

what's on the menu for '08

As new ideas and ingredients brighten the 2008 culinary landscape, four key dining philosophies will guide Americans' eating habits.

By Allison Perlik, Senior Editor



The foodservice forecast is brightest in 2008 for operators who stay relevant to how consumers live and who understand what drives dining occasions. Success begins with knowing not only what customers want to eat, but also how.

If Americans were to draw up a list of dining resolutions for the year ahead, it likely would read something like this:

- **Stay local, go global.** Look for more locally produced products, but at the same time, explore up-and-coming ethnic cuisines from Greece, Vietnam, Korea, South America and the Eastern Mediterranean.
- **Find feel-good foods.** Seek out more products, such as cage-free eggs, fair-trade coffee and sustainable seafood, that are grown, raised and produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.
- **Embrace easy nutrition.** Find simple ways to eat more-healthful meals, and add beneficial foods rather than avoiding

Sustainably raised, grass-fed beef made the Barbacoa Burrito (top) from Burrito Beach a big hit. At McLean, Va.-based fast-casual concept Vapiano, fresh-cut herbs from in-house gardens garnish pasta (l.).

ingredients demonized by fad diets.

● **Enjoy casual luxury.** Do all of the above while enjoying away-from-home meals that are relaxed and welcoming but that still offer experiences to savor.

The operators who best deliver on these ideals will find themselves a step ahead of the competition as 2008 unfolds.

LOCAL-GLOBAL

In the year ahead, global menu influences will transport consumers to ever-more-exotic destinations—think Brazil, Turkey and Vietnam—but at the same time, chefs will pay special tribute to roots close to home.

“I’ve heard everything from my customers about local ingredients, from ‘They taste better’ to ‘They’re better for me,’” says Stu Stein, chef-owner of Portland, Ore.’s Terroir Restaurant and Wine Bar. “They also like the idea of supporting farmers and keeping money in the community.” Terroir’s menu includes black-pepper fettucine with braised shoulder of local venison and locally sourced oysters with lime, chili and mint granita.

The trend is taking hold beyond the fine-dining realm. Dartmouth, Mass.-based casual-dining chain Not Your Average Joe’s recently promoted locally themed recipes such as pan-seared native swordfish served with locally made chorizo sausage and arugula from a nearby farm. At the University of Rochester in Rochester, N.Y., locally sourced foods account for 60% to 75% of the menu

at recently opened Connections Café.

Calling out ingredients’ local origins adds undeniable cachet; the mention elicits questions; conversations and, of the most importance, orders. So, too, do influences that stem further from home, as diners increasingly turn to ethnic cuisines for bold but nuanced flavors.

“It feels like everyone’s doing the same [contemporary American] menu now,” says Chef-owner Michael Dotson, who instead entices diners with Greek-, Turkish- and North African-accented fare at recently opened Sens Restaurant in San Francisco.

Examples include manti, ravioli-like Turkish dumplings traditionally made of lamb or beef that Dotson reimagines with kabocha squash and roasted chestnuts, and frikeh, the smoky, roasted green wheat that imparts unique flavor and texture to his market-inspired vegetable casserole.

As with local products, ethnic influences find broad audiences as well. At Parkhurst Dining Services, more than 250 recipes from such diverse destinations as Brazil, Greece and Morocco are available to school and business-and-industry accounts through the Pittsburgh-based contractor’s new Hemisflavors program. Students and employees alike now dine on Moroccan-style fish tagines, Greek *dolmades de bakaliaro* (grape leaves stuffed



Hot in '08

In the year ahead, we'll see more of the following on menus ...

- Even smaller plates (bites, snacks, samples)
- Functional foods/superfoods (açai, goji berries, etc.)
- Pickled everything
- Lesser-known cheeses (*crecenza*, halloumi, burrata)
- Gastropub fare
- Niche restaurants (mac and cheese, cereal, cupcakes)
- Korean-style beef
- Lamb in nontraditional cuts
- Mostarda (Italian fruit-and-mustard condiment)
- Mediterranean dips and spreads
- Single-varietal ingredients, e.g. chocolate, coffee

with rice and cod) and Vietnamese spicy-sour prawn soup.

