



FOODSERVICE CONSULTANT

As 2020, a year to forget, draws to a close, we look at how to prepare for 2021

As the foodservice sector emerges from months of disruption and devastation, this special global edition examines priorities and possibilities for the New Year

**THIS IS A
HARD TIME,
BUT THE BOTTOM
LINE IS THAT IT
WILL MAKE US
STRONGER. STAY
TRUE TO YOURSELF,
PERSEVERE AND
RETAIN YOUR
TEAM AS MUCH
AS POSSIBLE.
THE TIME WILL
COME WHEN
THINGS WILL
GET BETTER**

Alexander Hofer FCSI

“Going forward, a top priority should be strengthening the P&L and balance sheet”

Don Fox, CEO, Firehouse Subs

“We’ve had to take a magnifying glass to every aspect of our restaurant. It’s provided a time for introspection.

The silver-lining is that we’ve learned to always look forward and appreciate life a bit more. We are in a moment of humanity that will make history”

Ricardo Chaneton, chef/owner, Mono, Hong Kong

“The key requirement is unchanged – to remain focused on customer experience. The requirements may have changed slightly to ensure comfort of guests, but ultimately repeat business and strong recommendation levels will be led by this”

Edward Bircham FCSI

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Better times are around the corner

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. I'm sure that you are all like me: hoping that something good in the way of vaccines is on its way to help rescue the world from this awful problem.

For me, it's been quite a change from living on airplanes weekly, to attending Zoom meetings while sitting in my home office. I know all of you share my feelings on this. Now that the virus seems to be ramping up again everywhere, we are all asking ourselves: "When will we be able to get some sense of normalcy back into our lives?" I, for one, am an optimist who feels better times are not far away, and that we will beat this thing soon. I say to all of you: just hang on a while longer. We'll get there.

In talking to our Worldwide board of directors over the last year we all feel this. We have all seen the resiliency of our membership during tough times. Members helping others survive in various countries around the world where famine has emerged – when children and the elderly have needed help – and the result has been that lives have been positively impacted by their kindness and generosity.

**Let's applaud
who we are and
what we have all
accomplished as
part of the greatest
industry going**

This is who we are. A proud worldwide family of caring and understanding professional colleagues helping each other and helping others in their communities who are in need. In recent surveys that have been undertaken among both Professional members and Allied, one key feature has stood out and that is our members want, more than anything else, the opportunity to meet face-to-face once again; to share the camaraderie and social interaction that we all are known for and enjoy. We continue to plan for this and although these plans have had to be adjusted in an ongoing way, they will happen. I am confident of that.

Our EAME Division plans for an April Conference in the suburbs of Paris have been postponed until June. Our TAD conference in conjunction with the NAFEM show in Orlando, Florida, is planned for August and, god willing, it will go ahead and be a resounding success. Last, but not least, the APD Division continues to plan for a number of shows and exhibits in various parts of their territory. We continue to look forward to these occurring. Let's keep pushing forward and never lose hope that better times are coming, because they are just around the corner.

Finally, in this special global edition, let's applaud who we are and what we have all accomplished as part of the greatest industry going, as worldwide friends and colleagues and members of one of the finest professional organizations on this planet: FCSI. Through our combined efforts we are united in the belief that through supporting one another, we will advance the goals and objectives of who we are as individuals and professionals.



**William Caruso FFCSI (PP)
President, FCSI Worldwide**

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A special connection



**Eric Norman FCSI
Chair, FCSI The Americas**

As we wind down 2020, we reflect on what has been one of the most difficult years that most of us have ever experienced. We've had a front row seat on a rollercoaster of events that have touched everyone on a personal and business level. If anything, the pandemic and the subsequent events have taught us that we are more connected than we realized. The impact of the pandemic has reached every corner of the globe so it is

fitting that we finish the year with this special global issue.

The entire foodservice industry is continuing to bear the brunt of this global event. The summer provided some opportunity for outdoor dining and new creative ways to connect with customers. We are now faced with the reality of the winter months and raging virus numbers.

There is some good news on the horizon though, Pfizer and Moderna have released

positive news regarding their virus vaccines. Both plan to ship the first batches by the end of the year. I am sure this will be welcome news. Hopefully, this will be the first major step to getting things back to normal.

The Holiday season may look different this year but I wish the best for all of you and your families. I am looking forward to the New Year and am hopeful we can all connect in person soon.

What a year 2020 has been. It has impacted our lives, our businesses, and our world in different ways.

Most importantly it has given every one of us the opportunity to stop and think about who we are, what we do, why we do it. And we can also consider what are the most important matters we need to focus on moving forward.

There are three important attributes that have resonated

Lessons learned



**Mario Sequeira FCSI
Chair, FCSI Asia Pacific Division**

with me and I would like to share them with you as we bid farewell to 2020 and look forward with quiet confidence to 2021.

Collaboration: Our FCSI family within each division and globally gives us the amazing opportunity to collaborate with true professionals, constantly sharing our experiences so we can deliver best-in-class outcomes for our clients.

Diversification: the saying:

“Don't put all your eggs in one basket” rings truer than ever. With the ever-evolving needs and expectations of our clients, diversification permits our businesses to remain relevant and sustainable.

Good health: This is by far the biggest, most important lesson we have learned. Maintaining both our physical and mental well-being gives us the best chance of success and – together – making our world of better place.

Another reality



**Remko van der Graaff FCSI
Chair, FCSI Europe, Africa, Middle East**

While I write these words, there is a second lockdown in Europe, the US presidential election is behind us and we move towards Christmas and 2021.

Just one year ago I was enjoying a two-month vacation with my wife in Australia, New Zealand and Bali. I was blessed that we could take this great trip. One year later and we live in another reality.

Although it is difficult to look into the future, I hope that

as we start the first quarter of 2021 the sun will shine for all of you. I hope everyone is healthy and safe, and that you and your family can connect.

Meanwhile we meet each other via Zoom meetings and in digital webinars and are connected as much as possible. I have joined several FCSI events around the world and the FCSI EAME board has never been so connected as we now are. We have weekly meetings to set up digital

events, we invest time in the Middle East area and are discovering new local units in the Eastern Europe. The FCSI EAME Conference in Paris has been rescheduled from April 2021 to June 2021, depending on the pandemic.

