

## Cultural expansion in the industry

July 19, 2023 By John Unrein



Tarit Tanjasiri of Crema Artisan Bakers in Irvine, California, shares how his 17-year-old retail bakery transformed its business model to stay afloat. Tanjasiri offered tips on expanding your wholesale bread business, “We need more space,” he says. “That is our No. 1 issue.”

A rapid expansion of Asian, Hispanic and bakery products from other countries is fueling a significant business opportunity across America. Some 12% of all restaurants in the United States now serve Asian food, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis. That share is slightly higher than the 7% of the U.S. population that is Asian American.

Here are some other key takeaways from the analysis, which is based on data from SafeGraph, a data company that curates high-precision data on millions of places around the globe.

More than 15% of all restaurants in Hawaii, California, Washington, Nevada and New York serve Asian food, and each state has a significant Asian American population. Meanwhile, Asian restaurants account for 6% of all restaurants in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and West Virginia.

Around three-quarters of all counties in the U.S. (73%) have at least one Asian restaurant of any kind. And in eight counties with at least 15 restaurants of any type, Asian restaurants make up at least a quarter of all food establishments. Half of those counties are in California.

Some 9% of Asian restaurants in the U.S. offer cuisines from multiple Asian origin groups. Nearly seven in every 10 of these establishments are combinations of Chinese or Japanese food, either with each other (36%) or with some other cuisine: 18% serve Chinese and Thai food, 15% serve Japanese and Thai food and 10% serve Japanese and Korean food.

However, these relationships are not always symmetrical. For instance, 78% of Pakistani restaurants in the U.S. also serve Indian food, but just 10% of Indian restaurants serve Pakistani food.

## Global influences

Across the nation, there are numerous examples of how cultural expansion is dominating the retail and wholesale bakery industries. While local foods have a powerful appeal, international foods and flavors are enticing. Even though global travel has been dampened in recent years, many countries are promoting their culture around the world with culinary diplomacy programs that introduce new foods to consumers at home and away from home. 83% of consumers in this survey said they enjoy exploring new cultures through food.

The newest Culinary Visions 2023 nationwide survey of more than 2,100 consumers found the hectic pace of modern life requires fast fuel as much as personal service and social food-centric experiences. Modern consumers have a powerful sense of culinary adventure when it comes to exploring global foods. The most recent Culinary Visions study finds American consumers continue to be captivated by opposing trends both at home and away from home. The research identified three important areas where food professionals can satisfy and delight their patrons:

Pandemic weary consumers have returned with enthusiasm to immersive experiences like food festivals, street markets and fancy food emporiums where food is both the attraction and the entertainment. 71% of those surveyed in the recent study said they enjoy a food market experience because it is just as much a social occasion as it is a shopping trip.

Consumers will be drawn to trending global flavors like Caribbean cuisines, as well as comfort foods with a twist and charcuterie boards. All of these demonstrate the type of satisfying, shared dining experience that more guests are expected to seek out in 2023. Shoppers are hungry to purchase colorful sweet treats and comforting bakery products that are both nostalgic and inventive.

Milhojas pastries are a wonderful example of an authentic Hispanic dessert that is trending upward. These delicious desserts are stacked with layers of puff pastry and are topped with bountiful slices of colorful fresh fruits – presenting a true showstopper in the bakery cases.

“We are extremely proud of our milhojas pastries,” comments Gissel Miranda, whose father, Gustavo, started Miranda’s Bakery 16 years ago in Woodburn, Oregon, just north of Salem. “We started making them from the start, and now every bakery you walk into around here, they have it.”

Pastries filled with fresh fruits are prominent at Miranda’s Bakery, which offers traditional sweet breads in square shapes with circles of fresh strawberries, blueberries and peaches in the center.

Macarons, cake pops, muffins and even apple pie are bringing local communities together throughout the state, thanks to the imaginative efforts of local panaderías.

Churros are an increasingly popular item for snacking and breakfast, and San Antonio Bakery in Compton, California, makes an inventive breakfast dessert that is popular for parties and morning snacking occasions.

Churro cheesecake is made by San Antonio Bakery’s talented pastry chef Alondra Roman. She starts with a churro coating that covers the top of the rich cheesecake for a delicious flavor.

At Porto’s Bakery, one of the nation’s largest retail bakeries with six locations in Southern California, a greatly popular breakfast item is Cuban-style French toast known as torrijas.

The popular bakery makes torrijas starting with Porto's signature croissant dough topped with guava sauce and accompanied by whipped cream cheese and tropical fruit salad.

"It's all about the flavor," explains Adrian Porto, who manages Porto's newest location in Northridge, California, and is the son of co-owner Raul Porto.

Porto's has gradually grown into six current locations in Glendale, Burbank, Downey, Buena Park, West Covina, and Northridge, with a seventh location in the Downtown Disney® District on the way.

Rosa Porto's Cuban cakes and pastries are now accompanied by Porto's signature Cheese Rolls®, Refugiados® (guava and cheese strudels), and the bakery's famous Potato Ball®, among many other international sweets and savory items.

And just as Porto's Bakery started in Rosa's home back in Cuba, with Porto's Bake at Home, the company now ships most popular pastries and cakes nationwide directly to consumers nationwide.

