

2024 Top 10 TRENDS

TOP 10 TRENDS

ON THE MENU



1

WEST AFRICA IS READY TO RISE

For decades, the culinary heritage of West African nations has simmered in this country, keeping to the periphery in a low and slow burn. But as high-profile ambassadors for the cuisines of Ghana, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria and other West African countries showcase their signature ingredients, flavors and dishes in traditional and eclectic formats, interest in the foods of this region is catching fire across America. Creative applications starring fonio, jollof rice, yassa, maffé and suya abound, serving as the leading edge of opportunity and demonstrating a long runway for exploration.

Vegetable Maffé with West African peanut curry, seasonal vegetables and jasmine rice
—*Mawa's Kitchen, Aspen, Colo.*



2

AS THE PENDULUM SWINGS: IT'S TALLOW TIME

Fat is back as the nutrition pendulum swings in its favor. And tallow, the luscious ingredient produced from rendered beef fat, is a fat enjoying a particular culinary resurgence thanks in part, perhaps, to a rebellious reaction to the unrelenting attention on plant-forward eating. Regardless of the specific drivers at work, chefs and mixologists alike are bringing back tallow as a flavor builder and premium callout, applying it to a dizzying array of menu items, from bread boards and sauces to vegetable sides and cocktails. Providing flavor indulgence to guests through ingredients like tallow has moved beyond permissible—it may be a menu imperative.

Tuna Crudo with beef fat-shallot vinaigrette, veal aioli and crispy capers
—*Rose Mary, Chicago*



3

THE VIET CAFÉ IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Vietnam's vibrant coffee culture is making inroads in the U.S., with cafés like Seattle's Hello Em and Càphê Roasters in Philadelphia introducing consumers to classic and craveable offerings from the Southeast Asian nation. Coffee drinks may take center stage—such as the iconic and decadent Vietnamese egg coffee—but they are supported by a food menu that holds broad appeal, featuring variations of the banh mi, banh xèo (crêpe), egg and chicken sandos, and pastries like pork floss-cured egg fluff bread. There's broad opportunity for tapping into the growing affinity for such niche offerings.

Salted Brulée Cà Phê: Phin-brewed Vietnamese espresso and condensed milk, topped with salted cream cold foam and torched brown sugar
—*Càphê Roasters, Philadelphia*



4

SALADS: ALL DRESSED UP WITH SOMEWHERE TO GO

Salads are reclaiming their position on modern menus, no longer taking a backseat to bowls but applying lessons learned from the competition about nuanced flavor-building techniques. Mindful approaches to all elements are the name of the game, but salad dressings are proving particularly prime opportunities for differentiating innovation. Forward-leaning concepts are showcasing the possibilities in dressing development, ranging from impactful ingredient combinations to the creative vegan twist to the reimaged classic—all made in an effort to push flavor boundaries in exciting new directions.

Charred Kale and Little Gem Lettuce with masa miso, pan árame crumbs, burnt onion vinaigrette and Cotija
—*Bacalar, Austin, Texas*



5

HAWAII-INSPIRED IS PARADISE FOUND

The diverse and complex culinary narrative of our nation's 50th state is making moves across the mainland as Hawaii-inspired fare brings a welcome breath of aloha spirit to menus. Drawing a distinction between native recipes and the dishes embraced by locals throughout the islands is a critical guardrail in framing flavor exploration with respect and authenticity, but the wide range of ingredients and signatures—from kalua pork and huli huli chicken to plate lunch and malasadas—are all fair game for spot-on renditions and fresh translations.

Sloppy Koo with sweet tomato-stewed Black Angus, grilled pineapple and Asian slaw on a Hawaiian bun
—*Daytrader Tiki Bar & Restaurant, Seaside, Fla.*



6

MSG: THE COMEBACK KID

Unjustly sidelined for decades, MSG is poised for a major revival thanks to new research and the swelling ranks of ardent champions who embrace its umami-boosting properties. Positioned as a foundation ingredient, high-impact menu callout or tabletop seasoning, MSG adds flavor complexity, depth and balance to a wide range of applications. The spectrum of opportunity stretches from conventional soups and sauces to modern menu innovations that tap global influences and plant-forward trends. It's simply smart strategy to help usher in the next chapter in MSG's flavor narrative.

Fried Clams seasoned with MSG, salt, powdered kelp, powdered shiitake mushrooms, black pepper, Sichuan peppercorn and sugar
—*All That Fish + Oyster, Boston*



7

THE TORTILLA'S TIME HAS COME

Moving from muted background player to star performer, the tortilla is enjoying a long-overdue spotlight as attention is paid to its flavor and texture characteristics, looking beyond its fundamental capability to carry craveable fillings. Today's chefs are homing in on heirloom varieties, compelling origin stories, artistic presentations and regional specialties, giving the tortilla greater menu prominence. Social media has helped to froth up excitement here, in particular calling out the ingenuity and visual appeal of tortillas that boast a rainbow of varied colors and patterns. Playing into this zeitgeist is just one opportunity to leverage tortillas as a means of standing out from the competition.

Black Bean Tetela & Two Eggs topped with California queso fresco, pickled onions, jalapeños and salsa verde
—*Milpa, Las Vegas*



8

SCANDI-STYLE COMFORT IS CALLING

In Sweden, the word "fika" defines the act of sitting with friends, family or colleagues, enjoying a coffee or tea with something sweet or savory on the side. In the U.S., Scandinavian-inspired bars and cafés are bringing this concept to life, offering bright modern fare presented with culinary accents that evoke the distinctive culinary heritage of this region. Pure, seasonal ingredients offer a minimalist but assertive flavor approach, driving intrigue to learn more about smørrebrød, aquavit, gravlax and many other Scandinavian culinary touchstones.

