

**MENU MUST-HAVES
OF A CERTAIN AGE**

*Fish benefits from time,
page 4*

**MONEY MOVES
STAY STRONG**

*7 Ways to beat the post-holiday slump,
page 51*

**MEETING THE MOMENT
CULTURAL SENSITIVITY CHECK UP**

*Do you need one?
page 72*

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MENU MUST-HAVES

SNACK PACKS

Three meat-free ways to draw crowds to the bar.

4

CIAO NOW

What's happening in Italian cuisine?

12

OF A CERTAIN AGE

Time deepens the flavor and texture of fish—just like beef.

20

COVER STORY

FLAME THROWERS

How to fire up menus.

30

COFFEE WITH KOJI

Fermented beans are ready to disrupt your cup of joe.

39

TREND TRACKER

All things coming up, getting hot and cooling off.

44

ON THE COVER

Up the entertainment factor (cover and right) by setting food and drink ablaze. See page 30.

MONEY MOVES

7 WAYS TO BEAT THE POST-HOLIDAY SLUMP

51

THROW DOWN!

Delivery services entice with lower fees.

56

TAKE COMFORT

For design, it's all about feeling good.

60

MEETING THE MOMENT

US Foods

MODERN MAKEOVER

How one chef is redefining the age-old Chinese menu.

65

DO YOU NEED A CULTURAL SENSITIVITY CHECKUP?

Ask yourself these questions.

72

BY THE NUMBERS

Plant-based menu choices that add up.

76



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HOT TRENDS, COOL BUSINESS

Welcome to the winter edition of Food Fanatics® magazine!

With the impact of the pandemic truly behind us, the industry is poised to have one of the strongest holiday seasons in several years. There's no time like the present to ensure you and your team are ready for the increase in demand. We continue to offer solutions to ensure your menu and your team are ready!

In Menu Must-Haves, trends reveal one burning question: Can we set it on fire? Our cover story shares head-turning trends of blazing plates that both entertain and delight customers. Likewise, with today's restaurants being more competitive than ever, we offer options to stay competitive with popular Italian cuisine, along with ways restaurateurs are serving up whole fish—smoked.

In Money Moves, we focus on the ebb and flow of customers throughout the holidays, and how businesses can come out of this time with a bang. We also deep-dive into food delivery services and their pros and cons, and identify ways to warm up your front-of-house during cozy season.

In Meeting the Moment, we speak with acclaimed chef Lucas Sin, who demonstrates how updating longtime ethnic restaurants can extend to other mom-and-pops who have been open more than a generation—and what they need to do to stay business-healthy and relevant. Plus, we pinpoint some very important questions business owners need to ask themselves to provide a DEI-centric work environment.

Lastly, each well-researched article and trend report boasts some of our most gorgeous photography to date—which will hopefully inspire you to try new ideas, keep good business and stay hot this coming season.

Warm regards,



Jay Kvasnicka
Executive Vice President, Field Operations
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Snack Packs

**Three meat-free ways to draw
crowds to the bar**



**MENU
MUST-
HAVES**

US Foods

By Jacqueline Raposo
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda

Get the recipe
for Salt and
Vinegar Lotus
Root Chips on
page 10.



→ If the ongoing demand

for vegetarian dishes has anything to say about it, upgrading a bar menu with beverage-friendly, meat-free options can be a low-cost way to entice customers and ease understaffed, busy kitchens.

“Plants made their way onto bar menus in a big way in the 2000s and we are not looking back,” says Andre Darlington, food and beverage writer and author of recently published book, “Bar Menu.” “Now we are building on what we’ve learned from drinking cultures where veggies are an integral part of the experience—Japan, Italy and Spain come to mind. Turns out that a snappy carrot, a juicy cucumber or a crunchy artichoke can be an elevated bar snack with the right process.”

To revitalize the bar menu, consider these sour, spicy and salty approaches ideal for pairing with craft beers and signature cocktails.

FRIED PEANUTS AND LIME LEAVES

» **What it is:** These Southeast Asian-inspired peanuts are fragrant, crunchy and curiously complex. Coriander adds nutty, spicy notes. Makrut lime leaves offer a hit of sour.

» **Why it works:** A rise in allergy concerns and the increased affordability of other nuts once threatened to push peanuts into bar-snack oblivion. But they’re making a comeback thanks to their healthy, high-nutrient profile. The sour and salty elements of this dish pair particularly well with refreshing cocktails like daiquiris and gimlets. They’re easy for staff to make and can be served warm during winter or at room temperature in milder seasons. They’re also an affordable complimentary offering.

» **Good to know:** “Gratis snacks have accompanied cocktails since the beginning as early bar owners learned that kippers could coax another coin from guests’ pockets to quench the resulting thirst,” says Darlington. “More than financial gain, freebies make guests feel welcome and are a great way to begin memorable experiences that last longer than one drink—and one visit.”

Fried Peanuts and Lime Leaves

Andre Darlington
BAR MENU: 100+ Drinking Food Recipes for Cocktail Hours at Home

- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 teaspoons coarse sea salt
- 3 makrut lime leaves, finely sliced
- Peanut or vegetable oil for frying
- 2½ cups skin-on raw peanuts

Using a food processor or mortar and pestle, grind coriander, peppercorns, salt and lime leaves. Transfer to a medium size serving bowl. Heat oil (at least an inch deep) in a Dutch oven or saucepan at 365 F. Add half of the peanuts and cook, stirring frequently, until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Transfer peanuts to paper towels to drain. Repeat with remaining peanuts. Gently toss peanuts in the spice mixture until fully coated. Serve warm or at room temperature.





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Fried peanuts and
seasoned fries,
opposite page,
remain solid bar
food options.



Scan the code for the Highbridge Plantain Empanadas recipe.



HIGHBRIDGE PLANTAIN EMPANADAS

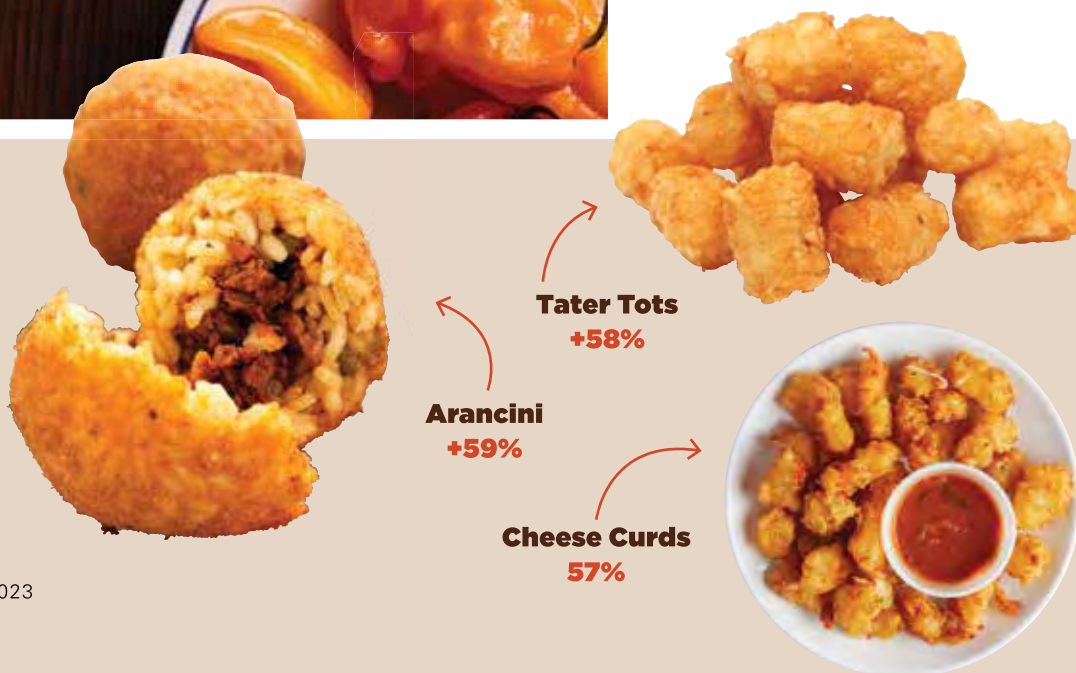
What it is: These patties combine West African and Caribbean flavors in an homage to the multicultural Highbridge neighborhood in the Bronx, New York. Filled with fermented plantains and collard greens, they're slightly spicy from smoked paprika and red chili flakes, fresh from a sofrito jumping with ginger, chilies and cilantro, and with a salty umami punch from white miso. "It gives that backyard feel and makes us feel at home," says chef Lester Walker, co-founder of Ghetto Gastro and co-author of "Black Power Kitchen."

Why it works: The dish meets diners' demands for satisfying plant-based dishes while not overwhelming the drinking experience. "Because this delicious snack is meatless, it's lighter on the stomach so you can enjoy more without feeling like you need a nap after," Walker says. Balancing sweetness and spice, these pair well with spicy, ginger-based cocktails with a splash of bitters.

Good to know: Bar culture is notorious for providing a unique sense of time and place, offering truly local experiences or transporting customers elsewhere. Vegetarian bar snacks help encourage such a locally authentic experience by layering people, time and place in creative, cultural cuisine. "This snack is for us by us," says Walker. "Its rich taste and strong ties to Afro-Latino culture is addictive as well as delicious. The future of food is plant-based."

HOT 'N CRISPY

The fastest growing fried snacks other than the #1 spot held by wings over the past four years, according to food research firm Datassential:





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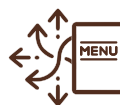
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eaten and/or used
soup once per week
or more

Source: Lightspeed/Mintel, March 2021

GTIN	APN	Description	Format	Pack Size
71398715012	1501519	Old Fashioned Creamy Tomato Soup	Bag	4 - 8 lb
71398113016	1117779	Broccoli Cheddar Soup	Bag	4 - 8 lb
71398355218	21394	Mushroom and Brie Soup	Bag	4 - 4 lb
71398232014	5847140	Southwest Roasted Corn Soup	Bag	4 - 8 lb
71398000026	71398	Buttery Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup	Bag	4 - 4 lb
71398220011	2371979	Loaded Baked Potato Soup	Bag	4 - 8 lb
7139810701	61350405	Chicken Noodle Soup	Bag	4 - 8 lb

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SALT AND VINEGAR LOTUS ROOT CHIPS

What it is: Thinly sliced lotus root is soaked in vinegar, fried until crisp, and doused with salt. They're a flavor-forward mashup of Asian and English chips.

Why it works: There's a reason why we reach for chips when slightly soused—moderate consumption of alcohol enhances how our brain tastes salt, fat and sugar. We also metabolize calories from alcohol quickly, seeking higher-calorie foods in response. "These trigger the brain with salt and fat—as well as the familiar pub malt vinegar flavors we love—but are also elegant and exotic," says Darlington. "They provide not just wowing flavor and texture, but genuine interest."

