

CONFIDENCE
IN EVERY CASE.



WINTER - 2021

Nearly a year after the world first heard of the Coronavirus, many expected the worst to be in the rearview mirror by now. Instead, the pandemic persists and restaurants are toggling between indoor dining, outside service, and delivery only protocols. But through it all, the foodservice industry is reinventing itself to keep creative, innovative food available from coast to coast.

As vaccines roll out and hope remains on the horizon, operators are employing strategies that are changing the way business is done for the near future and beyond.

Trends

WINTER - 2021

Off Premise: Adventures in Fine Dining

Foodservice has been one of the hardest hit industries throughout the pandemic, and fine dining has perhaps taken the strongest blow. In response, innovative chefs have seen this as an opportunity to redefine, retool, and reset their businesses to present new versions of the elevated meal experience.

- Ten of Los Angeles' top restaurants curated a 10-course drive through meal. Resy and American Express organized a safe way to offer trays of food featuring celebrity chefs like Nancy Silverton, David Chang, Curtis Stone, and Mei Lin—serving 1,200 guests over two nights.
- Many high-end establishments are packaging market boxes containing sophisticated ingredients that aren't available in groceries, such as sous-vide salmon, tomahawk steaks, house-crafted sauces and dressings, exotic mushrooms and herbs, compressed fruits, European butters, and artisan breads.
- Create excitement and convey hospitality with sleek, compostable packaging filled with craveable dishes plus extras like wine glasses, bottle openers, printed napkins, house-made mixers, and hand-written thank you notes that surprise and delight like a special gift.
- Highlight wellness ingredients such as collagen, seaweed, spirulina, turmeric, CBD, and apple cider vinegar in beverages and dressings.
- Safety remains critical, but quality will always be number one. Customers are not walking back on luxury, just changing their parameters. Test, test, test—to ensure the dishes you deliver arrive as planned.

Outside: The Best Seat in the House

Time was that the cozy back corner or busy bar were the most coveted seats, but with social distancing here for the foreseeable future, airy, spacious outdoor tables have taken the lead in where diners want (and need) to sit.



- Open-air patios, porches, rooftops, and converted parking lots are now prime real estate. Restaurants are using every available inch to ensure customers have a place to dine.
- Cold weather, rain, and snow are problems for elemental dining, but structures like igloos, yurts, geodesic domes, cabins, greenhouses—even Ferris wheels are not only protective, but create a fun, unique dining experience.
- Other innovative ideas include heated table modules and chair cushions, fire-ring cook stations, and BYOB blanket programs.
- Don't forget the essentials like circulating heaters, wind shields and tarps, protective clothing for staff, outdoor firepits, free Wi-Fi, and digital communication to prevent diners from waiting in the cold for their tables.
- Modernized comfort food dishes such as macaroni & cheese with specialty cheeses and roasted vegetables, puffed pastry pot pies, egg- and wild mushroom-topped croque madam sandwiches, heated bread with herbal butters, and desserts like dippable donuts with melted chocolate and hot apple pies.
- Serve warming beverages like cocoa bombs, spiked ciders and nogs, hot toddies, mulled spice wines, boozy lattes, and herbal teas create a welcoming, cozy ambiance.

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Trends

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Truly Spicy Food Arrives

When ghost chile donuts are being sold at Dunkin' Donuts, it's clear that fiery foods have hit the mainstream. Customers' palates have evolved, leading to one of the most popular C-19 dining adventures, heat. Whether it's with Indian and Szechuan sauces, chile glazes and jams, or Jamaican jerk pastes, chefs are incorporating flaming hot flavors.

- Appetizers and snacks (think wings, poppers, and nachos) are an ideal category to experiment with adding global notes.
- Adding chile-based ingredients to creamy dressings, vinaigrettes, and sauces is a simple way to boost the flavor of salads and dippable hors d'oeuvres. Pair with recognizable flavors like peanut butter, cilantro, cream, and mayonnaise.
- The Nashville hot chicken trend has evolved into the vegetable arena, with cauliflower, broccoli, and winter squashes being battered, fried, and dipped.
- Korean gochujang, Japanese wasabi, and Cajun cayenne crystals are being paired with sweet fruit flavors (think mango, strawberry, and watermelon) and mixed into cocktails and alc-free beverages to give customers an extra buzz.

The Hot List

- Chili Crunch
- Bento Box Packaging
- Ghost Kitchens 2.0
- Whole Branzino
- Honey Butter Spuds
- Cabbage & Chicory Salads
- Cauliflower "Wings"
- Drive-Through Tasting Experiences
- Labor-Saving Pre-Cut Vegetables
- Strong Brand Identity
- Elote/Esquite/Mexican Corn Dishes
- Shiso
- Themed Meal Packs
- Innovative Comfort Foods
- West African Recipes
- Fast Food Remodels
- Global Citrus
- Take & Bake
- Pop-Ups
- No-Touch Ordering/Payment
- Sous Vide Preparations
- Umami Through Seaweed
- Menu Optimization
- Creative Donuts
- Virtual Food Halls
- QR Codes
- DIY Pizza Kits
- Plant-Based Sauces
- Chef Videos & Recipe Cards
- Interactive Social Media
- Photo-Centric Menus
- Earth Positive Sourcing
- Tots with Dipping Sauces
- Food Waste Reduction
- Produce-Packed Beverages
- Backdoor Takeout Windows
- Immunity Boosters
- Delivery! Delivery! Delivery!

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- **Trends**—forecasts what is on the culinary horizon four times per year.

Gen Z: The Ones to Watch

Deepening ties to customers is a critical step during this social distancing era. As Gen Z comes of spending-power age, they are the group to look to for what and how diners want to experience their meals, whether inside, outdoor, or off premise.

- This generation is the most interactive age group yet—and with their widely shared posts can reach new customers. Be sure to highlight your menu offerings, specials, and social engagement in fun, creative ways via media platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, and Snapchat.
- Health and freshness factor heavily into this age group's decision-making process. Colorful produce like pink dragon fruit and crunchy bok choy taste delicious and make online photo shares pop. Skip preservatives and artificial flavors as they prefer key search words being organic, natural, and plant based.
- Grab & go convenience was their preferred mode even before the pandemic. Make ordering, and pick up/delivery as easy as possible to earn repeat customers.
- They are frequent snackers and order more appetizers and shareables than large main courses. Stack your small bites menu with their go-to choices such as bowls (grain, acai, and poke), avocado (and other) toasts, creative pizza/flatbreads, fermented foods, and fizzy fruit drinks.
- Gen Z opt for brands they can trust. Broadcast your sustainability efforts, community support, and socially responsible practices.
- This is the most ethnically diverse generation with a high percentage of vegan, flexitarian, gluten-free, and adventure-seeking eaters. Keep that in mind when menu planning.

Sources:

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