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Chicken’s more flavorful parts are losing it.

THE LAYERED LOOK
Lasagna goes in for a makeover.

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Introducing the Winter Issue of Food Fanatics® Magazine

Food and restaurant trends are moving faster than ever, so staying up to date on changing diner preferences can be a challenge. In this issue, we’re helping you keep a pulse on what’s hot now!

Our cover story delivers a wake-up call on the evolution of breakfast. Today, it goes beyond bacon and eggs. Specialty diets and demand for convenience, portability and healthy options are changing the A.M. game. Trending cuisines and adventurous flavors are dominating menus, and millennials are leading the charge. All-day breakfast offerings present an opportunity for operators to increase sales. In fact, breakfast is currently the only daypart enjoying growth.

Speaking of millennials—they’re the influence on the popularity of global cuisine has caused a dark meat chicken comeback! Chicken thighs are up by 105% in the past four years. And chefs are not complaining, thanks to their cost-efficiency compared to white meat.

We all know that a strong online presence is essential in 2018. So, in our Food People section, we’re guiding you on how to click with social-media obsessed diners. How can social snapshots help market your brand? How do you court influencers to up your social reach? Here are your must-dos.

In the same section, you’ll find our story on Mei Mei—a food truck business whose strong company culture helped it transform into a multidimensional business. Lastly, don’t miss our Road Trip. This time we’re in the Dakotas, exploring their vibrant food scene with one of our local Food Fanatics Chefs, Jared Larson!

Find these and other timely stories in the pages ahead, all created to help you make it. Plus, check out past issues at www.usfoods.com/magazine.

Enjoy!
let your mastery SHINE

the artisan’s beef

IN THE DOUGH

Unexpected toppings, switching up the crust and showing off on social media keep pizza on its game

BY MIKE SULA
Chef Erling Wu-Bower, below, of Pacific Standard Time, uses corn and rice flour for his pizza dough.

Gluten-Free Pizza Crust

3288 grams water
286 grams sugar
216 grams dry active yeast
3240 grams gluten-free flour*
260 grams nonfat milk solids
100 grams baking powder
116 grams salt
72 grams xanthan gum
360 grams extra virgin olive oil

Combine water and sugar. Add yeast, mix, and let stand five minutes. Combine remaining ingredients with the yeast mixture.

Mix on medium for five minutes. Allow the dough to rest and rise for 30 minutes. Makes eight to 10 medium-sized crusts.

*Wu-Bower uses a corn and rice flour blend.
confit with fontina, mushrooms, goat cheese and truffle oil.

At Krave It in Bayside, New York, Chef-owner Vishee Mandahar takes a similar approach. His list includes a Greek lamb gyro pizza with tzatziki on a pita crust to the “Homer Simpson”—meatballs, bacon, glazed donuts, maple syrup and cheddar.

He belongs to what he calls “the new-age pizza” movement. “I think pizza is the gateway to everything,” he says. “No matter what culture you’re from, everybody loves pizza.”

Break the Mold

To make your mark in a crowded market, zero in on a memorable theme. Chef Meghan Shaw of Pop + Offworld in Detroit bakes the kind of New York-style pizzas “that you would make if you were 17 and stoned.” They’re large and flat so she can sell them by the slice, but her toppings are unabashedly gonzo.

One of her bestsellers is the coco curry; a vegetarian pie bedecked with yellow vegetable curry, a mozzarella and provolone cheese blend, crispy chickpeas and spicy cilantro chimichurri.

There are ways to actively engage fans of these crazy pies on social media. At Paulie Gee’s in Chicago, owner Derrick Tung’s staff creates a meaty and meatless special every other week. Options run the gamut from the house’s Chicago hot dog pizza (yellow mustard base, pan-fried hot dog coins, grilled onions, pickled cherry pepper relish and hot dog breadcrumb mix) to the “Bechamee Mootzo” with vegan meatballs.

At the end of the year, Tung posts a Google survey so customers can vote on their favorite pies. The winners are brought back into rotation.

Diversity of Dough

As a franchise owner of the original Brooklyn Paulie Gee’s, Tung keeps some flagship combinations, but some of his most popular pizzas are adaptation of Detroit-style square-pan pizzas with thick, cheesy, caramelized crusts.

After making a pilgrimage to the original Buddy’s in Detroit, which is credited for inventing the style, he produced a Detroit-inspired riff with thicker cheese edges than you would find in the Motor City.

“Drawing off memory hasn’t allowed me to recreate the exact recipe,” says Tung, “but something that is truly our own thing.”

At Gather in Berkeley, California, Chef Anthony Lee takes an unorthodox approach to forming his dough, which doesn’t often yield neatly circular pizzas.

“We do not overmanipulate it,” he says. “We’re just simply taking our body weight down to the center of that dough with our palms and allowing gravity to do its work as the dough stretches off the side of our board,” he says. “We’re not throwing pies in the sky—just stretching it without molesting it.”

Changing Tastes

Catering to gluten-free diners has become a prerequisite in large markets. Trouble is, pulling off a crispy gluten-free crust is notoriously tricky—as it won’t rise like a regular pizza.

“As a businessman you have to do it now,” says Erling Wu-Bower, executive chef at Chicago’s Pacific Standard Time. Bower found success by using a corn and rice flour blend, a heavy dose of yeast and experimenting with hydration levels, eventually lowering the amount of water and increasing the flour.

His cooks wear gloves when they make the gluten-free pies to avoid cross-contamination with the regular pizzas, but guests are informed that both pies share the same oven.

At Paulie Gee’s, gluten-free pizzas are stretched on a separate line with a dedicated oven. At Krave It, Vishee Mandahar avoids the problem by ordering frozen gluten-free crusts.

It’s more proof that new ideas—and creative solutions—are boundless in the new age pizza laboratory.
Coco Curry Vegan Pizza
Chef Meghan Shaw
Pop + Offworld, Detroit

6 red Thai chilies
1 medium onion, chopped
8 cloves garlic
2 ounces ginger, peeled and chopped
2 ounces lemongrass, chopped
2 teaspoons curry powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
2 tablespoons vegan Worcestershire
1 tablespoon tomato puree
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
4 cans coconut milk

Dough, your choice
12 ounces provolone and mozzarella cheese mix
8 ounces crispy chickpeas
Spicy cilantro chimichurri, your recipe

Blend chilies, onion, garlic, ginger, lemongrass, spices, Worcestershire, tomato puree, lime juice and salt in a food processor until smooth. Transfer curry paste to a pot and heat until hot. Stir in coconut milk. Boil for 10 minutes to reduce. Add salt to taste.

Stretch dough to desired size. Spread curry sauce on top, sprinkle with cheese. Bake in preheated oven on a heated pizza stone at highest possible temperature.

Remove from oven, sprinkle with chickpeas and drizzle with chimichurri. Makes 1 pizza.
The desire and appreciation for authentic global cuisines, many of which construct dishes specifically with dark meat chicken, has been on the rise. So it’s not surprising that chicken thighs have shown the fastest growth on menus compared to other cuts—up 105 percent over the past four years and 27 percent over the past year alone, according to food research firm Datassential.

That’s good news, especially for chefs who deride chicken’s white meat for being pedestrian and typically costing more than its dark parts. For them, dark meat is juicier, deep flavored, more versatile and kinder to the bottom line.
**Fried Neck Meat**

Chef Akira and Satoru Hagihara
ROKI, New York

Canola oil, as needed
1 pound chicken necks
1/2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons sake
2 tablespoons mirin
1 tablespoon sugar
Little gem or other lettuce

Heat oil in a heavy bottom pan until smoky. Add chicken necks and allow them to get a hard sear.

Reduce heat and add remaining ingredients except the lettuce. After the liquid has boiled down, pull meat off necks and serve with lettuce. Makes 3 servings.

**Pollo a la Brasa**

Chef Brandon Carter
Farm, Bluffton, South Carolina

4 chicken legs
4 chicken thighs
1 quart brine, your recipe
4 chicken thighs
4 chicken legs

Combine chicken with brine and refrigerate for 4 hours. Remove chicken from the brine, pat dry, toss with marinade and marinate for 4 to 12 hours.

Grill chicken to an internal temperature of 155 F; rest meat.

Fried Neck Meat at ROKI in New York.

**Pollo a la Brasa** by Chef Brandon Carter at Farm in Bluffton, South Carolina.

**Play the Nutrition Angle**

Arm servers with evidence that white meat is not always the healthier choice. “We relay to our clients that dark meat has a higher nutritional content and quite a bit more flavor than white meat, with only a negligible increase in fat,” says Parind Vora, chef-owner of Lockhart Bistro and Jeezbel in Lockhart, Texas.

Highlighting a type of chicken, such as air-chilled, which results in a superior flavor and texture, or a particular breed can also be a differentiator. At Jeezbel, Vora gilds her lobster risotto with smoked chicken gizzards and poached Silkies chicken thighs. "Otherwise known as ‘black chicken,’ Silkies have naturally black skin that, Vora says, produce a unique mushroom-like flavor. “Dark meat is loaded with iron, zinc, B6 and B12,” says Alexander. "If a customer is taking a rounded approach to healthy living, dark meat should definitely be on their radar."
Lower-priced and full-flavored legs and thighs have long been the backbone of South American fare, like the pollo a la brasa from Farm in Bluffton, South Carolina.

