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Korean  
corn  
dogs

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Korean corn dogs—a hot dog or a wedge of cheese battered and fried—is ubiquitous street food in Korea that's making fast U.S. fans. See page 5.





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## FRESH IDEAS FOR LABOR RELIEF

Welcome to the winter edition of Food Fanatics® magazine!

As labor and supply challenges continue, we are seeking strategies to help food service operators get ahead in the new year. That's why in this issue, each of our food-trend stories will feature a call-out of how to adopt this trend to save labor or manage flexibility with ingredients and resources. This is in keeping with our brand promise – We Help You Make It.

In Menu Must Haves, the cover story on next gen street food jumps off the page and onto your menu. Global street food is short on labor and big on flavor, to help you wow diners with minimal prep. You'll also get a shortage-savvy strategy for seafood, using frozen cuts that thaw flawlessly and offer year-round consistency.

The Money Moves stories cover two heavy hitting topics in our industry today - overcoming labor challenges, and tech that's taking off in 2022. If you're struggling to find, hire and retain employees and are looking to technology to ease your labor gaps, these stories are for you. Head to page 49 to dive in.

In Meeting the Moment, "It's Showtime," on page 57, gives 6 tactical ideas for making dining an event, including ways to update décor on a budget and make diners feel at home on limited staff. Wrap with a spectacular interview with Chef Irene Li, of Boston's Mei Mei fame, who made a permanent pivot during 2020 and has never looked back.

Wishing you the best for the upcoming holiday season, and Food Fanatics will see you in the new year.

Thanks for reading,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Iacobucci".

Andrew Iacobucci  
Chief Commercial Officer, US Foods





# SEEING SHORTAGES? WE HAVE SOLUTIONS!

Find ways to solve your current business challenges with labor-saving ingredients, tips on dealing with supply challenges, advice on hiring and retaining staff and guidance on COVID-19 legislation.

See more at [www.usfoods.com/shortage](http://www.usfoods.com/shortage).



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**MENU  
MUST-  
HAVES**

## STREET FOODS THAT ROCK

**ROLLED,  
SKEWERED  
OR  
CRADLED**  
By Maggie Hennessy



PHOTOGRAPHY © ANDREA D'AGOSTO

Sweet potato leads  
with this take on a roti  
from Bridgetown Roti.





**WHETHER IT'S A  
HEARTY CARIBBEAN  
ROTI, A PILLOWY  
PERUVIAN BAO  
OR A CRUNCHY  
KOREAN CORN DOG,**

chefs and restaurateurs are leaning into casual, exciting and oh-so-Instagrammable global street foods, infused with the regional flavors and ingredients that reflect their local markets.

Their popularity—driven by portability and pent-up wanderlust—make such hand-held foods of the moment, but the appeal will be long-lasting. The foods tend to have lower price points, allowing for greater profit margins.

“They’re convenient and affordable,” says Carlos Altamirano, one of San Francisco’s best known ambassadors of Peruvian cuisine.

**PERUVIAN BAO**

Ever since the first documented Chinese immigrants arrived in Peru seeking work in the mid-1800s, Chinese and Peruvian have become deeply intertwined—coining its own term denoting fusion of the two, chifa. The convergence has evolved into hand-held packages, most notably baos and *sanguches*, all-day street-food sandwiches with interchangeable ingredients.

Chef/owner of several Bay Area restaurants, including Mochica and



Ingredients for Peruvian baos, such as adobo chicken, can also be used for other items, including the popular sanguches at Sanguchon Eatery in San Francisco.

**Bao Con Chicharron, Sweet Potato and Minto Criolla**

*Executive Chef Jesus Delgado  
Tanta, Chicago*

- 5 pounds pork belly, about 1 side
- 1 cup salt
- 3 pounds pork lard
- 3 bay leaves
- 2 ounces whole garlic, peeled
- 1 ounce whole black pepper
- 1 small red onion, julienned
- 1 habanero, deseeded and chopped
- Mint leaves, as needed, chopped
- 1 lime, to taste
- Sea salt, as needed
- 6 ounces mayo
- 2 ounces rocoto paste
- Sweet potatoes, baked, peeled and sliced, as needed
- Charcoal bao buns, recipe follows
- White bao buns, your choice

Cover pork belly with water, add salt and brine for 12 hours. Drain, rinse and slice pork into 2½-inch squares; set aside.

Melt fat in a Dutch oven and add garlic, bay leaves, whole black pepper and pork. Lower heat and cook for about 1 hour at 240 F. Stir occasionally. Turn the heat to 350 F and cook for 25 minutes or until the fat is crispy and golden brown; set aside.

Combine onion, habanero and mint; season with lime and sprinkle of salt to make criolla salad; set aside. Mix mayo with rocoto.

To assemble, layer 1 slice pork belly, sweet potato, spoonful rocoto mayo and criolla salad in a bao. Serve two or more per order of charcoal and white baos.

**Black Steamed Bao**

- 34 ounces flour
- 1.7 ounces charcoal flour
- 14.5 ounces water
- 9 ounces sugar
- 2 egg whites
- 2 ounces shortening or butter, melted
- 1 ounce dry yeast
- 0.2 ounce baking powder
- 0.6 ounce black food coloring

Sift flour and charcoal together; set aside. Using a mixer, combine water, sugar, egg whites, shortening, yeast, baking powder and food coloring. Mix for 5 minutes on low speed until the sugar and yeast dissolve.

Add flour mixture and beat 10 minutes or until a homogeneous mass is formed. Add more water if needed.

Cut the dough into 3.7 ounce pieces, flatten into 4-inch rounds, fold in half. Place on a sheet tray lined with parchment.

Ferment in an oven at 105 F and 40% humidity for 90 minutes or until it doubles in volume. Increase temperature to 212 F and steam-only for 8 minutes; it should double in volume again. Remove buns and cool to room temperature.



PHOTOGRAPHY © MATT ARMENDARIZ

Black and white baos at Tanta add dramatic contrast.





PHOTOGRAPHY © MATT ARMENDARIZ

### Potato Studded Korean Corn Dogs

- 185 grams flour
- 25 grams sugar
- 11 grams kosher salt
- 10 grams baking soda
- 125 mL milk
- 1 egg
- 2 large russet potatoes, peeled and diced, about ¼ to ½-inch cubes
- 240 grams panko
- Flavorless oil, as needed
- 6 hot dogs or similar-sized mozzarella sticks
- 6 wooden sticks
- Sugar and kosher salt, as needed
- Chili sauce, aioli, ketchup or other condiment, as desired.

**Combine** dry ingredients; set aside. Whisk together milk and egg. Mix into dry ingredients. Batter will be thick.

**Pour** the batter into a rectangular pan. This will make it easier to coat the entire hot dog. Place potatoes on a plate and measure out panko on another one.

**Heat** oil to 350 F. Pat dry hot dogs or cheese and skewer with sticks, about half the length of the dog but leaving enough stick to easily handle and eat from. Quickly roll in the potato and then the panko, using the breadcrumbs to help form a uniform cylinder shape.

**Fry** in oil for 3 to 4 minutes per side until golden brown; drain. While still hot, sprinkle with sugar and salt. Garnish with sauces. Makes 6 dogs.

For an extra-crispy texture, substitute potatoes with crushed, dried ramen.

Barranco, Altamirano recently debuted a brick-and-mortar outpost of Sanguchon, his popular fleet of Peruvian sangucheria trucks. “Street vendors are very popular and offer something for everyone. You could grab one for any meal—breakfast, lunch or dinner.”

While Sanguchon’s menu sticks mostly to tradition, chefs are reaching for the pillowy Chinese bao as the consummate fusion vehicle for creative sanguche fillings. At beloved all-day Peruvian restaurant Ceviche in London’s Soho neighborhood, the Peruvian bao bun stars tempura sea bass, salsa criolla and amarillo chili mayo on a soft steamed bun.

Chicago Peruvian eatery Tanta has made the sanguche bao con chicharron—a jet-black bao topped with crispy pork belly and fresh criolla salad—a staple of the restaurant’s brunch and happy hour menus. To make the sandwich, executive chef Jesus Delgado starts by brining pork belly for 12 hours, then confiting and crisping it in the oven. He makes charcoal-hued bao (thanks to charcoal flour and a few dabs of black food coloring) in-house then smears it with fiery rocoto mayo. He fills the bao with pork belly, sliced sweet potato and minty criolla salad for brightness.

**LABOR RELIEF**

- » Cross-utilize ingredients for bao fillings
- » Purchase bao buns from purveyors
- » Go with frozen Korean corn dogs
- » Opt for premade/bottled sauces

**“STREET VENDORS ARE VERY POPULAR AND OFFER SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. YOU COULD GRAB ONE FOR ANY MEAL—BREAKFAST, LUNCH OR DINNER.”**

—Chef Carlos Altamirano of several San Francisco restaurants

### KOREAN CORN DOGS

Battered and fried hot dogs on a stick became popular in Korea in the 1980s, according to the Korean Culture and Information Service. Before long, cart vendors began crafting thicker batter (made from all-purpose and rice flour instead of corn) that allowed them to affix extras on the outside. Complementary flavors started mildly with a shake of sugar and salt and a drizzle of ketchup and mustard, but quickly progressed to panko breadcrumbs, crispy cubed potatoes and roasted soybean powder with a drizzle of condensed milk. Naturally, corn dog-loving Americans have quickly embraced this cartoonishly photogenic Korean street food on a stick; specialty franchises like Two Hands, Mochinut and Oh K-Dog & Egg Toast are expanding at breakneck pace from Los Angeles to Houston and Queens, New York, to Fayetteville, Arkansas. Oh K-Dog’s battered corn dog fillings span mozzarella to squid ink, and nostalgic sprinkle toppings include honey butter, onion flake and snowing cheese. At Glenview, Illinois-based Holy Cow, the toppings smack decidedly of childhood; Fruity Pops are coated in multicolored crunchy rice puffs (think Fruity Pebbles cereal), while the Flaming Cheetah is blanketed with ground Flamin’ Hot Cheetos.





In Los Angeles, Bridgetown Roti takes orders in advance for its weekend-only pop-up specializing in Caribbean-inspired street food.





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## WHY STREET FOOD?

**1/3**

Consumers who say they're looking forward to trying new global foods and/or flavors

**42%**

Consumers seeking spicy foods

SOURCE: Datassential, 2021

## CARIBBEAN ROTI

Since laborers from India first introduced roti flatbreads to the Caribbean islands, they've been embraced as a means to sop up the sauce of the islands' ubiquitous curries and stews. In Miami, where these days Guyanese roti are almost as popular as Cuban sandwiches, Sheiks Bakery & Roti Cafe boasts a stellar veggie roti, in which sweet pumpkin mash, spinach, potato and curried channa are rolled up like a savory Caribbean burrito. At pop-up Caribbean restaurant Bridgetown Roti in Los Angeles, chef/owner Rashida Holmes channels her Barbadian roots and Los Angeles restaurant background (at vegetable-obsessed Botanica) with crisp yet tender paratha-style roti that she hand rolls before wrapping around comforting fillings like fiery smoked goat shoulder with roasted peanut sauce and fried potatoes. Holmes' Mom's Curry Chicken Roti is a buttery handheld hug packed with succulent, curry-rubbed chicken thighs, crispy local potatoes, turmeric-spiced cabbage, cilantro and scallions. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY © ANDREA D'AGOSTO



Chef/owner Rashida Holmes' Barbadian roots shine through with her take on mac 'n' cheese.





# TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

Underappreciated  
herbs can change  
the course of a menu

By Jacqueline Raposo  
Photography by Matt Armendariz  
Food styling by Adam Pearson  
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

Clockwise, scented  
geranium, lemon  
verbena, tarragon,  
pineapple mint,  
pineapple sage,  
chocolate mint and  
golden thyme.





▼  
**Incorporating fresh herbs**

into dishes has long been a vital component. What’s Sunday Sauce without basil or a mojito without mint? Most restaurant folks wouldn’t want to know. But for those looking to push boundaries, less familiar herbs that excite and entice now trend with diners more than ever.

For Mister Mao chef Sophina Uong, fresh herbs regularly keep her New Orleans diners on their toes. “We often use herbs to cool or refresh the palate between savory and fiery bites,” she explains. Her Vietnamese salad, served from a roving cart, features rau rum and sawtooth. Indian curry leaves fold into oils for major flavoring power. “Our guests appreciate our varied cooking styles and are excited by what is new for them to try,” she says.

At Gage & Tollner in Brooklyn, executive pastry chef Caroline Schiff gets particularly excited by herbs that bring everything up a notch. “Thyme is lovely, but lemon thyme is even more fun,” she explains. “Anise hyssop is just bonkers—the leaves are naturally sweet and taste like Good & Plenty.” Many of her dishes feature one seasonal ingredient and an unexpected corresponding flavor or texture, folded into a somewhat traditional pastry format. “I want diners to think they know what they’re getting. But then, at first bite, to blow their minds just a little bit,” she says. “That’s what great desserts should do.”

For New York mixologist Daniel Bedoya, unexpected herbs help him blend creativity and authenticity in every cocktail. “Using new ingredients not only sharpens you as an artist, but also brings that X factor guests are looking for,” he says. Bedoya uses natural sweeteners like honey and palm sugar to gently enhance the inherent sweetness of featured spirits. Adding fresh vegetables and herbs then deepens flavor and aroma while also contributing immune-boosting health benefits. Unexpected herbs like tarragon and mint dipped in edible gold bring on intrigue. “New Yorkers love to be in-the-know of new trends,” he says. “If they walk out of your bar having learned something new or wanting to experiment with an ingredient, they’ll come back for more.”

Not sure where to start? These six next-generation herbs guarantee such taste bud explosions.

**CARAWAY THYME**

The particularly heady aroma of this dense, leafy thyme holds its own amongst strong flavors and sharp aromas—so much so that it’s also called herba-barona or “herb of beef” for how well it seasoned meat while pushing the boundaries of freshness during medieval times. Fold it into breads and stewed meat dishes for a fragrant burst of robust caraway notes. In sweet applications, infuse it into buttery shortbread dough along with zest from citrus for an alluring result. “No one can ever put their finger on it,” Schiff promises. “It’s perfect after a big, rich meal with espresso.”

**CHOCOLATE MINT**

This one is a bit of an enigma. A hybrid of water mint, spearmint and orange mint, some think the chocolaty aroma is a hoax coaxed out of our natural association of mint and chocolate. “I, however, am a true believer,” says Schiff. “Sniff it side by side with conventional mint. I promise, it’ll blow your mind.” She particularly loves to make Chocolate Mint Ice Cream during the holidays where, infused into dairy, it produces an almost indiscernible pale green hue. “You’re completely blindsided when at first bite there’s a whiff of dark chocolate,” she says. “It’s like a natural thin mint.”

Uong utilizes its underlying citrusy notes in both sweet hot chocolate and savory eggplant purees. Try it in lemonade, stuffed in the glass of a mint julep or infused into sugar for use as cocktail rimmer, too. Infuse into sugar and use in brownies or chocolate cake for even more intrigue.

**LEMON THYME**

Blending thyme’s savory backbone with a zesty citrus aroma, this hybrid brightens many a winter dish. Add to the bouquet garni for stuffed poultry. Throw in braises or roasted meats. “I love using it in cobbler doughs, like the Blueberry Lemon Thyme Cobbler in my book,” says Schiff. “It’s great paired with vanilla in pound cakes and makes a wonderful infused ice cream as well.”

**LEMON VERBENA**

The long and feathery leaves of this bright and bushy plant are ready for action mid-spring. “It makes the best simple syrup for lemonade, sweet tea, meringue and margaritas,” notes Uong of its zingy, citrusy bang. Schiff adds that infused simple syrup is a must for marinating stone fruits and reviving berries. Try it in a refreshing winter granita, too. “It’s so crazy lemony. It really knocks my socks off,” she says.

**PINEAPPLE SAGE**

This herb and its accompanying flowers are best used fresh. The name of the herb is deserved, giving its heady pineapple scent, ideal for building on the actual fruit. The flavor, however, is subtle, similar to an herby green taste—not assertive like everyday sage. Toss the leaves in salads or rub them into sugar as a garnish for cocktails or topping for desserts.

**Tarragon Cachaça, Vanilla and Avocado Cocktail**

Mixologist Daniel Bedoya  
Howm, New York City

- 1½ ounces tarragon-infused cachaca**
- 1½ ounces vanilla-infused cane sugar**
- ¼ ounce clarified lime juice**
- ¼ ounce Chateau Aloe Vera liquor**
- 5 drops roasted pistachio oil**
- 2 generous bar spoons of ripe avocado**
- Golden mint sprigs, to garnish**

**Place** all ingredients into a shaker, add ice and shake vigorously. Pour over a tall Collins glass filled with crushed ice. Garnish with golden mint sprig for enhanced fresh aromatics.







Herb jam takes panna cotta to another level.

## CUT WASTE

- › Incorporate a specific type for each part of the menu, from beverages to desserts.
- › Promote as a theme.
- › Infuse herbs in simple syrup for cocktails or toss with sugar for desserts.
- › Plant your own underutilized herbs.

### Kabocha Panna Cotta with Herb Jam

Chef/owner Sophina Uong  
Mister Mao, New Orleans

**1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin**  
**2 cups whole milk, divided**  
**1½ cups heavy cream**  
**1 cup roasted kabocha squash puree**  
**1 tablespoon lemon thyme leaves, chopped**  
**1½ teaspoons kosher salt, plus more as needed**  
**Freshly ground white pepper, as needed**  
**Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed**  
**Herb jam, recipe follows**  
**18 thin baguette slices, cut on a strong diagonal**  
**Toasted pumpkin seeds**  
**Flaky salt, as needed**

**Sprinkle** gelatin over ½ cup of milk in a small bowl. Let soften for 5 minutes. Place the remaining 1½ cups milk, cream, squash and thyme into a saucepan. Whisk to blend. Warm over moderate heat just until it begins to simmer. Do not allow the mixture to boil.

**Remove** from the heat and add the softened gelatin, stirring until the gelatin dissolves. Season with 1½ teaspoons salt and pepper. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl. Let cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally. Divide among 6 wide but shallow ramekin-like containers. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

“I WANT DINERS TO THINK THEY KNOW WHAT THEY’RE GETTING. BUT THEN, AT FIRST BITE, TO BLOW THEIR MINDS JUST A LITTLE BIT.”

—Caroline Schiff, executive pastry chef at Gage & Tollner

**Grill** baguette slices and brush with oil before service. To serve, uncover panna cotta, add a spoonful of jam. Garnish with pumpkin seeds and flaky salt and serve with toasted bread. Makes 6 servings.

### Herb Jam

Chef/owner Sophina Uong  
Mister Mao, New Orleans

**Olive oil, as needed**  
**1 bunch green onion, chopped**  
**½ cup ginger, julienned**  
**½ cup garlic, chopped**  
**2 tablespoons cumin**  
**2 tablespoons caraway**  
**2 tablespoons Kashmiri chili or other chili**  
**1 tablespoon ground coriander**  
**2 bunches chard**  
**2 bunches lacinato kale**  
**1 bunch each mint, cilantro, tarragon**  
**Pinch kosher salt and sugar**  
**Splash sherry vinegar or lemon, to taste**

**Heat** 2 tablespoons olive oil in a stainless steel pan. Wilt green onion, ginger and garlic and add spices, sauteing until aromatic. Add greens, cook until soft, remove from heat and add herbs; season and cool. Puree in a food processor or rough chop. Balance acidity with sherry vinegar or lemon.

### SCENTED GERANIUM

This perennial is best known as adding color to flower beds but it’s the leaves that make it intriguing. Scented geranium, which include apple, orange, strawberry, rose and peppermint, perfume foods with their namesake scent. Lindsey Shere, the founding pastry chef at Chez Panisse, was known for lining the loaf pan with rose geranium leaves to scent the batter for pound cakes. Any type of geranium leaves can be steeped in simple syrup or rubbed into sugar to release the oils.

### TARRAGON

Bedoya often reaches for tarragon instead of mint. In his El Aguacate cocktail, tarragon-infused cachaca mixes with aloe liqueur and gets rounded out by vanilla-infused sugar, clarified lime and fresh avocado. Shaken, poured and topped with subtle golden mint, the herbs “bring this soft minty punch with really cool licorice layers,” he says.

Uong relies on tarragon’s licorice notes to underscore her unctuous herb jam, where earthy green vegetables, spicy ginger and bright sherry vinegar push mint and cilantro further to the flavor edge. Folded into pastas, added to eggs or dolloped onto savory breads, it unfolds layers of flavor that astound and intrigue. Add cream to the jam for a sauce that brightens chicken, swirl into hummus for a flavor dip, or toss with lemon potatoes for even more full-flavor applications.

### ALL THE BASILS

Only using basil in tomato sauce or salads? Then you’re greatly underestimating its value, says Uong. “Basil piccolo has tiny beauty and intense delivery. Lemon basil in bacon, corn and clam chowder makes you feel like it’s not cheat day. Thai basil is divine in stir-fries with oyster sauce, fish sauce, sugar and lime juice...” she says. Want to go really out-of-the-box? Try Christmas basil. The large, glossy leaves offer a refreshing bite to root vegetable dishes and hefty winter salads. Add even more fruity herbaceous notes to mulled wine, cider and cold cocktails.





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## Chocolate Mint Herb Ice Cream

*Executive pastry chef Caroline Schiff  
Gage & Tollner, New York City*

- 1,200 grams whole milk
- 900 grams heavy cream
- 150 grams glucose syrup
- 450 grams sugar
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 3 ounces chocolate mint leaves
- 300 grams egg yolks
- 3 grams guar gum

**Combine** cream, milk, glucose, half the sugar, vanilla, salt and mint leaves in a pot. Scald mixture, remove from heat and cover with plastic. Steep 30 minutes.

**Whisk** eggs with the remaining sugar until combined. Bring milk mixture to boil, lower heat and temper in sugar egg mixture. Using a large spatula, bring to an anglaise thickness; cool over ice bath.

**Pour** through a fine strainer to press all the liquid through the mint leaves. Blend in guar gum using an immersion blender. Refrigerate until fully chilled. Churn in ice cream machine at least 3 hours before serving. Makes 3 quarts. ■

Surprise—this tastes like chocolate mint but doesn't look it.