I would like to say thanks to all of you for your interest in FCSI EAME in 2020. I wish you all a lovely, warm Christmas with family and friends and hope to meet you face-to-face in 2021.

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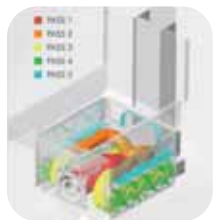


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CONTENTS

NEWS & VIEWS

3 WELCOME LETTERS
From your FCSI Worldwide president and regional chairs



8 ONLINE ROUNDUP
Find out about additional content on the fcsi.org website

12 AROUND THE WORLD
What's going up around the globe



14 THE INTELLIGENCE
Grégoire Michaud (right) is part of the Talkback panel pondering how foodservice will thrive post-Covid. We consider ways in which al fresco dining can help restaurants, although The Secret Chef regretfully stands by the decision to remain takeout only



15



38

FEATURES

38 Masaki Sugisaki
Chef Masaki Sugisaki tells Tina Nielsen about building his career while navigating the cultures of Japan and the UK on a quest for "the wow"

44 The FCSI interview
Cini-Little International's Dick Eisenbarth FCSI tells Michael Jones about a career dedicated to solving design puzzles and helping people

48 Company spotlight
Equipment manufacturer Salvajor believes in getting things "right the first time," general manager Arnold Hernandez tells Amelia Levin

66 Operator profile
German Doner Kebab must be doing something right. It is expanding from its German homeland to locations all around the world

COVER STORY

55 Foodservice 2021: The checklist
Tina Nielsen talks to foodservice professionals from a variety of sectors all around the world. The disastrous year of disruption and devastation is

acknowledged, but more typically of this resilient and innovative industry talk soon turns to working out the priorities and possibilities for the future. Under discussion is sustainability, new technology, local responsibility, revisiting equality and more stable finances

"Off-premise channels and having a solid digital platform have risen to the top of the priority list"



WORLDWIDE

THE AMERICAS

ASIA PAC

EAME

WORLDWIDE

THE AMERICAS

ASIA PAC

EAME

74 Project: Bottles & Bones

FCSI Associate Joey Navarro tells Karen E. Thuermer that team work was key to pulling off the bold concept at this beautiful new restaurant in Suwanee, Georgia

78 Project: Jackalope Hotel

Andrew Brain FCSI of MTD Hospitality Consulting tells Tina Nielsen about his team's work on the stunning Melbourne hotel's food and beverage facilities

82 Project: Cane Rum Society

Consultant Johan Öberg Larsson FCSI, owner and CEO of Storköksbyrån, tells Jamie Fullerton how he and his team brought a taste of the Caribbean to Stockholm, Sweden

96

87 City focus

This issue we explore the city by the bay. San Francisco has a lively and diverse food scene and has kicked off a few notable trends of its own

92 Teetotal trend

With health and wellbeing to the front of our minds, Melinda Joe examines how the Asia Pac region is embracing low- to no-alcohol drinks

96 Flight plan

Travel bans and grounded planes have had an impact on the airline catering sector of foodservice. Andrea Tolu looks at the future of in-flight food



87



82

92



INNOVATION

103 Camera technology

Jim Banks explores how artificial intelligence and facial recognition innovation is bringing cameras into the front line of foodservice

108 Power over Ethernet

PoE offers the convenience of power and data provided over a single cable connection. But how can it be harnessed for hospitality?





DDC video



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BRIEFING

112

Relaxing rules

Rule changes easing the way for hospitality's recovery

116

Digital connections

A strong website is a must have for foodservice businesses today

122

Take a deep breath

Covid-19 has made ventilation and air sanitation a top concern

126

China gets through

The world watches China's postpandemic recovery

131

Backing Beirut

Beirut's path back to normality after its devastating port blast

134

Consultancy focus: TAD

After 30 years, William Caruso & Partners has become YoungCaruso

138

Consultancy focus: APD

Brandon Kua FCSI is winding up Citrus Consult to join Kitchen Inc

142

Consultancy focus: EAME

French firm BEGC prides itself on a personal approach to each project

146

My kitchen

Lenny Martinsen, executive chef, Mercedes-Benz Superdome, New Orleans



122



131



126

DIGITAL UPDATES

A wealth of extra content is waiting on the *Foodservice Consultant* website. Go to fcsi.org for digital-only interviews, regular blogs, event coverage and expert analysis of the latest industry news. You can also sign up to the *Foodservice Consultant* weekly newsletter, a comprehensive roundup of the stories affecting the global food and beverage industry. The *Foodservice Consultant* app is also available on Apple and Android devices. Top online stories include:

- FCSI's highly successful 'In My View' video series continues, with new interviews with leading FCSI

Professional member consultants from across the world.

- Regular blogger Marius Zürcher, co-owner & founder of start-up 1520 in Apeldoorn, Netherlands, predicts the key trends in foodservice and hospitality he believes will dominate, post-pandemic.



- FCSI Associate John Reed, writes why operators – in cooperation with suppliers, manufacturers, consultants and the media – must change, not just restaurants, but also non-commercial foodservice, to share best practices.

- Future episodes of FCSI's Sustainability Lowdown podcast will address the issues of food waste and energy efficiency. 'Sustainability' is the theme of FCSI EAME's 2021 Conference in Chantilly, Paris (pictured left), which will see a full audit of the event's carbon footprint, presented by Progressive Content's Cameron Sharpe.

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WORLDWIDE

THE AMERICAS

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GETTY IMAGES

AROUND THE WORLD

Here's a selection of some of the leading construction projects being planned and built across the globe

POST Houston, Texas, US

Architect **OMA**
Builder **Harvey Builders**
Opens **2021**

POST Houston will transform a former United States Postal Service (USPS) facility on the northwest edge of Downtown Houston into a new commercial and cultural anchor. The mixed-use building – large enough to fit four Boeing 747 aircrafts – will have three distinct thoroughfares running from south to north through it. Each band has a distinct character with a range of experiences, from culture to food to creative workspaces. The bands intersect three levels: a vibrant commercial ground plane featuring a diversity of retail and food; a second level of expansive, interactive and collaborative office space; and a six-acre rooftop park.



