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CHEF VIVIAN HOWARD SHARES WHAT A TRUE FARM-TO-TABLE RESTAURANT SHOULD BE AND HER PLANS TO OPEN A THIRD RESTAURANT.

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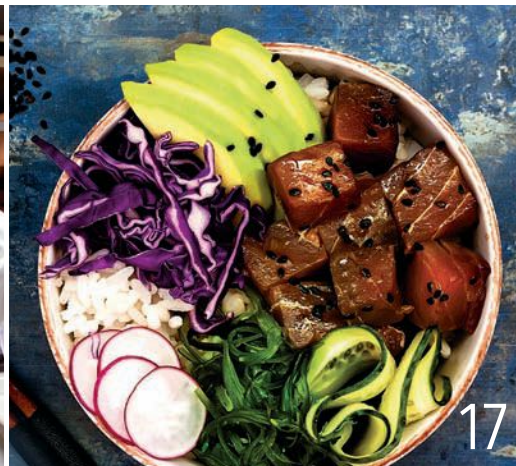
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Punch Bowl Social is Primed for National Expansion

Combine bowling with a food operation and what do you get? Chances are most people wouldn't picture Punch Bowl Social, an innovative chain that's breaking through the stereotypes of social-driven dining. With a renowned chef on board, the growing brand, which plans to open six units a year for the foreseeable future, is elevating the entertainment-eating concept to a new level. FSRmagazine.com/punch-bowl-social

THE EVER-CHANGING WORLD OF RESTAURANT DESIGN

There's no question the chef defines the restaurant. But designers, from start to finish, play a huge role in developing a concept that resonates with diners and leaves a lasting impression. Two of Dallas' most successful visionaries offer their tips to stand out from the crowd.

FSRmagazine.com/ever-changing-world

HOW LARKIN'S RESTAURANTS STARTED A CULINARY EMPIRE

Looking to spend more time together and escape the corporate world, Mark and Larkin Hammond took a chance: They packed up everything and opened a restaurant. Nearly 20 years later, the couple is leading a group of six successful units, and more are on the way.

FSRmagazine.com/larkins-restaurants

RESTAURANTS FEED THE ELECTION FEVER

Enterprising restaurateurs are tapping the frenzy over the presidential election to launch special events. In an age of social media, some eateries have learned that it's better to capitalize on a controversial election than ignore it.

FSRmagazine.com/election-fever

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Events

Conferences in the Full-Service Restaurant Industry

NOV. 14-20

San Diego Bay Wine + Food Festival

San Diego The 13th annual Southern California festival will feature more than 40 citywide tasting experiences and is expected to bring in 10,000 attendees. The event lineup includes a golf invitation, an ocean-to-table luncheon, educational sessions for beer, wine, and spirits, and an expedition to explore the cuisine of Baja.

SanDiegoWineClassic.com

JAN. 22-24

Winter Fancy Food Show

San Francisco The 42nd edition of this event will be held at the Moscone Center, where operators can discover on-trend and best-in-class products. Everything from cheese to confections to coffee to spices will be displayed by an estimated 1,500 exhibitors representing the latest in specialty food and beverage from across the U.S., as well as 35 countries and regions. SpecialtyFood.com/shows-events/winter-fancy-food-show

JAN. 24-26

Hotel, Motel & Restaurant Supply Show Of The Southeast

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina More than 6,000 industry leaders are expected to attend the show, now in its 41st year. In addition to learning about the latest innovations, operators can find ways to cut overhead and increase efficiency. Intended for companies selling products in the Southeastern hospitality industry, admission is free to industry members. hmrss.com

JAN. 29-30

Mid-America Restaurant Expo

Columbus, Ohio The Expo centers on foodservice innovation and technology. Presented by the Ohio Restaurant Association, the event's agenda covers the latest in industry tools, tips, trends, and tastes. Competitions, tastings, coaching areas, and demonstrations are packed into two days at the Greater Columbus Convention Center. The show, which is replacing the North America Pizza & Ice Cream Show, is expected to draw around 3,500 attendees.

MidAmericaRestaurantExpo.com

FSR

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The River Is Wide

HURRICANE MATTHEW HAS TAKEN A TRAGIC TOLL in North Carolina, the state we call home, and as I write this column our friends at Chef and the Farmer are watching the Neuse River rise just blocks from the restaurant. The hurricane passed through four days ago, but the river isn't expected to crest until a week after the storm.

There's a terrible irony in finalizing an issue that pays tribute to the revitalization that Chef Vivian Howard has brought to the community when much of that community now faces potentially devastating floods.

The town of Kinston, like many communities in eastern North Carolina, is being hit particularly hard. A 9 P.M. curfew is in place, so Chef and the Farmer—the restaurant owned by Vivian and her husband/partner Ben Knight—remains closed for a fourth consecutive night, and its sister restaurant, Boiler Room Oyster Bar, will close by 8 P.M.

I called to check on them—Vivian was on her book tour in Greenville, South Carolina—but the young woman working in the restaurant said Ben had just made the decision to keep Chef and the Farmer closed since it would be difficult to provide comfortable dinner service and meet the curfew. At Boiler Room, guests would be able to place orders until 7:30, but they wanted to get everyone home by the curfew.

The water was rising, but their concern was all about the safety of the people and the community. Even the girl I spoke with—who lives within walking distance of the restaurants—was more concerned about the well-being of those already affected and others potentially in harm's way than about her own home, which was predicted to be among the properties that would likely flood in days to come.

While they thought both restaurants would be spared from flooding (neither building flooded in 1999 during Hurricane Floyd), compassion for the community was the palpable undercurrent of our conversation. That's the culture that Vivian and Ben have fostered within their community—a community that extends beyond their restaurant, employees, and town to include all of the farmers in the region who partner with them.

You can learn all about that culture, and the profound differences that Chef Vivian has made, in the feature story that begins on page 38, where she notes: "In order to invest in your community, you have to believe in it and you have to believe it has intrinsic worth." She also gives a refreshingly realistic perspective on what the farm-to-table movement should entail and why "A Chef's Life" is purposefully unlike a celebrity food show.

For a chef who's consumed with convictions and commitment—starting with her loyalty to the communities and people of eastern North Carolina—there simply ain't no river wide enough to keep her from making a difference.

Wishing Thanksgiving blessings to all,

Connie



Connie Gentry

EDITOR
connie@fsrmagazine.com



Page 56

Restaurants source signature coffee blends, transitioning a commodity beverage into a craft sensation to elevate the dining experience.

Read Online

RESTAURANTS CLOSE, SALES SLIDE AT RUBY TUESDAY

FSRmagazine.com/ruby-tuesday-sales

On the Cover

Photographer Stacey Van Berkel captures the warmth and charisma of Chef Vivian Howard in an exclusive shoot for *FSR*. Raised in Nova Scotia, Van Berkel lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, but travels the world to photograph people, places, and all manner of food culture. Recent travels have taken her to Colombia, Ireland, and Italy.

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First Course

FORAGED COCKTAILS // APPY HOUR // ROCKIT RANCH SEIZES THE SNAPCHAT MOMENT



BACON, A CASUAL RESTAURANT SERVING BREAKFAST AND LUNCH, TRANSITIONS TO BERRYHILL, FOR "FINE YET CASUAL" DINNER SERVICE.

TANAPHOTOGRAPHY

OPERATIONS }

Fast Days, Fine Nights

John Berryhill's two concepts combine in a hybrid success. *By Amanda Baltazar*

Diners visiting 121 North 9th Street in Boise, Idaho, at night may do a double take if they were there earlier in the day. Operating as Bacon restaurant until 3 P.M., it flips to Berryhill restaurant for the evening.

Originally, the two concepts—both owned by veteran restaurateur John Berryhill—were in two locations, but to simplify his business and reduce overall costs, Berryhill

combined them in January.

The restaurants are completely different: Bacon is a breakfast and lunch spot with counter service; Berryhill is "fine yet casual dining," serving dinner only. A complete transformation happens daily to flip the business models.

Meals at Bacon are eaten at eclectic old-style wooden tables, with a bucket of rolled-up flatware,

condiments, and to-go menus on each. For Berryhill, placemats go down, along with silverware, wine goblets, water glasses, candles, "and big linen napkin poufs."

Bar stools are removed from the counter, to further enhance the open-kitchen dining, and the chalkboards showing Bacon's menu flip to simply say "Cheers." Outside, the restaurant's sign changes, too.

Every subtle detail is tweaked: The music changes, the lighting changes, the staff changes. Even staff uniforms change from Southern-style casual to more elegant clothing. Between 3 and 4 P.M., the designated flip hour, the restaurant plays "I Will Survive" really loudly, and 3 o'clock begins the three-hour happy hour. "That song really establishes the flip," Berryhill says.

There's a back-of-house flip, too, which is even more significant, Berryhill notes. The Bacon chefs put everything away, just as the Berryhill kitchen staff rolls out their utensils.

Operationally, the two concepts share some items, "because any time you can figure out how to share, it makes more sense from a cost perspective," Berryhill says. Among the shared items: bacon, pickles, lasagna, some cuts of beef, tomatoes, grits, and catfish.

An unexpected result of the combination of the two restaurants was that Berryhill was able to give some promotions and raises. For the most part, the operation has two teams—day and night—and there are fewer staff members, "so we've been able to be a little more picky." And it's definitely more efficient, he says. "We have less equipment, one health inspection, one liquor license, and so on."

In terms of challenges, the biggest one was unexpected: Storage space. Having enough back-of-house and front-of-house storage space for both concepts—from shelving to coolers—proved tricky. "The flip concept is not just a lunch-to-dinner transition," Berryhill explains. "Both back-of-house and front-of-house opening and closing procedures must be down pat, as moving from restaurant to restaurant with uninterrupted service can present challenges. During the actual flip, both crews *must* work together for a seamless transition. It's a dance—and sometimes it's a fast dance—almost a polka." ■

SUSTAINABILITY }

Foraging for Cocktail Ingredients

RICHARD WOODS HASN'T NIXED MANY INGREDIENTS for use in his cocktails at the Duck & Waffle restaurant in London, England, but he drew the line at ants. At least initially: "I said, 'There's no way I'm putting an ant into a drink.' But when I learned about the acidity they add, I said I'd give it a try," explains the head of cocktail development.

Ants are just one ingredient on Woods' "Urban Foraging vs. Urban Decay" LTO cocktail menu, which launched in July. The menu has an urban foraging side, which features ingredients sourced from the city, such as tree bark, moss and grass, and an urban decay side, which focuses on food—mostly items the restaurant's kitchen can't use—like tomato vines and leaves, burned toast, and banana skins. Many of these ingredients—such as the toast and tomato vines—are not used directly but instead are distilled and flavor is extracted from them.

Originally planned as an LTO for just a few months, the menu has proved so popular that Woods is continuing it. It's important, he believes, to show customers how they can make a difference through

urban foraging or urban decay, or simply by thinking more about using leftovers or practices like composting.

"If everyone makes one small change a day, it can make a huge difference," he says. "Making people more aware of how simple changes can be is really important."

Getting back to the ants: Woods has included them in his Woodland Negroni, which takes 24 hours to make. "It's layers of barks, leaves, moss, ants, and grass," he says, and the ants are essential to give the drink balance. "Balance is the most vital of ingredients



THE PINE NEEDLE LEMONADE AT DUCK & WAFFLE COMBINES HENDRICK'S GIN, PINE, VERJUS, AND WILD ELDERFLOWER.

because without that, what could have been an amazing drink is just an OK drink. The ants aren't dominant ... but it's the acidity from them that lends balance to a sweet and bitter drink."

The drink is a classic Negroni, containing gin, Campari, and vermouth. "A cold-brew coffee tower is filled with layers of nature and the Negroni batch is then dripped slowly through these layers, each imparting a varying degree upon the drink," Woods explains.

Other drinks on the urban foraging side include Hay, with Jack

Daniel's whiskey, maple, salted caramel, and a hay infusion, and the Ex-Presso Martini, which features Grey Goose vodka, chicory root liqueur, burnt dandelion root "espresso," and walnut shell. On the urban decay side, there are the Banana Split with Caña Brava rum, spent banana skin cordial, toasted coconut husk, and sour milk, and

the Avocado Aperitivo, with Patrón Reposado, chocolate aperitivo, toasted walnut Amaro, and avocado-skin infusion. All cocktails are priced £14 (\$18).

To begin the new cocktail menu, Woods went foraging with several of his suppliers in the streets of London. Now, he leaves the foraging up to them.

There is a problem and a blessing with urban foraging, he says. "It can be here today, gone tomorrow. But this is constantly challenging me to come up with new drinks and specials since they're always bringing in new things. ... It's a more conscious approach for how we source ingredients, and the importance of this."

{ BY AMANDA BALTAZAR



ERIK YAMAMOTO

TECHNOLOGY }

RESTAURANTS THAT PROVIDE GUESTS WITH WINE LISTS AND DETAILED INFORMATION VIA THE INVINE APP HAVE EXPERIENCED INCREASED BEVERAGE SALES.

Lucrative Appy Hour

GUILAUME BIENAIME, owner of Zola in Palo Alto, California, has always been leery of technology in restaurants, but when he was approached about InVine, he decided to give it a test run. As he was told, InVine was more than just an iPad wine list. While it does list the wine menu, along with more detailed information on those wines, restaurant owners also can use the program for managing inventory, running special promotions, and updating pricing.

Bienaime borrowed two iPads

and put them in his restaurant. It didn't take long for him to see clear results. "People who were intimidated about buying wine are now ordering it," he says. In fact, he has seen beverage sales increase between 10 and 15 percent.

At Hotel Valencia in San Jose, California, Jonathan Whitwell, director of food and beverage, says he also has seen an increase in wine and cocktail sales in the restaurant since adding InVine. "The pictures definitely help with the drink portion, and you can't beat the descriptions

and pairings with the wine," he says. But the benefits don't stop there.

Whitwell says he uses InVine to cross-promote specials in the restaurant and the hotel. These promos include specialty desserts, cocktails, live-music events, and even in-room packages for hotel guests. "We also started a Prestige Wine program in which we serve Dom Perignon, Ruinart Rose, Veuve Clicquot Brut, Silver Oak, and Twomey by the glass. InVine helped us set up the promotional display screen and the menu listings," he says. "This program has been a huge success, and InVine is a large reason why."

While InVine comes with more than 1 million beverages in its database, the company is ready to add more. Whitwell says he reached out to the company when he wanted to add a little-known wine from Ektimo Vineyards. "I simply had to submit a picture of the bottle, and within a day or two, the InVine team had every single detail on the wine in their system," he says. "It is very cool to see a company that is so responsive."

Bienaime says he also loves how easy it is to maintain inventory—simply adding and deleting items and skipping the menu-printing process. "I think between the paper and the time I save on printing menus and managing inventory, plus the increase in sales, InVine has definitely paid for itself."

{ BY KARON WARREN



ROCKIT RANCH PRODUCTIONS

WHAT'S ALMOST AS GOOD AS WINNING THE STANLEY CUP? SNAPPING THE MOMENT WHEN THE CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS, THE 2015 CHAMPS, BROUGHT THE TROPHY TO CELEBRATE AT ROCKIT BAR & GRILL.

Snap Judgment Prevails

AS RESTAURANTS RAMP UP their social media programs, operators typically consider the most popular platforms—Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Pinterest—to connect with consumers. But Billy Dec, founder and chief executive at Chicago-based Rockit Ranch Productions, has added another social media arrow to his overall marketing quiver: Snapchat.

"What is most exciting and most powerful is when Snapchat allows you to get a real closeness with how a certain brand and lifestyle plays out," he says. "This is a really interesting way for our followers on Snapchat to experience [our brand]."

Snapchat is a mobile app that allows users to send pictures or 10-second videos, complete with a caption or graphic—and these "snaps" vanish after being viewed. While Rockit Ranch still posts photos on Facebook, Snapchat takes imagery to the next level. "You can

take these swipes of life and share organic and fluid moments," Dec says. The process provides a more in-depth connection, he adds, particularly since the snaps can be added to a collection of photos or videos, creating a "story."

This is just the latest phase of mobile social media and visual communication, asserts Daniel Black, founder and chief executive of Glass-Media, a Dallas-based digital solutions company. "We all went to phones, then we had the ability to text, then imagery, and now it's all about video," he says. The responsibility is on restaurant operators, however, to make the connection and engage consumers. "It's their job to come up with compelling content to pull in these people, not vice versa," Black says.

Dec is the driving force behind Snapchat at Rockit Ranch. He had used the social media platform personally, and began integrating

the company's concepts—Bottlefork, The Duck Inn, Rockit Bar & Grill, Rockit Burger Bar, Sunda New Asian, and The Underground—into stories.

"Take a night out at Sunda," he says. "I could take a shot of a bustling room, then a tight shot of the sushi chef rolling a precise sushi roll, then a shot of searing Kobe beef, cutting to the front of the house, a wide shot—it's very cinematic."

You never know the stories his snaps may tell: One shows him with actor Johnny Galecki, of "The Big Bang Theory," at a Chicago Cubs game near Rockit Burger Bar. Another, of a fashion show at The Underground, includes a surprise visit by singer Justin Bieber.

Recently, Rockit Ranch's marketing team trained managers at each location to use Snapchat, teaching them how to tell the story of the brand. "We're trying to close the gap between what we offer and the guest," Dec says. {BY BARNEY WOLF

One Year In

AT BRANCH LINE, THE BIRD GETS ITS TURN.



Branch Line

OPENED: October 2015

LOCATION: Watertown, Massachusetts

OWNERS: Andrew Holden and Garrett Harker

DESCRIPTION: The French rotisserie elevates chicken to a starring role.

MELISSA OSTROW

BRANCH LINE'S OPEN KITCHEN IS THE CENTERPIECE OF ITS HISTORIC LOCATION, A SPACE THAT WAS ONCE ONE OF THE LARGEST ARMY ARSENALS IN THE U.S.

Putting a Spin On It

Often an afterthought on fine-dining menus, classic rotisserie-cooked chicken rules the roost at Branch Line. *By Ellen Koteff*

At Branch Line, guests can peer into the open kitchen and watch whole chickens turn on a spit, the flames kicking up. It's a simple, time-tested approach, but one that feels as classic and refined as the historic setting itself. Located in what was once one of the largest U.S. Army arsenals in America, the Watertown, Massachusetts, restaurant

has not only shifted chicken to the center of plate—the bird is also unquestionably taking center stage.

Boston restaurateur Garrett Harker's latest concept sells more than 500 of its rotisserie-cooked chickens per month.

"The Rotisol represents a benchmark in rotisserie cooking," says Andrew Holden, Branch Line's managing partner and co-owner of the restaurant. "It's a

beautiful piece of equipment with tempered glass that has very even heat distribution."

The restaurant also roasts chicken for a host of other dishes, including Lemon Chicken Soup with oregano, Greek olives, and big crusty croutons, and a Chopped Salad featuring chicken, avocado, and Feta.

Soon, Holden says, the Rotisol will be

One Year In

used for additional menu items such as potatoes, leg of lamb, cabbage, and fish.

The concept is part of the Watertown Arsenal, a historic series of distinguished buildings that dates to 1816.

“The Watertown Arsenal grew dramatically through the big world wars but it eventually evolved into a research center and was later sold in the early '90s,” Holden says. “There is a long-term vision for the complex by its developers—one where the community is a big part of it.”

Branch Line is part of co-owner Harker's group of restaurants, which include Island Creek Oyster Bar and The Hawthorne craft cocktail bar inside Hotel Commonwealth, two Row 34 locations, and Eastern Standard.

Other bestselling dishes at Branch Line include Sugar Snap Pea Salad, Marinated Lamb Skewer, and Garlic Grilled Squid.

“We keep the food simple with bold flavors, but not too many components on the plate,” Holden says.