Good to know: When pairing cocktails and vegetarian bar snacks, Darlington suggests balancing sweet,

sour and acidic elements. Then consider what might cut through or bulk up a beverage's intensity or create a flavor bridge between aromatics.

Salt and Vinegar Lotus Root Chips

André Darlington
BAR MENU: 100+ Drinking Food Recipes for Cocktail Hours at Home

- 1 lotus root, peeled and sliced thinly**
- ½ cup distilled white vinegar**
- 2 cups water**
- 3 cups peanut or vegetable oil**
- 1 teaspoon sea salt**

Submerge lotus root in vinegar and water at room temperature for at least 1 hour and up to 4. Rinse, drain and pat slices dry. Heat oil to 365 F and fry in batches until crispy and golden, 3 to 4 minutes. Sprinkle with sea salt.

BAR SNACK MENU SAMPLER

- Yucca fries with avocado crema, \$8
- Adobo-dusted tots, sour cream, pickled onion and cotija cheese, \$9
Sally Can Wait, New York City
- Brown-butter popcorn, \$10
- Maple, bourbon, rosemary and cayenne-spiced nuts, \$12
Death & Co, Denver, Los Angeles and New York City
- Sweet and salty snack mix of corn nuts, roasted peas, half-popped popcorn, chili and garlic, \$6
Punch House, Chicago
- Crispy Brussel sprouts, Eastern NC BBQ, blue cheese, pecans and chili mayo, \$13
Twisted Laurel, Asheville, North Carolina
- Chicharrones with charred tomatillo salsa verde, \$10
Father's Office, Los Angeles
- Marinated cucumbers, whipped tahini and chili salt, \$12
L.P. Rooftop, Los Angeles
- Hand-picked blue crab beignets with lemon and garlic aioli, \$16
The Gin Commission, Chicago



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CIAO NOW

What's happening in Italian cuisine

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda

➔ **Italian food remains** the most popular food in the world, so it's no wonder that new restaurants continue to open in the crowd-pleasing genre. Recent Italian restaurant openings across the country like Carbone's second location in Miami and Marc Forgione's One Fifth in New York's Greenwich Village are showcasing a stronger focus on simple dishes and freshly made pastas as well as importing specialty ingredients from Italy and sourcing the rest locally. Here are some creative ways new Italian restaurants are standing out from the competition.

Check out chef Marc Forgione's winter version of a burrata appetizer on page 18.

Pork belly envelops pork loin before Porchetta Polipo Sckattiata is confited in fat for 6 to 7 hours.



MARKET-RESTAURANT HYBRIDS

Inspired by Eataly's success, restaurants like La Devozione in New York's Chelsea Market, Canal Street Eatery in Chicago and Montelupo Italian Market in Portland, Oregon, are opening markets in their restaurants. At Montelupo, the market offers pasta sauces, fresh and dried pasta, craft beer, and wine all made in-house or in collaboration with local producers, along with specialty Italian pantry staples like olive oil, antipasti condiments and charcuterie. Margins are higher on housemade items, and about 30% of Montelupo's revenue comes from the market. "Morning customers are reminded that they should come back for dinner, and the evening customers are reminded

REGIONAL FOCUS

Chicago-based restaurateur Aldo Zaninotto specializes in regional Italian restaurants, from Piemontese fare at Osteria Langhe to ancient Roman cuisine at Testaccio. "My approach when opening my restaurants was to bring the true culture of Italy and its history to the USA, but that culture varies so deeply based on what region you're in," he says. "Diving into one specific location allows us to get hyper-specific with the history of food and wine and creates a more transportive experience." Classic Roman dishes like porchetta and lamb chops scottadito appear on the menu at Testaccio as well as across the country at Mother Wolf by chef Evan Funke, another new ode to Roman cuisine. By confiting the porchetta in rendered pancetta fat before roasting, Testaccio's chef Michael Lanzerotte keeps the meat juicy.

In New York, Parma Nuova focuses on the flavors of Parma, Italy, emphasizing ingredients like Prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano Reggiano, while Ramerino Italian Prime stakes a claim on Tuscan cuisine with a textbook version of bistecca alla fiorentina using olive oil and rosemary but no butter.

ITALIAN FUSION

Magari in Hollywood brought Tokyo-Italian fusion to Los Angeles earlier this year, serving dishes like roasted maitake mushrooms with togarashi fonduta and sake kasu-cured ribeye steaks. Northern Indian pizza parlor Pijja Palace is also drawing crowds with an Italian amalgamation. Diners can try peri peri vindaloo pizza topped with tandoori onions, housemade Goan sausage and kadai paneer cheese.

Pastry chef Nicole Guini always has tiramisu on the menu at Adalina in Chicago but changes the flavor profile several times a year with globally inspired twists. She's currently serving sesame honey tiramisu with chocolate halvah gelato, incorporating Middle Eastern ingredients into an Italian tradition. "I was inspired by these silicone soap molds I found online with cute little bees on them pollinating flowers," she says. Guini casts the honey mascarpone mousse in the mold, followed by tahini ganache and espresso cake that's brushed with coffee. It's then frozen and unmolded for a beautifully sculpted presentation.



10-SECOND SYNOPSIS

Characteristics of recently opened Italian restaurants:

- Emphasis on simplicity
- Italian imports of specialty ingredients with local sourcing
- Regional focus of the moment, such as Roman, Tuscan and Emilia-Romagna
- Italian markets within the restaurant
- Italian fusion with Japanese, Mexican or Indian

WHO'S DOWN WITH ITALIAN?



UNITED STATES
88%



GLOBALLY
84%

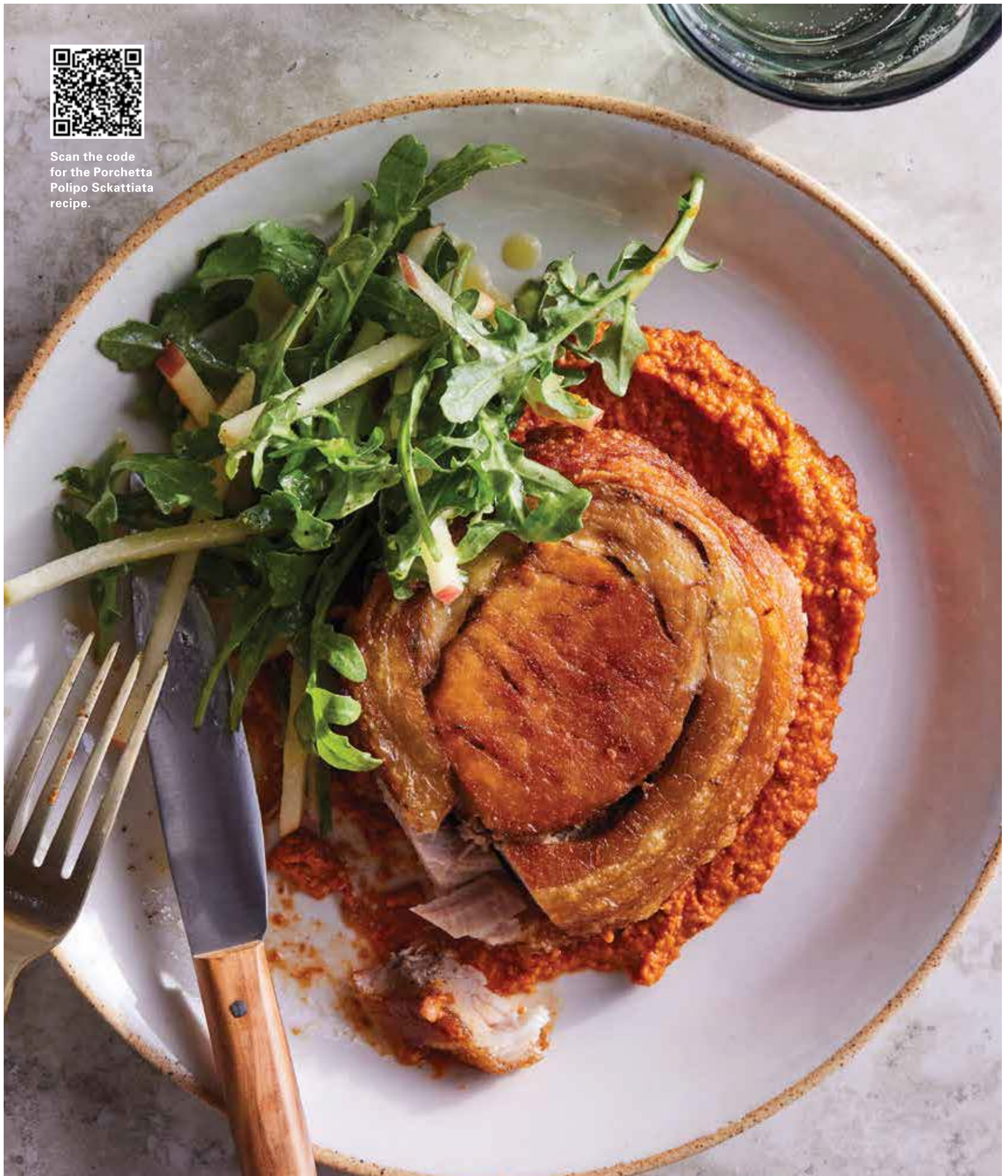
Source: YouGovAmerica international study of more than 25,000 people from 24 markets ranking 34 cuisines. The only food ranking higher than Italian in the United States was American food at 91%.



Ingredients that will complement Porchetta Polipo Sckattiata. Scan the QR code on page 16 for the recipe.



Scan the code
for the Porchetta
Polipo Scattata
recipe.





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that they can come back anytime for our market items,” chef Sedona Kusler says.

Giuseppe Di Martino, third-generation owner of Pastificio Di Martino in Naples, Italy, opened La Devozione and 30-seat open kitchen restaurant The Oval as a tribute to dry pasta, featuring more than 120 of Di Martino’s pasta shapes for sale and served in four- and seven-course pasta tasting menus for lunch and dinner. Diners can even buy hand-painted ceramics and plateware from the Amalfi Coast to recreate the full restaurant experience at home.

MADE IN ITALY

While many chefs extol the virtue of pasta made fresh and in-house daily, Uovo proudly proclaims that every noodle is made by hand daily in Bologna, Italy, then shipped overnight on passenger planes to their Southern California locations. They believe the eggs available in Italy created specifically for pasta result in superior noodles. “These eggs are from the countryside outside of Bologna and they are of a deeper, darker yellow-orange color, but far more importantly they have a different density and viscosity,” says Uovo co-founder Carlo Massimini. He also believes that the skillful hands of the sfogline who have spent a lifetime mastering the art of pasta-making are unmatched. “The result of both the Italian eggs and the precision of the hands is a pasta with a far superior texture and mouthfeel that bonds with sauces in the true Italian way,” Massimini says.

