

2013 Foodservice Culinary Trends

Introduction

Taking the time to understand what may be the next big thing in foodservice can shape how operators and consumers approach and interact with food and beverages in both the near-term and far-term. We have listed five trend predictions for 2013.

Many of these predictions are building on trends that have been influencing and changing the foodservice industry over the past five years: local sourcing, locally produced foods and beverages, social media and the “text” society, extreme customization, food trucks, and a focus on health/wellness. In some cases, the predictions below are the continuation of these trends while others are likely the results of a backlash to these trends.



photo source – Saxon + Parole

Prediction #1: House-branded Spirits

Over the past few years, cocktails have taken center stage and taken the spotlight away from beer and wine. “Mixologists” have become the new foodservice celebrities, and their artistry has both reinvigorated classic cocktails and introduced U.S. consumers to a wealth of new spirits and beverage concoctions. Patrons are increasingly treated to a host of house-made cocktail components including bitters, infused spirits, simple syrups, and juices.

At the same time, boutique, craft or micro-distilleries have significantly increased in numbers. Our prediction is that these two trends – house-made cocktail components and micro-distilleries – will result in house-branded spirits. The proliferation of smaller distilleries and the renewed focus on cocktails provides operators a unique opportunity to offer a spirit to their patrons that isn’t available elsewhere. Examples of this trend could be a unique flavor or a special blend of a common spirit such as gin or rye.

Restaurant Examples:

- **Longhorn Steakhouse’s** Strawberry Goldrush made with house-made vodka, strawberry and lemonade.
- NYC’s **Saxon + Parole** cocktail menu “features a fresh approach to bespoke spirits, syrups, bitters, fresh-squeezed juices, and house-made sodas, and includes Parole Whiskey – Saxon + Parole’s very own house brand of whiskey.

Prediction #2: Chef-focused Dining

There is no question that customization has been at the heart of many changes occurring in foodservice. Increasingly, operators offer a wide variety of garnishes, sauces, preparation techniques, and carriers from which patrons can create a one-of-a-kind menu item made to their unique specifications. These countless options for customizations, however, have proved stressful for some consumers.

The chef-driven menu or tasting menu seeks to solve this customization dilemma. These tasting menus put the consumer firmly in the hands of the chef and eliminate both the need and the opportunity to customize. The chef has taken back control of the ingredients, preparation methods, and everything about a dish. Certainly, tasting menus are not new but their availability and breadth of offerings have increased.

Restaurant Examples:

- Carlos Mirarchi’s **Blanca** in NYC offers an extensive tasting menu and is a 12-seat counter space behind his restaurant
- Bryan Moscatello’s **Storefront Company** in Chicago offers five-course tasting menus for \$80

Prediction #3: Upscale Diners

Diners are nothing new in the U.S. Many are still available regionally although they have become more of an “endangered species”. Enter the rise of fine dining chefs opening “downscaled” versions of their upscale operations. In an effort to reach a wider audience, while still delivering on both the quality and



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innovation that is the hallmark of their fine dining establishments, these chefs have opened everything from fast casual to casual dining operations, many of which are focused on burgers or sandwiches.

As a next step in this trend, some chefs are opening upscale versions of the classic diner. This creates in effect, the new American bistro. The focus is on quality and innovation but in a comfortable diner-style setting. The food and atmosphere is approachable with menu items tending toward innovative comfort foods. Furthermore, unlike many chef driven concepts, these upscale diners offer sit-down breakfast which is of course reminiscent of the classic American diner. We expect this trend to continue as fine dining chefs look to expand both their reach and their breadth of offerings.

Restaurant Examples:

- **Crossroads Diner** in Dallas (Chef Tom Fleming)
- **Nickel Diner** in L.A. (Chef Monica May)

Prediction #4: Rustic Ethnic

Street food has been the buzz word since the advent and rise of food trucks. Much of the appeal of street food is how approachable it makes an ethnic item or an unusual ingredient to mainstream U.S. consumers.

Rustic ethnic offerings can be seen as the next stage in this trend. While street food focuses on items that are typically found at street vendors and meant to be eaten quickly or on-the-go, rustic ethnic cuisine, on the other hand, is similar to the food available in the country and eaten by those who need hearty, healthy, and sustaining meals. Casseroles, stews, broths, and hearty ingredient combinations are typically the hallmark of these rustic ethnic dishes. Each country has its own version of rustic cuisine and, as a result, there is a wide variety of dishes. Some of these dishes are new and unique to some and others are comforting and familiar, depending on their country of origin.

Restaurant Examples:

- **Wagamama** chain restaurant offers a dish called Shrimp Kare Lomen - ramen noodles in a spicy coconut and lemongrass soup topped with shrimp, beansprouts and cucumber. Garnished with cilantro and lime
- **La Prima Catering** in Baltimore/DC and Philadelphia offers a Shrimp Grits dish - cajun spiced shrimp and andouille sausage baked with cheddar cheese and coarse ground white hominy grits.

Prediction #5: Communal Dining

There's no doubt about it, either a patron loves communal dining or they hate it. Rarely do you find a U.S. consumer who is noncommittal when it comes to communal dining. Despite this, there has been growth in communal dining over the past year and we expect the interest in communal dining options to continue.

Several trends are driving this growth. First, farm dinners have significantly grown in availability and participation. These dinners are nearly exclusively offered in communal table settings. Second is the fact that this trend can be seen as a backlash against the technologically-driven disconnect. While consumers now have a plethora of ways to communicate – Twitter, Facebook, texts, etc. – they are increasingly not speaking to or interacting with “real” people.

Though it's unlikely communal dining will replace private, intimate seatings, this unique opportunity for patrons to dine and interact with a wide variety of people and for operators to create a vibrant social atmosphere, will continue to impact foodservice. We see this trend now with several fine dining operators and can expect to see it move from fine dining into independent casual dining in the near future.

Restaurant Examples:

- **The Publican** in Chicago
- **Il Buco Alimentari** in NYC



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