Branch Line, open Monday through Saturday, has lunch tickets that average \$18 while dinners come in around \$55. Moving forward, Holden says, it's likely the restaurant will also open on Sundays.

Branch Line, with 2,400 square feet

inside and another 4,000 square feet outside, boasts a perennial garden and a bocce court. There's room for 60 people inside and another 50 can be accommodated outside on the heated patio during winter months. During warmer weather that number can swell to 77.

Branch Line's interior is warm and welcoming with high ceilings, wood floors, marbled accents, and a decorative back bar. “It feels very comfortable and is bright during the day because of the huge windows. At night, the lights are low, and it's a very sexy room,” Holden says.

Front-of-the-house employee uniforms feature dress shirts with a burgundy stripe that Holden describes as “classic but current.”

“The uniforms hit just that right note of energy and spirit but also class and professionalism,” he explains.

Branch Line also showcases a finely honed draft beer list featuring about 20 varieties. “These were meant to be consumed right after they are brewed,” says Holden. Beer accounts for 12 percent of sales.

There is an equal amount of art and precision that goes into the tightly focused wine program, featuring Med-

iterranean wines. Wines by the glass range from \$9 to \$14, while bottles sell for between \$35 and \$140. Wine sales account for 23 percent of sales.

“These wines are old to the world, but new to us,” Holden notes.

While Holden and Harker didn't expect many private parties when the restaurant opened in October 2015, the bookings have proved otherwise. “It didn't feel like a private-party type venue, but there has been a huge demand,” Holden says. “We have had buyouts of the bocce court as well as the enclosed patio. We never thought this would happen.”

With its strong response from neighbors, Branch Line is ahead of projections for the first year, and its tables turn up to four times nightly.

“The reception has been extremely positive,” Holden says. “It's hard to imagine how it could have been better.”

“Make sure you have fun every day at work,” he continues, referring to the lessons he's learned over the course of the year. “As a manager you have to be positive, a bit of a morale booster. Let the staff contribute, and ask them for ideas. You will always come up with better results when you listen.” ■



FAWIN DEVINEY / MELISSA OSTROW

THE SUGAR SNAP PEA SALAD IS A HIT AT GARRETT HARKER'S LATEST BOSTON CONCEPT, WHICH SELLS MORE THAN 500 OF ITS SIGNATURE ROTISSERIE-COOKED CHICKENS PER MONTH AND OFFERS A RELAXED SETTING THAT INCLUDES OUTDOOR BOCCIE AND PATIO SEATING.

Chefs & Ingredients

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Raw Delights

Lesser-known Hawaiian fish go mainstream. By Amelia Levin

Say Aloha to Hawaiian cuisine, which—along with the popular poke—has been enjoying a phenomenal explosion as of late. New poke shops continue to open up from coast to coast, while many chefs are revisiting authentic island dishes, breaking away from simply Spam or the 90's-era Asian “fusion” creations that mainlanders might think of when picturing Hawaiian food.

Native Hawaiians can't help but find it a touch amusing, but they're happy about the widespread embrace. When it comes to poke in particular, those who have lived in Hawaii are so used to eating the raw fish dish on a weekly, if not

daily, basis, and seeing it at every grocery store and corner shop, that its recent media attention is akin to peanut butter and jelly suddenly becoming the next big thing.

“Poke in many ways is the entry to other Hawaiian food,” says Chef Mikala Brennan, owner of Hula Girl Bar and Grill, the former food truck-turned-full-service restaurant and bar in Washington, D.C. Chef Brennan couldn't be more thrilled about the recent Hawaiian food renaissance. Brennan grew up on the island of Oahu after her mother, then a Pan Am flight attendant, met her father on the beach—and the rest was history.

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Chefs & Ingredients



HULA GIRL BAR AND GRILL

HULA GIRL BAR AND GRILL BRINGS CLASSIC HAWAIIAN FARE TO THE WASHINGTON, D.C., MARKET—LIKE THIS POKE SAMPLER, WHICH INCLUDES AHI TUNA POKE, GRILLED OCTOPUS POKE, AND LOMI SALMON (PRICED \$18). SPAM MUSUBI (\$3) IS ANOTHER CLASSIC APPETIZER SERVED AT THE RESTAURANT.

“Because people have enjoyed trending dishes like ahi tuna tartare, crudo, and ceviche, we have already had many introductions to raw seafood, and so eating poke is less of a leap of faith for consumers,” she says. “And it seems all of these things have naturally led to the recent poke craze.”

For the record: it’s pronounced *pok-ee*. Not poke, as in the verb to nudge, or even, *pok-ay*, explains Chef Brennan, who has been guilty of the latter. The sudden addition of an accent over the e, as in poké, also baffles her and other native Hawaiians whom she knows.

Essentially a raw fish salad, classic poke has a few common elements: diced raw *aku*, an oilier tuna; ahi tuna (yellow-fin) or octopus marinated in soy sauce; sesame oil; and green onions. Sometimes *limu* or other seaweed is added, along with seeds or nuts (in Hawaii, *kukui* or

candlenut) for crunch, and chilies or wasabi for heat.

At Hula Girl, Chef Brennan offers a classic version with ahi tuna chunks, sesame oil, fresh ginger, soy sauce, and a little chili oil, along with hijiki seaweed and—if she can get it—limu, an indigenous Hawaiian seaweed that’s more similar to a sea bean with some crunch. She’ll serve the dish in bowl form, either by itself or atop sushi rice or a Korean-style watercress salad, with pickled daikon, carrot, kimchi, cucumbers, and watercress—for a little more pop of color. Masago fish roe is sometimes used for a little extra umami flavor, a pop of texture, and its bright orange color.

For an octopus poke, Brennan lightly poaches the seafood and then grills it over a wood-fired grill before tossing it with some sesame oil, lemon, soy sauce, and green onions. Brennan also serves

lomi salmon, which is not poke, but is a cured fish salad of sorts. At Hula Girl, she cures the salmon with Hawaiian sea salt and tosses it with sweet onions, tomatoes, and a touch of sesame oil and chili water.

When serving poke, as one might suspect, it’s important to work with very trusted, reputable seafood purveyors who can get the freshest fish possible.

Other chefs are putting their own spin on the classic poke: At Liholiho Yacht Club in San Francisco, Ravi Kapur serves a tuna poke with sesame oil and radishes for crunch, along with nori “crackers” on the side. At MW Restaurant in Honolulu, Wade Ueoka and Michelle Karr-Ueoka offer classic ahi tuna poke, along with a few variations. For instance, they serve ahi poke with *mandoo* (Korean meat and vegetable-stuffed dumpling) with *hamakua eryngi*

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mushrooms from Hawaii and a garlic-soy vinaigrette. Another ahi poke features extra add-ins like *ikura*, or salmon roe, and delicate uni served with crispy rice crackers. The Ueoka's also prepare a poke with smoked *tako*, or octopus.

Chef Chung Chow of Noreetuh in New York City serves poke as a starter. He swaps ahi tuna for bigeye tuna, another prevalent tuna from the Pacific Ocean that is known for its firm and meaty, rich taste when served raw. The tuna is mixed with umami-rich seaweed, macadamia nuts, and pickled jalapeños—giving it some crunch and heat. Another bigeye tuna poke comes mixed with Chinese spicy miso, *tosaka* and *ogo*, both Japanese seaweeds. He has also served a cooked shrimp poke with cucumber, wasabi, pearl onion, and a yuzu marinade.

Chef Michael Slavin, culinary director for Houlihan's and its concepts J. Gilbert's Wood-Fired Steaks & Seafood, Bristol Seafood Grill, Devon Seafood Grill, and Devon Seafood + Steaks, likewise swaps ahi tuna for bigeye, which he sees as the next "hot" tuna. His poke features the tuna mixed with sesame oil and seeds, sriracha pepper flakes, sea kelp, macadamia nuts, thinly sliced candied ginger, and a dollop of yuzu-avocado mayo that is garnished with pea shoots and served with spiced wonton chips.

Exotic Eats

Beyond poke, Hawaii is a breeding ground (literally) for some amazing and unique fish that are less well known to mainlanders. Thanks to progressive and reputable seafood purveyors, gaining access to these species is becoming easier than ever before. What's more, trusted seafood purveyors source from sustainable fisheries and farmers to make sure they are not contributing to overfishing or damaging the ecosystems. This is even better news for chefs wanting to experiment with unusual types of fish, and the smaller supply adds a little mystique and intrigue to the menu.

For Chef Slavin, relying on personal relationships with these fishmongers and seafood suppliers allows him to

bring fresh seafood daily to restaurants in landlocked cities. Typically, he can only get a limited supply of the more unusual Hawaiian species, so he focuses on preparing the fish as simply as possible to showcase its uniqueness.

Most recently, he's been experimenting with *monchong* fish, which is a little harder to find but has a higher fat content that helps the fish stand up well to grilling. Slavin lightly seasons the fish with olive oil, sea salt, and fresh ground pepper, and grills the fish over mesquite wood to add a smoky, earthy flavor without muddying the rich fish flavor with too much spice.

He's also been sourcing *hapuku*, or wreckfish, which he says has a white, firm super-flaky texture when gently cooked, similar to silky black sea bass. Because it is difficult to catch, the fish can be a little pricy and hard to procure.

Slavin compares *hebi*, a Hawaiian spearfish, to swordfish—but adds that it's not as firm and is more delicate and pinker in color. Brennan also uses Hebi, in sushi grade form, and then prepares her classic poke with the fish for a denser, meatier taste and texture. For the poke, she'll also use *kampachi*, a boutique yellowtail that's sustainably farm-raised off the Kona Coast on the Big Island. To showcase its slightly sweet and delicate flavor, she'll swap out the soy sauce for a lighter yuzu dressing, adding a little pickled radish and macadamia nuts.

Opakapaka, a Hawaiian pink snapper, also makes for an interesting, simply prepared fish—but it can be expensive to source and chefs must make sure they're actually getting pink, not red, snapper, Slavin cautions. He also likes *opah*, Hawaiian moonfish, but it can be tricky to cook because of its leanness. "It's important not to overcook this fish," he says, noting the fish appears red when raw, but turns white when cooked.

As more seafood purveyors are able to source sustainably caught or farmed fish from the waters around Hawaii, chefs will continue experimenting with new species for their poke and other Hawaiian-inspired dishes, looking beyond the ubiquitous ahi tuna or mahi mahi. ■

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CHEF/OWNER DAVID GILBERT TEACHES HIS KITCHEN TEAM TO PLATE WITH PERFECTION AND WITH AN EYE TO POLISHED DETAILS.

Fine Dining Crafted Tableside

Detroit diners who visit Marais are treated to culinary presentations. *By Amelia Levin*

Detroit is a different city. After a few brave restaurateurs and food pioneers set up shop in what had been a barren business land, a couple more chefs and artisans followed. And then more and more. Meanwhile, community residents have worked together to develop urban farming and other outreach programs. Now, it's safe to say Detroit is on its way to becoming a burgeoning food mecca in the Midwest.

This means more competition for places like Marais, even though the upscale French restaurant sits just outside the city in Grosse Pointe. But competition and this evolution are good things. Chef/owner David Gilbert has used the escalation in standards and consumer expectations to think outside the box when it comes to keeping relevant, push-

ing past competition, and finding alternative revenue sources. Or maybe, it's more about re-thinking inside the box.

"Restaurants are great, but if you don't diversify, a restaurant will only do so much for you—especially in Detroit these days, where in the last couple of years maybe 150 restaurants have opened," says Gilbert, an alum of Chef Thomas Keller's French Laundry. "Our goal has never been to open multiple restaurants, which can stretch you thin. Instead, we're trying to give back to our community by having as many [options] within our four walls as we can to give different people more reasons to see us."

The revival that led to the creation of so many new restaurants has also contributed to Chef Gilbert's mindset. "It's helped give my wife and me the [motivation] to think of ways to introduce fun,

cool things and give back to our community."

Marais opened in September 2013, and in the last year Gilbert has introduced a weekly farmers market in the restaurant's parking lot, converted the cocktail bar to a coffee bar and pastry takeout for morning breakfast, and introduced tableside service to bring more excitement to his dining room.

For the farmers market, he acquired special permits from the city government so a tent could be set up to showcase seasonal fruits and vegetables from the farms with which he's cultivated relationships. The market has given the farmers another avenue to sell their goods and also allowed Chef Gilbert to sell some of the extra food he might have. Not to mention, it's been a great marketing tool for the restaurant.

"The response has been tremendous because there was not a farmers market in this area," he says. "You have people walking by all these crates of beautiful produce, and it makes them realize how we cook at the restaurant." During the markets, held on Saturday and Sunday mornings, Gilbert will also offer the restaurant's rotisserie chickens and ducks, which are sourced from small, sustainable farms.

Inside the restaurant, Gilbert transitioned his bar area in the mornings to offer coffee, popular pastries, and hand-made croissants, which are prepared in the traditional way and take three days to make. He learned this art from spending years working in patisseries and restaurants throughout France.

"We've had an amazing brunch service, and everyone would always want to take home more of our pastries, so we turned that into its own business," he says. To round out the morning selection, he offers Intelligentsia coffee drinks as well as fresh-made doughnuts and crepes, both sweet and savory, which are made in front of customers on a French machine.

These days, competing in the fine-dining space has gotten even tougher, with more chefs opting to go casual and

the latest buzz

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MARAIS RESTAURANT

OPULENCE ABOUNDS AT MARAIS: FROM CHAMPAGNE SERVICE TABLESIDE, TO FLORAL COMPLEMENTS IN THE MAIN DINING ROOM, TO THE FINELY APPOINTED COLLECTION IN THE WINE CELLAR.

some even branching into fast casual. There's more pressure on chefs and restaurateurs to think of new ways to make fine dining exciting, accessible, and approachable so that consumers will be willing to spend on these concepts. For Gilbert, the competitive edge came in the form of creative tableside dining, which he introduced earlier this year as a way to bring some of the exciting aspects of old-school fine dining to his guests and to pay homage to the traditions born in France.

"What we're finding today is that great food is just one aspect of the dining experience; customers nowadays are looking for an entertainment aspect to go along with great service," Chef Gilbert says. "If guests have a boring server or bad service, good food only goes so far."

His solution at Marais is to begin each guest's meal with a presentation of opulence: Servers roll out a tableside Champagne cart with a range of iced Champagne varietals selected by the sommelier. Guests can also select from a variety of caviars rolled out on a wooden cart, then scooped up by the servers, and served with accompaniments.

During the meal, for guests who order steak tartare or Caesar salad, servers

will roll out carts with the ingredients for those dishes, mixing them fresh at the table. And yes, Gilbert uses a raw egg yolk for the tartare, but he sets the yolk atop the meat rather than have the servers crack an egg at the table.

For dessert, there are carts for cheese presentations, as well as dramatic deliveries of cherries jubilee and bananas Foster—showcasing brandy, copper sauté pans, and flames.

Gilbert considers himself lucky his staff has wholeheartedly embraced the tableside dining. "We have always been champions of fan interaction with our service," he says. "I'm also lucky because our service team consists mainly of [restaurant] veterans who like to cook themselves, so we encourage them to have fun with tableside service."

To train the staff on the tableside service, Gilbert hosts demos every week and promotes regular practice to refine skills, and everyone learns how to do tableside so they can support each other when busy. "We've tried to give our customers what they asked for," Gilbert adds. "Giving back to our neighborhood and even to those from other areas who come to our restaurant has been so rewarding for us, but also for them." ■

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Lessons from the CIA

BY HOWIE VELIE

Military Veterans Command Respect in Restaurants

This Veterans Day, military professionals around the country will find a welcoming audience in restaurants. Countless operators, from the most recognized chains to the smallest independents, will offer food and drink specials to show their appreciation for the men and women who have served our country.

This might seem standard and even commonplace these days, but it wasn't always the case. When my father returned from Vietnam, he hurried to the nearest store and purchased whatever clothing he could find, fashionable or not. He was greeted with jeers and hostility, and had to rid himself of all military garb just to make it quietly through the airport. This changed as people became educated on POWs, MIAs, and, surely, after the tragic events of 9/11. In time, the restaurant workforce and veterans have developed a very gratifying relationship. According to the National Restaurant Association, there are more than 250,000 military veterans holding jobs throughout the industry. At The Culinary Institute of America, we average around 150 veterans on campus year-round. During our welcoming ceremony, we hand out a special pin to incoming veterans to honor their service.

One note you hear often from operators is that employees with military backgrounds stand out. There's no denying the sentiment. Statistics from the NRA show that 19 percent of veterans in the industry have management positions, compared with just 10 percent of nonveterans. Also, 14 percent of veter-



CHEF HOWIE VELIE APPRECIATES FIRST-HAND THE VALUE THAT MILITARY SERVICE BRINGS TO KITCHEN OPERATIONS—BOTH REQUIRE CONSUMMATE ATTENTION TO DETAIL AND AN ABILITY TO PERFORM UNDER PRESSURE.

ans are in supervisor positions, compared with 8 percent of nonveterans.

I was a petty officer third class in the U.S. Navy Submarine Service and served onboard a fast-attack submarine before the fall of the Berlin Wall. I can attest to the fact that the pressure and expectations of service translate very well to the kitchen. There's a sense of urgency and a need to stress every detail that meshes perfectly. *Mise en place*, or making sure everything is in order, is a way of life in the military. It's easy to teach somebody how to flip an egg, but it's a lot harder to get them to flip 50 eggs—the exact same way—in 30 minutes.

As for military professionals themselves, the restaurant environment presents a similar environment to being in the service. Think of it like this: If some-

one cooks a dish for a customer, there's a very short window before the performance review arrives. Quick satisfaction is a staple of the military. In regard to job performance, soldiers are told whether they did a good job or not, and if not, they're guided to do better. That's something even the best chef can relate to.

One challenge is finding a way to connect the two parties. There are numerous initiatives around hiring veterans, but it's a conversation that needs to keep advancing. Around 12 percent of veterans employed in restaurants have military disabilities, according to the NRA. Yet there remains a stigma, especially when it comes to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. I'm hopeful that, especially as veterans continue to prove themselves in the food world, this barrier gets broken through.

Students with military backgrounds are model citizens at the CIA. They come in, sometimes as 22- or 23-year-olds, with a strong foundation. This is definitely true of the career types, whom I often need to counsel to slow down and adjust to the pace of their younger peers. With the proper training, veterans can develop into great professionals and true leaders in our industry. Veterans know how to take charge of a situation, and, when it comes to a restaurant, that's a skill you simply can't teach. ■

Howie Velie, associate dean of culinary arts at the CIA, oversees the culinary specializations courses covering world cuisines, garde manger, meat and seafood identification and fabrication, and advanced cooking.

Liquid Intelligence

RISE and SIP

Wines with brunch are perhaps the most delicate and delicious pairings with that daypart's lighter fare.
By Kristine Hansen

At its core, brunch is a casual weekend meal, which is why sommeliers and beverage directors strive to remove any perceived fussiness from the wines poured alongside egg dishes, burgers, and raw-bar items.

This is especially true at the 21 Del Frisco's Grille locations across the U.S. "The restaurants are geared for that younger group of people," says Jessica Norris, director of wine education. "We're aiming for that young, hip, fun, funky, eclectic group. The millennial generation likes to drink outside the box. They're not necessarily going for California Cabernets. The value piece is huge." At Del Frisco's Grille, 50 wines are priced under \$50 a bottle.

Sangria served in a carafe and Mimosas in a milk-glass jar have been happy compromises. "It still counts as wine sales," Norris says. Whether sangria or wine, the choices are just as whimsical as the brunch dishes, which include a Red Velvet Belgian Waffle and Bananas Foster French Toast.

The Boston institution Aquitaine—celebrating 20 years in the South End in 2017—is also working hard to promote its wine sales during brunch service. Aquitaine reopened in July after a five-month closure to renovate and expand its footprint. Now the bar space is larger than ever



THE CLARET COBBLER
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before. “The restaurant has really become lighter and brighter. A new life, a new spirit of energy, has been created,” says general manager Emily Ackerman. Wait-staff are often thrust between old and new, offering familiar dishes and service to long-time customers while also courting first-time clientele.