At Testaccio, Zaninotto imports burrata from Caseificio Artigiana in Puglia, Italy, but makes seasonal mostarda in-house to accompany the burrata. At One Fifth, Forgione takes the opposite approach. He gets burrata made fresh daily less than a mile away from Di Palo’s Fine Foods in Little Italy but imports 30-year aged balsamic vinegar from Acetaia Reale in Modena to marinate radicchio that accompanies the dish. ■



Smashed Burrata with Charred Radicchio, Acorn Squash Confit and Aged Balsamic

*Executive chef Marc Forgione
One Fifth, New York*

- ¼ cup honey**
- ¼ cup aged balsamic vinegar**
- Kosher salt, as needed**
- Freshly ground black pepper, as needed**
- 1 small head of radicchio, halved**
- 1 small acorn squash, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes**
- Smoked extra-virgin olive oil, as needed**
- 1 ball of burrata**
- Parmigiano Reggiano, as needed**
- Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed**
- Fried sage leaves, as needed**
- Toasted pumpkin seeds, as needed**

Combine honey and balsamic and season with salt and black pepper. Marinate the radicchio in the mixture for at least 1 hour.

Grill the radicchio on both sides in a grill pan over medium-high heat until well charred, about 5 to 7 minutes; set aside.

Place the pumpkin cubes into a medium saucepan and cover with smoked olive oil. Place the pan over medium heat until it starts to bubble slightly. Lower heat and simmer until cooked through and soft, about 30 minutes.

At service, smash the burrata with some Reggiano, olive oil, salt and pepper. Spread on a plate. Place radicchio and pumpkin confit around the smashed burrata. Finish with fried sage and toasted pumpkin seeds. Makes 1 serving with leftover squash.

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Next-stage sustainability: Chefs taking a whole-fish butchery approach, which includes aging.

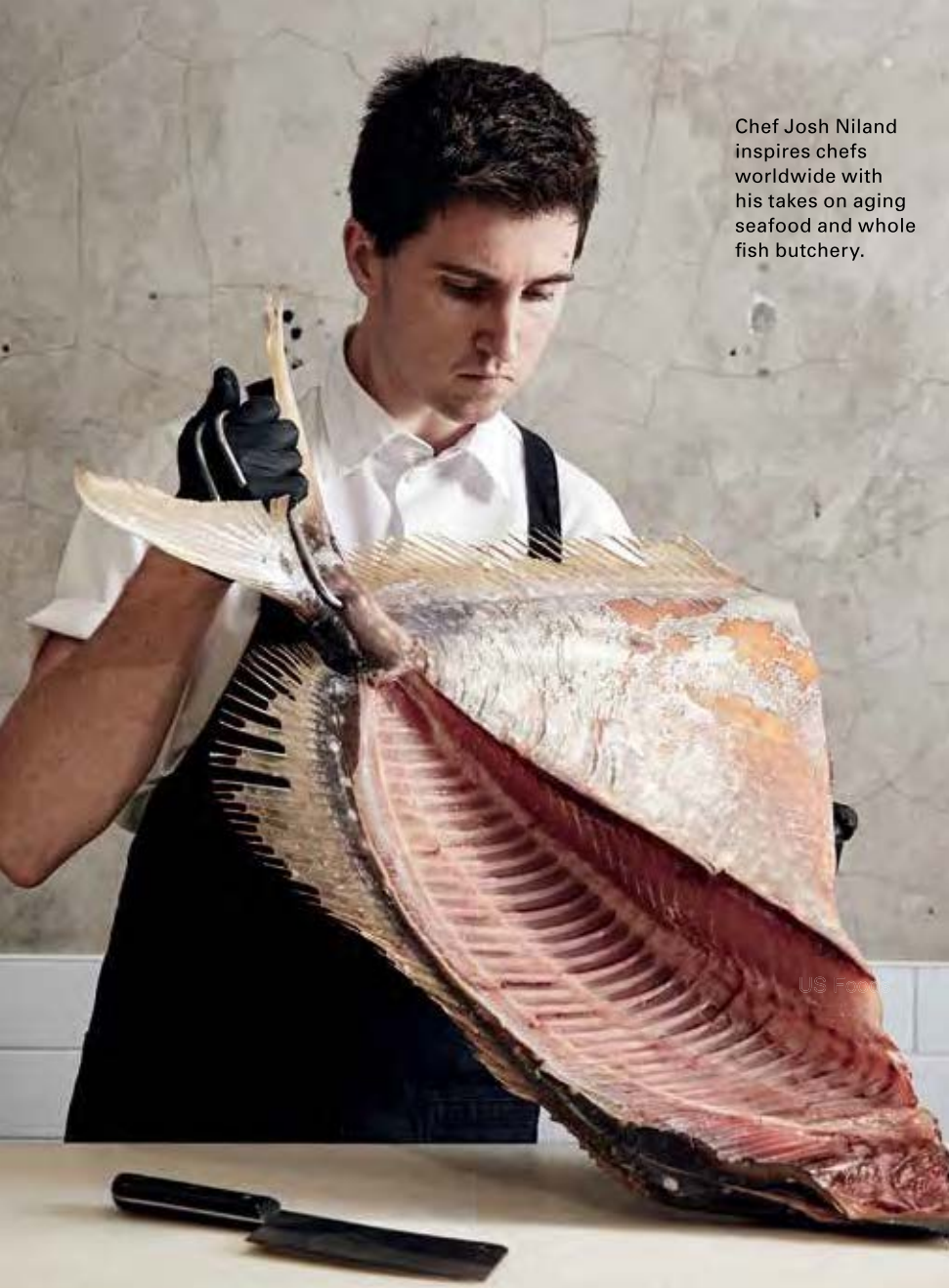


US Foods

OF A CERTAIN AGE

Time deepens the flavor and texture of fish—just like beef

By Kristin Eddy



Chef Josh Niland inspires chefs worldwide with his takes on aging seafood and whole fish butchery.

➔ **For a growing number of chefs,** the term “aging fish” is becoming a new path for exploration.

They’re intrigued by the preparation, which creates a deeper flavor and a melting but still-firm texture. It’s the same concept as dry-aging meat and a process that’s spreading thanks to advocates of whole-fish butchery, such as Australian chef Josh Niland. A meaty bluefin tuna, he says, has the sturdiness to stand up to a ribeye, and handled correctly, both benefit from a meticulously monitored rest. Experimenting at his Sydney restaurant Saint Peter, where he serves fish charcuterie (think yellowfin tuna and pistachio salami) and a 10-day dry-aged greenback flounder chop, led to “The Whole Fish Cookbook,” which won two James Beard Awards in 2020, and the followup “Take One Fish: The New School of Scale-to-Tail Cooking and Eating.”

Liwei Liao of The Joint Eatery in Sherman Oaks, California, lives by the hashtag “#Fresh is Boring,” and his Instagram feed, @dry_aged_fish_guy, is an epic love poem to meaty slabs of turbot, tuna, cod, sea bass and just about every other variety of fish.

At Itamae in Miami, a dry-aging room holds fish for ceviche and tiradito while Antico Nuovo in Los Angeles serves dry-aged branzino with olives, capers and lemon.

Before aging fish, see the tips on page 24.



Simple Aged Swordfish Steak

3 pounds swordfish, aged up to 20 days

Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed

Sea salt and black pepper, as needed

Brush fish with olive oil and place on a wire rack in an oven heated to 212 F. Warm until internal temperature reaches 95 F. Transfer to a grill and cook over high heat, 2 minutes per side. Rest 5 minutes, debone and slice. Serve with lemon or other accompaniments.

Aged swordfish needs only salt and the acidity of lemon.



Foods



Quality, proper handling and storage space are considerations for dry aging seafood.

THE AGING PROCESS

Chefs exploring dry-aged fish recommend nailing down the technique before getting creative. Keep the following in mind:

● CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Impeccably harvested and stored fish are essential. Just good-enough fillets may muddle the learning process if you end up with subpar results.

● WHAT TO PURCHASE

Sea bass and snapper, amberjack and mackerel, bluefin tuna, king salmon and striped bass are solid options. Generally, go for fish with character that's bound by strong sinews ready to melt and soften and can be butchered into a steak. Fragile fillets can be overwhelmed in the aging process. Apply the shinkeijime method—destroy the spinal cord to preserve freshness.

● LEAVE NO TRACE

The fish must not only be pristine but sparkling, thoroughly wiped clean of any scales, blood or other residue that could host bacteria. From a visual standpoint, this is generally not a case where flaws will be minimized through cooking.

● DRYNESS IS THE GOAL

The method won't work if the fish is battling too much condensation, so regularly patting down or scraping away moisture concentrates the flavor.

● DRAWBACKS

Space for aging or a dryer unit; the time lapse between prep and service; and the waste from trimming as the edges dry should be considered. The volume and weight of the product is also reduced, which can impact costs.

—Kristin Eddy

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Lucky Robot Japanese Kitchen in Austin, Texas, whose menu features prime dry-aged maki with assertive support from yuzu kosho, Japanese long green onion, and lemongrass soy, also took this dry-aged concept to salmon ceviche.

“People have an idea of what salmon should taste like. Fresh out of the water, the flavor is fresh and clean,” says chef Jay Huang. “Dry-aging King salmon brings out the sweetness; there are hints of creme fraiche, and the texture is softer.”

Huang and his team experimented with up to 44 days of aging the salmon (“way too long! It tasted like blue cheese”) and discovered that a tender fish like flounder could benefit from an aging of just 24 hours. “It all depends on the balance of how much moisture and what type of fish you have and time spent in the dryer.”

He laughed when asked about the choice to actually promote the term “dry-aged” on the menu. “It’s something we definitely discussed for a while but decided to go all in, and we so appreciate our customers’ support.” And dry aging, he added, “is so Texas.”

Still, the current exploration of this method most likely got its inspiration from Japan, with its respect for high-quality fish and a tradition of lightly curing fish for sashimi. Tokyo chef Jiro Ono, who became famous through the documentary film “Jiro Dreams of Sushi,” ages fish for up to 10 days, but other chefs go far longer.

“I’m still studying this,” says Joji Nonaka, chef at the omakase restaurant Sushi Salon in Oakland, California, who isn’t aging fish yet but has aged yellowtail amberjack up to 5 weeks and found that “aging fish makes it more like meat. It makes a stronger, deeper flavor; more umami.”

“Fresh,” agrees Huang, “is not always the tastiest.”





US Foods

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROB PALMER

A selection of aged, cured and smoked fish ham (marlin, trout, moon fish and swordfish) from "The Whole Fish Cookbook" by Josh Niland.



Start pastrami-inspired cured fish with something other than salmon.

