ayesha Curry is known for its global fusion take on barbecue. For example, St. Louis-style ribs are grilled, then marinated overnight in lemongrass, ginger, garlic, tamari soy and fish sauce. “We grill the ribs first to get a charred flavor when smoking,” says Mina Group head of culinary Gerald Chin.

At Tropical Smokehouse in Palm Beach, Florida, chef Rick Mace combines Caribbean and Latin flavors with all-American barbecue traditions, centered around his 500-gallon custom-built smoker. His mojo pulled pork butt is one of his most popular proteins, served in a sandwich or by the half pound. Mace pierces the pork thoroughly with a sharp knife on both

sides to allow the garlicky citrus marinade to better seep into the meat.

Far East Meets Middle East

Asian flavors also play a role in the tuktuk kebab at Branja in Miami, but with a Middle Eastern twist. Chef Tom Aviv uses both the holy trinity of Thai cuisine—ginger, cilantro and lemongrass—and an Egyptian doah spice mix that includes freshly roasted sesame seeds, cumin, coriander, anise and peppercorns mixed with coarsely minced beef. The kebabs are formed, skewered and basted with tamarind glaze before they hit the grill. Aviv recommends keeping kebab thickness around the half-inch mark and aiming for a dark sear on the exterior while the middle is still juicy pink. ■

At Branja in Miami, tuktuk kebab is chef Tom Aviv’s interpretation of Far East meets Middle East barbecue.

Spicy Barbecue Corn Ribs

Komodo, Miami

3 ears corn
1 tablespoon togarashi
2 tablespoons spicy mayo
2 tablespoons cotija cheese
1 tablespoon dry miso
1 tablespoon chives, chopped
1 lime, sliced

Slice cob into strips and fry at 350 F for 3 to 4 minutes. Season with togarashi. Plate them in a high stack, drizzle spicy mayo, cheese, dry miso and garnish with chives. Serve with lime.

Smoked Wagyu Brisket

Chef Adam Stephens
The Hope Farm, Fairhope, Alabama

200 grams salt
2 grams pink salt
150 grams black pepper
50 grams ground Sichuan peppercorn
80 grams brown sugar
1 wagyu or regular beef brisket with fatty layer on top
Apple cider vinegar, as needed for misting
Oak or pecan wood for smoking

Combine salts, peppers and sugar and rub over the brisket; cure overnight.

The following day, separate the point and the flat of the brisket if necessary. Fire up the smoker to 200 F and place the point closer to the heat and the flat farther away.

Smoke for 12 hours, spraying intermittently with the vinegar. After smoked, wrap in butcher’s paper and allow to rest in an insulated cooler for a minimum of 2 hours. Slice and serve or chop for tacos and other applications.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUTH KIM



Spicy Barbecue Corn Ribs check the box for non-meat eaters.

Hobnob in Atlanta prides itself as a gathering place for community and quality food.

BAR & GRILLS

REIGN ON

By Laura Yee



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW THOMAS LEE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ, FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON, PROP STYLING BY TAMASIN REID



Tacos, such as smoked barbecue brisket, fit into bar and grill favorites.



Burgers, barbecue, dips and fried food (dishes that can be shared) bring in customers at bar and grills while technology will make a difference in profits and growth, experts say.



Concepts come and go,

ebb and flow. But few have the enduring appeal of the bar and grill, which continues to draw diners with friendly service, quality food and fun drinks at a midscale price.

But that doesn't mean these neighborhood gathering places haven't evolved or won't continue to change with the times. The most successful are embracing technology, America's changing lifestyle and dining preferences. On the food side: more vegetarian options, protein alternatives and shareable selections—most often fried—along with burgers, barbecue, tacos, and mac and cheese. On the bar side: craft cocktails, low or no alcohol drinks, varying beer styles and a wider selection of spirits such as bourbon.

Menus reflect American classics, typically in the form of comfort foods with just enough of a twist by way of current flavor trends, be it Japanese, Korean, Mediterranean or Middle Eastern.

"Keep it simple and keep it familiar and do the best version of whatever that dish may be," says Sean Yeremyan, owner of Big Table Restaurants in Atlanta, which includes several locations of Hobnob Neighborhood Tavern. "What you put in it is what you get out of it."

» Just a twist

Comfort food has dominated bar and grills since Applebee's cast the mold 43 years ago. Today, bar and grills that started and grew locally are opening locations out of state, such as Michigan-based Black Rock Grill. The menu, like so many others that followed such a trajectory, reflects recognizable flavors along with a smidge of current trends. For appetizers: fried pickles with chipotle mayo; halloumi bruschetta but with pita chips; ribs

BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ. FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON. PROP STYLING BY TAMASIN REID



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ. FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON. PROP STYLING BY TAMASIN REID

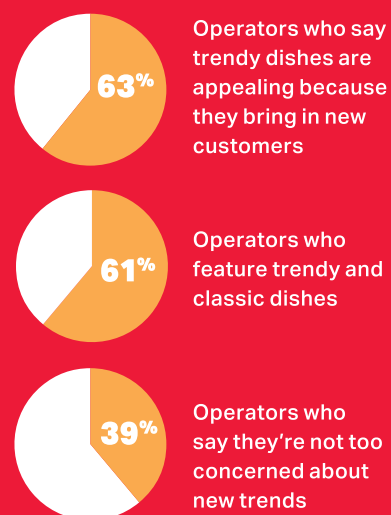
Inspired by Shorebird, which has a location in California and Arizona, crispy avocado fries with green goddess dipping sauce is a bar and grill favorite.



Varieties of beer, including low ABV, can be a draw at bar and grill concepts.

BY THE NUMBERS / BALANCING ACT

New and familiar play a role at bar and grills



Source: Datassential

with various sauces including Caribbean jerk. For entrees, surf and turf combos, penne primavera with a plant-based alternative meat and several burgers, including one sandwiched between “moons” of fried mozzarella.

Local independents, like Yeremyan’s Hobnob, stay regional as he expands to two more locations this year. He describes the menu as “tavern fare with Southern flare.” Fried green tomatoes are accompanied by Sriracha remoulade and goat cheese, but appetizers also include several tacos as well as tuna poke with chili garlic sauce, furikake, tavern chips and Tabasco onions—which he calls the most innovative item on the menu.

» Duo personas

Michael Midgley has competed in several chef competitions, turning out creative dishes that could rival any fine dining menu, but his Midgley’s Public House in Stockton, California—essentially the Central Valley—

straddles steakhouse fare along with bar and grill signatures. “I’m not a tweezers and microgreens kind of guy,” he says, yet his menu reflects his past training. Appetizers include avocado fries with Sriracha ranch; asparagus cigars wrapped with cream cheese and fried, served with a sweet chili sauce; and barrel-smoked prime rib sliders, as well as pork belly sliders. Steakhouse options include a tomahawk rib-eye and upsells like mac and cheese for \$14 and grilled bread for \$6.

» Grab the kids

A neighborhood gathering place undoubtedly means it’s suitable for kids, like Hildee’s Texas Dine-Inn. The requisite kid’s menu of a burger, chicken strips, pasta and grilled cheese is offered but small adults of millennial parents are more likely to order from off the big people’s menus. At dinner, there are shareable wings with a choice of sauces that includes chimichurri; brisket ragoon with sorghum sweet and sour; and smoked meatloaf with mushroom butter succotash, red okra and bacon tomato glaze, as well as farm stand risotto with local seasonal ingredients and chicken-fried wagyu steak—all artfully presented. Their moniker: dine in, stay awhile.