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Be an Old Gizzard
Now that diners are becoming more accepting of dark meat, why not move further into the dark side?
The benefits of adopting a beak-to-feathers approach—gizzards, bones and back meat—cut costs, reduce food waste and deliver one-of-a-kind flavors.

Show Some Heart
Pisco Rotisserie & Cevicheria in San Diego serves up authentic Peruvian chicken heart anticucho skewers and wok-fried chicken heart saltado.

Stick Your Neck Out
Due to its elasticity and layers of fat, chicken neck meat can be a chewy, jerky-like delicacy, as evident by ROKI’s preparation in New York City.

Cool Cartilage
Chef Masatomo Hamaya of Dragonfly Izakaya & Fish Market in Doral, Florida, marinates keel cartilage with sake, soy sauce and garlic before dredging them in cornstarch and deep-frying them into karaage snacks.

Go With Gizzards
Inspired by his grandmother’s fried gizzards, Chef Lindsay Autry of The Regional Kitchen & Public House in West Palm Beach, Florida periodically serves crispy chicken livers over dirty rice as an homage to New Orleans cuisine of the dark meat, he says.

At Pisco Rotisserie & Cevicheria in San Diego, Emmanuel Piqueras uses gizzards for his arroz con pollo with cilantro-beer rice.

“Dark meat works better for stews, soups and braising or roasting,” he says. “Most of the times, using these methods with just white meat can easily result in dry meat or lack of flavor.”

Meatier Margins
Home cooks tend to appreciate the ease of preparing chicken breasts. Unlocking the tenderness of the harder-working muscles of dark meat takes more skill, which can have a snowball effect on supply and demand for the industry.

“Many places lean on the grill and quickly cooked white meats,” he notes. “With greater demand for white meat, it makes the dark meat more affordable,” says Norman Van Aken of 921 by Norman Van Aken in Mt. Dora, Florida and Three in Miami.

Take fried chicken, for example. Koji and Satori Hagihara, the husband and wife duo at ROKI in New York City, use chicken thighs for their karaage because they cook quickly and yield crispier skin.

Thighs also tend to retain their flavor when shredded and folded into other dishes. At San Diego’s eclectic Rustic Root, Chef Marcel Childress often smokes and then braises chicken. After they’re cooked, he shreds them and uses the meat to bolster the flavor of everything from salads and pastas to his classic pot pies.

Giving thighs real estate on the menu, as the main protein or part of a dish, is essential for engendering change, Childress says.

Confit Chicken Drumstick with Sweet Potato Polenta
Chef Jimmy Bannos Jr.
The Purple Pig, Chicago
1 quart salt
½ quart sugar
½ cup toasted peppercorns, crushed
½ cup fennel seed, crushed
¼ cup paprika
6 pounds chicken drumsticks
Rendered pork fat, as needed
6 bouquet garni, your choice
4 ounces whole garlic
¾ pound European unsalted butter, divided use
1 quart heavy cream
1½ cups fine cornmeal
Sweet potato puree, recipe follows
Kosher salt, to taste

Combine salt, sugar, peppercorns, fennel, paprika and cayenne. Rub chicken and let sit overnight.

Rinse drumsticks thoroughly. Place 5 to 6 drumsticks to a hotel pan in one layer. Add a bouquet garni to each pan along with garlic. Cover with rendered pork fat. Confit in oven at 275 F for about 90 minutes or until cooked through.

Heat ½ pound butter and heavy cream in a sauce pan. Bring to boil, reduce to simmer, and leave on low heat. Add confit to sauce pan, cook and continually stir until creamy. Fold in sweet potato puree. Finish with remaining butter and add salt to taste.

To plate, serve sweet potato polenta alongside the chicken. Makes 12 servings.

To make the sweet potato puree: Peel and chop 5 large sweet potatoes and toss with ½ cup light brown sugar, ½ cup dark brown sugar, ½ cup cane syrup, ¼ cup maple syrup, 2 tablespoons molasses, 1 tablespoon honey, 1 tablespoon salt and 1 tablespoon black pepper. Place mixture in a roasting pan, cover with foil and roast in a preheated 400 F oven until potatoes are cooked, about 40 minutes. Strain liquid for later use and cool. Puree sweet potatoes in a blender, adding liquid if needed.
Lasagna goes in for a makeover and emerges as a head-turner

BY LAURA YEE AND MIN CASEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL STRABBING
LASAGNA

has withstood the evolution of restaurants and changing tastes. But even though it’s reliable and satisfying, the old-school staple of red sauce joints probably won’t cause any double-takes. Because it’s comfort food for diners, this multi-layered dish serves as a creative vehicle for chefs. The standard construction of meat sauce, pasta sheets and mountains of cheese remains vital, offering plenty of room to innovate and update without disrupting food costs or diverting from standard ordering. Many of the ingredients are apt to be on hand and can be purveyed into a menu staple.

“The great thing about it is people understand lasagna,” says Chef Brian Arnoff of Kitchen Sink Food & Drink in Beacon, New York. “It opens the door for a dish that’s not as familiar but more exciting.”

At Marcello’s Lasagneria in San Francisco, the mainstay is traditional: Six ultra-thin layers of pasta are layered with bechamel. Parmigiano-Reggiano, mozzarella and tomato sauce. But then the restaurant mixes it up with options such as Sicilian eggplant, Bolognese; mushroom; butternut squash; verdura with pesto; eggplant; Bolognese; mushroom; and bechamel. “There’s no limit to what you can create,” Arnoff says.

Creating fresh-tasting lasagnas helps to achieve that goal. The braised pork in his lasagna features pork and swiss chard raised nearby. The bechamel is made with milk from the local dairy, while the greens that garnish the plate also are grown within a few miles.

Ingredients can be swapped out when the seasons change or when Arnoff reaches to past gigs for inspiration.

PREP: Arnoff didn’t like the standard ring mold sizes he needed for cutting circles from house made pasta sheets, so he had them made to his specifications. The 3.5-inch ring molds are also used to build the lasagna.

PROCEDURE:

1. To make the bechamel, boil ½ gallon whole milk.
2. In a large saucepan, add 1 cup brown sugar, 1½ cup kosher salt, plus extra as needed.
3. Add 4 pounds pork butt and 5 cloves garlic.
4. Grate parmesan, as needed.
5. Roasted heirloom tomatoes, as needed.
6. Fresh pasta cut into 3- or 4-inch circles.

3. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large pot. Add garlic, rosemary, beer and stock and braise in 275 F oven for 5 to 6 hours.
4. Transfer pork into pot, strain liquid on meat. Reduce liquid 40 to 60 minutes. Cool overnight in liquid.
5. Shred pork into pot, strain liquid on meat. Reduce liquid 40 to 60 minutes. Cool overnight in liquid.

Grease 3 or 4-inch ring molds. Place a layer of pasta, followed pork mix and bechamel. Add another layer of pasta then greens, tomatoes and bechamel. Layer until dish is filled. Spread bechamel on top, then parmesan. Bake at 350 F until center reaches 170 F. Makes 10 servings.

To make the bechamel, boil ½ gallon whole milk. Melt ½ pound of butter, while in 8 ounces flour; add to hot milk. Cook 5 minutes until thick. Add ½ teaspoon nutmeg, pinch of cloves and cinnamon, pepper and salt to taste. Remove from heat, whisk in 1 pound provolone until melted.

Braised Pork Lasagna
Chef Brian Arnoff
Kitchen Sink Food & Drink, Beacon, New York

1 tablespoon whole fennel seed
1 tablespoon whole coriander seed
1 teaspoon black pepper, plus as needed
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ cup brown sugar
1½ cup kosher salt, plus extra as needed
4 pounds pork butt
5 cloves garlic
5 sprigs thyme and rosemary
32 ounces cream ale
32 ounces pork or chicken stock
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 pickled Fresno chili
½ cup red wine vinegar
3 bunches dark leafy greens, trimmed
Fresh pasta cut into 3- or 4-inch circles
Béchamel, recipe follows
Roasted heirloom tomatoes, as needed
Grated parmesan, as needed

COARSELY grind all whole spices and mix with sugar and salt to form rub. Rub pork butt and cure overnight. Roast at 600 F for up to 45 minutes. Transfer to deep pan. Add garlic, rosemary, beer and stock and braise in 275 F oven for 5 to 6 hours.

SAUCE:

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large pot. Add garlic, rosemary, beer and stock and braise in 275 F oven for 5 to 6 hours.

SHRED:

Shred pork into pot, strain liquid on meat. Reduce liquid 40 to 60 minutes. Cool overnight in liquid.

BLEND:

Heat 4 cups olive oil and sweet onions until translucent. Add garlic and chili flakes. Cook until fragrant. Add fresh-tasting tomatoes and stock. Cook until tender. Season with salt and pepper.

GREASE:

Grease 3 or 4-inch ring molds. Place a layer of pasta, followed pork mix and bechamel. Add another layer of pasta then greens, tomatoes and bechamel. Layer until dish is filled. Spread bechamel on top then parmesan. Bake at 350 F until center reaches 170 F. Makes 10 servings.

MAKE THE BECHEMEL: Boil ½ gallon whole milk. Melt ½ pound of butter, while in 8 ounces flour; add to hot milk. Cook 5 minutes until thick. Add ½ teaspoon nutmeg, pinch of cloves and cinnamon, pepper and salt to taste. Remove from heat, whisk in 1 pound provolone until melted.

