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2. Excluding Nonfat Cookies N' Cream, Nonfat Creamy Mint Cookie, Nonfat Maple Bacon Donut.

3. Mintel, Ice Cream And Frozen Novelties—US—July 2012.

4. Lin, Liza and Livesey, Ben. "Danone Raises Mengniu Stake Amid China Food Safety Concerns,"

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-02-11/danone-buys-shares-in-china-s-mengniu-raising-stake-to-9-9-.html>. Accessed Oct. 10, 2014.

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 SUMMER 2015



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FALL OFF THE BONE BARBECUE

PAGE 8

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Who are these people?

Writers who know the business like no one's business might be as dogged and passionate as the restaurant people they cover. Our latest contributors are called out here.

Kate Bernot ditched the Midwest for Phoenix to cover beer trends as the associate editor of DRAFT Magazine. Previously, she was a newspaper reporter and freelance writer specializing in cocktails and spirits. She consumes solid food, too, especially if it requires chopsticks. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @kbernot.



Mike Sula is the lead restaurant critic at the Chicago Reader. He's written about politics, crime, film, health care and paleontology. His work has been published in Harper's, Eater and NPR's The Salt blog. Not to brag, but he's a recipient of the James Beard MF Fisher Distinguished Writing award. Find him @MikeSula on Twitter.



Anthony Todd leads a double life, working as a lawyer and food writer. His stints in culinary coverage include the Chicagoist, Tasting Table and the Chicago Sun-Times. He's obsessed with crafting the perfect Vieux Carre and has never met an oyster he wouldn't slurp. Follow him on Twitter @foodieanthony.



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FOOD

Turn up the heat on these trends

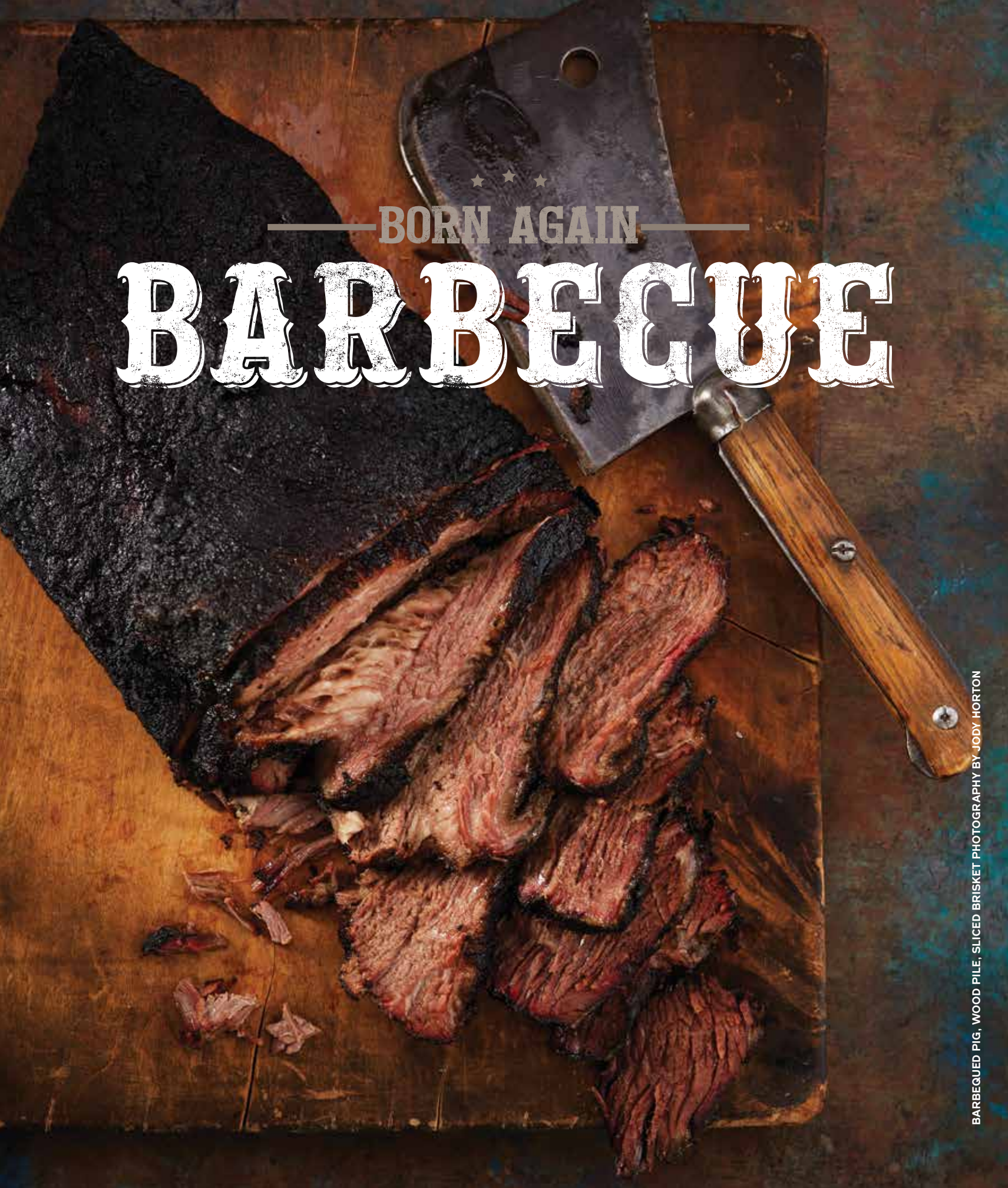
Smoked Out

Chefs reinterpret the art of barbecue

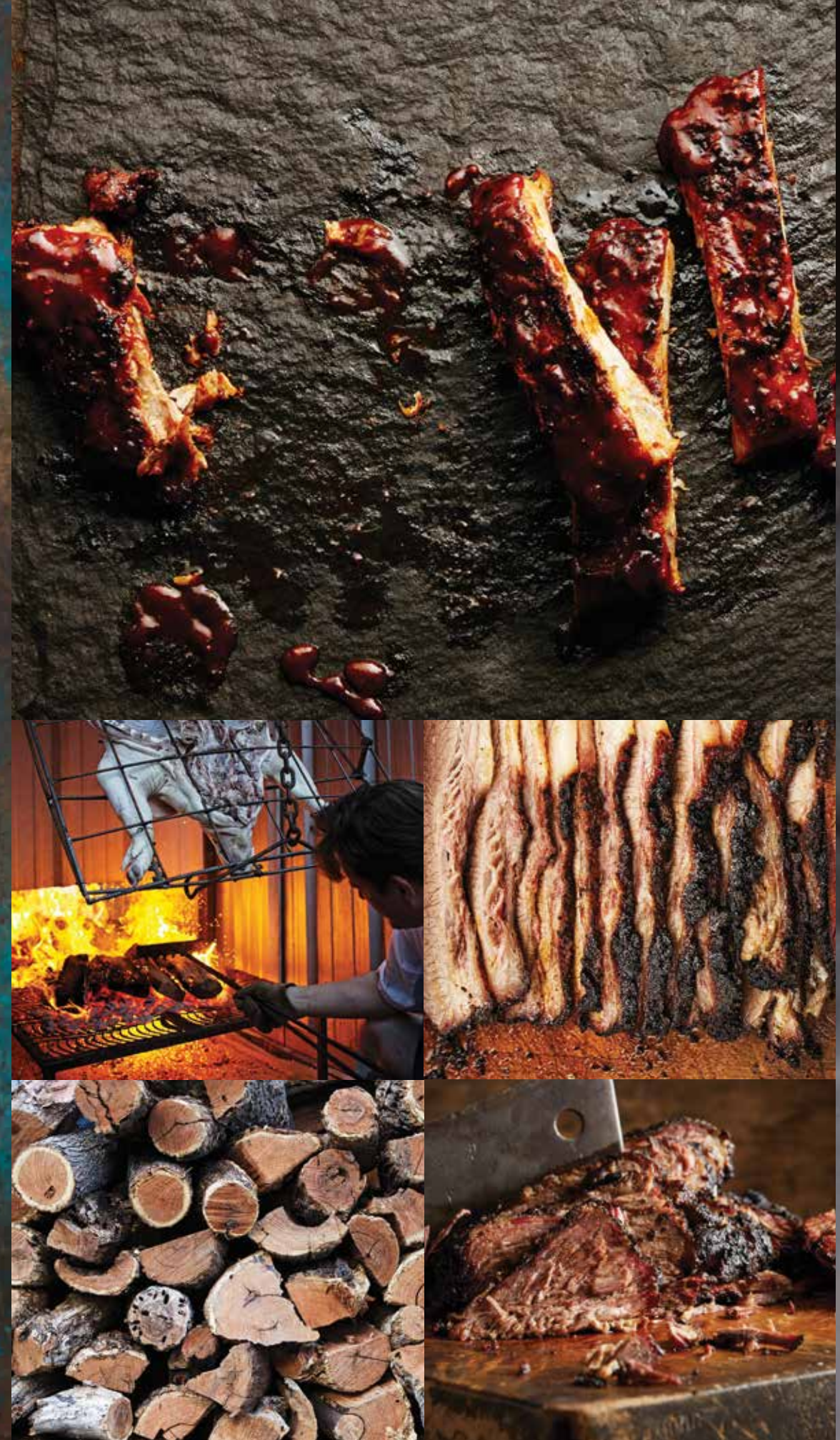


— BORN AGAIN —

BARBECUE



BARBEQUED PIG, WOOD PILE, SLICED BRISKET PHOTOGRAPHY BY JODY HORTON



A SMOKY AWAKENING IS CHANGING NOTIONS OF AN AMERICAN FAVORITE

BY MIKE SULA

EVERYBODY BELIEVES THAT THE BARBECUE THEY WERE BORN INTO IS THE BEST. BE IT TEXAS BRISKET, MEMPHIS RIBS OR CAROLINA WHOLE HOG, THE MAGIC THAT HAPPENS WHEN SMOKE MEETS MEAT INSPIRES FIERCE REGIONAL LOYALTIES.

But several chefs, many with fine dining cred, are taking cues from barbecue legends, tinkering with tradition and building a barbecue renaissance. They're smoking unconventional meats, offering creative sides and starting unique regional traditions in places where there were none before.

"There's definitely a trend toward people cooking more American regional food," says Tanya Holland, chef-owner of Brown Sugar Kitchen and B-Side BBQ in Oakland, California. "(It's) trying to find local inspiration as opposed to going outside the country."

Self-styled Barbecue

Holland opened B-Side three years ago because she says she couldn't find good barbecue in the Bay Area, though the neighborhood was once a thriving barbecue row. Her approach is different from those long-gone takeout joints, offering table service, a craft cocktail program and a broad-minded approach to barbecue.

A classically trained chef, Holland calls her way with wood and fire Oakland-style barbecue. The menu features items such as gingery, stout-sauced Dark & Stormy St. Louis ribs, jerk spice-rubbed baby backs and, for the vegetarians, tofu nuggets braised in barbecue sauce.

In Washington, D.C., Chef-owner Rob Sonderman combined his fine dining past with his love for barbecue to create DCity Smokehouse, a six-seat takeout spot that gained a fierce following after opening in 2013.

"In D.C., there are people from all over the country," he says. "So that's why I try to offer brisket for the people who are from Texas, and ribs for the people who [are] from Kansas or Memphis, and pulled pork for the people from the Carolinas," says Sonderman, who has pit master among his credentials.

Sandwiches figure prominently at DCity Smokehouse. Sonderman stacks chopped brisket and red chili coleslaw on a potato bun as well as chopped pork, cheddar and jack cheese and crispy fried onions. Then there's smoked turkey and pork belly with smashed avocado, tomatoes, chipotle aioli and cilantro ranch on Texas toast. He also sells meat by the pound or the rack, always with sauce on the side.

Everywhere is Barbecue Country

Traditionally, smoking meat was a way of making tougher, more unpalatable cuts tender, delicious and preservable. If you had cows and oak trees, you smoked brisket. If you had pigs and hickory, you smoked pulled pork and ribs. "You bloom where you're planted," says Chef Tim Byres, who owns Smoke in Dallas and Plano, Texas.

Today, chefs in regions with no history of barbecue are making it with the resources they have on hand. Blue Smoke, which has two locations in New York, works with hickory, maple and oak. At Fette Sau in Brooklyn, owner Joe Carroll uses white oak, maple and beechwood, which are native to the region and impart sweetness to the meat.

"I wasn't looking to do Memphis ribs or Texas brisket," Carroll says. "I wanted it to be its own thing. I wanted it to speak to a northeast sensibility; take the technique of barbecue and put it into a vernacular that somebody in New York would understand without much explanation."

So while the counter service operation might look familiar to anyone who's visited classic central Texas barbecue markets like Smitty's or Kreuz Market, Fette Sau also operates like a New York deli. Smoking beef cheeks, pastrami and local Italian sausages helps bring it home, too.

Texas-born Cody Taylor and wife (and former K-Pop star) Jiyeon Lee prove there's no limit to what goes in a smoker and comes out barbecue. They draw on their respective cultures at Heirloom Market BBQ in Atlanta, rubbing pork with the Korean chili paste gochujang and injecting brisket with miso, which adds salinity and tenderizes.

At Austin's Freedmen's, in the heart of Texas barbecue country, Evan LeRoy smokes beets for a starter, bananas for pudding, oranges for cocktails and tomatoes for Bloody Mary mix, all alongside his briskets, ribs, chickens and pork shoulders.

Where There's Smoke, There's a Smoker

Different types of smokers are used for barbecue. In Texas, it's typically a horizontal indirect heat pit with a firebox separated from the cooking chamber and a chimney for exhaust. At Freedmen's, LeRoy uses two smokers made from 500-gallon propane tanks.

Wood-fueled vertical smokers feature large cabinets with a box at the base to build the fire and rotisserie racks to rotate the meat.

Green Street Smoked Meats, one of Brendan Sodikoff's 10 Chicago concepts, uses the highly regarded Oyler vertical smoker, which burns a mix of hickory, oak and cherrywood 24 hours a day, six days a week.

"It's as or more complex as anything I've ever been involved in," says Sodikoff, a French Laundry vet. "And it involves just a couple ingredients."

Some vertical pits are gas- or electric-assisted, using a power source to ignite smaller amounts of wood. Purists frown on them, but they're easier to regulate than other smokers, and in cities like New York, the fire codes won't allow any other kind.

ON THE SIDE

Sides and snacks, like the salt and pepper pork rinds with malt vinegar mayonnaise served at Barrel & Ashes in Los Angeles, can help control the food costs of barbecue.

Executive Chef Jean-Paul Bourgeois of Blue Smoke in New York serves Anson Mills cornbread madeleines for \$7. "Our margins are good on cornbread, and that's getting on every table," he says.