» Booze is boss

If a concept is neighborly, alcohol will figure prominently. When Yeremyan opened Hobnob, the craft beer trend hadn’t hit Atlanta yet, so he featured it. Not long afterward, he began selling a wide selection of bourbon. Today, more craft cocktails are offered.

Southern California-based Bosscat Kitchen & Libations launched its American comfort food menu with a whiskey room (and whiskey club) that houses hundreds of whiskies from several countries. Founders John Reed and Leslie Nguyen call their four-unit concept a “lively dining experience,” something for everyone’s taste, whether it’s high-end bourbon or a working person’s beer. The menu, they say, reflects new ideas with seasonal produce, meats and spices. There’s California Onion Dip composed of whipped ricotta and cipollini

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW THOMAS LEE

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Community and familiarity draw diners to bar and grills, but fun and flavorful dishes like pork rinds at Hobnob keep them coming back.



onion confit served with pita; portobello mushroom fries with smoked jalapeno sauce; country bread with whipped ranch butter; a kale goddess salad that includes quinoa, corn, black beans, roasted red peppers, shaved Parmesan and pumpkin seeds tossed with creamy cilantro dressing; and a 12-hour beef short rib with black pepper sauce, scalloped potatoes and seasonal greens.

» Heed technology

While the familiar and friendly draws customers, industry experts say technology will keep their businesses thriving amid the everyday challenges of competition, labor and higher food prices. Look no further than Texas Roadhouse, a legacy concept with more than 600 locations that recorded its most profitable quarter ever earlier this year—a change that can be attributed to its investment in technology.

Meredith Sandland, a seasoned restaurant executive and co-author of the recently published, “Delivering the Digital Restaurant: Your Road Map to the Future of Food,” says a seamless dining experience sets operators apart. This “frictionless commerce” for example includes the ability to use your phone or restaurant tablet to order another drink, dessert or pay the check—basically any need a server typically fulfills after the initial greeting. Such software remembers the party and preferences.

“This is the year of innovation for BOH,” she says of back of the house software that can track labor, food costs, billing and inventory more efficiently than ever. “It’s kitchen display systems that give you a head’s up telling workers what dish they should be making and when. It’s common in QSR (quick service restaurants) but starting to be adopted by other segments.”

Innovation in third-party delivery and optimizing a restaurant’s online presence is also essential, she says. “Following your customer’s digital footprint online will make all the difference in a restaurant’s success.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW THOMAS LEE

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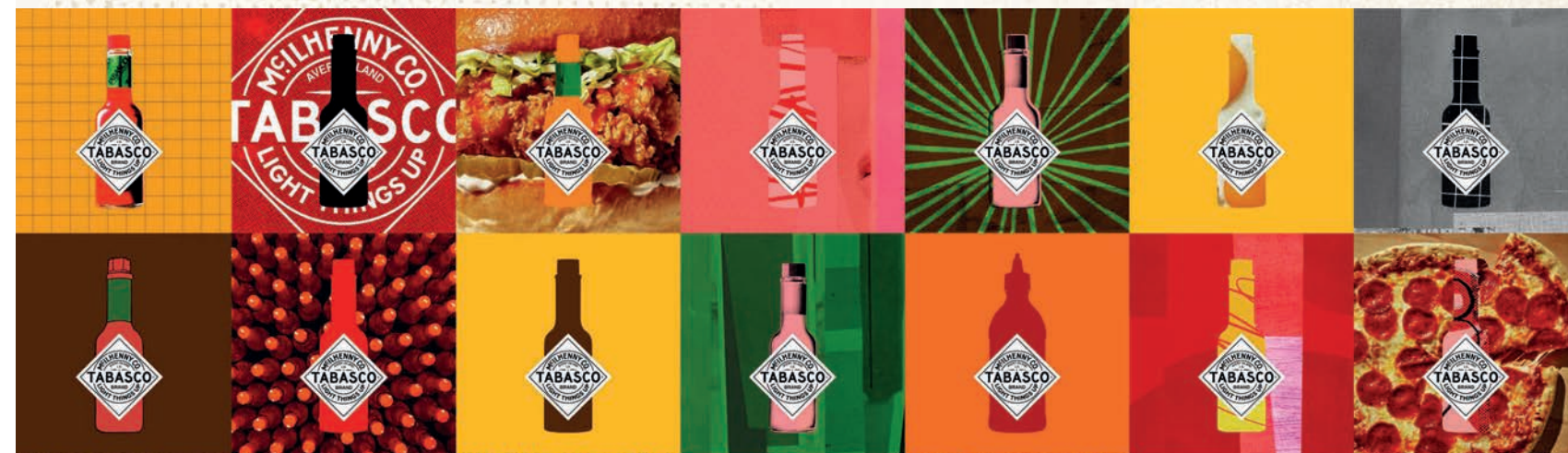
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Turn the page
for recipes.

HITCHING

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Tamasin Reid



A



RIDE



Garnishes
that rev up
cocktails



➔ **Say thanks to the outrageous garnishes** on bloody marys—they’ve paved the way for food accompanying cocktails known as sidecars. These smart and creative eye-catching edible embellishments are accompanying all kinds of cocktails, adding excitement and value. The ultimate food and drink pairing, sidecars provide the bar and kitchen an opportunity to work more closely together, which means sharing ingredients and controlling waste that ultimately leads to a better bottom line. Take a moment to drink in these approaches, but remember that a sidebar doesn’t need to be fancy; it just needs to make sense with the cocktail and the concept.

PINEAPPLE AND JALAPENO MARGARITA, \$20
At Hotel Indy’s Cannonball Lounge in Indianapolis, the caramelized pineapple and jalapeno infused margarita is garnished with skewered pineapple letters spelling out “Indy,” although any word works with a full set of alphabet cookie cutters. Senior food and beverage manager Chris Underwood has his team cut out pineapple letters just before service to streamline the prep, and they utilize pineapple leaves in the garnish as well. Any pineapple scraps are repurposed in a breakfast fruit bowl. “It’s a tribute to the city, and a feast for the eyes,” he says.

Margarita with Pineapple and Jalapeno
*Senior food and beverage manager
Chris Underwood
Cannonball Lounge at Hotel Indy, Indianapolis*

- 2 ripe pineapples
- 1 bottle silver or blanco tequila
- 2 jalapenos, sliced
- 1 ounce lime juice
- 1 ounce lemon juice
- ¾ ounce Triple Sec

Peel and core both pineapples. Slice and grill one and combine with tequila and 1 jalapeno, including seeds, in large container. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Strain.

Slice other pineapple into thin rings and cut out preferred letters. On a 6-inch wooden skewer, add 1 habanero pepper and then letters; set aside.

To make cocktail, shake 2 ounces infused tequila with remaining ingredients in an ice-filled container, except garnishes. Garnish and serve.

THE CARROT IN THE RYE WITH RYE BREAD FLOWER, \$24
Bartender Mark Bellemare-Sullivan pairs rye whiskey with rye bread and a rolled carrot straw at Bezel Cocktail Lounge in Denver. “The drink itself is quite thick for a cocktail with no egg, so it coats your mouth nicely for a bite of something complementary,” he says. “Taking bites of bread (shown bagel-style on page 34) between sips calms down the strong flavors of the turmeric cayenne honey and yellow chartreuse.” Drinking out of the carrot adds carrot flavor to each sip and accentuates the carrot-infused rye.