Gaité Montparnasse, Paris, France

Architect **MVRDV**
Builder **Egis**
Opens **2021**

MVRDV's restructuring of a large urban block built in the 1970s, comprises a shopping center, offices, a public library, a hotel and an underground car park. Each façade is opened up to light and access as much as possible and replaced by a collection of 'boxes' inserted into the existing structural frame. The majority of these are suspended from the façade revealing the wide range of facilities housed in the building, including bars, restaurants, shops, a library, exterior gardens, living and working spaces.



2 Murray Road, Hong Kong

Architect **Zaha Hadid Architects**

Builder **Henderson Land**

Opens **2023**

Located in the heart of Hong Kong's central business district, the 36-level Murray Road project replaces a multi-story car park to create a modern office building that connects with adjacent public gardens and parks. The design reinterprets the structural forms and layering of a Bauhinia bud about to blossom, which features on Hong Kong's flag. The banqueting hall at the top of the tower, designed to host a variety of public and corporate events, offers panoramic views of the city's surrounding skyline.

KaDeWe Berlin, Germany

Architect **OMA**

Builder **SMV**

Opens **2021**

Historic department store KaDeWe Berlin is getting a makeover courtesy of OMA. Rather than treating the existing building as a singular mass, the project will break it into four quadrants, each one with different architectural and commercial qualities. The existing vaulted rooftop restaurant will be replaced by a compact glass structure extending organically from the profile of the existing building. The rooftop will also feature an open-air courtyard for outdoor events and KaDeWe's food laboratories.



Four Seasons Resort Tamarindo, Mexico

Architect **Legorreta + Legorreta**

Builder **Paralelo 19 Desarrollos**

Opens **2021**

Four Seasons Resort Tamarindo, which is located on a private peninsula along the Pacific Ocean, will house 155 rooms – most of which will offer panoramic ocean views – three pools, a 24-hour fitness center, a young adults club and lounge, a water sports center and tennis courts. The grounds will also offer four dining and beverage venues, including an ocean-view bar and restaurant, beach bar and grill and golf club restaurant.

Welcoming new talent

Ed Norman FFCSI (PP) introduces new board members for the FCSI Educational Foundation, says farewell and thank you to loyal members moving on, and looks forward to 2021

Hard as it is to believe, it has been two years since I took over the presidency of the Educational Foundation. In the words of Grateful Dead: “What a long, strange trip it has been.” After a year of momentum in terms of fundraising and internships in 2019, we hit the proverbial wall in 2020. Like all other foundations, many of our programs have been put on hold. We are making progress toward reinvigoration in the new year with our new class of 2021 executive leadership and directors.

Jay Bravinder of Champion Industries will step into the role of president and I will take over the past president duties from **Nahum Goldberg FCSI**, of NG Associates. Nahum will be leaving the board and we wish him much success going forward.

Jennifer Murphy FCSI of Camacho will take over the role of secretary treasurer.

Below is an introduction to our new director members:



Richard Dieli FCSI, MA, MBA

As design principal at Dieli Murawka Howe (DMH), Richard Dieli has over 45 years of foodservice design experience and has been an FCSI Professional member for 28 years. He prides himself on providing an end-product result that follows the client’s needs and stays within budget. With a background in both operations and culinary the firm’s designs focus on up-to-date use of technology and equipment, efficient flow, and function.



Shaunya Noble

Shaunya Noble has a bachelor’s degree in Culinary Art/ Foodservice Management and Master of Business Administration from Johnson & Wales University. Last year she participated in the FCSI EF program, which included internships at FoodStrategy, Inc. The Vollrath Company, and Goliath Consulting Group. Noble is now working on projects at Goliath, and preparing to open her own restaurant.



Garrett Lennon FCSI

After 20 plus years in the foodservice industry, Garrett Lennon’s background includes operations, management, sales, design and consulting. Lennon joined JLR Design Group, a Seattle-based foodservice consulting firm in 2013 and is now the owner. His consulting experience includes working in all sectors of foodservice and hospitality. When not consulting, he enjoys spending time with his family and attempting to make perfect fried rice.



Kevin Kochman

Kevin Kochman is president and co-founder of KCL, the industry leader in foodservice design technologies. An original digital disruptor, he embraces technology and works to help others do the same. Kochman continues to innovate. He recently launched KCL NapkinSketch, which allows users to create detailed kitchen designs without a CAD or Revit program. When not working, he can be found on the tennis court or cheering on the Cubs.



James H. Petersen Jr FCSI (PP) DFS

Jim graduated from Cornell University School of Hotel Administration and received foundational experience with what was then Cini-Grissom Associates in Maryland. After a brief period as director of engineering at Stainless Equipment Manufacturing Company in Detroit, Jim established C.i.i. Food Service Design in 1979 and became a member of the newly formed FCSI. He served a term on the FCSI board in the 1980s. 20 years later he was elected as an FCSI-TA trustee, then chair of the division. He also served briefly as FCSI Worldwide president upon resignation of the previous president in 2015.

Katharine Mizla, CSI, CDT of Kitchens To Go will continue for a second term as a director. Sadly, **Ed Bernard FFCSI** of Cini-Little International will be leaving the board. We thank him for his wise contributions during his two years of service.

As we move toward 2021 things will improve. We are held to whatever economic and public health situations exist as we go through time. The Foundation will continue to react to whatever circumstances arise, and will hopefully be able to further develop our programs and services in the coming year. ■



TALKBACK

Three foodservice professionals give their views on one question



Grégoire Michaud

Chef, Bakehouse and Bread Elements, Hong Kong

In February 2020 when the Covid-19 situation started to affect our bakery businesses, we went back to the drawing board to see ourselves through this. The question we asked was: “If people can’t come to us, how do we get to them?” As bakers, we are not experts in logistics and distribution, so we started talking to the relevant players in food distribution and supermarkets. We spent most of the year fine-tuning our new model, which will be rolled out in Q1 2021. We have reacted quickly and created a model that will endure for many years to come, even beyond the Covid-19 era.