Other examples:

- ★ Smoked mashed yams, \$5
B-Side BBQ, Oakland, California
- ★ Green tomato kimchi, \$3
Heirloom Market BBQ, Atlanta
- ★ Frito pie, \$6
Green Street Smoked Meats, Chicago
- ★ Green chili cheddar grits, \$3 to \$5.75
DCity Smokehouse, Washington, D.C.
- ★ Grilled cabbage slaw, cider vinegar, caraway seed, \$5
Freedmen's, Austin, Texas
- ★ Crispy Brussels sprouts slaw, pimento cane vinaigrette, \$8
Blue Smoke, New York



Blue Cheese Coleslaw

Chef-owner Tim Byres
Smoke, Dallas

- 1 head green cabbage, about 4 pounds
- Kosher salt, as needed
- 1 large head radicchio
- 1 carrot
- 1 parsnip
- 1½ cups sour cream
- 1½ cups blue cheese, crumbled, divided use
- ¼ cup distilled white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon celery seed
- 2 tablespoons green Tabasco
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced

Core and shred cabbage; add salt; let sit in colander 1 hour. Core radicchio and shred along with root vegetables; combine in large bowl with cabbage. Whisk together sour cream, half of the blue cheese, vinegar, celery seeds and Tabasco and add to vegetables; season to taste with salt.

Toss with remaining blue cheese and scallions at service. Makes 20 servings.



Fire a Brisket

In restaurants that smoke multiple meats, brisket is invariably a top seller.

Sodikoff estimates his smoker turns out 3,500 to 4,000 pounds of brisket per week, a necessary volume that compensates for shrinking margins due to ever-rising beef costs. Given the time smoked brisket requires (usually 12 to 16 hours) and the period it needs to rest (two to four hours), predicting the amount to smoke can be tricky. "It's a very funny business," he says. "It's like hurry up and wait."

Analyzing sales patterns helps to reach that sweet spot of not running out too early but having enough to last through service. Left-over meat can fortify sides like beans, chili or Frito pie.

At Heirloom Market BBQ, Taylor puts left-over smoked turkey in his miso-rice vinegar collard greens. Sodikoff occasionally surprises staff at his other restaurants with a family meal made from leftovers.

The Price of Barbecue

There's an entrenched historical perception that barbecue is cheap food, so chefs are loath to raise prices in the face of shrinking margins. That's especially true if the meat is naturally and sustainably raised, like at Barrel & Ashes, Tim Hollingsworth's chef-driven barbecue and bourbon restaurant in Los Angeles.

Or when you have a loss leader like The Big Rib—the fourth, fifth and sixth bones on a beef rib—served with hominy casserole and fresh herb chimichurri at Smoke.

"Those are so expensive now (that) it's a dish we really don't make any money on," Byres says. "We just do it because people love it."

Serving breakfast helps balance food costs. "There's more margin in eggs and bacon, and we sell a lot of bacon down there," he says.

Sodikoff counts on his guests to help offset food costs. "Your percentages are smaller, but your volume is huge," Sodikoff says. "The diners benefit from that. They get great quality food at a lower price because they're doing part of the work, bussing the tables. You get it back (because) it takes one person to smoke 2,000 pounds of meat. There's no other ratio like that in the restaurant business. Ever. We can serve a thousand people with about 12 people working." ■

Mike Sula is a James Beard award-winning food writer for the Chicago Reader. Follow him on Twitter @MikeSula



WOOD IS IT GOOD FOR?

Wood is the way when it comes to adding layers of flavor to barbecue. A crash course:

Oak: Texas terroir; dense; burns hot and slow; versatile; medium smoke; consistent heat; good for large cuts

Hickory: more assertive than oak; a workhorse; sweet; smells of bacon; good for large cuts and poultry

Maple: sweet; burns hot and slow; good for poultry

Cherry: light and sweet; burns hot and long; imparts a deep mahogany color; good for poultry and fish

Pecan: fruity and sweet; burns slow; good for large cuts; pricy

Apple: fruity and sweet; burns hot and slow; good for fish and poultry; has a soft perfume

Peach: mild and sweet; burns hot and slow; good for fish and poultry

Alder: light and sweet; burns cool; good for fish

Mesquite: burns hot and fast; strong, smoky flavor that can overwhelm; good for grilling

Smoked Banana Pudding

*Chef-owner Evan LeRoy
Freedmen's, Austin, Texas*

9 ripe bananas
20 egg yolks
½ gallon whole milk
1 quart heavy cream, divided use
1 cup sugar
¼ cup vanilla extract
1 teaspoon salt
3 packets powdered gelatin
½ cup powdered sugar
2 tablespoons bourbon
8 ounces Nilla Wafers
Nutmeg, freshly grated as needed

Peel 6 bananas and smoke at 250 F, 30 to 45 minutes or until soft and brown; puree with egg yolks. Combine milk, half of the heavy cream, sugar, vanilla and salt. Whisk in egg yolk mixture, then whisk in gelatin. Cook over low heat until the mixture reaches 145 F. Strain through a finemesh sieve and chill until set. Whip remaining heavy cream with powdered sugar and add bourbon.

Slice remaining bananas and crumble wafers. In an 8-ounce Mason jar, layer pudding, banana slices, wafers and whipped cream. Repeat and top with freshly grated nutmeg. Makes 10 to 12 servings.



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THE RISE OF RICE

THE GLOBAL GRAIN IS
SO MUCH MORE THAN A
PANTRY STAPLE

BY KATE LEAHY

Jollof rice can stand on its own, but also puts etouffee over the top.

DINERS HAVE COME TO EXPECT A SCOOP IN A BOWL WHEN ORDERING RICE. AND WHILE THERE'S NO SHAME IN SERVING THE PLAIN SIDE, IT'S LIMITING TO THINK OF RICE SOLELY AS A STARCH.

As a familiar—and gluten-free—ingredient, rice already has a large fan base. By tapping into preparations from such places as Indonesia and Africa, chefs are elevating the popular staple to a starring position on the plate.

JOLLOF RICE WITH ETOUFFEE, \$26

Chef de Cuisine Anthony Scanio
Emeril's Delmonico, New Orleans
Inspiration: West Africa's jollof rice

Given the importance of rice on a Creole table, most meals at Emeril's Delmonico include some form of it. Scanio came across jollof, a West African dish, after digging into the origins of Creole food traditions. The dish is likely the precursor of jambalaya made in the Creole style with tomatoes, he says.

Scanio sweats onions and bell peppers with garlic and herbs. After mixing in and caramelizing tomato paste and jasmine rice, he adds the liquid—a blend of tomato puree and water. Smoked paprika and cayenne add a bit of smoke and heat, mimicking the flavor of rice cooked over an open fire.

CHAUFA AEROPUERTO, \$23

Chef de Cuisine Jesus Delgado, Tanta, Chicago
Inspiration: Chinese chaufa, a Peruvian fried rice dish

When Chinese immigrants introduced Peruvians to fried rice, native South Americans pronounced its Chinese name as chaufa. It has since become a popular comfort food made with meat or seafood. Delgado combines both—braised pork shoulder and grilled shrimp—in his version. He uses Japanese rice, which is cooked the day before with a little garlic oil.

While typical chaufa is made by cooking the eggs in the rice, Delgado prepares them separately—in a shrimp omelet that's served over the rice with a spicy ginger-garlic sauce. He also borrows a page from the Korean bibimbap playbook, serving the dish in a hot stone bowl so the kernels crisp on the bottom.

Chaufa Aeropuerto

Chef de cuisine Jesus Delgado

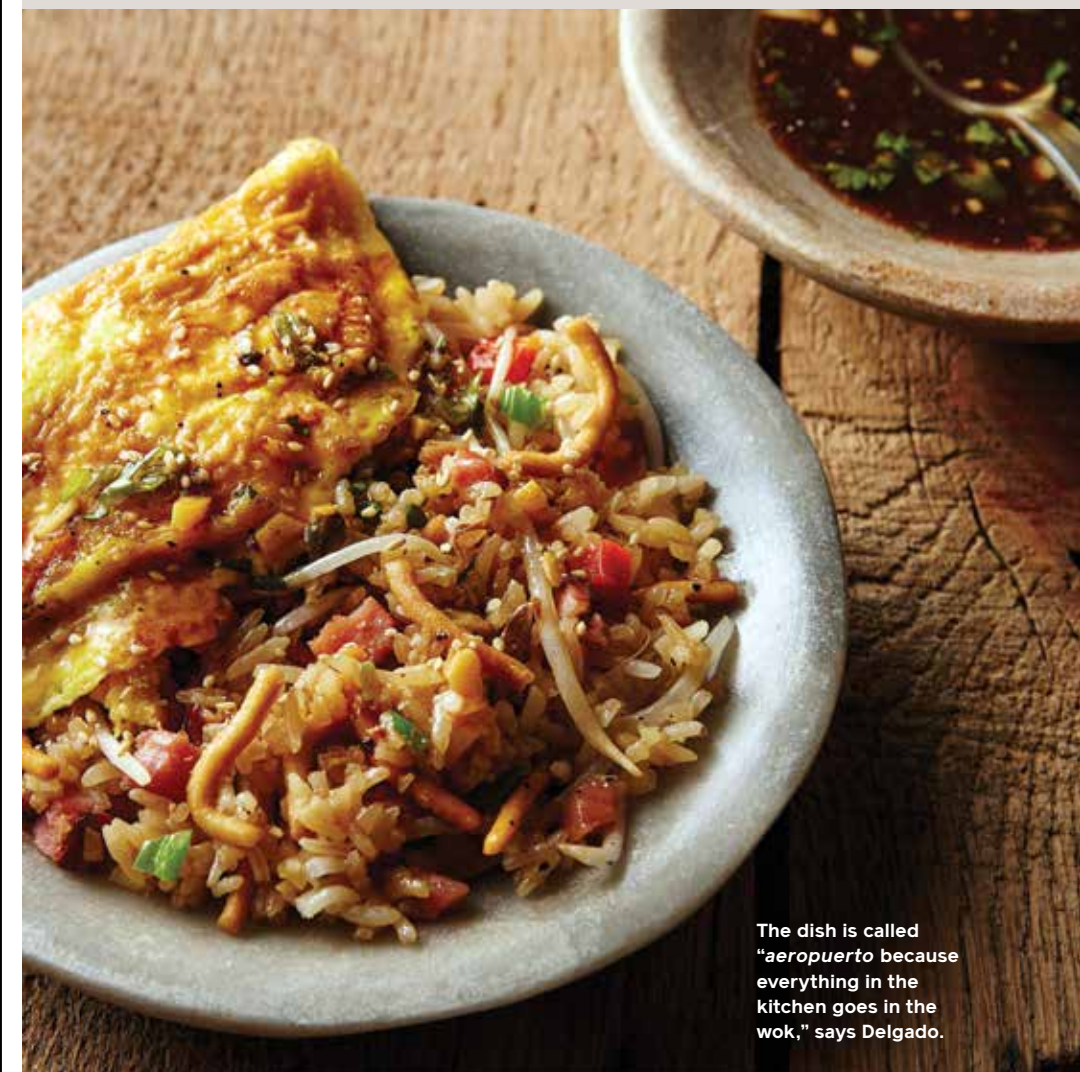
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 teaspoon garlic, chopped
1 teaspoon ginger, minced
2 cups jasmine rice, cooked
¼ cup *char siu* (roasted Chinese pork)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon oyster sauce
½ teaspoon salt
Pinch of sugar
2 tablespoons fried egg noodles
¼ cup bean sprouts
1 tablespoon green onion, chopped
1 tablespoon red bell pepper, chopped
¼ teaspoon toasted sesame oil
Shrimp tortilla, recipe follows
Spicy Nikkei sauce, recipe follows
1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds

Heat oil in wok over high heat. Saute garlic and ginger. Add rice; stir. Add roasted pork,

soy sauce, oyster sauce, salt and sugar. Add fried noodles, bean sprouts, green onion, red bell pepper and sesame oil and saute, 2 minutes. Serve on hot plate (stone bowl) to crisp bottom of rice. Top with shrimp tortilla and drizzle with sauce. Garnish with sesame seeds. Makes 1 serving.

To make tortilla, saute ¼ cup chopped shrimp in 1 tablespoon canola oil and pinch of salt over high heat; stir 2 minutes. Add 2 eggs scrambled with pinch of salt and fold over like omelet.

To make spicy Nikkei sauce, heat 1 tablespoon canola oil and saute 1 teaspoon garlic and 1 teaspoon ginger until fragrant. Add 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 2 tablespoons oyster sauce, 1 tablespoon jarred Chinese garlic sauce, 1 teaspoon chuno sauce (2 parts ketchup, 1 part Worcestershire sauce), 1½ cups crab stock, 1 teaspoon sugar and 1 teaspoon salt. Bring to a simmer, remove from heat and add 1 teaspoon chopped green onion and 1 teaspoon chopped cilantro.



The dish is called "aeropuerto because everything in the kitchen goes in the wok," says Delgado.



The richness of an egg rounds out the assertiveness of nasi goreng.

NASI GORENG, \$16

Consulting Chef James Trees, Hutchinson Cocktails & Grill, Los Angeles

Inspiration: Classic Indonesian fried rice

Seasoned with sambal and fermented shrimp paste, Indonesian fried rice stands out from other renditions with its assertive spicy and funky flavors.

To complement the seasonings, Trees includes trimmings from pork belly braised in Indonesian soy sauce and sambal as well as caramelized bits of grilled chicken and chunks of Indonesian soy sauce and sambal-seasoned shrimp. For the grain, Trees cooks jasmine rice in a rice cooker and slacks it out onto sheet pans. This prevents the kernels from sticking and helps the rice puff as it's stir-fried. "The most important part of fried rice is the rice itself," Trees says.

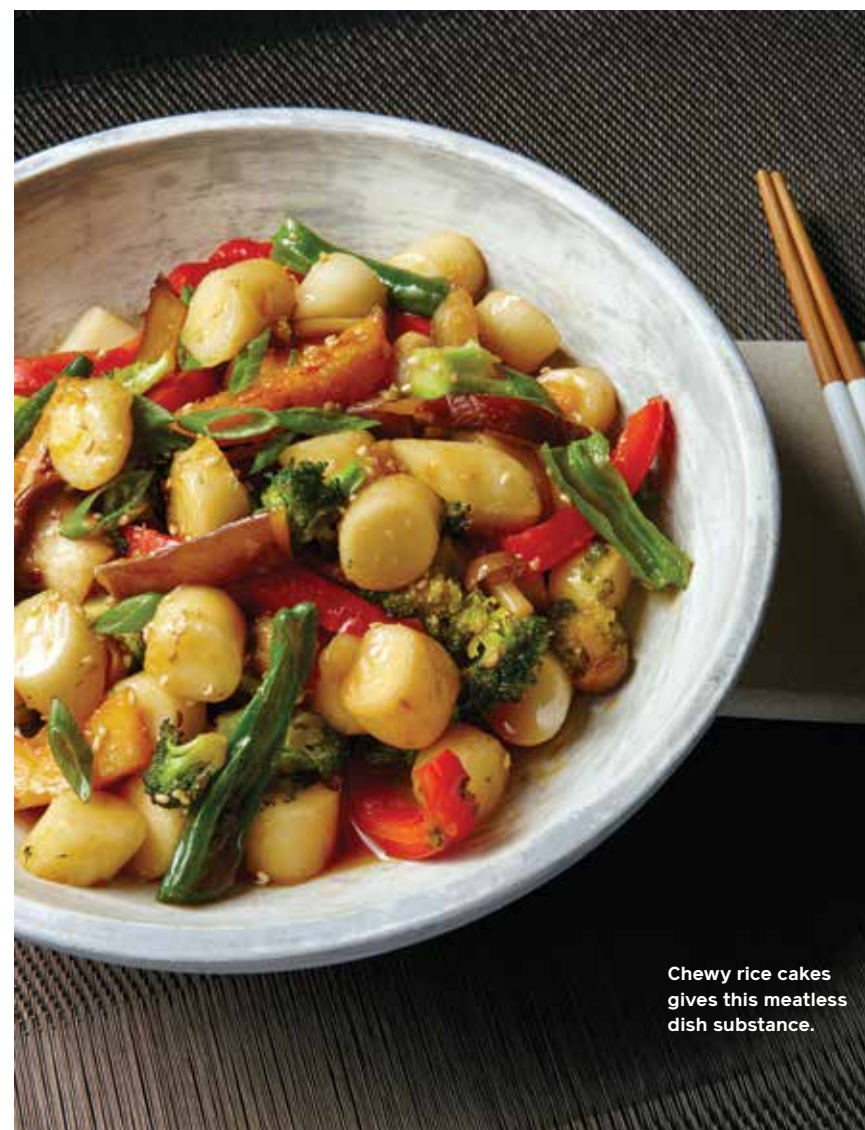
DUCK AND SAUSAGE JAMBALAYA, \$21

Executive Chef Justin Simoneaux, Boxing Room, San Francisco

Inspiration: Childhood memories and flavor

Growing up in Louisiana, Simoneaux ate rice like Americans in other parts of the country ate potatoes—with nearly every meal. When re-creating home-style jambalaya in San Francisco, he made the switch to organic brown rice. "It's more forgiving," he says, and its nutty flavor complements dishes containing roux, like gumbo.