# THE BOLD

## AND THE BEAUTIFUL



Bourbon's big,  
barrel-forward  
flavors are  
loving cocktails

By Kate Bernot  
Photography by Matt Armendariz  
Food styling by Adam Pearson  
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes



# BOURBON

can add punch to cocktail menus, but it’s like a punch with a velvet glove. Sometimes strong and brash, sometimes sweet and comforting, the spirit is proving its popularity extends to versatility as an ingredient.

The reason is simple, says Jeff Cioletti, author of several books about alcohol and the editor-in-chief of Craft Spirits Magazine: Bourbon is big, both behind the bar and in front of it. Because bourbon must legally be aged in first-use, charred oak barrels, few other spirits showcase a barrel’s influence the way it does.

“Bourbon’s got a lot of cachet with drinkers and a lot of cachet with bartenders,” he says.

That prestige has allowed bartenders to push bourbon cocktails into new, non-traditional realms such as tiki cocktails and smoked cocktails—and drinkers are more than happy to experiment, too, with cocktails featuring their favorite base spirit.

Now is an opportune time to showcase the spirit, as a trend toward premiumization makes drinkers willing to spend more for better-quality base booze. The sales of super-premium spirits represented 40% of revenue growth in 2020, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. The growth reflects what DISCUS chief economist David Ozgo calls consumers’ “willingness to spend a little extra ... during the past year since they were not traveling, going on vacations or dining out as often.”

To increase the value proposition, bartenders are increasingly putting, novel spins on bourbon cocktails. While Old Fashioneds and Manhattans aren’t going anywhere, Maggie Kimberl, content editor of American Whiskey Magazine and president of the Bourbon Women Association, says bartenders “have pulled

## UP YOUR GAME

- › Concoct a custom bitters
- › Design aesthetically-pleasing ice cubes
- › Create simple syrups with seasonal ingredients
- › Make bespoke sodas for bourbon highballs
- › Do something wacky like infusing bourbon with cereal

## BIG BOURBON



Approximate growth of American whiskey over the past five years

### \$4.3 billion

Sales of American whiskey in 2020, representing more than 8% growth



Pandemic-related supply chain problems that reduced the availability of imported spirits have helped fuel the trend of growth among U.S.-made spirits.

Source: Distilled Spirits Council of the United States; growth and sales includes bourbon.

out all the stops and guardrails” when it comes to experimentation. Recently, she judged a cocktail competition in which the winning bourbon-based drink also contained earthy, lightly spicy miso paste.

Creating their own custom bitters, designing aesthetically-pleasing ice cubes, infusing simple syrups with seasonal ingredients and whipping up bespoke sodas for bourbon highballs are just a few of the ways bartenders are pushing the envelope for this base spirit.

Innovations in bourbon production are also creating flavorful jumping-off points. Finishing—when a distiller ages a bourbon in another vessel such as port or rose wine barrels after first aging it in new, charred oak—adds nuances borrowed from other types of alcohol. Single-barrel selections are also increasingly popular, allowing a bar or restaurant to sell bourbon from a single barrel it specifically requested (An Old Fashioned made with a single-barrel selection is an Old Fashioned a customer can’t find anywhere else.) While bourbon must legally contain at least 51% corn, bartenders are working with bourbons containing high percentages of other grains such as rye and wheat or unusual ones like buckwheat or oats, which add secondary flavor tones to the spirit.

All told, there’s never been a better time to think creatively. Distilleries are releasing a rainbow of products for every palate, and consumers are willing to pay for unique and high-quality drinks made with those bourbons.

“We have the ability as bartenders to accentuate and let certain elements within specific bourbons shine when we’re creating cocktails,” Franklin says. “It’s not just that you have to take any bourbon and put it into any cocktail. You can think about the specific flavor components in a bourbon and elevate that. And you can go anywhere from there.” ■

## The Winter Jam

Food and Beverage Manager Markos Maganares  
Elm & Good Kimpton Pittman Hotel, Dallas

- 1.5 ounces bourbon, such as Maker’s Mark
- .75 ounce orange cordial
- .50 ounce lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon raspberry jam
- 1 teaspoon honey
- Splash of club soda
- Edible flowers, to garnish
- Raspberries, to garnish

Add all ingredients except soda into a shaker tin. Pour into in a highball glass filled ⅓ of the way with ice. Top with club soda, edible flower and a raspberry or two.

## It’s Cinnamon Toast Crunch

Bar Director Logan Brown  
Heritage Restaurant & Caviar Bar, Chicago

- 18.8-ounce box Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal
- 2 quarts almond milk
- 1 bottle bourbon
- .25 ounce Demerara simple syrup
- 1 dash Angostura bitters

Soak cereal in almond milk for about 6 hours, strain the cereal and dehydrate. Using a slow drip coffee maker, slow drip 1 bottle bourbon over the dehydrated cereal.

Combine 2 ounces infused bourbon with simple syrup and bitters. Serve over rocks.

Cereal-infused bourbon, below. Enough said.





# Club Med

Rich in plant-based essentials, the region offers many entries into meatless

By Jacqueline Raposo  
Photography by Matt Armendariz  
Food styling by Adam Pearson  
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

Pairing chermoula with cauliflower gives the vegan dish more personality. Turn the page for the recipe.





# In 6th century BC,

Pythagoras established that  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  when it comes to right-angled triangles. He was also the first to preach about the benefits of a meatless diet. Thousands of years since—until the word “vegetarian” first appeared in 1847—meatless eaters were called Pythagoreans.

Today, the Greek teacher and philosopher might be surprised that livestock is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption than any other industry. In response, the number of diners embracing vegan options has grown dramatically in recent years. Likewise, cuisines with a strong foundation in plant-based options, such as the Mediterranean, are innovating to meet the demand.

The traditional Mediterranean diet intrinsically promises health and vitality, with most dishes featuring vegetables and healthy fats and only adding meat, fish, dairy, sweets and wine in minimal moderation. This makes it easy for restaurants to dip their toe into vegan creations by eschewing dairy and animal fat or finding substitutes.

“We try our absolute best to provide vegan options for our guests,” says Kosta Pashalis, manager of Elea in New York, of recognizing the growing vegan trend. Elea specializes in fresh fish flown directly in from Kefalonia, Greece. But Pashalis points out that many staple Greek dishes are naturally vegan-friendly, including their gemista (roasted tomato, pepper and eggplant stuffed with rice and herbs) and horiatiki (a tomato, cucumber and onion salad served without feta). Its most popular appetizer, zucchini and eggplant thinly sliced, fried and stacked as chips, are also vegan.

Some Greek chefs are diving deeper. Before creating a special vegan menu

at Zaytinya in Washington, D.C., chef Michael Costa ate a plant-based diet for two months. “The most disappointing dishes tended to be those that tried to emulate meat or seafood—I never felt the cravings they were meant to satisfy,” he recalls. Preferring vegetables over processed substitutes, he no longer seeks vegan workarounds.

## START WITH TRADITION

“We don’t patronize tradition. We keep it alive and relevant by allowing it to grow,” he says. His mushrooms with dates dish combines four varieties of mushrooms roasted down with shallots, dates and almonds for an earthy, sweet and satisfying result.

## BREAK IT DOWN

### ANATOMY OF A DISH

Pistachio Chermoula Cauliflower with Tahini

**OBJECTIVE:** Textures that play well together—“something that’s soft, something crunchy, something that fades easily and something that punches and stands out,” says Chef Ayesha Nurdjaja of Shuka and Shukette in New York City.

**HOW:** The tahini brings in low earthy notes, cut with citrus and garlic. The chermoula adds tang, heavy herbaceous notes and crunch.

**SUBS:** The dish initially included feta, Nurdjaja says, generally believing feta and haloumi make everything better. “But it wasn’t the feta I was craving. It was sweetness.” Pitted and warmed dates round out the plate instead. “It’s fully satisfying,” she says, a promise that diners have affirmed. If feta is desired, good dairy-free options are available.

## Pistachio Chermoula Cauliflower with Tahini

*Chef Ayesha Nurdjaja  
Shuka, New York*

**1 head cauliflower, separated into florets**  
**Extra-virgin olive oil, as directed**  
**Kosher salt, as needed**  
**½ cup tahini**  
**1 garlic clove, finely grated**  
**1 teaspoon cumin**  
**2 tablespoons olive oil, divided use**  
**Water, as needed**  
**½ lemon, to taste**  
**1 cup cilantro, chopped**  
**½ cup green onion, chopped**  
**½ cup mint, chopped, plus extra leaves for garnish**  
**½ teaspoon sherry vinegar**  
**1 garlic clove, chopped**  
**½ cup pistachios**  
**½ cup medjool dates, pitted and quartered lengthwise**  
**Lemon zest, to garnish**

**Toss** cauliflower with 2 tablespoons olive oil and 1 teaspoon salt and roast in a heated 425 F oven until crisp-tender, about 10 minutes. Keep warm.

**Combine** tahini with grated garlic, cumin, 2 teaspoons olive oil and salt. Whisk in water to desired consistency and season with ½ lemon; set aside.

**Combine** cilantro, green onion, mint, sherry vinegar and chopped garlic in a food processor to make chermoula. Pulse until ingredients are combined but not pureed. Stir in chopped pistachios and season with salt.

**At service,** spread tahini on the bottom of a shallow bowl. Place cauliflower and dates in the center, drizzle about 4 tablespoons chermoula, scatter with mint and grate lemon zest on top. Makes 4 servings.





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Thinly sliced  
zucchini and  
eggplant make up  
the most popular  
appetizer at Elea in  
New York City.

## Elea Chips

*Elea, New York*

3 zucchinis  
3 skinny eggplants or Japanese eggplants  
Pastry flour, as needed  
Oil for frying  
Kosher salt, as needed  
Oregano, chopped, as needed  
Tzatziki, recipe follows

**Thinly** slice vegetables using mandolin or Benriner. If slices are damp, toss with flour (or otherwise rinse with water) and fry in flavorless oil heated to 365 F until crispy. Drain, season with salt and oregano. Serve stacked with a side of tzatziki.

**To make tzatziki:** Combine 2 cups grated cucumber with 1½ cups plain Greek yogurt, 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 1 medium clove garlic, minced, and ½ teaspoon fine sea salt. Before serving, stir in ¼ cup grated kefalograviera cheese.



Executive chef and partner at Shuka and Shukette, Ayesha Nurdjaja embraces the inherent beauty of vegan Mediterranean ingredients. After growing up in a food-focused Italian-Indonesian family in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, and working in New York’s acclaimed western Mediterranean restaurants, Nurdjaja jumped at the chance to feature Levantine cuisine—those of Middle Eastern Mediterranean countries.

“When anything is forced, it’s not authentic. And it becomes forced when doing traditional dining. How do you make a vegetable an entree? Four ounces of cauliflower eat differently than four ounces of lamb,” she points out.

**MAKE DISHES MORE ROBUST**

Instead, Nurdjaja embraces a communal “rip-and-dip” menu, where shared plates are passed around, mixed and folded into housemade breads. This welcomes flavorful, textural eating that’s also vegan-friendly for chef and diner alike.

