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FOOD FANATICS WINTER 2024

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A s'mores croissant roll filled with chocolate cream and garnished with toasted marshmallows from Pitchoun in Los Angeles speaks to the bakery renaissance. See page 14.



Asian-inspired calamansi coconut tart is photogenic and crave-worthy. Get the recipe on page 15.



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Cover Photography
Matt Armendariz

Photographers
Matt Armendariz
Frank Lawlor

Food Stylist
Adam Pearson

Prop Stylist
Amy Paliwoda

Feedback
We welcome your comments.

Contact Food Fanatics at:
Holly.Johnson@usfoods.com.

Contact Bite This Media at:
info@bitethismedia.com.

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EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Welcome to the Winter edition of Food Fanatics® Magazine!

With an earlier sunset and a chill in the air, winter meets us with an undeniable hunger for comfort food to keep us toasty – as well as culinary surprises to keep us on our toes. In our cover story, “Pastry Turned on Its Head,” we explore this dichotomy through the rising trend of creative baked goods and identify this movement across the country, as chefs continue to bake (and cook) outside the box.

As current **food trends** dictate, the weirder, the better. Unexpected mash-ups and fusions further prove that anything goes in “No Boundary Menus” – and we have Gen Z to show for it. This generation of classically-trained chefs cares less for tradition, proving that the culinary rules of what “goes together” are null and void.

Speaking of weird, or perhaps just futuristic, artificial intelligence (AI) has found its way into the food industry for good – and the opportunities are endless. AI technology applies clever ways to customize menus, drive demand on reservation platforms, create realistic photos of food and more. While these **tech trends** continue to move fast, many chefs are happily along for the ride.

Finally, the theme of surprise carries into **diner trends**, as customers come to crave unique experiences to get them in the door. We're talking thematic atmospheres, late-night menus, circus-like entertainment and even contests that make dining out really “going out.”

As always, please enjoy our carefully curated stories, beautiful photography and insightful advice as you dive into what to *unexpected* for 2024.

Thanks for reading,

Randy Taylor
Executive Vice President, Field Operations and Local Sales
US Foods®



Scallops, shrimp and cod hot dogs?

Anything goes for menus that
break the outer limits ★

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



Seafood in hot dog
form may seem
peculiar until it rocks
the menu. Scan the
code on the next page
for the recipe.



Scan to get the recipe for the Seafood Dog with fermented garlic tartar sauce, pickled carrots and dill.

I Chefs have been coloring

outside the lines for some time. Fusion of the '90s became the much-maligned era of “confusion” cooking until mixing and matching cuisines melded into the culinary landscape. Asian ingredients in Italian pasta dishes, Middle Eastern spices in old-school French desserts and Sriracha on bar and grill menus.

As the youngest millennials and oldest Gen Zers came of age, so did the cooks who commanded kitchens across America. They may be classically trained but aren't restrained by tradition. Then a perfect storm began brewing. Chaos cooking—throwing together the unlikeliest of ingredients—became a thing on TikTok, as if giving chefs the green light to hopscotch cuisines.

Chefs want diners to do a double-take; out-of-the-ordinary drives engagement on social media. Be weird, be different and embrace the outrageous. But there's a caveat. Strange sells only if taste matches the hype.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

CLEVER MASHUPS

Combining disparate ingredients couldn't be farther away from their origin countries. The classic rules of what “goes together” are going out the window like never before, whether it's flavor or food combinations. The difference now? They're getting more clever, even cheeky. Consider the chocolate chip cookie at Alex Stupak's Mischa in New York City. The “chips” are shingles of dark chocolate, milk chocolate, white chocolate and butterscotch that cover a cookie with a layer of praline.

Beef Wellington is democratized when chef Aaron Cuschieri swaps filet mignon for a burger in his burger Wellington. “I wanted it to have all the elements of a Wellington without the price tag,” Cuschieri says. The mashup includes layers of caramelized onions and mushroom duxelle inside puff pastry for \$26 at The Dearborn in Chicago.

Burger Wellington

Chef Aaron Cuschieri
The Dearborn, Chicago

2 pounds 80/20 ground beef
8 ounces Cambozola cheese
2 yellow onions, thinly sliced
Flavorless oil, as needed
Kosher salt and black pepper, as needed
2 cups button mushrooms, quartered
1 ounce dry sherry
2 tablespoons butter
2 sheets puff pastry
Egg wash
1 cup mayo
½ cup Dijon mustard

Cut cheese into four 2-ounce pieces and form meat into four 8-ounce balls. Press meat into flat discs and place 1 piece of cheese inside each patty. Wrap meat around the cheese to fully enclose. Season with salt and black pepper on both sides. Sear meat on both sides; cool.

Using oil, caramelize onions and season with salt and pepper; set aside. Heat more oil in same saute pan and sweat mushrooms on medium heat until soft. Add sherry and reduce au sec, add butter and season. Cool and finely chop so it's spreadable.

At service, cut pastry into 4 8x8-inch squares and place a tablespoon of mushroom mixture in the center of each one. Place the burger on top of the mushrooms and top with a tablespoon of onions.

Working from the top left corner, pull in the puff to the center-top of the onions. Fold all the way around and pinch together at the top. Flip the Wellington over so the seam side is down and smooth out the sides to resemble a sphere. Brush entire pastry with egg wash.

Bake Wellington at 450 F for about 20 minutes until golden brown for a medium burger. Combine mayo and mustard and serve with Dijonaise. Makes 4 servings.



In this beef Wellington mashup, the food cost drops when ground beef stands in for filet mignon.



★
The American hot dog meets an Asian counterpart in this no-boundary mashup with ground pork, tofu, cheese and hot mustard.

• **Little Escargot Wellingtons** dusted with dehydrated dill and parsley powder
From Chef/owner Sophina Uong of Mister Mao, New Orleans

• **Kimchi Caesar** with panko and Parmesan
From Executive Chef Dung "Junior" Vo at Noko, Nashville

• **Banana Bread Mochi** topped with toasted walnuts and Green Waffles made with pandan leaves
From CA Bakehouse, San Jose, California

• **Baklava Cinnamon Rolls** with honey, walnuts and cardamom halva
From Chef/owner Ayesha Nurdjaja of Shuka, New York City



Scan to get the recipe for Mapo Tofu Hot Dog from Executive Chef Tara Monsod of Animae, San Diego.

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★
Odd combos like strawberry honey ice cream with balsamic vinegar and black pepper, right, and pear and blue cheese work because the flavors complement one another.

“This combo (strawberry, honey, balsamic and black pepper) is so delicious because the balsamic vinegar bolsters the acidity of the strawberry while the black pepper, which has a ton of berry-like flavor notes, balances that acidity.”

—Tyler Malek of Salt & Straw based in Portland, Oregon

TREND WITHIN A TREND

ODD COMBOS

What’s the difference between a clever mashup and an odd combo? Perhaps the former is a quick “aha, I get it,” while the latter is unexpected, a head-scratcher until it’s sampled or explained. In Brooklyn, Cafe Mars is a self-described “unusual Italian restaurant” with

odd combinations like jell-olives: Castelvetro olives suspended in Negroni gelee, reminiscent of a savory Italian Jell-O shot. There’s also pork Parmesan—tender smoked ribs, breaded, fried crispy, topped with marinara and melted cheese—served with a cold spaghetti salad tossed with mayo, shredded cabbage and crispy cubes of mortadella.



• Kombu kelp and maitake mushrooms

From Executive Chef Richie Farina at Adorn Restaurant at the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago
“The inspiration was to create a visual of fog on the ocean,” Farina says of his vegan surf ‘n turf. “The smoke carries the aroma of the kombu seaweed to create a sense of place, and the umami of both the maitake mushrooms and kombu marry well together with the pickled vegetables, which add a nice pop of acid.”

• Pasta E Carne

Filet mignon topped with a large raviolo that gushes a creamy cacio e pepe sauce
From Executive Chef Nick Gaube and Chef de Cuisine Fernando Mayers at Bad Roman, New York City

• Ice cream

Pear and blue cheese; strawberry, honey, balsamic and black pepper; cinnamon and honey-fried chicken; and chocolate potato
From Co-Founder and head ice cream maker Tyler Malek of Salt & Straw, multiple West Coast locations



★
A parmigiana take on pork ribs and a Japanese cold noodle spin on spaghetti makes for a successful odd combo at Cafe Mars in New York City.



★
Asian-Mex comes through with Indian-spiced duck birria taco.



Scan to get the recipe for Kashmiri Duck Birria Taco.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

ASIAN-MEX

Various cuisines have coupled with Asian flavors, from Cajun and Vietnamese to Peruvian and Japanese. In 2024, expect to see more Asian-Mex.

For example, Sujan Sarkar serves Kashmiri duck tacos at his Los Angeles location of Baar Baar, inspired by the taco trucks and Mexican food in Los Angeles. “I wanted to honor the fusion of cultures in LA,” he says. “Birria is typically made with goat, but I wanted to do something more unique and use Kashmiri spices, which is unique and typical in Northern India.” The duck is cooked in the same style as lamb birria but with Indian spices like fennel, ginger, cinnamon and black cardamom flavoring the broth, served in corn tortillas.



• **Peking duck with flour tortillas**, pico de gallo and apricot chili sauce along with hoisin sauce for dipping
From Chef Masaharu Morimoto's Momosan restaurants, multiple locations including Boston, Miami and Seattle

• **Chicken tinga egg rolls** with braised chicken, chili, cheese, cabbage and chipotle sweet and sour sauce
From La Chinesca, Philadelphia

• **Piloncillo nuegados and pan de arroz** with Salvadorian cheese and black sesame butter;
Chinese sausage congee with micheladas and cold brew oolong tea
From Chefs Evelyn Garcia and Henry Lu of Jūn, Houston



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TREND 2024

BAKERY RENAISSANCE

PASTRY TURNED ON ITS HEAD



Scan to get the recipe for Calamansi and Coconut Tart.