This pandemic has had a terrible impact on our workers, yet it will give a gigantic push to stagnant industry practices, monopolies and the status quo. It’s time to adapt. The industry needs to rethink its systems and processes. People need to ask themselves the right questions, considering the new needs of the consumer, and taking into account its workforce and how work will be delivered. I hope we revert to more reasonable practices, smaller scale operations with greater customer care – not just focusing on the speed of checking into a hotel or getting food in under a minute, but caring about the whole journey.

Being more holistic in a post Covid-19 world requires deep reflection. The cards of the game are being redistributed.



Sam Ward

Managing director, Umbel Restaurant Group, UK

Crisis management has been the name of the game in 2020. Nobody can say they were prepared to deal with the challenges we faced. As a result, most people haven’t been able to strategize for the coming year in the same way and the foundations of the industry are under threat. Supply chains have also felt the pain and will be rethinking credit terms.

From day one of the first lockdown, we kept operations going, whether it was a meal service providing food to the church, hospitals and vulnerable local residents or delivering produce from Our Farm to people’s doors, or right through to creating Simon Rogan at Home.

It’s difficult to predict what the year ahead will look like, but now it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack. What will tourism be like? Will it be national or international? How will diners respond to eating out? Are we really going to be able to tackle this virus in a way that brings a level of normality again? The biggest challenge is knowing where to invest your time and energy for long-term results.

It’s important to be ready to react quickly and with great volume. Communication with your customers is incredibly important as a way to instil confidence. Don’t sacrifice your ethos and brand – even in the case of a global pandemic – because in the long term it will pay dividends.



Benjamin Lana

President, gastronomy, Vocento Group, Spain

Ever since tourism became a widespread concept enjoyed by the masses in the 1950s, hospitality has expanded non-stop and for some countries, Spain included, it is now one of the most important sectors in terms of economics and employment. Before the pandemic globalization had been of great benefit to the sector, but now, for the first time, this model that relies on global interdependence has left us in misery. The virus has severed the transit of people and, even worse, it has questioned, at least temporarily, one of the main functions of hospitality and one on which we place the global success of societies today: to be the focal point for people meeting and public socializing.

I’d compare the arrival of Covid-19 with the asteroid that crashed to earth and caused the disappearance of dinosaurs. Life continues, but it will be different. This time, the small operators will be replaced by the big ones. The groups that have the financial heft to, first, get through the pandemic, and second, to make the most of the resources in terms of buying, manufacturing and distribution or embrace the challenges of digitalization.

Countries such as Spain, in which the number of hospitality companies was huge, will witness a process of concentration and the more craft-based vision of business might give way to a more professional way of seeing things. Spai has seen the closure of 14% of bars and restaurants and this may increase to beyond 20% by the end of the pandemic.

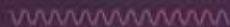
People living in societies immunized by a vaccine within the next few years will once again need those public socializing spaces called bars and restaurants.

How can foodservice thrive in a post-pandemic world?



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KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL

Along with every foodservice operator, **The Secret Chef** had to make some tricky decisions this summer, but they proved to be the correct ones

TOUGH CALLS

At some point in the next week, or so, I will pack up yet another box of takeout food. It won't be any different from the rest save for one fleeting detail that, if you didn't know it, you would miss entirely. Indeed, if my general manager hadn't pointed it out to me, I too would have been unaware that we've now sent close to 10,000 meals out into the world.

I've always been bad at marking significant moments or achievements. Guide inclusions or awards or reviews are noted quietly with a promise to acknowledge the accomplishment further down the line, perhaps when we have a day off together or don't have to work an imminent service. The celebration rarely arrives. Even if such things were marked with vintage Champagne the occasion of packing up 10,000 takeout meals into paper bags doesn't fill me with a sense of triumph.

It is, undoubtedly, an achievement of sorts but I take little joy in the survival of my business and even less in the unspoken secret of the profitability of it, especially as I see friends and colleagues struggling and action groups lobbying for state sponsorship to see our profession through what will be a long and dark and grim winter.

For many, when lockdown restrictions were eased in the summer it was an opportunity to open the doors and embrace the freedom of cooking

and serving, albeit operating under some draconian new measures. For reasons I explained previously, it was with a heavy heart that we continued to operate a takeout only operation.

The grim inevitability of a second wave of restrictions on indoor dining placed a burden on the restaurant during the summer months and there was no way we were going to mothball a successful business for one that carried undue risks, particularly the risk of closure. Furthermore, I realized that financially the business would be worse off due to reduced capacity and night time curfews – both of which would put pressure on the dining room and kitchen.

SHARING FRUSTRATIONS

It was a tough few months. The work remained repetitive and dull without the rush and emotional release of service,

There was no way we were going to mothball a successful business for one that carried undue risks, particularly the risk of closure

which is the payoff for the hard work of prep. I struggled with the notion that we were being left behind, that we were viewed as doomsayers and missing out on the opportunities to adapt and capitalize on the public's lust for dining out after being unable to for so long – a lust that I too had and sated with several glorious (and relatively normal) meals out.

I never resented going into work but was worried I might come close, a concern I also had about my team. From the start we had an honest dialogue and we were all in agreement. We shared the same frustrations, the same anger and the same sense that we had nowhere to vent our passions – we all wanted to cook and to serve food on plates rather than in cardboard boxes. But once a week I'd check in and the consensus remained and so the boxes continued to pile up, now in their thousands, and the plates remained wrapped in plastic.

I desperately wanted to be wrong and take no pleasure in now knowing that I made the correct call but knowing that my business will make it through this crisis intact with a full team and money in the bank does at least allow me to sleep a little more soundly at night. ■

Eating out given new meaning

The pandemic forced foodservice operators all over the world to introduce smart and safe solutions for customers to enjoy outdoor dining

Foodservice operators around the world have come up with innovative ways to continue to serve their customers during the pandemic. For most countries this has meant a move to outdoor dining.