Simoneaux makes other modifications to translate the dish to a restaurant. He cooks the grain in a rice cooker using chicken stock simmered with pork shoulder, duck gizzards and smoked duck necks. The pork from the stock is included in the rice along with andouille sausage.



Chewy rice cakes gives this meatless dish substance.

KINOKO MOCHI, \$14

Chef-owner Takashi Yagihashi, Slurping Turtle, Chicago

Inspiration: Korean rice cakes and Japanese vegetarian dishes

After fielding numerous requests for gluten-free and vegetarian noodle options, Yagihashi took a cue from modern restaurants in Japan and drafted a vegetarian dish with Korean rice cakes, called mochi in Japan.

The chewy rice cakes, made from pounding glutinous rice into a paste, come in several sizes. Yagihashi buys thick, 5-inch-long mochi sticks and slices them into 1-inch pieces. He simmers the rice cakes in water to soften them, while sauteeing Japanese mushrooms in olive oil with shallots, garlic and vegetables such as sliced red peppers and bok choy. The mochi are added to the pan and simmered with a sweet chili-soy sauce and vegetable stock. Yagihashi finishes the dish with Parmesan, as a nod to the modern Japanese knack for pairing Parmesan with soy, along with butter.

"By reducing the broth, the flavor gets into mochi," he says.



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Duck and Sausage Jambalaya

Executive Chef Justin Simoneaux

- ¼ cup canola oil
- 1 pound pork butt, cubed
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 pounds duck thigh, cubed
- 1 pound andouille sausage, sliced
- 2 cups onions, diced
- 1 cup celery, diced
- 1 cup green bell peppers, diced
- 1 cup red bell peppers, diced
- ¼ cup garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon cayenne
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 7 cups duck or chicken stock
- 4 cups brown rice
- 1 cup green onions, sliced
- ½ cup parsley, chopped

Heat oil in a 2-gallon cast-iron Dutch oven and brown pork, seasoning with salt and black pepper. Remove and set aside. Saute duck and sausage.

Drain fat, leaving behind ¼ cup to sweat onions, celery and peppers for 3 minutes. Add garlic, herbs, spices and salt; cook for 5 minutes. Return meat to pot and add stock. Simmer for 10 minutes.

Add rice and bring to a boil. Lower heat to simmer, cover and cook 35 to 40 minutes. Rest 5 minutes, fluff, correct seasonings and stir in green onions and parsley. Makes 10 to 12 servings.

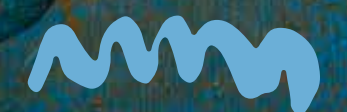


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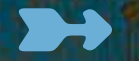


ISLAND FOOD HEADS TO THE MAINLAND

BY MIKE SULA



IF YOU HAVEN'T GIVEN CARIBBEAN FOOD A SECOND THOUGHT, THE LATEST TAKES ON ISLAND CUISINE SHOULD DEFINITELY GRAB YOUR ATTENTION.



Chef-owner Michael Jacober of Gladys uses local porgy in lieu of the indigenous Caribbean red snapper for this fried fish garnished with escovitch (pickled onion, carrots and bell peppers).

Breaking out of the dated pan-Latin phase of the '90s, chefs are updating traditional dishes with innovative techniques that bring the complex sweet-spicy flavors of the West Indies, Cuba and Puerto Rico stateside.

"The time I spent in the States, I really never went to a Puerto Rican restaurant and left satisfied," says Chef-owner Jose Enrique, who was named Food & Wine's Best New Chef in 2013 and returned to his native island to open Jose Enrique, Capital, Miel and El Blok.

"It just wasn't fun, the food wasn't great and I left unhappy," he says. "That's what I feel has started changing. I think people are starting to take a little more pride in their food."

Global Impact

Out of a troubled history, Caribbean food evolved into one of the world's great syncretic cuisines, its native staples influenced by international flavors and traditions brought by conquerors, colonists, slaves, laborers, traders and merchants.

The indigenous Taino, Arawaks and Caribs cultivated beans, chilies, cassava, pumpkin and culantro—and invented barbecue. Spaniards landed with salt fish, pork, garlic, vinegar and wheat. Africans contributed plantains, yams, okra, pigeon peas and taro root. The British planted sugarcane. East Asians came with curry and wok cooking. As such, each island developed distinct food traditions blown by the winds of change.

For decades, Caribbean food was a stealth cuisine stateside, thriving quietly in outlying city neighborhoods packed with recent immigrants. Jerk chicken and curry conch roti settled in Crown Heights, Brooklyn; Cubanos and *vaca frita* (crispy beef) in Little Havana, Miami; *lechón* (roast pig) and *papas rellenas* (potato croquettes) in Chicago's Humboldt Park.

In the mid '90s, Caribbean flavors swam mainstream with the Nuevo Latino movement. Chefs like Douglas Rodriguez, who has Cuban restaurants in Philadelphia and Miami Beach, used pan-Latin fusion to showcase the ingredients of Central and South America, and the Caribbean islands.

American palates adopted jerk seasoning and tropical ingredients like mangos and plantains, but exploration of Caribbean cooking as a stand-alone cuisine has remained under the radar—until now.

Puerto Rican Cooking Goes Modern

San Juan's Jose Enrique is a 10-minute walk from the beach. Each day, the chef writes his menu based on the local catch. He's making lighter, brighter versions of the heavy *cocina criolla* (native cooking), raising the acidity of soups and stews by subbing water and orange juice in place of heavy stocks.

Instead of rehydrating dried salt cod for the classic *ensalada de bacalao*, he buys fresh cod, salts it for two days before searing the fish and serving it with local tubers, avocado, onions, tomato and a sous-vide egg.

"You'll have people coming in who have been eating Puerto Rican all their life," he says. "They'll recognize the flavors, but maybe they won't really recognize the dish. They'll be like, 'Oh what's this?' And they'll take a couple bites and it's, 'Wow it tastes just like my grandma's.'"

Open-Door Cuba

Thawing diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba signal a leap forward in mainland appreciation for the island's food. Several Miami chefs, such as Rodriguez and Jamie DeRosa of Tongue and Cheek, have been leading cultural and culinary tours across the Florida Straits. Increased tourism overall is also likely to have an impact.

"Americans are finally going to realize that the food that they have been eating at Cuban restaurants like Versailles in Miami is very different than what they eat (in Cuba) today," says Guillermo Pernot, chef-partner of Cuba Libre Restaurant & Rum Bar, with locations in Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; Orlando, Florida; and Atlantic City, New Jersey.

To promote Cuban food, Pernot began bringing chefs from Havana in 2012 to run pop-ups in the U.S. "There are chefs making unbelievable stuff in Cuba now," he says. "It is more sophisticated and versatile than most would expect."

That's also true in the States. Chef Eleazar Fuerte of Son Cubano in West New York, New Jersey, draws on his two-year stint cooking in Singapore to add Asian flavors to upscale Cuban food, often with ingredients from both hemispheres. He serves a Cuban-Thai mango salad with cilantro, habanero and palm sugar-sweetened vinaigrette, and amps up a seven-seafood soup with coconut milk and chilies.

Fuerte's *vaca frita moderna*, an updated riff on the crispy shredded beef dish, starts with

sous-vide flank steak. Once tender, it's seared on the flat top and served with a taro root and goat cheese puree.

An Evolved Jerk

Jamaican food may have penetrated mainland consciousness thanks to the smoky allspice and scotch bonnet alchemy of jerk spices synonymous with chicken. Chefs, however, know it can be so much more.

At Miss Lily's 7A Cafe in Manhattan, Chef-owner Adam Schop makes a jerk ramen stock from reserved jerk chicken, pork bones and dashi. It's served with alkalized noodles, jerk pork belly, shoyu-marinated *ackee* fruit (a fleshy native fruit used as a vegetable) and fermented scotch bonnet paste.

Patois in Toronto showcases the culinary contributions from the Caribbean's Chinese population with jerk chicken chow mein.

Humboldt Park Vegetarian Jibarito

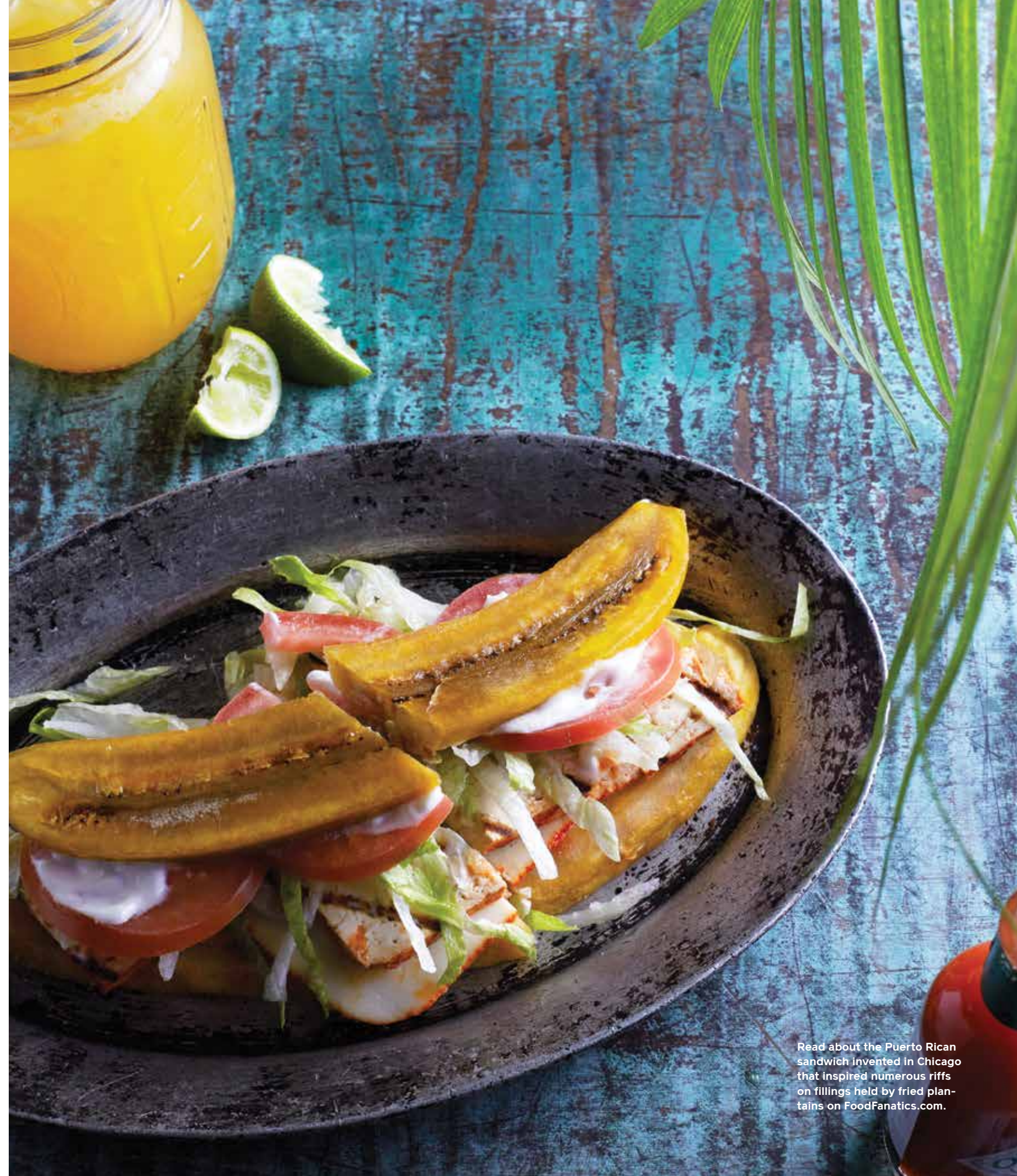
Chef-owner John Kaplan
ManBQue, Chicago

2 green plantains halved, lengthwise
Peanut oil as needed for frying
1 yellow onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped
1 lime, juiced
1 tablespoon Greek yogurt
1 tablespoon paprika
½ teaspoon cumin
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 block extra firm tofu, sliced*
Salt as needed
2 slices cheese, your choice
Iceberg lettuce, shredded
1 tomato, thinly sliced
Mayonnaise to taste
Hot sauce to taste

Fry plantains in preheated 325 F oil for 30 seconds; drain and cool. Place between parchment and press to flatten.

Combine onion, garlic, lime, spices and yogurt, and spread on tofu to marinate 1 hour. Heat grill or flat top and sear tofu. Fry plantains again in same temperature until crispy, about 20 seconds; drain and salt. Make sandwich, topping a slice of plantain with cheese, tofu, vegetables, mayonnaise, hot sauce and another plantain. Makes 2 servings.

*ManBQue also uses chicken.



Read about the Puerto Rican sandwich invented in Chicago that inspired numerous riffs on fillings held by fried plantains on FoodFanatics.com.

Get the jerk chicken recipe from Miss Lily's 7A Cafe on FOODFANATICS.COM

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCES

PUERTO RICAN

Colonial influences: Spain, Africa, United States

In the walk-in: plantains, pigeon peas, cilantro, wild oregano, *achiote* (annatto infused fats), *recaito* (cilantro, culantro, onion, garlic, green bell pepper, sweet chillies)

National dish: *arroz con gandules*—rice and pigeon peas cooked in sofrito

CUBAN

Colonial influences: Spain and Africa

In the walk-in: *sofrito* (onions, garlic bell peppers), rice, black beans, *viandas* (yucca, malanga, potato)

National dish: *ropa vieja* ("old clothes")—shredded flank steak stewed in tomato

JAMAICAN

Colonial influences: Spain, France, Africa, Great Britain, India, China

In the walk-in: allspice, scotch bonnet chillies, ackee, saltfish, curry, sugarcane, taro

National dish: jerk chicken—allspice and scotch bonnet rubbed, and smoked over pimento wood

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Colonial influences: Spain, Great Britain, Netherlands, India, Africa, China, Syria, Lebanon

In the walk-in: chickpeas, amaranth, taro, coconut, curry, habaneros, cassava, shark

National dish: crab and *callaloo*—shellfish and taro leaves stewed in coconut milk

Chef-owner Craig Wong chops a live lobster and stir-fries the pieces in butter and jerk paste.