GO GLOBAL

Brian Arnoff draws influences from the places where he’s worked, whether it’s the East Coast, Southeast Asia or Europe, to create a menu. But if he’s thinking lasagna, the dish won’t be limited to its Italian roots. Instead, his current location, the Hudson Valley in New York where Kitchen Sink Food & Drink is located, will come into play.

“I’ve always wanted to open something that’s unique for us,” he says. “And that’s meaningful when you know that your customers are the same people who are growing your ingredients.”

Creating fresh-tasting lasagnas helps to achieve that goal. The braised pork in his lasagna features pork and swiss chard raised nearby. The bechamel is made with milk from the local dairy, while the greens that garnish the plate also are grown within a few miles.

Ingredients can be swapped out when the seasons change or when Arnoff reaches to past gigs for inspiration.

APPEAL:

The construction of the dish allows diners to see each layer. Arnoff’s tweaks to classic lasagna for the winter months—warm spices in the bechamel, boldly flavored braised meat and smoked provolone—also resonate with diners, he says.
Butternut Squash Lasagna
Executive Chef Christian Frangiadis
Spork, Pittsburgh
1 small butternut squash
1 ounce butter, melted
1 ounce brown sugar
3 cups ricotta
1 cup mascarpone
3 cups Grana Padano, divided use
1¼ cup sage, chopped
1½ teaspoons black pepper
1½ teaspoons freshly ground nutmeg
Kosher salt, to taste
32 ounces marinara
12 fresh pasta sheets
32 ounces bechamel
2 cups chicken of the woods mushrooms, sautéed
1½ pounds fresh mozzarella, diced
2 cups chicken of the woods mushrooms, sautéed
1 cup basil, chiffonade

Squash lengthwise, scoop out seeds, and dice. Combine with ricotta, mascarpone, 1 cup Grana Padano, sage, pepper, nutmeg and salt to taste. Cover the bottom of a casserole dish with a thin layer of red sauce. Top with a thin layer of bechamel and two pasta sheets. The pasta should cover the entire area of the pan. Top the pasta sheet with a thin layer of bechamel, a thin layer of red sauce, a thin layer of squash filling, a thin layer of mushrooms and top with some of each cheese.

PREP: Cover with two more pasta sheets and repeat the process over again. Repeat three more times. Place the last two pasta sheets on and cover with bechamel followed by red sauce. Cover and bake for 45 minutes in a preheated 375 F oven. Uncover, sprinkle with more Grana Padano and fresh mozzarella and serve. Garnish with mushrooms, parsley and basil.

Zucchini Lasagna
Chef-owners Carla and Christine Pallotta
Nebo Cucina & Enoteca, Boston

Ingredients:
14 eggs, divided use
3 teaspoons salt, divided use
3 tablespoons black pepper, divided use
10 ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, grated, divided use
8 large zucchinis sliced lengthwise about ¼-inch thick
3 cups flour
Canola oil, as needed
2 pounds housemade ricotta cheese
½ cup fresh parsley, chopped
8 cups marinara
¼-inch thick
6 large zucchinis sliced lengthwise about ¼-inch thick
3 cups Grana Padano, divided use
1 cup mascarpone
3 cups fresh mozzarella, shredded
32 ounces marinara
12 fresh pasta sheets
32 ounces bechamel
2 cups chicken of the woods mushrooms, sautéed
1½ pounds fresh mozzarella, diced
2 cups chicken of the woods mushrooms, sautéed
1¼ cup parsley, chopped
1½ cup basil, chiffonade

PREP:
By using egg-dipped and fried slices of zucchini, Chef Carla and Christine Pallotta swapped out pasta for vegetables long before gluten-free and plant-based dining became lifestyle choices. The dish is as comforting as the classic version but offers a twist that follows the mantra of “we love to eat.”

THE PREP: The $25 zucchini lasagna is served in individual portions, allowing the kitchen to prep the dish in advance. Let portions come to room temperature throughout services or par bake to cut time. Look at the dish’s ordering history to prevent waste.

PRO TIPS: The dish is gluten-friendly (the lasagna slices are lightly dusted with flour) but becomes gluten-free by using rice flour or gluten-free flour instead. Make sure to properly drain and cool the fried zucchini so it stays crispy before compiling.

THE APPEAL: Familiarity sells, especially when a vegetable leads the ingredient list. Although “healthy-ish,” the dish still teams with ricotta, Romano and mozzarella cheeses. But its big claim to fame? It’s the dish that won “Throwdown with Bobby Flay” on the Food Network show.

THREE TIMES A CHARM
When Christian Frangiadis returned to Pittsburgh a few years ago to open Spork, he was older and wiser, intent on making restaurant decisions based more on business rationales rather than ego. He remained committed to freshly made ingredients, from house-baked breads to fresh pasta, but also considered how best to fill seats on Monday nights.

“The food is terrific,” he says, “but what else can you offer on a night where everyone is recovering from the weekend?” His recommendation? Offer diners a solid deal built around a beloved favorite, like lasagna. Every Monday, his chef-driven shareable menu offers three types of lasagna paired with wine and salad for $25.

The trio of options are simple but vary enough to ensure the dishes are distinguishable. Unique presentations are also important, which is why a lasagna might be made in a hotel pan and sliced, baked as a single serving or constructed freestyle.

PRO TIP: Some diners rarely deviate from the standard, which means a classic version should be included. Thinking beyond the expected should drive a version, while another lasagna could check the box for local and seasonal.

THE APPEAL: Dishes that are only made available on certain days boost demand, especially when you run out. But it’s a delicate balance because you don’t want to alienate or frustrate diners. Frangiadis expresses his passion for lasagna with a classic Bolognese and a three-cheese basil lasagna made with housemade spinach noodles. For the winter, the seasonal one works in toasted butternut squash as well as with spices that pair well with cold weather, such as cinnamon and nutmeg.
Wake Up Call

If everyone is making bank on breakfast, what are you waiting for?

BY AMBER GIBSON
Let’s agree that just about everyone loves breakfast.

Maybe it’s ingrained from childhood as we’re told it’s the most important meal of the day. Or that today’s healthier lifestyles begin with a nutrient-charged breakfast. Specialty diets—paleo, keto, vegan and gluten-free, just to mention a few—also stress the importance of the morning meal.

To take the biggest slice of the breakfast pie, past sales growth statistics indicate that menu options must allow customers to eat and walk at the same time. Convenience, portability and healthy also rank.

Today, the same rules apply, but the choices extend beyond bacon and eggs. Trending cuisines, evolved healthy, more adventurous flavors and dishes that blur the breakfast fare lines are dominating menus. Also trending: all-day breakfast spots as well as traditional lunch-dinner operations that open early to capture breakfast or brunch sales.

“We have more people for breakfast than lunch,” says Geoffrey Meeker, owner of French Truck Company, which has five cafes in New Orleans, Memphis, Tennessee and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with five more on the way. Meeker says that 70 percent of his customers buy food. “Restaurateurs have figured out that margins are better for breakfast than dinner,” he says. “What’s an egg—even a good egg—cost?”

Some 29 percent of restaurants offer a separate breakfast or brunch menu, a 24 percent overall increase from a decade ago, according to Datassential, a food research firm. The growth is concentrated in sit-down restaurants with a 58 percent increase in casual restaurants and a 31 percent jump in fine dining spots for the same period.

Breakfast, in fact, is the only daypart enjoying growth. The NPD Group says breakfast visits have increased 1 percent for the year ending March 2017, while lunch sales were flat and dinner decreased.

A Healthy Turn

Today’s “healthy” breakfast offerings rest squarely on protein and veggie combos that satisfy meatless and paleo diets.

Diners at Early Girl Eatery in Asheville, North Carolina, can add tempeh to its veggie breakfast bowl of rice, black beans, sweet potatoes, fresh spinach, cheddar and scrambled eggs topped with salsa and avocado relish. Denver’s Whole Sol offers an array of nutritious savory options like its primal bowl, which tops a base of shredded cabbage with two poached eggs, avocado and a creamy nut-free hemp seed pesto.

And for those who want comfort without the gluten, cauliflower grits topped with a fried egg, sauteed Brussels sprouts and Parmesan satisfies or a pepper and egg white sandwich with shishito peppers, pepper jack, organic kale and spinach fits the bill for on-the-go customers at Beatrix, a health-centric concept in Chicago.

At Real Good Juice Co., cold-pressed juices and organic smoothies act as the backbone of its menus, but according to founder Jon Schiff, breakfast sales have grown “exponentially” at the Chicago concept. Most of Real Good’s customers order breakfast to go, so the portability of toasts and smoothies is attractive.

“Today, breakfast is 30 percent of our

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK LAWLOR

Millennials are more likely than any other generation to purchase breakfast, averaging two breakfasts per week, compared to 1.3 in the population at large.

—Datassential 2018 report on millennials
The cabbage in The Whole Sol’s Primal Bowl is topped with eggs, avocado and hemp pesto.

RESTAURATEURS HAVE FIGURED OUT THAT MARGINS ARE BETTER FOR BREAKFAST THAN DINNER. WHAT’S AN EGG—EVEN A GOOD EGG—COST?