Operators were swift to come up with solutions to keep customers safe from infection and comfortable whatever the weather. A greenhouse solution in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, was followed by igloos in Chicago while others took ownership of their sidewalk or moved on to roof terraces.

In New York City, mayor Bill de Blasio permitted over 10,000 restaurants to set out tables and chairs on the pavements and streets – an emergency measure that is set to become permanent.

In central London in the UK, a scheme that allowed restaurants to use street space for dining was extended, first beyond the summer, then into the fall and operators are now allowed to keep some form of al fresco dining into 2021.

There are examples of the authorities introducing more flexible licensing rules all over the world and for many restaurant operators the chance to implement outdoor dining has meant the difference between survival and closing the doors to the business for good.

This important lifeline to operators has also required an already entrepreneurial sector to think of new solutions – while welcoming people to an outdoor restaurant during the summer has



The Rocky Mountain town of Banff in Alberta, Canada, closed its town center to vehicles and took dining out onto the streets during the summer

been fairly straightforward, winter presents a more challenging scenario.

The prospect of a vaccine allows us to look ahead to a time beyond the pandemic and a return to conditions more similar to pre-Covid times, but this experiment of moving the dining room outside is likely to have longer-term effects. In cities where the cars used to rule, the streets are taken over by people coming together eating and drinking.

With this new space and license to operate, outdoor dining is set to become a more permanent fixture of the foodservice world in the future. And once indoor dining returns at something closer to normal capacity, the outdoor facilities should provide a welcome boost to a sector that has struggled for so long. ■



Ofelia restaurant in The Playhouse in Copenhagen, Denmark, put up greenhouses allowing guests to enjoy the view and dine in splendid isolation



A restaurant in Hanau Am Main in Germany also erected greenhouses in the courtyard, allowing customers to dine "outside" whatever the weather



Streets in Soho, in the West End of London, UK, were closed to traffic and opened up to tables from local restaurants



Business as usual: Chinatown in Bangkok, Thailand, is famous around the world for its street food – and its street dining



Outdoor dining areas in Midtown Manhattan, New York, US, have been allowed to stay, although New York's cold winters do present a challenge



Wuhan, China, was where Covid-19 first came to our attention. As the first area to lockdown, we all watched as Wuhan reopened for business. Wuhan Star Hotel's outdoor dining in May 2020

INDUSTRY NEWS

Robot workforce the future for hospitality

More bartenders and servers could soon be replaced by robots in the future, says a new study from Ball State University. In *How to Build a Better Robot for Quick Service Restaurants*, published in the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Dina Marie Zemke, an associate professor of residential property management in the Miller College of Business at Ball State, found the majority of respondents believe there is no stopping the robotic transformation of the foodservice industry.

"There was a high level of resignation about the inevitability of QSRs incorporating robots during our group interviews," said Zemke, who collaborated on the study with several faculty from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "This finding is similar to the acceptability of routine societal change. Participants felt that the incorporation of robotic technology is a question of when, rather than a question of if."

Zemke points out that robotic technology designed to perform specific physical tasks has emerged as an option for hospitality businesses due to decreasing costs. To buy a hamburger cooking robot costs about \$60,000. However, many industrial service robots, such as robotic vacuums and robotic assembly arms, are leased. A commercial robotic vacuum costs between \$7,000 and \$15,000 to purchase, but is leased at \$4-\$6 per hour of operating time, less than the minimum wage of \$7.25. Plus, the manufacturer or distributor is responsible for all maintenance on the device.



The National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF), the philanthropic arm of the National Restaurant Association, was awarded a five-year, \$9.2m contract from the US Department of Labor to expand the foundation's apprenticeship program. Run in partnership with the American Hotel and Lodging Association and the Multicultural Food and Hospitality Association, the Hospitality-Sector Registered Apprenticeship program allows those who want to enter the industry from all backgrounds to "earn while you learn" and must have at least one pay raise during the term of the apprenticeship. There are currently over 2,500 registered participants in the apprenticeship program across 48 states with a retention rate of 80% across employers. The apprenticeship program's goal is to train applicants to enter the restaurant and hospitality sector with skills to be successful. The contract will enable the foundation to expand the reach of applicants to "increase opportunities for underrepresented populations, including women, veterans, persons currently or formerly incarcerated, youth and minorities" as well as leverage stakeholder resources to support the long-term sustainability of apprenticeship across the industry.

NEW OPENINGS

Townie at W Aspen Aspen, Colorado

Townie is the W Aspen's food truck, which first opened as "Bitsy" this past spring to feed first responders and locals during the Safer at Home pause. The concept, overseen by Chef Jacqueline Siao, became so popular that it is now a permanent fixture and includes expanded café-style seating in front of the hotel. It features great food with riffs on classics like the Cali Club with roasted turkey, crushed avocado, hot house tomatoes, peppered bacon, black garlic aioli and lettuce on sourdough.



Ysidora, San Juan Capistrano, California
Ysidora at Inn at the Mission San Juan Capistrano, Autograph Collection opened in September 2020 and is overseen by executive chef Aaron Obregon and features traditional Spanish dishes with a contemporary twist, crafted from regionally sourced ingredients in a contemporary setting.



Orleans Room, Omaha, Nebraska

Orleans Room is located within the Kimpton Cottonwood Hotel, a fully renovated 205-room property in Omaha's Blackstone District. The hotel is a historic transformation of the former Blackstone Hotel, an iconic fixture in the heart of the city. Orleans Room serves breakfast, lunch and dinner. The hotel is also home to Petit Orleans, a café offering coffee, sandwiches, sweet treats, and more; The Committee Chophouse, a modern steakhouse serving tender aged beef and custom Cesar Salad; and The Cottonwood Room, a charming, mixology-forward cocktail bar with a drink menu full of fresh surprises and tried-and-true classics.



Tin Cup Kitchen + Oyster Bar Virginia Beach, Virginia

Set to open in December, Tin Cup Kitchen + Oyster Bar is a coastal American eatery with an expansive outdoor terrace overlooking Chesapeake Bay. The restaurant, led by established Virginia Beach chef Kevin Dubel – of The Cavalier Hotel and Terrapin – will be housed within new hotel, Delta Hotels Virginia Beach Bayfront Suites, which is designed as a 295 all-suite property. Conservatory at Tin Cup, is a 56-seat outdoor dining and drinking oasis, which will be nestled between Tin Cup, the outdoor pool and Café 2800, a full-service stand-alone specialty coffee shop featuring Starbucks coffee and a variety of freshly made donuts and sandwiches.