"The Jamaican palate is a bit more suited to spice, and (Jamaicans) like a lot of sweetness as well," Wong says. "It really bridges the gap over to Chinese, which is very umami driven."

Chef-owner Michael Jacober of Gladys in Brooklyn, New York, who's clocked time at Manhattan fine dining institutions Per Se and Anissa, devotes a menu section to jerk. That's one of the ways he keeps the Caribbean restaurant real. He also imports sweetwood and pimento wood for the grill and stays true to a simple approach with dishes like whole fish. It's grilled, steamed or fried, and paired with a flash pickle of julienned vegetables.

"It was definitely nerve-wracking being a white guy cooking Caribbean food in a Caribbean neighborhood," he says of Brooklyn's Crown Heights section. "I still get tons of skepticism, but it's cool because people try the food and it's immediate acceptance."

The Rainbow Country

No island cuisine has had more world influences than Trinidad and Tobago's.

Its appeal is palpable in Seattle, which had no Trini food until 2006. That's when former housekeeper Pam Jacobs opened Pam's Kitchen, at a time when the city "needed an education" on *roti*—pan-fried flatbread made from chickpea or

wheat flour, stuffed with curried chicken, beef, lamb or goat. She makes them from scratch, just like her sweet milk-based peanut and pumpkin punches, and bittersweet *mauby*, a beverage made from boiled buckthorn tree bark.

In nearby Tacoma, Washington, Trini food is surging, thanks to Kerry Ramroop's food truck Kerry's Caribbean Takeout. Spicy jerk chicken is his biggest seller, but he frequently serves Trini dishes like cheesy macaroni pie, thick corn soup, dried fruit-studded coconut sweetbread and cumin-saturated "Geera" pork tenderloin.

He relies on the power of scent to bring customers to the truck. "It's very aromatic when you cook from scratch," he says.

Off-Island inspiration

One rather compelling indication of Caribbean cuisine's potential to explode lies in Roy Choi's Sunny Spot in Venice, California. Here, Choi, the father of the food truck revolution and the chef responsible for popularizing Korean food in the U.S., is riffing on traditional dishes like Puerto Rican *mofongo*, mashing plantains with applewood bacon, fennel, chili vinegar and ginger oil; and tossing Jamaican-style braised oxtails with pasta, mustard greens, and chillies.

It may not be long before goat curry, mofongo and jerk chicken burritos are as common as the kimchi taco. ■



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* NPD Crest, 2012

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PULL THE LEVER ON
SOFT SERVE ICE CREAM FOR
ITS WIDESPREAD APPEAL

FROZEN ASSETS.

BY HEATHER LALLEY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIN KUNKEL

SOFT SERVE—THE SMOOTH-EST, CREAMIEST AND MOST COMFORTING CHILDHOOD TREAT—IS FINALLY GROWING UP.

Nearly a decade after Momofuku Milk Bar's Christina Tosi revolutionized soft serve with flavors like cereal milk and Cracker Jack, another wave of enthusiasts is proving that the dessert has undeniable nostalgic appeal and profitability.

Soft serve has grown 18 percent over the last four years and 11 percent between 2013 and 2014 alone, according to Datassential, a market research firm for the foodservice industry. The NPD Group, a consumer research company, measured the popularity in servings: over 1 billion last year.

"People have great memories of eating soft serve growing up, and that's what motivates them to order it," says Bruce Hill, owner of four San Francisco-area restaurants that sell soft serve.

Flavor it Forward

Bryan Petroff and Douglas Quint, who had no foodservice experience, launched Big Gay Ice Cream from a humble food truck in 2009. Their truck became an overnight sensation, forming long lines wherever it parked. Two New York storefronts came next, and ones in Los Angeles and Philadelphia are scheduled to open this year.

The reason for the hype: their brand of kitsch, for sure. But also the elevated toppings dusted or sprinkled on their soft serve flavors, from wasabi pea dust, olive oil and sea salt to red chili pistachios and toasted curried coconut.



Intensify flavors with toppings like cocoa nibs and cayenne, top, Himalayan sea salt, bottom, and cornflake crunch, left.

PHOTO BY PAUL STRABBING

Vanilla continues to rank as the most popular flavor, according to Datassential. But emerging dessert flavor trends, like hibiscus, cardamom, agave, brown butter and smoke, suggest consumers are interested in venturing out of their comfort zone.

Soft serve bases, such as buttermilk, sweet pea, tomato, cucumber, Parmesan with candied country ham and even foie gras with gingerbread have landed on the menu at Restaurant Roux, a French creole-inspired restaurant in Seattle. For the summer, former Executive Chef Mike Robertshaw is thinking about experimenting with local flowers like violets and nasturtium, along with seasonal fruit.

"It is time consuming," Robertshaw says. "But it's so fun to play with something new."

It's All About the Base

Matthias Merges, chef-owner of three Chicago restaurants, Yusho, A10 and Billy Sunday, churns out flavors like salted caramel with bourbon, amaro berry, burnt marshmallow, cannoli, huckleberry and Thai curry.

"I've always been a huge fan of the texture of soft serve and what you're able to do with it," Merges says. "I wanted to bring it back in a way that was more creative."

Like Robertshaw, Merges develops a base in-house, which is different depending on sugar content and viscosity.

Adding fresh fruit, for example, changes the amount of sugar and water in the base. So, Merges might add an emulsifier, such as eggs or xanthan gum, for stability.

For Robertshaw's in-house base, non-fat powdered milk and agar work as a stabilizer with different ratios of whole milk, cream and sugar. Seasonal fruit is cooked down to evaporate excess water and to ensure the soft serve doesn't get icy.

"I have a set recipe that we worked out that's just a plain, milk-flavored base," Robertshaw says. "Depending on what you're going to add, you have to fluctuate the fats."

A premade base, however, takes away the guesswork. Hill worked with Straus Family

Olive oil and sea salt are favorite toppings at Zero Zero in San Francisco.



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Cornflake Crunch

Chef-owner Christina Tosi
Milk Bar, New York

- 170 grams cornflakes
- 40 grams milk powder
- 40 grams sugar
- 4 grams kosher salt
- 130 grams butter, melted

Crush cornflakes to a quarter of their size and toss with milk powder, sugar and salt. Drizzle butter and toss to coat. Slack onto a Silpat or parchment-lined sheet tray and bake in preheated 275 F oven for 20 minutes until crunchy and chewy. Sprinkle onto soft serve. Makes 4 cups.

Creamery, an organic dairy in northern California, to develop a base for his restaurants. It's also sold to other restaurants in the area such as Alta, an Eastern European-influenced neighborhood bistro in San Francisco.

Social media lights up when Tosi of Milk-bar (eight locations and counting) rolls out new soft serve flavors, be it cranberry limeade, yuzu citrus verbena or sticky toffee pudding.

Top it Off

Toppings can intensify flavors and texture (think dehydrating or oven-drying ingredients). For example, brown butter and white chocolate are cooked down for brown-butter solids. Tosi also tosses crushed cornflakes with milk powder, butter and sugar and bakes the mixture until crunchy and offered as a regular add-on.

So when a premade base seems limiting, toppings can do the heavy lifting.

Chef Yoni Levy, formerly of Alta, turns simple soft serve into complex desserts. For baklava, vanilla is added to the malted soft serve base. Phyllo dusted with cinnamon, sugar and cardamom serves as a topping with toasted pistachios and honey-vanilla syrup. It's then finished with crunchy salt and olive oil. The peach cobbler soft serve dessert is similarly deconstructed with streusel, hazelnuts, peaches and whipped cream. For the

late-night bar crowd, Levy offers up soft serve ice cream sandwiches.

Even though Alta is a sit-down restaurant, "lots of people just walk in for soft serve to-go," Levy says, "because the flavors are so creative and fun."

Let the Cash Flow

Pour base in the machine; pull handle. Pretty simple, right? Considering the ease, it's no surprise that soft serve can be a moneymaker. The initial investment for the machine, depending on capacity, starts around \$5,000. Chefs say it's best to gauge the operation's volume to make the ideal choice.

Hill's Pizzeria Picco in Larkspur, California, sells \$250,000 in soft serve annually, while his Italian concept, Zero Zero in San Francisco, brings in \$300,000. Hill says the food cost is around 20 percent, but skews higher or lower depending on the expense of toppings. Nearly all operations, however, charge extra for them, typically 75 cents to \$1.

For some chefs, it's tough to hold back from the endless toppings.

"Sometimes there are great food costs," Levy says. "And sometimes we get so excited about all the toppings, the food cost is higher." ■

Heather Lalley is a Chicago-based food writer with a degree in baking and pastry arts. She has never said no to a swirl cone.

KEEP IT STRAIGHT / SOFT SERVE AND FROZEN CUSTARD ARE USED INTERCHANGEABLY, BUT THEY COULDN'T BE MORE DIFFERENT. SAN FRANCISCO RESTAURATEUR BRUCE HILL OFFERS FROZEN CUSTARD AT FOG CITY AND SOFT SERVE AT HIS THREE OTHER RESTAURANTS. HE BREAKS DOWN THE DIFFERENCES:

SOFT SERVE	FROZEN CUSTARD
Dispensed from a machine in a swirl	Made in a continuous flow freezer; cannot be dispensed like soft serve
Sometimes made with eggs	Always made with eggs
Less fat (around 5 percent)	Higher fat (around 10 percent)
Light and creamy	Dense and chewy
Lots of air	Almost no air
Soft, but not scoopable	Soft and scoopable
Cannot be frozen; must be eaten immediately	Can be frozen
Does not need to be fresh; no waste	Must be made fresh



Soft serve can be swirled; frozen custard cannot.

TREND TRACKER

The heat index on what's happening



High-profile chefs turn their eyes toward specialty taco concepts.



Restaurants clean up their act by reducing waste.

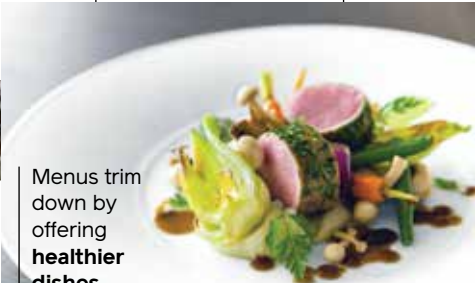


Ditch upscale comfort food for a signature dish.

The stars of Caribbean food start to shine on the mainland.



Get the milk ready: Cookie platters are back.



Menus trim down by offering healthier dishes.



Burrata gets a breather after a ubiquitous menu run.

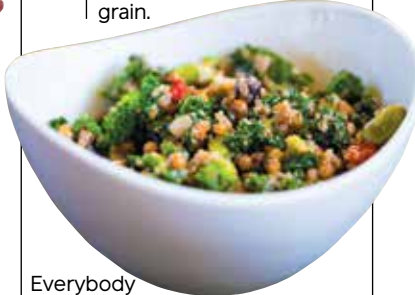
WARMING UP ON FIRE COOLING OFF



Specialty fats like grass-fed and coconut butters hit the pan.



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Quinoa steps aside as the "it" ancient grain.



Barrel-aged cocktails get 86'd for lighter tipples.



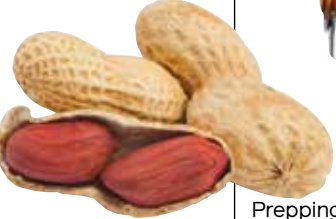
Salted fish is the latest to ride the preservation train.



Chefs get sweet on sour flavor profiles.



Everybody loves soft serve and its toppings.



Prepping for every food allergy proves to be a fruitless effort.

COOKIE PHOTO COURTESY OF HOTCHOCOLATE



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FOOD PEOPLE

The down-low on the industry

Loaded Question

Handle plastered diners without offending them





HOW DO YOU HANDLE INEBRIATED DINERS?

BY HEATHER LALLEY

ALL'S FUN AND GAMES UNTIL SOMEBODY CAUSES A SCENE—OR WORSE. DRUNKEN DINERS CAN BE A RESTAURANT'S ULTIMATE NIGHTMARE. THEY CAN BE LOUD AND BELLIGERENT, DISRUPTING OTHER CUSTOMERS. EVEN MORE DAMAGING, THEY CAN BE A LIABILITY IF THEY GET INTO A WRECK ON THE WAY HOME.

Inebriated or not, these people are still your customers. You don't want to lose their business once they sober up (unless they're repeat offenders).

Here's some advice from those in the trenches on dealing with customers who've had a few too many.

Nick Sharp

Operations manager
Steamboat Restaurant Group
Steamboat Springs, Colorado

Backstory: Worked in the restaurant and bar industry for 15 years

"We always get food of any kind—french fries, chips—in front of them. A drunk person with food in front of them will nibble on it. After we tell them we can't serve them more alcohol, we let the server get on the side of the patron. That way, they're not mad at their server. They'll say, 'I know it sucks. Let me see what we can do. My manager won't budge but I'll keep working on him. In the meantime I brought you cheese fries on the house.' I like to distract them from the fact they're drunk with conversation. I ask them about their vacation. Sometimes it can be ridiculous, but it lets their mind free them from the fact they won't be served. Then they forget they've gotten cut off."



Keep Calm and Move On
HANDLE INEBRIATED CUSTOMERS THE RIGHT WAY
AND YOU JUST MIGHT WOO THEM BACK UNDER BETTER
TERMS. HERE ARE SOME GO-TO TIPS:

Don't lose your cool.

A one-time offense might not be worth losing a longtime regular. Speak calmly to the offender and other customers to avoid creating a circus.



Lisa Holt

Managing partner
Build Pizzeria Roma, Berkeley, California

Backstory: Designed and developed restaurants and hotels for 30 years; owned and operated hotels and restaurants for 15 years

"Stop serving them immediately. This needs to be done politely but firmly, as we cannot be associated with an over-pouring situation. Be aware of how they will depart the establishment. Call them a cab (suggest Uber or Lyft, which offer discounts and free rides for first-time users) or, if they are with others, ensure they will not be driving and someone sober from their party will be. If they are on foot, we can escort them to the corner, or someplace close, and ensure they are safe enough to arrive at their destination."

“

STOP SERVING THEM IMMEDIATELY. THIS NEEDS TO BE DONE POLITELY BUT FIRMLY.

”



Train your staff. Consider a program like TIPS (Training for Intervention ProcedureS), a 30-year-old training system that helps employees prevent and deal with intoxicated customers.

“MANAGERS NEED TO ENSURE THAT THE SERVERS AND BARTENDERS ARE COMMUNICATING TO ONE ANOTHER.”



David Mitroff

Restaurant consultant
Piedmont Avenue Consulting, Oakland, California
Backstory: Industry advisor in the San Francisco Bay Area for 15 years

“Have posters up, or indications on the bar menu, that promote responsible drinking. This may not guarantee that customers will drink responsibly, but it will indicate to them that your restaurant promotes drinking socially and not dangerously.”

Train your servers and bartenders to keep tabs on customers to make sure they are not in danger. Managers need to ensure that the servers and bartenders are communicating to one another. Have them discuss which customers need a more watchful eye. To avoid offending the guests, say and do everything politely. You are still in the customer-service field.”



Find them a ride. Get to know services like BeMyDD, the nation's largest designated-driver service. This company employs drivers that will chauffeur drunken customers home using the customer's car.