Kingfish, Amberjack, Hamachi or Yellowtail Pastrami on Sourdough with Pickled Red Onions and Creme Fraiche

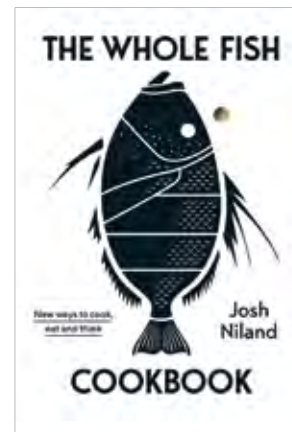
- 80 grams fine salt
- 40 grams superfine sugar
- 1 tablespoon ground fennel seeds
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander seeds
- 1 fresh bay leaf, finely chopped
- ¼ teaspoon nitrate
- 2 pounds plus 3 ounces Kingfish, amberjack, hamachi or yellowtail, skin on
- 2 tablespoons lemon myrtle
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- Sourdough bread, sliced, lightly toasted
- Creme fraiche, as needed
- Pickled red onions, your recipe
- Watercress, as needed

Combine salt, sugar, fennel, coriander, bay leaf and nitrate. Rub all over fish and place on a parchment-lined stainless steel rack. Cover with parchment for 3 to 4 days, turning the fish daily.

Remove from the tray and pat dry with paper towel. When ready to serve, combine lemon myrtle and black pepper, season fish and slice to desired thickness.

Spread cream fraiche on bread and top with a little watercress, onion and fish. ■

Recipes adapted from "The Whole Fish Cookbook: New Ways to Cook, Eat and Think" by Josh Niland, Hardie Grant Books.



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COVER STORY

FLAME THROWERS

How to fire up menus

By Jacqueline Raposo

US Foods



US Foods

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL STRABBING

Lighting up its 1821
Old Fashioned
creates a wow factor
for guests at Lyra in
Chicago.

The Bacon Tower at the Black Sheep has become a must-have starter.



→ Dinner time is showtime,

tableside entertainment that creates a wave of diners who suddenly want it, too.

There's food assembled and served tableside, artful compartments holding accoutrements and dishes accompanied by not just a sprig of an herb but the entire plant.

Nothing turns heads, however, like flames from a dish torched at the table. At Nisos in Chicago, salt-crusted whole fish

doused with ouzo is so dramatic that the servers take a few steps back. But they join in on the fun, expected when guests joke that their eyebrows have been singed.

Flambe is indeed an accessible, affordable and an easy way to encourage word-of-mouth marketing. When it catches on, it can bring in new customers as well returning guests who want the wow factor again. Here's how fire heated up the menu for these restaurants.

THE BACON TOWER

At The Black Sheep in Manassas, Virginia, slices of Nueske bacon get pre-baked and hand-rubbed with raw brown sugar. Pinned by wood clips onto a line, they are then torched tableside with a sprig of rosemary, which heightens the sweet and smoky aromatics.

"Every concept has a signature item—this is ours," says Justin Gudiel, executive chef and director of culinary experiences for the Villagio Hospitality Group. The dramatic presentation makes it their most Instagrammed menu item. Guests ask for it by name. It also creates an entertaining experience fortified by staff interaction.

▶ Torching tips: Keeping essential tools stocked is a must when a menu item is constantly requested, "especially with the supply chain issues we have experienced due to the pandemic," Gudiel says. "Not having the bacon tower available is not an option due to its popularity." Make sure you have consistent plating and torching systems your staff can repeat. Improvisation can mean dangerous mistakes.

Torched Bacon Tower

*Executive chef Justin Gudiel
The Black Sheep, Manassas, Virginia*

4 slices bacon, thickly sliced
Raw brown sugar, as needed
Sprigs of rosemary

Place bacon on a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake in a 250 F heated oven for 10 minutes. Hang 4 bacon strips to a wooden hanger with a sprig of rosemary in the center. Torch tableside. Makes 1 appetizer.

After it's set
afire, salt-
crusted fish is
cracked open
and served
tableside at
Nisos.

US Foods

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL STRABING



Smoke from lighting the drink adds depth and drama to Lyra's old fashioned.



OTHER WAYS TO THROW FLAMES

A simple dish:

Traditional Portuguese restaurants slice chourico, then set it over a ceramic grilling dish filled with cachaca liquor and light it on fire.

Americana nostalgia:

Setting aflame sliced bananas set in sauce of sweet browned butter, dark rum and banana liqueur before pouring it over vanilla ice cream, the mid-century classic bananas Foster harkens to a time when suits and skirts were requirements for diners and servers alike.

A nod to modernity:

Portable smoking guns can add fragrance to a dish or drink while dry ice provides a smoke-like element—both of which up the entertainment experience.

GREEK CHEESE

Several menu items get torched tableside at Steventon's in Le Claire, Iowa. But the appetizer of Kasseri cheese flambéed with 151 Rum and served with fresh lemon and garlic toast points is a best seller.

Steventon's boasts that they have the "hottest food in town." Guests see spinach salad, cherries jubilee and bananas Foster torched at tables across the dining room, which bulks up the overall entertainment element. As a savory item, the cheese is a simple preparation that makes an excellent

shared dish. They also offer an outdoor fire pit so that guests can lounge with cocktails and shared plates while taking in an expansive view of the Mississippi River.

› Torching tip: No matter the dish, train staff on how to set various liquors or sugars on fire. Also, organize the equipment pre-service. The point is to offer guests a show, sure. But it's also an opportunity to make each experience feel personal and attentive. With equipment and skills supported, servers spend more time interacting with guests and less time rushing to put together the next setup.

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Baked Alaska gets renewed love for its fiery wow factor. Scan the code for the Spiced Honey and Kahlua Baked Alaska recipe.



BAKED ALASKA

A combination of cake, ice cream and torched meringue often modified with seasonal elements has made a comeback in recent years. At Edmund's Oast in Charleston, South Carolina, pastry chef Heather Hutton pairs a sweet spice cake and a bitter, boozy honey caramel Kahlua ice cream for her winter offering.

While most restaurants, such as RPM Steak in Chicago, light the dessert tableside, Hutton prefers to do it in the kitchen. "I want full control of how bitter or how sweet I want that meringue to be torched," she says. With sweetness from the cake, meringue and a finishing honey caramel drizzle, she aims for a slightly charred, black swirl from the torch. "It'll be bitter from that meringue with a floral sweetness on top. The dessert combines nostalgia and creativity, offering guests a dessert they may not have experienced or seen as a plated dish. "It doesn't matter if somebody was looking for a fancy dessert or a casual dessert."

Hutton creates an Alaska to torch tableside on special occasions or holidays. For those occasions, she focuses on chocolate combinations that can handle going more sweet or bitter. This way, the final dish isn't dependent on counterbalance from a precisely torched meringue.

Torching tip: For consistent, stunning presentations, Hutton warns that the Alaska should be frozen completely, and the meringue be very cold before attempting to pipe it on top. "If it's not cold, it'll fall off," she says. If stored in an air-tight container and kept frozen, they're quick to finish during service, making them an excellent dessert to prepare ahead. ■



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AT COMPETITOR
INGREDIENTS?**

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Coffee with Koji

Fermented
beans are
ready to
disrupt
your cup
of joe

By Lesley Balla
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



→ The dedication some coffee aficionados take to brewing the perfect coffee is akin to chefs creating a runaway hit or winemakers developing an exquisite vintage.

Coffee growers are now playing with an age-old fungus—koji—to bring something new to the market. It's what's used to make soy sauce, miso and sake, and the same process that's set food and beverage ablaze in recent years: fermentation. In its nascent stages, koji-fermented coffee has roasters, brewers and anyone who wants to differentiate beverage offerings chomping at the bit to get it.

Much like using koji to ferment meats, grains or vegetables, it can add depth of flavor to coffee, and depending on how the beans are later roasted, sweeter or

“IT’S FASCINATING TO SEE HOW THE TRADITION OF KOJI IS MEETING THIS NEW WORLD EXPORT. TO SEE HOW THESE TWO CULTURES KIND OF MELD, HOW THIS ANCIENT FOOD TECHNIQUE CAN BE APPLIED TO A MORE MODERN PRODUCT.”

—Christopher Feran, coffee industry consultant

more savory notes become more apparent. Some roasters have found that koji brings out more umami flavors; others taste a subtle funk.

“It’s fascinating to see how the tradition of koji is meeting this new world export,” says coffee industry consultant Christopher Feran. “To see how these two cultures kind of meld, how this ancient food technique can be applied to a more modern product, in this case specialty coffee, and how the synergy is almost alchemistic.”

How koji works

For millennia, artisans in Japan, Korea and China have used koji to produce soy sauce, miso, mirin, sake and shochu. The enzymes in koji mold help break down complex carbohydrates and proteins into amino acids, fatty acids and fermentable sugars. It helps boost flavors, especially umami—sweet, salty, savory and a little funk—reduce acids, and add more depth to the final product.

Coffee already goes through a fermentation process. After beans are picked and dried, they sit in water-filled tanks for up to 2 days, which allows naturally occurring enzymes to remove the slick layer of mucilage from the outer parchment. The grower would then apply koji to ferment the beans.

Once dried and milled, the coffee—now known as green coffee—goes to roasters. Roasters apply various techniques to bring out the beans’ natural sweet, chocolaty or savory notes.



DESSERTS THEY CRAVE

AT YOUR TABLE
OR THEIRS



US Foods



Recipe

Gluten-Free Honduran Chocolate Brownie Bowl

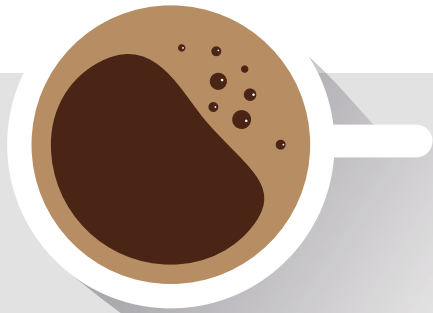
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FAST DRIP ON KOJI

Here's a simple primer on a complex process of fermenting coffee beans: After the beans are picked, they're fermented with koji for up to 36 hours before the drying process.

Roasters receive the beans and apply varying techniques for the desired flavor, be it a dark, medium or light roast.

The taste: More umami flavors, a subtle funk, greater depth.



Coffee beans in the koji-fermentation process, top and above.

Why now?

Feran enlisted friend Jeremy Umansky, chef and owner of the James Beard-nominated Larder restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio, to help develop this new protocol. Along with Kaapo Paavolainen, a world barista champion, they connected with El Vergel Estates, a Colombian coffee grower to try this experimental technique. When the beans were introduced at the 2021 World Barista Championships in Milan, Italy, they found that coffee growers could raise the quality of beans without investing in expensive technology and potentially help struggling growers financially.

What's the taste?

"We're an industry-focused roaster, and it had a lot of mixed reviews from coffee people," says Jon Allen of Onyx Coffee Lab in Arkansas. "It was either the greatest coffee they ever had, or they didn't want sweet mushrooms in their coffee."