Barrio Charro, Tucson, Arizona

Barrio Charro is a collaboration between two Tucson food heroes and James Beard Award nominees – local baker and owner of Barrio Bread, Don Guerra and chef Carlotta Flores, matriarch of the Flores family, which owns the Charro family of restaurants in Tucson, including El Charro Cafe, the oldest family-run Mexican restaurant in the US. This concept was created as a result of Covid-19, designed to respond to the growing demand for more takeout and delivery-friendly food.

Evette's, Chicago

Mitchell AbouJamra and Rafael Esparza, co-chef/owners, open this concept in late September in former Lincoln Park hotdog stand turned light, airy oasis, designed by Siren Betty Designs. Combining Lebanese and Mexican cuisines through a Midwestern lens, co-chef/owners Mitchell AbouJamra (DMK Group, Bistro 110, Sur La Table) and Rafael Esparza (Finom Coffee, Dorian's) thoughtfully source ingredients and prepare each dish by balancing their culinary upbringings with nutritional integrity and big flavors. Evette's is available for takeout and delivery, with limited indoor and sidewalk seating. The sliding front windows are well-suited for food pickup.

Yolan, Nashville, Tennessee

Yolan, from James Beard Award-winning chef Tony Mantuano and wine and hospitality expert Cathy Mantuano, is the signature restaurant at The Joseph, a Luxury Collection Hotel, in Nashville. Its authentic Italian cuisine is a love letter to Italy. There is a five or eight-course tasting menu plus à la carte items such as caviar service complete with burrata, prosciutto, and potato pancakes as well as house-made pastas, fish and meat dishes.

Knife & Spoon Orlando, Florida

Knife & Spoon at The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes, is a new signature steak & seafood restaurant conceived and led by award-winning chef John Tesar, renowned for his innovative meat and seafood techniques.



Mamey & Orno

Miami

A member of *Food & Wine* magazine's "Best New Chefs" class of 2020 and a James Beard Award nominee, chef Niven Patel has added a new restaurant to his Aya Hospitality lineup (Ghee, Erba) with Mamey at the much-anticipated THésis Hotel Miami in Coral Gables. The first to market of two concepts the acclaimed chef is cooking up at the new hotel, Mamey, opened in August. The vibrant concept incorporates a fun cocktail program by Miami's esteemed collective Bar Lab. Inspired by Patel's travels throughout Asia, Polynesia and the Caribbean, Mamey derives its name from the unique fruit while showcasing the exotic flavors and spices commonly found in tropical cuisine. Patel is also planning to unveil Orno, a modern neighborhood restaurant that will focus on top-notch ingredients and wood-fired cooking, classic cocktails and thoughtfully-crafted wine list.

CHAIN NEWS

Hotels are pivoting: get ready for more day-time services. **The Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel Chicago** announced it is offering a Blu Workspace package when offices and co-working spaces remain closed. Day rates are available at \$99 Monday through Thursday from 8am-5pm. Each day-use guest room comes with complimentary Wi-Fi as well access to the onsite restaurant, FireLake Grill House and Cocktail Bar for a quick lunch or after work bite and cocktail. Central location off Chicago's Magnificent Mile and near Millennium Park offers an easy midday walk.

Ruby Tuesday, the Maryville, Tennessee-based chain, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection after closing nearly 300 locations in the past three years, including 185 restaurant closings during the pandemic. **CEO Shawn Lederman said in a statement: "The announcement does not mean goodbye Ruby Tuesday."**



Cracker Barrel announced plans to expand its off-premise business, which has grown by 145% since the pandemic, to include grab-and-go stations in addition to its ongoing curbside delivery program. The chain also announced it will begin trials for a separate catering kitchen, and will be converting some of its front porches to become outdoor dining areas.



Wade Koehler, CAE, executive director, FCSI The Americas

So, anything happen in 2020?

While 2020 has been a new learning experience for all of us, it's also taught us a lot about ourselves. How many of you were regular Zoom or Teams users prior to March? We learned more about our colleagues' personal living spaces than we ever expected.

FCSI The Americas was scheduled to host our biennial conference, Camp FCSI, in Austin, Texas, not once, but twice, before we were forced to cancel it entirely. While it's been a challenging year, there are some positive things, such as new programs introduced in FCSI The Americas. In March, we launched a weekly FCSI TA Happy Hour that allowed all members to interact and learn from each other via Zoom as we began navigating the pandemic together. These weekly sessions were a freeform discussion with a potpourri of topics, ranging from shutdown tactics to cleaning strategies to travel experiences to binge-worthy TV titles.

In August, we transitioned the Happy Hours to monthly and added in a monthly webinar series, BizEssentials, geared toward consultants as they look to rebuild and strengthen their businesses and client relationships in a post-pandemic world. We're happy to announce both monthly webinars will continue in 2021. We're also planning to host our biennial FCSI The Americas Symposium in August prior to the NAFEM Show in Orlando, Florida, and are excited to debut a new weekly podcast series, FCSI On Tap presented by FCSI The Americas, which will debut in January and will feature interviews with FCSI TA members showcasing our consultants' specialties as well as getting to know them a little more on a personal level.

While we have all been affected by Covid-19, we recognize some have been more impacted than others. Our hearts go out to those who have suffered from the virus, lost a loved one, or experienced financial strain. 2020 has definitely been filled with challenges, but I remain optimistic for 2021 and wish you all the best in the year ahead.