The full wine list is available at every meal, including at brunch where it spans 150 selections, about 60 of those are white, the rest red. The majority, about 80 percent are French, explains Ackerman, and the rest are domestic.

“With the reopening, we wanted to better represent ourselves as a wine bar,” she explains. Served by the glass are Grüner Veltliner, Riesling, Albariño, Malbec, a Cabernet Sauvignon–Merlot blend, and two Pinot Noirs. By offering a Pinot Noir from Oregon’s Willamette Valley, Ackerman hopes that people will stray from an expected California find into new territory. Even so, a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir is available by the glass.

Ensuring these wines pair well with brunch foods is key. “Rosé is at the height of its popularity,” says Ackerman,

who suggests sipping it with *Mussels en Cassoulette*, a signature recipe on the menu since opening day that is served in a beautiful copper pot for an elegant twist on brunch. With a *Salmon Gravlax Salade* featuring capers, shaved red onions, dill *crème fraîche*, and fingerling potatoes, a *Coté Mas Crémant* (\$10 a glass or \$40 a bottle) is pitched as an affordable sparkler. “It cuts a little bit of the sweetness of the *crème fraîche*,” Ackerman says.

To encourage brunch customers to order wine, especially if they might feel deterred by the early hour, a dish and its suggested pairing are posted on social media. Each member of the wait-staff is trained in recommending wines for brunch. “You’re setting the tone for a leisurely afternoon. It’s acceptable to sit and enjoy a bottle of wine,” Ackerman explains.

Like Aquitaine, The Katharine Brasserie & Bar—inside the Kimpton Cardinal Hotel, which resides in the historic R.J. Reynolds Tobacco building in downtown Winston-Salem, North Carolina—doesn’t abbreviate its wine list during brunch service. What’s available by the

glass and bottle for lunch and dinner is also served at brunch. But assistant general manager Logan Gebhart won’t stop there. He wants guests to receive a little education about what drinks are best during brunch, while enjoying entrées like house-smoked salmon or an omelette with Gruyère and *fines herbes*.

“We’re working toward getting a menu insert that highlights the brunch wines. Trying to get someone to order a glass of wine [at brunch] is definitely very different,” he says, although he’s cautious about the concept becoming too pretentious. “My theory with brunch wines is to try not to take it too seriously and make sure the wines are affordable and fun.”

To that end, 18 wines are poured by the glass or carafe, and about half of those come from kegs. Around 70 wines are sold by the bottle and—because it’s a French-inspired restaurant—are primarily French.

Among Gebhart’s suggestions for diners who enjoy white wines are a sparkling Vinho Verde from Portugal that’s “a very lightly carbonated wine” and “lighter white wines that are racy because brunch food is heavy and fatty,” he says.



SCOTT GARDNER: WAFFLE // JAY SINCLAIR: FISH // DEL FRISCO'S GRILLE: SALAD AND SANGRIA POP

WINES PAIR BEAUTIFULLY WITH BRUNCH DISHES LIKE THE MARKET FRESH GREENS AT DEL FRISCO'S GRILLE (LEFT) AND THE WAFFLES WITH MAPLE-BOURBON SAUCE (TOP) OR SEARED FISH WITH SPRING VEGETABLES (BOTTOM)—BOTH SERVED AT THE KATHARINE BRASSERIE & BAR INSIDE THE KIMPTON CARDINAL HOTEL. THE SANGRIA POP (RIGHT) IS ANOTHER BRUNCH FAVORITE AT DEL FRISCO'S GRILLE.



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For reds, a glass of sparkling Lambrusco from Italy “gives them the opportunity to enjoy something on the red side,” and Beaujolais—when served chilled—is a lighter style of red wine more suited for daytime hours.

Pinot Grigio, he's found, has been a go-to wine for many, but by consciously not offering it he is forcing diners to look outside of their comfort zones. “It forces the guest to try something different,” Gebhart says.

What are good brunch wines for the cooler months? Last summer when Norris sat down to plot an upcoming change-out of wines in the fall, she sought to broaden geography. She added an Oregon Pinot Noir to a roster of California Pinot Noirs—“It's not just about California anymore,” says Norris. And she chose blends because, as she notes, “Red blends and white blends are super easy to drink and easy to sell.”

Current bestsellers are Albariño by the glass, Au Contraire Chardonnay (Russian River Valley, Sonoma County, California), and Kung Fu Girl Riesling from Charles Smith Wines in Washington state.

Table service to promote these wines is key, says Norris, to defuse misconceptions about day drinking. Waitstaff armed with notebooks taste wine between three and five times a week before their shifts. To personalize the experience, they are also required to come up with keyword descriptors for each wine “so it sounds totally different than some stock description,” she says.

As with any meal, wine pairings can help nail the sale of a glass or bottle of wine. And you can't beat the preferred pairings suggested by the waitstaff. For Norris, describing how fried chicken and waffles taste with sparkling wine evokes a mouth-watering description. “I am a die-hard fried-foods-with-bubbles fan.”

Mulling over the various ways to promote wine at brunch service, in a way that social media cannot, Gebhart says, “A lot of it just really takes place at the table.” Because who can turn down a mouth-watering recommendation delivered in person—wine pairing included? ■

Clear But Colorful

New World gins are bringing a kaleidoscope of flavors to craft cocktails. **By Alia Akkam**



Spirits Editor **ALIA AKKAM** is based in New York but travels the world experiencing and writing about spirits, food, and hospitality.

Gin plays a starring role in a number of classic cocktails—the Negroni, the Bee’s Knees, and the Gimlet among them. Most often it is coveted in the forms of the elegant Martini and summer’s go-to Gin & Tonic. However, for decades juniper-laden gin took a backseat to vodka, the clear spirit of choice among drinkers. But with palates increasingly shifting toward the adventurous, new gin selections are spawning imaginative cocktails.

Since the 1950s, vodka is the spirit that has captivated Americans—for a number of reasons, says Jason Logie, beverage director of The Mixing Room in the JW Marriott Los Angeles L.A. LIVE. “Vodka was imported from Russia and was thus exotic; James Bond drank it in a Martini and was thus chic; and it was the base for popular drinks of the era like the Moscow Mule, Bloody Mary, and Screwdriver. But as cocktail culture has grown in the States, bartenders have begun to see the versatility and nuance that gin offers, and they want to play with that complexity,” he explains.

Christine Kim of Schlow Restaurant Group, who oversees the bar programs at Chef Michael Schlow’s five Washington, D.C., establishments, agrees. “Vodka had such a strong hold on the market—and let’s be real, people don’t like change—I think it took a while for the general public to be open to trying new things.” Also, Kim continues, “It took a long time for those working behind the bar to get a real grasp on the different types of gins and to educate consumers.”

Before its reputation was marred by Prohibition’s onslaught of toxic bath-



THE TICO IN WASHINGTON, D.C., PART OF SCHLOW RESTAURANT GROUP, IS A FUN SETTING FOR GIN TO INCH ITS WAY INTO THE COCKTAIL MENU, AS IT DOES WITH THE COOL HAND LUKE, WHICH COMBINES GIN, LEMON, CUCUMBER, PINK PEPPERCORN, AND MINT.

tub interpretations, gin was embraced in cocktails. But without that rich context, in the aftermath of the “Noble Experiment” it was simply deemed old-fashioned. As Lawrence Kobesky, bar manager of Chicago-based Gibsons Restaurant Group, points out, “Gin for many younger drinkers was the spirit of their parents and grandparents, and they didn’t want to drink what [their elders] were drinking, hence the vodka generation.”

So why all the fanfare now over, say, joints like the 500-gin-strong Whitechapel in San Francisco, or the Gin & Tonic menu at Spanish restaurant Bellota in the same city? Modern-day imbibers are undoubtedly curious, eager to taste as much as possible. The advent of New

World gins, balancing lively botanicals with the spirit’s signature juniper, was just the creative push the category needed. Instead of the crisp, refreshing, timeless London dry gins associated with hot-weather tipples, these gins offer more depth and intrigue year-round.

“Gin is no longer just juniper; it’s a kaleidoscope of dizzying choices in the best way. Behind the bar we can choose from gins with cooling, warming, soft, floral, sweet, smoky, and herbaceous qualities,” says Gates Otsuji, chef de bar at New York’s Standard Hotels and co-founder of Swig + Swallow cocktail mixes. “What’s given gin its current staying power is a renewed interest in flavor.” Adds Kobesky, “I think until some of the New World gins hit the market, the



MARIA HARTE PHOTOGRAPHY



THE MIXING ROOM

AT THE MIXING ROOM IN L.A., ONE OF THE BESTSELLERS IS THE CITY OF ANGELS (ABOVE), WHICH TOPS GIN, LEMON, AND TONIC WATER WITH A HOPPY IPA. AT HUGO'S FROG BAR & FISH HOUSE IN CHICAGO (LEFT) GUESTS RAVE FOR THE BLACKBERRY COLLINS: HENDRICK'S GIN PLUS BLACKBERRY LIQUEUR.

majority of people believed it all tasted like chewing on pine cones.”

Soraya Odishoo, bartender at the vegetarian restaurant NIX, in New York City, says that forward-thinking brands like St. George and Gin Mare are leading the way in this realm, creating infused variations that have a profile suited to gin on the rocks, “which is pretty avant-garde for the spirit.” As a result, she sees professionals enthusiastically experimenting with new cocktails. Ingredients like basil and kaffir limes give dimension to these gins, which in turn allows them to be relished year-round. Kobesky points to game-changing brands like Aviation and Fords for helping the category “transcend the seasonal barrier. Bartenders are using modifiers with their gin they might have once only considered for a brown-spirit cocktail.”

While he predicts that “gin Martinis and Gin & Tonics will always be bulletproof cocktails of the ages,” Kobesky notes that one of the most sought-after choices at Gibsons’ eatery Hugo’s Frog Bar & Fish House is the Blackberry Collins (Hendrick’s gin, blackberry liqueur, lemon juice, simple syrup). At Nix, Odishoo makes several gin cocktails to complement the likes of tofu-skin pockets and Yukon potato fry bread. There’s a blackberry rendition, too, called the Albion (fresh blackberry, juniper, lemon) as well as the Honey Bee (Thai basil, clo-

ver honey, sake). One of Logie’s bestsellers is the City of Angels, in which gin, lemon, and tonic water are topped with a hoppy, botanical-balancing IPA.

Kim makes a number of gin cocktails for each of the group’s restaurants. There’s the Virginia Slim (Beefeater, Aperol, lemon, sparkling rosé) at Riggsby. And she adds, “We aren’t going to forget all of our beloved London dry gins,” citing the 4 o’ Clock Somewhere cocktail that’s popular at Tico (Aviation gin, dry vermouth, Earl Grey reduction, lemon, Bittermen’s Hopped Grapefruit bitters).

Kim also likes to amplify holiday punches with gin. While the season calls for a barrage of cloves, ginger, and anise, she says it’s better to keep the recipe clean and simple. “Don’t go too heavy on ingredients that can overpower and mask the great flavors of gin,” she advises. Odoshoo reaches for a classic London dry style to make a punch, buoyed by “agave or fresh maple syrup, fresh lemon juice, muddled sage, and a little bit of elderflower liqueur.” Logie also believes elderflower liqueur, along with sparkling wine, makes good companions with gin in a punch. “The elderflower and gin play off each other and the bubbles add a celebratory touch.”

With punches emphasizing blends rather than layers of flavors, Otsuji recommends starting with a traditional gin cocktail structure, like the Singapore

Sling, swapping out the citrus elements and bolstering the oleo saccharum with smoked spices, flamed citrus oil, and caramelized sugar. The gin concoctions he serves at the Standard are vast, spanning A Girl’s Best Friend (Dorothy Parker gin, lemon, Moët & Chandon Imperial Brut, grenadine snow) to the Indecent Proposal (Chief Gowanus New Netherland Gin, Hennessy XO, black plum cordial). “It’s warm and luxurious,” he says of the latter.

Chief Gowanus New Netherland Gin—in addition to Citadelle Réserve and Texas-made Treaty Oak—is a sterling example of the currently thriving aged-gin segment, says Otsuji: “I think barrel-aging sands off a lot of sharpness. It certainly blurs the line in cocktail construction and has allowed me to make some cross-category choices I would never have considered before.” It’s also, says Odishoo, another opportunity to uniquely present gin to customers and “definitely a way to extend the spirit into the winter months. For me, the juniper takes on a more alpine feel.”

Some aged gins, according to Logie, “warrant sipping alone. Barrel-aging a gin transforms it into a more substantial spirit with notes of wood and smoke.” Bourbon and Scotch lovers may also be swayed by matured gin, adds Kim. “Honestly,” she says, “I’ve seen whiskey drinkers convert.” ■

SIPS APPEAL

BEER EDITOR



JEFF CIOLETTI combines his love of drink and passion for travel to write about beer. BeerEditor@FSRmagazine.com.

Since the weather starts to transition in earnest in November, we begin on the mild and refreshing side and close with the big and bold—with a few entries in between that defy categorization.



Deschutes Hop Slice Session IPA

4.5% ABV Deschutes brewery has turned hoppy beers into an art form. Now it's been bitten by the session IPA bug with Hop Slice, whose addition of Meyer lemons harmonizes with the hops' citrus characteristics (subtle enough to not be radler-like). A true session beer, the IBUs are moderate (45), and the flavor, aroma, and mouthfeel scream "bright refreshment."



Susquehanna Brewing Goldencold Lager

5.0% ABV Seldom has a name been so descriptive. Pennsylvania's German roots definitely show in this ode to a lager from the old country. The breadly malt is definitely the star here, but there's just enough of a restrained floral hop bitterness to keep things interesting.



WINE EDITOR



KRISTINE HANSEN has written about wine since 2004 and is passionate about pairing food with wine. WineEditor@FSRmagazine.com.

The winter months are packed with celebratory times when diners are more apt to order bubbles or dessert wines. Plan to offer options that can please any palate, whether crisp, refreshing sparklers or intense, full-bodied reds, which can easily transition from dinner to dessert. Rosés are the perfect compromise for a table of drinkers.



The White Knight Prosecco

TREVISIO, ITALY From the wine's toasty-baguette nose to its honeyed layers of white peaches—which are balanced and not overly sweet—this is a very approachable style of Prosecco. Made from Glera grapes, and it's also a good value.



2014 Plungerhead Old Vine Zinfandel

LODI, CALIFORNIA From an up-and-coming wine region in terms of Zin acclaim—but not in terms of history as the vines date several decades back—a subtle cedar nose leads to cherry-pie flavors and an undercurrent of cocoa powder, ending with a round mouthfeel and smooth finish.

SPIRITS EDITOR



ALIA AKKAM is based in New York but travels the world experiencing and writing about spirits, food, and hospitality. SpiritsEditor@FSRmagazine.com.

An alluring collection of whiskey newcomers dominated the spotlight in 2016. As we delve into the holiday season, warming brown spirits continue to flow. High-proof bourbon and single malts hailing from India and Washington state also tempt, just as new incarnations of rum, tequila, and amaro are welcome at any festive fete.



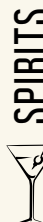
Pusser's Gunpowder Proof Rum

In 1970 the Royal Navy stopped dispensing daily rations of rum to its sailors. To commemorate the anniversary of this morbid occasion—dubbed Black Tot Day—Pusser's Gunpowder Proof Rum hit the market last summer. Crafted in wooden pot stills first employed in the 1700s, this blend of rums from Guyana and Trinidad is rife with caramel and molasses notes. At 54.5 percent alcohol, it makes for quite a heady quaff.



Glen Grant 12-Year-Old

So only the most refined vapors are maintained at Glen Grant. The sole Speyside distillery to do so, it utilizes water-cooling purifiers in the first and second distillations of its Scotch. One such example is the bright Glen Grant 12-Year-Old. Released in tandem with the more deeply layered 18-Year-Old, it has aromas of almond and citrus that pave the way to a fresh-from-the-oven apple pie.



SIPS APPEAL



Odell Brewing Co. Drumroll APA

5.3% ABV In terms of its ABV, Drumroll is somewhere at the intersection of session IPA and IPA proper. The fact that it's simply dubbed an American pale is a testament to how far American palates have come. The catty, fruity aroma gives way to a pronounced—yet quickly dissipating—bitter bite, and a mango-esque flavor that would make most IPAs proud.



South Street Brewing Satan's Pony

5.3% ABV Though officially an amber, if there were such a category as an "American light-to-medium brown ale," Satan's Pony—from the Charlottesville, Virginia, brewery South Street—would be in it. A light to medium body, walnut-like and bready aroma and flavors, and a moderately creamy head make it devilishly difficult to fit neatly in a box.



Lost Rhino Brewing Company Rhino Chasers Pilsner

5.6% ABV Well-crafted, flavorful Czech-style pilsners are having a bit of a moment, and Ashburn, Virginia's offering is a solid representation of that trend. Rhino Chasers is a bit of a stealthy beast, with a delightfully aggressive bitterness that builds and builds to a startling crescendo.



Champagne Charles Heidsieck Brut Réserve

REIMS, FRANCE Culled from 60 different crus, light golden-apple flavors with touches of honey are perfectly balanced—neither dry nor sweet—on this lush Champagne. Aromas of just-baked brioche, almonds, and dried fruits are a delightful entry point.



Bisol "Crede" Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G

TREVISO, ITALY Snappy and crisp, this Prosecco—consisting of Glera, Verdiso, and Pinot Bianco grapes—features golden-apple notes and mineralities on the finish. Consider pairing with raw-bar items.



2015 J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines "Gesture" Grenache Rosé

PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA With a silky profile, the watermelon notes mingle with red-fruit notes, as well as with toasted vanilla, to create an ideal pairing with white meats or seafood.



Redemption Whiskey

Redemption Whiskey has bolstered its Aged Barrel Proof Collection with three new variants, including the 9-year-old High Rye Bourbon. Composed of 60 percent corn, 36 percent rye, and 4 percent barley, it's distilled in Indiana and aged in charred new oak barrels, then minimally filtered and bottled at full proof in Kentucky. An herbaceous entrée culminates in a marmalade finish.



Garryana American Single Malt Whiskey

Quercus garryana is a rare white oak unique to the Pacific Northwest. For the debut of its Native Oak Series, Seattle's Westland Distillery has unveiled Garryana American Single Malt Whiskey, which has been matured in this mysterious indigenous wood. The process manifests in unusual jolts of coffee grounds and blackberry preserves.



Paul John Indian Single Malt Whisky

Paul John Indian Single Malt Whisky is distilled along the tropical beaches of Goa, from summer-harvested barley grains that grow at the foothills of the Himalayas. It's aged for a minimum of five years, which—given the sultry climate—is comparable to 10-year-old Scotch. Among the selections is Brilliance, matured in bourbon casks with hints of cinnamon, cocoa, and vanilla.

NEW AND NOTABLE LABELS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE SPOTLIGHT THE BEST IN BEER, WINE, AND SPIRITS.



Samuel Adams Winter Lager

5.6% ABV The addition of ginger, cinnamon, and orange peel bring a Christmas cookie-like complexity to one of the mainstays in Boston Beer Company's cold-weather portfolio. It's a dependable brew for sipping next to a fire, especially as the flickering glow would play nicely off of the lager's deep copper hue.



Lonerider Brewing Company Sweet Josie Brown Ale

6.1% ABV Raleigh, North Carolina's Lonerider has taken quite a few medals for its true-to-style American brown ale. The balanced, light-to-medium-bodied Sweet Josie Brown sports a nose that evokes Ovaltine, with dark German bread notes on the palate.