There's never been a more exciting time

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

Fun and creative baked goods are exploding—a trend that shows no signs of quieting in the new year.

The riffing typically begins with a plain foundation such as laminated dough rolled into a spiral, filled with a flavorful, luscious cream and stunningly garnished (see cover). Bread or cookie dough are also shaped differently or prepped in an unexpected way—all of which achieves a wow factor. Jessica Oloroso of Chicago's Black Dog Gelato sells a dark chocolate cookie studded with white and bittersweet chocolate chips and stuffed with peanut butter, then finishes it with milk chocolate ganache. Even macarons are getting special treatment. Offbeat Macarons and Sweets, also in Chicago, recently dropped a version with apple pie filling as well as a tie-dyed macaron with raspberry jam and cream cheese and a white swirled cinnamon-spiced macaron with cinnamon cream cheese.

Various reasons are driving interest: the never-ending quest to level up classics, global ingredients fusing excitement into traditional renditions, head-turning visual appeal and FOMO. Post a luscious, stunning dessert on social media featuring on-trend flavors and limit availability, and lines will likely form.



TREND WITHIN A TREND

Laminated Dough

Dominique Ansel rocked the pastry world when he developed the cronut. A decade later, laminated dough is taking on different shapes again—even teeny croissants that fit on a spoon. But it’s the cube and spiral croissants—both filled with pastry cream—that are poised to repeat the craze. Andrew Carmellini’s Lafayette in New York City introduced the Supreme in the spring of 2022. But it didn’t create an internet sensation until social media caught wind of it in the fall. Today, the cream-filled round pastries finished with a complementary garnish have spawned copycats across the country. “The spiral is a more enticing shape, which creates a crispier exterior,” Executive Pastry Chef Scott Cioe says. “The crispier crust helps the Supreme hold up more to the filling than a traditional croissant would.” New and seasonal flavors such as blackberry matcha and blood orange meringue drop each month creating lines that wrap around the corner.

• Laminated baguette

From Chef/owner Amadou Ly of ALF Bakery, New York City

• Cube croissant

Filled with pastry cream
From Chef/owner Julien Khalaf of Julien Boulangerie, New York City

• Squiggle croissants

Dusted with rosemary sugar
Pastry Chef Lauren Madson of Librae, New York City

• Croissant cereal

Glazed cinnamon sugar syrup
From Chef/co-owner Gautier Coiffard of L’Appartement 4F, Brooklyn, New York



Baguettes at ALF Bakery get a buttery textural layer with an outer wrap of laminated dough usually reserved for croissants, left, while Lafayette Bakery uses the dough for its seasonal Supremes, above, as a take on s’mores as well as a strawberry lemonade version, right.

ALF BAKERY PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRAVIS BROWN. LAFAYETTE BAKERY PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIANA BALDUCCI. LAFAYETTE SUPREMES PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF LAFAYETTE



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF LAFAYETTE

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Asian Influenced

In major cities, such as Boston, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, patisseries and dessert menus are working the Asian diaspora. But imports such as Hong Kong-based Mango Mango are also familiarizing palates with more than 30 locations in U.S. cities including Plano, Texas, and Lafayette, Indiana, by serving green tea mille crepe cake, king durian cream puffs and whipped cream pancake parcels with center-filled pieces of ripe mango.

As a rule, these desserts are striking in appearance, making them Instagram and TikTok-worthy.

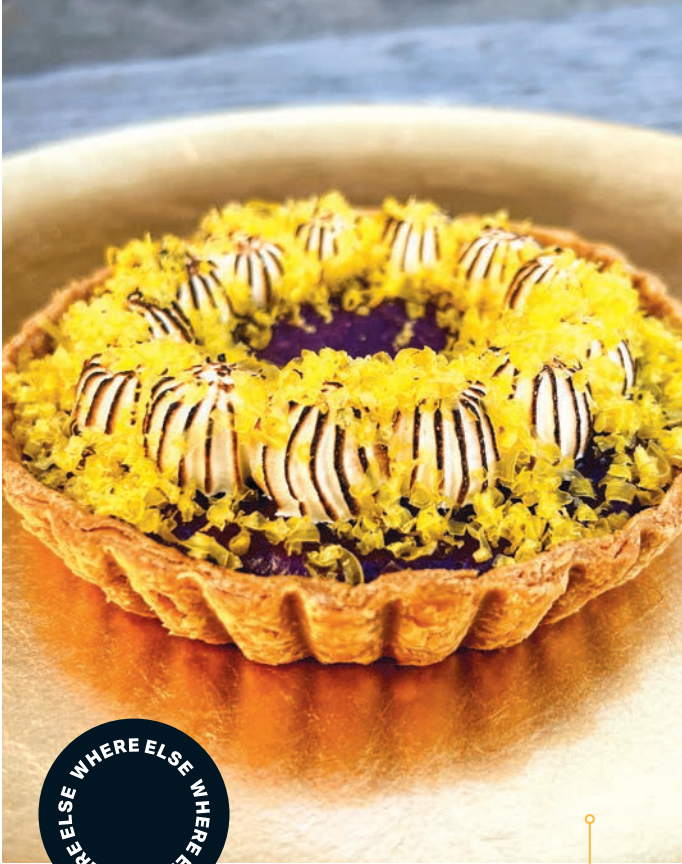
“Asian-French pastries are able to showcase freshness and richness at the same time,” says Chef Nic Yang who describes his Ando Patisserie in New York City as a classic French patisserie twisted with Asian flavors and

ingredients. “The biggest difference between Asian and Western pastries is that the Asian kind uses much less sugar and are lighter than traditional Western ones.”

For example, he controls the sweetness of black sesame lava cream crepes roll, a bestseller, by making a fresh paste from roasted black sesame seeds in lieu of a premade product.



At Ando, Asian-inspired black sesame lava crepe roll is less sweet than its American counterpart.



Restaurants are especially embracing the artistic and photogenic potential of tarts. Baker Ismael De Sousa of Reunion Bread in Denver often posts Instagram stories of his creations, asking followers to guess the new flavor. “When people see the whole process, it catches their attention and they want to try it,” he says.

In Vallejo, California, Chef/owners Monique and Paul Feybesse look to nature for their floral-inspired tarts at Tarts de Feybesse, like how the white petals of the coconut whipped ganache and the calamansi citrus curd center of their calamansi coconut tart resembles a daisy.

“Aesthetics play so much into our identity,” Monique Feybesse says. “Floral patterns and textures mimic natural beauty. We are inspired by how that can unfold through the final

touches of pastries. In our tarts, maybe you’ll see a flower, but the symmetry of an artichoke or the grooves of a rambutan might be playing a part as well.”

- **Not Ube Tart**
Roasted purple sweet potato, topped with meringue and grated salted egg yolk
From Bread Belly, San Francisco
- **Black sesame yuzu kouign amann**
From Dan the Baker in Chicago
- **Cha Cha Cha Chia Tart**
(raspberry mousse, coconut chia pudding, raspberry glaze and dark chocolate shards)
From Craftsman and Wolves, San Francisco
- **Ube cheese, chocolate boba and classic durian Portuguese egg tarts**
From Na Tart, Flushing, New York

TOP PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BREADBELLY. BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ANDO PATISSERIE

ARE YOUR DESSERTS BLAH?

Maybe it's you and not them

It's a paradox, a vicious cycle. Baked goods and desserts of all kinds are having a moment yet pastry chefs and pastry cooks are on the decline. Restaurants say they can't afford them, and desserts aren't big-selling money-makers anyways. But are diners not ordering them because they don't like sweets or is the dessert menu a snoozer? Nearly three quarters of respondents in a recent survey by One Poll describe themselves as “a dessert person.” What gives? Without pastry staff, chefs rely on the tried and true and not inventive renditions, making it difficult for servers to sell and easy for diners to pass.



Scan to get the recipe for Chocolate Hazelnut Tart



Zio Peppe uses pizza dough for its Bread and Spread, left, while Kiln offers a braided fermented potato bread.

Pull-Apart Focaccia with Romesco

Executive Chef Steven Chiappetti
The Albert, Chicago

¼ ounce instant yeast
1 teaspoon sugar
¾ cup warm water
2½ cups bread flour
1 teaspoon kosher salt
6 tablespoons olive oil
Rosemary, leaves only, as needed
Flaky salt, as needed
Romesco sauce, recipe follows
Pecorino Romano, shredded, if desired

Combine yeast and sugar and add to warm water, about 98 F. Let stand 15 minutes.

Combine flour, salt and half of the olive oil and mix to form a ball. Divide dough into 6 equal balls, about 250 grams each and then into small balls. Place into greased 6-inch cast-iron skillet and let the dough rest for an hour and 30 minutes, then finger punch dough. Let rest for another 30 minutes. Brush the dough again with olive oil and sprinkle with rosemary and salt on top.

Bake at 450 F for 15 minutes or until golden brown. Garnish with grated cheese while hot, if desired.

To make romesco: Blend 1 cup San Marzano tomatoes with ¾ cup blanched, skinless almonds, 3 strips roasted red peppers, 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar, 1 garlic clove and 1 teaspoon oregano. Season with kosher salt and pepper.

TOP PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACKIE TRAN. BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF KILN



TREND WITHIN A TREND

Next-Level Bread Service

Expect more restaurants to up the ante on bread service by offering a spin on bread along with its accompaniments. Case in point: the beautifully braided fermented potato bread with caraway and beef drippings, served with slow-poached jidori egg yolk, pickled allium and smoked mushroom broth at San Francisco's Kiln. Remember it must be fresh; extra points if it's served warm.

In Chicago, Executive Chef Steven Chiappetti recently added pull-apart housemade focaccia to the menu at The Albert, presented in a piping hot cast-iron skillet with a side of romesco. "Romesco is a robust sauce that lends a textured richness you won't find in olive oil and butter," he says.