A special promotion at Irving, Texas-based Omni Hotels allows business and pleasure travelers to experience Argentinean cuisine via in-room dining and on-site restaurant menus. Recipes include *choripán* (sandwiches of garlicky chorizo sausage with chimichurri sauce on crusty bread) and beef empanadas.

“It’s a whole different range of food for our guests,” says Executive Chef Sam DeMarco of the Omni Berkshire in New York City. DeMarco traveled to Argentina

with a group of Omni chefs to learn the country’s food ideas and techniques firsthand.

CASUAL LUXURY

Diners are known for seemingly paradoxical demands—witness the enduring popularity of adventurous comfort foods—and they’re at it again in 2008. In dining experiences of all kinds, they’re looking for less formal, more accessible meals that still offer top-shelf trappings.

Consider the parade of dressed-down, unfussy-food dining rooms from big-name chefs: Nancy Silverton, Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich’s Pizzeria Mozza in Los Angeles; Eric Ripert’s Westend Bistro in Washington, D.C.; and Daniel Boulud’s Bar Boulud in New York City, to name a few.

Fortunately, celebrity chefs aren’t required to capitalize on this upscale-casual movement. Six-month-old Sepia, a contemporary American restaurant in Chicago, earned hot-spot status by designing its menu and décor to be > 38

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

22.9%

Percent of consumers who say they are more likely to go to restaurants that buy locally grown produce and other foods. (R/I 2008 New American Diner Study)





DINING WITHOUT BORDERS

32%

Percent of consumers who will order Greek food again. About 16% say they'd order Vietnamese again, and 15.8% would retry South American. (R&I 2008 New American Diner Study)

<37 approachably stylish. Entrées tout high-end products such as Berkshire pork and free-range chicken, but each is priced below \$30.

"The restaurant is casual, but the elegance is in the details," says Executive Chef Kendal Duque, pointing to house-made herb pasta accompanying beef short ribs braised in a liqueur-spiked liquid as well as roasted Berkshire pork chops paired with sliced-to-order green apples, arugula dressed in black-currant-infused Cassis vinegar and grilled Berkshire bacon.

Diners don't dial down their expectations based on a restaurant's dining genre, so the casual-luxury trend works the opposite way as well. Carlsbad, Calif.-based family-dining chain Coco's Restaurant & Bakery added Angus beef burgers and steaks, an espresso bar and sparkling wine by the glass. At Chicago fast-casual chain Burrito Beach, grass-fed-beef burritos proved so popular that they may become a menu fixture.

"Customer reception has been phenomenal," says Greg Schulson, Burrito Beach founder and president. "Consumers

expect more from restaurants these days, and that includes higher-quality and unique products."

FEEL-GOOD FOOD

Dining out is no longer just a social occasion; increasingly, it's about being socially and environmentally responsible. In 2008, operators who address customers' growing concerns about treating workers fairly, animals humanely and the environment respectfully will earn customers' esteem—and their business.

"Ultimately, we believe our policy will pay off in a longer positive and



Still Strong

They were in demand before, and they will be again ...