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14%



CHICK-FIL-A **DOUBLED THEIR**
WAIT TIME SINCE LAST YEAR TO

9:01

MINUTES



85%

OF ORDER FOR PICK-UP CUSTOMERS
PLAN TO CONTINUE USING THE
SERVICE POST-PANDEMIC

SPEED MATTERS



CUSTOMERS WHO WAIT LESS
THAN TWO **MINUTES** FOR THEIR
ORDER ARE **FOUR TIMES** MORE
LIKELY TO REPEAT ORDER

BEST IN CLASS



CHIPOTLE **BEAT THE QSR**
COMPETITION WITH A
2020 WAIT TIME OF

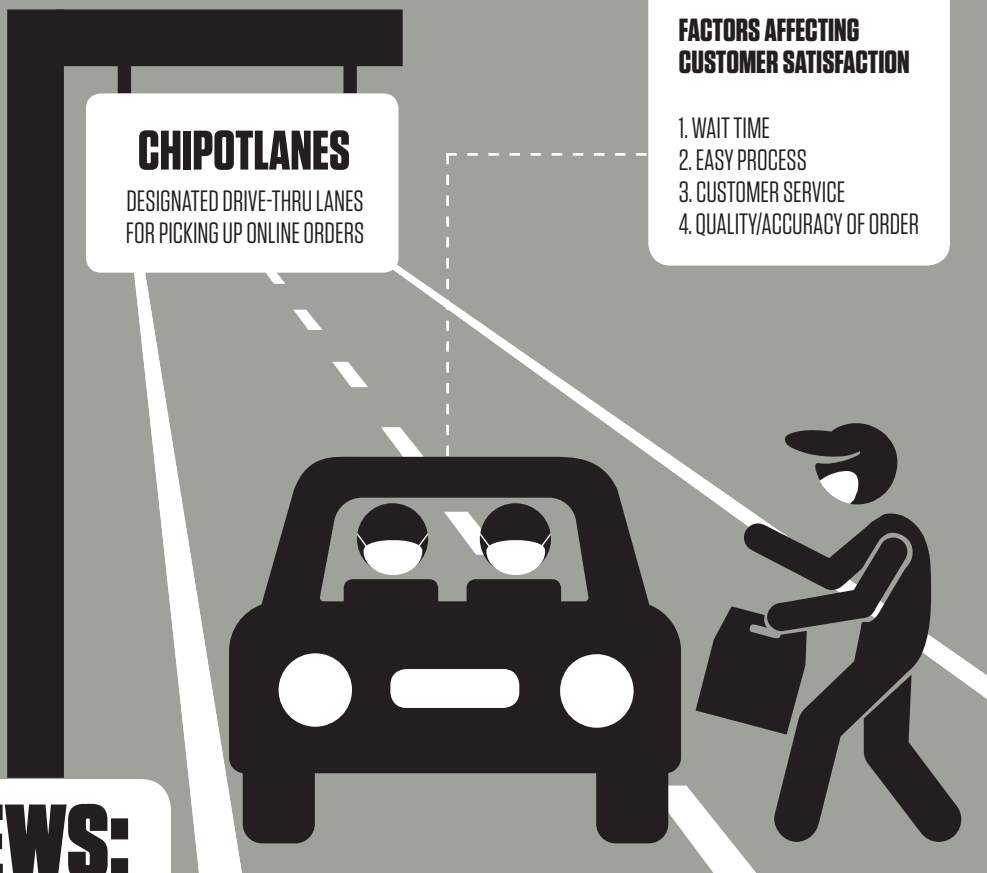
1:34 MINUTES

CHIPOTLANES

DESIGNATED DRIVE-THRU LANES
FOR PICKING UP ONLINE ORDERS

FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

1. WAIT TIME
2. EASY PROCESS
3. CUSTOMER SERVICE
4. QUALITY/ACCURACY OF ORDER



SOURCE: RAKUTEN READY 2020 TIME STUDY

THE AMERICAS

NEWS & VIEWS:

Operators' response to the boom in order for pick up

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Reusable delivery containers

With more people opting for food delivered to their homes during the pandemic, there has been an increase in disposable containers and cutlery usage. An extra 1,334 tonnes of plastic waste was generated during the two-month period of Singapore's two-month circuit breaker when dining in at restaurants was not allowed, and schools and workplaces were closed. The three largest delivery players in Singapore have now made reusable containers an option, hoping to cut down on single-use plastics. Foodpanda rolled out this option with barePack in April and also with Muuse in July, with 48 food businesses on board. GrabFood recently started this with Muuse with 10 restaurants on board. Deliveroo is partnering with barePack, allowing customers to opt for food in reusable cups and boxes. Since October, they had more than 50 restaurants on board.

How does it work? Customers will have to return containers to the restaurants they ordered from – or any participating merchant. Home collection is also offered with barePack and it has a membership option. Foodpanda has noted delivery and pick-up using reusable packaging has tripled in the past six months. Non-members at barePack pay S\$6, which is refunded when they return the containers. There is no time limit but they are limited to borrowing only up to five containers. Muuse charges S\$25 to those who fail to return the containers within 14 days. The F&B businesses will clean containers before reusing them for new deliveries.

These delivery and container sharing companies are keen to grow the number of F&B businesses participating and increase user rates. In so doing, they hope to significantly cut down plastic waste in the future.



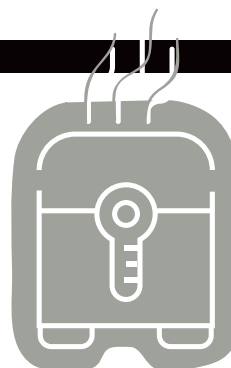
Vietnam's rice imports up

Vietnam earned over US\$2.6bn exporting nearly 5.3 million tonnes of rice in the first 10 months of this year, growing 8.2% in value despite a decrease of 4% in volume year on year according to Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Development. It exported a total of 6.3 million tonnes of rice, earning a total of US\$2.8bn, in 2019. Vietnam recently shifted to exporting higher grade rice such as Japonica, fragrant and sticky rice. Its major export markets include China, Malaysia, and the Philippines. By year end it expects to export a total of 6.7 million tonnes.