Chiappetti recommends pre-heating the pans before filling with dough for a light crispy exterior.



• **Pull-apart milk bread rolls**
Laced with cheese served with pimento cheese and black lava salt whipped butter
From Pastry chef Lizbeth Ramirez of Crown Block, Dallas

• **Bread & Spread**
Bread made in the pizza oven with an accompaniment to slather, such as artichoke fonduta, honey chamomile goat cheese, poblano chili con queso and cilantro basil pesto
From Chef Devon Sanner at Zio Peppe, Tucson



TREND 2024

PLANT-FORWARD GLOBAL

GREEN LIGHT READY

West African, Turkish, Latin American and Ethiopian cuisine provides inspiration to satisfy meatless diners

By Abigail Covington
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RONIT SHAKED ERS



Scan to get the recipe
for Efo Riro Kale Stew



The Motherland pairing features coconut curry, yaji-spiced vegetables, blackeyed peas and plantains over rice at ChopnBlok.



When the spotlight hits a lesser-known cuisine, a cascade effect happens: The audience expands, not just for those restaurants but for others that want to ride that wave by adding a corresponding dish, ingredient or spice to the menu.

In the case of West African, Turkish, Latin American and Ethiopian cuisines, there's an added benefit: each one is already plentiful with protein-forward ingredients like grains, legumes and vitamin-rich vegetables coveted by vegans, vegetarians and others seeking healthier foods. While meat substitutes like tofu, seitan and lab-grown proteins have a place, the focus in 2024 is on vegetables and authentic plant-based eating.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

West African

Searches for West African dishes like fufu increased 120% in 2023, according to Google trends data, while a spate of new restaurants, like the recently opened Ubuntu in Los Angeles, has taken major food towns by storm. Ubuntu's chef, Shenarri Freeman, has been at the helm of the plant-based movement since she debuted her vegan soul food restaurant, Cadence, in 2021. At Ubuntu, she traces Southern soul food back to its West African roots, offering up fonio grits, charred okra salad and jollof arancini with curry, tomato and miso.

• Motherland Curry

Nigerian honey beans, black-eyed peas, bell peppers, tomato and habanero in yellow coconut curry sauce
From Ope Amosu, owner of ChopnBlok, Houston

• Ndambe' stew

Tomato-based with black-eyed peas, sweet potato and okra
From Chef Pierre Thaim of Terranga in New York City,

• Akara and Dodo

Black-eyed pea fritters and fried plantains with seasonal vegetables in Ata Din Din sauce as part of a tasting menu
From Dozzy Ibekwe, chef/owner of Dozzy's Grill, Chicago



TOP PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN HON. BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPHY BY A. SCOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

Ndambe Black-Eyed Pea Cakes

*Executive Chef/owner Pierre Thiam
Terranga, New York City*

1 pound yuca, peeled and cut into large chunks
1 pound sweet potatoes, roasted but still firm
¼ cup vegetable oil
2 small yellow onions, finely chopped
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
½ cup vegetable stock
2 cups cooked black-eyed peas
¼ cup parsley, leaves only, chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup red palm oil or vegetable oil

Place the yuca in a pot and cover with salted water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, and cook until the yuca is nearly tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain well and let cool until it is easy to handle. Remove and discard the string-like fibrous core. Cut the yuca into ¾-inch cubes. Cut the sweet potato into similar size.

Combine onion and garlic and cook, stirring, until soft. Add the tomato paste and stock and cook until the liquid is reduced by almost half. Add yuca, black-eyed peas, and parsley and season with 2 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper. Combine well and continue cooking, stirring from time to time, until it forms a chunky mass. Adjust the seasoning and let cool until it is easy to handle. Shape by hand into 10 to 12 thick cakes about 3 inches wide, or use ring molds. Place the cakes onto a plate, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and chill in the refrigerator for about 1 hour until they firm up.

Fry the cakes in palm oil over medium heat, working in batches, if necessary, until golden brown and crisp, 3 to 5 minutes on each side. Place the cakes onto a baking sheet and finish cooking in a 350 F heated oven.





Turkish foods are inherently meatless, including these sun-dried eggplant and pepper dolmas.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Turkish

Turkish cuisine is at the heart of the Mediterranean diet, which in 2023 was voted the best overall diet for a record-breaking sixth consecutive year, according to US News & World Report. It was also voted best plant-based diet, no doubt due to its heavy focus on fresh vegetables and whole grains and its famous preference for olive oil over butter.

But Andy Urkin, the restaurateur behind New York-based Nar, says it isn't just the cuisine's love of healthy fats that make Turkish food an ideal vehicle for plant-based noshing. "Western Turkey and Southern Turkey are mostly vegetarian dishes, all with fresh vegetables and herbs," he says. "It's a natural part of the cuisine. It comes from years of culture."

While Nar also serves meat-forward dishes, Urkin says the vegan dishes are just as popular, citing the mass appeal of the restaurant's mezze sampler—a staple in modern Turkish cuisine.



• Sun-dried eggplant and pepper dolma

From Nar, New York City

• Mercimekli Imam Bayildi

Oven-roasted eggplant with green lentils, mint, tomato sauce and garlic yogurt
From Omer Artun's Meyhouse, Sunnyvale, California

• Carrot Tarama

Carrots with yogurt, sour cream, garlic and walnuts with griddled pita
From Troy, Austin

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Latin American

Latin food might not be synonymous with plant-based cooking, but according to a recent study published in the academic journal Meat Science, Latin as meat-centric is a common misperception. In fact, meat didn't become a staple in Mexican food until the Spanish conquest in 1521. Fast forward to 2023 and 20% of Mexicans identify as vegetarian and meat consumption is on the decline. Now Latin chefs in the U.S. are returning to their roots with a menu of plant-based items.

In Los Angeles, customers form a line down the block to try the plant-based offerings at Villas Tacos. The vegan trio includes *frijoles con nepal* (black beans and cactus), *frijoles con papas* (black beans and potatoes) and *soyrizo con papas* (vegan chorizo and potatoes), all served on the restaurant's handmade blue corn tortillas with a side of lime, radishes and hibiscus-pickled onions

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GÖKÇE YILDIRIM



• Jackfruit Lechon Cuban

Glazed seitan ham, pickles, cheese and mustard on Cuban bread; From Reid Trapani, chef/co-owner of La Semilla, Atlanta

• Phat Hass Tacos

Fried avocado, pico de gallo, chipotle cream and pepita cilantro slaw
From Gregory Owens, chef/owner of Hijo de su Madre, Los Angeles

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASH ARTHUR

At La Semilla, Cuban staple bistec de palomilla goes vegan via lion's mane mushroom over a yuca-cauli mash with housemade mojo sauce and caramelized onions.



Ras Plant Based offers a variety of toppings over injera, including *difin missir* (lentils, onions and fenugreek) and *yater kik* (yellow split peas, onions and jalapenos).

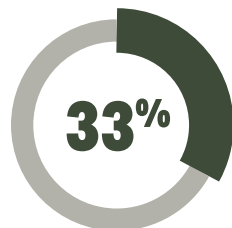
TREND WITHIN A TREND

Ethiopian

Perhaps no cuisine is better-suited for a plant-based lifestyle than Ethiopian. According to Romeo Regalli, chef/owner of Ras Plant Based in Brooklyn, New York, veganism is a natural part of life in Ethiopia, where more than half of the population belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and abstains from eating animal products 180 days out of the year. As a result, Ethiopians have a natural knack for plant-based cooking and a slew of hearty local ingredients

like legumes, lentils, yellow peas and collard greens, which can easily replace meat as the protein base of a dish. “Most of our guests are not even plant-based diners,” says Regalli. “The feedback we always get is they don’t miss the meat when they’re eating here.”

Ras Plant Based is a part of a new vanguard of upscale eateries taking Ethiopian mainstream and bringing renewed attention to local, no-frills institutions.



Consumers who say their plant-based consumption, which includes fruit, vegetables and dairy alternatives, will increase over the upcoming year

Source: Datassential, Plant-Based Keynote Report 2023

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER COE

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Lentil-filled sambusa with awaze sauce is a crowd-pleaser among meat and nonmeat eaters, including the diners at Ras Plant Based in Brooklyn, New York.

"Most of our guests are not even plant-based diners. The feedback we always get is they don't miss the meat when they're eating here."

—Romeo Regalli, chef/owner of Ras Plant Based, Brooklyn



- **Ye misir Kik Wot**
Yellow pea sauce, split peas cooked in wot oil, onions, garlic, curry and ginger
- **Qey Sir**
Beets cooked with garlic and ginger both, served on injera bread
From Chercher, three locations in the Washington, D.C., area
- **Yefasolia Wot**
Mixed vegetable stew of green beans, carrots, garlic, ginger and turmeric
From Rahel, Los Angeles



SPICE IT UP

Taking the spice route is one of the easiest ways to introduce an on-trend cuisine to diners. Some options to shake up the menu:



BERBERE—ETHIOPIA

A bright red, fiery seasoning made of more than 30 individual spices, including nutmeg, cumin, dried red chili peppers and Ethiopian cardamom, derived from the native plant corrorima. Use it as a rub for vegetables or throw it into a stew for extra heat.



SOFRITO—LATIN AMERICAN/CUBAN

While the ingredients vary by region and even city, most include tomatoes, green bell pepper, garlic and onion pureed into a chunky sauce as a base for many Latin dishes. Don't even think about making Cuban black beans without it.



SUMAC—TURKEY

As tart and tangy as a cranberry with the same crimson coloring. Use it for a dash of acid in dips and salad dressing.