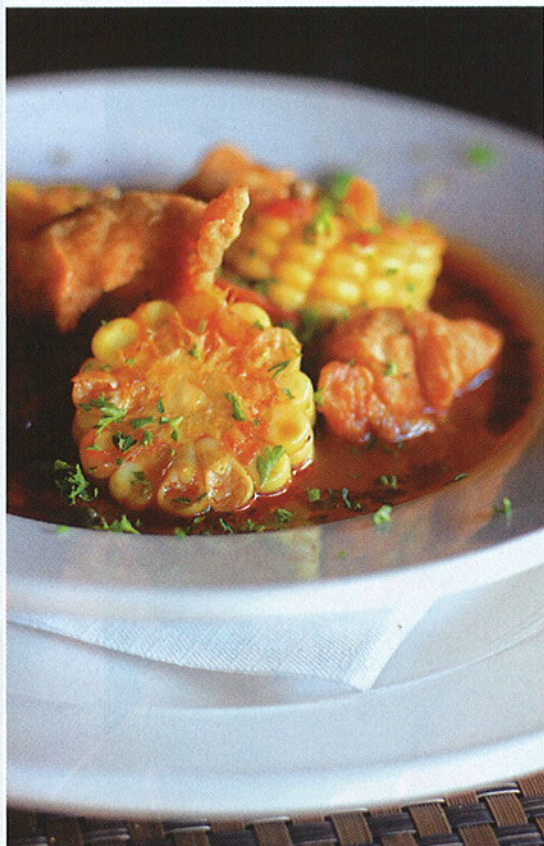
- Seasonal menus
- Everything Asian
- Burgers, burgers, burgers
- Snacks
- Mini sandwiches
- Street food
- Pork every which way
- Neapolitan-style pizza
- Wood-fired anything

sustainable business trend," says Executive Vice President Joe Essa at Los Angeles-based Wolfgang Puck Worldwide, which pledged in March to use only all-natural or organic crate-free pork and veal, sustainable seafood, cage-free eggs, and all-natural or organic chicken and turkey from humane farms in all of its fine-dining, fast-casual and catering venues.

Cathal Armstrong, chef-owner of Restaurant Eve in Alexandria, Va., says that although food quality drove his decision to serve > 40

Chef Cathal Armstrong prefers butter from pasture-fed and antibiotic- and hormone-free cows in preparing butter-poached lobster at Restaurant Eve.





<38 only meat, poultry, egg and dairy products that are “certified humane” by a national nonprofit organization, the potential to positively affect Americans’ dining habits is an extra reward.

“People who make dining decisions based on restaurants’ humane practices are very much in the minority so far—so far,” he says. “But I expect that will change over the next five years.”

Big-name and high-end chefs often take the lead in such dining trends, but perhaps the most telling sign that socially and environmentally responsible practices will be of more importance to consumers is that the foodservice giants who serve the masses are taking note.

Contractor giant Sodexo’s Jazzman’s Café, a 202-unit chain operated by the Allentown, Pa.-based Retail Brand Group, touts the fact that it purchases coffees only from sustainable sources or growers who honor environmentally friendly-farming and fair-trade employment practices. On the quick-service front, Miami-based Burger King and



South American cuisine is on the rise. Omni Hotels’ “Flavors of Argentina” menu highlights recipes such as Malbec-braised short ribs (below), while Parkhurst Dining Services features interpretations of Brazilian dishes such as *feijoada* (above).



Carolina Black Bass With Orange-Braised Fennel

Chef-owner Cathal Armstrong
Restaurant Eve, Alexandria, Va.

Yield: 4 servings

Fennel bulb	1
Olive oil	as needed
Orange	1
Bay leaves	4
Salt and pepper, divided use	to taste
Unsalted Irish butter	2 oz.
6-oz. fillets of black bass	4
Young tarragon, leaves and flowers	to garnish

1. Cut fennel in 8 pieces, keeping core intact. Sauté in olive oil over medium-high heat until browned.
2. Remove zest from orange and add to fennel; then squeeze orange juice into pan. Add bay leaves; simmer gently until fennel is tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper; stir in butter.
3. Season black bass fillets with salt and pepper. Sauté skin-side down over medium heat until skin is crisp; turn to flesh side and cook through.
4. To serve, place 2 pieces of fennel in bowl, top with black bass fillet and garnish with tarragon leaves and flowers.

Carpinteria, Calif.-based CKE Restaurants (parent company of Hardee’s and Carl’s Jr.), have committed to buying small percentages of cage-free eggs as well as pork from suppliers that do not use gestation stalls or crates.