Working within this style, she steered away from the typical whole-roasted vegetables, such as cauliflower. Instead, large and small florets are tossed with a creamy tahini sauce and topped with pistachio chermoula. See sidebar on page 28.

**RETHINK TECHNIQUES AND PRESENTATION**

To contemplate a new dish, consider the flavor and texture of a main ingredient as well as how it can be prepped and welcome robust seasoning. “Understanding that dynamic reduces the challenge and helps us suggest regional influence, rather than trying to

impose non-vegan stand-ins,” says Drew Brady, wine director and director of operations, of Avant Garden. The vegan restaurant, which opened in New York in 2015, leaned away from replicating traditional dishes with vegan ingredients and, instead, focused on innovative vegetable-based dishes.

Take its celery root dish, spiralized and cooked down at high heat. The process achieves an almost pasta-like texture; a broad surface area of craggily nooks now fully absorbs umami-packed ingredients including mushrooms and kombu. “This dish is just so deeply satisfying,” Brady says of the visually stunning result. “It’s fun watching people’s reaction as they take their first bite.”

At Crossroads Kitchen, a vegan Mediterranean restaurant that opened in Los Angeles in 2013, chef and owner Tal Ronnen developed an arsenal of creative vegan substitutions that brought him quick success.

Some swaps are inherent, like vegetable stock for meat stock and olive oil for butter. But there’s also a truffle bechamel made from nut cheese that adorns mushroom pizza. Stuffed artichokes come presented like oysters, complete with kelp caviar.

“It’s been great to see people from all walks of life starting to eat plant-based, even if not full-time,” he says of increased interest in his seasonal Mediterranean vegan cuisine.

No matter the ingredients or angle, Nurdjaja reminds her fellow chefs that “a vegan wants to eat the same way everybody else does.” Fortunately for those featuring Mediterranean cuisines, delicious essentials for success are

already here. How far they can be taken remains to be seen. “To me, trend was neon in the ‘90s—it’s a thing that goes away,” Nurdjaja says. “Vegan cuisine is here to stay.” ■

**Mushroom Baharat with Dates, Walnuts and Cumin**

*Chef Michael Costa  
Zaytinya, Washington, D.C.*

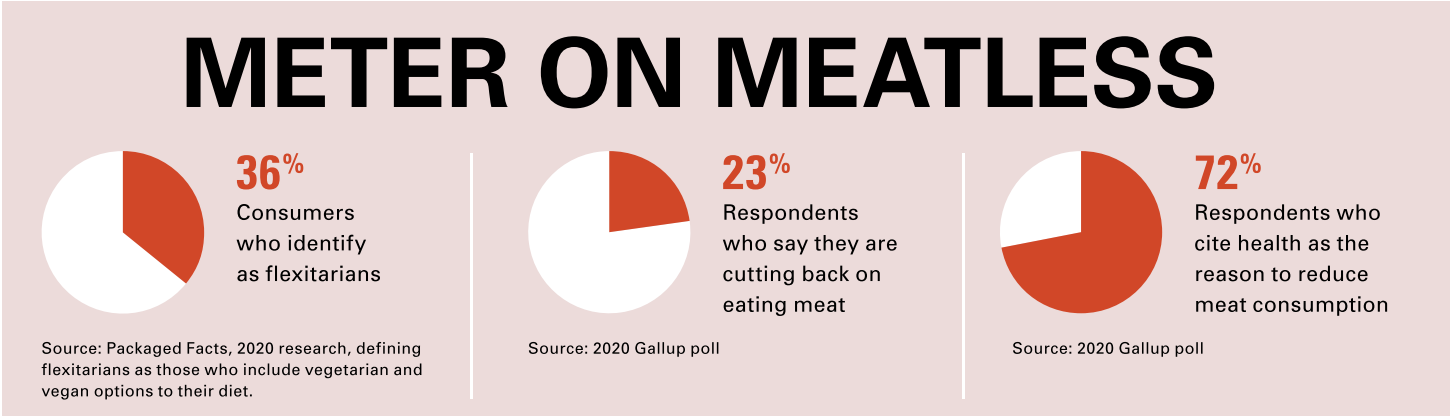
- 8 ounces shiitake mushrooms**
- 8 ounces cremini mushrooms**
- 8 ounces oyster mushrooms**
- 8 ounces trumpet royal mushrooms**
- Olive oil and kosher salt, as needed**
- ¼ cup walnuts, roasted and roughly chopped**
- 1 shallot, minced**
- 8 Medjool dates, pitted and quartered**
- Small bunch chives, minced**
- ½ teaspoon golden baharat**

**Wash** and dry all of the mushrooms, removing the tough parts of the stems. Slice mushrooms into bite-sized pieces.

**Heat** oil in a large saute pan over high heat until just starting to smoke. Add the mushrooms in a single layer and a three-finger pinch of salt.

**Cook** for about 5 minutes, tossing mushrooms a few times to encourage even cooking. Add shallot and walnuts and continue cooking, 1 minute. Add dates and warm through, 30 seconds. Remove from heat, add chives and baharat. Season to taste with salt and additional olive oil to taste.

For vegan and vegetarian dishes, expect simpler prep with big umami flavors.





# AS THE TIDE TURNS

## Farm-raised seafood gets its due

By Amber Gibson  
Photography by Matt Armendariz  
Food styling by Adam Pearson  
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes



Farm-raised seafood, clockwise: prawns, green lip mussels, salmon, branzino, arctic char, pink shrimp and trout.



# BRANZINO,

the flaky, mild, ideal-sized, wide-appealing fish has been riding a wave of popularity for the last few years. Reasonably priced and most often served whole, the fish is missing only one attribute: It's not wild.

That's because nearly all branzino consumed in the U.S. is farm-raised. As seafood prices are more likely to rise than fall and sustainability is more important than ever, farmed seafood is getting respect from diners and chefs.

It's more environmentally friendly thanks to better advancements in aquaculture and land-based closed-loop farming that consumes fewer natural resources and generates less pollution by raising plants and fish in a symbiotic ecosystem. Farmed seafood also isn't handcuffed to a season.

## CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS

"I believe people always want to hear that their fish is wild, but when you explain to them why you are using farmed, they feel good about it," says New York-based chef Bryce Shuman. He's been purchasing farmed branzino since he worked at Eleven Madison Park, and will continue using the fish at his new project, Sweetbriar. For Shuman, farmed branzino is the obvious choice when wild branzino is widely over-fished, not as consistently available, cost three or four times as much and are on the Marine Stewardship Council's avoid list. "Price and quality drive my purchasing decisions," he says.

Chef William Disson at The Market Place Restaurant in Asheville, North Carolina also has met diners who have misconceptions about farmed seafood: that it's raised like commodity chicken in tight pens and poor living conditions, pumped full of antibiotics.

"There have been a lot of poor farming practices with species like Atlantic salmon," Disson says. "On the flip side, there are many highly sustainable farmed seafood species like oysters and clams." Disson has been working with Sunburst Trout Farm in Canton, North Carolina, for more than a dozen years and attributes the crystal clear, ice cold water from Shining Rock Wilderness to the trout's sweet flavor. "This is some of the best farmed trout on the planet," he says.

Disson enjoys cooking whole trout directly on the wood-fired grill to add a smoky char flavor, paired with a bright gremolata. He also hot smokes trout to make a smoked trout dip, adding ample roasted garlic and fresh herbs to enhance the flavor.

## KEEPING IT LOCAL

At Kensington Quarters in Philadelphia, chef Nicholas Bazik sources from many local and regional purveyors, including Bangs Island mussels from Maine and whole rainbow trout from Green Walk Trout Hatchery just two hours north of the city.

## LABOR RELIEF

- ▶ Portioned fish cuts labor but may cost more than whole unless all parts are used.
- ▶ Seafood is the least forgiving in regards to shelf life. Be sure inventory is well managed (use tech not pen and paper).
- ▶ Drill companies on farm raised practices and compare prices. The most advanced systems ensure the highest quality products.

## Goan Prawn Balchao with Fennel and Chili Chimichurri and Buttered Pao Bread

*Executive Chef Sujan Sarkar  
Baar Baar, New York City*

**8 large Ecuadorian prawns**  
**½ teaspoon kosher salt**  
**½ teaspoon turmeric**  
**1 tablespoon canola oil**  
**2 tablespoons Balchao sauce, recipe follows**  
**1 tablespoon unsalted butter**  
**Fennel and chili chimichurri, recipe follows**  
**Pao bread**  
**Cultured butter, as needed**

**Deshell** and clean prawns, keeping head and tail intact; pat dry. Toss with salt and turmeric.

**Heat** oil in a pan and sear prawns on both sides. Add Balchao sauce and cook for a few minutes. Add butter and emulsify the sauce. Correct seasoning.

**Place** the prawns in a deep bowl, pour the sauce over the prawns and drizzle fennel chimichurri around. Serve with pao bread and butter.

**To make the fennel and chili chimichurri:** Process or mortar and pestle 1 cup chopped fennel, 3 Indian green chilies, ½ cup chopped cilantro (including stems), 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice and 1 teaspoon salt.

**To make Balchao sauce:** In a food processor, add ¾ cup canola oil; 1 tablespoon chopped garlic; 1 cinnamon stick; 1 teaspoon cumin seeds, 1 teaspoon turmeric and 1 cup dry Kashmiri red chiles, rehydrated; 1 cup vinegar and 3 green chiles; process until smooth. Saute 1½ cups chopped red onion until translucent and add the blended mixture. Season with 3 tablespoons sugar and 1 tablespoon kosher salt.





# WHAT A CATCH!

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## FROZEN GETS FANCY

Snubbing frozen seafood is so '80s

Water temperature maintenance and micro-misting allow for higher quality, more consistent farmed products cultivated in smaller batches. Rapid deep freeze technologies preserve flavor and texture. For example, sustainably farmed fish fillets like salmon are vacuum-sealed at peak freshness and immediately flash-frozen to maximize flavor.

Chef Sujan Sukar of Baar Baar uses farmed prawns from Ecuador that are quick-frozen and cost less than half of what fresh wild-caught prawns would cost. "The consistency of the frozen farmed prawns are much better because of the micromanagement supervision," he says. "It's difficult to differentiate between wild and frozen farmed in a blind taste test."

"Bangs Island mussels are larger, sweeter and much firmer texture than your standard Prince Edward Island mussels," Bazik says. They're available year-round, so he always has mussels on the menu, but updates the accompaniments according to what's in season, transitioning from a mussel escabeche with cantaloupe, sherry gastrique and dried chili peanuts in summer to a pickled mussel tartine with marinated pumpkin, pumpkin seed aioli and toasted pumpkin seeds in the winter.

The rainbow trout that Bazik receives from Green Walk Trout Hatchery are so fresh that they are still in rigor mortis. "They pull them out of the water Thursday morning and we get them Thursday afternoon," he says. "We hang them for a week before we even start using them, displaying them in our walk-in so guests can see them aging." Bazik orders 14- to 16-inch trout so he can portion three fillets from each fish. Aging the trout for a week gives the fish a softer texture and dries out the skin so it's crispier when cooked. The price he's paying might be more than larger trout fisheries in Idaho, but to Bazik, the integrity of the product, buying directly from a local hatchery and doing what's better for the planet are worth it. Plus, he hasn't faced the same price spikes as other commodities this past year. The smoked trout bodies also make a great fumet, which is used throughout many other dishes.