SUYA—WEST AFRICA

A spicy peanut-based dry rub that's a popular a seasoning found in Nigerian street food of the same name. Make it plant-based by swapping out the beef or other meat for plantains, which pairs nicely with suya's nutty flavor profile.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER COE

The Ras Breakfast consists of classic Ethiopian foods such as dirkosh firfir (dried injera), enkulal firfir (scrambled eggs) and Ras kitfo, a spiced soybean-based crumble.



Ras Plant Based serves West African food that's inherently meatless but also offers classics like mac and cheese with toasted spiced injera.

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TREND 2024

EXPERIENTIAL DINING



A MEAL

Guests get dinner and a show at Maison Kasai in Los Angeles.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREA D'AGOSTO

A weekend DJ and requisite disco ball make Belles Beach House in Venice, California, more than a place to eat.

PLUS SOME

Experiential dining and drinking are transforming the industry, one disco ball and fiery tableside preparation at a time

By Lesley Balla

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK LAWLOR



I The consumer search for more is ever-present, a demand that's turning hospitality on its head. People don't want to just dine out; they want an experience that transcends good food and drinks. In 2024, expect operators to dig even deeper to entice people off the sofa, leaving Netflix behind.

Operators making inroads are trying everything from interactive dining to transportive decor and innovative throwback cocktails. And maybe a disco ball or two.

Experiential dining doesn't mean relinquishing quality, however. Chefs and beverage directors have found new ways of matching adventure with aesthetics, hitting the right balance between form, vibe and substance.

The possibilities are endless: Late-night caviar service while aerialists dance above the

Belles Beach House pulls out all the stops to attract diners for more than just the food. It goes after a vibe with decor, seating and lighting.

"It's not just about a tiki drink, it's about a feeling you get that is so subtle and so deep, that you don't want to leave and can't wait to get back."

—Chris Newcomer, general manager of Belles Beach House, Venice, California

room; modern teppanyaki with cauliflower steaks, wagyu and elaborate tableside cooking; cocktails that harken back to simpler times while still embracing contemporary mixology; and bar menus that go way beyond burgers and a beer.

Equally important is capturing the attention of diners who can drive social media engagement. The TikTok generation loves a good hook and a good show, but they can also suss out what's genuine and what's not. Delivering an epic good time and a great meal is paramount.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Going Big on Vibe

Creating a full dining experience is more than a high-caliber menu. The space is as important, whether it's the new generation of theme restaurants or simply turning a former Cuban cafe into a rollicking Vietnamese party spot, like the escapism of Miami's Tăm Tăm. That's where the funky '70s-style aesthetic—wood paneling, "Barbarella" posters and karaoke in the bathroom—goes hand in hand with its diverse and exceptional menu.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK ALWILOR

Real chefs, **REAL** SOLUTIONS

Innovative ideas on how to create value, minimize costs and maximize profits with Real California Dairy

In a famously low-margin industry, optimizing operations has always been top of mind. With additional challenges including inflation and labor shortages, finding new ways to delight customers while saving time and money can be critical to the success of your foodservice business.

The California Milk Advisory Board asked three chefs who spec California dairy products to discuss how they're delivering the quality that keeps patrons coming back while decreasing the time, money and labor it takes to do it.

Extending Flavor

Chef Lars Smith was eager to share a technique he says has been of major benefit to the two restaurants he co-owns, State of Mind Public House and Pizzeria and State of Mind Slice House. "We blend premium and unique cheeses, such as California Toma with less expensive California whole milk Mozzarella for our pizzas," he says, "and we do the same thing with mild Cheddar in our fried jalapeño balls and beer-cheese sauce to get the flavor of these very special California cheeses while managing our food costs."

A similar tack is taken by Chef Glenn Cybulski, who says he always uses the premium, flavorful cheeses as what he calls toppers, "so the customer gets the full flavor effect in their first bites." And he adds, "Because of their high quality, you can actually use less of the California dairy products to make a much better tasting end product—you use less and get better flavor!"

Merchandising Quality

Chef Cybulski also leverages his use of high-quality ingredients in another way. "Marketing the high-quality ingredients you use is a great way to draw attention to high-profit menu items," he says, "Customers recognize names like 'Real California Cheese' when they see them on our menu or website, and it increases the appeal of certain dishes and signals to them that we use quality ingredients in our food."

Chef Smith offers another idea for using California dairy products to add value. "When I write our seasonal menu, I include the name of unique California cheeses we're using but don't give a description. Then we train the staff on the taste, texture and application of

each cheese and it becomes a conversation starter and an educational opportunity for our guests—we're giving them a memorable experience," he says.

Reducing Waste

Chef Ben Diaz recommends three different ways he reduces food waste at Tacos El Chapin. "I love using the leftover cheese rind in stocks and sauces," he says. "It gives them a boost of flavor and body." He also blends a variety of California Hispanic-style cheeses with Mozzarella "to add a unique flavor across the menu while saving time and energy." For instance, he says that adding California Oaxaca to Mozzarella "creates a unique and creamy cheese blend that's fantastic on pizza, pastas or sprinkled over a salad." Chef Diaz also helps his fresh cheeses last longer by storing them in airtight glass containers, which he claims "ensures quality and optimum freshness."



For more trends and tips, visit us at realcaliforniamilk.com/foodservice



The Bar Next Door, below, offers an old Hollywood vibe while Maison Kasai, right, is reviving teppanyaki for a new generation of diners.



• **Teppanyaki** revived for a new generation of diners with tables centered by flat-top grills and chefs doing fiery antics and fancy knife work.
From Executive Chef Joshua Gil of Maison Kasai, Los Angeles

• **'70s Island theme** with a corresponding food and drink along with weekend DJ, contests and dancing; painstakingly sourced art and artifacts round out the vibe
From Belles Beach House, Venice, California

• **Old Hollywood** with gleaming neon, a reel-to-reel tape recorder and menus that look like vintage newspapers
The Bar Next Door, West Hollywood, California

• **Coastal Mexican cuisine** with late-night DJ and dancing replete with a fog-emanating dance floor
From Costera Cocina, Chicago

• **Steakhouse supper club** with luxe protein add-ons and giant cuts of meat, such as the 40-ounce prime tomahawk steak wrapped in edible 24-carat gold
From Executive Chef Brandon Truesdale of Supper Club on Belcourt, Nashville

• **Parisian supper club** embodying an elegant atmosphere with Parisian art and decor, as well as late-night live music, such as a six-piece Japanese band called the Konichiwas
From ADKT (Art, Drinks, Kitchen, Tunes), West Hollywood, California

THE BAR NEXT DOOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBIEE ZIEGLER. MAISON KASAI PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREA D'AGOSTO



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Wanderlust, below and right, goes next-level with food, drinks and entertainment.



TREND WITHIN A TREND

Elevated Late-Night Menus

Bars have upped the ante on what to eat while drinking. It’s not just restaurants with great bar menus, which proliferate across the country. It’s bars and lounges with kitchens turning out dishes that go far beyond wings and pizza.

An aerialist dangling over the room is just one highlight at Mr. Wanderlust, a vast jazz bar and piano lounge at the Tower 8 restaurant development in downtown Los Angeles. Executive Chef Richard Archuleta keeps the cocktail menu in mind when creating small bites, like caviar toad in the hole and braised wagyu beef “cigarettes” with shishito and umeboshi. The goal is to take guests on a journey, whether it’s the escapist theme or a few globe-trotting snacks, well into the night.



- **Osetra caviar** with banana johnnycakes and Boston Sling cocktails, a riff on the Singapore Sling made at the original Long Bar in Singapore. *From the Long Bar & Terrace, Raffles Hotel, Boston*
- **Wagyu skewers** with black olive butter and pine nut crumbs *From Dahlia, Proper Hotel, Los Angeles*

AERIALIST PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL KLEINBERG. FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY WONHO FRANK LEE

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Throwback Drinks

What fueled the 1970s—disco, funky patterns, olive green, Burt Reynolds and Harvey Wallbangers—is back in a big way. It’s not just the decor of the Me Decade inspiring restaurants and bars; cocktails also bring an element of nostalgia and fun to menus. And it’s attracting everyone from Gen Z to Boomers (who loved them the first time around).

What people were drinking in the ‘70s—layered cocktails with lots of fruit juices, simple high balls, inexpensive regional beers and Riunite on ice—was easy, breezy, all about the party and come as you are. People were trying to stay upbeat during a time of cultural, economic and political upheaval, which resonates today. The food, however, is still bar food like wings, but with modern flavors such as miso with furikake lollipop wings at Pins and Needles in Lakewood, Ohio.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ. FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON. PROP STYLING BY AMY PALIWODA

A strawberry daiquiri puree tops a ‘70s take on a pina colada for a dramatic effect at Rule of Thirds in Brooklyn, New York.

Bars with on-trend food, such as a version of miso lollipop chicken wings at Pins and Needles, are becoming more prevalent.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ, FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON, PROP STYLING BY AMY PALIWODA



The Donna Summer Dress

A "fruity yet dry paloma"
From *The Let's Go, an Italian Disco and Cocktail Club*, Los Angeles, California

The Dirty Ashtray

Miller High Life topped with hot sauce, salt, pepper and a crushed lime plus a sidecar of Malort
From *Good Night John Boy*, Chicago and Cleveland

Emerald Necklace

Pins and Needles, Lakewood, Ohio
1.5 ounces white rum
0.5 ounce dark rum
0.75 ounce blue curacao
0.5 ounce Darna amaro
1 ounce passion fruit juice
0.25 ounce lime juice

Combine all ingredients in a shaker filled with ice. Shake well, pour into a highball glass filled with ice. Garnish with a lime wheel and paper umbrella.



TRENDOTRACKER

ON THE RADAR



From Darling to Daring.

Simple or experiential, dumplings are shareable, budget-minded and can reflect any cuisine.

Last seen: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa in Manalapan, Florida. "They are the perfect vehicle to encompass trends like vegan, vegetarian ancient grains and gluten-free," says Neall Bailey, executive chef.