— Geoffrey Meeker, owner of French Truck Company


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Primal Breakfast Bowl
Co-founder Alexa Squillaro
Whole Sol Blend Bar Denver
2 cups shredded organic cabbage
2 eggs
½ avocado, peeled, pitted and sliced
1 lime
Salt and pepper
Hemp pesto, recipe follows
Hot sauce, your choice
Add cabbage to pan with just enough water to cover and a pinch of salt, bring to boil and cook until tender, about 5 to 7 minutes. Drain and add cabbage to serving bowl. Cook egg to preference (Whole Sol poaches them) and add to one side of bowl. Arrange sliced avocado fanned along the other side and top with 2 tablespoons of the hemp pesto. Finish with healthy squeeze of fresh lemon juice as well as salt and pepper over all. Drizzle on hot sauce of your choice.

How to Get Juiced
Want to add a juice element to breakfast? Some tips from Real Good Juice Co.'s Jon Schiff.
On with organic ingredients, added sugars. And don’t get carried away with fruit. "We juice tons—literally—of local apples but ars. And don’t get carried away with fruit. Go with organic ingredients—no added sugars. And don’t get carried away with fruit. We juice tons—literally—of local apples but are looking for real food that they can venture beyond the familiar. Owners Nick Gabriel, Serena Rundberg and Sean Lehmann of Feed Cafe in Bozeman, Montana, know that some customers want staples, such as French toast and pancakes, but they’ve found success focusing on more creative fare. Panzarella made with sourdough bread, organic arugula, bacon, sheep’s milk feta and sun-dried tomato vinaigrette topped with a fried egg is among the specialties as well as pastrami hash made from grassfed beef, potatoes, French cut green beans, caramelized onion, roasted garlic aioli and sunny-side-up eggs. Even their breakfast sandwiches skew toward the creative with Hawaiian bruttwurst, scrambled egg, pepper jack cheese, grilled pineapple and harissa mayo on sourdough. Jordan Kahn innovates further at Destroyer, his 14-seat breakfast and lunch spot in Culver City, California. An alum of Thomas Keller’s Per Se and Grant Achatz’s Alinea, Kahn draws from the breakfast fare of Southern Chinese peasants by serving porridge, only his comes with caramelized broccoli, puffed rice and burnt onion. His breakfast menu also features green gage plums with Bavarian cream and pistachio streusel, plus mushrooms with spelt, arugula, cheese and seeds.
"People are going out for breakfast more now," says Meeker of French Truck Company. "You just have to get people over the mental barrier of spending more than $10 for breakfast." Breakfast sandwiches are his bestsellers, contributing to 70 percent of his retail business.

Global Flavors Wake up the Morning
When the vegetarian and vegan-friendly Pandandora opened, Indian food for breakfast was a hard sell, but over the past seven years, it’s become a cornerstone of the business. Owner Anita Jaisinghani believes the desire for more robust flavors, a younger audience and healthier items contributed to this shift.
Her Houston restaurant serves a creative and health-conscious Indian twist on breakfast. Inspired by food from her home state of Gujarat, India, the menu includes the morning hauling, platters of saag (creamy spinach), oats, saffron yogurt, salad, potato cake, utthapam (South Indian savory pancake) and a fried egg. Dosas are popular as well as the breakfast frank, a Mumbai-based masala scrambled egg roti wrap with veggies or lamb (think Indian taco). Dosas are on the menu at BimBeriBon in Indianapolis. With six locations, the menu has changed and now even serves avocado toast, but many items, including the namesake pancakes, remain from day one.

"People tend to gravitate towards breakfast items that are familiar," says James Beard-nominated chef and baker Melissa Weller. Known for her creative approach to comfort food at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Cafe. But that doesn’t mean they aren’t attracted to twists on nostalgic. “Our cinnamon rolls are very nostalgic,” she says. "They’re bestsellers along with our pistachio cherry croissants and bignouu- monut (cake made from bread dough). These really hit home with our guests.”
Good things come in small packages

Miniature baked goods have staying power. Smaller-sized pastries satisfy sharing among fellow diners, the chance to mix and match flavors and the opportunity to cash in on snacking occasions when consumers might not want a full-sized treat.

23 percent
Growth in mini breakfast pastries

Take it Away
Biscuits are an a.m. bright spot, reaching 13 percent of breakfast menus, a 20 percent increase over the previous four years. The rise of handheld breakfast sandwiches and Southern cuisine has driven some of the growth.

On the Menu
Inside the biscuit

Coffee braised brisket, egg, mustard greens, tomato and Dijon
Division 3, Los Angeles

Housemade chicken sausage, organic egg, cheddar and basil pesto
Bird and Biscuit, Austin, Texas

Tofu bacon, “omelette,” vegan cheese, avocado and tomato
Water Course Foods, Denver

Peanut butter, banana, honey and bacon
Wandering Goose, Seattle

Smoked sausage, cherry jam and pimento cheese
Fox Bros. Bar-B-Que, Atlanta

Fresh-baked items

Menu Must-Haves

Items that dominate

Muffins
44%

Cinnamon rolls
20%

Biscuits
13%

Scones
20%

Sweet rolls
11%

Source: Datassential

Customers willing to pay more for items baked on premise.

Fresh wins

67%

Tomorrow Morning
Consumers will continue embracing the sweeter side of breakfast:

• Proteins and protein-rich grains will become greater breakfast influencers. Expect rolls and buns to not just have plain but roasted and seasoned nuts to offer bolder flavors.

• Higher-nutrient whole grains and ancient grains—oat flour, flax meal and kamut among others—are expected to make greater inroads. They satisfy a younger generation that wants healthier foods.

• Clean label ingredients will make a greater impact to meet consumer demand for transparency. Think non-GMO grains, no artificial flavors or colors and natural ingredients.

• Salty sweet flavors are poised to make a larger impact among breakfast pastries, such as salted caramel and bacon, jumping from doughnuts to morning buns.

Morning Calls

Fresh-baked items are syncing with morning routines, meeting consumer demand for portability and quality while driving profitability into the afternoon. Muffins, cinnamon rolls, scones and biscuits not only anchor menus, they’re strongholds. Classics are beloved but baked goods also welcome innovation by way of toppings such as brown butter granola, seasonal fruit, roasted nuts and sweet and salty flavors. Sweet aromas await.

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For more inspiration and menu ideas, check out generalmills.com
Spreading the Love

Dips and spreads have moved from ‘dullsville’ to superstars on shareable appetizer menus.

LAST SEEN: Look for feta and roasted chili dip at Iron Gate in Washington D.C., and smoked mahi-mahi dip at Number 13 in Galveston, Texas.

Currying Up

Curry is muscling into American-themed menus where its spicy complexity is the new gold standard.

LAST SEEN: At NOLA’s Bywater American Bistro, you’ll find curried snapper with sticky rice, green apple and natchoum, while Washington, D.C.’s Elle revs up green goddess dressing with curry for its gem salad with lentils.

The Rind Way

Keto and gluten-free diets have given pork rinds a second life and their usefulness really gets crackin’ when they’re blitzed into a panko coating. The coating for gluten-free fried chicken can go for it, too.

LAST SEEN: Blue Dog Cafe in Lafayette, Louisiana serves cracklin’-crusted Gulf catch with gnocchi, peas, lump crab and ham, while David Burke whips up porky panko waffles.

Carry On Now

Sitting down to breakfast is so 1990. Get woke with portable foods that are on-the-run awesome.

LAST SEEN: Check out these eye-openers on page 26.

Win Tin Tin

Open a can and serve has never been smarter and, duh, easier when artisanal oil-cured seafood is inside the tin.

LAST SEEN: Tinned Seafood Platter at Brenner Pass in Richmond, Virginia, where mussels escabeche are an option. Seattle’s JarrBar serves polpo with aioli and pimiento while Boston’s Saltie Girl pairs sardines with bucheron cheese and piquillo jam.

Call a Truce

Dial back the high-minded superiority that often goes hand-in-hand with your meat and dairy-free ways.

TRY THIS INSTEAD: Train staff to embrace alternative proteins and veggies as the star. They’re not going anywhere anytime soon.

Last Seen: The Trippel at Chicago’s Farm Bar with three melted cheeses, pickled cranberries, bacon mayo on marble rye, while Bittercreek Ale House in Boise, Idaho, pairs house-ground leg and shoulder with feta, greens, jalapeño, crispy onions and tzatziki.
PLANT-BASED IS THE NEW WAY TO GROW

Dairy-free creamer sales are up 85%* — and Silk is the #1 brand consumers are looking for. Stay on top of trends, attract new customers and watch sales flourish with NEW Silk Dairy-Free Creamer Singles.

SHOWING A LITTLE LOVE TO THE SNAPCHAT AND INSTAGRAM CROWD CAN YIELD A WHOLE LOT OF FREE MARKETING BUZZ.

BY KATE BERNOT
chef Chris Coombs found a perfect spot for the second location of his restaurant Boston Chops. There was just one glitch: it had no windows, so no natural lighting.

Coombs knew that photos of his food would come out dim and pixelated. Not only would this pose challenges for in-house food photography, it would render guests’ Instagram flat and unappealing. He chose the location but built a table for photo-snapping diners by reservation only—one decked out with adjustable lights overhead and on the table’s sides.

“A lot of these serious food Instagrammers or photographers, they bring their own lighting systems to dinner, and it’s really intrusive to other diners. And that was really how the idea initially formed,” Coombs says. “We wanted to give them what they needed to take beautiful photos, but not disturb other guests.” An extreme example of catering to today’s social-media-addicted customers? Perhaps, but the logic behind the move is sound: More diners than ever are tethered to their smartphones, snapping photos and updates and posting them in real time. According to a 2017 survey by Maru/Matchbox, 69 percent of millennials snap a photo of their food before eating. And if 33 percent of customers discover new businesses through social networks, then those photos have real value.