EXTRA CHILLED MARTINI WITH PICKLED CHANTERELLES, \$26
For an exceptionally dry and cold martini, Aviram Turgeman, beverage director at Monterey, New York City, freezes the classic cocktail for an hour before serving, then garnishes it with a skewer of lightly pickled chanterelle mushrooms. It’s one of the top-selling drinks. “The chanterelle adds an umami element to the palate that together with the saline, creates another layer of complexity,” he says.

MERROIR MARTINI WITH OYSTER, NORI AND TROUT ROE, \$30
At Hog Island Oyster Co. in San Francisco, the bivalve gets top billing. The cocktail creates an “aquarium” with purple nori floating in the glass, smoked trout resting atop and a raw oyster on the side. “The inspiration was to showcase multiple forms of merroir in one drink,” says beverage director Saul Ranella. Dehydrated nori is added at the bottom of the rocks glass, rehydrating and unleashing umami flavors. He encourages guests to eat the smoked trout roe off the zested lemon peel to coat the palate with citrus oils and smoky piscine flavor. Next comes a sip of herbaceous, coastal gin before slurping the plump, sweet oyster off its shell. “Your palate has been primed to effectively become a mignonette for the oyster.”

“Taking bites of bread between sips calms down the strong flavors of the turmeric cayenne honey and yellow chartreuse.”
—Bartender Mark Bellemare-Sullivan, Bezel Cocktail Lounge in Denver



Scan the QR code to get the recipe for The Carrot in the Rye with Rye Bread Flower.

Merroir Martini with Oyster, Nori and Trout Roe

Beverage Director Saul Ranella
Hog Island Oyster Co., San Francisco

2 ounces merroir-influenced gin
1 ounce Oceans Vesper Blend, recipe follows
Dehydrated purple seaweed, as desired
Large ice cube
1 lemon
Smoked salmon roe, as desired
1 oyster, shucked

Combine gin and Vesper Blend in a shaker; stir for 1 minute.

Add dehydrated Nori seaweed to the bottom of the rocks glass. Place a large clear ice cube on top and pour in mixture.

Zest a 1-inch-wide lemon skin while expressing oil over the entire cocktail. On the same zested skin, place a generous amount of salmon roe and position on cocktail. Serve with the oyster.

To make Oceans Vesper Blend: Combine 2 parts Accompani Blue Dorris liquor with 2 parts Tempus Fugit Kina L'Aero d'Or Aperitif, 1 part Dolin Dry vermouth and 1-part Lillet Blanc Aperitif.

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BELL & TORCH BLOODY MARY WITH BLOODY MARY CHIP, \$18

Le Salon's Erin Gabriella isn't a bloody mary fan, so the New York City bartender challenged herself to create one that she'd drink. She introduced other veggies into the mix like roasted bell peppers, fresh celery stalks and whole green olives to mellow out the tomato flavor. "I saw how much fiber we had after straining out the juice base and I didn't want to throw it away," she says. She dehydrated the discards to make a zero-waste bloody mary chip to accompany the cocktail. "The chip is a little sweeter so it can balance some of the acidity in the cocktail. It took me a few tries to perfect the sugar content—too much, and it's glass; too little, and it's leathery." ■

Bell & Torch Bloody Mary with Bloody Mary Chip

*Bartender Erin Gabriella
Le Salon, New York City*

46 ounces tomato juice
350 grams red bell pepper, blistered
286 grams whole olives, pitted
3 celery stalks, chopped
4 ounces simple syrup
100 grams Worcestershire
6 grams celery seed
6 grams kosher salt
¾ teaspoon cayenne
½ teaspoon smoked paprika
1½ grams rosemary spice blend
1½ ounces vodka
Bloody Mary Chip, recipe follows
Small sprig rosemary

Combine all the ingredients except vodka and garnishes in a high-speed blender until smooth. Strain through a chinoise, reserving solids. Return half of the solids to the mixture.

Place a large ice cube in a medium-sized glass. Combine enough bloody mary mix with vodka, pour over ice and garnish with chip laid across the top with a sprig of rosemary. Light rosemary before serving.

To make the Bloody Mary Chip: Place remaining strained solids in a blender and add 6 ounces simple syrup; blend gently. Pour the spread over a baking mat and spread thinly. Bake 30 minutes in a preheated 225 F oven. Peel away the spread from the mat and cool. Break off into 4-inch pieces.



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ON THE RADAR



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Top it Off.

Forget about which pizza style is best. It's all about the toppings—the more unusual the better.

HIGH ALERT



Clucking Really?

Did fine-dining chefs just figure out they can stress less and make more with fried chicken joints? Expecting some innovation here.



Interactive Cocktails.

Add a garnish that's edible, scent/flavor-piquing and of course eye-catching, and FOMO will take it from there. See page 34 for examples.



The Price is Right.

Dynamic pricing—charging less on slower nights and more on busier ones—is all about supply and demand. Airlines and ride share (surge pricing, anyone?) know all too well and so should you.



Bougie is Better.

A smidge of caviar on ice cream is an easy-to-execute upsell. **Last seen:** Kaluga caviar on housemade sweet corn ice cream with caraway toast and hot pepper jelly at Sorrel in San Francisco nails it.

FADING OUT



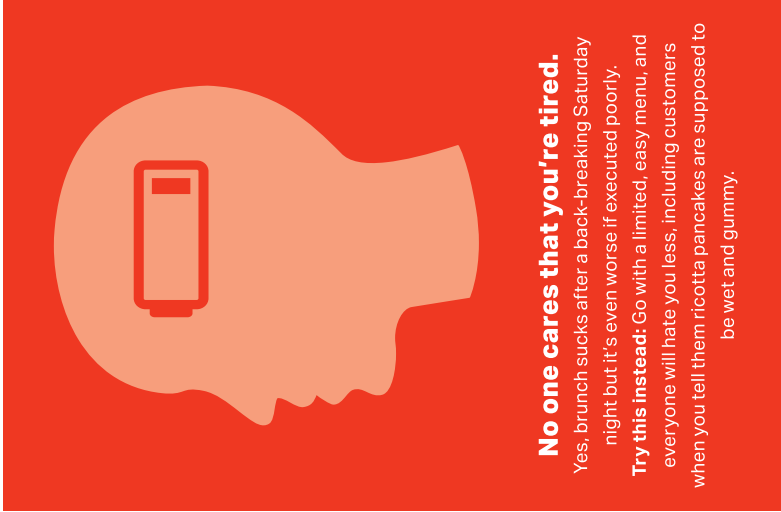
One Word: Bread.

Bread is an easy money-maker when it's not stale. **Try this instead:** Crispy and salty on the top and spongy soft in the middle, focaccia with a flavorful spread (whipped herb butter or whipped ricotta) is trending.



Mondays Off.

The day of industry respite means dollars left on the table. **Try this instead:** Pick another day or two to take off and capture new diners when there's less competition.



No one cares that you're tired.

Yes, brunch sucks after a back-breaking Saturday night but it's even worse if executed poorly. **Try this instead:** Go with a limited, easy menu, and everyone will hate you less, including customers when you tell them ricotta pancakes are supposed to be wet and gummy.



Boring 'Cue.

Slathering a straightforward ketchup, brown sugar and vinegar sauce on barbecue is a snoozer. **Try this instead:** Spice up rubs and marinades with global flavors to keep diners coming back for more. See page 18 for ideas.



SPECIAL ADVERTORIAL SECTION

Kindred Spirits

How low and no alcoholic drinks
can pave a profitable path



This Vegan Avocado Matcha Smoothie gets a tropical twist from a pineapple coconut foam.