### SUSTAINABLE STREET CRED

Even if local aquaculture options are not available, if sustainability is important, it's easy to check the credentials of farmed fish against sustainable seafood advisory lists like Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch and the Marine Stewardship Council. Last year, there were more than 18,000 MSC certified sustainable products available worldwide.





# Bang Island Mussel Escabeche

Chef Nicholas Bazik  
Kensington Quarters, Philadelphia

56 grams garlic, chopped  
56 grams shallot, chopped  
Olive oil, as needed  
224 grams white wine  
5 bay leaves  
2½ pounds mussels  
104 grams sherry vinegar  
22 grams sugar  
65 grams water  
4 grams kosher salt  
4 grams black peppercorns  
5 grams harissa powder  
Grilled sourdough, sliced, grilled and buttered  
Pumpkin seed aioli, recipe follows  
Squash gastrique ribbons, recipe follows  
Bulls blood baby beet greens, to garnish

**Sweat** garlic and shallots in olive oil in a heavy bottom pot until translucent. Add wine and 2 bay leaves; bring to a boil.

**Add** mussels and cover; cook for 5 to 7 minutes. Agitate the pot every couple of minutes. Strain, cool and remove mussels and beards from the shells.

**Combine** sherry vinegar, sugar, water, salt, peppercorns and 2 remaining bay leaves in a pot and bring to a boil to make pickle. Strain and add harissa powder; chill.

**To plate**, spoon a thin layer of the pumpkin seed aioli in a shallow bowl, top with mussels, dress with pumpkin ribbons and garnish with greens.

**To make gastrique squash ribbons:** Roast small pumpkin until just tender; cool and peel; set aside. Combine 100 grams sherry vinegar with 88 grams honey and bring to a boil. Add 4 grams Peel the pumpkin and shave the flesh with a T-shaped peeler on a 30 degree angle. Marinate in the harissa gastrique.

**To make pumpkin seed aioli:** Puree 3 egg yolks with 20 grams Dijon mustard; 3 cloves garlic, zested; 5 grams sherry vinegar and 128 grams toasted pumpkin seeds. Slowly add 410 grams sunflower seed oil and water to thin if necessary.



Trout is having a moment thanks to its affordability.

“THEY PULL THEM OUT OF THE WATER THURSDAY MORNING AND WE GET THEM THURSDAY AFTERNOON, WE HANG THEM FOR A WEEK BEFORE WE EVEN START USING THEM, DISPLAYING THEM IN OUR WALK-IN SO GUESTS CAN SEE THEM AGING.”

—Chef Nicholas Bazik on rainbow trout from Green Walk Trout Hatchery

Specific species on the Seafood Watch app or website can be searched for ratings, from best choice” and “certified” to “good alternative” or “avoid.”

Shuman purchases branzino from Ağromey in Turkey because it’s a reputable farm that uses no antibiotics, chemicals, GMOs or contaminating PCBs. They’re considered a Seafood Watch “best choice” because they’re farmed indoors in recirculating tanks with wastewater treatment. Closed-loop farming methods combine hydroponic plant farms with recirculating fish farms in one system. Nitrogen waste from fish makes great fertilizer for plants.

Even top sushi chefs are turning to farmed fish for species like Spanish

## NO ONE’S DISSING WILD

Just because farmed seafood is more affordable, available year-round and more consistently available and better for the environment when raised properly doesn’t mean wild should be shunned.

Wild seafood fetches top dollar and its FOMO status brings in customers and drives sales. Just be sure to sufficiently promote it and manage waste and food costs.

bluefin tuna, Japanese snapper and ocean trout. Chef Otto Phan still sticks to wild-caught fish only for Kyoten in Chicago, where omakase menus are \$500 per person. However, at Hinoki Sushiko, his larger and less expensive restaurant, Phan uses Ora King salmon, Petuna ocean trout from Tasmania and Pequot sablefish farmed in Canada. As for the prized bluefin tuna, his auction-grade tuna from Toyosu market is around \$200 per pound compared to \$35 per pound for farmed bluefin tuna from Spain.

“It takes an experienced palate to tell the difference between wild and farmed,” he says. “The future of fish is surely farmed, especially when taking into consideration value and freshness.” ■



## ON THE RADAR



**In Labor.** First salads in a jar, then healthy, fresh snacks, and now a flash-frozen 10-inch pizza with a “brick-oven taste” hot out of a vending machine in three minutes. Take that, labor crunch.



## BUG OUT.

With so much development in lab-grown food, will we ever really need to eat bugs? InnovaFeed and ADM, two leaders in the field, say hell yes. They’re building the world’s largest insect protein factory.



### What’s Old is New.

Ancient medicine gets its due as edible flowers emerge not only for their good looks on a plate but for medicinal value. Think spilanthes acmella, aka lemon drop, electric daisy and buzz buttons, for their antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effects.



### Get the Blues.

“Blue foods”—aquatic animals, plants and microorganisms—could be the key to global health and sustainability since they “offer significantly more nutrients than land-based crops and livestock,” according to research recently published in Nature.

## HIGH ALERT



### Cabbage Patch Kids.

Noma’s Rene Redzepi and The French Laundry’s Thomas Keller are dressing up the humble cabbage. In Yountville: caramelized savoy plus preserved cabbage consomme.



### How does your garden grow?

For the next season herb box, try papalo, saltwort or hyssop. Growing or even adding underutilized herbs can differentiate the menu. See page 14 for more.

### Home for the Holidays

73%

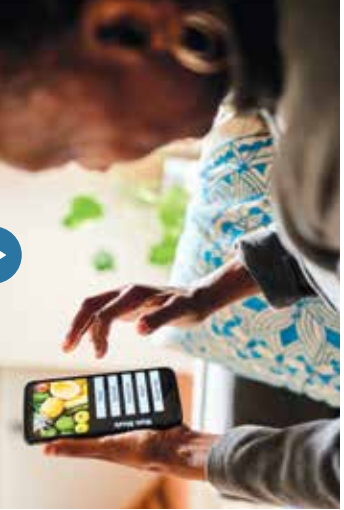
Percentage of off-premise restaurant visits in August, according to NPD, means make sure plenty of party-sized options are available to-go for the holiday season, from Thanksgiving to New Year.



### Heat Waves.

Not so hot is hot, which means chilies offering layers of flavor and more than just heat is the way to go. No wonder urfa, aleppo, sumac and the Korean way with chilies are so hot.

## FADING OUT



### It’s Not Your Way...

...It’s their way. If you don’t allow customization online, customers will take their orders elsewhere.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Use software that allows guests to make substitutions as a choice, not as a side note. The tech exists.

## MEAT THIS.

It’s time to offer choices other than a plant-based burger to check the meatless box.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Add vegetable-focused options, even a seasonal fried vegetable appetizer. Fritti veggie, anyone?



### Take, Take, Take.

Your customers supported you during the worst of times and even now as the labor crunch affects service. It’s time to give back.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Nothing says thank you like free. Launch a “we appreciate you” effort with larger portions on popular items for a limited time or include a low-food cost snack, such as a dip, or dessert of miniature cookies with takeout orders.



### Trashing It.

It’s getting harder to toss food night after night.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Alternatives are becoming more prevalent, such as Too Good to Go, an app that links customers to restaurants and retail to purchase food surplus.





# FROM UNDERSTUDY TO STAR

Cheese inspired by a variety of countries can reach  
GOAT status

Baraonda  
Ristorante & Bar in  
Atlanta showcases  
California burrata  
with fried green  
tomatoes.



From Bowery  
Bungalow in  
Silverlake, California:  
Konafah “Queens  
Dessert” featuring  
California ackawi  
cheese, and  
pomegranate seeds.



**As interest in plant-based and meatless options continues to surge**, chefs are looking at cheese through a different lens.

They’re discovering that cheese, especially from the leading dairy state of California that’s not subject to global supply chain constraints, can emerge as a Greatest of All Time dish. Whether it reigns as center of the plate or shares the marquee in a more assertive role, it’s not an accent; it’s a presence that makes the most out of texture and flavor.

## Firm but Amendable

Few cheeses can take the heat and keep their shape like halloumi that hails from Cypress, its cousin talagani with its roots from Greece or paneer that originates from India—all of which are produced stateside. That sturdy attribute, which ackawi and Greek and French-style feta also enjoy, makes them go-to main proteins. They have heft, don’t melt like mozzarella and grill nicely offering a “meaty” taste.

At Greekman’s, the pop-up by chef Jonah Freedman’s eponymous Jewish deli north of Los Angeles, a generous slab of griddled feta is the headliner. It’s draped over giganti beans braised in tomatoes and honey for a melding of bold and balanced flavors.

Haloumi is pan-fried and elevates rosemary focaccia at Newtown in Brooklyn’s Williamsburg, New York. The hearty cheese is accompanied by roasted portobellos, eggplant, tomato and herbed cream cheese.

Talagani, which is softer and creamier than halloumi, is the focus of the chef’s special page at Loi Estiatorio in New York City. It’s grilled and accompanied by just lemon, olive oil and honey.

For chef Manish Tyagi of Aurum in Los Altos, California, a firm cheese can take the place of an ingredient.

“We take paneer and reimagine it as a lasagna,” says chef Manish Tyagi of Aurum in Los Altos, California. “The idea is to balance the sharpness and richness of the dish.”

For his version, the paneer is served as the pasta, layered with spinach sautéed with toasted cumin, onion, garlic, ginger, green chiles and chili powder before it’s served with a cream-fortified tikka masala sauce. “It’s a very popular dish in our restaurant,” Tyagi says.

## That Certain Something

When cheese isn’t the main focus, it surprises in a way that stands out. At Socalo in Santa Monica, California, the croutons on the kale Caesar are not bread but deep-fried cubes of California cotija. The cheese for the tacos and quesadillas at the Cal-Mex restaurant is a blend that considers sharpness, richness and salinity: cotija, manchego and panela.

The blend is melted on a flattop before a blue corn taco is pressed on top, flipped and filled with briefly sautéed

**Cypress** ▸ Halloumi

**Greece** ▸ Talagani

**India** ▸ Paneer

▸ Produced domestically, they offer heft, don’t melt like mozzarella and grill nicely offering a “meaty” taste.



California feta and mozzarella fill crispy cigars at Zino in Berkeley, California.

WHEN CHEESE ISN'T THE MAIN FOCUS, IT SURPRISES IN A WAY THAT STANDS OUT.



Mexico > Cotija

Middle East > Labneh

Latin America > Queso blanco

> Domestically made cheese with global origins bolster the story of the dish.

local vegetables. For this vampiro taco, a salsa macha of almonds, pepitas, garlic and three types of chilies is drizzled on top along with chopped onion and cilantro. The same process is used to make burritos, which creates a barrier preventing the tortilla from getting soggy and adds a layer of flavor from the toasted cheese.

**All About the Creaminess**

The tang and consistency of yogurt has become a useful tool in the back of the house for adding creaminess, from dressings and dips to sauces and desserts. Less ubiquitous is labneh, which a purist might argue is strained yogurt and not cheese. Its growing popularity and Middle Eastern cuisine, however, would beg to differ.