He's referring to that kick of umami koji adds to coffee, a distinguishable earthiness and savoriness. Allen says that historically that characteristic could

be detrimental to coffee, but tastes are changing, and a new generation of coffee drinkers are chasing the next big thing.

Who wants it?

Like anything in its nascent stage, awareness and price can be obstacles. Onyx, which supplies around 400 high-end cafes worldwide, says its first allotment of its koji coffee sold out within hours at \$75 for 10 ounces.

Restaurants that want to build an exclusive experience around the coffee are the most interested, according to Mason Salisbury, co-owner of Luminous Coffee, a roaster in Las Vegas. For example, Kodo, an izakaya in the Rykn hotel in Los Angeles, serves Luminous koji coffee as a special nighttime-only espresso.

"For now, it really only works at higher experimental levels," says Salisbury. "Once more notable restaurants start serving it, others will take the risk."

Says Feran: "Millennials and Gen Z want something new. Folks are motivated by new flavors, and they can taste that koji coffee is different and special. This coffee has a lot of potential for an 'aha' moment." ■



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ON THE RADAR



Healthy Doughnuts?

At Takibi in Portland, Oregon, pillowy tofu doughnuts are made with an equal ratio of cake flour and soft tofu for a lighter and more nutrient-dense treat.

HIGH ALERT



Old is New.

Fresh isn't always best. Dry-aging fish achieves next-level flavor and texture. See story on page 20.

FADING OUT



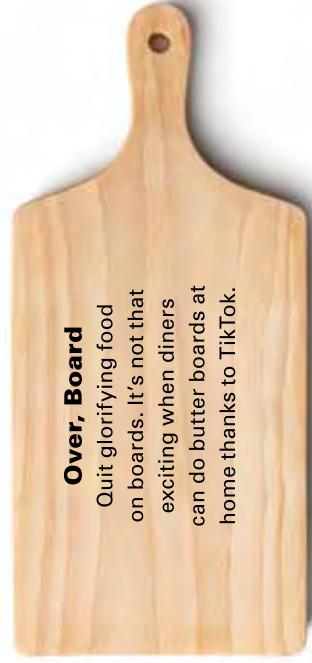
Boring Bowls.

The acai variety are colorful and photogenic but a dime a dozen and often too sweet.

Try this instead: Whole Sol in Denver steps up with a matcha super green smoothie bowl and a superfood dragon fruit bowl with mango, strawberry, coconut and granola.

Over, Board

Quit glorifying food on boards. It's not that exciting when diners can do butter boards at home thanks to TikTok.



The new food celebrities.

Chefs and food influencers with culinary cred—who are putting restaurants on the map faster than traditional media—are giving TikTok a serious side that's often missing when posts about chicken cooked in NyQuil go viral.

Fungus here and everywhere.

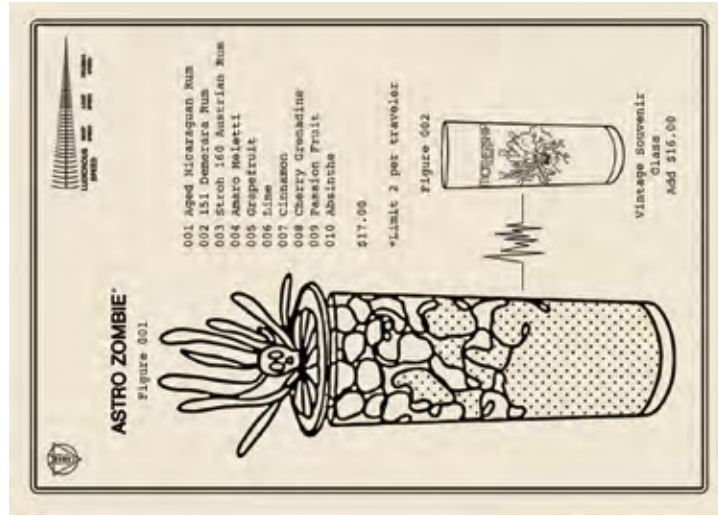
Michelin-starred chefs at Atelier Crenn, Lazy Bear and Jeune et Jolie are using koji, an edible fungus, to tenderize meats, thicken sauces and add umami to sweet and savory dishes as well as beverages. See page 39 to learn about how koji is growing on coffee.





It's All Greek to Us.

Greek cuisine finally has its day, but it may not be so obvious given that the latest spate of openings are cloaked as Mediterranean.



Eat with your eyes.

Menu design has figured out that no one really wants to read.

Last seen: San Diego's new sci-fi vegan tiki bar, Mothership, gives guests a visually driven menu—a mission operations directorate—to begin their journey, with diagrams of each cocktail and dish. Drinks are labeled from cruising speed to warp speed based on strength, while allergens are cleverly denoted.



Open, Sesame.

Tahini is the "it" ingredient, moving from its Middle Eastern roots to mainstream.

Last seen: Sesame paste is showing up as a vegan and nut-free substitute, from tahini and jelly sandwiches and baked goods to garlic tahini noodles at Crudo e Nudo in Santa Monica, California.



Even salad gets a show.

Beyond a typical Caesar, the \$45 Proper Salad at Villon in San Francisco wows diners with pickled beets, mushroom jerky and preserved garlic miso dressing assembled and tossed tableside for two.



Fallen and shouldn't get up.

With a recession and rising seafood prices, diners are less likely to splurge on seafood towers.

Try this instead: PRESS in St. Helena, California, lets guests mix and match a half dozen different seafood small bites to begin, serving their fruits de mer on modular arbutum stands of varying heights by Crucial Detail.



Please stop the music.

Defaulting to house music is just wrong.

Try this instead: Do better by being on brand or show some personality. At Melisse in Santa Monica, California, chef Josiah Citrin spins his personal vinyl record collection, from Frank Sinatra to David Bowie, throughout the evening.

SPECIAL
ADVERTORIAL
SECTION

Honey Butter Fried
Chicken in Chicago
levels up mac
and cheese with
barbecue sauce and
ranch dressing.





The wizardry of everyday ingredients

▼
VIEWING KETCHUP JUST FOR FRENCH FRIES and mayonnaise mostly for sandwiches is understandable—even expected—considering that they’re standard condiments. Same goes for barbecue sauce that’s used primarily for ribs and ranch dressing merely for salad. But they can be so much more. Beneath their pigeon-holed persona lies innumerable ways to advance their use. They easily can become instruments for building complex sauces, the wand that raises the flavor quotient.

Consider mustard, for example. “Growing up, we only ate Grey Poupon on sandwiches,” says Laura Vaughn, head of culinary for Kraft-Heinz, whose background includes stints at fine dining restaurants. “It wasn’t until I became a chef that I learned how much mustard can do.”

In Chicago, Honey Butter Fried Chicken reaches for barbecue sauce and a drizzle of ranch dressing to distinguish its pimento mac and cheese from others while mustard comes together with honey on salmon at Erick Williams’ casual Mustard Seed Kitchen. In Denver, mayonnaise is paired

with ‘nduja and served with thrice-cooked potatoes at The Greenwich. At Sassafra, in the same city, roast beef breakfast featuring the meat, collard greens, cheesy potato casserole and a poached egg is finished with barbecue sauce and gravy.

“Any time you’re stirring something into a sauce, it’s not just one plus one equals two but it’s a dozen different flavors of deliciousness,” Vaughn says.

Consider these ways condiments and sauces can amp up flavor on their own or paired with others:



Denver's Stoic and Genuine pairs tempura delicata squash doughnuts with harissa aioli.

MUSTARD: Offers many characteristics that will unify a dish.

- ▶ Adds sharpness and helps emulsify dressings.
- ▶ Serves as the “glue” for dredging in breadcrumb and other coatings while adding a layer of flavor.
- ▶ Flavor mellows when it’s heated.

TRY THIS: After pan-searing a steak or a piece of fish, swirl a little butter and grainy mustard in the pan for an elevated and elegant sauce.

MAYONNAISE: It’s basically eggs and oil, so take advantage of the fat.

- ▶ Ideal base to deliver customizable flavors, from richness (aioli) to heat (chilies) and acid (citrus and vinegars)
- ▶ Serves as the glue for dredging, which is customizable for a range of spices and dry seasonings such as ranch powder or togarashi.
- ▶ Can take on a seemingly endless range of global flavors as a spread or dipping sauce. Think roasted garlic, chilies, harissa, miso and chili crunch.

TRY THIS: Sebastien Rouxel, Thomas Keller’s pastry chef at Bouchon Bakery and co-author of the eponymous

cookbook swears by it for moist and complex chocolate genoise.

KETCHUP: Heat up this condiment for the maillard reaction or use its sweet and acidic notes for other sauces.

- ▶ Enhance classics, from meatloaf and burgers to grilled chicken and pork.
- ▶ Think of ketchup as an ingredient that can be used to add notes of tomato to achieve a sweet and sour profile.

TRY THIS: Spread atop meatloaf and “run it under the broiler until it’s caramelized, which brings out the roasty caramelized sugar and tomato notes,” says Vaughn.

WORCESTERSHIRE: Treat this tangy, briny condiment like soy sauce to up the umami factor.

- ▶ Stir into sauces for a more savory flavor or to finish a sauce.
- ▶ Add a few dashes to any sauce, dressing or dipping sauce to add complexity.
- ▶ Include in the egg wash for coating vegetables or proteins before dredging.

TRY THIS: Combine with ketchup and brush onto burgers. ■

AWESOME SAUCE

What’s on the rise:



Parmesan garlic
48%



Ranch
34%



Maple syrup
31%



Sea salt
28%



Buttermilk
27%



Ketchup
23%



Sriracha
20%



Mayo
17%

Source: Datassential, 4-year-trend of center-of-the-plate sauces/flavors that experienced the greatest gains.



CUSTOM CREATIONS

The HEINZ Ketchup #10 Tin Can is PERFECT for building signature bulk sauces. Here are a few simple ways to transform HEINZ Ketchup into your own custom creation.



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NAME	BASE #10 CAN	+1 INGREDIENT	+2 INGREDIENT	+3 INGREDIENT	DESCRIPTION
Sweet Heat Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	3.5 c Sriracha	1.75 c Honey	1.5 c Lime Juice	Bring the bold heat and sweet finish with a citrus tang – great for onion rings and loaded tots!
Asian Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	3.5 c Hoisin Sauce	1.75 c Soy Sauce	2.5 c Honey	A classic tomato base with an Asian twist – pair with fried green bananas or fried shrimp!
Gochujang Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	1.75 c Brown Sugar	1.75 c Gochujang Chili Paste	.25 c Ginger Grated Raw	Put a Korean spin on this quick sauce, great for chicken and fried shrimp!
Sweet & Spicy Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	1.75 c Sweet Chili Sauce			A perfect signature sauce for your house cut fries!
Mediterranean Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	1.75 c Balsamic Glaze	.25 c Roasted Garlic Paste		Sweet and savory, all at once!
Tropical Mango Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	2.75 c Mango Chutney	1.5 c Lime Juice		A blend of bright tropical flavors, perfect served alongside sweet potato fries!
Smokey Chipotle Ketchup	HEINZ Ketchup	3.5 c Chipotle Chilies in Adobo	.25 c Chopped Fresh Cilantro		Top off a black bean burger with a spicy kick!