HIGH ALERT



Lament This.

Croissant aka laminated dough offers countless possibilities.

Last seen: At Poulette Bakeshop in Parker, Colorado, the spiral croissant is filled with pastry cream, such as caramel cremeux. See page 16 for more inspo.

FADING OUT



Head-in-the-Sand Wine Service.

Your wine list doesn't have to be a deadbeat. There are many ways to move those bottles instead of hoping they'll sell.

Try this instead: Offer half glass pours, a trend that's gaining traction and allows diners to taste more and try more dishes, says Carlin Karr, wine and beverage director at Colorado's Frasca Hospitality Group.



Go Small or Go Home.

Bigger is not always better when it comes to the size of your restaurant.

Last seen: Atlanta Chef Deborah VanTrece is finding success opening smaller restaurants around 50 seats or fewer versus 100-plus, all located near one another with uniquely different and defined concepts.



Where the Cash is Stashed.

Chefs and restaurateurs are opening bars, often dubbed speakeasies, at a head-spinning clip.

Last seen: The Golden Years in Chicago. None of the Above in St. Louis and Medina in Washington, D.C.



Restaurants Instead of Dating Apps?

The running joke among users of dating apps: it's not where you find relationships. A better place could be restaurants.

Last seen: Business is booming for Friend of a Friend Collective, which is organizing informal dinners among vetted strangers in restaurants around New York City.



Guilt Trip or Good Trip?

Restaurants are considering the environmental footprint of their dishes by using less high-impact foods or including the distance the ingredients traveled.

Last seen: At Condado Vanderbilt in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where Executive Chef Juan José Cuevas includes dishes that are healthier for humans and the environment.



New, for Real.

Tinkering with the genetics of fruits and vegetables to withstand climate change isn't novel, but produce that never existed? That's innovation.

Last seen: Sweet Garlic, which touts the sweetness of leeks and a mellow side of garlic, created by Chef Dan Barber's Row 7 seed company.



Budget-Minded Tasting Menus.

How to give diners an affordable experience? Go family style via a tasting menu.

Last seen: At David Fisher and Serena Chow Fisher's new San Francisco restaurant, 7 Adams. The five-course tasting menu includes one large family-style main course.



Totemic Luxury.

Caviar, truffle, foie gras and lobster are everywhere, making them not as special as they should be.

Try this instead: Reframe luxury to be authentic to you and your restaurant. "Luxury can be handmade tortillas, recipes with family stories, and the story around each ingredient and each dish," says Pablo Peñalosa Nájera, executive chef of Bishop's Lodge in Santa Fe.



Eye-Popping Prices.

The priciest iconic food—from the \$31 Italian wagyu beef sub at Kindling in Chicago to the \$140 cookies for a dozen at Los Angeles' Last Crumb—will grab media and influencer attention, but what about the potential blowback?

Try this instead: Make it a special or tie it to an occasion so if things go south, you'll still have your dignity when the item generates more criticism than sales and you take it off the menu.



Thinking of Just the Meal

Dining doesn't mean just eating and leaving. Customers can keep thinking about you long after they pay the check.

Last seen: Tucson's Coronet offers tabletop items such as ceramics and stemware, many of the wines it sells as well as housemade pantry items, says owner Sally Kane. See page 56 for more.

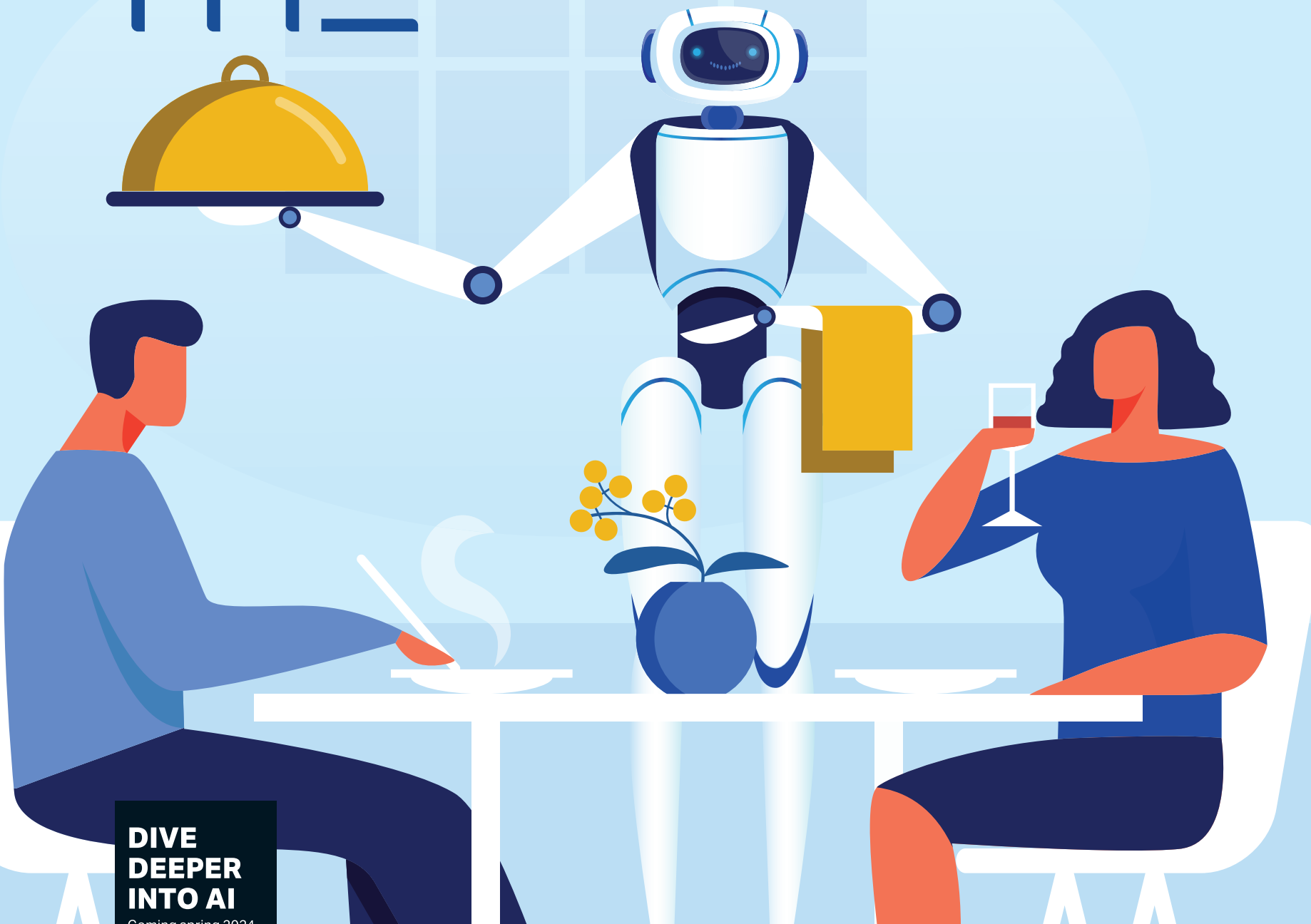
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANNA SMIRNOVA

THE POWER

OF AI



5 trends in machine learning that will dominate the new year

By Kristen Hawley

I To the casual observer, artificial intelligence might sound a lot like sentient robots waiting to take over the world. The reality is less sci-fi and more subtle, and it's already creating incremental benefits for restaurants that have tapped into the tech. AI will play an important role in the future of dining, whether it's generating simple smoothie recipes or doing more of the heavy lifting. Here's a small taste of how AI is already working for restaurants today.

**DIVE
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TREND WITHIN A TREND

Customization

The computers ran the show when BetterBlends opened in downtown San Francisco. Claiming to be “the most personalized restaurant, ever,” the concept used artificial intelligence to generate smoothies based on customer preferences.

Customers would scan a QR code with their phone and then answer a few questions. How sweet do you like your smoothie? Options ranged from “not sweet” to “basically dessert.” Do you prefer a dairy or nondairy base? How do you feel about vegetables? Any allergies? Are you following a specific diet, such as dairy-free or keto?

Once the system generated a recipe, it gave it a cheeky, if not all that creative name. For a not-too-sweet fruit and vegetable non-dairy combo, the computer suggested a “Mango Sunrise,” a “Creamy Carrot,” or even an “Island Sunset,” which disappointingly did not contain coconut milk, but did contain pineapple. Luckily, customers could override the computer and human employees made the smoothies.

Combining fruits and milk blends into \$10 smoothies isn’t a mind-bending technology. Conceptually, BetterBlends isn’t all that different from Jamba Juice. But AI is still a

novel technology that restaurants can offer as a point of difference. Does a smoothie blended by an algorithm taste better than an off-the-menu option? Maybe not, but it’s a lot more fun for customers.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Driving demand

Reservations platform OpenTable announced a partnership with ChatGPT in March. OpenTable feeds information to ChatGPT including its roster of restaurants and real-time availability data, so people can ask ChatGPT for restaurant recommendations and availability. The results are strikingly useful answers to questions like, “What’s the best place in San Francisco for Mother’s Day brunch?” or “Where can I eat with a friend in Brooklyn on Saturday at 8 p.m.?”

“It could very well be a significant or important piece of traffic and demand for restaurants,” says Debby Soo, OpenTable CEO.

Once customers are in the door, AI can help create personalized marketing campaigns to encourage repeat visits. Loyalty provider Thanx uses AI to help restaurants write better emails, suggesting subject line improvements or helping a restaurant strike the right tone

“It’s not just about pushing a menu or an experience; it’s about building genuine connections.”

— Zach Goldstein, CEO of Thanx

between friendly and formal. The platform can create segments of customers based on predicted behavior and suggest ways to engage them, like running a marketing campaign with an attractive promotion to diners who aren’t likely to purchase in the next month without a suggestive nudge.