A cross between the consistency of cream cheese and sour cream, labneh adds unctuousness and balance to boldly spiced vegetables or proteins. At Israel Mediterranean Motek in Miami, it stands on its own with za'atar but also with hummus and eggplant salad. It also puts breakfast over the top with eggs, tahini, feta and the heat of schug. At Newtown

in Brooklyn, labneh accompanies a fried egg, cucumbers, greens, harissa and za'atar in a pita.

Cheese typically doesn't have a big presence in Asian cuisine, which makes its inclusion all the more appreciated when it delivers.

At Pasadena's Bone Kettle, where southeast Asian cuisine meets a California sensibility, burrata shakes up traditional rujak, Indonesian fruit salad. The locally sourced California cheese is front and center, surrounded by melon, kiwi, strawberries, sour mango and jicama. Cut in different shapes for eye appeal and texture, the mix sits on a savory-sweet peanut sauce dusted with a spicy lemon pepper blend and peppermint microgreens.

"It's not a natural marriage of Southeast Asian cuisine and cheese," says Eric Tjahyadi, co-owner and brother of chef Erwin Tjahyadi. But the success of the dish spurs innovation.

Erwin Tjahyadi says he prefers California burrata for its consistency and flavor. "You have to stay true to your roots and use that by twisting it a little bit." ■

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**Labor Cost** within the restaurant sector jumped **12%** in April 2021<sup>1</sup>



The restaurant industry is about **1.5 MILLION workers short** of its pre-pandemic employment base<sup>1</sup>

### MAXIMIZE TICKETS



When adding soup to an order, the average check size increases **20%** or more<sup>2</sup>

### MUSHROOM BRIE PASTA

Yield | 8 Servings

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb Bucatini Pasta
- 3 tbsp Olive Oil
- 1¼ lb Blended Wild Mushrooms, sliced
- 15 c **TRUESOUPS** MUSHROOM BRIE SOUP
- 1¼ c Chopped Spinach
- ½ tsp Crushed Red Pepper Flakes
- 1¼ tsp Kosher Salt
- 25 oz Grilled Chicken Breast, sliced
- 5 tsp Chopped Parsley
- ½ c Parmesan Cheese
- 2½ tsp Lemon Zest

#### PREPARATION:

1. In a large pot of boiling salted water cook the bucatini pasta to al dente. Drain the pasta reserving 3 c of the pasta water.
2. While the pasta is cooking heat the oil in large pan and cook the mushrooms until soft.
3. For each order: heat 1½ c of the mushroom brie soup, ¼ c pasta water and 2 tbsp spinach in a large sauté pan to 185° F for at least 10 minutes.
4. Season the sauce with a pinch of red pepper flakes and kosher salt.
5. Add 2½ oz of cooked chicken breast and 8 oz cooked pasta. Toss to evenly coat.
6. Garnish with chopped parsley, parmesan cheese and fresh lemon zest.



<sup>1</sup> 2021 Technomic, Inc. Technomic's Take Roadblock to Recovery

<sup>2</sup> The NPD Group, CREST®, September 2019

<sup>3</sup> Technomics 2019, NPD Crest 2019

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PHOTOGRAPHY © CHARLIE FIRTH

# HARD LABOR

Fixing the worker shortage requires more than money

By Diana Hubbell



▼

## After suffering an unprecedented economic fallout from the pandemic,

the restaurant industry is facing a problem that a patch can no longer fix: a severe labor shortage.

To be clear, it's not so much a labor pinch but a wage shortage, according to advocacy group One Fair Wage, which cites a recent study conducted by the University of California at Berkeley Food Labor Research Center. It says 78% of foodservice workers would stay in the business if it offered a livable wage while 39% worry about harassment or verbal abuse from customers, and 26% feared hostility or harassment from coworkers. In other words, many of the frustrations that have led to restaurant workers leaving predate the pandemic by decades.

"It was a shaken bottle waiting to burst. This was going to happen sooner or later," says Emmeline Zhao, managing partner and sommelier at Silver Apricot, a fine dining Chinese restaurant that opened in New York City in July 2020. "There needs to be a sea change in this industry, which would require a serious introspective look in terms of workplace culture and overall support."

### Increase Pay But How?

Offering higher compensation is the first step to attracting and keeping restaurant workers in this competitive market. A separate study by One Fair Wage found that within a two-week period, 1,600 restaurants across 41 states have raised wages to at least the full minimum wage in addition to tips. Chain restaurants including McDonald's, Olive Garden, TGI Fridays and Chipotle have all



Equitable pay structures are among the many ways to attract and retain employees.

increased wages to attract workers. Other restaurants, including Papa John's and Portillo's Hot Dogs LLC, an Illinois-based chain, are betting that hiring bonuses will entice prospective employees. At Starr Restaurants, which operates the majority of its restaurants in Philadelphia and New York, the signing bonuses go up to \$300. But in many cases, the bonuses are one-time payments while the wages and payments don't apply to franchises.

### It's More Than Money

When Claire Sprouse reopened her restaurant, Hunky Dory, in Brooklyn during the pandemic, she raised prices across her menu 20 to 25% to pay all of her staff a living wage. Corrinna Stum,

who opened Ruby's West End in Portland, Maine, last year, pays every member of her team the state's minimum wage of \$12.15, then adds a mandatory 20% tip to each check, which is shared evenly among all staff.

Better financial incentives, more equitable pay structures, and improved benefits all go a long way but still are not enough to address all of the underlying issues. "There are tons of restaurants that are offering signing bonuses and higher wages, but they're still struggling to hire," Zhao says. "That's because these workers aren't just in it for the money. They want to be in places that understand their need for mental and physical well-being."



Corrinna Stum, seated, of Ruby's West End in Portland, Maine, pays every worker the state's \$12.15 minimum wage plus the mandatory 20% tip from the check.



## Numbers Say 1,000 Words

The "why" behind the restaurant industry labor shortage must be understood before figuring out the "how" to fix it.

### ► WHY workers leave the restaurant industry

|                                                 | ALL | WOMEN | MOTHERS | MEN |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|---------|-----|
| Low wages                                       | 76% | 78%   | 80%     | 78% |
| Hostility/harassment from customers             | 39% | 39%   | 36%     | 39% |
| Hostility/harassment from co-workers/management | 26% | 25%   | 24%     | 31% |
| Transitioning to another industry               | 31% | 29%   | 20%     | 38% |

### ► WHAT would make workers stay

|                              |     |     |     |     |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| "Full, stable, livable wage" | 78% | 79% | 78% | 75% |
| Paid sick leave              | 49% | 49% | 43% | 48% |
| Health insurance             | 44% | 44% | 37% | 46% |
| Improved working environment | 45% | 45% | 40% | 47% |

Source: University of California Berkeley Food Labor Research Center





Restaurants that understand the needs of their workers are better positioned to succeed.

“THESE WORKERS AREN’T JUST IN IT FOR THE MONEY. THEY WANT TO BE IN PLACES THAT UNDERSTAND THEIR NEED FOR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING.”

—Emmeline Zhao of Silver Apricot in New York City

### Change the Culture

Part of the reason that Zhao and her business partner, chef Simone Tong, have had greater success in retaining and hiring staff through the labor shortage is that they have consistently done just that. Years of enforcing a more compassionate workplace culture, listening to the needs of their staff, and providing opportunities for long-term growth within the restaurant have led to a loyal team. Five of their current staff members followed them from Little Tong, a critically acclaimed Yunnanese noodle shop in the East Village that shuttered during COVID.

“We’re still short a couple of people, but we benefit from the fact that our DNA is rooted in long-term investment in our people,” Zhao says. “We are fortunate in

that we really spent a lot of our previous time fostering and nurturing this community. Our starting wages here are well above the state mandated minimum. We provide paid time off and fully subsidized health care and transportation compensation.”

### Know the Specific Staff Needs

Paid time off and health care, particularly maternity care, go a long way toward making workers feel valued. One Fair Wage found that mothers disproportionately lost tip-based income during the pandemic and that many were leaving the industry to seek more stable employment elsewhere. Amanda Cohen of Dirty Candy in New York also has made a point of offering better benefits, which leads to greater employee retention.

“There needs to be a massive overall shift in terms of how we value hospitality workers,” Zhao says.

“For the longest time, they have been considered service workers, but the connotation that comes with that doesn’t mean that we don’t see the benefits that one sees in corporate America. Health care, time off, and child care are not seen as expectations, but does that mean (hospitality workers) don’t deserve those things?”

Ultimately, Zhao says that the onus to implement substantive structural changes cannot rest on individual restaurants. Without industry-wide reforms, restaurants offering more equitable pay and increased benefits will continue to lose customers due to their higher price points. Policy changes at the federal level are necessary to make restaurants more sustainable. In the meantime, restaurant-owners will need to take the initiative to prove that their businesses offer generous pay and benefits, as well as positive work environments that care about their employees and provide opportunities for career growth. These decisions may cost more in the short-run, but as Zhao has found, they pay off. ■

## Recruit AND Retain

By Danny McGowan

Chief Operating Officer, Cornerstone Restaurants

The mantra “Everything we do is marketing,” has changed to “Everything we do is recruiting.” And it’s every day, knowing that recruitment right now is the No. 1 goal.

We don’t claim to have the magic bullet on the labor shortage but we know that to succeed at recruitment you have to be thinking about retention. Here are ideas and our approach (for the eight restaurants under Cornerstone Restaurants which include Bill Kim’s Urban Belly and Michael Jordan restaurants):

**1 Use all job posting sites.** Ours include Indeed, Craigslist and Snagajob.

**2 Check all applicant channels several times a day.** The response time is no longer days or hours but minutes. Text the candidates. Gen Z and the younger millennials rarely use email.

**3 Incorporate recruitment** into your social media campaigns, emails, signage at the restaurant tables, retail counters and displays.

**4 “Recruit” in every conversation.** Does your neighbor have kids coming home for breaks and need work? What about newly retired people who want to get out of the house?

**5 Offer internships.** Can you help college students earn credits or help recent graduates with job experience and a wage while they look for work in their field? For example, if they want to get into marketing, include some of those duties in addition to other areas where you need help.

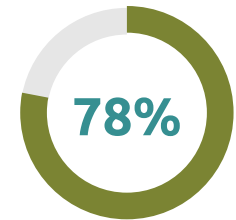
**6 Provide incentives.** Offer signing bonuses or referral bonuses to existing employees. Investigate what’s been done. Some companies have become especially creative with these.

**7 Evaluate your current rates of pay and employee benefits.** Are you competitive with your market (your competition is no longer only hospitality.) Do you have unique benefits that may attract employees?

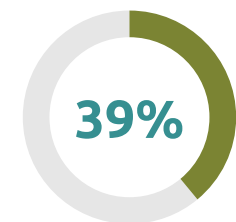
**8 Be flexible with hours and days.** Can parents or guardians start later to get kids off to school, or start earlier and leave earlier to pick up kids or get to a night class? Can your business hours be flexible, such as closing earlier, opening later, closing a day of the week that is historically not busy to accommodate workers?

**9 Evaluate the needs of your staff and what’s important to them.** As a restaurant you can partner with other businesses through trade to offer workers discounts and benefits.