Get help. Enlist the people with the drunken customer to help cut off their friend. Slow down service at a problem table. Suggest non-alcoholic drinks. Once you've cut someone off, be firm yet respectful.



Bill Cipriani

Co-owner and executive kitchen manager
The Post Sports Bar & Grill, St. Louis
Backstory: Degrees in culinary and foodservice management from Johnson and Wales University

“Each situation is different. Sometimes drunk people come in and it's somebody else's problem they're bringing to us. We'll offer to pay for a cab. We'll try to diffuse the situation, move them outside, try to talk to them in a calm manner. It's the other people in the restaurant we worry about. Once we remove them, we buy everybody half a shot to try to lighten the mood and make everybody happy again.”

“WE'LL TRY TO DIFFUSE THE SITUATION, MOVE THEM OUTSIDE, TRY TO TALK TO THEM IN A CALM MANNER.”



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Strike it Rich With **HIGH ROLLERS**

PLAY THE RIGHT BETS TO WIN OVER THIS GROWING DEMOGRAPHIC

BY ANTHONY TODD ILLUSTRATION BY RADIO

THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS IS BOOMING, WITH INDUSTRY EXPERTS ANTICIPATING THE BIGGEST YEAR YET. EVEN BETTER: A GROWING DEMOGRAPHIC OF CUSTOMERS WITH FAT WALLETS.

The number of high-income households has been on the rise for the last two years, a trend that is expected to continue, according to the National Restaurant Association. Households earning \$100,000 or more account for 36 percent of food eaten away from home, while those with incomes between \$70,000 and \$99,999 make up 18 percent of industry spending, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

These “high roller” clients present an opportunity and a challenge for restaurateurs. While they share attributes with the standard diner, they require a different approach—one that begins before they walk through the door.

“They want to be recognized,” says Chef-owner Jean Joho of the long-standing Everest in Chica-

go and Eiffel Tower in Las Vegas, both fine dining restaurants.

“They expect that you know who they are and what they like, that they were there before and when,” he says. “If you don’t know, you’ll lose them.”

Extracting value from the dining experience, feeling important and having an emotional connection with the food and restaurant are essential to winning over the high-income demographic.

Saving Face

Technology can help restaurants excel at service by keeping tabs on customers, from a spouse’s birthday and a favorite whiskey to the desired temperature of salmon.

“There are so many easy opportunities to provide that recognition, and it’s not expensive (or) takes a lot of time,” says Chef-owner Michael Kornick of longtime Chicago restaurant MK. “That’s how you value restaurants—they make you feel special.”

The best service tool in the industry is still good old-fashioned memory: A notable host or server recognizes a regular customer and has a sense of what they want.

“When a guest gets recognized, they become loyal,” says Executive Chef Fabrizio Schemardi of the Four Seasons Resort in Orlando, Florida. “They have the tendency to book private or

business events, casual dinners, and send you new customers.”

In fact, restaurateurs say knowing guest preferences is the new luxury of polished service.

High rollers, however, want a deeper rapport with a restaurant. Knowing the owner, chatting with the chef about an ingredient that just arrived from a local farm and engaging with a server who can recall personal preferences, such as favorite ingredients and food allergies, keep them coming back.

“They get recognized from the open kitchen and they come just to talk to the staff,” Schenardi says. “I encourage the cooks that if they see someone familiar say, ‘Hello.’ Recognition beyond the greeting is important.”

For out-of-towners, the higher level of hospitality—that feeling of being taken care of—comes from a restaurant’s relationship with hotel concierges. They can send diners anywhere, but travelers who feel pampered will return to the recommended restaurant.

Kornick knows this well and has honed his network over the years to build regulars at MK.

“The good concierges know our layout,” he says. “They know if they have a young couple, they should ask for table 62 because it’s the deuce that overlooks the dining room. If someone is looking for a deep Bordeaux list, the concierge will know and send them to us.”

The New Foodies

High-income diners, restaurateurs say, are typically well versed in food. They’re aware of trends and are often the first ones to check out a new restaurant. Luxury items like truffles and other high-priced goods are front of mind when they’re in season.

“We do everything in-house, and they love that,” Schenardi says. “The meat is all prime. When they ask about fish, they want to know where it’s coming from.”

But for all the pomp and circumstance around the theater of dining, high rollers want recognizable food.

“Where they go isn’t very elaborate,” Joho says. “It’s mostly food that’s similar in different places. It’s not about sophistication in dining; it’s about the status symbols.”

Here’s the Deal

Everybody loves a deal—even the wealthy. It’s just that the wealthy view a deal on a different scale. A \$500 bottle of wine on the menu for

\$250 may be out of reach for most diners, but for a high roller, it’s a bargain.

“It doesn’t matter how much money people have,” says Howard Gordon, president of Los Angeles-based Gordon Restaurant Group. “They’re looking for deals.”

And no one wants to feel gouged.

“I’ll buy turbot and cook it myself before paying \$90 for it,” Gordon says. “People know what things cost, and unless they’re on an expense account, it pisses them off.”

Exclusivity Counts

An experience that’s not readily available to everyone can be a draw for a high-end diner.

At Stake Chophouse & Bar, a luxury steakhouse in Coronado, California, diners are presented with a choice of Japanese-, French- and German-made knives before a meal.

“When we serve a 50-ounce Tomahawk steak whole, we offer to cut it for them,” says Executive Chef Tim Kolanko of the \$120 prime cut. “Half of the time the guest wants to cut it themselves so they can use the awesome knife they just chose. It becomes a conversation point among guests.”

Exclusivity can also play out on wine lists at restaurants that attract all demographics. And those can be found at high-end and most moderate-priced, chef-driven restaurants.

David Chang’s Momofuku Má Pêche in New York, for example, has hidden gems on its list featuring a special section of 56 wines priced at \$56 each. Momofuku Beverage Director Jordan Salcito knows the stories behind the labels, which is what high rollers want to know.

A wine that isn’t available at retail or ones that are impossible to find create a value that justifies a higher cost, Gordon says.

“You have to know the producer and not the label,” says Gordon, a former executive of the Cheesecake Factory. “I want to make sure that I’m getting a great experience for the amount of money I’m paying.”

Equality Still Reigns

A restaurant can’t change its menu, service or decor to fit the needs of every guest. That’s why it’s important to treat all diners like they might be able to order a \$10,000 bottle of wine or give a \$1,000 tip.

Plus, when that guest clad in ripped jeans orders up your entire wine cellar, you’ll be glad you didn’t stand on ceremony. ■



DON’T TURN OFF HIGH ROLLERS

AVOID THESE SURE-FIRE WAYS TO GET HIGH ROLLERS TO SLAM THEIR WALLETS SHUT.

Overpriced menus. The cost of certain ingredients has to justify the price. Be sure that it’s not the standard, and tell the backstory of the value.

Tasting menus. So 2006, and very passé. Diners want freedom of choice.

Dress codes. There’s a reason jackets are no longer required at fine dining spots and tablecloths are of lore. Don’t look down on jeans-clad guests. Today’s designer jeans can cost as much as a jacket.

Jacked up wine prices. Anyone who can pay \$500 for a bottle of wine will likely know its true worth even with the restaurant markup.

Anthony Todd is a practicing lawyer and local food advocate. Follow him on Twitter @FoodieAnthony.

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Chicago



FOOD FANATIC

Matthew Dean is a Food Fanatics chef from Illinois who’s all about finding new ways to spin traditional barbecue, no matter what the Midwest weather brings.



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EVERY CITY IS KNOWN FOR “MUST HAVE” FOODS, THE KIND THAT WILL CUT YOUR STREET CRED IF YOU DON’T TRY THEM AT LEAST ONCE. FOR CHICAGO, IT’S DEEP-DISH PIZZA AND THE CHICAGO-STYLE HOT DOG.

These iconic foods are always worthwhile eats, but they have competition as the number of barbecue joints, ramen shops and other single-concept restaurants multiply. Our solution: strategic dining.

Accept that snacking is an official meal period that can happen several times a day. Use this time to reacquire yourself with the neon relish, pickle spear, chopped white onions, tomatoes, peppers, mustard and celery salt that accompany that all-beef dog in a poppy seed bun. Or grab a sandwich, like the barbecue brisket at Green Street

Smoked Meats or the pickle-brined fried chicken at Leghorn Chicken.

Don’t commit to a full meal at any restaurant. If you go to Formento’s, where old school Italian learns some new tricks, stop at Rural Society first for wood-grilled appetizers. Or go with starters and wine at Seven Lions, master sommelier-turned-restaurateur Alpina Singh’s latest restaurant, before hitting Prime & Provisions for a steak.

Some of Chicago’s most notable chefs are stationed in the city’s neighborhoods, so it’s easy to hit several restaurants without much effort. Build an appetite strolling the strips in Logan Square (Fat Rice, The Radler) or Wicker Park (Dove’s Luncheonette, Lillie’s Q). Cocktail culture (Lost Lake, Black Bull) thrives in these neighborhoods as well, making it an easy way to cap the night. ■

THE HIGHLIGHTS

The Blanchard

Go for the section of the menu dedicated to foie gras at this modern take on French. Then be impressed with Chef-owner Jason Paskewitz’s take on bistro fare.



Grace

In a city where casual restaurant openings far outnumber fine dining, it’s good to know there’s a place to splurge and feel really good about it. Make time for this standout.

MFK

A nod to legendary food writer M.F.K. Fisher, MFK delivers bold flavors, much of it by sea and often through Spain, located in an intimate space by Lake Michigan.



Momotaro

Modern Japanese played out in a big space with a big menu and fish from all over the world. Get ready to be wowed.

Three Aces

Seasonal dishes showcase local farms, housemade pasta and flavors that just work. No fuss here, just sensible creativity.



MASTER OF HIS UNIVERSE

THE ORIGINAL CREATOR OF CONCEPTS DISHES ON HOW TO SUCCEED

BY PETER GIANOPULOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB COSCARELLI

RICH MELMAN KNOWS WHAT DINERS WANT TO EAT BEFORE THEY DO. IT'S AN INSIGHT THAT BUILT HIS \$500 MILLION EMPIRE, CHICAGO-BASED LETTUCE ENTERTAIN YOU RESTAURANTS, OVER THE LAST FOUR DECADES.

His first restaurant, R.J. Grunts, which features a more-than-40-ingredient salad bar as its centerpiece, issued in customization decades before it became a buzzword.

Not all his concepts have endured, but they are always trend-forward: from a kitschy '50s diner (Ed Debevic's, now sold) and retro steakhouse (Wildfire) to upscale French (Everest) and tiki bar (Three Dots and a Dash).

Melman, 73, won't cop to being the grandfather of the concept restaurant, even after earning the James Beard Foundation's lifetime achievement award this year for his "positive and long-lasting impact" on dining in America.



HEAD OF THE KITCHEN CLASSROOM

Since February, Rich Melman has been conducting a culinary experiment in his former Chicago fine dining restaurant, L20.

At his newest restaurant, Intro, the executive chef changes every two to three months. Each new chef is supported by an established front and back of the house and works with Lettuce partners as business mentors. The chefs also get a percentage of profits during their tenure at Intro.

If chefs are interested in applying for a chef-in-residence position at Intro, they can share their resumes at IntroBOHemployment@leye.com. For more details on Intro, check out the blog on FoodFanatics.com.

But he'll answer questions on how he achieved success with more than 100 Lettuce restaurants. Sharing knowledge is so important that it's the underpinning of his latest concept, Intro (see sidebar). The restaurant brings in a new chef every two to three months, providing all the support to open and run a restaurant, including the space, staff and paying customers.

Here's Melman, the founder and chairman, whose company turns 44 next month, in his own words:

Q: What are three of the most important things restaurant owners need to do to be and stay successful?

A: You have to have good food; that's number one. It's got to taste great, it has to look good, be presented well, and it has to be a good value for the customer. But you also need to make money. That's number two. And you have to do the right deals early on. The concept, the location, the lease,

the hiring of the people, the training—it all goes into the planning. I have a belief that 80 percent of a restaurant's success takes place before you ever open your doors.

Q: At Lettuce, you focus intensely on the importance of partnerships, especially sharing responsibilities and profits. What are the roots of that philosophy?

A: In the '60s, I worked for my father and his partner for four years. I had saved up \$10,000. So I went to them and said, 'I'd like to buy into the business. I'd like to be a partner with you.' They said, 'We appreciate your hard work, but we don't think you're settled enough. If you got married and had a family, we would then consider a partnership for you.'

I thought to myself, 'I don't even have enough time to date.' I was working six or seven days a week from 5:30 in the morning to 6 or 7 at night.



I started to realize how important it was to feel like you're a part of something, that you're a partner in a business.

A week later, I gave my notice. Eventually, I met a man named Jerry Orzoff who believed in me. Not only did he put money in, but he gave me the guidance and direction that I needed. That changed things. For \$25,000 to \$50,000 you could have owned a big piece of Lettuce Entertain You. And that—I guarantee you—would have been a hell of an investment

Q: Why did you decide to use Tock, a ticket based reservations system, for your newest restaurant, Intro?

A: My kids have gone into a partnership with Nick (Kokonas of Next), and I think it might be revolutionary. It's going to be nice to know ahead of time that people have paid and you're not going to get all those no-shows. One of the things that I love is that if you come early on a Tuesday, you pay less than prime time on a Saturday.

Q: You've created numerous restaurants and concepts over the years; where do you find your inspiration?

A: It's really simple—from the food. Nothing else. We have a test kitchen, and when someone

gets an idea, I say, "Talk to me with the food." If I love the food, I do it. We can figure out what it's going to look like, how many seats we need, the financials and all that stuff. But the one thing that's unequivocal to me is I have to be excited about the food.

Q: Once you settle on a concept, what type of research do you do?

A: I eat, I read, and I explore and meet with our creative teams constantly. I think I know what the average person likes ... and what their tastes are. Generally speaking, I look at one or two things at a time. I don't create five restaurants at a time. If I'm thinking about an Italian restaurant, I'll eat a lot of Italian food. I'll say, 'Let me try pastas this week.' And I'll eat pastas in five or six different places. You learn something if the food is good and something if the food is bad.

Q: In recent years, we've seen independent chefs going casual in large numbers. Do you see this trend continuing?

A: You don't have to go to a four-star restaurant to get great food. I think a lot of chefs, after a while, don't want to work with tweezers. I have found it is harder to make good

money in fine dining restaurants. The type of restaurants where people want to come once a week or every two weeks, instead of once a year, usually do more sales. And that's one of the keys: How do you get more sales? When you get sales, everything else falls into line.

Q: How has the advent of social media changed your business model?

A: When I started, it was all word of mouth. Now, it's a combination of social media and word of mouth. Today, in two days the whole country knows what you're doing, as compared to in two years when I first started. We also use social media for customer service. We can get to a guest while they are still in our restaurants and help elevate their experience in real time.

Q: Now that you've been in the restaurant industry for more than four decades, how would you sum up its impact on you personally?