“It’s not just about pushing a menu or an experience; it’s about building genuine connections,” says Thanx CEO Zach Goldstein. “Relevance is what allows us to connect with our customers on a personal level, tailoring our communications to their unique interests and behaviors.”

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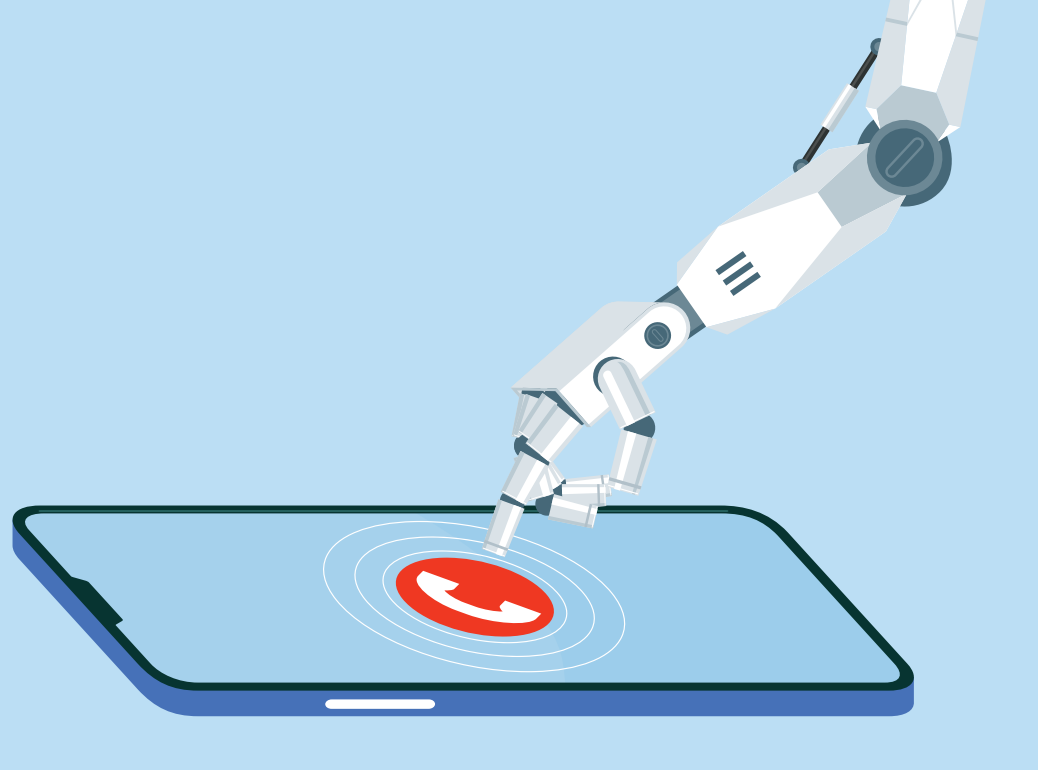
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TREND WITHIN A TREND

Answering the phones

“Press 1 to make a reservation,” doesn’t cut it anymore. AI can answer the phone and provide diners information without involving host staff.

Benson Wang, founder of San Francisco-based Palm Hospitality, uses Slang.ai to take calls at a handful of Bay Area restaurants. At first, he was skeptical. Now, bots answer between 70% and 80% of calls to the restaurants, responding to customer questions about hours and location and helping them book tables.

“We will always prioritize the in-house guest experience when human interaction makes the biggest impact,” Wang says. “But technology allows us to automate, and in most cases enhance, the reservation booking system so that personnel can focus on serving our guests. This gives us a chance to improve staff utilization, maximize revenue and optimize hospitality.”

The voice technology works so well, Wang says, that callers sometimes can’t tell the difference. At the end of the month, Slang.ai sends customers a report, along with call recordings. Most people eventually catch on that they’re talking to a robot, Wang says, but it’s not immediately clear in conversation.

By 2030, Slang says it will save a collective one billion minutes of time with voice tech, according to its website—“more human than human.”

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Dreaming up photos

It’s easy to worry that smart computers are replacing human workers. But in some cases, they perform tasks better. Joey Rubin leads Biite Club, which hosts special events and pop-ups (dubbed “drops”) in Los Angeles. Biite Club sells tickets to the events and markets them online, a process that requires food images. And when photos don’t exist to illustrate a dish, generative AI can create them. Rubin has used Midjourney to generate enticing photos of dishes that don’t yet exist, but will soon.

“Food is very expensive, and all of the drops are original,” he said. “In some cases, we literally need to generate an image from scratch because it costs so much to light up labor and materials for a small drop. We can get very close to the product and the feeling with AI for the ones when a chef is coming in from out of town or photos simply aren’t possible.”

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Engaging employees

AI helps restaurants connect with guests, but it’s also becoming an internal time-saver.

Angelina Sabatini, director of training and development at Ford’s Garage, a concept with 25 locations across the South and Midwest, says she’s saved hours—even days—by using

“Technology allows us to automate, and in most cases, enhance the reservation booking system so that personnel can focus on serving our guests.”

—Benson Wang, founder of San Francisco-based Palm Hospitality

artificial intelligence to build online training programs for employees. Recently, she used software from a company called Opus to transform her restaurant’s menu description guide from a lengthy printed book to an interactive digital lesson in about an hour.

She uploaded relevant information—in this case, the existing menu guide, images, even social media content—and the software generated an outline and lesson she could quickly refine with a human touch.

This process works so well because it’s personalized to every restaurant’s experience, explains Rachael Nemeth, Opus co-founder and CEO.

“The more we train the models, the better they can serve employees,” Nemeth says. “The more you use our content builder, the more it picks up your tone of voice. Every restaurant culture has its own language, and it can learn that behavior. We’re not pulling from the billions of data points on the internet. We’re pulling from your existing working documents that you use every day, and we’re just helping you make them better.”

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DOING EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE

Meeting the latest
diner needs to
thrive and survive

By Bret Thorn

As restaurants respond to an increasingly difficult business environment by raising prices during the last year, diners are reacting, too. They're simply going out less, choosing quality over quantity, and new or good experiences over mundane ones, according to a recent report by financial consulting firm AlixPartners.

How to pivot and adjust? Find new ways to entertain guests and to meet them wherever they want to be met.

If guests want to buy food or other products online, set up a virtual store.

If diners are looking for new experiences, create a collaboration. Team up with other businesses, including restaurants.

If customers want restaurant-quality food at parties or at work functions, improve or launch a catering arm.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Catering

Catering no longer equates just to big events. It's the sweet spot between an event and takeout for two. Increasingly, larger orders can be placed online without connecting with catering staff to reduce labor.

Some publicly traded restaurant companies are reporting double-digit growth in catering, and smaller operators are also seeing success, such as Detroit-based concept Savvy Sliders, whose 24-packs of miniature beef, chicken and falafel sandwiches are a hit at office events, school functions and even weddings.

"Catering not only allows people to enjoy their favorite restaurant or bakery, but also lets them share their love of that business," says Zachary Schmahl, founder of Schmackary's, a cookie shop in New York City. "When someone really loves your products, they want to let people know how good they are by having it at whatever event they are throwing." Schmahl also sees catering, large and small, as advertising. "It gets our cookies in the hands of many different people ... and we get paid for it, which is great."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK LAWLOR



Little Fatty, one of chef/owner David Kuo's concepts in Los Angeles, is succeeding by offering online ordering for larger orders.



• **Taiwanese “soul food”** that includes seasonal Asian salad, marinated cucumbers, General Tso’s cauliflower and beef chow fun for eight to 20-plus people
From Chef/owner David Kuo of Little Fatty, Los Angeles

• **The \$29 hot dog and condiments** in shareable portions since going viral, along with salads and sandwiches on house-baked bread
From Chef/owner Alex Stupak of Mischa, New York City

Orange chicken with pork dumplings, right clockwise, Hainan chicken with marinated cucumbers and mapo tofu are a part of the catering menu at Little Fatty.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK LAWLOR

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Online Stores

Improving technology to offer online ordering post-pandemic has opened the door for restaurants to do more. Enter restaurants as lifestyle brands, selling signature ingredients, favorite kitchen gear and branded merchandise.

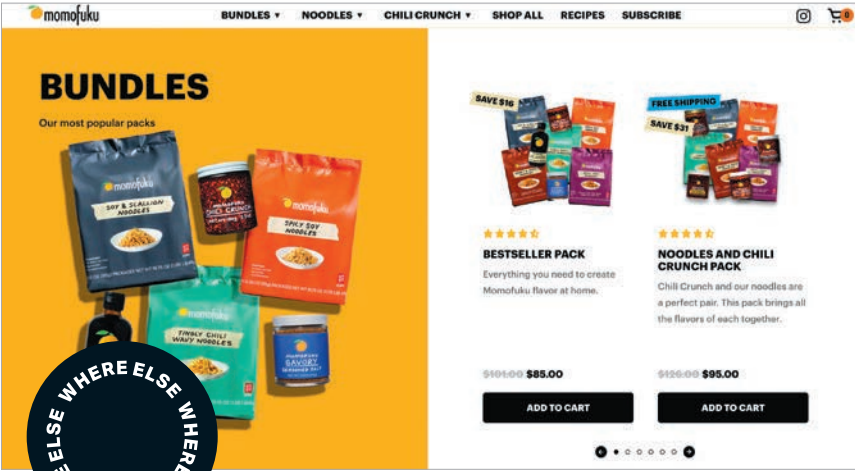
Visit the website of Momofuku, David Chang’s restaurant empire, and the menu on the left doesn’t start with a link to reservations or a list of his restaurants but instead to the company’s online shop, which features candy bars, condiments, noodles and more.