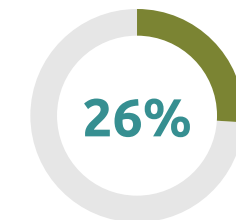
**10 Check your culture.** Is your operation a place that people want to come to? Workers have a lot of choices these days.



Foodservice workers who would stay in the business if offered a livable wage



Respondents who worry about harassment or verbal abuse from customers



Employees who fear hostility or harassment from coworkers.

SOURCE: University of California Berkeley Food Labor Research Center



# TECH TO WATCH IN THE NEW YEAR

The pandemic and climate change push advances

By Peter Ganovsky

Servi, far right, can bring food to diners while Alfred mixes ingredients.



## ▼ Innovation in technology

for the hospitality industry is abundant, hastened by the fallout of the pandemic and the light it shed on existing shortcomings. In a few words: the labor shortage and the environment.

Just how deep and widespread such advances will be adopted by the industry as a whole remains to be seen. But it's safe to say that each innovation spurs another, adapting and filling another need that improves efficiency and the bottom line. Here are five poised to make an impact.

### 1. AI AND YOU

Marketing itself as the only “win-win solution in the restaurant industry,” Bite Ninja uses artificial intelligence and remote workers to take orders; they essentially run drive-thru services from home, their faces and voices still greeting the customer at the restaurant. Bite Ninja boasts improved order accuracy, reliability and an overall streamlined experience that both creates security and enthusiasm within preexisting jobs.

### 2. SERVERS ON WHEELS

Servi from Bear Robotics is another product that's tackling front of house issues from the inside. Evolved since debuting in 2017 as the “Penny 1,” this automated server does exactly what you may think it does—it serves food and drink. With a quick manual mapping and an overnight charge, Servi is programmed to stealthily navigate even the tightest of restaurant corners and ensure a safe and efficient dining experience—no full staff required.

### 3. PAY PER USE

Like any new invention, costs can be prohibitive, especially for small businesses. But several companies are making tech advances more affordable with low-priced subscription plans to make their products affordable even to smaller businesses. Dexai Robotics' Alfred, for example, a robotic kitchen arm aid, takes advantage of a pay-per-use model, with restaurants paying a certain fee for every meal made by the bot.

### 4. WHAT'S APP?

Expect more problem-solving apps, like Too Good To Go. It's making fast inroads in reducing food waste by connecting restaurants, grocers and other food purveyors to customers who purchase their surplus at reduced costs. Earlier this year, the New York-based business expanded nationally and has signed on nearly 60,000 restaurants. While profits, if any, vary, less waste would benefit the bottom line.

### 5. FROM THE LAB

Fueled by the trend of healthier eating and the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from animal agriculture on climate change, the most far reaching tech advances are happening in the lab. Lab-grown foods that mimic proteins structures are poised to impact world hunger as well. For the past three years, Redefine Meat has been working to perfectly 3D print meat down to a certain animal's exact muscle structure, their machine building off of the science of plant protein to craft a new food entirely,



## LABOR RELIEF

Over the past several years, apps, software programs and point of sales systems have evolved to assist in just about every aspect of the food business, especially labor. They include apps that allow staff to fill and swap shifts, sales data to track and reward performance, past sales to better staff workers and so much more. Go to [usfoods.com](https://usfoods.com) for leads.

something they call “New-Meats. At Kingdom Supercultures, developers have tapped into the makeup of natural microbes and rearranged them to create plant-based foods that taste more similar to the real thing than ever before. “Supercultures” comes from the newly designed microbes, essentially reborn through precise fermentation processes, completely void of animal labor, plant/land usage and excessive energy. Besides meat, foods also being grown in labs include dairy products, seafood, honey and coffee. ■

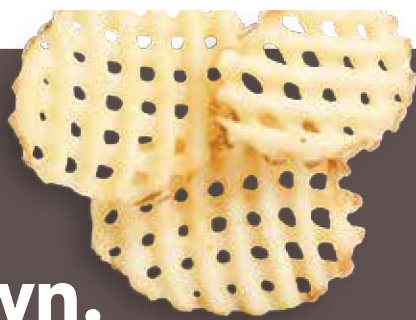
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MEETING  
THE  
MOMENT

# IT'S SHOWTIME

oods

Any restaurant can make dining an event,  
and it doesn't have to hit you over the head

By Kristin Eddy

PHOTOGRAPHY © DREW BEAVER



# DINING

as an event used to mean a couple of things: You were going out for a Big Deal reason and the correspondingly Big Spend. Or it was theater: decor that overwhelmed in good ways and bad; bossy, bold menus and servers coached to deliver attitude as well as food.

After 2020 radically altered the dining experience and the hard reset to better times hasn't happened for everyone yet, creating the right kind of memories in 2022 means understanding that customers are hoping for some delight with their sustenance rather than concept-driven drama.

It doesn't need to be a do-over, but if ever there was a time to find ways to draw back, it's now. Restaurateurs say it's a compilation of moves that make eating out feel special, all of which helps to create a mood and something memorable. And that can be achieved in all kinds of ways.

## 1 Upend their expectations by not giving any

At a dinner party, the host doesn't announce a lineup at the top of the evening. Similarly, you won't be given a menu at New York City's Saga, a restaurant collaboration between James Kent, formerly a star chef at Eleven Madison Park and The NoMad Hotel, and Jeff Katz, a longtime managing partner at Del Posto.

"We purposely don't want preconceived notions," Katz says. "Whenever you look through a menu you are ranking the dishes in your head," about what you think you like and don't like and what you already know is going to be your favorite. "We want you to go through the meal without an idea of how it's going to taste and how it's going to feel."

Curated in large part by partner Derek Fleming, artwork by Kara Walker, Derrick Adams and Mickalene Thomas of Red Rooster Overtown in Miami is a reflection and inspiration to the menu's culinary roots.



PHOTOGRAPHY © RED ROOSTER OVERTOWN'S

## Like Dinner at a Ritzy Home

Consider the intent of Saga in New York City: to create a persona for each part of the restaurant that encourages exploring—as if you were dining at an opulent home that draws you from one section to another. It doesn't need to be high-end—just intriguing in some way.



A bar where customers will be greeted after stepping off the elevator onto the 63rd floor.

Artwork by Jean-Michel Basquiat hangs on the wall of one of Saga's dining rooms on the restaurant's main floor.



PHOTOGRAPHY © SAGA

Saga's cocktail bar and various dining areas lead to outdoor terraces.





COLLABORATING WITH A LOCAL ART SCHOOL, GALLERY, OR PRIVATE ARTIST FOR LOANS IS ONE WAY TO SPARK A CONVERSATION.



The artwork at Red Horse in Rumson, New Jersey, was carefully curated to fit the vibe of the menu and room.

Servers discuss each course with guests, but the only choice for diner is between two entree options.

“It’s a risk,” says Katz, “but we are here to craft evenings and keep people engaged by surprise.”

★ **APPLY THIS:** Smaller operators can test out this trust exercise at a starter level by offering a no-menu dessert program. Customers are relaxed at this stage of the meal, sugar hits everyone in all the right ways, and they’re likely to find a way to love whatever you set down because the surprise element feels special. Think of it as an amuse-bouche on the back end.

## 2 A Change of Scenery

When chef David Burke opened the steakhouse-sushi restaurant Red Horse in Rumson, New Jersey, earlier this year, this hard-core collector made sure the artwork was as obsessively curated as his salt-aged beef cuts. Paintings, photographs, glasswork and a quirky objects like a vintage carousell pony are over and around every wall and corner. Marcus Samuelsson’s Red Rooster Overtown in Miami opened at the end of 2020 displaying works from a wide range of African-American artists for a thoughtful reflection of—and inspiration to—the menu’s culinary roots. Sona, in New York, is an elegant Indian restaurant with art drawn exclusively from a talent pool of contemporary Indian artists. And Atlas restaurant at the St. Regis Atlanta may be the closest you get to a private collection of Picasso, Monet and Chagall works without a museum guard standing by.

★ **APPLY THIS:** This isn’t about subtle decor; attention must be paid, and the average restaurant design budget doesn’t quite cover it. But collaborating with a local art school, gallery or private artist for loans, or even investing in a single statement piece, is one way to spark a conversation.

PHOTOGRAPHY © DAVID BURKE HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

ROY’s redesign of SPQR in San Francisco considered the transition from coffee bar to booze bar to convey a persona for each daypart.

## 3 Flip the Script

Operators big and small already have done the hard math to make sure every square foot delivers profit while the doors are open. Over the last few years, operators have been turning underutilized space into different concepts, sometimes complementary to the existing one while other times completely different. It’s not new, but maybe now is the time to repurpose part of the dining space into a coffee bar or to-go meal grocery.

★ **APPLY THIS:** A project from ROY, a hospitality design studio in San Francisco known for stylish California spaces, including the redesign of SPQR, hopes to avoid any letup in traffic with a hybrid counter-service model that’s a juice bar by day and a cocktail bar at night. It seeks to appeal to the remote and in-person office workers and others in the neighborhood who will drive multiple income streams in a venue they can visit before, during and after work and get a different experience each time. It will be partly implemented by concealing the liquor bottles behind a screen, enhancing the light, and placing fresh fruit on the counter for the daytime service, and bringing the lights down and bottles out at the cocktail hour.

“I think most operators are in the process of rethinking their strategy and keeping an extremely small staff,” says Hannah Collins, principal designer and founder of ROY. “The footprints are getting more intimate. There’s no reason to limit to just one kind of service.”

## 4 Light Touch Waitstaff

So much of what scared people over the past two years related to our proximity to other people, and then places and things. Contactless delivery, contactless payment, and online-only ordering seemed like the opposite of hospitality at first, then exactly what everyone wanted.

PHOTOGRAPHY © ROY



“FOOTPRINTS ARE GETTING MORE INTIMATE. THERE’S NO REASON TO LIMIT TO JUST ONE KIND OF SERVICE.”

—Hannah Collins, principal designer and founder of ROY

as if they’re at someone’s dream home for dinner and taking a self-guided tour.

★ **APPLY THIS:** Encouraging guests to get up and move during dinner so it feels more like an experience can be done by suggesting dessert on the outdoor patio or after dinner drinks at the bar. Depending on your setup, it can also entail a walk through the kitchen for early or late reservations when the area is less hectic.

## 6 Prep Work

Do what you can to manage the guest experience before they even walk in. With dining out so often fraught with restrictions, updates, mandates and menu changes, pretty much every guest in the place will have checked out your website in advance.

★ **APPLY THIS:** Many restaurants might have alerts on their websites about corona virus masking and dress codes, but Liholiho Yacht Club in San Francisco has a full page devoted to another anxiety-filled experience: being a walk-in. Offer guests details such as what the wait would be like if you show up without a reservation on a Friday night; allow ample time for parking; bring a sweater. It’s like your mom is waving you out the door but you know what?

These days, diners venturing into the world are already girding themselves against a certain measure of stress, so a bit of warmly expressed, “We get it, and we’ll look after you,” messaging sets everyone off on the right course. ■





# STAYING THE COURSE

The  
reckoning  
of racial  
inequity  
happened.  
Now what?

By Peter Ganovsky



## The racial unrest of 2020—from the high profile killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor to anti-Asian hate fueled by the pandemic—

resonated among businesses but struck hospitality like no other industry.

