

BEHIND THE TRENDS

Hard to believe, but it's time again for our second annual Top 10 Trends issue. For me, the fear of a "sophomore slump" was tangible. As we geared up for our second edition of this special issue, I couldn't see any way we could top last year's inaugural edition, filled with spot-on trend tracking and predicting, and packed with hundreds of expert insights and take-them-and-run menu ideas from some of the country's top R&D consultants. How could we possibly match those initial efforts?

Well, my fears were for naught. Again this year, we worked closely with Joan Lang, our writer and all-around menu savant, to identify the forces that will build menu momentum in the year to come. With more than 25 years of journalism, editing and culinary experience, Joan is our go-to expert, whether the question is where to get the best Italian food in Boston or what sauce she's seen on at least 10 different menus in the past month. Her insatiable interest in menu development is matched by her ability to track culinary inspirations through to a variety of industry influences.



JOAN LANG

This year's trends range from the aspirational — elegant cocktail creations, desserts spiked with daring and unexpected savory elements, global street food — to the homey: Eggs are making a strong comeback, slow cooking is gaining steam and an ultra-simple culinary approach makes farm-fresh food dazzle.

Like last year's list, this year's Top 10 deliver far more than mere ingredient forecasts or pithy predictions. We delve into why and how these trends can influence menus in every segment of our industry. Each page is bolstered by further insights and commentary from influential chefs, operators and menu developers in the trenches, the ones making real changes, whether in hundreds of units across the country or independent, stand-alone restaurants. To provide an even clearer picture of our trends in action, we expanded our team of operators to include a greater cross section of multi-unit professionals and independent menu innovators, as well as a smattering of experts in other aspects of the industry, like contract feeding and retail.

Each of our trends is followed by the kind of "try this now" menu-development ideas you've come to expect from *Flavor & The Menu*. Here, our talented panel of seven R&D experts provides tips and techniques that can bring these food and beverage trends to life on your menu quickly and easily.

So, even if you don't believe a savory dessert has any place on your menu, you can still learn other ways to add excitement to your sweets, whether by offering interactive dessert opportunities, like dips and sauces, as Todd Downs suggests, or by trying new combinations of hot and cold desserts, as Robin Schempp advises.

We've been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and generosity we've experienced, both with operators wanting to chime in on our trends and in the thoughtful menu ideas our culinary consultants have provided. We thank everyone for their input.

This time of year also brings the unavoidable resolution talk. My resolution for 2008 is to work smarter, not longer. I'm sure there's a whole step-by-step regimen to go along with this catchy phrase, but to my mind, working smarter means finding and using the right information to cut down hours at work and shorten the time between an idea and a fully executed plan of action.

This issue can help you work smarter. Whether you read it from cover to cover or pick and choose among trends that strike a chord, I promise you will find culinary inspiration, executable ideas and the reinforcement you need to efficiently create new craveable outcomes in months to come. Here's to a flavorful 2008!



Kathy Hayden

Kathy Hayden, *Managing Editor*