Smaller businesses have seen the benefits of online stores as well. For Surbhi Sahni, the chef/owner of Tagmo, an Indian restaurant in New York City, online retail is an essential part of her business, including lines of *mithai* (sweet confections), spiced nuts, spices and porcelain candle holders among other merchandise.

The online market is considerably more profitable than the restaurant, she says, although business is less consistent, with the most traffic during the Indian holiday of Diwali, she says. But kitchen staff can handle preparation of the retail products throughout most of the year, allowing her to offset costs. She hires extra help in the run up to Diwali and has separate staff to handle shipping.



San Ho Won, top and bottom left, sells merch online for customer loyalty while Momofuku products get more love than its restaurants on the website to maximize sales.



- **Seasonal merchandise** such as the 6-foot tall inflatable spider doughnut during Halloween

From Dunkin’, locations nationwide
- **T-shirts, shorts and hats** in collaboration with rapper Fat Joe under the “Night Castle” brand promoting late-night dining

From White Castle, locations nationwide
- **Wines, products from celebrity chef friends, dish towels and other kitchen-themed items** also available in the restaurant’s cellar shop

From owners Michael and Tara Gallina of Winslow’s Table, St. Louis
- **Solid white lychee wood charcoal and branded merchandise**

From Chefs Corey Lee and Jeong-In Hwang of San Ho Won, San Francisco

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SAN HO WON

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TREND WITHIN A TREND

Collaborations

Attention-grabbing and money-making partnerships aren't limited to the industry's celebrities. Chefs are increasingly working with other chefs to prepare special dinners, turning the meals into events while leveraging their collaborators' fans.

Gracias Madre, a Mexican restaurant in Newport Beach, California, partnered with guest chef Shachi Mehra of Adya, an Indian restaurant in the same Orange County city, to celebrate the holiday Dia de Los Muertos with a special dinner. Indian vegetable pakora fritters were served beside oyster mushroom "chicharrones," and a coconut chickpea curry with green rice and basil marinated tomatoes showed influence from both cuisines.

Following this third collaboration between the two restaurants, Mehra said the events were popular and a great way to build the morale of her cooks. "The synergy between Indian and Mexican cuisines always makes these dinners a sell-out event," she says. "I love the opportunity to be introduced to loyal guests from a like-minded restaurant, but more than that, these collaborative dinners give me and my culinary team an outlet to be creative beyond our restaurant menu."



- **Birdie G's** nod to Jewish Americana and Southern cooking heads east to **Atoboy**, a modern Korean tasting menu format in New York City From Chef/owner Jeremy Fox of the Santa Monica, California, restaurant and Chef/co-owner Junghyun "JP" Park

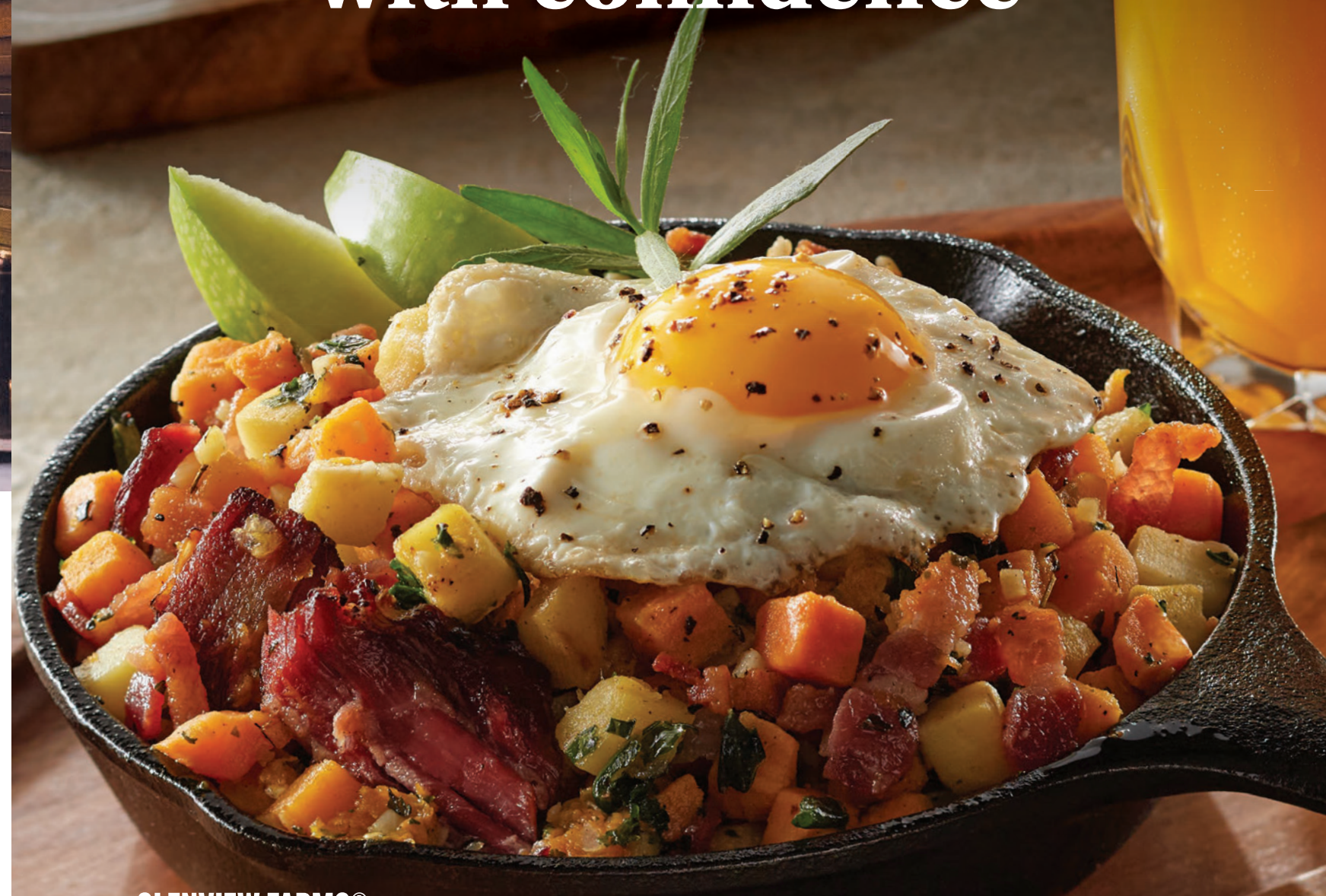
- Two popular but different restaurants team up at a cocktail bar in New York City From **Daniel Humm's Eleven Madison Park**, which provided cocktails along with the venue **Shinji**, and **Chef Daniela Soto-Innes of Cosme** which served Mexican street snacks.



Diners went wild when two top-rated restaurants, Eleven Madison Park and Cosme, collaborated for an event at Shinji.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREA GRUJIC

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TREND 2024
LABOR LESS

*Sign of
the Times*

When cutting
hours and service
improves well-
being without
hurting profits

By Bret Thorn

*Based on life cycle assessment of estimated emissions from raw materials through manufacturing and delivery to US Foods® distribution centers verified by SCS Global Services per ISO 14044-2006. Electricity emissions include use of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs).

I For many years restaurants wanted to be all things to all people. They'd opened whenever guests wanted to eat there. To maximize the benefits of fixed costs, they'd add breakfast and serve food between lunch and dinner service. If unused space existed, they'd develop another concept, such as a speakeasy or a limited to-go operation.

That's changing, especially for independent restaurateurs, who have had a chance during and after the pandemic to reflect on what was important to them.

Developing concepts that function with less labor has been the solution for some operators while restaurants in general are opening later or closing earlier, according to market and menu research firm Datassential. Last year, the average restaurant opened 6.4 fewer hours than in 2019, a decline of 7.5%. Pete's Kitchen, which had been a 24-hour standby in Denver for decades, started closing at 9 p.m. except on Friday and Saturday simply because they didn't have enough staff.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Tableless operations

A new class of takeout-only restaurants is thriving, catering to guests who are content to not sit down with their food.

The benefits of offering no tables include requiring fewer staff and less expensive real estate.

Flame Broiler, a Korean bowl chain based in Southern California, has introduced takeout-only restaurants for those reasons.

"We're here to do whatever it takes to serve our franchisees, employees, and customers at a world-class level," Christian Lee, chief operating officer, said in a press release.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OFFLAME BROILER

• Slice House, a pizza concept featuring a 500-square-foot kiosk available for stadiums and high-foot traffic areas
From San Francisco-based Pizzaiolo Tony Gemignani

• To-go only storefront with bakery operation behind the selections, closed Monday and Tuesday
From Pastry Chef Mindy Segal of Mindy's Bakery, Chicago

A tableless restaurant like Flame Broiler, which serves Korean bowls, above, requires less space and fewer staff.

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ADKT, a recently launched Parisian supper club, is opened only during the four busiest days of the week, top, while Bar Vinazo offers an easier-to-execute menu that allows it to open seven days with minimal staff.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Open fewer days

Monday has traditionally been the only day of rest for restaurants, but increasingly it has crept to two or three days. Restaurateur Joe Campanale closes his popular Italian restaurant Fausto on Monday and Tuesday because he can't find enough staff. He later developed a Spanish wine concept Bar Vinazo, which has a limited menu dominated by easy-to-prepare charcuterie and cheeses, allowing him to open seven days a week with minimal staff.

Deborah VanTrece, Atlanta chef and restaurateur, closes all three of her restaurants—Oreatha's, Twisted Soul Cookhouse & Pours and La Panarda—on Monday and Tuesday for several reasons echoed by many of her peers.

"It was for self-preservation and preservation of my staff," she says. "We work hard dealing with customers ... and it wears on you mentally. Being away from this place was the healthy thing to do. It's taking more control of what we're doing. I think prior to COVID we didn't spend as much time thinking about ourselves."

And she discovered that her guests were perfectly capable of adapting to restaurants open only five days a week. "We learned that we could make as much money with shorter hours," she says.



