

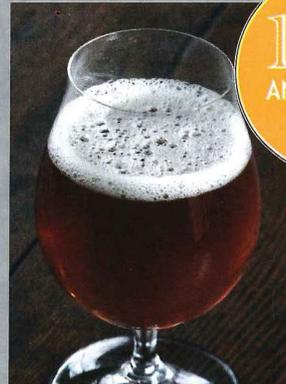
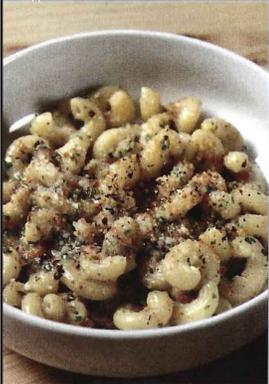
FLAVOR TRENDS, STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS FOR MENU DEVELOPMENT

# FLAVOR & THE MENU

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inspire big-idea innovation and to deconstruct trends into a relevant context that helps build brands. Services include focused original research with custom crafted professional and consumer panels, innovation labs and a wide range of culinary marketing services. Culinary Visions publishes Conference Beat reports throughout the year that identify trends spotted at leading domestic and international food and beverage trade conferences. [sharon@culinaryvisions.org](mailto:sharon@culinaryvisions.org)  
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# TOP 10 TRENDS

2016

INFLUENCING FLAVOR & MENU DEVELOPMENT

# TOP 10 TRENDS

2016



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## FLAVORED BUTTERS

With big, bold flavors continuing to dominate, butter offers a familiar canvas for adventure. From miso to maple butter, chefs are discovering ways to dial up condiments and components alike.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Asparagus with sesame-miso butter —*Takito Kitchen, Chicago*
- ▶ Dry-Aged Bone-In Ribeye with gochujang butter —*Succotash, National Harbor, Md.*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

Either a simple value-add or a premium upgrade, a pat of flavored butter is transformational. Potential here is endless, from signature bread service to a memorable finish on grilled meats.

“Butter is a smart area of innovation for operators because more customers make subtle judgments about restaurants based on the quality of condiments. Flavored butters are a safe experimentation for customers. Miso butter is an interesting example; butter is not often seen in Asian cuisines, yet it is captivating. Menu developers might also think of flavored butters as an easy way to get consumer feedback on flavors being considered for LTOs or new menu items.”

-Sharon Olson



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## NEW COMFORT BASES

Flavor innovation meets comfort food in modern iterations of hash, chilaquiles and savory porridge. With deft culinary upgrades, there is rich opportunity for menu distinction in any daypart.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Smoked Brisket Hash: Seasoned potatoes, smoked beef brisket, fresh garlic, roasted kale, roasted onion, cage-free eggs any style, maple barbecue sauce—*First Watch, multiple locations*
- ▶ Braised Pork Chilaquiles with fried egg, lime, cilantro and queso fresco —*The Bristol, Chicago*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

With comfort food always in demand, these three “new” carriers offer modern platforms for signature builds, including global mash-ups and eclectic combinations. Each of them moves easily into any daypart, too.

“Classic comfort bases can span all dayparts as consumers define what they want to eat by their taste of the moment rather than the traditional time of day. This trend allows operators to be creative with items that are already in their pantries to create flavorful new renditions of classic comfort food.”

-Sharon Olson



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## VEG-CENTRIC CUISINE

Produce is now garnering serious attention, with chefs coaxing out high-impact flavors through cooking techniques and ingredient combinations. Protein interplay is welcome here, adding richness and depth.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Roasted Veggies with bulgur, yogurt and za’atar—*Wassail, New York*
- ▶ Blistering Blue Lake Green Beans tossed with Thai basil, chile sauce and crispy pork —*MB Post, Manhattan Beach, Calif.*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

With veg-centric dishes securing craveable status through high-heat cooking and flavor play, chefs can successfully move them into bar snacks, shareables, elevated side dishes, sandwich and taco builds, and more. Creative menu development relays both health and wellness cues and an on-trend modern sensibility.



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## SOFT CHEESES

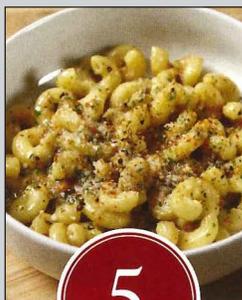
Riding the burrata wave, chefs are discovering the menu possibilities of soft cheeses like mascarpone, stracchino and ricotta. Used as flavor accents, a little dollop adds dairy-fresh flavor and creamy texture, and premium, fresh-from-the-farm cues.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Crispy Heirloom Potatoes, salsa verde, smoked mascarpone, soppressata piccante —*Graffiato, Washington, D.C.*
- ▶ Wood-Grilled Hamburger with burrata, pickled green tomato, bacon —*Deli at Little Dom's, Los Angeles*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

Soft cheeses offer an upgrade on everything from veg-centric dishes to flatbreads. With ties to artisanship and perishability, they help tell a “fresh, less-processed” story that so many consumers look for today.