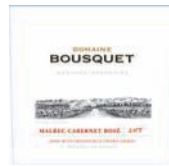
Ommegang Great Beyond Double IPA

8.8% ABV Brewery Ommegang of Cooperstown, New York, made a name for itself as a Belgian-style brewer, but its latest offering is unabashedly American. The Cascade, Centennial, Mosaic, Calypso, and Mandarina Bavaria hops bring plenty of the citrus and pine, with a sweet, tart juiciness to temper the 83-IBU bitterness.



2015 Domaines Paul Mas Côté Mas Rosé Aurore

PAYS D'OC, FRANCE Crafted from 30% Cinsault, 20% Syrah, and 50% Grenache Noir, this rosé is pale pink in color. It expresses watermelon notes, minerals, and balance, and an approachable profile with a crisp finish.



2015 Domaine Bousquet Malbec Cabernet Rosé

TUPUNGATO VALLEY/MENDOZA, ARGENTINA A blend of 50% Malbec and 50% Cabernet Sauvignon—all certified-organic grapes—on this dry-style rosé results in wild-strawberry aromas and salinity emerging mid-palate. This wine would pair well with seafood, light meats, and berry desserts.



Casal Garcia Vinho Verde Sparkling Rosé

VINHO VERDE, PORTUGAL An amber hue in the glass, this semi-dry wine's fresh cherry and strawberry notes don't let up until the finish, and the palate also features herba-ceous notes and toasted vanilla. Perfect to uncork as an apéritif or serve with the meal—ideally Italian foods.



Amaro Lucano Anniversario

Lucano 1894 is one of the amari brands that have helped illuminate the Italian digestivo trend stateside. Now there is the higher-proof Amaro Lucano Anniversario, showcasing a recipe unearthed from an 1800s-era manuscript. The Basilicata-made elixir is laden with more than 30 herbs and spices, including holy thistle, gentian, and clary sage, attractive to bartenders eager to tinker with bitter-centric cocktails.



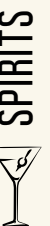
Lagavulin

In the 1880s, esteemed British spirits historian Alfred Barnard paid a visit to Islay's Lagavulin distillery, where he deemed an 8-year-old Scotch "exceptionally fine." Inspired by this scribe's complimentary words, Lagavulin now presents a limited-edition liquid of the same age to coincide with the brand's 200-year anniversary. Softly smoky and chocolaty, it becomes fresher and fruitier with the addition of water.



Espolòn Añejo X

Aged for six years, Espolòn Añejo X is an ode to Barro Negro, the mid-century Mexican art form. The jet-black matte glass bottle handsomely depicts the tradition of the Day of the Dead—but inside, the tequila is rich and nuanced. Its classic agave character is heightened by bursts of nutmeg and white peppercorn, which shine in a riff on the Old Fashioned.



A Side of Sparkling

Operators delight customers by serving sparkling water with espresso.

most restaurants try to give their guests anything but water because it is often a loss of profits, but one recent trend may actually make a case for why operators should serve more water.

The reason is that sparkling water acts as a palate cleanser and refresher, especially when served with espresso. As espresso sales continue to stay strong, sparkling water is a great differentiator for restaurants trying to improve customer experience.

“What you find is a lot of different cafés seeking out a specific sparkling water that they enjoy most and serving that alongside espresso, since espresso is a very strong concentrated coffee,” says Rusty Angell, field correspondent for Bunn. “It’s nice to have something light and refreshing that goes along with it.”

Sparkling water can serve as an upgrade for customers, as well as signals to them that baristas are interested in how they experience a restaurant’s espresso.

“Customers order one thing, and it’s almost a nice little surprise the first time you get the extra water,” Angell says. “The barista is saying to a customer, ‘We understand customer experience, and we just want to go the extra mile.’”

Even on its own, sparkling water consumption is growing among consumers, some of whom order it alone or as a pairing with meals and other beverages as a healthful alternative to traditional tap water. The NPD group, a national research firm, reports that 3 percent of all menu



SPARKLING WATER CAN BE A POWERFUL DIFFERENTIATOR FOR OPERATORS SERVING ESPRESSO BEVERAGES.

orders in the entire full-service category include carbonated water.

The problem is that until recently, there was not always a good way for restaurants to offer sparkling water. Due to the fact that it traditionally comes in a bottle, the water is often not used before it goes flat. In addition, bottled sparkling water takes up valuable storage and chilling space, and operators must question whether or not guests will tolerate restaurants raising the cost of espresso to cover the costs of the sparkling water program.

“Operators are seeing this sparkling water as a giveaway item,” says Angell, “so for those who have been slow to adopt the practice, it comes down to the fact that it’s a very nonsustainable way to offer the water when you’re serving it from bottles.”

But today, sparkling water systems make it much easier for operators to fit the beverage in their budgets and their kitchens. These systems filter municipal water to eliminate the odor and taste of chlorine and add carbonation to make a refreshing beverage or the base for custom-crafted drink offerings.

“You actually end up opening a whole new beverage lineup in your location,” Angell says. “You may be able to withstand that extra increase in your espresso price because, on the side, you’re also beginning to make really interesting handcrafted sodas or other items.”

Because technology makes offering sparkling water so much easier, more affordable, and reduces waste, there is little doubt that the trend of serving sparkling water with espresso will continue to grow. ✨



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“I’ve always had this need and desire to please people—to make them laugh, to make them feel comfortable, to make them happy. That’s at the root of almost everything I do.”

Vivian Howard

STACEY VAN BERKEL

Southern Candor

BY CONNIE GENTRY


She cooks, she writes, she stars in the award-winning TV show "A Chef's Life," and—most of all—Chef Vivian Howard makes a difference, dispelling food myths along the way.



BAKED BARKELY'S MILL
GRITS WITH PIMENTO
CHEESE, PRESERVED TOMATO
SALSA, AND PORK RINDS

STACEY VAN BERKEL

LEADERSHIP PROFILE



A self-described storyteller whose first book, *Deep Run Roots*, debuted last month, Vivian Howard has made a tremendous impact on her hometown and on the restaurant industry. One of her most compelling attributes is the candor with which she discusses her work, her rise to culinary acclaim, and her impassioned perceptions of the industry's most sacred cows. I set out to talk with her and write what was fully expected to be a Southern-homecoming fairy tale—ideal for an issue dedicated to telling the stories of chefs who make a difference.

The only part of that preconceived notion that proved true is that she is the perfect personification of what it takes to make a difference—but this chef's no soft-spoken princess. For every ounce of charm that Chef Howard exudes, she's got a bucket load of Southern grit, topped off with even more wit and a refreshingly real take on the farm-to-table frenzy, celebrity food shows, and building a community-focused restaurant.

Building Community

First thing to know: Kinston, North Carolina, may be small-town America to most of us, but to Vivian—growing up in rural Deep Run (population 3,000)—nearby Kinston was the city. The place you got dressed up to go shopping.

Ten years ago, it was also the place where she and her husband/business partner, Ben Knight, decided to open *Chef and the Farmer*, their first restaurant and arguably the catalyst for their success as well as the salvation of a town in decline.

The most telling description of the town comes from folks who moved away and look back in awe at where the town stands now—like the candid observation one such friend shared with me: “Kinston was circling the drain for years before Vivian Howard opened her restaurant.”

Since opening in June 2006, *Chef and the Farmer* has become a destination restaurant for travelers trekking to and from the Carolina coast as well as a culinary icon for foodies around the country who are fascinated with the simplicity of its Southern farm-to-table motif and the commitment to local ingredients. On the heels of *Chef and the Farmer*'s initial acclaim, *Mother Earth Brewing* opened in 2008 followed by additional restaurants, economic development, and, in

2015, a luxury boutique hotel.

“We’ve seen a tremendous shift in our community over the last 10 years,” Chef Howard acknowledges. “The biggest impact I think we’ve had and the difference I’m most proud in making is that we’ve been able to show the people who live here—and who have long apologized for living here—their food traditions in a way that gives them self-worth. By exalting something simple, like chicken and rice, both in our restaurant and on the show, we point out things they have done their whole lives and we place value in those things—and that gives the individuals value and pride in their place. In order to invest in your community you have to believe in it and you have to believe it has intrinsic worth, so that’s the difference we work to make here.”

Ironically, it took a stint in New York City restaurants, unfulfilled ambitions to become a journalist, and a Southern homecoming that fell far short of love at first sight for Howard to develop that sense of pride herself. She had gone to New York in hopes of finding work as a journalist, but instead found herself working in a West Village restaurant with a focus on Southern food via Africa.

“For a 23-year-old who didn’t think the food she ate growing up was distinct—she was ashamed of it—to learn

that there were all these rich, very complex stories around the most simple things on our table was just mind-blowing,” Howard says. “I wanted to be a story-teller, so when I started hearing these stories tied to food I thought maybe this was the type of writing I needed to do. I started working in that restaurant’s kitchen before my shifts on the floor as a server, to just get a bird’s eye view into the food world. I thought I would be able to translate that into a career in food writing—but what I did was translate it into a job as a line cook.”

The writing career landed on the back burner for a number of years—finally coming to fruition in the form of her blog, *Gorging on Life*, and in this year’s publication of *Deep Run Roots*, a voluminous collection of personal stories, food traditions, recipes, and how it all relates to her life.

But the cooking aspect quickly took on a life of its own: She and future-husband Ben launched a side venture delivering homemade soups, which fostered such a following that they were faced with the dilemma of whether to legitimize it with a brick-and-mortar store in New York or open a restaurant in North Carolina. Family ties won out over city allure, but the transition wasn’t all easy.

“The small-town dynamic when I first

LEADERSHIP PROFILE



REX MILLER



JOSH WOLL

TOBACCO FARMS, SMALLER IN ACREAGE THAN MOST FARMS, LAY DORMANT—BUT CHEF HOWARD REALIZED THEY WERE PERFECT FOR NICHE PRODUCE, PROTEINS, AND CHEESE. "I'M NOT SURE WE'RE A CATALYST FOR IT AS MUCH AS JUST A PARTICIPANT IN IT, BUT TOBACCO FARMS BECOMING FOOD FARMS IS A MAJOR CHANGE THAT WE SEE IN OUR REGION."

FRESH
TOMATO PIE



REX MILLER



With two restaurants, multiple career paths, and 5-year-old twins, life for Vivian Howard and Ben Knight is “like a tug of war.” It’s a day-to-day juggling act, she says, with their children the common ground where neither of their professional pursuits interferes. Family time is their time “to be normal.”

STACEY VAN BERKEL

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

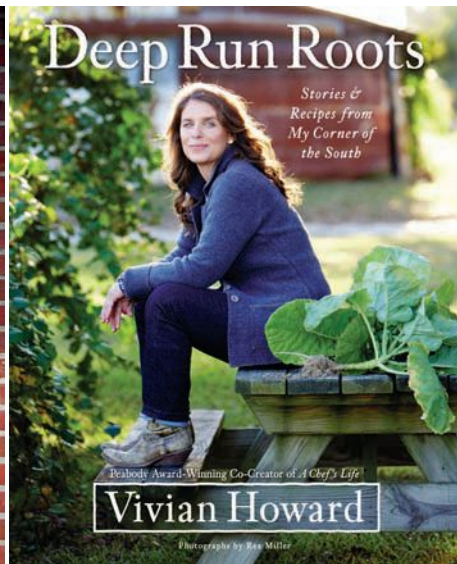
came back here was a little difficult,” Howard says. It was minor things: She and Ben missed brunch in the city, but on a much deeper level, the reception to their restaurant was hardly empowering. “As we were building out the restaurant there was this consensus in town that the restaurant was going to fail. We actu-

important work.”

That it was: It was purposeful, it helped people in the community, and, in the blink of any eye, it almost came to an end.

Five years ago a fire destroyed the restaurant’s kitchen and Chef and the Farmer closed for several months. But

people in the kitchen had been with us from when we started 10 years ago,” Chef Howard says. “Now we just have one person who has been here 10 years, because a gentleman who was with us left to go to engineering school. But in the front of the house we have three people who have been with us for nine years, and we’re



VIVIAN HOWARD AND BEN KNIGHT PLAN TO OPEN THEIR THIRD RESTAURANT, A BREAKFAST-FOCUSED BAKERY, NEXT YEAR, AND SHE SAYS, “I HAVE TO WRITE AT LEAST ONE MORE BOOK AND I’VE ALREADY GOT A DELIVERY DATE. BUT TO BE A PROLIFIC COOKBOOK AUTHOR THERE HAS TO BE A MACHINE BEHIND YOU—MAYBE RESTAURANTS, MAYBE TELEVISION—THAT MAKES SOMEONE WANT TO BUY YOUR BOOK. I DON’T KNOW WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS, BUT I’M GOING TO KEEP PUSHING TO MAKE SURE IT’S A BUSY ONE.”

ally felt like people wanted it to fail. People were suspicious about our intentions, they were really critical of our food, and for a long time we felt like outsiders in the small town.”

But in 2008 when the economy tanked and they saw restaurants closing left and right, their business held strong. “We realized that we were really making a difference in our community and we were masters of our own destiny. It was then that we decided it would be crazy to leave here, that we had something really special and were changing lives. Many people who worked in our kitchen—especially in the first five years—I taught them how to hold a knife. We weren’t hiring people from culinary school; we were hiring people who just needed a job. And in some cases, people from the homeless shelter—and we were giving people skills that would allow them to go somewhere else and get a good job. It felt like

tough times reveal true colors, and Howard explains, “When people in the community found out we were going to reopen, they really rallied around us. For the first time, we felt like members of the small town and part of a community.”

It was then that Ben and Vivian decided to open their second restaurant, Boiler Room Oyster Bar, which she says has been great for the community. “It’s the kind of place where everybody likes to eat; the price point and the expectation is really manageable for all walks of life.” The average check at Boiler Room runs \$24, compared with an average check of \$43 at Chef and the Farmer.

Relationships run deep, not only between the restaurant and the dining community, but also between the owners and their employees. Of the 60 employees who work in one of the two concepts, many have been with them for years. “Until about a month ago, two

one of these rare places where people leave and then come back. It’s interesting because a lot of the people who work in our restaurant have never worked in another restaurant, so we often suggest, or agree with them, that they [should] go work in another restaurant. So they’ll go do that and, often times, they come back.”

Bringing Farmers to the Table

Perhaps even more surprising to Vivian than the cool reception the restaurant initially received was the evolution—or devolution—of the food scene from the homegrown focus she remembered as a child. “In the 15 or so years that I had been gone, people’s eating habits and the socio-economic status here, the whole community, had changed. We opened our restaurant across the street from the farmers market, [where] they were selling oranges and pineapples and things people don’t even grow here. No one was

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

shopping at the farmers market, so from the very beginning we saw this need to help transition the region back into a place where people understand where their food comes from.”

A primary goal was also to help transition some of the former tobacco farmers into food farmers: “That’s been one of our big missions from day one, and it’s actually happening quite a bit,” she says. “Tobacco farms are unique because they were traditionally small; a family could make a living off 25 acres of tobacco. But you can’t really make a living off 25 acres of corn or soybeans or cotton, so those small farms are the perfect place for niche produce or proteins or cheeses. We’re seeing that happen in this area. And we’re seeing people who were commodity chicken farmers become cage-free and free-range egg farmers. I’m not sure we’re a catalyst for it as much as just a participant in it, but it’s a major change that we see in our region.”

The restaurants work with a number of farms, so many in fact that it’s become essentially a full-time job for someone to manage all of the farmer relationships and the ordering. It’s a complicated process, made even more difficult by the fact that Chef Howard expects the chefs in the restaurants to work within her voice.

“We have meetings every week and talk about ideas for dishes, things they are excited about, and I filter those things through my lens,” she says, adding that often she tells them: “I love this idea, but we need to connect it to this place in some way, so if you want to do a marinated bean salad with lemongrass and ginger and soy, then we need to connect it to eastern North Carolina in some way. Can we do a cornbread crouton?”

The intent is to provide feedback that will keep them working within the mission of the restaurant, part of which includes working with new farmers. It can be difficult to continually remain focused on farmers and fare from eastern North Carolina, especially when the chefs are striving to control food costs and manage labor resources, but as Chef Howard explains, “I am often in opposition, saying that we really need to sup-

port this person and we need to use this product, and I know it takes longer to deal with it in this way, but this is what our restaurant is all about. This is what we’ve done from the beginning, so we need to figure out a way to make it work. ... I’m not in the trenches the way I once was. I’m more like a guiding force, constantly checking [the chefs], reining them in, and making sure that we are focusing on fruits, vegetables, and grains; that we’re using animals in the proper way; and that we have an emphasis on preservation and community.”

Standing in opposition in order to achieve a greater good is simply a trademark of how Vivian Howard lives out her commitment to make a difference. There’s no ambiguity or reticence in her declaration of what a true farm-to-table restaurant should entail: “The whole farm-to-table movement is so frustrating to me, because the reason we adhere to it and the message for us is about community and making our community a better place—a place with a stronger economy and a place based on food production—and it’s not about this really precious notion of eating baby vegetables straight from the ground.” (If only the tone of her voice as she says this—the passion, conviction, even sarcasm—could translate to this page.)

She goes on to detail pragmatic characteristics of operating a farm-to-table restaurant, saying, “It’s really more about [recognizing when] a farmer has an overload of this particular thing, and can I help him by taking all of it? And, it’s about buying whole animals so the farmer doesn’t have to worry about moving the tongue. It’s not about sexy technique as much as it’s about allowing that farmer to sell the whole animal, because it’s way more efficient for him.”

That mindset and model for operating a business has become second nature for Chef Howard, but it started with a conscious effort to make a difference. “In the beginning, when we opened the restaurant, it was just me feeling like this was the right thing to do, and saying to these key farmers, ‘I’ll buy whatever you have, just as long as you plant it next season.’

Lots of times, that put me in a position when I’d end up with tons of something, then feel like this is what my cooking has to be based on and I have to use all of it—maybe use some of it now, then change it so that it can be in several parts of the menu without the menu seeming redundant. By saying that I wanted to work with these folks and then living up to my word, it’s what I had to do.”

Dishing on Celebrity Food Shows

The winner of a Daytime Emmy, a Peabody Award for excellence in broadcasting, and this year’s James Beard: Outstanding Food Personality, there’s no denying that Chef Howard has achieved celebrity status. The fourth season of “A Chef’s Life,” which is broadcast in 96 percent of the PBS markets around the U.S., is currently airing, and the filming of season five has begun, incorporating elements of the book tour she’s taking around the country via her food truck.

One of the objectives for “A Chef’s Life,” Howard explains, is to show the restaurant industry for what it actually is, and not, as she says, “what networks make it out to be.”

“I think so much of food television and the representation of chefs make our work seem glamorous and easy, but also cutthroat and harsh—things that I don’t think any of my peers really believe that it is. Also, I think some food television portrays our work as very precious, and I don’t think that’s how most people who do it perceive it. So my goal is to show what it’s really like. That’s why there’s not someone doing my hair and makeup when we’re filming. That’s why I wear the clothes I would normally wear, and why I’m sweaty and not perfect-looking—because that’s really what our work is like.”

In fact, when Chef Howard first envisioned the show she imagined it as a documentary about the dying food traditions of eastern North Carolina and she saw herself as a journalist producing the show, but certainly not a star in the show. She reached out to her childhood neighbor, Cynthia Hill, who had become a successful documentary film-



Despite all she has going on, between filming “A Chef’s Life,” writing, and touring to promote her book, Chef Howard keeps her hand in the kitchen: “I need to be involved because people come to our restaurants and want to feel like they are eating my food. And while we have a chef de cuisine at both spots, they have to work within my voice.”

STACEYVAN BERKEL

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maker, and they experimented with a film of Vivian's family putting up corn—the consensus afterward: Vivian needed to be in the show.

“It became clear we weren't going to make a film but instead it would be a series with multiple episodes, because every tradition has so many rich stories tied to it,” Howard says.