A: The restaurant business has been wonderful to me. I was a kid who was lost; I didn't quite know what I would do with my life. And then I entered the restaurant business. It's been good to me and for me. ■



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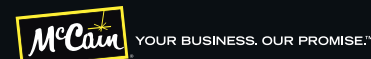


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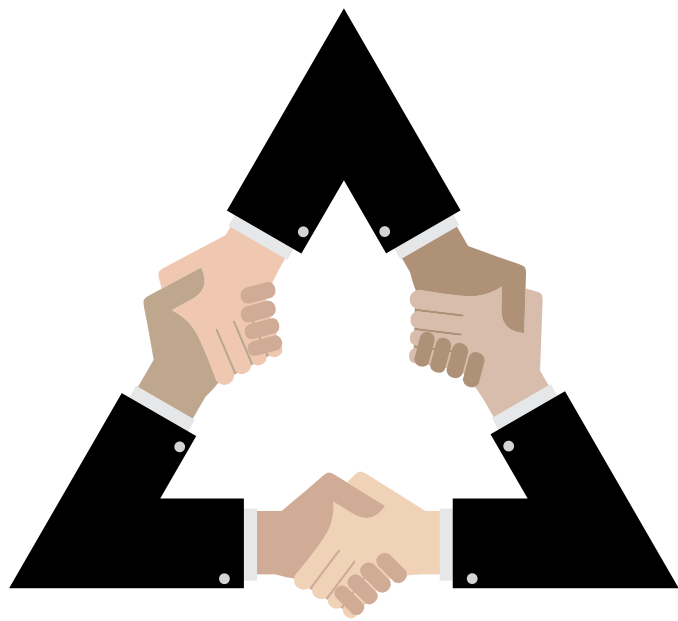


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A FRIEND INDEED RESTAURANTS BUILD LOYALTY WHEN THEY HELP AN EMPLOYEE IN NEED

BY MONICA GINSBURG

A DEBILITATING ILLNESS, THE UNEXPECTED DEATH OF A LOVED ONE AND OTHER LIFE-ALTERING EVENTS GALVANIZE THE RESTAURANT COMMUNITY IN A WAY THAT EXEMPLIFIES HOSPITALITY.

Staffers organize monetary collections, host or participate in fundraisers. They'll deliver food to a co-worker's home or take turns bringing meals to the hospital.

Pitching in for co-workers has long been a hallmark of restaurant life. Some restaurateurs, however, find it pays to do more. Creating a caring culture, operators say, is smart business. A happy staff ultimately means happier customers.

"Investing in people pays off in loyalty and commitment," says Dan Simons, a partner and concept developer at Founding Farmers Restaurant Group, a 500-person company that runs four farm-to-table restaurants in Washington, D.C., Virginia and Maryland.

"Once they get through the hard time, if you need them to pick up an extra shift or stay late, it's the mentality of 'you were here for me, now I'm here for you,'" he says.

Rainy Day Funders

Last year, two of Simons' employees faced life-altering events: A server spent several months in the hospital after a serious car accident and a sous chef gave birth to her first child.

Co-workers organized a monetary collection matched by the company. The restaurants sent food to the hospital for the serv-

THE FINE LINE BETWEEN CARING AND SMOTHERING

Showing staff that you care can be tricky, especially when it involves personal matters. How to step in without crossing the line:

> Determine interest

"I didn't want to be parental to staff, but I did see a need," says El Gaucho's Chad Mackay, who purchased a financial management tool to help his staff with money issues. "There was a definite cry-out for help when I asked them about it."

> Be consistent

"There's no straight formula, but your efforts will be a disaster if you're seen as being kind only to a certain group of people," says Founding Farmers' Dan Simons. "Take each situation on its merit and try to help in a reasonable manner."

> Maintain some distance

"It's not uncommon for us to help our employees get guidance on things like immigration matters and even pay for legal fees," Simons says. "It's important to get good guidance, but I don't want to be the source of that guidance. It's pretty easy to get sucked in. I have to remind myself to balance my head and my heart."

> Communicate your values

Generosity is one of the values of the Boca Restaurant Group in Cincinnati, says John Giua, director of culture for the four-restaurant company. "We're all about going the extra mile for our guests, and we treat our employees the same way," he says. "We talk about our culture and share examples in the interview process, during training and at daily staff meetings. We've found that storytelling is very powerful."

> Walk the talk

It's easy to say you care about your staff but "at the end of the day, it's all about our actions," says Craigie on Main's Tony Maws. "We have two busy restaurants, and the work is mentally and physically draining. Anything we can do to help balance that is an important thing."

er's family and the hospital staff. Staffers organized a baby shower at the restaurant for the sous chef, complete with gifts of furniture and other nursery basics.

"In those situations, everyone knows what happened and we have a very caring staff that takes action," Simons says.

More common, he says, are employees struggling in private. "This is where we want to help in a one-on-one way."

Simons established a \$5,000 annual discretionary fund when the group's first restaurant opened in 2008. The fund aids at least 10 employees each year.

"We've helped people pay rent and buy food; we've given gift cards," Simons says. "If an employee needs a hand, we do our best to help out."

A Different Kind of Health

Chad Mackay, president of El Gaucho Hospitality, which includes upscale steak and seafood restaurants in Seattle and Portland, Oregon, stepped in with financial education.

"Some staff did quite well; others were broke all the time, living paycheck to paycheck," he says, noting that some of the financial difficulties came from debts such as repaying student loans.

The tipping point came last year when a bartender gave notice to avoid having his wages garnished.

Mackay purchased the Dave Ramsey CORE Financial Wellness video series for \$10,000 and offered it free to his 375 employees. So far, 40 employees have participated and feedback has been positive.

Show, Don't Tell

When a water pipe burst and temporarily closed The Modern last year, the Union Square Hospitality Group, which operates the restaurant, used the time to show employees their value to the business.

"We knew the restaurant would get taken care of, but our concern was how do we take care of the team," says Dino Lavorini, director of operations for Art Food, which includes The Modern, located at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

USHG created a program to pay its 180 staffers 40 hours' worth of their average hourly wage for continuing education and volunteer work. Opportunities included tours of Sixpoint Brewery in Brooklyn, a service seminar with CEO Danny Meyer, volunteer days at Edible Schoolyard NYC and training at sister restau-



rants, such as Gramercy Tavern (cocktail creation) and North End Grill (rooftop farming).

About 90 percent of the staff participated.

"Our staff felt cared for," Lavorini says. "The morale of our team really was at an all-time high when we reopened."

Exceed Expectations

Tony Maws, owner of Craigie on Main and The Kirkland Tap & Trotter, both in the Boston area, decided to be proactive about the needs of his employees. That meant providing the best benefits he could afford and pushing for a better work-life balance.

Maws hired a human resources director, who helped create a package that includes employer contributions to health insurance and paying more than half of dental and vision coverage.

"When we started, it was almost unheard of in this industry," he says. "Even if it's the given, we want to be the place doing more."

Maws' show-you-care benefits for his 100 part- and full-time employees also include free yoga classes, bike-share memberships and a new focus on staff education.

Turnover, he says, is below average, and teamwork is high.

"As an employer, I have to listen to what the market is about," he says. "There are more great restaurants and more great restaurant cities. If people don't want to work for you, there are plenty of other options." ■

Monica Ginsburg is a Chicago-based business writer.



Chef-owner Tony Maws, left, and restaurants like the Modern, right, and Founding Farmers, believe that the good will of caring for staff trickles down to how well diners are cared for.

Gremolata Scrambled Eggs



MONEY & SENSE

Ideas to bank on

“What’s trending?
SCRAMBLED
eggs for dinner.”

- Andrew Freeman*
Hospitality and Restaurant Consultant

Eggs aren’t just for breakfast anymore. Scrambled eggs are showing up in new and creative ways. Loaded with versatility and incredibly high consumer acceptance, the egg is the perfect center of the plate canvas for creating your next culinary inspiration. Ideas to get you started can be found at AEB.org/recipes

*Freeman’s AF&Co., hospitality and restaurant consultants, authors an annual trends report for hotels and restaurants. 2015’s edition, *The Pleasure Principle*, is found at www.afandco.com

Scrap the Trash Habit

Move toward composting and recycling





THE DIRT ON RESTAURANT WASTE

IF YOU'RE DOING NOTHING, IT WON'T BE FOR LONG

BY ABIGAIL PICKUS

GREG ISCHE OF TRECENTO QUINDICI DECANO, THE RESTAURANT AT THE ST. REGIS ASPEN RESORT IN ASPEN, COLORADO, DIDN'T NEED MUCH CONVINCING TO PARTICIPATE IN A LOCAL COMPOSTING PROGRAM.

With Colorado's Pitkin County landfill almost at capacity, and a personal connection to composting as a longtime gardener, the executive sous chef signed on the restaurant after one informational meeting and then helped bring on the resort.

"It's mind-boggling the amount of waste produced by restaurants," said Ische, who joined the composting initiative in November 2014.

Restaurants have entered a new era of waste management—and it's gaining momentum.

More operations keep separate bins for recyclables, food waste and garbage, making composting and other ways of reducing waste, such as recycling oil and grease, more common. Composting has also gone high tech: methane emissions are captured for electricity.

Visual Impact

Quantifying the restaurant's waste was a big eye-opener for Ische. Eighty percent of the restaurant's waste now lands in the compost bin instead of the landfill, thanks to the program sponsored by the county and city of Aspen.

"We are composting over 5,000 pounds of waste every week, which is the equivalent (to the weight) of a Toyota Tundra or small elephant. Instead of going into the landfill and producing ethanol gas, (it) will go back into gardens to grow vegetables and grass," he says. "That's leaving a very small carbon footprint, and we're only one institution in Aspen."

Cut the Trash

Scott Dolich, chef-owner of Park Kitchen and The Bent Brick, was among the initial restaurateurs in Portland, Oregon, to separate organic waste for composting, long before the city passed its recent food waste law.

His kitchens divide garbage into three separate containers, one for organic food waste; recyclables like cardboard, glass and plastic; and trash.



They've recently added oil to the recycling plan. When vegetable oil runs its course in the fryer, it's collected and turned into biodiesel. Restaurants in New England and the south, such as Hyman's Seafood Company in Charleston, South Carolina, are also sending off their used vegetable oil to be turned into biodiesel.

"I'm amazed at how little garbage gets produced now," said Dolich, who's reduced garbage to two 90-gallon roll carts per week for both restaurants from a 2-cubic-yard dumpster.

At FT33 in Dallas, Chef Matt McCallister implemented a unique way to conserve and reuse waste.

The restaurant reserves its scraps of fruits, vegetables and bones for local farmers who turn the waste into compost that helps grow produce specifically for McCallister. Some of the compost also comes back to the restaurant for its on-premise garden that grows herbs.

"We try to do whatever we can, but if there were more of an industrywide requirement to compost, you would probably see a lot more benefit from it," McCallister says.

Overcoming Challenges

Going green isn't always easy. Recycling and composting businesses have grown across the country, says Michael Oshman, president and CEO of the Green Restaurant Association. Yet 54 percent of independent restaurant owners and 92 percent of multiunit operators say they face barriers to food waste recycling, citing transportation constraints and insufficient

If it smells like french fries when the Grand Canyon Railway steam locomotive chugs 65 miles across Arizona, that's because it runs on the oil that fried them.

Instead of diesel fuel, this old-time steam engine—which runs 12 times a year as a tourist attraction—has been retrofitted to burn waste vegetable oil, collected from over 20 nearby restaurants and a local potato chip factory.

"Some call it the french fry express," says Morgan O'Connor, director of sustainability for Xanterra Parks & Resorts, which owns and operates the Grand Canyon Railway & Hotel.

Leftover kitchen grease, such as fryer oil, is a 100 percent renewable fuel. When burned in the steam engine it reduces over 26,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per round trip.

Xanterra further reduces its carbon footprint by donating leftover food from the train and its restaurants to feed animals at the nearby Bearizona, a wildlife park.

options, such as storage and refrigeration, according to a 2014 survey by the Food Waste Reduction Alliance, based in Washington, D.C.

"Sometimes I feel like I am fighting an uphill battle," McCallister says. "It's difficult to get a recycling program started. I tried to do this at a previous restaurant with old wine bottles because we threw out so many that it was insane."

When McCallister contacted a recycling hauler, he was told the restaurant had to wash the bottles first, which would require additional labor and a fee for the hauler.

While recycling wine bottles is cost-prohibitive, McCallister reuses bottles for housemade vinegars and endeavors to produce as little waste as possible. He has a separate bin for composting and takes a nose-to-tail, root-to-stalk approach to his menu.

"Challenges do exist but there are also ways to overcome them," said Laura Abshire, director of sustainability for the National Restaurant Association.

A Work Around

Urban Farmer Steakhouse in Cleveland overcame roadblocks after its initial attempt to save organic waste for composting. Problems arose when the recycling bins, which were kept in an indoor space shared with an adjacent building, attracted some unwanted guests.

"Over the summer when it was so hot, the compost attracted flies. It also smelled because of the internal venting system," says Troy Christian, Urban Farmer's general manager. "The building next to us was not very happy."

They solved the problem internally. One of the restaurant's line cooks owns a small organic farm where the waste is now composted for crops that Urban Farmer buys.

"It all comes full circle," Christian says. "We know where the vegetables are coming from,

everything is organic, nothing goes to waste and it benefits both sides."

But Is the Waste a Waste?

The ethical reasons for composting and recycling are clear-cut, but for many chefs and restaurant owners, the decision comes down to the bottom line.

A composting and recycling program has initial costs, such as bins, equipment and training. But for most restaurants, it's a wash. Trash disposal fees drop because the volume is less but it's replaced with a composting fee.

For Dolich of Park Kitchen, the price of composting and sustainability isn't much more than maintaining one multipurpose trash bin. He pays \$1 per bag for the required organic waste bin liners, but the cost of trash removal is significantly higher than organic waste removal.

"There is a financial zero-sum game to what we were paying before and what we are paying after," he said. "But the real benefit is not financial. It's knowing that we are not throwing everything into landfill," he says.

Reducing waste, however, can create a new revenue stream, making the upfront costs similar to transitioning to pricier LED lighting, which yields long-term savings.

"You can recycle used grease for biodiesel and get paid for that," Abshire says.

Savings or not, Ische of The St. Regis Aspen Resort says he sees composting and recycling this way:

"As culinarians and professionals, we have to be responsible about our environmental impact. This is just common sense and the right thing to do." ■

After four years of taking in Jerusalem, Abigail Pickus is back in her hometown of Chicago working as a writer and editor.

FIVE WAYS TO CONSERVE WASTE

1. SEPARATE SCRAPS

Composting can be as simple as separating organic food waste from all the other garbage and arranging a pickup by a local waste hauler. Some facilities can even compost meats, fish, dairy and oil. Check out sources at FindAComposter.com.

2. DONATE LEFTOVER FOOD

Reach out to local food pantries and agencies such as Feeding America and the Food Donation Connection. They both link restaurants to local hunger relief agencies.

3. AUDIT YOUR WASTE

Monitor your operation's waste using food-waste tracking systems such as LeanPath to foster better purchasing habits and bigger savings.

4. PUSH FOR CHANGE

San Francisco was the first city to pass a mandatory recycling and composting ordinance in 2009. Since then, the state of California has followed suit, and numerous cities, such as New York, Seattle and Portland, Oregon, have passed composting legislation targeting food service institutions. If it's not happening in your area, contact your legislators to get the ball rolling.

5. TAP EXISTING RESOURCES

Check out the National Restaurant Association's "Bright Ideas" newsletter (Conserve.Restaurant.org). More information can also be found at Food Waste Reduction Alliance (FoodWasteAlliance.org) and the Green Restaurant Association (DineGreen.com).