• **Open only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday** and closed holidays, Sugar Moon Bakery, Chicago

• **Closed Sunday, Monday and Tuesday** ADKT, a Parisian-themed supper club in West Hollywood, California

ADKT PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSHUA BICHAYDA. BAR VINAZO PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIZ CLAYMAN

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TREND 2024
THE KIDS HAVE CRED

FEEDING **FUTURE** DINERS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK LAWLOR

College students can provide valuable insight on emerging trends—and your bottom line

By Heather Sennett



I In his 25 years at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Ken Toong has witnessed massive changes in the students he serves, their dining habits and their food preferences.

Toong, the award-winning executive director of Auxiliary Enterprises, and his team prepare 52,000 meals a day, roughly 9 million meals per year, for a student body that is much more diverse, concerned about the environment, and likely to have food allergies and special diets than when he began working at UMass.

College students are also a demographic, he says, that expects a meal to be an experience, one that is fun and exciting. Such habits are likely to continue as these students graduate, secure jobs and flex their buying power.

Toong's Gen Z diners of today are the restaurant diners of tomorrow. Here's a look at some of the trends that Toong and others in college foodservice expect to dominate in 2024.



TREND WITHIN A TREND

Authenticity

Gen Z expects authenticity and specificity. About 35% of the freshman class comes from countries other than the U.S. “They want something that reminds them of their home,” Toong says. UMass serves 4,000 sushi rolls a day, an Indian breakfast with paneer and Southern Indian Idli and a Chinese breakfast of customizable congee with toppings including thousand-year eggs.

New this year at Vanderbilt University in Nashville is a selection of globally inspired meals to complement the school's Language Table program, where students can chat over dinner in Japanese, Russian, Hindi-Urdu and more while enjoying regional specialties.

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Value

Students—and their parents—want to know they're getting a good value from their meal plans. But value today is about much more than the quantity of food served, Toong says. It's an equation that balances quality, sourcing, storytelling, creativity and more. Years have passed, for example, since UMass offered an 8- or 10-ounce steak. The only people who ate such large portions of meat were dads visiting the school, he says with a laugh. Students are looking for better-quality meat, in smaller portions. The university also offers half sushi rolls and bagels that are an ounce smaller than standard. “People want to eat less, eat more often and eat better,” he says.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF UMASS DINING SERVICES

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Creating a dining experience

Customization is evolving into a dining experience. Students want to have a say in the toppings on their avocado toast. “Gen Z also wants fun components,” Toong says, which might take the form of specials prepared by guest chefs or celebratory meals for the Lunar New Year or Diwali. Schools around the country are also working with local independent restaurants to elevate the dining experience. At Washington University in St. Louis, the school asked four woman- or minority-owned area restaurants to open satellite locations on campus at the start of the school year. Concepts range from boba tea and Chinese snacks to Filipino barbecue and a build-your-own salad station, with the goal of diversifying the school's dining options and supporting local businesses.

Since the restaurants started serving meals on campus, the effort has been successful. Lines form all day, and the businesses sell out.

Ken Toong, opposite page, says students want restaurant quality, such as sushi rolls, authenticity right down to a country's regional foods, like traditional Indian breakfast, left, and customizable congee, below.





Bowdoin College grows produce and offers a lobster bake for students.



TREND WITHIN A TREND

Calling out what's important—to them

At UMass, almost 11% of students report having a food allergy, so Toong and his team keep the dining app, as well as posted menus, updated with potential allergens. Menus also note which dishes are halal, vegetarian, local or antibiotic-free and the meal's carbon footprint rating. Nearly 80% of Gen Zers report eating plant-based meals at least once a week, with 60% saying they want more meatless offerings, according to a survey from contract food management firm Chartwells Higher Education. On his campus, Toong sees interest in meat analogs, as well as unprocessed plant-based proteins, especially among students from India, China and Japan. But a food must taste good to get them coming back for seconds. "We find that Gen Z will try everything," he says. "Deliciousness is really important to them."

TREND WITHIN A TREND

Just like restaurants

Today's students are on the hunt for new flavor combinations and twists on classic comforts, Toong says. Chicken sandwiches are always popular, but UMass diners want something next-level. "Can you make it differently, besides the pickles and so on," he says. "Make it distinctive from other competitors." Just like a restaurant might have a signature item, college dining can do the same.

At Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, where up to 40% of ingredients are locally sourced, lobster bake is a school tradition. The dish features local Maine lobsters swaddled in seaweed and steamed over an outdoor hardwood fire. "People love the culture behind the food," Toong says. "Tell your story. Why is your food better than your competitors?"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHELE STAPLETON PHOTOGRAPHY

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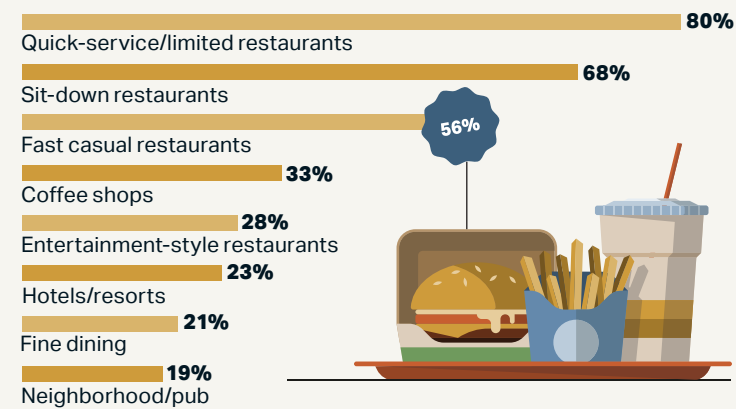
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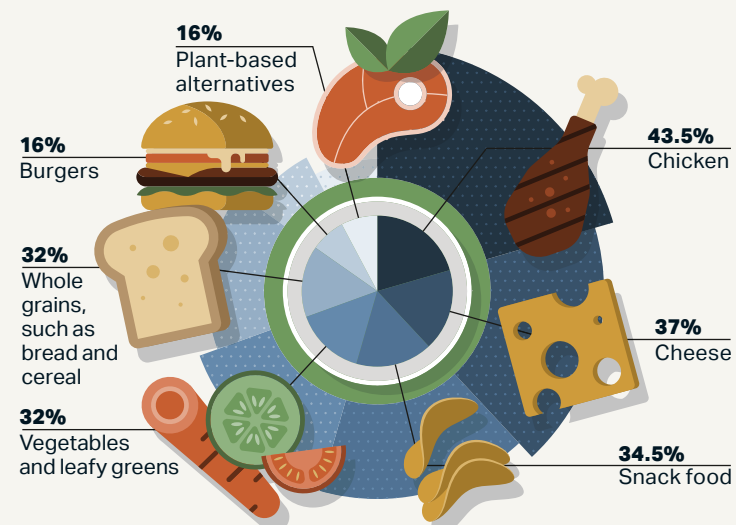
BY THE NUMBERS NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Gen Alpha, the youngest diners and future restaurant spenders, is already influencing menu decisions. Here are insights on the 12 and under set.

WHERE THEY EAT



WHAT THEY EAT A FEW TIMES A WEEK

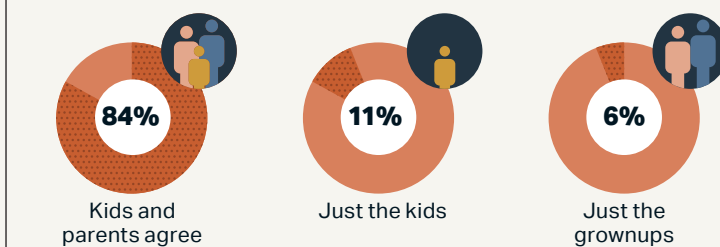


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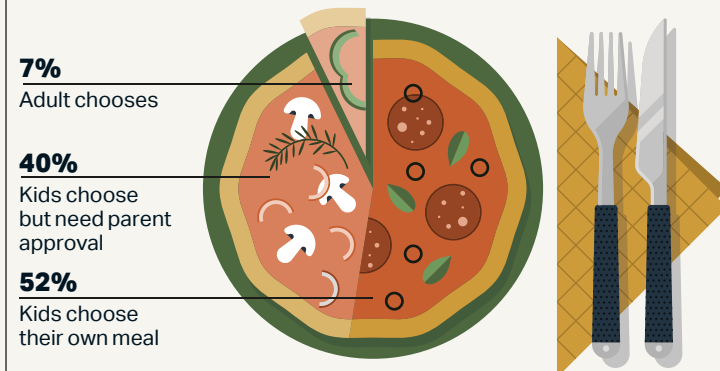
eat fresh fruit daily but also eat hot dogs and fried foods at least once a week



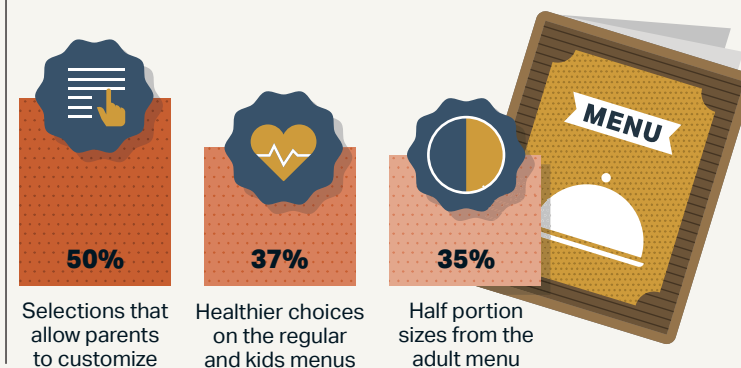
WHO CHOOSES THE RESTAURANT?



...and the food?



WHAT INFLUENCES DECISIONS



Source: Datassential

ILLUSTRATION BY ADRIAN BAUER



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