» What happens when a cocktail loses its spirit? It doesn't wither away but actually grows the bottom line.

Over the last several years, low and no-alcohol spirits have come into the market, giving bartenders plenty of ways to create cocktails equally as complex as their boozy counterparts. The segment is expected to grow 25% from 2022 to 2026, according to IWSR, a drink marketing consultancy. Today, consumers want the choice to imbibe or not, which has fueled the growth of boozeless bars and more spirit-free menu choices. Generation Z and millennials are showing the greatest interest.

Creative booze-free drinks, however, don't need to depend on boozeless spirits. Fruit juices, from pineapple and peach to passion fruit and mango, work with and without alcohol. While alcohol boosts brunch sales, booze-free cocktails are seeing the greatest growth in the weekend segment, according to foodservice marketing and research firm Datassential.

The drinks at daytime cafe First Watch, which has more than 470 locations nationwide, exemplify the potential of the category. Its Tropical Sunrise features a colorful blend of mango, pineapple, strawberry and lime, while Kale Tonic Fresh Juice highlights kale, Fuji apple, English cucumber and lemon.

To maximize the profit potential of alcohol-free beverages, consider the following tips from bartenders whose offerings support the restaurant's menu and overall vibe.



Get fancy with Snap Dragon Tea, which features Dole Pineapple Coconut Mix, tea, lemonade and cubes of dragon fruit.

No ABV Georgia Peach is happy with or without alcohol, joining peach puree, Dole Pineapple Coconut Mix, lime juice, coconut cream and peach syrup.



TURN HEADS

A beverage can say special simply through the vessel, whether playful and wavy or tall and sleek. For example, the Coco Loco at Sushi Roku in Scottsdale, Arizona, features coconut water, coconut syrup, lime and pineapple juice with crushed ice mounded in a mock coconut container. Its Lost in Paradise drink is presented in a shorter glass so that a spice blend can rim the sides to support a blend of serrano chilies, orgeat, lemon, pineapple, passion fruit and ginger ale. At Someday Bar in New York, the Optical Illusion—a nonalcoholic gin, hibiscus lemon and club soda—is poured into a coup glass.

ADD VALUE WITH GARNISHES

The finishing touch of a cocktail is also essential, adding value and aesthetic. The

signature Hula Juice with passion fruit syrup, pineapple, orange juice and cranberry juice at Hula Modern Tiki in Scottsdale is topped with a purple orchard; the Captain's Colada of coconut cream, allspice falernum syrup and pineapple juice is garnished with a large pineapple triangle and leaf. At Gatsby's Prime Seafood in Houston, part of the drink is so visually striking it could be viewed as the garnish: hibiscus tea is frozen into small ice cubes that float to the top when grapefruit juice and club soda are poured into the glass.

BUILD ON FLAVOR

Just like their chef counterparts, bartenders and mixologists develop drinks based on complementary flavors. Fermenting juices, creating shrubs or including savory ingredients help create layers of flavors—a must for all

SPECIAL ADVERTORIAL SECTION

spirit-free cocktails, says Chris Marshall, founder of Sans Bar pop-up in Austin, Texas. That approach is evident on the cocktail menu at Los Angeles' Wolfsglen, where watermelon is paired with holy basil seed, rose and mint. At Philadelphia's Buddakan, the Rising Sun combines passion fruit, peach, lemon and grenadine; the Yuzu Sour features yuzu, lychee, lemon and sugar; and the Bitter Truth blends together lime agave and tonic water. In Seattle at Oddfellows Cafe, there's Palo Alto, a mix of blood orange, pineapple, honey and coconut milk.

Bartenders often reach for heat to add contrast to booze-free beverages. 1751 Sea and Bar in Atlanta pairs an orange alcohol-free spirit with grapefruit juice, honey and a ghost pepper tincture, resulting in a sweet and subtly spicy concoction. The same can be said of umami to up the flavor. Eem in Portland, Oregon, combines cola with cinnamon, maple, lemon and shoyu.

REFLECT THE CONCEPT

It makes sense that nonalcoholic beverages support the concept. The spirit-free cocktails at Galit, a Mediterranean restaurant in Chicago, are inspired by gazoz, Israeli carbonated drinks. The seasonal drinks with fresh herbs include pomegranate with cardamom rose and hibiscus and apricot with a shrub, urfa pepper and anise. Mott 32 in Las Vegas, an Asian-inspired restaurant, offers the Jasmine Cooler made with lychee, jasmine tea and orange blossom and the Stonecutters with passion fruit, miso honey, lemon verbena and plum.

While the boom in non-booze shows no sign of slowing down, it by no means is a harbinger for the end of alcohol. The 74% of consumers who order no-alcohol drinks also order alcohol.

"I'm so excited at how far the industry has come," says Lorelei Bandrovski, who founded alcohol-free Listen Bar in Brooklyn, New York, in 2018. "It wasn't that long ago that people were laughing when I said I was opening a bar with no alcohol!" ■



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Images move along
a table at Journey.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY NYC RESTAURANT.COM

Technology
turns dinner
entertainment
on its head

By Bret Thorn



The table for an interactive dinner, top right, with Elise Ramaekers at the Peregrine in the Salon Fashion room, both at Journey.

A meal accompanied by a high-tech

animated show replete with immersive video is ushering in a new era of dinner theater.

At Journey, a new restaurant in New York City's Flatiron district, the menu supports a narrated story told through a spectacular display of images. The operators behind it drew inspiration from other dining experiences that feature animation and augmented reality, such as Le Petit Chef.

Decades ago, dinner theater meant food served while watching a performance on stage. Then dinner and a movie became a thing while a meal often precedes theater, a concert or sporting event. But now, new technology is allowing imaginative restaurateurs to offer awe and excitement with food to match.



The type of show at Journey depends on the room; different shows are shown in the restaurant's different spaces.

For example, at Journey 360, up to 20 people sit at a communal table with high-resolution video projected onto the tablecloth, walls and ceiling. A story, narrated by a live actress whose own character has a rather involved backstory, "takes" the guests via immersive video aboard a luxury blimp docked at the Empire State Building.

Guests are transported to different countries, from the Amazon to Southeast Asia, and then underwater and into space, with high-definition computer generated imagery as they're served food meant to fit the environment.

And the food is no joke. Chef Edward Hong offers subtle and complex dishes. On one night, black cod with Japanese ginger in a yuzu dashi glaze paired with an Oregon Pinot Noir was served as images of manta rays and other ocean dwellers virtually swam along the walls and across the table. Hong then presented gin-cured salmon with cucumber, horseradish, apple and dill and poured Vernaccio from Tuscany, as grand videos of the Arctic played. Veal cheek with black rice risotto, harissa and mascarpone cheese, paired with a Washington Cabernet Sauvignon, was served amid videos of the heart of a volcano.

In another room, Journey Odyssey, Tony award-winning actresses Judy Kaye, Cady Huffman and Deborah Craig appear virtually on the tabletop as part of a story about an apprentice cook named Sam who is hoping to get promoted, as the guests are also transported to different venues, from Venice, Italy, and China to Argentina and ultimately, to outer space.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NYCRESTRAURANT.COM

Even at the bar, guests are treated to video projections featuring celebrities who tell stories related to the drinks they ordered.

The star power is thanks to Marc Routh, a Broadway veteran who is partners with restaurateur Alex Cesaria in Journey.