Luckily, what the Snapchat and Instagram crowds seek from a restaurant isn’t so different from what other diners want: a memorable experience, some eye-catching details and the chance to feel special. How that’s delivered, however, makes all the difference.

▶ MAKE IT SHINE

Visually driven mediums—especially Instagram—have magnified the importance of eye-catching design features, allowing them to double as marketing tools. At Steak 48 in Chicago, a wall sheathed with vintage meat cleavers has shown up in guests’ social media posts “more than a few times,” says Oliver Badgio, chief brand officer of hospitality group Prime Steak Concepts.

Likewise for the restaurant’s elaborately displayed raw bar, which typically includes oysters, Maine lobsters, colossal shrimp and whole-chest Alaskan king crab. It’s eye-catching, sure, but social media posts also point to Steak 48’s focus on fresh ingredients and underscore that there’s more than just steak on its menu.

Strategically curated artwork can be similarly magnetic, especially when it captures a particular mood or idea. At Steak 48, striking black-and-white closeups of women wearing elegant hats upends the notion that it’s a boys’ club—only steakhouse, while at Denver’s Mister Tuna, a dynamic mural of a woman’s lips highlights the artistic nature of its industrial chic space and creative platings. When in doubt, go local or symbolic. Detroit’s Townhouse has a chalkboard-esque mural extolling the virtues of its fair city, while Fox In The Snow Cafe in Columbus, Ohio, encourages selfies in front of a wall illustration of its namesake fox.

“Our new restaurant, Taco Chelo, has been called ‘Instagram-friendly,’ and we designed it with that in mind,” says Lauren Saria, marketing director for Chamberlin Hospitality. “Our new restaurant, Taco Chelo, has been called ‘Instagram-friendly,’ and we designed it with that in mind,” says Lauren Saria, marketing director for Chamberlin Hospitality. She points to a huge red neon sign against a brick wall that reads “Taquero Mucho” as a major draw. “The neon sign was handwritten, and a lot of our furniture is custom. That adds to the space being one-of-a-kind and interesting.”

69% of millennials snap a photo of their food before eating.

33% of customers discover new businesses through social networks.

LEFT PAGE, BOTTOM: PHOTOGRAPHY BY EATERS COLLECTIVE
ALL FOOD IS PHOTO FODDER

Indulgent, colorful, fresh and whimsical food dominates photo-driven platforms. Tacos, sushi, burgers and pizza tend to be the most Instagrammed foods globally. Food can look different in a photo than in person, so consider lighting: Does your space offer enough windows or soft light sources during all times of day? Consider angles: A customer’s line of vision is a downward slope to the plate, but photo-snappers might take shots from table level, overhead or from a distance. Does your plate offer vertical and lateral intrigue? Consider the palette: Are the colors vibrant and fresh?

Then there’s the whimsy factor. There’s a thin line between novelty—doughnuts in a Chinese takeout container, say—and absurdity, so plate with your identity in mind. The tiki culture at Lost Lake in Chicago allows bartenders to go wild with fresh garnishes, swizzle sticks and umbrellas, including its iconic banana dolphin garnish. “Each of the garnishes is functional,” says co-founder Shelby Allison. “They correspond with an ingredient or produce an aroma that highlights an ingredient in the drink. And the swizzle stick is part of the grand tradition of cocktails.”

INVITE THEM IN

There’s no doubt that “Influencers” are the pinnacle of this social media triangle, with the potential to sway thousands of followers. But it’s also true that today’s upcoming Instagrammer may become one of the chief influencers of tomorrow. The solution? Treat them like they’re insiders. Consider inviting influencers to new menu rollouts or private events, says Combs. A private event lets them properly style their photos and allows the kitchen to plate each dish perfectly. If an influencer has 200,000 local followers, the right event can generate real reach.

What can’t be ignored is how important service remains, especially during regular dining hours. If your service is not on point, you’ll read about it in the caption to that gorgeous photo. “You can’t take a picture of service, but you can certainly comment about it in a caption,” Combs says. “I think if you give people a tremendous experience, they’ll reflect that in the post.”

RETHINK CELEBRITY SIGHTINGS

Not every restaurant can draw in A-list—or even B-list—celebrities, but there are benefits to inviting well-connected social media personalities, including guest chefs, bartenders or even musicians. Lost Lake brought in Elliott Clark, a Denver-based bartender and the photographer behind Instagram account @apartment_bartender, which has 50,000 followers. Clark guest-bartended for a night at Stranger In Paradise, a smaller “experimental” bar space adjacent to Lost Lake.

“We packed the house for hours,” Allison says. “I did maybe two Instagram posts promoting it, and he did some stories and posts and like 100 people came. Which to me, for so little work and promotion, was very successful.”

Meat-free your breakfast menu. Each wholesome bite has a hearty meat taste and texture made from just six ingredients. Thaw and prepare your way—from breakfast bowls to scrambles, burritos to tacos—for a flavorful, protein-packed dish that meets the growing demand for meatless.

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LOOKS LIKE MEAT.
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Contact your sales rep for more information.
When is it time to fire a bad worker?

With the growth of fast casual restaurants and unemployment at historical lows, the labor pool has grown increasingly shallow. The crackdown on undocumented workers and fewer teenage applicants also contributed. A decade ago, 45 percent of those between the ages of 16 and 19 worked in the industry. Today, it’s 30 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Keeping a poor worker based on the adage “someone is better than no one” may be a quick fix but certainly not a long term solution. Unhappy workers can alienate guests, hurt the bottom line and poison morale.

Still, how do you know when to cut the cord or try more ways to help the employee become a better work version of him or herself? In their own words, restaurant pros weigh in.

When someone stops contributing to the organization’s success and becomes a damaging factor to the company’s culture, work environment or financial performance, it is my responsibility as a leader to let that person go. We attract great talent and carefully onboard our team members, making sure they are a good fit and have all the training and tools to be successful at their job. So usually we do not come across clear-cut cases of dismissal.

We have great retention. I attribute it to being transparent about company goals, achievements and challenges. Such an approach ensures buy-in and mission to metric of most team members. Also, encouraging our employees to express themselves, challenge and state ambition.

We’re a young, dynamic and fast growing company. Roles and organizational structure have needed to adapt along with those changes. It has been my responsibility, and my own expectation of myself, to articulate these changes and transition people into new roles successfully. What decides if someone stays or not is that individual’s desire to grow professionally, adapt with the needs of the company and continue to contribute.”

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“Letting a staff member go is our least favorite thing to do as an employer and not a decision we take lightly. Our priority is to follow the law and our employees’ rights… Next, we consider the tenure of the employee and their individual circumstances. Given the nature of our business, employees are not numbers, but rather family, and we like to take a personal approach to handle each situation.

It’s important we set initial expectations upon hiring a new employee so there’s less room for confusion and error on either side. We have weekly meetings with management which then flows down directly to their staff. We have regular performance reviews with employees, offer continuing education and training, and always keep open lines of communication. We try to work through issues with employees as often as we can.

Due to a shortage of qualified employees in the market, we work even closer with our new hires to try to prevent issues and be proactive when an issue arises. We have probably been more lenient over the years for this reason. It’s been key to create long-term connections with the employees to ensure retention along with competitive financial compensation.”
MOLLY HOPPER SANDROF
Director of People and Staff Development for Garrett Harker’s restaurant group in Boston
Backstory: Handles human resources at Eastern Standard, Row 34, Island Creek Oyster Bar, The Hawthorne and the Branch Line.

“We never want terminations to be a surprise to the employee or any fellow managers. To achieve this outcome, we use very measured approaches of course correction, communication (both verbal and written) and documentation.

We do train all managers on delivering feedback and coaching. When coaching an employee, we often encourage that two managers sit with an employee. This helps the employee receive two perspectives and may remove personality conflicts between two people.

We discuss expectations with the individual during the hiring process, as part of onboarding, throughout training and at the conclusion of training. Then, we act swiftly if an employee seems to not understand the expectations associated with their position.

We use every tool at our disposal to help an employee work through issues. These tools could include additional training, support from other managers, change in schedule or area of responsibility, access to appropriate counselors or professionals and also the opportunity to define their own strategy for solving problems.”

—Molly Hopper Sandrof

TRAVIS CHRISTOPHERSON
Director of Operations for Levy Restaurants at Ravinia Festival in Highland Park, Illinois
Backstory: More than 20 years in restaurants and health and wellness, opening Applebee’s restaurants and Lifetime Fitness clubs.

Before you go down that road, make sure you’ve given that person every opportunity to succeed. I look at it from two areas. Have they quit the job and keep showing up or are they engaged in what they are supposed to be doing?

The other thing I look at is have you done your job as a manager or a leader to be successful? Is this employee damaging the overall team? Is working with the employee an addition or subtraction? Is the time you’re spending taking away from the business and hurting it? Are you going to be losing respect as a manager if you carry someone along who isn’t performing?

There are so many measurable components to our business. Look at performance: how are the prime costs going? How are sales going? Looking at the nuts and bolts of the business and what’s affecting costs is a real indicator.