What wasn't abundantly clear was how the show might come to life. It was rejected by the Food Network, with a curt explanation that it simply wasn't good. (Don't you know those folks have shed some tears since.) And similarly dismissed by the producers at UNC-TV, who said they didn't understand what it was, that it needed to be either a cooking show or a documentary. But when Amy Shumaker at South Carolina ETV viewed the reel, she called back instantly, asking to take it to national PBS. The response was a definite maybe: PBS asked for 13 episodes, each 26 minutes long, and then they would consider distributing it.

“We thought we had scored—but what we didn't realize is that there was no money tied to that,” Howard says. “We had to raise all of the money to make those 13 episodes, and do so without any guarantee that they would ever see the light of day.”

The first season was truly a labor of love, as she explains, “Everyone who worked on season one just did so in hopes of it working. We all really believed in it, and everybody worked for free.” Basically the entire first-season team is still involved: Cynthia Hill remains producer/director, Amy Shumaker is the executive-in-charge for South Carolina ETV, and Rex Miller and Josh Woll continue as photography directors.

For her part, Vivian says, “The reason I love making ‘A Chef's Life’ is because it's so much more than a cooking show. I think it improves people's lives, I get the most heartfelt letters from people, and hearing their stories lets me know that we're doing something important.”

Prepping for Another Restaurant

To make a difference—to uplift the communities and individuals touched by her

food and stories—that is the mission running throughout her work and the standard to which she holds her next endeavors, whatever they entail.

Another book is already planned, with a projected publish date of autumn 2019. “When I was at my office writing the first one, I felt so guilty because I was enjoying what I was doing so much,” Howard says. “But in order to be a prolific cookbook author, there has to be a machine behind you that makes someone want to buy your book. Maybe it's restaurants, maybe it's television, I don't know.” She doesn't know, *per se*, but she muses, “And the [book] idea that I have is kind of tied to a possible idea for a show—it's not the same as ‘A Chef's Life’ but it has the same goals and intentions. Of course, I have to pitch both ideas to different entities to make either one of them work. So we'll see.”

As for more restaurants—it's definitely happening, but again, not necessarily in a traditional owner/operator format. “I've said that I don't want to open any more restaurants, but I have an idea for one. ... What I would like to do, and what we've told some of the people who work with us is, ‘If you want to have a restaurant and you demonstrate loyalty to our organization, work with us for a period of time, and we believe in your ability to manage your own place, then we will invest in that and help you be able to do that.’ I don't need a string of restaurants with my name on them, but I love the creative process of building a restaurant and figuring out what it will be. I don't necessarily want to carry the weight of it, but I'd love to be able to help people within our organization do that for themselves—so I think I'll be able to scratch my itch in that way.”

While they wouldn't contemplate moving from Deep Run, Vivian and Ben have entertained the prospect of opening a second Boiler Room location in Wilmington, about an hour and a half east of Kinston. “One issue is that we depend so heavily on people traveling within our region to stop at one of our spots that opening one of our resta-

rants somewhere else might cannibalize what we have here—so we have to be very careful of that, and our primary goal continues to be to improve our own community,” she explains. “In opening the Boiler Room, we asked what type restaurant Kinston might need that it didn't have. This other restaurant idea I have is based on that approach as well: What do we need that we don't have in our town?”

The answer to that question will likely debut by August: “We're going to open a bakery that is breakfast-focused, because there is nowhere to get a proper breakfast in town, particularly on the weekends, that's not a chain,” Howard says. “We just bought a building for it, right next door to Chef and the Farmer, and we'll likely serve biscuit sandwiches, some baked egg dishes, and sweet pastries—plus have the bread production for both our restaurants.”

The decision to open a new restaurant is driven in part by this need in the community, but also because they want to create an opportunity for a loyal and talented employee. “There's someone who has worked with us in the kitchen for about six years, and she's always talked about wanting to have a bakery. We think now is the time.”

What started as making a difference in a tiny community has blossomed into one of the most popular and respected food shows in the country, with a chef who's known in small towns and big cities nationwide. As for the legacy she hopes to impart, Chef Howard says, “I'd like to think one of the differences that I've made, or that my story has made, is that it allows someone who's cooking in a large city like New York, but is maybe from a smaller town, to have confidence that they can do what they want to do wherever they want to do it. And I hope our story encourages people to be closer to their family, and to lean on their family for their success. I think we're going to see a lot more restaurants like ours opening in small towns, and I hope our story lets people know you don't have to be in New York to make delicious food and have people care about it.” ■

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Chef D. Brandon Walker helps serve upward of 750 meals a week to homeless patrons at Venice, California, restaurant Bread & Roses Café, which has been a community staple since 1989. His new restaurant, The Mar Vista, will donate all excess food to the concept.



MAKE A DIFFERENCE

an actual lease. Chef McHugh and his wife, Sylvia, opened the aptly named Cured in late 2012. The name honors his battle with cancer as well as the menu's focus on cured ingredients. As for the location, Chef McHugh wanted to make a difference in the same city he believes saved his life. They restored the administration building at the Pearl, a San Antonio structure built in 1904. "I just said, 'You know, if we're going to do this, we've got to make sure people know we're here to stay, and we really love San Antonio and want to be a part of this community,'" Chef McHugh says. "I had this connection here because this is where my doctors were and where I received my treatments. It seemed like a great place to stay and reboot my life."

With charcuterie as the restaurant's signature dish, Chef McHugh decided that \$1 from every platter sold would be donated to a rotating charity that changes every three months. "We didn't know what that was going to mean," he says. "We weren't sure if it was going to be \$50 or \$500."

In the four years since opening, Chef McHugh says they've averaged around \$5,000 per charity, per quarter. In fact, these days, Chef McHugh has to form a pseudo committee every year just to choose the recipients. This helps stave off the avalanche of requests he fields each week in his inbox.

Since this project began, Cured hasn't repeated charities. The restaurant has included at least one cancer-related organization per year, such as the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and Susan G. Komen, and given to causes "near and dear to our hearts."

For instance, they've raised money for Team Gleason, an organization built around the story of former New Orleans Saints player Steve Gleason, to benefit ALS research. This came a year after the restaurant's general manager lost his father to the rare condition also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. Chef McHugh had a dog for 13 years that passed away, so he held a pet adoption out front of the restaurant and teamed up with the Animal Defense League.

In addition, starting in 2015, Chef McHugh has staged a yearly Cured for a Cure dinner at the restaurant. He's joined by four other chefs, who each prepare a course. The money is donated to The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, of which Chef McHugh serves on the local South Central Texas Chapter board of trustees. Last year's edition raised \$28,500. The 2016 dinner, held in September, collected \$35,000 for the cause.

"It tough for me because I want to make a difference, but sometimes when you're looking at fundraisers, there's maybe not something there that excites you," says Chef McHugh, who was a finalist for this year's James Beard Best Chef: Southwest. "The problem is, I'm just not good at going out and asking for money. ... So, I looked at it in the sense of: I want to make a difference, but how can I make a difference? What is it that I do really well that I can leverage to raise money for this great organization, this organization that saved my life because of the treatment they discovered. For me, the obvious choice was a dinner, because that's what we do. We're taking what we're great at and paying it forward."

Coming Up Roses

For much of the past decade, Chef D. Brandon Walker went about his business quietly. The Bread & Roses Café, a full-service restaurant in Venice, California, has provided quality meals to the city's homeless population since 1989. When Chef Walker stepped into the kitchen in April 2007, he redefined the role. Instead of canned goods, he began to search local food banks and restaurants for donations of high-quality ingredients. Chef Walker also asks patrons to make reservations and deploys volunteers as servers in an effort to mirror the authentic restaurant experience. And back in the kitchen itself, he's making a difference beyond just providing upward of 750 meals a week. Chef Walker is the program manager and instructor of the culinary training program at the St. Joseph's Center, which offers free education to people facing hiring barriers, such as felony records and mental illness. During

each program, he picks students to join him on the line, teaching them the skills needed to re-enter the workforce.

"A lot of my friends' parents lived in the mobile homes and out of their cars on Rose Avenue in Venice Beach," says Chef Walker, who also runs a successful catering business. "To be able to go back to the very community where I cut my teeth and to help those people, I think that's what did it for me."

In 2013, Chef Walker's profile reached new heights when he earned the title of Food Network's "Chopped" champion on an episode dedicated to chefs who give back in their careers. Winning one of TV's top-rated shows did something else as well: It provided him with enough star



CHEF JILL DAVIE'S CRANKED DEVICE TURNS "UGLY" FRUIT INTO GRANITAS.

power to make an even bigger impact in his community.

Chef Walker was on track to open The Mar Vista along with Chef Jill Davie this past fall. The two met during an event at the Good Hurt, a music venue in West Los Angeles' Mar Vista neighborhood. The Good Hurt shuttered in 2014 and, as chance would have it, the pair picked the exact same space to open their first solo venture.

"It's super cool," Chef Walker says. "You definitely get that feeling like it was meant to be." Chef Davie herself

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

was no common chef citizen, either. She had appeared on Food Network numerous times, including a stint on “Next Iron Chef.” She also spent more than a decade as the “Lemon Lady,” traveling the world promoting citrus for Sunkist. With their collective reputations in tow, both agreed The Mar Vista was a perfect vehicle for philanthropy.

Chef Walker brought in one of his former students from the St. Joseph’s Center, Jorge Rivas, to direct the kitchen as chef de cuisine and partner. “Now it’s come full circle and he owns a restaurant with his old teacher. That’s pretty rad,” says Chef Walker of Rivas, who was the executive chef at Blue Plate Restaurant Group before this venture.

Rivas’ inclusion is just the beginning, Chef Walker adds. Eventually, he would like for the restaurant, which spins renditions of local cuisine against a musical backdrop, to be completely staffed by St. Joseph graduates. In the meantime, there will be two externs from every program working in the kitchen. Additionally, Chef Walker will instantly become Bread & Roses Café’s biggest supporter and donor.

All excess food from The Mar Vista will head straight to their kitchen. “It’s a cool thing because I have an inside knowledge of the kinds of things that can really be used—the kinds of things that are shelf-stable and are in good enough condition. I understand the logistics of saving food.”

Also, Chef Davie, who grew up in Mar Vista, will bring her “Cranked” concept to each table. The device, which she founded, turns “ugly” fruit into semi-frozen desserts known as granitas.

“Maybe it just starts with something small and builds into something bigger,” Chef Davie says. “Maybe if we can, in our restaurant, just embrace our values and our morals and our ethical practices, maybe we can influence [others] and get people involved in seeing the big picture.”

Extending An Olive Branch

Naturally, tackling food insecurity has always made sense for restaurants. Feeding America states that one in seven people struggle with hunger in this country. When you consider that more than 80 percent of the food waste generated by restaurants ends up in a landfill, carv-

ing out a donation program—even a small one—can make a major dent in this problem.

In Olive Garden’s case, the casual-dining brand, which has more than 800 units in the U.S. and Canada, didn’t think it was doing quite enough. That’s after donating a reported 35 million-plus pounds of food through its Harvest program over the last 13 years—the equivalent of some 30 million meals.

In March, Olive Garden announced that it was partnering with Feeding America to propel those numbers even higher. The goal was to tack on 5.5 million more meals to its current effort. “As we looked at what we could do, and ways we could give back as a company, hunger relief is just a natural fit as a restaurant company,” says Jessica Dinon, the manager of public relations and communications for Olive Garden.

She adds the company is able to leverage its position as a polished-casual restaurant to donate high-value items. “[The food banks] get a lot of chicken and seafood and fruits and vegetables from us that they probably don’t get much of typically,” she explains. In fact, Olive Garden has been donating its surplus food for so long that the processes are built into the company’s training materials. “It’s just extra steps at the end of the day,” she says. “Any of our surplus food—sometimes we’ll overprep vegetables or proteins—we cook it just like we would for our guests. Then we chill it and freeze it so it remains safe to transfer and be donated.”

Olive Garden also encourages its franchises to get involved on a local level, and on Labor Day each year, they deliver food to first responders. The company supports a number of other causes, from partnering with the Red Cross in times of natural disasters to donating old furnishings, small wares, and décor items to local Habitat for Humanity Restores whenever a restaurant is remodeled. “Guests are becoming more passionate about the causes they believe in, and it’s important for restaurants to make sure we’re always listening to our guests as well as our team members,” Dinon says. ■



OLIVE GARDEN HAS DONATED MORE THAN 35 MILLION POUNDS OF FOOD THROUGH ITS HARVEST PROGRAM OVER THE LAST 13 YEARS.

Gaming Gets Real



RESTAURANTS THAT GAMIFY THEIR PROMOTIONS FIND GUESTS DEVELOP A STRONGER AFFINITY FOR THEIR BRAND. BY KEVIN HARDY

While most advertising and marketing efforts have strict objectives and measurable outcomes, Jovanis Bouargoub is more flexible when it comes to his efforts to capitalize on the buzz surrounding Pokémon Go. If gamers travel to his Chop steakhouse in Chicago's South Loop just to collect make-believe characters, he's OK with that. Even if they purchase nothing.

"It doesn't bother me," he says. "Not at all, actually. At least that person came into our place and saw what we have. And maybe one day that person will be a paying customer."

The GPS-based Pokémon Go game, an augmented reality game where users travel to different locations to collect fictional Pokémon creatures, was introduced July 6 and became an immediate hit with both longtime and new fans

of the Japanese media franchise. Bouargoub didn't want to be left out of the craze. His Chop steakhouse became a Pokéstop, a hub for Pokémon players. He commissioned a brightly colored Pokémon mural. And both Chop and its sister barbecue concept Porkchop offer discounts to players as they reach milestones within the game. For instance, after reaching Level 15, players can buy a beer at Chop for only a dollar. At Level 25, they receive half off their bill.

Pokémon Go was widely heralded as an unparalleled success: In mid-July, information technology firm SimilarWeb reported that the game surpassed Twitter in daily active users, eclipsed Facebook in engagement, and was far more popular than Netflix. The game also became an instant hit among restaurants and retailers, who capitalized on the hype by purchasing in-game sponsorships, which offer a rare opportunity to drive traffic to specific locations during specific time periods.

Bouargoub says purchasing sponsorship through the app has proved beneficial. While some people come in just to collect characters, some have come back to buy a beer or a meal, independent of their interest in the game. "It's not like it's cheap, but it is worth it," Bouargoub says. "The buzz is worth it. The marketing behind it is worth it. It's a great invention of a game. And hopefully we are using it correctly. For us as a business, it is definitely worth it."

Chop's owner says he will keep an eye out for future cultural phenomena like Pokémon Go that offer a business opportunity. For his brand, such playful promotions fit in well—the purposefully casual Chop isn't exactly your suit-and-tie kind of steakhouse. "We are the Everyman steakhouse," Bouargoub says. "You don't have to be dressed up to come in. So for us it makes sense. It makes the place cool."

Gamify the Promotion

Pokémon Go's success has undoubtedly highlighted the unique draw of gaming, but it's also shown that retailers and restaurants can convert consumers' engage-

ment with games into engagement with their brands—whether it's with custom games created in-house or games out in the world that allow businesses to play a role.

John Findlay, founder and program designer at digital game builder Launchfire, says gamified promotions allow restaurants to build deeper engagement than an LTO or loyalty program can.

"Loyalty members really appreciate adding a little fun," he says. "I think the difference is that typical loyalty programs reward people for purchases only. But what we're seeing with gamified programs is we can reward customers for other things important to the brand."

Launchfire's custom games (usually built on websites, not apps) allow restaurants to push customers to sign up for email blasts or complete surveys, cultivating deeper relationships than they might through just a loyalty reward. Some games resemble McDonald's iconic Monopoly promotion, which allows customers to collect more game pieces with each additional visit.

One Launchfire game built for California Pizza Kitchen saw restaurants handing out game cards in the store. Customers weren't allowed to open the cards in store. If theirs wasn't a winning card, they were promoted to a special game online for another chance at a prize. If they did win, they would have to return to the restaurant to redeem their prize.

Regardless of how they're designed, Findlay says, games serve a different role than a traditional ad campaign. "I think people are motivated by the ability to play and the ability to win, and secondarily, by the brand. If I ran a commercial on TV and said turn to channel 57 to see an ad about my new menu item, how many people are going to turn the channel?" Findlay says. "If I said tune to channel 57 to play a game and you could win a free meal, you're going to get a much bigger yield. To create that

emotional experience with customers, it needs to be interactive."

Fair Play

That interactive experience also allows restaurants to capture rich data on their customers, explains Shyam Rao, CEO and founder of Punchh, which builds branded mobile apps for restaurants. Through a mixture of surveys, games, and loyalty programs, Punchh-built apps empower restaurateurs to better market to specific customers.

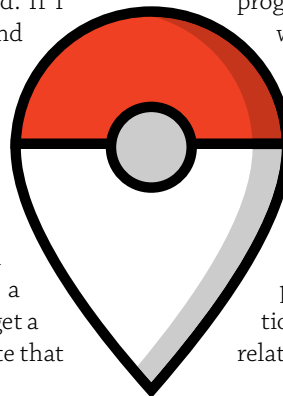
"Really, the holy grail is about understanding what your ideal customer looks like: their profile information, when they come in, what they buy, how much they spend, who they are," he says. "If I were a vegetarian or gluten-free, then you shouldn't be marketing the Meat Lovers pizza to me. There's only so many emails or push notifications after which I'll ignore it."

Still, games may not be a good fit for all full-service brands. While Punchh builds apps and games for restaurants from the quick-service realm to fine dining, Rao says games may not be right for everyone. The key is ensuring engagement efforts tie into the overall brand identity.

"There are many ways to engage guests," Rao says. "When appropriately used, any sort of mechanism can be powerful. But you don't want just a car with no engine in it. You need to have the intelligence platform running in the background."

If done correctly, Rao says, engagement efforts will foster the same feelings that customers have toward a familiar mom and pop store. That's a deeper relationship than an earn-and-burn loyalty program can foster. "That's what

we're trying to enable: that one-to-one connection. You're engaging your guest through all these connections," Rao says. "I don't think it's as transactional. It's not to use the machine to get things out of these people. It's to build that relationship. And if you build that relationship, you will get more."



Bringing Home the Gold

During the 2016 Summer Olympics, the 24-unit Hickory Tavern launched its first-ever Tavernlympics, a limited-time promotion built around the summer games. The promotion was based on a punchcard system: Diners who visited a Hickory Tavern five times during the 17-day Olympics and spent at least \$5 each visit received a \$20 gift certificate.

“I think it made a lot of sense for us,” says CMO Thom Perez. “Sports are in our DNA. Our guests like competition. They like a little friendly smack talk now and then.”

The summer Games presented a unique opportunity to drive sports-based traffic outside of traditional marquee sporting seasons like March Madness or Monday Night Football. Perez says game-based promotions are not a major component of Hickory Tavern’s marketing strategy, but the Tavernlympics did give the brand a unique draw compared to other sports bars: It gave diners a good excuse to cheer on Team USA at a Hickory Tavern—and, while the restaurants have some ultra loyal customers, Perez says he wouldn’t expect many to visit five times within 17 days outside this promotion. At the conclusion of the summer Games, Perez reports the company did experience increased traffic during the Olympics, particularly on weekdays, and by mid-August they were already seeing gift card redemptions.

“Anybody could turn on a TV and show the Olympics. I could do that at my house,” he says. “We try and think about things, about what’s really going to enhance the viewing experience for the guest. What’s going to make it more interesting, more dynamic?”

Whether centered on the Olympics or cultural trends like Pokémon Go, game-based promotions often require a rapid response from restaurants looking to get in on the action, says Dan Bejmuk, co-founder and CEO of digital agency Dreambox Creations. That means those brands that found a way to incorporate Pokémon Go into their marketing strategies should remain on watch for the next

cultural obsession.