EASY NUTRITION

Foodservice operators aren’t responsible for their customers’ health, but the easier they make it for diners to make better choices, the more reasons diners will find to patronize the operators’ establishments. Case in point: Seattle-based Starbucks’ decision to replace > 42

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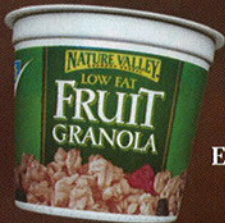
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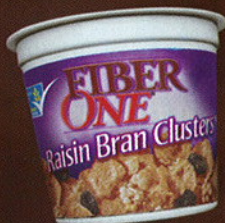
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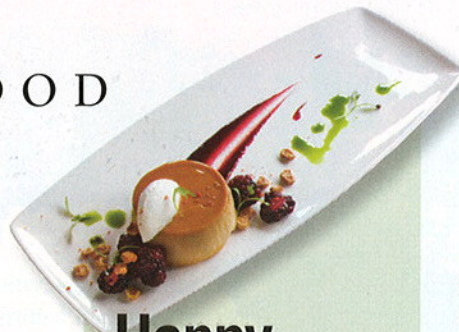


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Happy Endings

Dessert menus expand their horizons with unexpected flavors and flair in 2008.

- Yogurt is everywhere, in classic fro-yo and tangy versions (à la Pinkberry) as well as in accents such as creams and sorbets;
- Savory ingredients now part of the pastry chef's pantry include chiles, olives, bacon, corn and tomatoes;
- Desserts are going sci-fi—showcasing the transformative abilities of elements such as liquid nitrogen, sodium alginate and xanthan gum;
- Pastry chefs are playing with subtle notes of spices including coriander, basil, cumin, thyme, anise and curry;
- Doughnuts paved the way, and now more childhood delights are back in style, from s'mores and root-beer floats to cotton candy and caramel corn.

for ways they can not only enjoy the food they eat but also feel good about it.”

Continuing to push the flavor envelope in preparations that rely less on fat, sugar and sodium remains an important tactic, too. At the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Conn., a new line of more-healthy grab-and-go choices includes a salad of black beans, red kidney beans and chickpeas in citrus vinaigrette with mandarin oranges, and lemon-currant tuna with red grapes, sliced almonds and dried cranberries in a wheat wrap.

“Conscious Cuisine” menu selections at Splendido, a retirement community in Tucson, Ariz., include baked sweet-potato fries, fruit-

juice-marinated chicken breast with fresh fruit salsa, and Carbonara Primavera, a twist on indulgent pasta carbonara that uses broccoli, red peppers, low-sodium bacon bits and low-fat cream sauce.

“Having these choices makes our guests consciously focus on eating a little better,” says Splendido Executive Chef Albert Dileo.

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<40 whole milk with 2% as the default milk for espresso drinks.

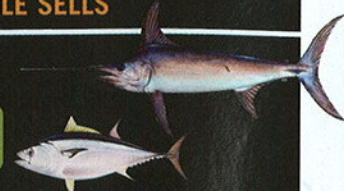
One effective approach for 2008 is emphasizing ingredients that benefit diners. The “Optimal Choice” program at Vesuvio Restaurant & Bar in Philadelphia features meals designed by a nutrition specialist to provide balanced portions of lean proteins, whole grains, vegetables, healthy fats and fiber. The choices, denoted by small menu symbols, include grilled salmon with honey-lime barbecue sauce, roasted vegetables and bulgur wheat, and seared, pepper-crusted tuna with ginger, carrots, artichokes and wasabi sauce.

Strategies can be as simple as injecting more whole grains into menus—a practice evident in dishes such as grilled shrimp with quinoa at Westend Bistro in Washington, D.C.; toasted barley “risotto” at Michael Smith Restaurant in Kansas City, Mo.; and duck breast with buckwheat grains at Sona in Los Angeles. Another strong technique is to communicate to customers the positive benefits of a natural ingredient, as Salt Lake City-based TCBY is doing with regard to the seven live and active cultures in its frozen yogurt.

“Health, nutrition and wellness used to mean avoiding certain things, but now it’s a much more proactive approach,” says Steve Willes, TCBY’s director of marketing. “Consumers are looking

SUSTAINABLE SELLS

25.7%



Percent of consumers who say they’re more likely to go to restaurants that have taken endangered fish or seafood off the menu. (R&I 2008 New American Diner Study)