The numbers don’t lie; they tell a story. For example, if the employee is a bar manager, is he struggling with costs? Put a plan and start impacting the numbers of where you fall short. If you don’t see an increase in effort or an interest in improving that’s when you make that decision.

—Travis Christopherson

“Due to the shortage of qualified employees, we work even closer with our new hires...”

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Irene Li is a rising star. Since starting Mei Mei, a food truck specializing in Chinese-American eats, with her siblings in 2012, her business has grown to include a thriving brick-and-mortar restaurant and a sauce company. Numerous accolades followed; Eater named Mei Mei Boston Restaurant of the Year and Zagat anointed Li with a spot on its national 30 Under 30 list.

Her secret weapon? A strong organizational culture that clearly communicates its mission, while offering fair compensation, employee training and loyalty-building incentives.

“Thirty years ago, restaurant culture was a very corporate idea,” says Salar Sheik, owner of Savory Hospitality Restaurant Consulting in Los Angeles. “An owner or general manager would take a class and come out saying, ‘OK, we’re going to implement a culture.’ Now everyone is establishing a specific culture from the very beginning—even an ice cream shop with only five employees—because it reflects on their product and their customers.”

Sheik says 80 to 90 percent of problems he solves for clients can be traced to an “I-don’t-give-a-damn” culture. A nurturing, growth-focused ethos, by contrast, can yield a variety of enduring dividends.

By codifying and creatively communicating its simple yet powerful creed—“a better way to source ingredients, and a better way to employ people”—Mei Mei in Boston has evolved from an upstart food truck operation into a multidimensional business.

Mei Mei distills its core values into a two-part creed: “A better way to source ingredients, and a better way to employ people.” In practice, this translates into locally sourced, sustainable ingredients and ethical labor practices.

“When we conduct interviews, we always ask people why they want to come work here,” Li says. “They need to have a compelling answer—one that aligns with those values. We end up attracting highly educated, passionate people who are looking for a different type of restaurant experience.”

Loyalty tends to follow. Li’s staff members typically stay a year or longer, while her three most-senior employees have been at the restaurant all five years.

Sheik says, “Every restaurant should have a mission statement, as a guideline for management. But don’t overuse that language—if it’s repeated ad nauseam at the end of every team meeting, it becomes meaningless.”
A few years ago, Mei Mei instituted an open-book restaurant-management training program for all staff. Once a week, the entire staff meets for a class that teaches basic business practices, including how to read Mei Mei’s profit-and-loss statements. The system teaches valuable skills, while making employees feel more invested in the restaurant. “So often in restaurants, it feels like the owner or the management versus the employees, and that’s not a smart way to run a team,” Li says. Employees can see firsthand how much money goes toward covering the business’s high costs and debt—as opposed to the owners’ pockets.

Li’s open-book management system also makes running inventive incentive programs easier. Her “Cost of Goods Challenge” asks employees to negotiate better prices with suppliers. Should the restaurant exceed its healthy profit target for the year, a profit-sharing plan kicks in, and additional profits are split equally among all employees. Dishwashers receive the same cut as managers, which motivates everyone to contribute. “We reward them for the money saved in the short-term, and the business continues to save money in the long-term,” Li says.

**Culture Shock**

*Tips for creating a positive restaurant culture.*

**Be Holistic**
Fund compensation plans that enable full-time employees to lead healthy, well-rounded lives by providing health insurance, paid vacation and paid parental leave. Good benefits often translate to better performance.

**Mix It Up**
To gain buy-in, schedule vendor talks and farm trips so that employees know they’re investing in them.

**Get Organized**
Consider organizing activities, like a designated coffee and pastry hour, so that the front and back of the house can get to know one another.

**Be Available**
Owners should make their presence felt during group meetings, not only to make themselves available for questions but to forge personal bonds.

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The Dakotas

Those born and bred in North and South Dakota are accustomed to an outsider’s lack of knowledge about what makes our plains great. We’re hardy outdoor people whose favorite foods align with our way of life: ice fishing, snowboarding and embracing the elements. Once you get a taste of what our locals know, you’ll wonder why the Dakotas are under the radar.

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As a North Dakotan, I always think of chislic, a South Dakota food, that started out as a way to use tough mutton by cubing and deep-frying it. Served with just about any kind of sauce, it’s a menu staple but only within South Dakota. Though the background of both states makes these states unique, you’ll wonder why the Dakotas are under the radar.

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Get a mouthful from our resident expert.

FOOD FANATICS

Chefs: Jared Thor Larson

Iva Food Fanatics chef/owners

US Foods is from North Dakota, just below the Canadian border. Land to table has always been a way of life.

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Plug with a Purpose
How to share, not shove, your restaurant values

BY ALISON GRANT
At Spice Kitchen + Bar in Cleveland, owner Ben Bebenroth’s social and environmental values are on visual display as customers walk from the parking lot into the restaurant. The 40-seat patio is lined with open-air shelving, holding pots of Thai basil, wild marjoram and borage; flats of pea shoots and micro-greens; young apple trees and beds of strawberries.

Spice is among the next generation of restaurants that believe in transparency by putting ecologically sustainable and moral practices at the center of their business model. They practice “hyper-localism, buy non-GMO products, believe in the ethical treatment of farm animals and hire staff that subscribe to their values. It’s an approach that particularly appeals to millennials and Generation Z, who make purchasing decisions and become brand loyal to businesses with similar do-good core values.

Conveying such principles, however, can be tricky.

Too heavy of a message can be a turnoff for customers. “Some people come here for the politics,” Bebenroth says. “Some just come for the polenta fries.”

Furthermore, some restaurants blithely adopt terms such as “sustainability” for a gloss of environmental concerns without actually employing many Earth-friendly practices.

If you’re the real deal, how can you show your authentic self to customers who are interested in knowing?

Use Your Website to Carry the Message

Check out the “Philosophy” drop-down link on Honey Butter Fried Chicken’s site, and you’ll find the source for ingredients, how the food is prepared and served and who’s cooking it. “So when you eat our chicken, our sides and desserts, we hope you’ll spend some time thinking about the ideas behind every bite,” the Chicago restaurant says.

Website visitors learn that the chicken is humanely raised, antibiotic-free and comes from an Amish farm in Indiana. The staff has health insurance and fair wages. Packaging from straw to chicken bones is compostable and biodegradable. The single largest capital investment is a closed-loop fryer that recovers used frying oil that is later converted into biodiesel fuel.

On its website, Chipotle pledges it will slum GMO ingredients and uses vegetables “grown in healthy soil” and pork from pigs “allowed to freely root and roam.”

“The key to being transparent is making sure our customers can get the exact information they want, whether that is information about what is in the food, its nutritional value, or the stories behind some of our suppliers,” spokeswoman Quinn Kelsey says. “Our website and app contain it all.”

Back Up Claims with Numbers

Common Roots Cafe buys as much product as possible from local farms. And it provides the details.

“The Minneapolis-based restaurant publishes a pie chart every month that shows the portion of local sourced (within 250 miles of the cafe, organic, fair trade, sustainable seafood and conventional ingredients), while an interactive map identifies its vendors.”

“T’ll like to see more accountability in the market,” owner Danny Schwartzman says. “One of the things that frustrates me is ‘green washing’ and ‘local washing,’ says. “One of the things that frustrates me is ‘green washing’ and ‘local washing,’ intentional or not.”

Communicate the Values In-house

Spice puts a map of its companion farm, Spice Acres, on the menu. It reinforces the restaurant’s message to the customer and staff. A diagram that shows the plots for asparagus and raspberries, the location of fig trees, mushroom beds, laying hens and beehives, all of which is 21 miles from the front door of the restaurant. The motto “From our farm to your plate” accompanies the map.

Honey Butter stresses good pay—$13 an hour for servers—health insurance, paid parental leave and profit-sharing for its employees. So it tells customers, via a sign at the ordering counter, “No need to Tip! We’re paid and treated to lunch for their time. We’re committed to a half day at Spice Acres. They’re paid and treated to lunch for their time. The server you’re talking to may have weeded that row of radish,” Bebenroth says. “That’s one way we tell our story.”

Play the Long Game

“The majority of customers come to the restaurant because they want to eat fried chicken with honey butter on it,” co-founder and owner Christine Cikowski says. “But we try to use it as an opportunity to educate our customers about why we’re running the business the way we are, and why they should also support us for that and not just because we have delicious food.”

At Spice, immersing staff in the trenches helps reinforces the message. New hires commit to a half day at Spice Acres. They’re paid and treated to lunch for their time. “The server you’re talking to may have weeded that row of radish,” Bebenroth says. “That’s one way we tell our story.”

For common terms on promoting social and health values, visit USfoods.com/foodfanatics
Socially Aware
Does your online presence rate?
BY RENEE BACHER

B y now you should accept the fact that a social presence online is as important as the one at your restaurant. But are you making the most of the channels connecting your brand to current and potential customers? While you think of ways to make a bigger impact in the New Year, consider these tried-and-true best practices from restaurant industry influencers.

Do Facebook, Instagram and Yelp

The most important social media platforms for chefs and owners to maintain are Instagram (800 million users), Facebook (2.19 billion monthly active users) and Yelp (75 million average monthly desktop unique visitors), says Alessandra “Ahs” Madrid, director of marketing for Pythian Market, a food hall in New Orleans.

No matter how good your menu reads on your website, she says, “people crave things after they see them.” Madrid recommends posting at least once a day on both Instagram and Facebook, for Instagram post relevant hashtags; produce two to three Instagram “stories” daily, tagging your business location to expand your reach.