"When we started to work on this project, we were looking at how we might use different technology," Routh said. "There were a couple of different techniques. One was a 360-degree projection mapping experience, and the other major one was this table-top projection. We liked both of them, so we decided to do both. They're pretty different and the variation that we were able to make, which has never been done before on the tabletop, was that we added the live performers that we filmed in a green-screen studio.

"Then after we had filmed that, we created the animations that they're in, and so that was kind of an exciting technique. It allowed us to tell a more complex story than a pure animation would, because they were actual Tony Award-winning Broadway actors rather than just animated figures."

Although Routh comes from the theater world, he said the food is the centerpiece. "That's sort of our secret," he said. "You think when you're going to one of these things that it's going to be all about the technology or the entertainment, but in fact the food is really quite spectacular."

Routh's inspiration that included Le Petit Chef has been making the rounds in Europe and Asia, and currently at the JW Marriott

Washington, D.C., New York Marriott Marquis, The Fairmont Chicago, Millennium Park and Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans. Another source of inspiration is Sublimotion, an immersive experience in Ibiza, Spain, for which guests pay \$2,000 each for a three-hour banquet that virtually transports them through time and space as they eat avant-garde food by two-Michelin-star chef Paco Roncero.

TableMation Studios, the creators of Le Petit Chef, have debuted a similar project at the SLS Hotel Beverly Hills and the Four Seasons Hotel Austin, with plans for shows in the San Francisco Bay area soon.

In the show, titled "Nya & Ned Save the World," laser projectors broadcast visuals onto guests' tabletops showing chefs Nya and Ned trying to conduct a cooking class while the villain, Dr. Animator, attempts to foil their plans.

As at Journey, the guests are taken on a global adventure, this one culminating at the Eiffel Tower, while the culinary team at each venue prepare their versions of Nya and Ned's food.

The experience at Journey is \$175 per person for a tasting menu and cocktails are \$18 each while Petit Chef ranges depending on the menu. At the Fairmount Chicago, prices start at \$155.

"It's fun and whimsical, pairing perfectly with the four courses to create a unique Instagrammable night out for our guests," says TableMation Studios' CEO Michael Bickel.

And of course, the fact that these experiences are so visually engaging, and thus great fodder for social media, as Bickel says, means that the guests become the restaurants' best marketers. ■



The bar at Journey, top, with KC Connor as Morpha at Journey's 360 room, bottom, along with cocktails and crudo.



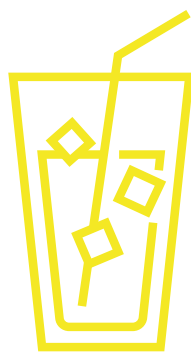


ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

10 ways
to better
portion
control

A bad portion size, whether it's food or drink, can be the beginning of the end. Controlling it, however, can lead to better profitability.

Consumer packaged goods are masters at shrinking volume and keeping prices the same or even increasing them. Restaurants can become just as adept but the old school method—filling out a dish with lower cost ingredients—isn't as effective anymore. Yes, a dish can be balanced so that a higher-cost protein is accompanied by lower-cost items. But there's more to it.



1. CHANGE PLATES AND GLASSWARE

Reducing the amount of food in an appetizer or entree works better if it's served on a smaller plate. It also helps cooks, preventing them from adding more than the portion that's been calculated for food costs, says Michael Midgley of Midgley's Public House in Stockton, California. He also uses drink- appropriate glassware for the bar. "You don't need a (beer) pint glass for a vodka tonic," he says. "Smaller plates and glassware have made a huge difference."

2. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

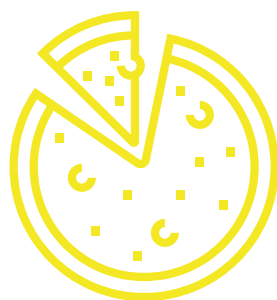
Value can be subjective. Eight small housemade ravioli filled with ricotta and served in a simple, fresh marinara with basil for \$30 might fly at Antico Nuovo in Los Angeles but would be a tough sell elsewhere.

3. CONSIDER NEW BALANCE

Chef Richie Farina at the Adorn Bar & Restaurant at the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago balances out food costs throughout a variety of dishes on his tasting menu. "If one course has caviar on it, then I'll have a vegetarian course that's still delicious and creative but might have a smaller percentage cost per plate," he says. That vegetarian course might be seared heart of palm with young coconut or a maitake mushroom plate with kombu, kale and pickled romanesco. "Dishes that are inventive and fun create value," he says. "I'm driven to create value not only on the plate but also in the dining experience for guests."

4. LOSE WEIGHT

If you offer the weight of meat on the menu, stop. Ounces mean more to you than a customer unless it's large and you need to justify the cost. At the Trump International Hotel Waikiki, executive chef Joseph Rose has reduced portion sizes on



dishes like prime beef, from a 14-ounce New York strip to a 12-ounce portion without any pushback.

5. OFFER MORE CHOICES

Scott Weiner, founder of The Fifty/50 Restaurant Group, has raised prices across the board at his Chicago restaurants, but he's careful to keep more accessible entry-level items on the menu. When he raised prices on his 12-inch pizzas at Roots Pizza, he also added a lower-cost margherita pizza to offset the more expensive specialty choices.

6. JUST SAY GOODBYE

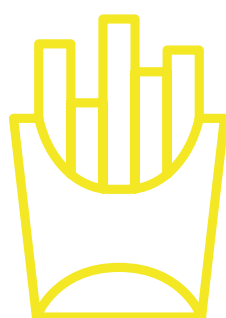
The loss leader is losing its cache in the current environment. "Some items like king crab or Dungeness crab, I just don't use at all anymore," Rose says. But if an ingredient or dish is that popular, price it accordingly so it's a money-maker.

7. LET FLAVOR DO THE WORK

It's unlikely any guest will notice thinly-sliced bacon over a thicker-cut version in an omelet though your bottom line will feel it for the better. Flavorful ingredients like bacon or goat cheese can be reduced too. For example, at breakfast, Rose's team is using thinner slices of bacon and two eggs instead of three in omelets.

8. MAKE IT SHAREABLE

Food that can be divided among the party can justify the cost or even work as an upsell. These items, from bread service to dips (see story on page 4), should also be low cost and low labor. "I've added more shareable items, where we can make money, but that are a good value to the guest." For example, Rose uses fish trim for a popular smoked fish dip with taro chips, checking off the box for reducing waste and maximizing all of the protein.



9. GO WITH PRE-PORTIONED

Midgley is a fan of pre-portioned ingredients, such as french fries, as a better way to help cooks maintain portion control. But he's seen even better results with pre-cut steaks, which fell out of favor for some chefs when whole- animal butchery became a trend.

10. KEEP VALUE

When Weiner opened Kindling earlier this year, the bistro steak worked as the more affordable option alongside more expensive cuts. "We haven't made plates smaller to make portions look bigger, but we definitely try to create the impression of value," he says.

In the best-case scenario, only increasing prices might raise eyebrows among regular customers. Worst case? They stop being regulars, opt for a lower cost restaurant or dine out less. ■

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"Dishes that are inventive and fun create value. I'm driven to create value not only on the plate but also in the dining experience for guests."

—Chef Richie Farina at the Adorn Bar & Restaurant at the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago



PEARLS OF WISDOM

Boater Circle (see
page 60 for recipe)
can be boozy or not,
but boba pearls put
it over the top.

Boba adds
fun and value
to drinks and
dessert

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Tamasin Reid





B O B A

is mostly associated with Asian tea and beverage concepts that have proliferated the U.S. in recent years. But there's no reason why these pearls that pop and gush with flavor can't be equally popular on any drink or dessert menu.