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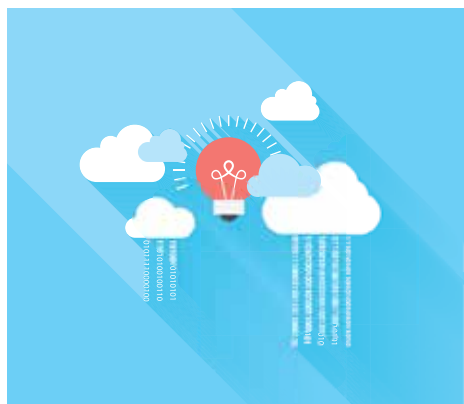
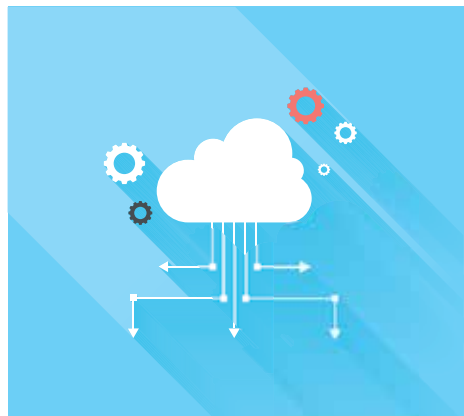
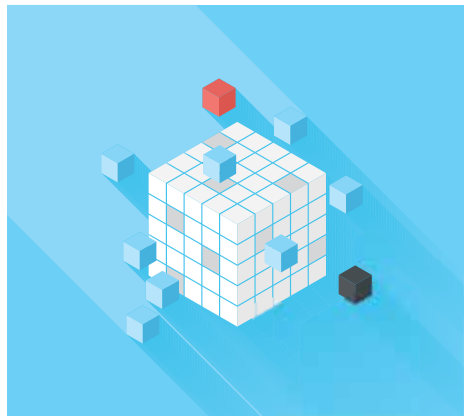
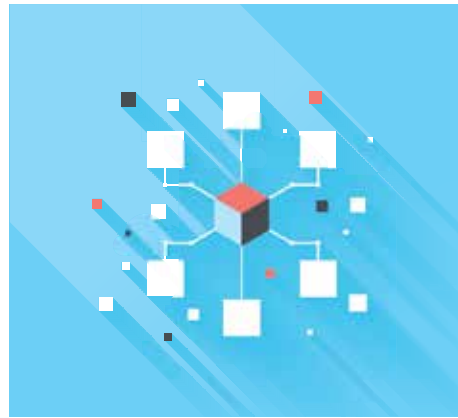
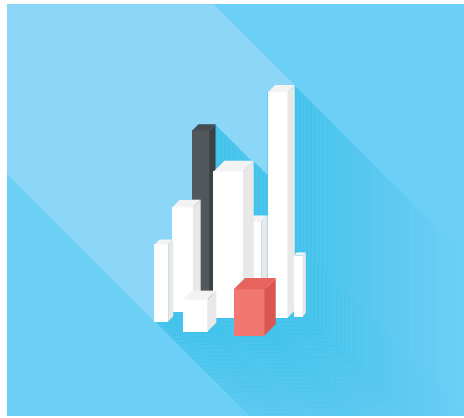
WASTE BY THE NUMBERS

60
MILLION TONS
Food waste generated in the United States in 2010

40
MILLION TONS
Food waste that went to landfills in 2010

Source: Food Waste Reduction Alliance





Just the Right Byte

Big data is for the big boys. Independent restaurateurs can improve operations with specialized analytics tools

BY PETER GIANOPULOS

BIG DATA IS THE BUZZWORD OF THE MOMENT, HAILED AS THE WAY TO MINE INFORMATION FROM THE MILLIONS OF TRANSACTIONS THAT BUSINESSES CONDUCT EVERY DAY.

That's great for mega-chains like McDonald's, Subway and Taco Bell. Big data services sift through thousands of gigabytes of data and identify key patterns within that jumble. But they can be pricy and ineffective for smaller operators that experience only a fraction of transactions in comparison.

"Don't use an elephant gun as a fly swatter," data expert Mark Herschberg says of leveraging big data programs to solve the needs of independent restaurants.

Instead, Herschberg, chief technology officer of Madison Logic, a New York-based data solutions company, and other experts, say independent restaurants and smaller multi-unit operators can use standard analytics

tools. Better yet: They're more affordable and offer a good return on investment.

"Some mom-and-pops are scared off by analytics, but they shouldn't be," says Jesse Marshall, vice president of Native Foods Cafe, a healthy fast casual concept with locations in five states plus Washington, D.C. "They don't have to buy into this huge expensive infrastructure anymore. Everything is integrated now."

Today's analytics tools collect more than information; they create a holistic picture of sales, inventory and reputation that can help remedy a host of problems. Take a closer look.

Problem: How do I improve customer loyalty?

Solution: Analyze ordering patterns and create customized promotions.

Matthew Joseph, information technology director of national chain Fig & Olive, relies on Venga, an analytics tool that links point-of-sales data with OpenTable reservations to determine what customers are ordering.

With Venga, Fig & Olive creates profiles of guests to customize dining experiences. The information might include food allergies, wine preferences and the frequency dessert is ordered. This data is useful for personalized service that turns guests into devoted regulars.

Problem: How do I maximize profits from my wine and beverage list?

Solution: Track wine prices and beverage orders in real time.

At Rattan Pan-Asian Bistro in Houston, owner Ron Chen allows guests to swipe through more than 250 different wine selections on an iPad equipped with an analytics tool called Uncorkd. Uncorkd allows customers to search wines by keyword, read taste descriptions and view images. The backend, however, makes the most difference.

The system provides real-time feedback on which wines are searched and ordered, as well as pricing data about each bottle compared against other restaurants.

Before Uncorkd, Chen sold 30 percent of his wine by the bottle and 70 percent by the glass. Now sales are an even 50-50. Uncorkd also saves time. Managers no longer type and print new wine lists, which saves up to six hours a week.

Problem: How do I fine-tune the skills of my wait staff?

Solution: Link together online critiques with hard data.

When Chef-owner Andrea G. Di Carlo opened her Norfolk, Virginia-based Italian restaurant La Bella in Ghent in 2007, she generated analytics manually from the POS system. A year ago, she started using Swipely, a system that fuses sales and customer data on one dashboard, to transform the way she trains her staff.

When a customer uses a credit card, Swipely records a wealth of data about the visit—what was ordered, who served the meal and more—and links it to the name on the credit card. Using the dashboard feature to monitor review sites such as Yelp, TripAdvisor and Google+, Di Carlo can review negative feedback and then work on improving specific skills of individual servers.

Di Carlo has nearly eliminated negative service reviews. Check averages are up about 7 percent, as servers can recommend specific food and wine offerings to regulars based on stored data.

Problem: How do I drive more traffic toward special events and holidays?

Solution: Implement a marketing strategy tied to free WiFi offerings.

Canadian chain Original Joe's has found quantifiable success using Troglo, an analytics tool that creates targeted in-store messaging attached to the restaurant's WiFi services.

When guests log on to the restaurant's free WiFi, they accept the terms of use and are sent to a landing page comprised of customized content such as new menu items or special events.

Last year, Original Joe's ran targeted WiFi ads about its St. Patrick's Day offerings and saw a 61 percent uptick in covers with those who saw the WiFi promotion compared with those who did not. Other event ads followed and continued to hit at an impressive rate, with as much as 7 percent of ad clicks tied to highlighted specials or event attendance. ■

Peter Gianopulos is a dining critic for Chicago magazine and an adjunct professor at Loyola University.

“**SOME MOM-AND-POPS ARE SCARED OFF BY ANALYTICS, BUT THEY SHOULDN'T BE.**”
- Jesse Marshall of Native Foods Cafe



SO YOU WANT TO WRITE A COOKBOOK

5 questions to answer before picking up the pen

BY KATE LEAHY

MOST CHEFS AND RESTAURANT OWNERS HAVE ENOUGH STORIES TO FILL A BOOK. THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT A COOKBOOK DEAL IS A SURE BET.

Since my first co-authored cookbook, *A16 Food + Wine*, came out in 2008, the cookbook market has changed significantly, becoming more sophisticated—and competitive—each year. While publishers are more interested in chef books than ever before, they also expect more from the authors.

Even if a book doesn't make money, it's still a valuable PR tool. A successful cookbook can bring national press coverage, awards, product endorsement deals, television appearances and opportunities to create a product line.

Before you take the plunge, ask yourself these questions:

1. What's your angle?

Cookbooks that focus solely on a restaurant's greatest hits worked well a decade ago (think *The French Laundry Cookbook*). Now, books need an angle that differentiates them from the pack. Can you give readers an in-depth look at Laotian food traditions? Do you specialize in brunch? Will your recipes be all about feeding a crowd?

2. Who's on your team?

Most chefs work with a writer to help craft their stories, and an agent often makes introductions. To get started, you and your co-author will need to write a book proposal, which is a detailed plan describing the scope of the project. Proposals include a marketing plan, table of contents,



WHO GETS A CUT?

Considering the unpredictable nature of cookbooks, it's best to think of book expenses as part of a restaurant's marketing budget. Here's a general breakdown:

› **Agent:** Plan on paying 15 percent of the advance and royalties.

› **Writer:** Hiring an experienced writer to draft a 40-plus page proposal including tested recipes runs about \$5,000. Once a book deal is in place, you will have to compensate the writer with a flat fee or a portion of the advance and royalties—or a combination. An agent can help negotiate rates with writers and draft contributor agreements.

› **Photographer:** Some publishers require authors to pay for photography.

› **Indexer:** Who puts together the index of a cookbook? The author is required to assume this cost when the publisher does not. The rates vary.

› **Recipe tester:** A professional recipe tester may charge \$100 to \$150 per recipe, not including the price of ingredients. Alternatively, you can amass a volunteer network of testers among loyal customers in exchange for a free copy of the book. Volunteer testers, however, require follow-up, which means more of your time.

Sharp ideas to get butts in seats

recipe list and five to 10 tested recipes. If you work with an agent, he or she will get the proposal in front of acquisition editors at publishing houses. Once a publisher buys the book, an editor, designer and photographer get on board.

3. Can you afford it?

After signing a book deal, publishers usually give authors an advance against royalties paid out in installments. The advance is intended to offset expenses from writing the book. Once the book sells enough copies to earn back the advance, you start to earn royalties.

Some books make money; many never do. Even when a book sells well, it can take a couple of years after publication for royalties to kick in. No magic number of book sales is considered successful, but, broadly speaking, 30,000 is plenty for most authors to secure a second book deal.

4. Can you go it alone?

Restaurants with a local fan base may find more success through self-publishing. Selling 5,000 self-published copies at \$30 may be more lucrative than selling 15,000 books and waiting on royalties. But it is not easy to sell 5,000 directly out of a single restaurant, and getting books into brick-and-mortar stores is no small feat.

In addition, creating a book that rivals one from a publishing house requires a significant outlay of cash. You will need to hire a team (see sidebar) and set aside half the budget for printing and shipping costs—\$6 to \$10 per book for a print run of 5,000. One way to fund a book is through crowdsourcing via Kickstarter, which has a roughly 30 percent success rate in funding publishing projects, including cookbooks.

5. Will you have the time (honestly)?

Cookbook crunch time—roughly a month before deadline—is when the going gets tough. On top of running a restaurant, you need to set aside time for writing and reading drafts, discussing notes and finding solutions for recipes that don't work outside of a commercial kitchen. Before you dig into a major project, map out the year and see if you can set aside time to work on recipes with your book team. ■

*Kate Leahy is the co-author of *The Preservation Kitchen*, *SPQR* and the recently published *Cookie Love*. Follow her on Twitter @KateLeahy.*

Be efficient and tech savvy at the same time



The Personal Touch

Technology can make every guest feel like a regular

BY GLORIA DAWSON

Imagine diners walking into your restaurant who are recognized by the host and greeted by name. Servers offer favorite drinks, knowing all of the guests' food preferences.

This dining scenario was once limited to frequent diners or fine dining establishments. But new technology is empowering all restaurants to give every guest personalized treatment.

"It's a bit of the 'Cheers' effect," says Scott Jampol, senior vice president of marketing at reservation platform OpenTable. "People love to feel welcomed and recognized."

Tools that personalize diner experiences typically work with a restaurant's existing point-of-sale system. A POS system can't alert a

restaurant that a guest has arrived but it stores a powerhouse of information ideal for harvesting.

Knowing diners' preferences, ordering history and frequency of visits, among other things, is about building customer loyalty, cultivating repeat visits and increasing sales.

A Name With the Face

Interest in food, chefs and restaurants has created a culture where diners more than ever crave to be acknowledged. But on their own terms.

Facial recognition technology, which may sound intriguing, has been met with apprehension. Operators who have tried Facedeals, for example, say their custom-

ers weren't ready for it, calling it "creepy."

Beacons, however, are showing promise for restaurants. Already gaining traction in retail, these small Bluetooth enabled transmission devices work with an app to alert the restaurant of a guest's arrival.

The diner, who has downloaded the restaurant's app, receives a welcoming popup notification after walking into the establishment. By communicating with the restaurant's POS system or computer, the beacon app triggers the diner's profile, allowing the host to greet the customer by name while giving servers access to dining preferences.

Once the guest is in the restaurant, other notifications can pop up, promoting dishes or specials.

Tanoi, a software company that offers the beacon app, has about a dozen restaurants using the service, including Atlanta-based chain Moe's Southwest Grill.

Devices cost as little as \$5, and, depending on a restaurant's need, one should do the trick. Companies behind the beacon app, such as Mahana, charge a monthly fee, which for Mahana can start at \$39 per month per location.

"What's interesting about technology is how you can scale that experience so anyone can have it at any price point," says Danielle Gould, founder and CEO of Food+Tech Connect, an organization that works with businesses in the restaurant and technology industries.

Sharing Is Caring

If you keep diner preferences and own more than one concept, or your restaurant has different locations, chances are you don't know whether the same diner is frequenting them—until now.

“IT'S A BIT OF THE 'CHEERS' EFFECT. PEOPLE LOVE TO FEEL WELCOMED AND RECOGNIZED.”

—Scott Jampol of OpenTable

New technologies are giving operators the tools to mine information from different restaurants, enabling them to further deepen personalization.

Restaurant software company Venga allows cross-communication among restaurants under the same ownership by unlocking data stored on POS systems and OpenTable, though the reservation platform has also started enabling cross-communication.

On Target

Retail companies have been hot on targeted email marketing for years, and the restaurant industry is finally starting to catch up. Data-gathering software from companies like Venga can sift through data to help restaurants seamlessly send guests custom messages.

"We can easily pull up a list of people who were interested in a certain type of event, or ordered truffles," says Lauren Hobbs, director of marketing at Union Square Hospitality Group in New York. "When the next [truffle] season comes up, you can communicate with that specific group rather than blanketing the whole list." ■

*Gloria Dawson is a New York-based writer and contributor to *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. She loves when restaurants greet her by name.*

DEAR FOOD FANATIC

Seasoned advice on the front and back of the house

Q My siblings and I are taking over our long-lived family restaurant. My brothers want to go cheap on ingredients and raise prices to make it more profitable. This feels knee-jerk to me. What's your take?