Chefs, restaurateurs, nonprofits and big brands stepped up to combat inequity. The industry looked inward: Pledges of inclusivity were made, mission statements changed and even diners contributed by supporting fundraisers.

“The spotlight is a wonderful aspect of the shift, but the support from brands that we’ve supported our entire career has been the best part,” says Detroit-based chef Max Hardy.

But how does inequity remain a focus as a new year approaches and the industry is plenty ready to have the economic devastation of the pandemic in the rearview mirror for good?

It begins, operators say, by addressing the causes, including systemic racism. Consider, for example, that the average startup capital for white entrepreneurs lands around \$106,720 compared with \$35,205 for Black entrepreneurs, according to the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research.

Black restaurateurs say the statistics shouldn’t be surprising considering that people of color have far less to access to professional and financial resources. The economic divide, in part, can be attributed to the perpetual erasure of Black voices.

“To combat this, we must continue working with each other and using our voice, in social media, during events and just using every avenue possible,” Hardy says.

Pastry chef Paola Vellez, for example, has been using her Instagram feed, @smallorchids, to share her visually striking and creative sweet creations but she also regularly posts about inequality to her 24,000 followers. Recently, she challenged the Latino community to support Haitians crossing the U.S. border saying, “I know some of y’all don’t want to hear this but Haitians are Latinos ... Stand up for each other and make the Latino community inclusive for all.”

Once businesses acknowledge the inequity, they need to put in practices that support true inclusion, from hiring and promotions to treatment of workers



THE SPOTLIGHT IS A  
WONDERFUL ASPECT  
OF THE SHIFT, BUT THE  
SUPPORT FROM BRANDS  
THAT WE’VE SUPPORTED  
OUR ENTIRE CAREER HAS  
BEEN THE BEST PART.”

—Detroit-based chef Max Hardy (above)

and purchasing decisions, Hardy says. Creating or revising a mission statement is a start.

The James Beard Foundation, best known for its prestigious awards, realigned its mission statement last year to better reflect inclusion. It audited its procedures and policies to remove “systemic bias” and increase the diversity of those who vote for the awards.

“There’s so much to be done to help the community build back in way that address the issues exposed by the pandemic and the national reckoning of race and gender,” says Clare Reichenbach, the foundation’s CEO at the JBF awards ceremony in September. “...The new standards of our industry must include equity, sustainability and working conditions where all can thrive.”

Reichenbach added that the lens of inclusion and equity would influence and determine future grants, educational programs and the awards.

Combating lack of access will also increase



10 SECOND SYNOPSIS

## HOW TO KEEP THE MOMENTUM

**Acknowledge** the inequity at all levels of foodservice.

**Collaborate** and work with the community using access, clout and your own audience at every touch point, from social media to everyday interaction.

**Examine** your own culture, hiring practices, promotions and purchasing to ensure inclusivity.

**Foster** mentorship for marginalized workers.

**Support** nonprofit organizations committed to equal access and success for people of color.



Nonprofit Black Food Folks, below, is funding restaurants to increase access for people of color.



“THE  
INDUSTRY  
NEEDS A  
BREATH OF  
FRESH AIR.  
  
THEY  
NEED OUR  
CULTURE,  
OUR  
EXPERTISE.”

—Dipping Spoon founder  
Charity Blanchett, right



equity. Nonprofit Black Food Folks is funding Black-owned businesses while the Dipping Spoon Foundation is awarding full scholarships to women of color to attend culinary school.

“The importance of representation for BIPOC (Black, indigenous people of color) in this industry is vital and access is where it’s at,” explains Dipping Spoon founder Charity Blanchett. “There are some systems in place where some may not be able to utilize their craft based on someone else’s beliefs.”

Blanchett emphasizes the importance of evolution for the restaurant industry, creating connections between racial injustice and the climate crisis. “The best people to reach out and talk to about how to cultivate the land moving

forward is Black and indigenous people. The industry needs a breath of fresh air. They need our culture, our expertise.”

Says Hardy, “...the best way is to have mentoring programs, setting up culinary scholarship programs for aspiring chefs and starting culinary programs in high schools.”

For their own part and for others who want success, Hardy and Blanchett underscore the importance of learning, whether it’s in a formal classroom or taking on new experiences.

Hardy worked as the personal chef to NBA star Amar’e Stoudemire, formerly of the New York Knicks before opening his own restaurants, two of which are under development.

Says Blanchett: “I believe that life is one big education credit.”

To keep the momentum moving, Hardy encourages people to reach out—people want to help.

“The advice I offer most is to keep learning, honing your skills and learning everything the industry has to offer,” Hardy says. “Join different organizations to help and support your growth.”

And for everyone, including peers, Hardy offers this: “When traveling or in your own city, research Black/POC chefs and restaurants. You are supporting an entire community. (By) supporting the locally owned restaurant, the chef and the employees, you’re supporting someone’s dream to provide their neighborhood with a quality menu.”

Blanchett agrees. “To facilitate the growth of the world we want to live in, we have to work together. We have to listen with all five senses,” she says. “I’m excited for the new world we’re creating. The new world wants us as much as we want it.” ■

# change

WILL DO YOU GOOD



A first-generation chef  
learns that exiting doesn’t  
mean leaving

By Kristin Eddy





**While 90,000 restaurants closed last year and workers left the industry in unprecedented numbers, Irene Li is proving her place in the food world extends beyond the stove.**

Mei Mei, the Boston restaurant she co-founded with her siblings featuring foods from her Chinese-American culinary heritage, closed when the pandemic struck. What followed is a similar story among chef/owners across the country: she joined a nonprofit to cook for those in need, streamlined the menu and offered only takeout and started selling sundry goods at the restaurant. And like her industry peers, she had to make the difficult choice to lay off workers.

Li emerged this year in a completely different place but knows the current chapter couldn't be written without the prologue of the previous ones. In her words on how her training and experience led to her current endeavor:

**Q. You really buttoned up your operation when 2020 got ugly. Is it working?**

**A.** We've made some pretty big changes and now are not offering any foodservice out of the restaurant except for packaged products. But I think that my vision of what Mei Mei could be was always flexible. We wrote a cookbook, and did catering and we had a sauce company at one time. We've dabbled. In 2020, we also started online dumpling and noodle-making classes.

With her siblings, Irene Li started a food truck in Boston and then a restaurant. Selling dumplings at farmers markets provided another revenue stream.

**Q. And you found another unexpected outlet.**

**A.** We've also started selling the dumplings at farmers markets. One customer said they thought the packages would do well there and they ended up selling like hotcakes. We do a package of 12 with sauces for \$16. We're in 13 farmers markets now and that's turned out to be a natural setting for us. We always sell out. It's been amazing.

**Q. What now?**

**A.** We just signed a lease on a new location. It's primarily for production and it will be kind of like a factory store, where you can see dumplings being made, with counter service and a few seats. I haven't been doing any restaurant work in the last six months, so luckily, I have two partners leading the way. I spent eight years building up the business and certainly never imagined running a factory and scaling the business like this, but my team is all in and taking the reins and I get to represent it.

**Q. What do you say to colleagues who are also trying to figure out how to manage in these difficult times?**

**A.** I really love the idea of sticking with takeout for the future, and I have seen the pivot to takeout be really, really great for some businesses. But in general, what I see happening for the industry is smaller menus but revenues coming from more service charges and hospitality fees. The advice I give right now to colleagues is really knowing your customer and what motivates them.

**Q. You've had James Beard Foundation recognition multiple times, numerous awards spotlighting your success in your 20s and plenty of national media attention. In the past, that would automatically have meant going big in the size of your budget, footprint and national reach. Yet you seem to be somewhat easing out of that chef role.**

**A.** I'm not from an illustrious lineage of restaurants (laughs). I started with a food truck. It's a hard time right now in the industry. I still have a lot of colleagues fighting the good fight, so to speak, but I'm not among them.

**Q. You've long been involved with support for food sustainability and resource programs. Do you see yourself moving away from the dining and producing side of the food industry to primarily advocacy and community development roles?**

**A.** Last year, I spent four months running a local program for small business owners called the Restaurant Resiliency Initiative. It was a restaurant management mentorship with Black and Latino restaurant owners that gave advice, and training, and support to BIPOC-owned restaurants. And I was recently accepted into a venture capital-funded fellowship that works with entrepreneurs from under-represented communities to create technology that supports restaurant owners.

**Q. What's that like, after nearly a decade of dumplings?**

**A.** This is a dream job. ■



**On Irene Li**

**Started** with a food truck in 2012 selling dumplings before opening a brick-and-mortar counter service, limited seating restaurant

**Recognized** as being among the first mom-and-pop Asian restaurants to source from local farms

**Six-time** James Beard Award nominee, including Rising Star Chef

**Mei Mei** (little sister in Mandarin) now only features a takeout-only menu of four packaged dumplings: lemongrass pork, cheddar scallion, curried sweet potato and peach pie, as well as a dumpling meal kit and condiments.





# BY THE NUMBERS

▶ PLAY THESE NUMBERS FOR A BIGGER PAYOUT

## SPICE IT UP

Seasonings have the power to transport and transform any dish, dessert or drink from one part of the world to another. Time to start exploring.

### These Spices Are Poppin'

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Furikake     | +102% |
| Turmeric     | +77%  |
| Togarashi    | +37%  |
| Galangal     | +32%  |
| White pepper | +15%  |
| Curry powder | +11%  |
| Five spice   | +14%  |
| Thai chili   | +6%   |

### FALLING DOWN

|                  |      |
|------------------|------|
| Caraway          | -36% |
| Nutmeg           | -27% |
| Green peppercorn | -26% |
| Fennel           | -25% |
| Tarragon         | -24% |
| Coriander        | -23% |
| Sage             | -23% |
| Anise            | -23% |

### SMALL BUT MIGHTY

They may be on fewer menus now but they're the fastest growing.

+366%

#### ACTIVATED CHARCOAL

|           |      |
|-----------|------|
| Pandan    | +75% |
| Lava salt | +70% |
| Aleppo    | +46% |
| Nigella   | +44% |

#### TAJIN

|         |      |
|---------|------|
| Marash  | +43% |
| Za'atar | +40% |
| Dukkah  | +23% |
| Sumac   | +23% |

+100%

#### URFA

|         |      |
|---------|------|
| Marash  | +43% |
| Za'atar | +40% |
| Dukkah  | +23% |
| Sumac   | +23% |

Source: Datassential

### SPOTTED ON THE TRAIL

Heat, types of salt and spices indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa dominate as newly trending but which ones will proliferate remains to be seen.\*

COBANERO CHILI  
ESPELETTE PEPPER  
BAHARAT  
GARAM MASALA  
BERBERE  
GRAINS OF PARADISE  
RAS EL HANOUT  
GOCHUGARU  
SHISO  
KELP  
HYSSOP  
LONG PEPPER  
MAKRUT LIME  
AMCHUR  
BLUE TURMERIC  
JUNIPER  
GREY SALT  
ROCK SALT  
FLEUR DE SEL  
SMOKED SALT

\*Sampling of latest entrants in no particular order at the inception stage from fine dining, and on-trend bars

ILLUSTRATION BY RENEE WOOD

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