Boba, also known as fruit caviar and fruit pearls, is cost and labor effective while providing a bit of fun, flavor and color. Whether it's boba or chewy tapioca pearls traditionally found in milk tea, they don't require prep (unless you want to make a flavor that's not available for purchase) or knowledge other than choosing a complementary flavor.

At Palette Tea House, a restaurant in San Francisco, mango pudding is topped with coconut sauce, strawberries, diced mango and mango boba. The "jiggler," aka a gelatin shot, at Miladay's in New York City, is served in a scallop shell with boba that complements the flavor of the shot, whether it's orange, strawberry or kiwi.

The light purple-hued "Taro Shinju" cocktail (sake, taro tea, cognac and apple boba) at Indo in St. Louis is inspired by Japanese-American beverage director Kira Webster's nostalgic obsession with taro boba milk tea. At \$15, it's the priciest cocktail on the menu, but a fun and unique option to pair with or instead of

Pearly Tropical Cremeux

Inspired by executive pastry chef Scott Green

220 grams passion fruit puree

132 grams sugar

140 grams whole egg

125 grams egg yolk

120 grams coconut oil

Coconut mousse, recipe follows

Passion fruit and kiwi boba, as needed

Combine passion fruit puree, sugar, whole eggs and egg yolks. Cook, while whisking, to 82 C. Cool for 5 minutes. Add coconut oil; hand-blend. Cast mixture while hot into a glass, filling halfway. Cool and add a layer of kiwi and passion fruit boba. Pipe a layer of coconut mousse on top; refrigerate until ready to serve. Garnish with more boba.

To make Coconut Mousse: Bloom 12 grams gelatin with 60 grams cold water; set aside. Whip 395 grams coconut cream to soft peaks; reserve refrigerated. Combine 106 grams water with 20 grams coconut milk and 107 grams coconut cream and bring to a simmer. Combine 140 grams egg yolk and 98 grams sugar and temper into coconut milk mixture. Cook, while whisking, to 85 C. Add 6 grams vanilla paste and gelatin; mix until homogenized. Cool to 30 C; fold in reserved whipped coconut cream.

dessert, coaxing guests into having one more drink at the end of the meal.

While boba is typically filled with a fruity flavor, brown sugar boba finds its way into brunch, coffee drinks and desserts, such as the Earl Gray ice cream with caramel popcorn at Softbite in New York City. It's also featured in the Deja Brew cocktail. Served at Sit Boba Lounge in Los Angeles, the drink is made with milk, tea, coffee liqueur, Irish cream liqueur and simple syrup. At Grace Street in Manhattan, brown sugar boba accompanies milk tea french toast topped with ice cream and caramel popcorn.

Available in a myriad of flavors such as kiwi, passion fruit and strawberry, fruit caviar/fruit pearls can layer custards, top ice cream or garnish any dessert.





Beverage manager Colin Stevens uses mango popping boba from QBubble in Queens to add a sweet, fruity accent to his Bubble Trouble cocktail at Wau in Manhattan. The drink is served with a thick boba straw in a tall highball glass with ice. “Mango and lychee are a phenomenal classic combo, but I didn’t want the fruity flavors to overwhelm the koji notes of the sake or the ginger spice,” Stevens says. “By keeping the mango locked away inside the boba, the guest can decide when to go for a sweet burst of mango flavor as they sip away at this otherwise dry and slightly spicy cocktail.”

Cristhian Salazar, senior culinary director at Xperience Restaurant Group, also uses fruity boba in a couple different cocktails at

Las Brisas Laguna Beach. Both bartenders find that a tablespoon is the right amount of boba per glass and the visually appealing color and texture help sell the drink.

Bar manager Stefan Lohka takes boba’s visual appeal a step further at Minami in Vancouver by serving ginger-popping boba in a clarified rum cocktail with mango hojicha tea, ginger liqueur and mango juice. “The bright zest of the ginger boba is a textural contrast to the lush creaminess that results from the milk clarification,” he says.

“We see our boba cocktails ordered more frequently at brunch,” Salazar says. “They are more playful, and these drinks are social media friendly, which helps us spread the word.” ■



TOP 3 DESSERT PAIRINGS FOR BOBA

1. CAKE

2. ICE CREAM

3. MOCHI

Source: Tastewise

Deja Brew Cocktail

CEO and founder Jackson Chang
Arena Nightlife Group
Sit Boba Lounge, Los Angeles

4 ounces milk
4 ounces black tea
1 ounce coffee liqueur
1 ounce Irish cream liqueur
1 ounce simple syrup
Brown sugar boba, to taste

Shake all ingredients, minus boba, with ice, then pour over a glass with boba and ice.

Boater Cycle

Senior director of culinary Cristhian Salazar
Las Brisas, Laguna Beach, California

2½ ounces vodka
1½ ounces strawberry syrup
2½ ounces lemon juice
1 tablespoon mango boba
Sparkling water
Pea tendrils or sprig of spearmint to garnish

Shake all ingredients minus boba over ice. Strain into a glass with ice and boba at the bottom. Top with sparkling water and garnish.

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**MEETING
THE
MOMENT**

UP ON THE **MILE HIGH CITY**

Denver's got it going on



By Aran Essig with Peter Ganovsky



When people think of Denver, world-class restaurants may not be top of mind. The city's renowned outdoor spaces and beautiful nature may overshadow its impressive restaurants. But over the past two decades, Denver's culinary scene has grown tenfold. With innovative restaurants opening at amazing rates, Denver is making waves. From top-tier barbecue to Colorado lamb and pueblo chilies to striped bass, Denver hosts a wide variety of quality ingredients and styles of food, taking inspiration from the unique landscape and highlighting the many cultures that inhabit it. What's driving the success? The way restaurateurs are approaching the business.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF FIERBERG



Food Fanatics chef Aran Essig

● WOLF'S TAILOR

Helmed by Chef Taylor Stark, Wolf's Tailor finds inspiration in Colorado's diverse natural environment, from land to sea. Utilizing local wild game and seasonal, locally sourced produce and grains, this dining experience is creative and well-executed throughout the year, tailored to the fabric of time and the ecosystem it rests on. Wolf's Tailor features an "entrust" menu that changes nightly. The multi-course tasting menu helps with controlling waste and showcases thoughtful ingredients alongside complementary wines and spirits that work in tandem to tell a unique story. Wolf's Tailor also boasts a zero-waste approach in the kitchen and the bar.

● LINGER

Inspired by makeshift kitchens and street food, Linger caters to a crowd that wants fun. Housed in a former mortuary, this restaurant's ambience is warm and macabre, posh and welcoming. Aside from the food, the view from Linger's rooftop is one of the best in Denver. Also on the roof is a 1975 GMC RV-turned-bar and a kitchen space repurposed from a food truck. Red coconut curry from Thailand,

WOLF'S TAILOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF FIERBERG. LINGER PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHAN WERK



Local ingredients—Colorado lamb, grains and produce—draw guests at Wolf's Tailor, opposite page, and top. Linger nails it visually with design, left, and food (short rib barbacoa pupusa), right.



Salmon offers flavor and visual appeal with serrano chili atole, adobe potatoes and chimichurri at My Neighbor Felix, above, along with an elderflower margarita, while Stuffed Chili Relleno at Work & Class honors the chef's background.

bibimbap from Korea, dosa from India, tamales from Mexico or plant-based sliders from America, Linger finds solace in indecision. It's also a part of the Edible Beats restaurant group, which runs other influential concepts in town like Root Down, El Five and Ophelia's.