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Think ahead.



ways to
prepare for
the post-
holiday
slump

By Bret Thorn

Offer lower price point specials to spur sales during slower times.



1

Do more with takeout and delivery

Many independent restaurants have mastered off-premise dining and customers got used to it. Michael DeGano, vice president of operations for Denver-based Sage Restaurant Concepts, which operates mostly single-unit concepts in 17 states, said takeout hasn't diminished since restrictions lifted; it's now just part of their business. For January and February, especially in colder climates where people tend to hunker down, he's looking into recreating meal kits that helped keep many restaurants afloat during the 2020 lockdown. They contained raw or partially cooked ingredients with instructions to finish preparing the meals at home.



2

Focus on great holiday service

Customers only remember their most recent experience at a restaurant, Stibel said, so no matter how hectic the holiday season gets, make sure that each guest feels appreciated, and give them the special attention that is the hallmark of great independent restaurants. "Most of the chains can be mechanical because they have to be," he said.

► **This holiday season looks to be a prosperous one** for restaurants as consumers are likely to splurge in a market now largely free of COVID-19 related restrictions.

But the new year is another story. The weeks following the holidays are traditionally slow times for the restaurant business, and with inflation remaining a major concern along with general jitters of global instability, this January could be especially slow.

"People are going to have a merry Christmas. They're going to spend money; they've got savings. But they're not going to have a happy new year," says Gary Stibel, founder of New England Consulting Group in Westport, Connecticut, which advises restaurants and other businesses. "Gas prices are going to be high, inflation will continue, rent will be high ... so this will be a more severe cutback than we've seen in years—probably decades."

But restaurants can take steps now to stay top-of-mind, draw guests during the colder/slower months and provide value, especially in 2023.



Pitch directly to diners on what's to come while you have their attention during the busier months.

71%

Operators who say it's more important to focus on satisfying regulars over attracting new guests.

Source: *Datassential 2022 report on customer loyalty*

4

Build your contacts and lean into rewards

“Turn off your answering machine,” says Stibel, and make sure your phone is answered no matter how busy you are. Even if your restaurant is fully booked, take down everyone’s name, phone number and email address and invite them back as business slows down.

“Lean into your rewards program,” adds Zoiss. “Offer special incentives to your most loyal fans in January and February.”

DeGano said Sage has been working on that for the past two years. “We’ve been focusing on building brand loyalty with guests,” he said. “We’ve grown our databases and have more interaction with our guests on social media. Let’s reach them where they are.”

3

Give guests a reason to come back

“Capitalize on the rush of the holiday season by providing an offer to the guests you see in November and December that’s redeemable in January and February,” said Angela Zoiss, chief marketing officer of Chicago-based Bottleneck Management Group, which runs beer-focused concepts including City Works and Old Town Pour House as well as South Branch and Sweetwater restaurants.

“That could be a bonus offer or gift card purchases, a free gift that’s provided to each table around the holidays, etc. Find creative ways to put these offers in front of your guests while your restaurants are full.”

Stibel suggests accompanying your guests’ check with a handwritten note—always a nice personal touch—inviting them back for a free cocktail, dessert or similar low-cost, high-impact item.

5

Be price-conscious

The holidays are a time to splurge, but many consumers are likely to be feeling a debt hangover come January. DeGano said that while Sage won’t likely be lowering prices, they are likely to offer specials with lower price points, such as less expensive cuts of meat, and will promote them heavily via social media.

Cross-train now to avoid cutting hours or people later.

6

Create special events in January

March has St. Patrick's Day and NCAA college basketball championships while the Super Bowl and Valentine's Day are bright spots in an often slow February. But restaurant operators can create their own special occasions at the beginning of the year.

Stibel pointed out that just as many people watch college football as college basketball. He suggested a January equivalent of March Madness. Zoiss suggested that, if you host private or semi-private events, offer incentives to guests to hold them in January or February instead. "You can encourage guests to host holiday parties after the hectic season. Perhaps your event minimums are lower in January-February," she said.

DeGano said January is also a great time to plan wine dinners, chef collabs, tributes to local celebrities or sports teams. "Start looking at that now," he said. Although the holidays might be too busy for such activities, the first quarter is perfect for them.

7

Cross-train staff

Many operators are working to staff up during the holidays, but good workers are going to be hard to come by in the new year, too, DeGano said. So rather than alienating them by laying them off or cutting their hours once business slows down in the new year, he suggests training them to handle different jobs, helping to keep them happy and employed during the colder months. ■



38%

Customers who say that service and staff engender loyalty the most versus 24% who cite the menu.

Source: Datassential 2022 report on customer loyalty

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A smiling Black man wearing a light blue safety helmet and a dark blue quilted jacket. He is carrying a large black delivery bag on his back. The bag features an orange logo of a bicycle with a fork and a spoon crossed over it, and the word "DELIVERY" in white capital letters. The background is a blurred indoor setting, possibly a restaurant or cafe, with brick walls and wooden accents.

THROWN DOWN!

US Foods

Delivery services compete
with lower fees

It was only a matter of time before competitors would start to gain traction for a slice of the third-party-delivery pie

by enticing restaurants with fees lower than the average 30% charged by big players like Grubhub and DoorDash.

Emboldened by New York and San Francisco, with laws that prevent such high commissions and consumer support for lower fees, regional and national services have been popping up all over the country. Here are a few to keep an eye on:

► LOCO CO-OPS

Created in Iowa by Jon Sewell, LoCo Co-ops is a cooperative delivery service controlled and owned by participating local restaurants. Sewell developed the service in response to Grubhub's rise and its looming financial threat over independent restaurants. It operates in several states, such as Tennessee, Florida and Virginia, with plans to expand.

HOW IT STANDS OUT: LoCo boasts fair commission rates, a fleet of solid drivers and a promise to put the communities first.

+ PROS: Independent contract drivers can earn as much as \$20 per hour.

- CONS: Start up fees for each franchise as well as the responsibility to manage the delivery service.



► COCO

Coco is a California-based third-party service using robots by way of remote human operators. Robots are driven by a human operator to pick orders who then dispense the robots to the recipients. Delivering 50 to 60 orders per hour and partnering with over 100 local merchants in Southern California, Coco is planning to expand to more cities in 2023, according to Anna Dailey, chief of staff.

HOW IT STANDS OUT: Coco robots are electric, leading to zero emission versus car-based trips performed by delivery drivers on other services. Instead of replacing delivery jobs, Coco integrates human roles into their operation.

+ PROS: Between 20% to 50% cost savings compared to standard commission rates like Uber Eats and Grubhub. Equates to about \$5 to \$6 per delivery. “We can charge less than a courier-based delivery service because our costs are less,” says Dailey. “Traditional delivery companies have to over-index on the supply of couriers to ensure demand isn’t outpacing supply. In our business model, we’ve decoupled local supply and demand to create 1:1 pilot: Delivery utilization with no downtime.”

- CONS: Sidewalk congestion and collisions with people, though advances in technology are working out the kinks.



PHOTO © COCO / SAM DRAKE PHOTO

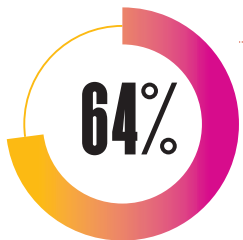
► OWNER

Co-founded by Adam Guild and Dean Bloembergen in 2020, this all-in-one platform works with more than 700 restaurants to build an online presence to streamline visibility and online delivery orders, among other benefits.

HOW IT STANDS OUT: Owner works with services like DoorDash and Uber Eats to strategize lower costs for its delivery services, but customers order through a restaurant's website or app. Owners charge a 5% commission fee.

+ PROS: Restaurants negotiate a flat fee that's split between the customer and the restaurant, the amount of which the latter determines.

- CONS: Dealing with a partnership versus a single entity.



Gen Z are the most receptive to robot delivery

Source: National Restaurant Association State of the Restaurant Industry 2022

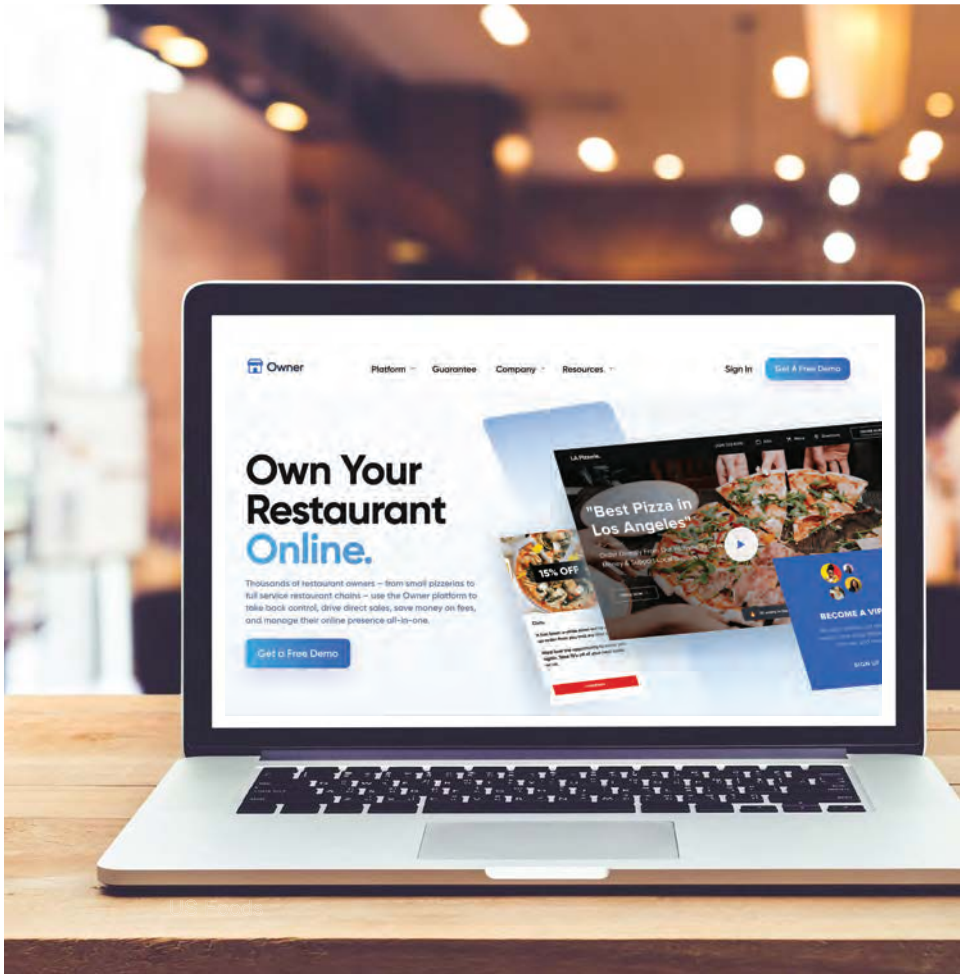
► LOCALDELIVERY

A nationwide network of local delivery companies, which are members of the Restaurant Marketing and Delivery Association (RMDA).