“We find that the most successful restaurants on digital—whether it’s something incorporating Pokémon Go or incorporating a response to a celebrity that may Tweet the brand—the brands that are the most successful are the ones that are able to nimbly adapt to what has been presented to them,” Bejmuk says. “It’s one of the reasons our agency now supports the restaurants on social media sites seven days a week, so that we can very quickly and creatively react.”

He sees plenty of opportunity with trending games like Pokémon Go. In that app, it’s relatively cheap to buy a lure, which, as the name suggests, lures coveted characters to a certain location. “You can put a lure right out there and see guest traffic increase over the time you’re running the lure,” he says. “During the time when the lure is active, restaurant staff can engage with gamers to further introduce the restaurant brand, whether it’s through samples or introducing verbally the brand that is right next door.”

He says restaurateurs should consider whether gamified promotions make sense for their individual brands, as games should be a natural extension of a brand’s story. Dreambox built an online game for Bubba Gump Shrimp Co., the whimsical chain built around the iconic 1994 movie, “Forrest Gump.” Bejmuk says that game works well for the brand because the trivia questions are based on the movie’s story line. That’s probably something a diner would find nowhere else.

“I think if it’s presented in a way that is really resonating with the pillars of an individual restaurant concept, I think it’s something that can work well for a brand,” he says. “But we have this tendency in the restaurant space—especially as it relates to tying into POS or loyalty programs—there are some key brands that will rebrand the same products over and over again. And I think that’s risky for a brand.”

Daniel Black, CEO and founder of marketing technology company GlassMedia, says the rise of mobile platforms

like Pokémon Go speaks to the power of location-based promotions. “A new emerging trend is that brands are targeting people who are already at the business,” Black says. “They can throw you an offer or ping you when you’re 10 feet from the front door.” He suggests brands should experiment with trends like Pokémon Go, which require far less investment than custom-built apps or mobile sites.

“That’s why platforms like Pokémon Go, Google, and Facebook are already popular,” he says. “The audience is already there, and the cost to get involved is not too high.”

Executives at Buffalo Wings & Rings used similar logic in creating the brand’s fall fantasy football promotion.

The 70-unit chain had previously created a Pick’em promotion, challenging diners to predict winners of weekly NFL matchups. But customers weren’t nearly as engaged with the restaurants’ Pick’em contests as they were with their own fantasy football leagues, says marketing director Diane Matheson.

“We did try to do something ourselves,” Matheson says, “but at the end of our day, are we game development experts? That’s just not our forte. Our forte is great environment, great experience, great food. There’s no sense in us trying to reinvent fantasy football, but we can help enhance the experience.”

Instead of creating another in-house game, Buffalo Wings & Rings decided to jump on the fantasy football bandwagon. A preseason fantasy football kit offered free restaurant space for fantasy league drafts, free Wi-Fi, draft sheets, VIP coupons, and an in-house draft board. Plus, each league’s winner will receive a \$25 gift card at the end of the season.

The kit even includes “punishment cards” for league members who break league rules—by selecting a kicker in the first round, for instance. One such punishment required rule breakers to eat one of the brand’s atomic wings. “We’re trying to bring a little bit of fun to the actual draft party,” she says. “And we’re giving them all the things they need to execute a successful draft in the restaurant.” ■

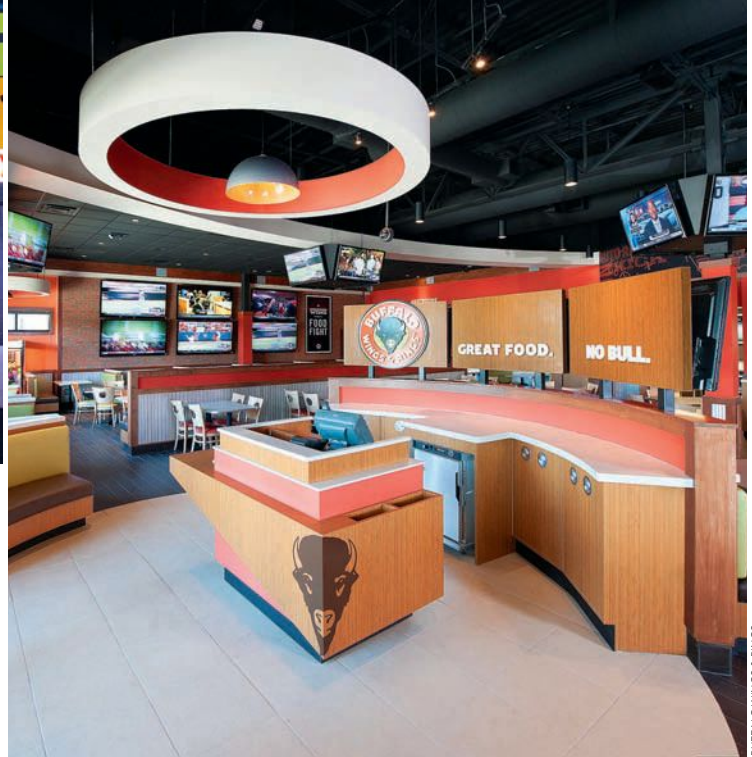
CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT



CHOP CHICAGO

ABOVE: THE POKÉMON GO GAME WAS A NATURAL FIT AT THE INTENTIONALLY CASUAL CHOP STEAKHOUSE IN CHICAGO.

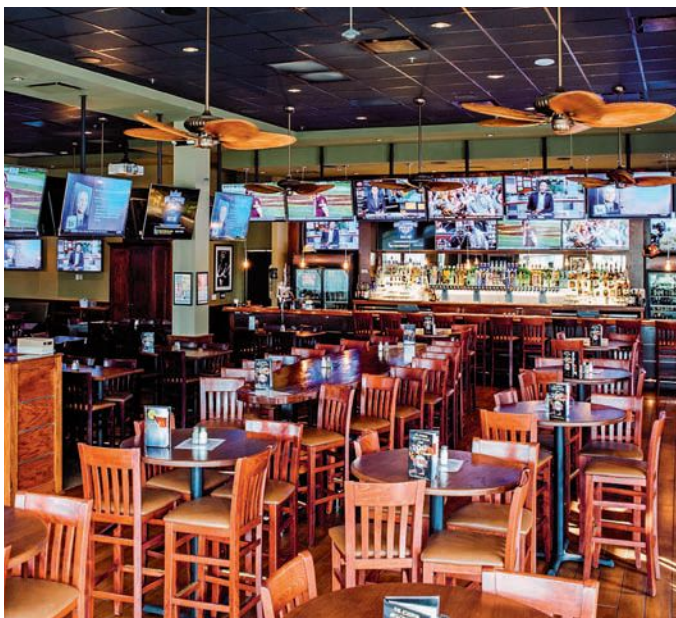
RIGHT: RATHER THAN CREATING ITS OWN GAME, BUFFALO WINGS & RINGS CHOSE TO LEVERAGE THE WILDLY POPULAR FANTASY FOOTBALL PHENOMENON, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO OFFER GUESTS FREE SPACE FOR FANTASY LEAGUE DRAFTS AND A HOST OF PERKS FOR THE SEASON.



BUFFALO WINGS & RINGS

“While some people come in just to collect characters, some individuals have come back to buy a beer or a meal, independent of their interest in the game.”

Jovanis Bouargoub, Chop Chicago



HICKORY TAVERN



HICKORY TAVERN

DURING THE 2016 SUMMER OLYMPICS, THE 24-UNIT HICKORY TAVERN LAUNCHED TAVERNLYMPICS TO ENCOURAGE REPEAT VISITS.



SIGNATURE BEVERAGES

Increasingly, restaurant operators want to offer guests signature coffee options that will reflect and reinforce the dining experience and individual brand.



From exclusive blends to elevated service, restaurants are transitioning coffee from a commodity beverage to a craft sensation.

AS A COFFEE AFICIONADA, Kelly Fields—executive pastry chef and partner at the year-old Willa Jean in New Orleans, a restaurant also operated by celebrity chef John Besh—knew regular drip coffee just wouldn't do. "I am a little bit of a coffee snob," she says. "I wanted what I thought was the best coffee experience we could offer in New Orleans."

Looking beyond brewing methods and the beans, Willa Jean sought out a roaster to create a custom blend exclusive to the restaurant. The restaurant found a match in Chicago-based Intelligentsia Coffee, which—in addition to wholesaling coffee—operates cafés in Chicago, the Los Angeles area, and New York City. "Our values as a restaurant group align perfectly with Intelligentsia," says Fields, "as far as sustainability and the desire to treat the farmers they work with in a fair way." She also points to the roaster's reliance upon issuing seasonal coffee—in other words, only when the beans are at their peak—which means, she explains, "You get all the nuances of the flavor and the personality of the coffee."

THINKSTOCK

SIGNATURE BEVERAGES



ZINGERMANS

ZINGERMAN'S COFFEE COMPANY HAS OFFERED CUSTOM-BLENDED COFFEES FOR 13 YEARS, AND BASES ITS BLENDS ON THE PROFILE A CHEF IS HOPING TO CREATE.



THINKSTOCK

A SIGNATURE COFFEE CAN MODERNIZE A MENU, AND EVEN IF A RESTAURANT DOESN'T HAVE A CUSTOM BLEND, AN ELEVATED COFFEE SELECTION ENHANCES THE EXPERIENCE.

After trying “a bunch of blends” prepared by Intelligentsia, Fields says the winning Willa Jean Blend—brewed as pour-over and drip—“is chocolatey and fruity.”

While offering customers an exclusive coffee to drink alongside entrées and other menu fare is trending, there is one eatery that has long been considered a pioneer in this type of partnership. Twenty years ago, Nora Pouillon—chef-owner of Restaurant Nora in Washington, D.C., open since 1979—sought out a coffee roaster to further drive home the point of her farm-to-table concept. At a food show, she met a Massachusetts coffee roaster—Jim Cannell, founder of Jim’s Organic Coffee—who buys coffee beans from small producers in Central America. “We are (also) into supporting small farms—chicken farmers, dairy farmers, and beef farmers, for example,” Chef Pouillon says.

In 1999, when Nora’s became certified-organic (and was the first American restaurant to do so), Jim’s Organic Coffee followed suit, so the two businesses could continue working together. After many trial tastings, in which the coffee roaster shipped small samples (plus a grinder, to ensure maximum freshness) to Restaurant Nora, “We chose one,” says Pouillon, “it’s called Nora’s Blend. It’s a very mellow, very neutral coffee you can drink without any milk.” This was important to her because, in keeping with the restaurant’s commitment to using all-natural ingredients, cream is not provided with coffee service—just whole milk, raw sugar, and stevia are offered as more natural options. And while initially the restaurant ground its beans on site, Jim’s Organic Coffee now does the grinding for them.

Just like Restaurant Nora and Willa Jean, Happy Cooking Hospitality—a group of five restaurants in New York City’s West Village that includes Perla (Italian) and Fedora (a supper club)—sought out a roaster that aligned with its mission. For the proprietary blend served in its restaurants, it was important that the beans be roasted to order, purchased as directly from farmers as possible, and 100 percent organic—



STEPHEN YOUNG/S&P

IN MOST INSTANCES, RESTAURANTS HAVE THE SAME EXPECTATIONS FOR SOURCING SIGNATURE COFFEE BLENDS THAT THEY HAVE FOR SOURCING GOURMET FOODS AND INGREDIENTS: COFFEE BEANS SHOULD BE ROASTED TO ORDER, THE COFFEE SHOULD BE PURCHASED DIRECTLY FROM FARMERS WHENEVER POSSIBLE, AND THE COFFEE SHOULD BE 100 PERCENT ORGANIC.

adhering to the same philosophy used for sourcing food served at its eateries.

Although Stumptown Roasters might be clear across the country in Portland, Oregon, it had recently grown its presence in New York City with a café inside the Ace Hotel and a stand-alone café in Greenwich Village and, more importantly, it ticked off all the boxes on Happy Cooking Hospitality's wish list. In 2014, a match was born, and the result

is the Happy Cooking blend, merging South American and East African beans. In addition to touting the coffee on its dessert menu and the coffee section of its breakfast menu, the restaurant group also sells 12-ounce bags of the Stumptown Happy Cooking Drip.

Grind On

Developing a signature coffee can also be a way to modernize a restaurant. Michael

Johnson's grandparents began operating Pheasant Restaurant & Lounge in Brookings, South Dakota, during the 1960s. The restaurant, however, has been open since 1949 and is an institution among locals. Now, Johnson is at the helm. Six years ago, after sipping amazing coffee with his breakfast at a restaurant in Sioux Falls, he was intrigued, wanting to bring that same level of coffee to his family's eatery.

SIGNATURE BEVERAGES

He turned to Cherrybean Coffee Company, a small-batch roaster in South Dakota run by Shawn and Jennifer McCormick, a married couple who are the third owners. Shawn is a full-time farmer in addition to helping with the coffee business, which they purchased this year.

"I sought them out to see if they'd be interested in doing an exclusive blend for our restaurant," Johnson says. After some trials—using organic and Fair Trade beans per Cherrybean Coffee Company's commitment to supporting coffee farmers with a fair wage—the two businesses homed in on a match.

"We were looking for something very special. We have roots as an old-school South Dakota café. We have a lot of Scandinavians in the community, and it's common to sit around and drink coffee all day," Johnson says. Equally important was a coffee that would drink well with breakfast, lunch, dinner, and dessert—not just breakfast. He adds that the "robust, medium roast of three (bean) varieties" has been a hit with customers who like to brew coffee at home, too.

It's that interest in elevating awareness around coffee that led Zingerman's—a collection of boutique food and beverage artisans in Ann Arbor, Michigan—to start working with restaurant clients on developing a signature coffee blend. After all, since its founding as a deli in 1982 by Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw, Zingerman's had built a reputation as being the go-to guys for everything from loaves of bread and bagels to cheese spreads and gelato, just a few of the wholesale products offered to restaurants and cafés. The company even wholesales chocolate products, such as its Zzang! chocolate bars, sold at Murray's Cheese Shop in New York City's West Village.

"We have always felt that [signature coffees] are something that our partners want," says Steve Mangigian, a managing partner with Zingerman's Coffee Company, and thus the custom-blended coffees have been offered since the wholesale coffee company was founded 13 years ago.

To nail a coffee blend, the exclusive product is "based on the profile that the chef is trying to create," Mangigian explains. He'll often talk to the chef extensively about the culinary mission, asking, "What is it you're trying to create? Is it experiential or related to flavor?" He starts with a roster of coffee beans stemming from different coffee-producing regions, and percentages are assigned to each. "We'll just tweak it until we get to a place where we're happy and they're happy," he says.

Restaurateurs will often travel to the cupping lab in Ann Arbor, for a more in-depth experience, but Zingerman's can also mail samples. But a face-to-face visit is preferred: "I really like it to be an involved process," Mangigian says.

He recognizes that coffee is only one of several dozen ingredients that a restaurant is sourcing, and to find the best quality takes time. This is one reason restaurants should work with a coffee roaster, because the roaster has already done the research. It is especially challenging when coffee is not grown commercially in the United States, making a visit to a producer—as one might for cattle, dairy, or wine—a challenge. "If we can be a conduit between what a restaurant wants and what's going on with producers, then we have done our job," Mangigian notes.

Coffee is now an elevated experience at cafés across the U.S., with customers being asked not only what coffee they'd like to drink—Ethiopian Yirgacheffe or Mexican Chiapas, for example—but also through what method of brewing they prefer—French press, drip, or pour-over. And with the higher-end experience, the cost for a cup of coffee has risen as well, in some cases to nearly \$5.

Restaurants may be taking longer to catch up with the posh-java trend, but it's only a matter of time. "Overall, restaurants treat coffee like it's a food-cost item. It's something they have to offer. I've always struggled with the paradigm that a fine-dining restaurant tops a meal off with a terrible cup of coffee," Mangigian says.

He's pleased to see an evolution

among restaurateurs where coffee is now as important as any other menu category, from appetizers to desserts. In fact, he feels it's the fourth wave of coffee, following what industry experts dubbed "the third wave," a movement to produce higher-quality coffee than ever before. "This is driving and pushing restaurants to look at their coffee programs and re-evaluate," Mangigian says.

The value of signature brews and elevated coffee service continues to gain traction. S&D Coffee & Tea, which has been roasting coffee since 1927, has always had an eye on what diners want to sip in a restaurant setting—which can be vastly different than a cup of morning coffee to-go from a café. Developing a dark-roast coffee blend called Dark Sky Café Blend, S&D pulled in beans from Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, and Honduras, pairing with Indonesian coffee to extract a mouthfeel that's both acidic and rich. And the company has worked with restaurant clients to develop exclusive blends as well, like the blend developed for a multi-unit operator who then began serving it at all of the brand's 55 restaurant locations. But the partnership didn't stop there. After the chef started to rub steaks with Hawaiian Kona coffee, a new coffee-food pairing was born.

Beyond developing an exclusive blend, restaurants also ought to rely upon alternate brew methods, to drive home the point that this is a place to enjoy gourmet-level coffee. To that end, Seattle's Canlis, a fine-dining restaurant, brews coffee for customers in Chemex, a glass beaker that is used with the pour-over method. It's worth noting that this restaurant was also a pioneer in developing an exclusive coffee blend: Up until 2010 Canlis worked with Starbucks on its Casi Cielo blend, weaving together two Guatemalan coffee farms. Similarly, Duo Restaurants, with locations in Denver, Colorado, and Brattleboro, Vermont, opts for French press coffee service during brunch.

"That's on the very early cusp," says Mangigian, about the alternate brewing methods, "but it's the next big thing." ■

The Coffee Conundrum

How operators can use technology to help improve consistency.

ONCE ESPRESSO-BASED BEVERAGES WERE A SPECIALTY, but as espresso, cappuccinos, and lattes have grown in popularity, so, too, have consumer expectations.

Datassential reports that 51 percent of people who drink coffee weekly cite convenience as a top motivator in coffee purchases, and 70 percent say that a disappointing coffee experience negatively impacted their attitudes or behaviors toward the offending restaurant. This means there is simply no room for error when it comes to coffee; however new technology can help operators with this problem.

FSR spoke with Martin Lines, vice president of category marketing for Nestlé Professional Beverages North America, about how technology is helping operators ensure consistency and quality across their businesses without sacrificing convenience.



MARTIN LINES OF NESTLÉ PROFESSIONAL BEVERAGES EXPLAINS HOW TECHNOLOGY KEEPS COFFEE CONSISTENT ACROSS A CHAIN.

What are the challenges facing operators with specialty coffees? Anyone can make one good espresso, but doing a good espresso 20 times in a row simply and quickly is often the challenge. I think what operators should be looking for is the right balance based on what they want to offer their consumers.

You have different needs at different ends of the scale. High-end coffee shops are very focused on consistency, so automating those is not really the issue. People are going into those stores, and they don't mind waiting two to three minutes for their espresso, cappuccino, or latte because they know it takes time to do it on a hand-prep basis. It's part of the experience.

On the other extreme, there are restaurant operators that want to enter this growth market but don't have staff with the right skill-set, so for them it's about simplicity and repeatability. This is where technology can help.

How can operators find that balance for a good coffee experience?

If you have a good experience that is consistently the same, and you're happy with it, you'll continue to go back.

There are many new high-end coffee systems, which use telemetry—the ability to remotely access equipment to ensure an experience that is consistent.

Say I'm running 20 restaurants, I can sit at my computer and

remotely look at all my stores and see who is performing well, who is selling a lot, or whose sales are declining, as well other vital information. I can change the machine settings for promotions and see warnings when a store is about to run out of coffee. If the machine needs repairing, I can see that one of the components is not working properly or is about to break down, and I can fix it before it becomes a big problem.

One of our coffee systems has a small LCD screen with training videos, so if new staff comes on board, you don't have to spend hours training them. They can be in front of the machine and run a small, step-by-step video to see how the machine works and how to respond to service issues, and all of this is making sure drinks are consistent.