She likes Facebook because it’s visual and allows for reviews, while Yelp ensures your restaurant’s information is accurate and up to date. And if you have a blog, all social media accounts should drive visitors there.

Be Authentic

Pastry Chef Scott Green, formerly of Travelle Kitchen + Bar in Chicago, has amassed 30,000 followers on Instagram (@chef Scott green) in part because he posts images of desserts he actually serves, not super shiny and overtly glossy dishes created just for the camera. “This is not (just) a visual craft,” he says. “Food is meant to be eaten.”

Use a Scheduling Tool

“We love Later,” says marketing director Natasha Miller, who runs the social media accounts for The Meatball Shop in New York City, which has 59,900 followers on Instagram (@meatballers). “You can schedule Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at once, which is a big help.”

In addition, chefs and owners developing their brand should post about life outside their restaurants. Miller encourages founders to post about openings, events and personal campaigns, while chefs can focus on what they’re eating and cooking, as well as their travels. “Chefs are experts and their audience wants to learn from and be inspired by them,” she says.

Continually Strategize

Visually, images should be consistent and complementary. Miller suggests reviewing two weeks of Instagram posts to ensure images tell a story and reflect a restaurant’s identity. “At The Meatball Shop, humor is a key part of our brand, so we like to have fun, hence all the ball jokes,” Miller says.

“but we also want our guests to learn about the high quality ingredients we use and the integrity behind our cooking.” Also consider creating curated hashtags across accounts, says Bullfrog + Baum Digital Director Arthur Bovino. “Repeating words and slogans is just good marketing, no matter the decade.”

Train Wait Staff to be Social Media Savvy

Knowing whether your social media efforts are paying off can be tricky, but Bovino argues that tracking engagement with key influencers is a good barometer. “Analytics can also be a well-trained wait staff,” he says. “Do people come in asking for things you’re posting on social media? Are you turning dissatisfied customers into repeat visitors or, at least, making sure they don’t turn into permanent negative brand ambassadors?”

Be Engaging

Post specials and hashtag the names and dishes you post, but don’t use social media for blatant marketing pitches, which can get you unfollowed. Try responding to good and bad reviews alike (be generous and solicitative with the latter, asking people for another shot), try the poll feature on Instagram by asking lighthearted questions, like “Life’s short. Eat this dessert first? Yes or no.” And don’t be boring. “Don’t be afraid to ‘go live,’ but don’t abuse it either,” says Executive Chef Piyarat Potha Arreeratn (aka Chef Bee) who has 33,000 followers on Instagram (@beesm). “No one cares that the post office line is extra-long today.”

Only Post Quality Photos

The new iPhone profile photo feature makes food pop, while blurring the background, so there’s no excuse for posting shoddy images. “Don’t post dark or blurry photos,” says Miller. “It doesn’t matter how much you love the dish, no one wants to look at that.” Natural lighting usually works best with iPhone photography, but if you can afford a professional photographer, or even a digital SLR camera and one umbrella light, do it.
Get Out?

Seven deadly signs that a restaurant may be on its last legs

BY MEGAN ROWE

The failure rate for restaurants is notoriously high—up to 70 percent, depending on the source. So it’s hardly headline news when a spot shutters, except for the shocked staff who had no clue. A lifeless dining room is an obvious red flag, but plenty of subtler clues can signal that a restaurant is on shaky ground. Do you ride it out or jump ship?
1. A SHRINKING STAFF
If you’re in the back of the house, keep track of layoffs or defections in the front of the house. Servers and managers are a key bellwether. Servers will bolt if their numbers—and thus their income—starts shrinking. When managers begin talking about “looking elsewhere” and “making do with less,” know that difficult days are likely ahead for everyone.

Maybe I should stay: Management goes back to the basics, educating its staff and stressing that small things can add up to big gains. “A problem meal can be overlooked if the staff are empowered to solve the problem on the spot to ensure satisfaction,” says Roger Beaudoin, whose Restaurant Rockstars consulting service specializes in restaurant finance and service training.

4. BEWARE THE PHRASE “MINIMAL SERVICE”
When everyday restaurants start “strategically” shutting down one or two days a week, there’s often nothing strategic about it. Taking days off or choosing to close earlier or open later—especially when it’s antithetical to the hours stated on a website—sends a bad message. Staff members know they’re going to take a pay cut, and customers will notice, both online and with friends, any restaurant that can’t keep set hours.

Maybe I should stay: Some restaurants—especially new ones—don’t have the demand to justify staying open for longer hours, seven days a week. And sometimes they overstaff. The owner might just be finding the right balance.

5. DEALS THAT NEVER DIE
An occasional meal deal or Groupon offer is one thing, but a continuous wave of freebies is often a debilitating crutch for cash-strapped operators. “When restaurants turn to aggressive discounting, it becomes kind of a drug,” says Yana Busjuy, account director with Marlo Marketing, a New York and Boston-based marketing agency. “Sales might go up for that month, but once the offer expires, sales are down again.”

Maybe I should stay: Management invests in a marketing strategy or PR push that doesn’t feel desperate. These can be as simple as penning a narrative about your chef’s experience, creating a new menu section or trying thematic bar offerings.

6. OWNER NO-SHOWS
When hands-on owners become conspicuously absent, trouble is often brewing. “A lot of small restaurants don’t necessarily have a bookkeeper—the owner handles it. And if you don’t keep up with your accounting, you can get behind the eight ball very quickly,” says Small.

Maybe I should stay: If an operator shows a willingness to identify critical problems by touching tables, tasting the food and holding regular staff meetings to absorb the feedback, he’s still in the game. More than one restaurant has flirted with closing before finding lasting success.

7. MONITOR YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS
Disastrous Yelp ratings or a trail of critical comments on Facebook can kill a once-thriving restaurant. Unfortunately, by the time a negative review appears, the fire has probably been smoldering for some time. “When you catch a problem, it’s generally something that happened a month or two ago,” says Johan Engman, founder and owner of Rise & Shine Restaurant Group in Southern California. “Sometimes it takes a while to rectify it because you need to win back customers.”

Maybe I should stay: An owner who heeds the critics and rights wrongs is worth sticking with, particularly if that means improving service and the menu through training or better management.
If a single unifying thread could sum up restaurant design for 2019, it would be authenticity.

Consider what’s in: Green, both the color and the movement, is big. Nontraditional seating—mixed and more communal—continues to grow in popularity. Less will be more, or even less will be even more, as long as you avoid the overused “minimalist” tag.

Retro remains in. The ’80s are growing in influence, but mid-century modern is still king. Warm woods and vibrant colors will be everywhere, inviting diners to linger in versatile spaces that can assume different identities as day edges into night.

“There is definitely a trend toward more authenticity and lighter, brighter, airier spaces,” says Caroline Grant, co-founder of New York-based Dekar Design, “nothing overly designed or gimmicky.”

Many of the hottest trends in 2019 will continue to blur the line between restaurant and residential design—a perk for owners, as they are comparatively affordable. Plants cost less than marble or artwork, and cherry-picked vintage or refashioned pieces can convey personality and comfort with minimal investment.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

After six years of seating guests in a dining room meant to resurrect the spirit of a 1920s Parisian salon at Found in Evanston, Illinois, Amy Morton opted for a makeover last spring. “I wanted it to be me,” she says. “The spaces that speak to me are the ones that grew out of someone.”

Found’s makeover, says Morton, is “Jackie O meets The Beatles in India.” Palm-print wallpaper greets diners, vibrant textiles cover the walls and seven bright lotus flowers are painted on the ceilings above the bar. And when the summer breeze arrives, Morton can open the large windows facing downtown Evanston and invite the outside in.

Morton has a story for each design element, anecdotes that servers can share with diners to forge a more personal connection. “I wanted to take it down a notch in formality,” Morton says, “so people know it’s OK to just come in for a drink or some oysters, or to eat at the bar.”

GO WITH COMFORT

At Rosemary’s, a seasonal Italian spot that opened in the West Village of New York City in 2012, Dekar Design imported the ambiance of an Italian piazza via rich woods, rustic tables, benches and chairs, plus strings of outdoor lights. For its new sister restaurant, Rosemary’s Pizza, which opened last summer, Grant and Dekar co-founder Dolores Suarez took an even more casual approach, creating a residential feel in an old brownstone that boasts a wood-burning oven and a long banquette with colorful throw pillows. The open, airy space oozes comfort and simplicity, without pretension anywhere.
Go workplace chic

Keep tabs on the evolution of office space designs, as mobile professionals may be embracing the idea of turning restaurants into temporary workspaces.

Consider Spacious, a company in New York and San Francisco, that turns dinner-only restaurants into a shared work area during the day by supplying a host, coffee, powerful Wi-Fi and meeting space, all for a monthly fee.

These deals offer additional revenue streams when they’re dark. But the hope is that workers will stick around for happy-hour drinks or a meal as the space transitions back into a restaurant.

“A lot more owners are interested in having multifaceted experiences in one space, so can I make this a cafe by day and a bar by night or create a grab-and-go area in the front of the restaurant that in the evening becomes a display,” says Jeremy Levitt, co-founder of Parts and Labor Design.

Levitt says his firm considered how such mixed-use projects might impact the public space at The Evelyn Hotel in Manhattan, which offers a bakery, fine dining and a large lounge.