● WORK & CLASS

Housed in a shipping container, Work & Class is an expression of James Beard nominee Dana Rodriguez, who co-owns and serves as head chef of this down-to-earth concept that describes its output as a "square meal, stiff drink and fair price." With a heavy belief in familiar, quality ingredients and unpretentious, irreverent service, the menus at Work & Class expertly fuse American with Latin, true to Rodriguez's



Mexican roots. Rodriguez owns another top restaurant in town called Super Mega Bien and assisted South Park creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone on a commissioned reopening of local favorite Casa Bonita.

● PIRATE ALLEY BOUCHERIE

In the heart of Denver, Pirate Alley Boucherie succeeds as a deli with seasonally driven food influenced by the South. The menu includes housemade charcuterie, myriad small plates and artisanal sandwiches like po' boys, melts and heartwarming deli classics. Located in the Historic Ice House, Pirate Alley Boucherie has a big commitment to its community. The restaurant also serves as an event space that hosts cooking classes,

themed dinners and other engaging cooking events.

● MY NEIGHBOR FELIX

Self-described as a Colorado-Mexican restaurant, this concept is a hot spot for millennials looking for a night, or afternoon, out on the town. The food is simple and traditional yet incorporates exciting twists at every corner. That mixed with quality ingredients and reliably beautiful presentations is what My Neighbor Felix is all about. Initial success is driving growth; a fourth location is on the way. It's operated by the Lotus restaurant group, which also runs The ViewHouse, another Denver favorite known for its scenic views and cozy, sports bar like atmosphere. ■

MY NEIGHBOR FELIX PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAMANTHA CAMP



Linger maximizes its appeal with tables on the rooftop that has views of the city.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHAN WERK



KEEP UP

Change with customers to stay successful

By Heather Sennett

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF RESULTS THRU STRATEGY

When you've been in the restaurant business for more than 40 years like Fred LeFranc,

you've basically experienced every type of dining challenge. Running a half dozen restaurant companies followed by a consultancy during that time combines for a unique perspective.

Specifically, LeFranc has helped position several bar and grill concepts for success and has seen the evolution of the neighborhood tavern segment on all fronts, from menus and technology to changes in diner behavior.

Here's LeFranc on how independent bar and grill operators can find success even as their audience evolves.

Q: Tell me about the evolution you've seen in the neighborhood bar and grill space.

A: If you go back to the early days of TGI Fridays, when they were then called fern bars, and then even Chili's and stuff like that, I've seen them evolve and grow ... You've seen a bifurcation of the category, let's call it gastropubs, which was now the elevated version of a grill and bar with better food. It's interesting to see the bigger chains, the Chili's and Fridays, sort of go through this peak and then decline. One of the challenges in all categories of restaurants is if you follow your customer base, as they get older, a phenomenon occurs: So do you.



INDUSTRY CRED: FRED LEFRANC

- ▶ Co-founder and CEO of Results Thru Strategy Inc., a consultancy in Charlotte, North Carolina
- ▶ Engelman's Bakery, CEO
- ▶ Flat Rock Grille, president and CEO
- ▶ Ruby's Diner, former president

Q: How do operators stay relevant in this segment?

A: All you've got to do is ask yourself the question, "What is important to this age group and this bracket in this generation, this contemporary time?" And that may change. Now every concept must be tech-enabled. There was no tech in the early days, right? Now every concept must consider food allergies or food preferences or vegan or whatever, all the myriad of things that the new generation of consumers want. So, if you're a brand that was catering to a 30-something boomer and then a Gen Xer and now, let's say, a millennial, you're going to be very, very different.

Q: And there's the social media factor today, right?

A: Because everyone's got a smartphone, you must have these Instagram walls specifically for customers to take pictures. I talked to an interior designer who does restaurants in New York, and she generally works on designs

where they bolt the tables down on the floor. They don't allow them to be moved because they will put pin-spot lighting perfectly in the center of that table so that when you take your Instagram food shot, it looks good.

Q: How have bar and grill menus changed over the years?

A: That whole category has changed. So you've got the ones that grew with the big chains that sort of had to appeal to a broad palate, which is a tendency to make the food bland, versus the ones that became gastropubs and gave themselves permission to have food with flavor: poke, tacos, vegan, different types of menu items that would not be considered bar food back in the day.



The Marlowes, above, and The Smith, left, in New York City, have benefited with updates that keep up with trends and what customers want: recognizable, comforting foods in an inviting setting to match.

Q: Do you think it's easier in some ways for independents in this segment because they can be nimbler and more easily grow and evolve and change?

A: Prior to COVID, the independents were kicking the chains' butt, by far. When COVID hit, sadly, they were not in the same financial position as the chains, so they really struggled. And while I think inherently they have a competitive advantage because they can be nimble, they can hyper-localize it, things like that, they're coming out of a very tough financial situation. So, I wouldn't say it's easier.

Q: Talk to me about the tech shifts you've seen in the bar and grill space during your time in the restaurant industry.

A: Right before COVID hit, I was doing my due diligence for the acquisition of a grill-and-bar kind of concept. The question you ask is, 'Do you offer third-party delivery?' And the answer was, 'Absolutely not. We don't believe in it. We would never do something like that.' This

was three weeks before COVID hit. Two weeks after COVID hit, everyone was offering third-party delivery to survive. So, the whole industry went through this incredible digitization very rapidly because they had no choice. It was survival. Survive or die. So, the price of entry now for all restaurants is some form of tech enablement, whatever that may be.

Q: How are these operators doing in terms of tech adoption?

A: Probably not enough because they can't afford it and don't understand it. And that's the challenge. It's very confusing what to do right now as an independent.

Q: What do you think are the key challenges that keep some operators from succeeding?

A: They're experiencing the same challenges everybody else is, which is rising costs and labor, the labor shortage. So that doesn't go away. They have some advantage on the labor side because they can have a true relationship with that employee, much better than just a

manager. We talk about it as labor, right? Why don't we talk about people? But a lot of chains don't talk about people. They talk about labor. An independent will talk about Susie and Jack and Jose and Sammy.

Q: If hospitality is at the core of everything you do, how do you translate that into the off-premises experience?

A: Third-party delivery is risky. I've always encouraged staff to say, 'Treat the drivers with love and care and respect because, in a way, they're your customer too.' Give them a sandwich. Give them something to eat. Just treat them with courtesy. If you look at it like they're schlepping your food, they'll schlep your food. If you realize that they're carrying precious cargo and you treat them accordingly and say, 'You've got our brand in your hands. Thank you. And by the way, are you hungry? Let me give you something to eat here. I'd appreciate if you handle this carefully and deliver it in a professional way.' They're human beings. They will react to it. ■

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IT PAYS TO CARE

A little love goes a long way

By Peter Ganovsky

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM SULLIVAN

When it comes to smoothly running a successful business, the proverb “it takes a village” rings true—especially with restaurants. No role is dispensable, but more operators are realizing that praise along with valuing and appreciating hard work are the underpinnings of a thriving restaurant.

Restaurateurs like Stella Dennig of Daytrip, Jeffrey Kim of Nudibranch and George Cole of Sons & Daughters are seeing the benefits of such efforts: a healthier work culture and better retention.

► Hear them Out

As simple as it seems, the act of listening is the first way to appreciate staff. “It’s easy to understate the value of formal systems built to hear our team and act on their feedback,” says Dennig, co-owner and general manager of Daytrip in Oakland, California.