What does this technology mean for operators? Telemetry enables customers to leverage the power of these new systems. It allows the operator to manage the complexity of coffee across a chain more simply. He doesn't need to be everywhere. With a couple of computer keystrokes he can make the setting so that every machine makes the same coffee the same way every time. ❖

MARTIN LINES was born in Manchester, England, and is currently vice president of category marketing for Nestlé Professional Beverages North America, based in Tampa Florida. He graduated in French & Business and has lived and worked in UK, France, and Switzerland. Having spent over 30 years in a variety of national and international sales and marketing roles in small and large organizations, he is currently responsible for the beverage marketing for Nestlé's Out of Home portfolio across North America.

Wise Up

When opening a second restaurant leads to ruin for a young operator, he rebounds with a chain of successes. **By Jen Karetnick**

A million-dollar mistake with a happy new beginning, that's the story Scott Wise, president and CEO of Pots & Pans Production, which owns four restaurant concepts including Scotty's Brewhouse, has to share. But his knowledge of the industry has not come easy. Wise is quite candid about just how difficult and expensive his own young learning experience proved to be, and how—just as he was in the midst of a rosy comeback—an almost fatal illness changed his entire philosophy.

Wise started out as that proverbial overnight success: At the age of 22, he opened his first restaurant, Scotty's Brewhouse, in his hometown of Muncie, Indiana. The year was 1996 and the reception was ideal as eager customers, acclaim, and ready cash poured in. Now, celebrating two decades in the business and about to sign a lucrative private equity deal that will add 180 new Scotty's locations (with draft beers, a full bar, and a "from scratch" menu) in places as far away as Japan, he's the first to admit that he achieved success far too effortlessly, and that it made him cocky. "I thought, this is easy," he reflects. "Why does everyone think it's so hard? So, we opened a second restaurant."

Rather than repeat the formula of his first restaurant, however, he decided to do something completely different: what he calls a "very nouveau" fine-dining restaurant. His lack of training, along with his youth, showed, and the restaurant led to his ruin. He ticks off his mistakes like a shopping list he's determined to fill: "We had two-hour ticket times. There were failures on how the line was set up. I didn't know how to deal with a chef who was going to the market with my checkbook and who didn't want to talk to guests. The payroll was too high. And I was working with my wife, who is the boss of me everywhere, especially at home. But in the restaurant, she would snap at me when I was just trying to manage the place."

It took three years for Wise to give up on this particular dream, and it cost him \$1 million.

Not only did Wise go into serious debt after the closure



AT 22, SCOTT WISE, NOW PRESIDENT AND CEO OF POTS & PANS PRODUCTION, OPENED HIS FIRST SCOTTY'S BREWHOUSE.

COURTESY OF POTS & PANS PRODUCTION

of the fine-dining establishment, his relationship with his wife, who is now a hairstylist, became strained. So did the one with his mother-in-law, whose recipes for the cakes and pies at Scotty's were the backbone of the pastry department. She wouldn't disclose the recipes to him, holding them over his head. "She would make them all at her house, then I would have to pick them up and drive them around to the various Scotty's restaurants."

But thanks to the teachings of his father, who told him that *can't* is a curse word, and his self-described "type A, OCD, first child, entrepreneurial" personality, Wise never gave up. Over the next eight years, he paid back every penny he owed, all the while continuing to build up Pots & Pans Production, the management company for Scotty's Brewhouse, which has locations in Indiana, Florida, Illinois, and Ohio. The company also owns Scotty's Brew Club, Scotty's Dawghouse, and the Thr3e Wise Men Brewing Company, a family-friendly brewery-eatery.

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Wise waxes philosophical about his journey: “The only thing that holds you back is yourself. Everybody has mistakes and failures. Name any CEO who hasn’t. ... I was never a guy who was going to quit,” he says. “I look at the mistakes I made in those three years and I know I learned more than I did in the last 17. All those experiences I cherish, even though I wouldn’t want to go through them again or wish them on my worst enemy—but when your back’s up against the wall, that’s a test of your true character. And I know I’ll make more mistakes.”

When the recession hit in 2008, he had been leaning too much on credit and buying superfluously. As a result, when cash flow got tight, he couldn’t borrow and didn’t have money to grow. Instead, he found his way out of the hole by creating “management contracts” for Scotty’s Brewhouse, enabling others to put up the money and reap profits, while Wise retained the licensing of the name and recipes—including his mother-in-law’s cakes and pies, which are now made by a local bakery under a nondisclosure agreement.

But he also made plenty of pay-dirt moves, including

debuting on beer-friendly college campuses and locating a Thr3e Wise Men Brewing Company site in his Muncie hometown, where he’s beloved.

Unfortunately, another test of his character was soon to follow: He came down with viral encephalitis, a brain infection that almost killed him. His recovery included months of seizures that precluded him from driving. “It was like I was 15 again,” he says. But in addition to feeling helpless, Wise also found a new sense of purpose.

He realized his workaholic tendencies made him neglect his family. “Now it’s family first, work second,” he insists. And he relishes the experiences he’s collected along the way, such as the Super Bowls he’s been able to attend and that time he threw the first pitch at a Cubs’ game. “You can be a glutton for punishment as long as you have passion,” he says. “But you also have to enjoy the journey.”

Most of all, he thinks God gave him another chance for a reason. Wise changed both “the scope of how I run the restaurants and the culture of the restaurants” by emphasizing a vision statement that combines philanthropy with pride in one’s actions. Every 90 days, he and his employees volunteer to “do good and donate mind, body, and soul” by working with soup kitchens and shelters, or building houses with organizations like Habitat for Humanity.

Around this time, Wise became involved with The Arc of Indiana, a trust that serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc approached him to install an anchor restaurant for a local Marriott and operate it as a training center, employing 25 percent of staff that is physically or mentally challenged. Wise found great purpose by doing so. “You know, not

every [employee] has the heart that they should. Then you see these kids, who are so awesome. While other kids are complaining about tucking in their shirts, they’re skipping through the dining room because they’re so excited to wear a uniform. They cry when get their first paychecks.”

Wise noticed this particular restaurant had very little attrition compared to his others, and he says, “There’s a big brother/big sister effect. The bond in restaurant employees is already tight. Here it becomes even tighter.”

In fact, the program has been so successful that he instituted a new policy early this year: Company-wide, he aims to hire physically- or mentally-challenged personnel for 10 percent of his staff. After reaching out to groups like the vision- and hearing-impaired, he’s already up to 8 percent.

Although it wasn’t his intention, Wise’s insistence on “doing good in the world” has created a loyalty among his 1,400 employees that’s hard to match. But it’s also the little touches that keep his workers close to him. “I try to reach out to every new employee personally, at least by email,” he says. “If someone gets a compliment, I send it to them.” ■

FSR
NOVEMBER 2016

Restaurant

SMARTS

Taking on Trends

The top industry trends finding their way to the plate. **BY PEGGY CAROTHERS**

IDAHO POTATO COMMISSION

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Full of Flavor

Bolder bites add excitement to menus and delight consumers.

This year, consumers are after new flavors and dishes previously unseen or underused in American cuisine. This is leading to a surge in global and ethnic flavors in American restaurants.

“The bold flavor trend is nothing new, but it continues to evolve,” says Judson McLester, executive chef and ingredient sales manager for **Tabasco**. “Chefs are showcasing innovative flavor combinations and using global-inspired ingredients in nontraditional ways.”

McLester attributes the changing

trends to the Millennial population.

“Millennials drive nonconformist, original, and experimental products,” he says. “This will have the food industry continuing down the path of formulating via worldly cuisine experiences and their unique flavor combinations, ingredients, and spices.”

Global Cuisine

Though global foods as a whole are trending, some ethnic cuisines are seeing particular growth, such as Japanese,

Korean, and Middle Eastern foods.

“You’re seeing the influence of folks having a much more adventurous spirit,” says Bryon Coleman, vice president of food service and international for **Jones Dairy Farm**. “They are looking for bold flavors like harissa. You see more traditional bold flavors, like chipotle or chorizo, and you’re looking at Korean barbecue or Asian spice blends and flavors that are really influencing what’s being put on the menu to be exciting, bold, and different.”

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RESTAURANT SMARTS TRENDS ON THE PLATE

Although many consumers want to try these flavors, finding and using the ingredients at home can be a challenge, so restaurants are the ideal place for consumers to try them.

“People want to experience those ethnic cuisines and global foods,” says Bill Bennett, executive chef at Corral de Tierra Country Club on the Monterey Peninsula in California and consulting chef for **Boggiatto Produce**, “and they might not necessarily want to make those at home and chase down ingredients they’ve never heard of and find markets on the far ends of town. They want to go out ... and find a restaurant near them that has something on their menu to offer them to satisfy that need to try a new ingredient.”

New flavors and offerings can be a risk to both operators and consumers, both of whom may not want to invest money in a new product that is unknown.

Bennett, who has been experimenting with *gochujang*, a Korean chili paste, finds that appetizers and small plates can be a good place to start.

But for a relatively unknown ingredient, consumers may not want to risk paying for a meal that they might not

like. For that reason, Bennett has experimented with offering the gochujang with something familiar—lettuce. By offering a familiar tie-in, he finds that consumers are more likely to take a risk.

“A lot of people have never had gochujang and may not want a \$20 entrée, but in a \$6 appetizer, you may try and like it,” Bennett says.

He has been serving gochujang with Iceberg Babies lettuce in a wrap of curry and beef. He foresees the gochujang growing in popularity in the next year.

“Gochujang is one of those ‘it’ ingredients,” Bennett says, “and, especially in the coming year, will be as ubiquitous as miso.”

“People want to eat those and experience those flavors, but they enjoy it on a familiar platform like the iceberg lettuce or romaine lettuce,” he says, “so this is a vehicle to get involved with those trendy foods, but not stepping out of your box too far.”

Another way operators can menu adventurous new items for consumers is by offering them in appetizer portions. These can serve as both an entry point for customers and make for great limited-time offers for operators looking for

low-risk ways to inject variety into offerings, especially as restaurants look at new ways to serve seafood or new varieties.

“We have seen an increase in appetizers as trials,” says Jessica Henry, director of marketing for **Clear Springs Foods**. “Limited-time appetizer menu items are a great way to introduce your customer to a new ingredient or species of seafood.”

Fusions

For some restaurants, the surge in ethnic cuisines is giving operators greater latitude and allowing them to blur the lines between what might have been strict concepts in the past.

“For so many years where there was Italian or Chinese, you almost had to be an Italian restaurant to have something on the menu that reflected the heritage of your parents your grandparents and where you were from,” says Don Odiorne, vice president of foodservice at the **Idaho Potato Commission**.

“The fusion that’s happening now seems like it’s understood by the customer base to say they don’t necessarily go to a place for a particular style of food,” he says. “Consumers also like to



BOLD FLAVORS ARE SEEN THROUGH A VARIETY OF CONCEPTS.



CAMPBELL'S

CHEFS HAVE BEGUN EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW COMBINATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF ETHNIC CUISINES.

go to some place that is more adventurous and allows them to experience what may be comfort food, whether it be sushi or all kinds of things.”

But just because a restaurant can offer fusions does not necessarily mean it should, Bennett says. He notes that while menuing trendy ethnic foods can be a benefit to a restaurant, operators have to stay true to their concepts.

“As a chef, you are true to the type of food that you’re doing,” he says. “If you’re a Mediterranean restaurant, you’re not going to make pho and put it on your menu. But you have to find trends and capitalize on your operation and not play into them for the sake of getting into the game.”

Authenticity

Just as important as being authentic to a concept is being authentic to the cuisines on the menu. Foods and flavors that have cross-cultural appeal are especially growing in popularity, such as curries.

“From Persia all the way through India and Thailand, curries are used in a lot of different dishes,” says Richard Calladonato, executive chef at **Campbell’s**. “People today will look and think ‘this is an authentic curry,’ and I think people want to understand that authenticity.”

This move toward authenticity has been aided by the Internet, Calladonato says, who notes that more traditional

global dishes are finding their way onto menus and plates in American restaurants, as well as going by their traditional names.

“Ten to 15 years ago I went to a restaurant and they served *coq au vin* on the menu,” Calladonato says. “They would never call it *coq au vin* because people didn’t know what that was. Now restaurants will call it that, give it a beautiful description, and we can research

what is authentic and understand it.”

This ability to research food is giving chefs far more latitude in the types of items they put on their menus and allowing them to find authentic, creative usages of items.

Calladonato has been experimenting with this freedom in his own concoctions, like Middle Eastern breakfast dishes featuring rich tomato and curry-based sauces and farm fresh eggs.

He’s also playing with using Japanese miso in desserts. “I’m really loving using miso in a dessert,” he says. “It creates a really unique flavor, and that’s the thing I’m playing with the most right now.”

Guilt-Free Grilling

Another large flavor trend taking off is the use of flavorful cooking methods, rather than using ingredients that add calories and chemicals to a dish. As a result, roasted, grilled, and burnt, are all flavor profiles that are seeing growth.

“[We’re seeing] the resurgence of the term ‘grill’ and the use of smoke in various foods, along with clean labeled flavors that elevate savory and create more craveability,” says Jodi Schwalbe, marketing manager for **Red Arrow Products**.

She notes that chefs are drawing out sweet, nutty notes by caramelizing onions, evolving flavor from the drippings when meat has been in direct contact with roasting pans, or searing and

charring meats over wood and charcoal.

“We’re actually seeing a nice uptick in those roasted products,” says Michelle Myers, senior commercial marketing manager for the **J.R. Simplot Company**. “One of the biggest trends has been burnt and burned, and we’ve been seeing a rise in roasted over the last few years,” she says. “It’s nice to see that translating into sales as operators see this is a way to add flavor and add that back-of-the-house look without adding fats, oils, additional ingredients.”

Smoke is itself one category growing due to its abilities to enhance flavor and the appearance of meats, as well as the antioxidant properties that extend the life of flavors, Schwalbe says.

“Smoke has many natural preservative qualities and is well recognized for its antimicrobial functionality,” Schwalbe says. “Smokes originating from different wood species have unique flavor and aromatic qualities. This leads to development of certain foods that one may formulate to allow the smoke to enrich the flavor and not necessarily be the dominant driver.”

Sous vide, the French term for “under vacuum” is another popular method of cooking because it allows chefs to create tender, juicy dishes without the longer cooking times or the exposure to harmful pathogens and spoiling.

“*Sous vide* has been discussed for decades; however, in reality, very little traction has been made excepting in the last decade,” Schwalbe says. “Creating food items that are cooked to optimize juiciness and tenderness and do so in a manner that minimizes potential for spoilage and pathogenic bacteria is now gaining some traction,” she says.

As consumers become more adventurous in the styles and cuisines they are willing to eat, flavor has become the trend. This has given chefs freedom to play with a variety of ingredients, cooking techniques, and dish elements they were not able to use before.

As the popularity of these new items continues to grow, the next question is what chefs will think to introduce to American audiences next. ■

Diet Dichotomy

Health and indulgence compete for space on the plate.

This year, trends are more diverse than ever, especially as consumer demand has become somewhat contradictory.

“Consumers are very into health, but at the same time, they are into indulgence,” says Michelle Myers, senior commercial marketing manager for the **JR Simplot Company**.

This paradox can be seen across the industry, and it means chefs are working at two extremes.

Don Odiorne, vice president of the **Idaho Potato Commission**, likens this trend to a metaphorical barbell. “At one end you have health and wellness,” he says. “On the other, crazy ideas and indulgent foods.”

This means operators are following both healthy and not-so-healthy trends to keep up with demand.

Healthy and Happy

“The health and wellness industry is booming and influencing the way people think about food,” says Doug Wickman, vice president of marketing and business development at **Perdue**.

And many consumers are willing to pay more for meals with perceived health improvements, he says.

“Studies have shown that consumers are willing to pay more than 25 percent more for products that are antibiotic-free or organic,” Wickman says, citing a Datassential report.

Squeaky Clean

Clean labels, which reduce chemical additives and prioritize items with fewer harmful ingredients, such as sodium,



THOUGH AMERICAN CONSUMERS LOOK FOR HEALTHY FOODS, INDULGENT DISHES ARE ALSO POPULAR IN MANY RESTAURANTS.

are seeing particular growth.

“We see that options for enhancing flavor while reducing sodium will continue to trend,” says Jodi Schwalbe, marketing manager for **Red Arrow Products**.

The same goes for sugars, as many chefs are turning to alternative sweeteners. Still want to reduce chemical additives, chefs are incorporating natural sweeteners into dishes.

“We are seeing more uses of alternative sugars,” says Richard Calladonato, executive chef at **Campbell's**. “There is more use of fruit juices as sweeteners so that we can add a bit of sweetness to a recipe, but it’s taking [sugar] off the ingredient label.”

Functional Foods

But health-conscious eaters are not just eating foods that lack certain ingredients, they are also looking for functional foods which add positive supplements to their diets, such as omega-3 fatty acids, which have been linked to many health improvements.

Many consumers already know they can find omega-3s in fish, but seafood experts are finding ways to help consumers include more omega-3s into their diets, says Jessica Henry, director of marketing for **Clear Springs Foods**. She notes one dish leaves the skin on the fish to increase the positive benefits of the food.

Many happy returns.



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RESTAURANT SMARTS TRENDS ON THE PLATE

“The rainbow trout dish has a deliciously crispy, seasoned skin intended to be eaten,” she says. “We love this plate, and it’s a great way to get even more of the heart-healthy omega-3s found in Rainbow Trout.”

But fish are not the only source of omega-3 fatty acids. Walnuts are another excellent source and the only nuts with a significant amount of the nutrient, says Jennifer Olmstead, marketing director of domestic for the **California Walnut Board and Commission**.

Proteins are popular dietary additive consumers are trying to incorporate more of in their diets.

“Proteins are a popular functional food often found in meats,” says Bryon Coleman, vice president of food service

ticular growth as vegetables move toward the center of the plate.

“We’re seeing more plant-based burgers, and walnuts can be a great component of that,” Olmstead says. As a result, the CWBC is experimenting with plant-based dishes, such as walnut chorizo because consumers do not necessarily want to give up animal proteins, even if they are looking for more plant proteins, she says.

Indulgence

On the other end of Odiorne’s metaphorical barbell is indulgence. Despite health food trends, consumers still want food that is satisfying but don’t necessarily want to give up their diets. Chefs are now finding new ways to satisfy

As an example, she mentions the Chop House and Connors Steak & Seafood, both of Connor Concepts brands, are serving 4-ounce trout fillet portions on their lunch menus.

Even beyond the health perceptions around smaller portions, many consumers enjoy bite-sized appetizers where they can try many small items at once.

Bill Bennett, executive chef at Corral de Tierra Country Club and consulting chef for **Boggiatto Produce**, says consumers “yearn” for different flavors and textures in one meal, but they don’t want to go to different restaurants. Serving tapas and small plates allows them to try something new.

“[A small plate] satisfies people’s need to keep their palates energized, and when you get two or three bites of something and then two or three bites of something else with a completely different texture and flavor profile,” he says. “You’re not just eating a 14-ounce piece of meat and taking the same 30 bites.”

While small portions are on the rise, so are options that allow customers to share their meals with other guests at both in larger portions, as well as tapas-style, which also allows for easy sharing.

“We are seeing more restaurants adding tapas, smaller plates, and shareable items to their menus,” says Rocky Rockwell, corporate chef for **Alto-Shaam**. “As people are dining out, they are making it more of a community experience, so they are sharing bites of food and trying different food items. ... Eating together with friends and family in a community-style dining is a great way for them to do it.”

Schwalbe of Red Arrow is seeing the same trend toward small, shareable plates.

“It seems that we observe smaller portion tapas-style presentations more frequently where guests tend to be very inclined to share their meal openly,” she says.