HOW IT STANDS OUT: Instead of the third-party giants, restaurants pair with a locally owned company. Fees are negotiated between the restaurant and the LocalDelivery member. "Most of our member companies charge a 15% commission but sometimes it's a 0% commission and the 15% fee is passed along to the customer," says Andrew Simmons, RMDA president.

+ PROS: Money stays local; fees could be lower.

- CONS: Lacks exposure; costs may not be less.



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TAKE COMFORT

For design, it's all
about feeling good

By Jacqueline Raposo



Serving guests
from the line at
Agi's Counter
minimizes
the need for
additional labor.

Sara Pagan, Michael Herman, and Jeremy Salamon, left to right, at Agi's Counter

➔ **The comfort diners** feel in a space reflects the times. They may not notice how it supports or weaves into a restaurant's design, but operators know this to be true: You can't host a party if people don't feel good in your space.

Restaurant design trends ebb and flow, too. Some pass on as new preferences emerge.

And others make a lasting impact, appearing with each new space that operators create. So when it comes to comfort in design, where have we come from and how does that influence what's next?

Big was big

As the hospitality industry began pulling out of the 2008 recession, some started to push physical boundaries. In Philadelphia, Mare Vetri's Alla Spina sat 200 at a time inside a former Buick dealership garage. At Linger in Denver, 150 people packed across two levels.

Design touches reflected the honesty of a chef's story. Exposed light bulbs, reclaimed wood tables and iron bars peppered many such spaces.

"It was a lot of exposed brick and wood and industrial kind of finishes. Things that were workmanlike and honest," remembers Stephani Robson, senior lecturer emerita at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. "I don't know that people would equate that with physical comfort. Maybe psychological comfort. It was about consistency of message with the food, which is what you want."

Feeling safe is paramount

Safety and comfort are more important than ever yet, so are the challenges. With coronavirus a part of life, design needs to lure diners worried about exposure and public violence. And there are permeating staffing and supply chain problems. "The math doesn't work anymore," Robson says about massive dining rooms with packed tables. "It's not comfortable from a restaurant operator's perspective. Or a



"AN OPEN KITCHEN WINDOW INVITES THE DINER INTO THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE RESTAURANT SO THERE ARE NO SECRETS, WHICH IS EXACTLY HOW MY MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHERS OPERATED IN THE KITCHEN."

—Chef Jeremy Salamon of Agi's Counter

guest perspective—they don't want to be one in a sea of people.”

Some operators of large spaces are modifying their current design. At Andina in Portland, Oregon, owner Peter Platt installed two new air systems for improved filtration and ionization. He also built a new patio. But many operators can't afford such upgrades. And so current design trends suggest that simple modifications can help new spaces look lean and clean.

Tiny touches

Oregon restaurateur Andy Fortgang says comforting guests requires welcoming them to the action while keeping them out of the bustle. “That is a tall order—combining energy and excitement while maintaining a perceived sense of calm and being cared for,” Fortgang says.

As co-owner of Le Pigeon and Canard in Portland, he's incorporated design shifts at their new, larger Canard location in Oregon City, which opened in July. A sizable patio includes a pass-through window for sundaes and snacks. Inside, large windows, a few extra inches between seats, and quality air flow create a sense of airiness for guests. “It's about creating many slightly different spaces that still have site lines to the others,” Fortgang says of how this serves staff patterns, too.



Large windows and spacing of tables provide a sense of airiness.

Strategic seating

Smaller restaurants also benefit from strategic seating. Chef Jeremy Salamon opened Agi's Counter in Brooklyn, New York, in November of 2021. With only 27 seats, many of his guests sit at a counter facing a large open kitchen window. As guests are served from the line, this minimizes a need for additional servers.

The window also reflects his restaurant's Hungarian story. “An open kitchen window invites the diner into the inner workings of the restaurant so there are no secrets, which is exactly how my mother and grandmothers operated in the kitchen, inviting people in,” Salamon says. “It creates a level of comfort for guests. I'm lucky to have a talented staff who are passionate about the food we create.

Conveying that to diners is important to their experience, especially now.”

From banquettes to booths

On the opposite wall of Agi's Counter, guests eat at tables running down a wood banquette. The counter and banquet setup repeats at The Walrus & Carpenter in Seattle. And again at Chef Angie Mar's Les Trois Chevaux in Manhattan. “People are much more comfortable when at least one side of their table is up against something structural. It helps defend their personal space,” Robson notes. “With COVID, this has become even more important.”

Banquettes help operators streamline seating. But Robson projects we'll see

fewer of them in the future—and more booths. Mar added a few plush blue booths at Les Trois Chevaux. And at Chai Pani in Asheville, North Carolina, guests eat “mindblasting” Indian street food in vibrant red booths that line one wall. People spend more money per minute when seated in a booth, Robson says.

What's coming

For a variety of factors, independent restaurants will stay on the smaller size for several years to come.

“The math works,” says Robson of restaurants capping out at 60 or so seats. Small restaurants reduce real estate costs. And they're easier to staff—a problem projected to remain for a while.

Keeping everyone safe means making sure staff can easily assess their stations. So we may see more open kitchens, fewer separated dining spaces and simplified foot patterns. ■



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MEETING
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Redefining the classic
Chinese-American
menu includes mapo
mac and cheese.

modern makeover

How one chef is redefining the age-old Chinese menu

By Bret Thorn
Photography by Alex Lau



► **Lucas Sin** is on a mission to modernize old-school Chinese mom and pop restaurants that brought takeout chop suey and General Tso's chicken to the masses. He's helping them streamline menus and update operations, such as by adopting online ordering and delivery as well as implementing POS systems that can offer sales forecasting and diner data.

It's a career that seemed obvious and circuitous at the same time.

The 29-year-old ran a pop-up restaurant in Hong Kong when he was 16 and started another in his dorm at Yale University. He cooked in restaurants in Japan, Hong Kong, Seattle and Manhattan before opening Junzi Kitchen and expanding the fast-casual Chinese-American concept to three other locations between New York City and New Haven, Connecticut. Media called it among the best Chinese food in New York and Forbes magazine named him a 30 Under 30 to watch in 2020. Then Food & Wine Magazine crowned him a best chef last year.

He's now using his latest concept—a takeout joint called Nice Day—as a model



Whether the concept is Chinese, Mexican or Middle Eastern, updating mom and pop restaurants—from technology to earth-friendly containers, above—can improve operations.

to modernize the thousands of mom and pop Chinese-American restaurants across the country, ailing from the backlash of anti-Asian hate and first-generation operators whose kids don't want to take over the business. But it's a business model that could apply to any type of restaurant in need of modernizing. Sin's days are nonstop, but he took some time to share an update.

Q. How is Nice Day doing?

A. We just recently opened our first (client) location in Huntington, New York, working with the former owner, Mr. Zhang, whose son and daughter went to Columbia and NYU (New York University), respectively.

Q. That's part of your mission, right? Taking over Chinese restaurants that are closing, in this case because the kids don't want to work in them.

A. In this case, Mr. Zhang doesn't want to cook anymore and he mostly wanted to get the lease off of his hands. On the other hand, there are people we are talking to who do want to keep cooking or they want to change their cuisine; they want to cook food that's a little, I suppose, more authentic to the type of food they want to make—maybe they're from Singapore, or Malaysian, or Fujianese (from Southeastern China) and want to cook that way. Each restaurant that we work with is on a case-by-case basis.

Dishes that have rotated through Junzi Kitchen, clockwise, include Tomato Egg Noodles with Lion's Head Meatballs, Chilled Noodles with Chinese Chicken Salad, Firecracker Chicken Rice and Pepper Beef over Brown Rice.



General Tso's chicken gets an update by way of a sandwich.



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The Unlikely Advocate

30 seconds on why you should read the 5-minute piece on Lucas Sin redefining Chinese-American food

- Opened his first pop-up at 16 in an abandoned newspaper factory in Hong Kong where he grew up.
- Earned a bachelor's degree in English and cognitive science from Yale University.
- He and his Yale buddies opened Junzi Kitchen, which takes Chinese food and makes it into customizable bowls, fast-casual style: Pick rice, noodles or salad, select a sauce, protein and toppings to-go. Also served an after-hours menu of fried chicken, instant noodles and cocktails.
- Junzi is a Chinese term for an upstanding citizen according to Confucian values. Of the four locations in the New York City area, two have closed, one became Nice Day, a pop-up.
- Nice Day, which closed to become the template for a new business, is named for the "Have a Nice Day" message and accompanying smiley face on the plastic bags in which Chinese takeout is delivered in New York City.
- The goal behind Nice Day: modernizing Chinese-American food by respecting its origins in the U.S. and China.

Lucas Sin, left, researched the origins of Chinese-American food and tasted numerous mainstays like General Tso's chicken and beef and broccoli before updating menus.

Q. What do you bring to these restaurants that they don't have already?

A. A lot of them don't actually have online delivery or takeout. It's not as easy as one might think to order from a Chinese-American restaurant in the suburbs. Oftentimes, it requires knowing the menu, or having the physical menu in front of you and calling them and hoping that they have enough drivers to bring your food to the right place at the right time. That's just one of the many things that we hope to bring these restaurants on board with.

Q. How did you get interested in Chinese-American food?

A. I remember vividly having Chinese-American food for the first time. I couldn't tell the difference between orange chicken and sesame chicken and General Tso's

chicken ... but having no idea what I was eating. Of course it was delicious, but it was very different from the type of food that I grew up with. But still recognizably Chinese. When I got around to opening restaurants and cooking and the U.S., I'd tell people I made Chinese food and they said, 'Oh. You make authentic Chinese food, not Chinese-American food, right?'

And I never thought too much about it until we started thinking about Nice Day. And quickly we came to the realization that, yes, Chinese-American food was authentic, it was just authentic to something a little bit different than what people expect. Now we're asking ourselves what the role of Chinese food is in America. It's more than what people think of as bastardized recipes. It really is its own regional cuisine that happens to exist outside the borders of China.