Broder Bord: House-cured gravlax, curried egg salad, chèvre, Havarti, beet-pickled egg, crackers, Nordic rye and housemade granola parfait
—*Broder, based in Portland, Ore.*

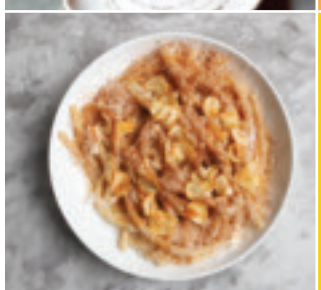


9

DRINK IN MEXICAN-INSPIRED MIXOLOGY

When it comes to contemporary beverage innovation, Mexican-inspired creations are a surefire bet. American consumers provide a ready fan base, demonstrating a passionate following for everything from modernized margaritas to newer discoveries like mangonada and horchata. The depth of opportunity here cannot be overstated, with an abundance of ancillary ingredient support coming from the Mexican pantry for both boozy and non-alc development. Think aloe vera as a flavor accent; house-infused tequilas for next-level flavor and color; and lesser-known Mexican spirits for unexpected flavor notes.

Chilosa Cocktail with green chile-infused gin, cilantro, lime, coconut and gol gav zaban, a Persian flower tea
—*Movida Lounge, San Francisco*



10

CINNAMON TAKES A SURPRISING TURN

Cinnamon's warm and comforting profile makes it a trusted favorite, but its familiarity may have inhibited its culinary potential, until now. Cinnamon is poised to break big beyond expected sweet-centric builds and make major menu moves. Global flavor systems like Vietnamese pho, Middle Eastern shawarma, Indian garam masala and Mexican mole prove cinnamon's flavor-building potential, encouraging further exploration. Today, chefs and bartenders are looking to cinnamon as both an unexpected "Wow!" factor and a trusted gateway that invites trial of less-familiar ingredient pairings.

Spinach Campanelle with lamb Bolognese featuring cinnamon, garlic, coriander, green cardamom, cayenne, smoked paprika and lemon juice
—*The National, Telluride, Colo.*

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GEORGE LOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY



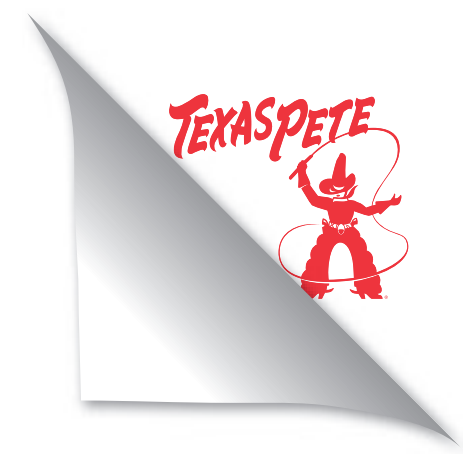
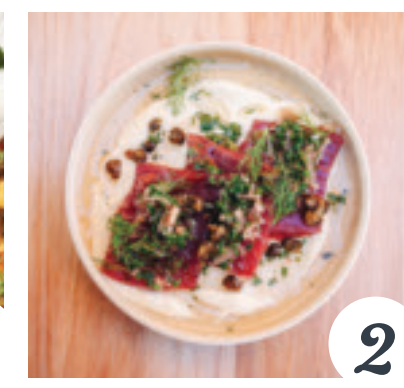
Süti & Co. in Boulder, Colo., specializes in Scandinavian sweets like shortbread cookies made with Danish butter, Cardamom-Rosewater Olive Oil Cake and a Cardamom-Orange Latte.

ON TREND: *A Case Study in Fika*

There's been much discussion in recent years around filling the consumer need for a "third place," a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1989, which refers to a social environment that is a welcome escape from home and work. With professional and personal schedules melding into new individualized routines, the afternoon hours have become prime time for quick breaks and social gatherings. Although it's tempting to make this time block a happy hour, that doesn't always scratch the itch for a little escape, a little treat and a little time.

With the wave of Scandinavian cafés gaining momentum across the U.S., the Swedish "fika" concept is a welcome response to the rising demand for third places. Loosely translated as "coffee break," it's an intentional pause to stop and enjoy coffee or tea and indulge in a sweet treat—a far cry from the usual dash to the nearest Starbucks for a caffeine fix.

Süti & Co., a Scandinavian-style café in Boulder, Colo., offers a case study in the modern approach to fulfilling today's growing desire for well-crafted, trend-forward menus. Chef/Owner Andrea Uzarowski celebrates her family's Danish recipes with beverages like the Cardamom-Orange Latte and sweets like the olive oil cake, infused with cardamom and glazed with rosewater, and a sampler of Danish shortbreads, ranging from a chocolate shortbread filled with ganache and dipped in melted chocolate to a vanilla bean shortbread filled with toffee pieces. Her menu does more than just offer a sweet snack. Süti, and other new places like it, offer a welcoming respite. It has carved out opportunity, answering modern lifestyles with a feel-good aesthetic and cozy vibe. Uzarowski sees it as filling a gap in the market. "One of the first things I missed when I moved to the U.S. was the lack of desserts that aren't the typical overly sweet ones," she says. "I missed being able to have a small treat with a great cup of coffee in the middle of the day." She's clearly onto something, with Scandi cafés and other global café cultures helping us slow down and rethink the value proposition of snacks, sweets and beverages like coffee and tea. ☕



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