Post-shift meetings are held nightly for both front and back of the house at Daytrip. “I get the feedback nightly and use it to incorporate changes, asks, protocol shifts, etc., in our pre-shift meeting the next day,” she says, adding that a safe space to share feedback is crucial. “It’s an important step in building the foundation for a healthier culture.”

► Show me the benefits

In addition to health benefits, Daytrip helps employees with time off, from swapping shifts to two weeks of guaranteed time off.

“Increasing pay across the board, enhancing healthcare offerings, guaranteeing two weeks of paid vacation and establishing a bonus program based on profit sharing” improve his employee’s experience at Sons & Daughters in San Francisco says Cole. An IRA is also offered.



► Say it with words

At Nudibranch in New York City, value and appreciation come in the form of acknowledgment. The website boasts the names and positions of everyone on staff, including hosts, porters and servers.

“From having staff-wide pre-shift meetings to cross-training all positions, we actively preach the importance of working together,” says Kim, co-chef/co-owner.

“Whether it’s front of the house or back of the house, it’s still one house.”

On Nudibranch’s social media accounts, staff are also recognized for their work and for their personal interests. Kim says he’s cultivating a healthy work environment—one that ultimately aids in staff retention—by highlighting and uplifting their talents and interests.

“Excellent compensation is a great way to attract good, talented people, but is not necessarily enough to keep them,” Cole says. “We respect our team members, celebrate their accomplishments and successes, all while setting clear expectations of excellence and helping them to meet them.”

At Daytrip, each team member’s name appears on the menu, giving everyone the attention they deserve, Dennig says. “Daytrip’s systems and growth over the past year and a half,” Dennig says, “have been so heavily impacted by the entire team’s feedback. Every single person is so essential in running service nightly.”



20 SECOND SYNOPSIS: APPRECIATION 101

► Listen. Establish a regularly scheduled meetings so employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns.

► Address employee concerns in a timely manner with compassion and understanding.

► Create a system for employees to receive time off, paid or not.

► Celebrate staff with a shout out on your menu, website and/or social media accounts.

► Set clear expectations and strive toward reaching achievable, yet challenging goals one at a time.

► Be the restaurant you want to spend your own money and time at.

“We respect our team members, celebrate their accomplishments and successes, all while setting clear expectations of excellence and helping them to meet them.”

—Jeffrey Kim, co-chef/co-owner of Nudibranch

► Tell your story

Visibility is also important to customers becoming increasingly interested in the well-being of staff who make up the spaces where they spend money. “Guests and consumers are interested now more than ever on who is behind the scenes creating, imagining and cultivating the food, drink, cuisine or experience,” Kim says.

Says Denning: “While people want to feel better about where their dollars go, the gap between that desire and the reality of what it means for their bill is still very wide. There’s a lot of work to do, but at least we’re moving in the right direction.” Similarly, poor treatment of staff no longer flies with the staff and public thanks to social media and cancel culture.

► Cultivate culture—from the start

While cultivating a positive culture can happen anytime, Dennig recommends setting clear intentions and expectations prior to opening a business. “That helps attract people who share those values from the start.”

She also suggests frank conversations as a way toward a positive work culture as well as setting goals. For example, Dennig mentions “setting target hourly and salaried raises you’d like to get to one day and set achievable benchmarks over time.” Moving in that direction, even without a sense of how you’ll get there, is the proper first step, she says. “Set a bar that feels challenging but achievable, meet that mark, then raise the bar.”

Kim recommends getting to the core of why people are in the restaurant industry in the first place. “We are all in the industry for different reasons, but at the core, our work is to nurture and take care of one another as best we can.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM SULLIVAN

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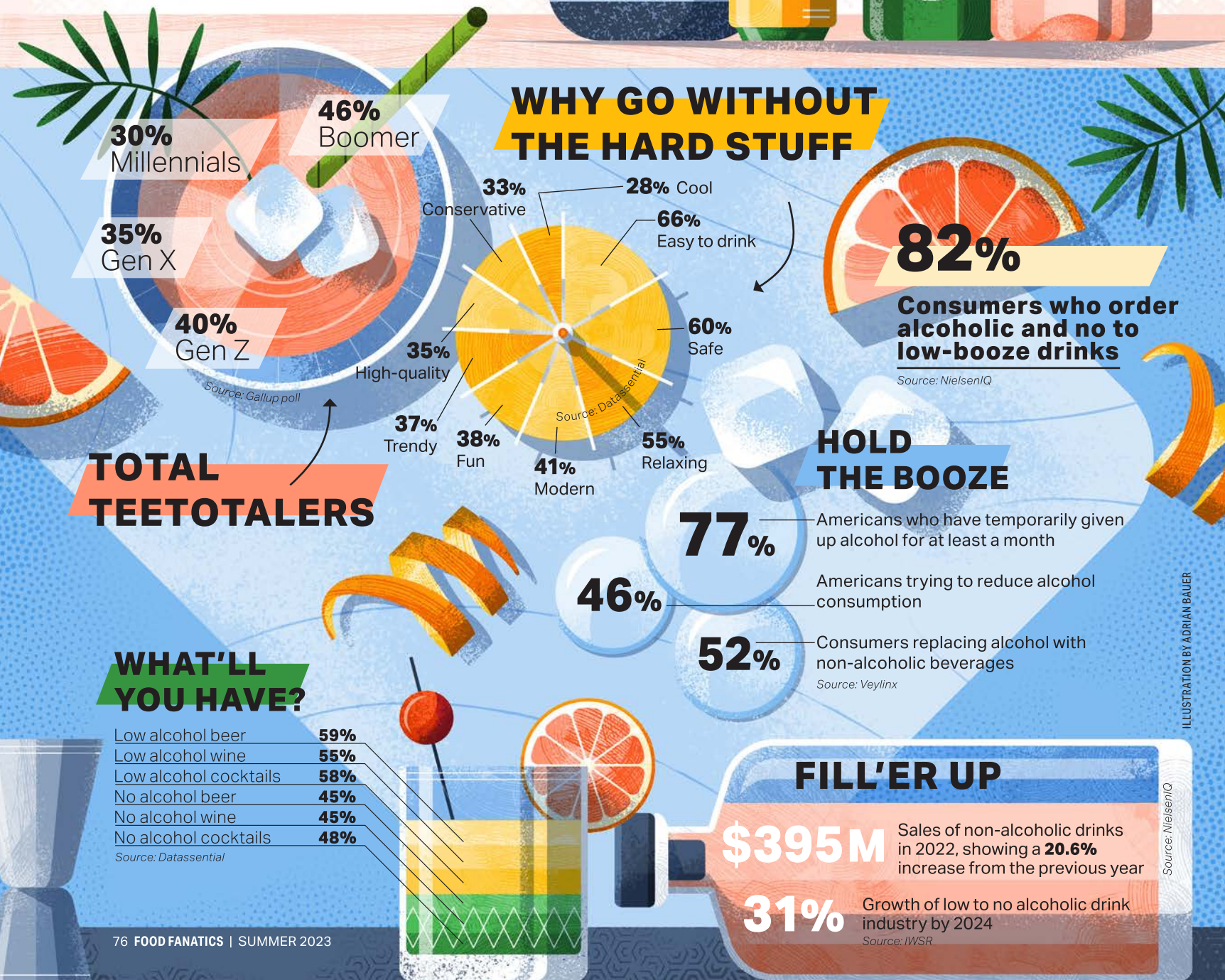
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