Q. What is your approach to “perfecting” Chinese-American food, like General Tso’s chicken or beef and broccoli?

A. We’re not trying to elevate Chinese-American food. It all comes down to respecting and really honestly understanding the precedent and asking yourself what a dish should look like in the modern day. General Tso’s Chicken is an interesting story. We called so many chefs who have been running restaurants for 20, 30, 40 years, asking them about their General Tso Chicken and everyone would give me a different answer. So we ended up having to create it just by taste. We bought General Tso’s chicken from at least 20 restaurants near Bleecker (St. in New York). It was a very fun culinary

exercise because we built it based on taste instead of off of a template of a recipe. From there, the innovation is really just to make it fit into how restaurants work and how people like to order food and eat today.

Q. Do cheeseburger egg rolls and mapo mac and cheese—some of your best-known dishes as Junzi Kitchen—now count as Chinese-American food?

A. I’d hardly be the one to say that this is in the canon of Chinese-American food now, but we are a Chinese-American restaurant. We serve it. And half of the idea comes from China, half of it comes from the U.S., so maybe by some definitions, yeah.



Old-school mom and pop Chinese restaurants aren’t the only ones that could benefit from refresh to improve sales.

Q. What are some traditional Chinese-American dishes that you brought into the modern era at Nice Day?

A. There are some little things. Beef and broccoli is a really wonderful dish, but for modern people, modern Americans’ palates, people don’t often like the beef as soft as they used to. So we reduced the amount of baking soda that we use in our velveting process, for example.

A lot of this just comes from feedback from real customers. A lot of people have shellfish allergies, so we make a vegetarian brown sauce instead of oyster sauce. The biggest change is that most of these American-Chinese restaurants have menus that are like 100, 200 items long and we really pared it down to, like 50 that people really like to order.

Chinese-American food, it’s usually in groups on the floor at home out of the takeout boxes. It’s a popular food and democratic and I think it’s important to have that be the driving energy. ■



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DO YOU NEED A CULTURAL SENSITIVITY CHECKUP?

Ask yourself these questions

By Kristin Eddy





↓

For generations, stories of bad behavior

in the hospitality industry took on a legendary quality that allowed racist, sexist, homophobic and abusive conduct to thrive and be accepted.

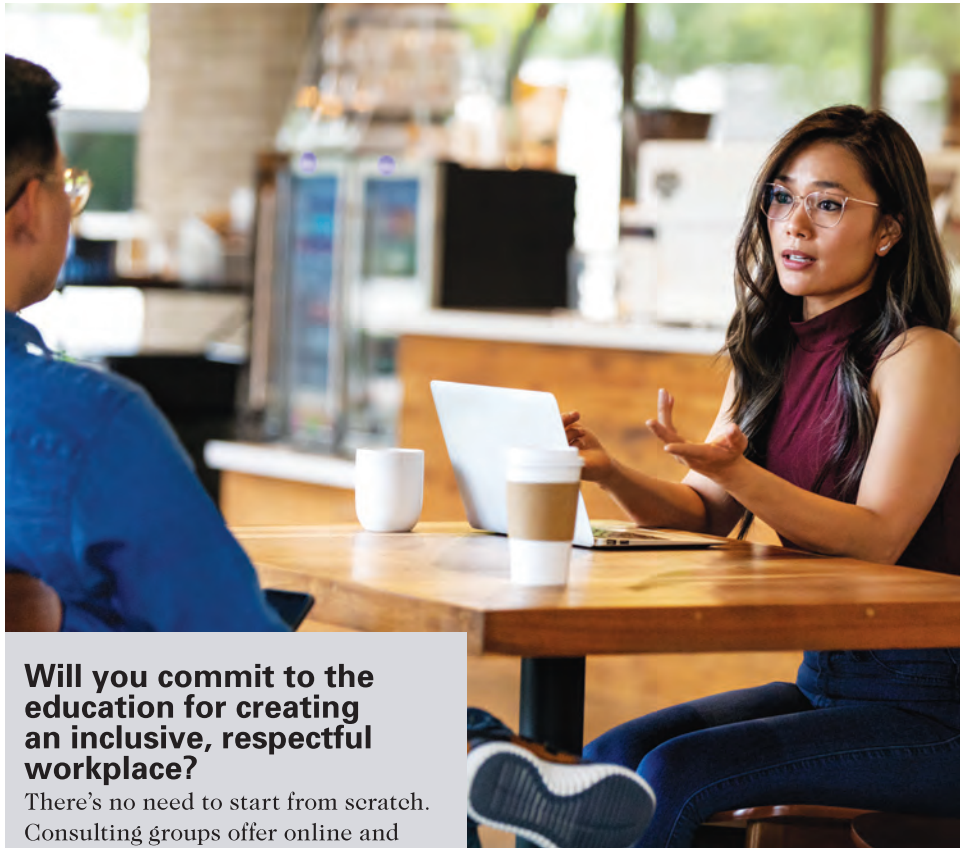
Then several events accelerated change, turning a cultural shift into an earthquake. The #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements shattered forever the notion that demeaning language and attitudes could be acceptable in any workplace. Consequently, the challenge to traditional definitions of gender and identity is finding wider acceptance. Demand for acceptance and respect is dovetailing into an emboldened workforce that's holding employers to a higher standard—not just tangible benefits but the culture of the workplace.

With labor as an ongoing issue, businesses that aren't adjusting to new and emerging norms are likely to run into trouble, especially among younger workers who are arguably the least likely to accept unacceptable behavior. Making the workplace inclusive, tolerant and tolerable in a way that retains good employees and protects the business isn't always obvious.

To begin, ask yourself these questions:

What are your state and federal obligations?

Every employee on your payroll has legal protections, including a work environment free from harassment and hostility. What's different now is that the "go along to get along" mentality that kept intimidated staff from speaking up in the past is dissolving not just in the face of a diminished labor pool but in media reports of successful challenges to retaliation by businesses. Social media will do the rest by gleefully, even if sometimes inaccurately, carrying the message that you're at best an uncaring employer.

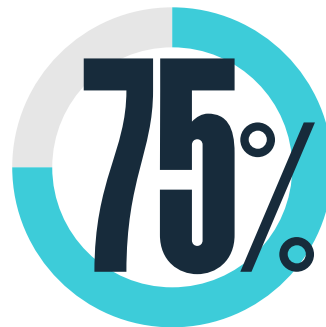


Will you commit to the education for creating an inclusive, respectful workplace?

There's no need to start from scratch. Consulting groups offer online and in-person training and presentation materials that cover cultural inclusion and sensitivity topics. If that's not in the budget, consult your local Small Business Administration chapter or Chamber of Commerce. Check out federal and state labor relations departments for guidance and training options.

Have you thought about the diversity of your staff and how it relates to your customers?

When Andre Howell, vice president of the Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance, talks about "the browning of America," he points out that "by 2044, the current (white) majority will be a minority," with the new majority making up Black, Hispanic and Asian backgrounds. "The business implications are clear for wanting to be inclusive," he says. "It's really about being able to reach the broadest group of your audience. It applies to all segments of foodservice, including distributors and manufacturers. This is a business imperative, not just about being benevolent. Diversity does matter and it's going to continue to matter even just by the numbers. There's money being left on the table if you don't follow that reality."



Companies with an inclusive workplace that exceed their financial goals

Source: Gartner Management Consulting Company



Workers who think that diversity and inclusion offer a competitive advantage

Source: Deloitte

Does an employee handbook exist?

Creating an employee handbook can be a daunting task, and although templates can be purchased or downloaded for free, consider reaching out to your network for someone who'll let you draft off theirs. Ideally, it should be reviewed by a human resource professional or employment lawyer. At a minimum, create a code of conduct outlining specific behaviors and language that will be expected and others that will be cause for disciplinary action. "Without a doubt, you need to have everything on paper," says Colter Dahl, executive chef at the six-unit Stout NYC Hospitality Group in New York. "With a lawsuit you might lose your restaurant or bar. Look at restaurants that are still dealing with the repercussions of sexual harassment from 10 years ago. You definitely have to have some way to hold employees accountable."



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"THE BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS ARE CLEAR FOR WANTING TO BE INCLUSIVE. IT'S REALLY ABOUT BEING ABLE TO REACH THE BROADEST GROUP OF YOUR AUDIENCE. IT APPLIES TO ALL SEGMENTS OF FOODSERVICE."

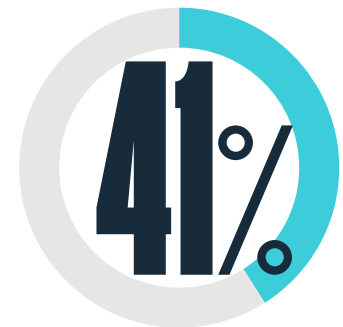
— Andre Howell, vice president of the Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance

Are you listening?

It's not just about setting enforceable standards, Howell says. Improving workplace culture means being mindful that people want to be "respected and welcomed," he says. "You have to be a good listener and make yourself vulnerable to what you're hearing. What are the gaps? What do we need to work on? It's insulting to give an almost dismissive, 'I know what happened, now get back to work.' You listen, you learn, you act."

Are you clearly communicating that it's time to let go of the past?

A shift from ignoring derogatory comments about race, gender or sexual orientation to an explicit no-tolerance policy can be confusing to the staff. "Employees were comfortable because it wasn't a place where you had to watch your tone," Dahl says. Now, Dahl says, an employee might be reprimanded for behavior that was previously accepted, and that's a confusing message. It's up to the employer to be clear about what will be accepted going forward, and enforce it, he says. ■



Managers who cite "being too busy" as a reason for not implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives

Source: HR Daily Advisor

BY THE NUMBERS

PLANT POWER

Consumers want more plant-based menu choices at a time when growth in alternative proteins is exploding. Where do the opportunities lie for restaurants?

▼ MOST POPULAR

Plant-based burgers	2,824%
Cauliflower wings	431%
Plant-based eggs	398%
Buffalo cauliflower	348%
Jackfruit	298%
Plant-based crumbles	248%
Plant-based fish	186%
Plant-based meatballs	149%
Plant-based cheese	123%
Plant-based seafood	120%
Plant-based sausage	84%



\$162 BILLION
Plant-based market by 2030

▼ MILK IT

Oat milk	1,020%
Almond milk	55%
Cashew milk	37%
Coconut milk	16%



▼ GOING GLOBAL

Paneer Dum Biryani 232%

(Cheese in aromatic rice)

Gobi Manchurian	137%
<i>(Crispy cauliflower in tangy, sweet and spicy sauce)</i>	
Jeera aloo	56%
<i>(Indian-spiced potatoes)</i>	



▼ TOP PLANT-BASED DISHES

Taco salad	755%
Tacos	228%
Cheese steak	211%
Alt protein bowls	111%
Grilled cheese	102%
Mac and cheese	99%
Lettuce wrap	94%
Cheeseburger	89%
Pizza	83%
Burrito	55%



▼ EVERYBODY WILL LOVE ALT BACON?

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Sources: Datassential, percentage of 4-year growth



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