And he expects many concepts to follow suit.

“Restaurants are becoming more approachable, and there’s less in the way of serious fine dining,” Levitt says. “It’s a more casual approach to really great food.”

Problem: Menu is tired and needs a jolt. Change can be good, but longtime loyal customers may not be receptive.

Solution: Pair familiar favorites with on-trend accents. If you offer a steak or roast chicken, for example, top it off with a butter infused with bold Indian spices or wrapped with miso or ssamjang, a Korean paste. That same butter also could be tossed with grilled or roasted vegetables.

Problem: Younger workers aren’t responding to incentives.

Solution: Do your incentives speak to them? According to surveys, younger workers have a shorter attention span than millennials. Not surprisingly, they respond better to immediate gratification. Ensure incentives, whether they’re monetary rewards, discounts for dining or schedule preferences, come sooner rather than later.

Benefit: Understanding what matters most to your workers leads to better performance and a stronger commitment to the job.

Problem: Customers are complaining about the quality of delivery-food isn’t warm, containers leak. Are delivery services all that different?

Solution: Before you dump your current delivery system, look at what your packaging. How does it rank in quality? What menu items are getting the most complaints? After evaluating the materials, determine whether the size of the containers is the right fit for the amount of food.

Benefit: With the growth of off-premise dining, it’s good business sense to shore up any deficiencies in that area. Ultimately, food quality will more likely have a greater impact on the restaurant.

Problem: Posting on social media isn’t yielding results.

Solution: Develop a results-minded social media strategy by identifying goals, whether it’s increasing dessert sales or calling out new drink specials. Posting photos of beer when customers are familiar with your selection won’t generate engagement. Also use ad-targeting features to pinpoint and refine your desired demographics.

Benefit: Goal-minded posts make it possible to track whether the effort was successful and to adjust your strategy accordingly. Before every post, ask yourself the question: “What will this picture, video or sentence accomplish for me and my business?”

Problem: Automation, such as kiosk ordering and hand-held tablets point of sales. These options aren’t new, but the choices are better today and warrant another look.

Solution: Automation, such as kiosk ordering and hand-held tablets point of sales. These options aren’t new, but the choices are better today and warrant another look.

Benefit: Lower labor cost, fewer employees serving more customers and faster and more efficient service. The upfront costs are offset when staff and customers are comfortable with the change. Fully commit with ongoing training and clear directions to guests.

DO WORKPLACE CHIC

Ray Chung, director of design at The Johnson Studio at Cooper Curley, says his firm has been incorporating more greenery into its restaurant designs, whether it’s a wall lined with plants at Prato Italian Gastropub in Winter Park, Florida, or a project underway in the Catskills that incorporates two large trees into the dining room. Bringing in visual reminders of the farm-to-table movement not only reflects diners’ increased interest in health and sustainability, says Chung, but also offers a bakery, fine dining and a large lounge.

Parts and Labor Design.

GO WORKPLACE CHIC

GO WORKPLACE CHIC

GO WORKPLACE CHIC
Be efficient and tech savvy at the same time

**Show Us the Money**

Are pay-to-play reservations and booking services here to stay?

**BY MIN CASEY**

Asking diners to open their wallet before sitting down to a meal is becoming more common. But many diners still need convincing.

Milwaukee restaurateur Dan Jacobs understands the crippling effects of no-shows and last-minute cancellations. By securing reservations with advanced payments or deposits on meals, online booking platforms such as Resy and Tock are eliminating one of the costliest variables in running a restaurant.

When Jacobs and his partner, Dan Van Rite, opened EsterEv, he turned to Tock to secure advance payment for its 40 seats. Within months, however, the restaurant reverted to OpenTable, whose online reservation system also offers marketing muscle and collects data about diners like Resy, Yelp and Reserve.

"Paying in advance was not what our guests wanted," Jacobs notes. "I'd love it if we evolve to where we can go back to Tock, but you can't ignore customers."

Restaurateur Nick Kokonas, who revolutionized the industry when he introduced Tock in 2014, says Milwaukee—or any city—is ready for Tock's capabilities, including instances where up-front cash is part of the pact. While its 600 restaurant clients are dwarfed by the 45,000 that use Priceline-owned OpenTable, he says that a vastly improved product, high degree of restaurant-controlled customization and 24/7 customer service will continue to drive growth around the world.

**On the Clock**

The good news for Tock is that some high-profile restaurants, including French Laundry, Eleven Madison Park—as well as Alinea, The Aviary and Next, of which Kokonas is a partner—use Tock. Sports fans and concert-goers pre-purchase tickets and agree to non-refundable contracts, so why not restaurants? Tock's system comes with advantages: no-shows are virtually nonexistent, while food purchasing/prep and staffing can be controlled as the number of covers is known. Plus, money is banked before guests walk in the door.

Pre-payments are only one option on Tock. Clients also can choose industry-standard bookings or deposits that are applied later to the diner's tab. Kokonas says that pre-paid reservations represent only a sliver of the business, making sense only when demand for tables exceeds supply—i.e. red-hot restaurants with prix fixe menus. "A restaurant that often has empty seats would not be the right candidate," he cautions.

With roughly 2,500 U.S. restaurant clients, Resy holds a middle ground, size-wise, between OpenTable and Tock; it pins growth to e-capabilities on its website and app.

Launched last spring, a revamped site and app allow guests to book more simply. For operators, an inventory optimization program "helps minimize gaps between reservations," says a company spokesperson—in other words, fill tables at all hours. Resy, too, offers pre-pays and deposits as options and like Tock, it has a waitlist option that can help fill tables when reservations are canceled.

Flexibility among such platforms is important, such as allowing the diner to apply the deposit when a missed reservation is rebooked, considering the cost of OpenTable's $1 per reservation charge.

**Up with Down Payments**

Christopher Muller, professor of the practice at Boston University’s School of Hospitality Administration, says technology is driving change. "We’re the industry that stands with arms outstretched saying, ‘Come in, come in.’ We do it for free. Hotels and airlines don’t, and that helps consumers accept it from restaurants."

This summer, Tock struck a partnership with Chase and Chase Pay that Kokonas says will extend reach and raise visibility. The company also picked up McDonald’s as a client, not for its burgers and fries but for special events at its new Chicago headquarters, a sign that the times may, indeed, be a-changin’. ■
Mediterranean wines are ready to bust out the Mediterranean are due for a breakout year. "We’re seeing a real growth in demand," says Annette Gebre, beverage director at Estiatorio Milos in Las Vegas. "People are really interested in wines that are different, that are unique, and that stand out." Gebre is one of a growing number of beverage directors across the country who are embracing Mediterranean wines as a way to add excitement and variety to their wine lists.

"The key to selling Mediterranean wines is to really engage with guests, to have a conversation with them," says Gebre. "We want people to feel like they’re being transported to Tel Aviv, that they’re getting a complete Israeli dining experience." Gebre recommends starting with relatively inexpensive wines, like a Domaine Ouled Thaleb white blend from underappreciated Mediterranean producers. She says something like a Domaine Ouled Thaleb white blend (Farah Alzaher) with its subtle citrus notes, works as a weightier substitute for a typical French Sauvignon blanc. And Slovenian whites—perhaps a Burja Estate blend like its Bela—marry well with asparagus, nut butters and vegetable-centric flatbreads. "The fun part," says Gebre, "is when guests turn around and look at you, and say, ‘I had no idea it would be this good!’"

HOW TO TALK UP THE REGION

1. **Spin a yarn,** whether it’s about the volcanic terroir of Sicily or the ancient wine-making heritage of places like Turkey, Israel and Palestine.
2. **Compare wines on the list with more traditional or highly coveted varietals,** e.g. try framing agiorgitiko as a dry merlot.
3. **Tap into the “natural wines” trend** by highlighting how producers limit sulfur, rarely inoculate and adhere to organic or biodynamic guidelines.
4. **Project knowledge and confidence.** If servers know what they’re selling and offer short descriptors, it’s often a done deal.

If one of the oldest and oft-quoted maxims of the wine world—“what grows together, goes together”—is still trustworthy, then coastal wines of the Mediterranean are due for a breakout year.
Pose the question, “what did you drink yesterday?” and 64 percent will say coffee compared to 56 percent who prefer unflavored bottled water and 49 percent who choose tap water, according to a National Coffee Association survey.

Coffee is hot but not just in your cup.

WHEN COLD IS HOT

486%
Growth of cold brew coffee
Source: Datassential, increase over the last four years.

HOW DO YOU TAKE YOUR COFFEE?

93%
Growth of Mexican coffee

87%
Growth of pumpkin-flavored coffee

75%
Growth of ginger-flavored coffee

68%
Growth of almond-flavored coffee

59%
Growth of Vietnamese coffee

39%
Growth of caramel-flavored coffee

31%
Growth of coffee desserts on menus
Source: Datassential, increase over the last four years on dessert menus.

COFFEE MUCH?

64%
People who say they drank coffee the previous day

57%
Source: National Coffee Association annual survey of 3,000 respondents.

FOR THE RIGHT WAY

50%
Growth of coffee rubs on food, such as pork or chicken
Source: Datassential, increase over the last four years.

44%
Millennials who drink coffee, making up the largest group of coffee drinkers
Source: National Coffee Association annual survey of 3,000 respondents.

WHEN YOU SELECT BREW, YOU SELECT SATISFACTION.

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