Though consumers are more health-conscious than ever, chefs are helping consumers stay healthy and happy with indulgent dishes and healthier ingredients. ■



SMALL PLATES AND TAPAS ALLOW CONSUMERS TO EAT INDULGENT FOODS WITHOUT KILLING THEIR DIETS.

and international for **Jones Dairy Farm**. “You’re seeing the influence of paleo-type diet, so the trend might be protein with some other health benefits to it, for instance, lower in sodium.”

Walnuts are also a great source of protein, especially for consumers seeking plant-based proteins in their diets.

“Walnuts do offer four grams of protein per ounce,” Olmstead says. “They really help replace some of that animal-based protein by giving you that nice satiety.”

Plant-based proteins are seeing par-

indulgent cravings without overloading guests with unhealthy ingredients.

One way this goal is accomplished is through smaller portions that give consumers a taste of what they love without weighing them down with large portions, heavy sauces, cheeses, and more.

“For many years, a butterfly fillet was the preferred cut in many restaurants for classic dishes, such as Trout Almondine,” says Henry of Clear Springs. “The preference has shifted to a natural fillet that offers a smaller portion with great plate coverage and versatility.”



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To Every Beer There is a Season

Every year, as the number of pages in the calendar gets scarce and we move headlong into “’tis the season” territory, I get a little contemplative about the seasons—more specifically, about the limited-time brews that correspond with those seasons. And the upcoming winter/holiday seasonals are among the ones I anticipate most eagerly. What’s not to love about chewy, malty, baking-spicy brews whose big, bold mouthfeel almost makes consumers wonder why they’re not served with knives and forks?

Chefs and beverage directors have a blast tailoring menus to promote season-specific dishes—whether it’s the stews and roasts of colder months or the salads and grilled meats of hotter, sultrier days.

In centuries past, the fact that certain beers were available only during certain seasons was a matter of necessity. Ingredient availability, production, and storage were all at the mercy of temperature shifts.

But in this age of climate control, modern logistics, and refrigeration technology, consumers can enjoy any beer style they want at any point in the year they want. And yet, for the sake of tradition or because of capacity limits for brewery production, they’re available only within limited seasonal windows.

Classic German styles like Berliner Weisse and gose have gained traction among U.S. brewers and drinkers, but a substantial majority of those are available as summer seasonals—substantial, but not absolute. Some against-the-grain brewers are bold enough to release Berliner Weisse selections in January. But for the most part, restaurant guests who



SEASONAL BEERS INCREASINGLY ALIGN WITH SEASONAL FOODS, BUT LIMITING A STYLE OF BEER TO ONE SEASON COULD TRANSLATE TO A MISSED OPPORTUNITY.

crave the gently wild tartness of a Berliner Weisse or the moderate salinity of a gose with their meal in December are generally going to be out of luck (unless the establishment has a few bottles or a keg left over from five months ago, which is a problem in itself).

Adam Dulye, the executive chef for the Brewers Association (BA)—the trade group representing U.S. craft brewers—says keeping such emerging styles within their traditional seasons could translate to a missed opportunity. “Berliner Weisses and goses are great beers for palate cleansing and also for starting a meal off—and yes, they have definite year-round potential,” says Dulye, who’s the culinary force behind BA food-focused events like Savor and the Paired pavilion at the Great American Beer Festival. “But what it comes down to is just

production and quantity—most breweries don’t have the capacity to produce all of those year-round.”

Seasonal flexibility may apply to more refreshing beers of the wheat-based ilk, but probably not so much with the boozier brews of winter, right? Well, yes and no.

Dulye points out that while consumers typically seek out lighter brews when the weather gets hot, those barrel-aged, full-bodied roasty beers can have a place at the summer dining table.

They tend to work quite well with barbecue—the sweetness and roasted notes match similar characteristics in the sauces and the meats. The beers are also good accompaniments for warm-weather desserts, like ice cream, gelato, or custard.

“When you do it with cold [desserts] like that, it brings the heat and the booz-

Pairings

iness of the beer down, and it becomes pretty doable,” Dulye explains. “But the people who are running out to do that are few and far between.”

It’s still a fairly tough sell to make a 12 percent ABV barrel-aged stout sound appealing to guests when it’s 95 degrees out. That and the fact that those styles, more often than not, are packaged in 22-ounce “bomber” and 750-ml cork-finished bottles, assuming it’s not available on draft. Whichever member of a dinner party wants to order a boozy beer must convince at least one or two others to share.

They’re much more attractive as small, 2-ounce or 4-ounce pours.

“I think that certain styles are in demand year-round and not to provide them is foolish; you want to strike a balance,” says David Kravitz, beverage director at Corner Table Restaurants. The Smith, the group’s casual brasserie with an extensive, seasonally changing beer list, now boasts four locations in New York City with another planned for Washington, D.C.

On one hand, Kravitz says, it’s imperative that the beer list, like the food menu, changes with the season. On the other, it’s also important to have some beers around—if available—that may traditionally be considered incongruous. A Belgian-style witbier, for instance, may be more closely associated with summer, but it’s become such a popular style that

producers brew it year-round. It’s a reliable, lighter option, even in the winter.

There is, of course, the notion of too much of a good thing. If certain popular seasonals were available year-round, it’s likely they would lose their special-ness. People who get a kick out of the holiday season are bummed when it’s over and January rolls around—but that doesn’t mean they’d be happier if it lasted all year.

Restaurants that put considerable effort into their beer programs and offer well-curated, rapidly rotating selections, benefit greatly from the heightened buzz as beer lovers count down to the drop dates of their favorite seasonals.

New York’s Café D’Alsace, part of the city’s Tour de France restaurant group, has witnessed that dynamic play out each year in the decade-plus that the Alsatian-inspired eatery has offered one of the most eclectic beer lists in New York City.

“I think the two most successful [types of] seasonal beers are the ones that come with the most drastic weather changes,” observes Café D’Alsace beer and wine sommelier Watson Brown. “For winter beers, you get the excitement of the holidays while you’re celebrating this really crappy weather.”

For many, the appearance on the menu of Deschutes Brewery’s latest iteration of its annual Jubelale, or Anchor Brewing’s Christmas Ale, or 21st Amendment’s Fireside Chat is what officially

inaugurates the festive season.

Eventually, though, the chill starts to overstay its welcome. “In spring,” says Brown, “there’s so much excitement in the air, in terms of winter finally being over.”

Typically, as the days get brighter, so do the flavors in spring; roasty, chocolatey high-ABV beers start to make way for citrusy, fruity expressions of more moderate strength. “And people are starting to eat lighter, so they want a lighter beer,” Brown says.

So, despite the fact that it’s easy enough to make a case that virtually any beer style has a right to be on the table at virtually any time of year, the fleeting appearance of the most-prized seasonals will remain the norm, mostly for the sake of tradition. But it’s also a matter of freshness, both literally and figuratively.

“The beers that are becoming more popular in a season are lining up more with the foods that are happening in that season,” says Dulye. “The paths that beer and food are on are just one lane next to each other, and they’re syncing up really nicely right now. It’s playing a massive role in what [chefs] are doing right now because when we have that connection and pairing, it’s a lot easier to sell and move that beer.”

It’s hard to argue with that logic. Still, if you’re looking for me in the next month, I’ll be the one vainly poring over the menu in search of my beloved Berliner Weisse. ■

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A Cure for Labor Pains

Nick Kapnison has been in the restaurant game for more than a half century, but the current labor environment, from minimum wage hikes and paid sick time to Affordable Care Act (ACA) mandates, is something altogether new. And frustrating.

“As difficult as it is to get good employees, these new guidelines are making the labor side of the business that much more difficult,” says Kapnison, who owns five full-service restaurants in Albuquerque, New Mexico, including the venerable Nick & Jimmy’s and El Patron, a 500-seat casual eatery.

Kapnison, in fact, estimates that adhering to ACA guidelines alone will cost him upward of \$300,000 each year, a sizable sum in an industry that largely counts its profit in singles and fives, not twenties and fifties.

Enter ShiftPixy, a California-based startup aiming to minimize the sting of labor pains that restaurant operators like Kapnison face. Launched in July 2015 in response to the ACA, which requires “applicable large employers” to offer health benefits to full-time employees—defined as 30 hours of service per week or 130 hours of service in any given month—or face possible penalties, ShiftPixy will process the entire payroll, insurance, and regulatory demands for each shift-hour worked, thereby removing the arduous compliance burden from the restaurant owner’s shoulders.

“This is a way for restaurants to offload their part-time employees and make ShiftPixy the employer of record,” ShiftPixy co-founder Steve Holmes says.

Holmes, who has been working in the



THE GROUP THAT OWNS FIVE RESTAURANTS IN NEW MEXICO, INCLUDING THE 500-SEAT EL PATRON (ABOVE), SAYS ADHERING TO THE ACA GUIDELINES WILL COST THE COMPANY UPWARD OF \$300,000 PER YEAR.

hospitality labor market for more than two decades, estimates that half of restaurant owners have done nothing with ACA compliance, which could result in fines of up to \$3,000 per employee.

“We see massive noncompliance because operators don’t have the tools to address this complex legislation,” Holmes says. “So instead, owners just throw up their hands and hope it is repealed or that they don’t get fined.”

With ACA a still-present reality, however, those “applicable large employers” must get in line. Holmes says this is fueling an increasing strategic shift at many restaurants, where operators are capping the schedules of all staff beyond “core full-timers” to 29 hours of weekly work—in hopes of escaping the ACA hammer. Juggling all those part-timers, however,

is an onerous task.

To address the dilemma, Holmes says operators can simply move part-time employees onto the ShiftPixy system, which will handle all of the administrative and regulatory matters that accompany the hiring of part-time staff. Restaurants, then, get the benefit of having a qualified workforce and maintaining the necessary staffing levels—sans the regulatory burdens that come with employing a plethora of “Shifters,” as ShiftPixy terms them.

“This solution hits at the heart of restaurant operators’ greatest liability and risk, which is the variable-hour, part-time employee,” Holmes says.

The solution holds particular appeal for operators like Kapnison who bemoan the administrative headaches that hefty

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new regulations like ACA unleash. "It will be a lot easier for us to run employees through [ShiftPixy] rather than adhering to all of the book work and regulations the government is requiring," Kapnison says.

In addition to the administrative end, ShiftPixy also provides operators access to an on-demand labor pool. Directly on the ShiftPixy system, an operator can broadcast a shift opening and assess candidates, including reviewing any prospect's résumé, which includes work history and employer reviews.

"This is a big difference from placing an ad, interviewing candidates, and then onboarding a new employee," Holmes says, adding that ShiftPixy includes a quality control feature that ensures only relevant candidates are approved to work at a given establishment. Consider, he suggests, a restaurant with five unique drinks at its establishment. For a "Shifter" to be eligible to work at that specific restaurant, the individual would need to pass a restaurant-specific test and demonstrate his or her technical knowledge.

"Better yet, there's no HR implication here," Holmes says. "If the Shifter doesn't do the job, then you just don't bring them back." Conversely, Holmes adds, operators also have the option to permanently hire a Shifter who displays the right tools and attitude. "In this way, you're essentially automating recruiting and doing so at no cost," he says.

The ShiftPixy app debuted in early September in California and will be operating in New York City, Chicago, Dallas, and Orlando, Florida, by year's end. In the early months of 2017, Holmes says ShiftPixy will add another 10 to 12 U.S. cities onto its platform. "With all the contingent liabilities and more uncertainty than ever in the labor market, ShiftPixy helps put a lid on labor costs by giving restaurant operators cost certainty," Holmes says.

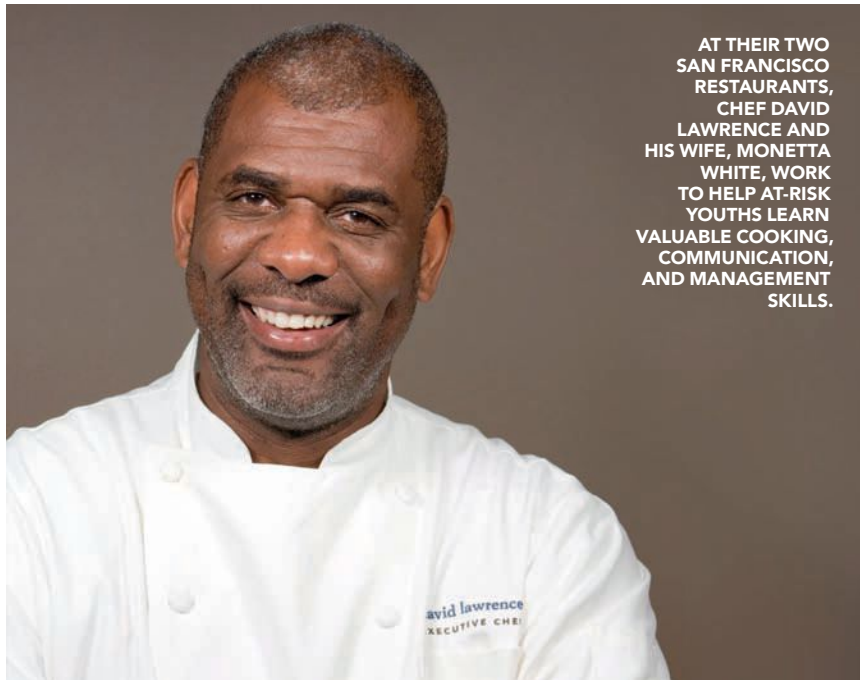
Indeed, it's that potential that intrigues Kapnison: "Given the complexities in the labor environment, creative solutions are needed and that makes [ShiftPixy] worth a serious look." ■

Maybe It Takes a Restaurant, Not a Village

When Monetta White and her husband, Chef David Lawrence, opened their modern Southern restaurant 1300 on Fillmore in San Francisco in 2007, their initial plan quickly expanded to something greater. The couple embraced the idea of giving back to the youth of the community, an ethos that extends to their latest venture, Black Bark BBQ, a restaurant located a few doors down in the same Western Addition neighborhood. The new concept specializes in Southern comfort food and urban barbecue. “I think you can’t be here if you’re not helping your own community,” says White, who co-owns the two establishments with Lawrence. “It’s our responsibility to make it better.”

In fact, White recalls that when Sheryl Davis and her nonprofit organization, Mo’MAGIC, which helps at-risk youths through afterschool programs and summer programs, brought in some local children to see 1300 on Fillmore a few years ago, the kids were elated to see an African-American couple running the establishment. “They saw me and my husband and said, ‘They’re black like us,’” says White, who was raised in the city’s predominantly African-American neighborhood of Potrero Hill. “I could just see what that meant to them, to see their own possibilities.”

Since then, allied with Mo’MAGIC, the couple have added summer internships that allow participants to learn about different staffing positions, and Chef Lawrence gives in-depth cooking classes. The restaurant uses its front- and back-of-house positions to teach



AT THEIR TWO SAN FRANCISCO RESTAURANTS, CHEF DAVID LAWRENCE AND HIS WIFE, MONETTA WHITE, WORK TO HELP AT-RISK YOUTHS LEARN VALUABLE COOKING, COMMUNICATION, AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS.

restaurant skills to young people and to address diversity issues on the management side of the business. To address a growing truancy issue, White says they started a program: “Because if these kids are being accountable for going to school, [as part of their job] we can make sure they show us their grades and stay out of trouble. We’ll feed them, they’ll make money, and we can help mentor them.”

White says that many kids had shied away from restaurant management jobs due to a lack of confidence. However, with the training at 1300 on Fillmore and the right encouragement, the kids’ verbal communication skills have blossomed. White and Lawrence have also helped by adjusting work schedules so some employees can go to college. Two employees who started in the summer

program now work at Black Bark BBQ, and White adds that they recently started a culinary boot camp for people with challenging histories (many of whom have been incarcerated or dealt with drinking problems) to help those individuals acquire skills to return to the workforce.

Born to Jamaican parents who were immigrants, Chef Lawrence grew up in a London council house (the British equivalent of U.S. public housing that is often referred to as the projects), so he understands many of the kids he mentors. The chef feels it’s crucial to show young people the culinary career paths that are available, and to give them work experience and communication skills. “I always tell them it’s not where you start, it’s where you finish in life,” he says. ■

The ment'or BKB FOUNDATION

WITH THE NOMAD CHEFS

Competitions Benefit Restaurants

The NoMad Hotel in New York City has numerous dining venues and private-dining spaces. The NoMad's executive chef James Kent and chef de cuisine Brian Lockwood are avid proponents of the ment'or BKB Foundation and chef competitions. Chef Kent competed in the Bocuse d'Or in 2011, placing 10th in the world, and Chef Lockwood is serving as an adviser for Team USA, which will be competing in the 2017 Bocuse d'Or.

After experiencing intense competitions, what do you bring back to your work in restaurant kitchens?

CHEF KENT: Over the past five years, the experience of competing has helped me find my voice and my path. Then, I was a young sous chef at Eleven Madison Park and it was a two-year process from the American competition, through training, and then the competition in Lyon, France. ... It was about life experiences and working with incredible people. When I came back to Eleven Madison Park, I stepped into the chef de cuisine position. If I had just stepped into that role from being sous chef, it would have been hard for the team to respect me, but they understood I had [acquired] the skills to come back and help push the restaurant.

CHEF LOCKWOOD: In competing to be part of Team USA, I found the organization needed was on such a different level. Generally cooks are pretty organized and efficient, but a competition takes it to a whole other level. It also makes you



FROM THE NOMAD COOKBOOK / FRANCESCO TONELLI

CHEFS JAMES KENT AND BRIAN LOCKWOOD CHALLENGE THE YOUNG CHEFS ON THEIR COOKING TEAM AT THE NOMAD TO GROW, TO LEARN TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT FOOD, AND TO PARTICIPATE IN CULINARY COMPETITIONS.

think about food differently. It pushes you to think more creatively, and ask: Is there a better, more efficient way to do this? And that carries over into the daily routine of the restaurant.

How are you thinking differently about food for the next year?

CHEF KENT: I've been working with food a long time, about 20 years. Every year I try to do new things, evolve, and grow. Now, as I get older, I'm really focused on being healthy and eating right.

Are you bringing that to your menus as well?

CHEF KENT: Definitely. It's not cooking healthy foods; it's about finding ways to make food delicious but not necessarily heavy. It's not a conscious thing; it's more the way I want to live my life now, and it translates to the food I cook.

For the past six or seven years—first at Eleven Madison Park and now at The NoMad—we've been focused on vegetable-forward food. We always have a vegetable entrée and vegetable dishes, not

like side dishes, but the focus. And it's just the way that we cook now.

What is your passion relative to the food you prepare?

CHEF LOCKWOOD: I love the mechanics of cooking, just the daily repetition—breaking fish down and dicing vegetables. Those little Zen things like peeling cherry tomatoes. The tedious jobs that people at first find challenging, those are the things that calm me and soothe me.

CHEF KENT: Running a restaurant is more than just cooking and I love the leadership aspects—challenging young cooks to grow and seeing people [succeed]. That's really what I love about this.

It's so much more than just food. To work at this level, you need to know how to cook really well and put food together. That's the base level, and then it's about challenging people and watching people grow. We all started somewhere. As a young cook, I worked with people who helped me grow, and I'm happy to do that for others. That philosophy dovetails 100 percent with the ment'or BKB mission. ■

THE NON-PROFIT MENT'OR BKB FOUNDATION, CREATED BY CHEFS DANIEL BOULUD, THOMAS KELLER, AND JÉRÔME BOCUSE (SON OF CHEF PAUL BOCUSE), SEEKS TO INSPIRE CULINARY EXCELLENCE IN YOUNG PROFESSIONALS AND PRESERVE THE TRADITIONS AND QUALITY OF CLASSIC CUISINE IN AMERICA. IT PROVIDES UNIQUE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS ACCESS TO A CULINARY COUNCIL OF RENOWNED CHEFS WHO SERVE AS MENTORS, AND ALSO SPONSORS THE BOCUSE D'OR TEAM USA. WWW.MENTORBKB.ORG

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