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## NEW ITALIAN AMERICAN

Italian food, America's favorite cuisine, is finally being pried open for innovation by chefs in this country. With American culinary ingenuity, seasonal touches and eclectic mash-ups, Italian food is getting a modern facelift.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Braised Lettuce Bruschetta with English peas, spring garlic and burrata—*Alimento, Los Angeles*
- ▶ Sweet Italian Grits with bacon-Sriracha sauce —*Flour Restaurant, Cleveland*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

As consumers yearn for the “what's next?” when dining out, innovating around a beloved, well known cuisine adds a fresh, hip vibe to menus. Modern mash-ups, regional sensibility and eclectic updates bring menu distinction to a cuisine that already has a stamp of approval.

“Soft cheeses of all types are readily available, and there is a significant opportunity for house-made cheeses in this category that can differentiate a restaurant from its competition. Taking advantage of this trend is as easy as substituting a soft cheese in place of another variety, or in place of a soft-cooked egg on a regular menu item.” -Sharon Olson

“Moles in particular give an operator a chance to enhance the diversity of Mexican flavors on the menu. When one thinks of mole, it evokes the wonders of the state of Oaxaca—a word not easily pronounced, but made familiar and desirable by distinguished culinary guides like Diana Kennedy and Rick Bayless.” -Sharon Olson



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## CITRUS ON FIRE

Forward-thinking chefs are applying the flavor of fire to citrus, giving it depth, smokiness, savoriness and terrific eye appeal. From torched blood orange segments to blistered lemon wheels, this trend is making a quick path into all menu parts, including beverages.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Roasted Beets with charred orange marmalade vinaigrette and toasted pistachio —*Bridge Club, Raleigh, N.C.*
- ▶ Fried Calamari with Mama Lil's peppers, grilled lemon aioli, chimichurri—*Boka, Seattle*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

Grilled, charred, blistered, torched or embered citrus yields flavor nuance with wow factor. From upgrading iced tea to infusing fresh flavor into grilled meats, it's a beautiful way to deliver a signature difference.



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## MODERN MEXICAN

Chefs are looking to Mexican flavors and ingredients, melding them into their non-Mexican themed restaurants without apology or explanation. With these flavor-forward elements, they're creating exciting, modern American fare.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ “Cochinita Pibil” Hummus, pickled onion and charred pita —*Son of a Butcher Tavern, Chicago*
- ▶ Stella's Pork Carnitas: Pork shoulder slow-cooked in Stella Artois, smoked Gouda-sweet potato mash, pineapple-habanero salsa—*Comida, Denver*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

With global mash-ups pulling from far-flung, exotic places, this trend has familiarity locked up. With brilliant touches like fiery chile peppers, complex moles and versatile tortas, there's huge potential here.

# TOP 10 TRENDS

2016



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## FRIED CHICKEN

Culinary pedigree has reached out to fried chicken, where chefs are now tinkering with batters, brines and butters to make fried chicken new again. From Asian-inspired to eclectic tweaks to the Southern classic, there's no end to the possibilities.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Gochujang Fried Chicken with blue cheese and nori chips  
—*Succotash, National Harbor, Md.*
- ▶ Spicy Fried Chicken Sandwich with pickles and Fuku butter, steamed potato roll  
—*Fuku, New York*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

Familiarity, craveability and innovation give this trend huge menu potential. Chefs can express values of craftsmanship and creativity with this American classic, brilliantly updated for modern diners.

"With the rise of 'better QSR' concepts over the past decade focusing largely on burgers, fried chicken is the next comfort-food favorite to be swept up in our food renaissance. Trendy new concepts focused around fried chicken as a flagship item differentiate with signature touches, and affordable price points draw in Millennials and families alike. As 'homemade' becomes a new definition of quality, operators have the opportunity to draw from their own history with a great family recipe or culinary tradition."

—Sharon Olson



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## HARISSA

Sriracha has cleared the path for harissa, a fiery, brightly colored chile paste from Tunisia. With added complexity, chefs are turning to harissa as a high-impact flavor accent in anything from meatballs and burgers to roast chicken and salad dressing.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Grilled Harissa Meatloaf: Turkey, basil, harissa, sun-dried tomatoes, onion  
—*Champps Kitchen + Bar, multiple locations*
- ▶ Lamb Pops with cumin glaze, harissa and spiced cashews  
—*Sable, Chicago*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

As consumers continue to demand big, bold flavors, harissa gives chefs another chile pepper paste in the arsenal. And this one comes with a trending Eastern-Med flavor complexity and a sense of discovery.



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## TEA

Tea is the next big thing in beverage, informing both non-alcoholic and alcoholic drink development. Modern consumers are looking for variety, customization and quality, giving tea the thumbs-up as both a healthful and hip choice.

### MENU EXAMPLES:

- ▶ Jalisco Campfire: Lapsang souchong, tequila, agave, Thai chile and lime  
—*Joule, Seattle*
- ▶ Dalai Palmer Mocktail: Black tea, ginger, honey, Blenheim spicy ginger ale, lemon  
—*Garland, Raleigh, N.C.*

### GROWTH POTENTIAL:

Operators can change up their iced tea offerings, adding fruit purées and syrups, or perhaps turning them into sparkling options. Or they can lend depth to boozy drinks, putting yet another spin on the hot cocktail culture.