A IMPROVE WHAT THE RESTAURANT HAS BEEN DOING, and don't cut corners. Costs can be slashed numerous ways, which would also improve the bottom line. Take a hard look at labor (are slower nights overstaffed?), assess inventory (are you holding on to too much?) and review purchasing history (are you taking advantage of vendor promotions and buying seasonally?). Buy the best ingredients at a price point you can afford, and build on items with good food costs, like pasta and salads.



FOOD FANATIC

Josh Hoellein, a Food Fanatics chef from Salt Lake City, Utah, is driven to advance the epicurean landscape.



@chefjhoellein
Follow the Food Fanatic on Twitter for more tips.

Q. How in the hell do I get my employees to show up for work every shift?

A. Look for employees with a solid work history and implement a training program that helps new hires feel invested. Show appreciation for attendance with small incentives, like gift cards, comped meals and first dibs on premium shifts. Treating staff well produces loyal employees, ones less likely to pull a no-show.

Q. Cooking with wood, charcoal and smoke is so popular, but I don't have the room for that type of equipment. Are there alternative ways?

A. Get a smoking gun to infuse flavors into dishes, from woods and herbs to tea and spices. Smoke can be added before cooking vegetables and proteins, or as a final blast of flavor. Use smoke to enhance brunch staples like eggs and cheese. Or raise the bar by infusing smoke into bloody mary mixes, salts and spirits, like bourbon.

Q. I want to breathe some new life into my menu with global flavors, but I don't have the labor to execute difficult dishes. What are some quick hit ideas?

A. How about sauces? A sense of global flavor can be achieved by adding a spiced up sauce to

sandwiches, grilled meats and vegetables. Spike mayo with curry, ketchup with Sriracha and glazes with chilies. It can be as simple as getting the flavor on a dish rather than reinventing the recipe.

Q. How can I get my guests to order more wine?

A. Start with your servers. Choose wines you want to move, let staff taste them with paired dishes and brainstorm words to describe the characteristics. Know the winemaker's story so your servers can share it with customers. Designate wine promotions on slower nights, which help familiarize customers with your list and may attract more customers.

Q. Got any tips for making vegetarian dishes that aren't boring?

A. Treat your vegetables like a protein, keeping it simple and planning ahead. Par roast vegetables or grill them to create visual appeal and flavor. It also allows you to create quick dishes that can be cross-utilized with nonvegetarian dishes. Offer great grains or unique pastas served with spices, sauces and cheeses that make it look like you went the extra mile.

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Locked, Stocked and Ready to Rock

7 WAYS TO A MORE EFFICIENT WALK-IN

BY PETER GIANOPULOS

THE WALK-IN IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF YOUR RESTAURANT. NEGLECTING IT CAN COST MONEY AND CAUSE BIG HEADACHES.

The percentage of waste may not seem big—3 percent by some accounts—but as any operator knows, those percentages are better off on the bottom line than in the garbage.

Nip the problem in the bud with these tips on how to build a better walk-in:

1. Know where everything goes

No one likes getting burned—especially when it's freezer burn. Understanding the best location for each product is essential. Morrissey Hospitality, a St. Paul, Minnesota-based restaurant and hotel management group, advises clients to store fresh produce as far from a unit's fans as possible to reduce the chance of freezer burns. Store meat on the lowest possible shelf to prevent accidental spills from contaminating the food below, and space items three inches apart from each other to allow cool air to circulate around the products.

2. LED the way

Upgrading to LED lights, which can cost about six times more than fluorescent, saves big bucks in the long term. "LEDs work better in cold environments, making them the ideal choice for coolers in commercial kitchens," says Amy Silver of MaxLite, an LED manufacturer for restaurants and grocery stores. LEDs also may last 35 to 50 times longer than incandescent lights and about two to five times longer than fluorescents. According to Silver, operations can see a return on investment in six months.

3. Practice checkups

A recent list of best practices from the Washington Restaurant Association and the University of Washington underscores the importance of maintenance. Keep an eye on door seals and hinges to prevent air from escaping. Monitor refrigerant levels to ensure your compressor isn't wearing out. And clean condensing coils regularly so fan blades don't ice over, which can reduce drag and cause energy costs to skyrocket.



4. Educate your staff

Chef Mark Estee, who owns and operates eight restaurants in Nevada and California, suggests that chefs teach walk-in maintenance with the same level of detail as knife skills. Show your staff the way—and how often—you clean, and they will follow your lead. One tip: Map out where each item should be placed, and create a visual guide for all to follow.

5. Stick to a rotation schedule

Sam Corigliano, owner of the 35-year-old Marina Cafe on Staten Island, New York, says assigning walk-in duty to a steward ensures profitability. When inventory arrives, the steward removes items from cardboard cases and places them in clear storage containers to make them easier to identify. New items are then placed in the back of the cooler, pushing the older items to the front. "Use first" stickers on containers act as a safety net to ensure older products are used first.

6. Put an eye in the sky

Kathy Matrious, director of service operations-food and beverage at Grand Casino Hinckley, in Hinckley, Minnesota, suggests monitoring the cooler with cameras. An inexpensive camera aimed at the walk-in is a reminder for staff to reduce the amount of time they spend in the cooler and to turn off any lights. She also recommends that smaller operations install vinyl strip curtains to pre-

“THE WALK-IN IS THE HEART OF THE HEART OF YOUR RESTAURANT. THAT'S WHERE YOUR MONEY IS, SO YOU'VE GOT TO DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO PROTECT IT.” —Cory Wilk, of City Range Steak House Restaurant

vent air leakage from the walk-in, but larger outfits use blast chillers to shorten the time it takes to cool products down before they get placed in the walk-in.

7. Customize your freezer

Cory Wilk, co-owner of City Range Steak House Restaurant, based in both Greenville and Spartanburg, South Carolina, uses three different walk-ins: one for proteins, another for produce and dairy, and a third for drinks. As a result, his bar team knows to stick to its cooler and the kitchen team theirs. Wilk says each cooler uses customizable shelves, which can be adjusted and removed for easy cleaning. "The walk-in is the heart of the heart of your restaurant," Wilk says, "That's where your money is, so you've got to do everything you can to protect it." ■

I'LL DRINK TO THAT!



PUT AN Umbrella ON IT

TIKI COCKTAILS WORK OUTSIDE THE TROPICS

By Kate Bernot

DON'T CALL IT A COME-BACK. TIKI CULTURE, THE ISLAND-CENTRIC COCKTAIL AND FASHION CRAZE, NEVER REALLY LEFT.

It just hit a rough patch for the past three decades. Sugary drink mixes, chintzy raffia decor and the dreaded slushie machine cheapened what pioneers like Don the Beachcomber and Trader Vic established in the 1930s.

How the tropical tides have turned. Thanks to serious bartenders spearheading the tiki revival, like Paul McGee of Chicago's Lost Lake and Martin Cate of Smuggler's Cove in San Francisco, retro tropical cocktails and their "endless vacation" vibe are white hot again.

But jumping on the tiki bandwagon means more than slapping a Mai Tai or Painkiller on the menu and calling it a day.

"You have to take the formula and run with it. If you're just doing the classics and you're not adding any of your own stamps to them, why are you doing it?" says Jeff "Beachbum" Berry, author of numerous tiki cocktail books and owner of Latitude 29, a tiki-themed bar and restaurant in New Orleans. "Take that template that Don the Beachcomber established and add today's ingredients and liquor brands."

Sometimes that means tapping outside talent. New York City craft cocktail bar Pouring Ribbons sought the expertise of bartender-turned-consultant Brian Miller to host a Monday night tiki party. After making a name for himself at New York hot spots like Death & Co. and Pegu Club, Miller has been making the rounds for the past

Signature Tiki Cocktail

Owner Paul McGee
Lost Lake, Chicago

- 2 ounces rum, high quality*
- ¾ ounce passion fruit syrup
- ¾ ounce lime juice
- ½ ounce pineapple juice
- ¼ ounce maraschino liqueur
- ¼ ounce Campari

Combine ingredients in a tall glass and top with crushed ice. Swizzle to incorporate. Top with more crushed ice, garnish tropically with ingredients like a pineapple crescent and leaves, orange peel, paper umbrella, a small orchid and a bendy straw. Makes 1 drink.

*Lost Lake prefers Appleton V/X for its signature cocktail.

four years using nontraditional tiki spirits like Scotch, sake and beer.

"We're trying to expand the bounds of tiki beyond juice, syrup and rum thrown together," Miller says. "Modern tiki is able to use ingredients that people don't expect or bringing stuff back that people don't know. It's a way of making tiki available to everyone, not just rum heads."

A classic Mai Tai, for instance, takes an inverted twist in which the main ingredient is Grand Marnier, rather than rum.

For bars that want to tap into the rum-drenched trend without going full hula skirt, the tiki spirit can be infused in subtle ways. Think tiki nights or one or two drinks, ideal especially during summer, Berry says.

On Tiki Mondays at Pouring Ribbons, Miller creates eight seasonal tiki cocktails from \$14 to \$16. ZZ's Clam Bar, also in New York, features rum-based tropical originals alongside modern, esoteric cocktails in vintage vessels.

It may sound counterintuitive to a movement that's all about kitsch and excess, but nontropical bars should keep drinks restrained, Berry says. Many classic tiki cocktails can be a pain to tackle behind a busy bar, especially when garnishes are involved.

"If you think it's difficult to balance a three-ingredient drink, [try] to balance an eight- to 10-ingredient drink," Berry says.

Fun garnishes are part of the package, and easy PR for your camera-snapping customers. But non-tiki bars don't need to set anything on fire to make a point.

Consider small flourishes like custom swizzle sticks or branded umbrellas. Funky ceramic mugs can also be a point of sale for souvenirs, sold at places like Otto's Shrunken Head in New York or Lucky Joe's Tiki Room in Milwaukee.

"You can be as sophisticated and as refined as you want to be. You don't have to carve an animal out of a piece of fruit," Berry says. Simpler garnishes, like fanned out pineapple leaves, are elegant decorations and don't hike up costs.

Maybe more important to tiki than any garnish or cute mug, though, is the staff's attitude: Keep it chill.

"You can't really be an academic behind the bar," Berry says. "If you're serving a drink in a tiki bowl, it's not like going to church. It's OK to have fun." ■

Kate Bernot is an associate editor at Draft magazine. Follow her on Twitter @kbernot.



JEFF 'BEACHBUM' BERRY'S TIKI COMMANDMENTS

1 Thou shalt vary thy menu. "A chief complaint of a lot of tiki drinks is that they all taste the same. Narrow it down to one drink in each flavor profile." This means you only need one dark rum punch, or just one passion fruit cocktail.

2 Thou shalt serve a Jungle Bird. "The Jungle Bird is a gateway drink for non-tiki drinkers because it's got Campari in it. It's got an amaro, so it's a little bitter." In addition to the amaro, you'll need blackstrap rum, lime and pineapple juices and simple syrup.

3 Thou shalt garnish. "Guests expect the drinks to look pretty, and they tend to be kind of bummed out if they get a drink without some type of garnish." Be as creative as you want with these embellishments. Chicago's Three Dots and a Dash has custom octopus and mermaid swizzle sticks and bananas decorated like dolphins. At Tiki Mondays, Miller often garnishes his drinks with plastic toys like pirates and surfboards.

4 Thou shalt offer communal drinks. Punches that serve two to five people are a big part of the classic tiki experience. Larger portions can also increase bar revenue.

5 Thou shalt illustrate the menu. Hire an illustrator to give your menu a custom look. A small icon that displays a cocktail, its vessel and its garnish helps sell the drinks at San Francisco's Tonga Room and Hale Pele in Portland, Oregon.

BY THE NUMBERS

Do the math for a better payoff

BEEF IT UP

America's appetite for burgers is insatiable, preferring simplicity and improvisation. Expect greater emphasis on the quality of meat, though add-ons remain limitless, according to BurgerBusiness.com.

84%

Diners who think in-house ground meat is important

68%

Diners who say grass-fed and organic beef is important

63%

Diners who believe a gourmet ground blend is important

64%

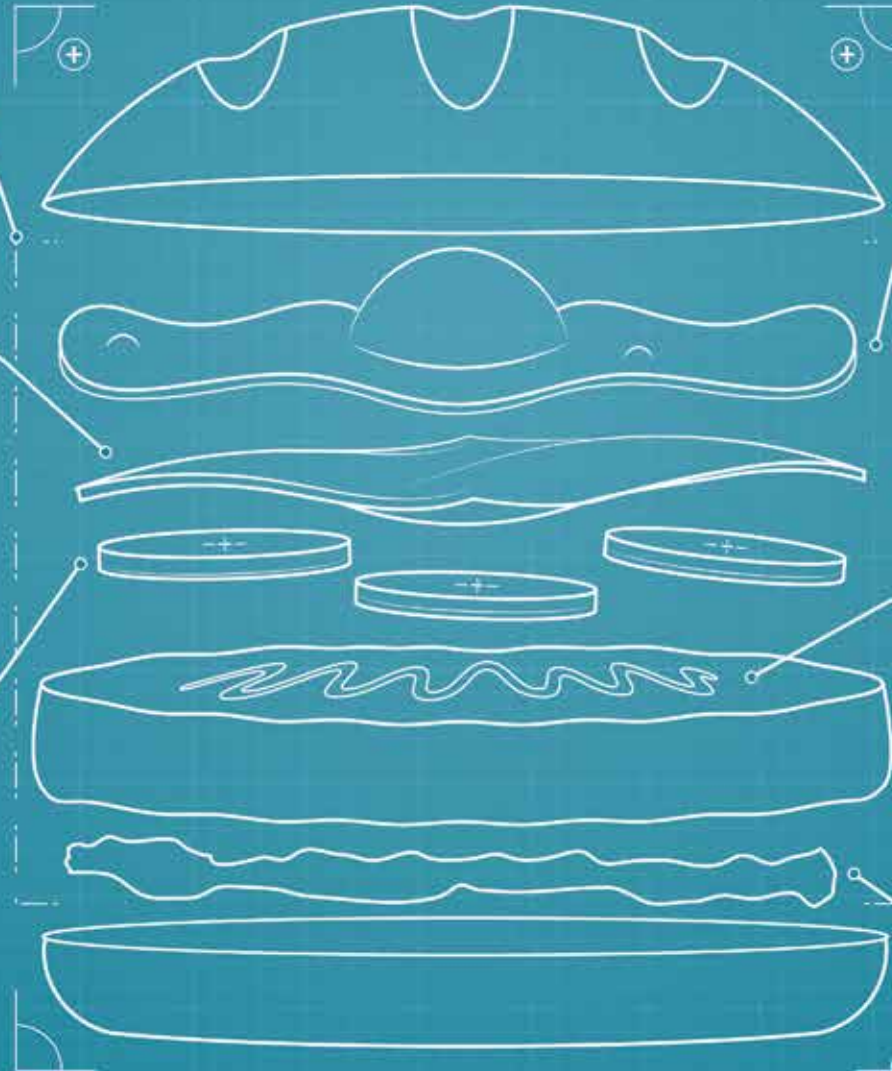
Diners who see custom burger toppings as important

69%

Independent restaurants that serve cheese on burgers compared to 85% of chains

#1

In-house pickling is the most popular preparation method, used for toppings and sides



2X

The number of operators topping burgers with fried eggs has doubled over the past four years, 16 percent in 2014 compared with 8 percent in 2010

50%

Burgers that include a sauce, from ketchup to dressings

3 in 4

Burgers topped with at least one vegetable

Sources: Datassential, Food Genius, Technomic, Zagat



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