## **Flavor inspirations**

Tanjasiri started Crema Artisan Bakers as Crema Café, a small breakfast and brunch location on Main Street in Seal Beach, California, in 2006. While serving food, he realized that there was a shortage of artisan sandwich bread and quality French pastries in the area. He started baking in order to fulfill this need for the café. He travelled all over the world to learn and train at French pastry schools and under world renowned bread and pastry chefs. In his pursuit of perfection and excellence, he grew a passion and love for artisan baking. After many years, other cafés and restaurants also wanted fresh baked products for their businesses, so in 2012, he opened Crema Artisan Bakers for wholesale.

Maravilla's Bakery in Salem, Oregon, features new dessert cups presented in a single-serve clear cylinder cup filled with fresh fruit pieces, swirls of chocolate, whipped cream and topped with chocolate and fruit decorations. These elegant dessert cups are featured in the beverage bar of the bakery.

At Maravilla's Bakery, the driving force of current merchandising efforts involves accentuating the traditional favorite flavors and comfort foods, as an after effect of the pandemic.

"We are reinventing the business," points out Alma Maravilla, who runs Maravilla's with her husband, Juan. "The hardest part of the past two years has been to keep our customers. Fortunately, people really wanted to get out and talk to people and get something from the bakery they love."

What the bakery is experiencing now is "let's bring back memories," Alma says.

"Our community is heavily Hispanic. A lot of people can't go back to their hometown, and they come here. We bring people back that emotion of being home. For me, that emotion, that time, you can't compare that to a trend. Those emotions speak louder. As an example, we had a customer come in with their daughter who is just turning 15. We helped her celebrate happy birthday with mariachis. Their daughter was very emotive. It was a special moment. You remember that feeling."

In Brookline, Massachusetts, Danish-Israeli bakery Bakey is bringing babkas, burekas, bread, sandwiches and iced lattes to town at 2Life Communities' Brown Family House at 370 Harvard Street in Brookline. Bakey opened to the public on Friday, May 19.

Situated in the heart of the Coolidge Corner neighborhood across from the Brookline Historical Association Lawn, the bakery is run by co-founders Uri Scheft and Or Ohana, originally from Israel. The pair has operated a Tel Aviv-based bakery chain, Lehamim Bakery, since 2002.

Bakey is attached to the Brown Family House at 2Life Communities, a nonprofit organization leading the way with housing solutions for senior adults. The opening comes as part of 2Life's broader strategy to not only offer affordable, community-nurturing senior living, but contribute to the surrounding neighborhood. Many of the café's patrons consist of 2Life residents and their visitors.

“We aim to be a neighborhood resource everywhere we go, and we are always looking for ways to make meaningful contributions to the local ecosystem” said Amy Schectman, CEO of 2Life Communities. “We love being in Brookline, and so do our residents. By teaming up with inspiring restauranteurs like Or and Uri, we’re excited to welcome neighborhood folks and friends into our space.”

The Brookline location is Bakey’s second in the Boston area, following the 2021 opening of the duo’s downtown location at 151 Tremont Street in Boston. The location marries coziness and minimalism, with walls lined with merchandise and baking books. Among a number of sandwiches, pastries and broad coffee options, Bakey specializes in sweet and savory babkas, a braided bread with roots in Europe, stitched with a sweet filling. Among the café’s best sellers are its chocolate or almond babkas, and spinach and cheese burekas, a flaky triangular puff pastry with Maplebrook Farm feta and cream cheese filling. Bakey baristas use Umbria coffee beans for a full-bodied espresso pull, alongside a number of flavors and milk alternative options.

According to the cofounders, Bakey was born out of a passion for bread and pastries, and the desire to celebrate them at their very best, straight out of the oven.

“We crafted our menu with the goal of serving a great cup of coffee next to out-of-the-oven pastries,” said Ohana. “The chocolate is still gooey, and the cheese is still stretchy. Guests don’t have to worry about whether it’s fresh, whether to heat their pastry up. That’s the way I eat pastries, and that’s how I believe others should too.”

### **Need for space**

Dean Kim of OC Baking Co., Orange, California, has created a community around his bakery. During the pandemic, the company’s headquarters in Orange doubled as a makeshift market, with chefs from Adya, Sessions, Nok’s Kitchen, Cali Dumpling Co., and more setting up tables and selling dishes. Today those pop-ups are ongoing monthly. In the meantime, Kim has worked up a wholesale account list that includes many of the area’s biggest names, including Heritage Barbecue.

Dean Kim points out that if a customer is going to order thousands of pieces a day, or per week, then your answer should be yes. “But the more SKUs you have,” he cautioned, “it can be complicated to manage.”

For the past four years, Crema Artisan Bakers was faced with limited cold storage space, high labor costs driven by repetitive problems, and a high break-even point. “Growth is a matter of survival,” Tanjasiri exclaimed.

So, their bakery began construction on expanding from a 3,800-square-foot warehouse to a 7,800-square-foot facility in four years. It was a complete rebuild. They were pivoting to survive, he said.

Crema Artisan Bakers in Seal Beach was founded by Tarit Tanjasiri in 2006. In 2012, Crema expanded with a wholesale location in Irvine. Disney dessert lovers might recognize its Pop-Tart-inspired hand pies, which are sold throughout the parks in Anaheim. At Artisan by 7 Leaves & Crema Bakery, you can taste most of the bakery items plus the croffle, a croissant-waffle hybrid served with vanilla cream, salted caramel, or jam.