Air fryers hot in South Korea

Air fryers are gaining popularity globally, as they provide a healthier way of frying food, as well as the convenience the appliance offers. According to Mintel Asia Pacific's recently released *Food and drink landscape* report, there's a five-fold rise in launches of food products with

the description 'air fryer' between June 2017 and May 2020, driven by South Korea – where there are many air-fryer-friendly-food innovations. One example is the Pulmuone Cheese Crust Cream Cheese Super Deluxe stone baked pizza, created for the air fryer. There is also Shinsegae Food



Olbaan Big Size Gyoza with Lobster. This seafood dumpling is wrapped in thinner, dumpling sheets to make it easier to cook in the air fryer. Furthermore, air fryer related products in South Korea, such as oil spray, rose to 7% of launches globally, up from 1% in the same period a year ago.



Megan Ogier, The Association Specialists (TAS) and secretariat of FCSI Asia Pacific Division (APD)

A year of firsts

FCSI APD has partnered with my company association service provider, The Association Specialists (TAS), we started working with the division on 1 August 2020.

TAS brings a wealth of knowledge and it currently manages over 80+ associations throughout Australia and New Zealand. TAS will oversee aspects of the association, which will enable APD to offer a more streamlined and efficient service into 2021.

Due to the restrictions in place because of Covid-19, we held APD's very first virtual AGM, which was a great success. We will hold virtual meetings on a more regular basis where we can take the opportunity to share, support and inspire each other until we can meet face-to-face again.

We held the first of four planned webinars with our special guest facilitator, Glenn Flood. Glenn is renowned in the realm of foodservice, having worked alongside some of the biggest names in food, including star chefs Jamie Oliver and Heston Blumenthal. The sessions will cover the FCSI ethos of 'share, support and inspire'. The first session focused on sharing and supporting each other through these unprecedented times.

If you have a topic of interest to share at future virtual meetings, please get in touch at apd@fcsi.org.



Mocktails popular in Asia

According to Bacardi's *2020 Cocktail Trends Report*, 83% of bartenders said that low-alcohol options are more popular. Mocktails came up 42% more often in online searches in 2019.

With the US and Europe taking the lead, Asia Pacific is catching up with this trend (see Melinda Joe's feature on sober sipping on page 92). This low-to-no-alcohol market is expected to grow more than 7% from 2019 to 2025.

Singapore was the first in Asia to launch the Heineken 0.0 beer last year. Japan was first to get ex-Noma chef William Wade's non-alcoholic wine, Non. In 2020, Singapore and Hong Kong launched Lyre, alcohol-free spirits.

Health, wellness, and abstinence for religious reasons, or simply not wanting to have a hangover are all driving the growth for the low-to-no alcohol market in Asia.



Impossible Foods expanding to Singapore and Hong Kong

Impossible Foods, the California-based alternative meat company is now available in 200 grocery stores in Hong Kong and Singapore. While the plant-based meat has been available in select restaurants in both cities, this expansion into retail is a big step with consumers able to buy it from supermarket chains ParknShop in Hong Kong and FairPrice stores in Singapore. The demand for plant-based products increased during the pandemic due to meat shortages and beef plant closures. Ramping up its retail presence is part of Impossible Foods' mission to cater to the growing demand for alternative protein options. Impossible Foods' competitor Beyond Meat has signed a deal for a production facility in China by 2021 and plant-based egg producer, Eat Just is set to break ground in building a production unit in Singapore next year, in addition to its current operations in US and Germany. Eat Just's plant-based egg products are already available in South Korea, Thailand, and Hong Kong. However, these plant-based food manufacturers have their eyes on China's vast market. Mainland China accounts for 28% of global meat consumption.

Purple rice yogurt, anyone?

The popularity of purple rice yogurt drink in Asia Pacific has gained traction in Australia, China, and parts of Southeast Asia. Fresh yogurt is combined with purple rice – positioning it as a nutritious, guilt-free drink with a chewy texture. The purple rice has higher levels of protein, fibre, iron, and healthy anti-oxidants compared to white rice.



Hungry for travel

After months of travel restrictions, diners have been grabbing any chance they could for a taste of travel, even if it meant merely eating Singapore Airlines meals on a stationary plane. For two weekends between October 24 and November 1, two A380 Superjumbo planes offered a meal worth S\$642 (US\$480) for the luxury dining experience in a suite or S\$53.50 (US\$40) per person for a tray in economy. All tickets were sold out in less than half an hour. And those who missed it could pay S\$888 (US\$663) for the airline's first-class dining at home, including the amenity kits, tableware, slippers, and delivery.

ASIA PAC

Rise in plant-based diets and vegan bakeries in Asia

While the vegan claims in the bakery are niche, Mintel reports they are growing with Australia leading this area. In 2019, 12% of all food and beverage in Australia carried a vegan claim. This is an opportunity for brands to differentiate products using plant-based protein sources. In Thailand 69% of consumers believe that plant-based foods are better for the environment than meat or dairy; 29% of Vietnamese consumers resolve to eat less animal products after the covid-19 pandemic; 29% of Chinese consumers are very interested and 50% are somewhat interested in trying packaged bakery products made with plant-based butter. Mintel sees an opportunity for bakeries to connect their ingredients to plant-based eating. They suggest Asia's vegan bakeries look towards Australia for inspiration.



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Small businesses in the UK remain focused on Covid as Brexit takes a back seat

As the Brexit transition period comes to an end, new research from Hitachi Capital Business Finance has found businesses were twice as likely to be concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on their business as they were about the impact of Brexit.

Asking a nationally representative sample of 1,107 small business leaders what they thought their biggest barrier to growth was in the next six months, the study revealed over half (51%) cited the direct impact of Covid on their business operations. By comparison, a quarter (25%) were concerned about Brexit and its impact on their business.

The businesses most attuned to the consequences of Brexit in the coming months were those who largely operated online. A third (34%) of businesses that did most of their trading online were focused on Brexit, compared with 19% of businesses that operated largely offline.

Joanna Morris, head of marketing and insight at Hitachi Capital Business Finance commented: "Before the pandemic, Brexit was front of mind for the majority of business owners. As we enter our second national lockdown closer to the deadline, we are no further along with plans to comply with the changes, minimize any negative impacts and capitalize on the positives. This loss of momentum is a concern. It is vital that all channels for business remain open and clear in our increasingly connected world. The pressure on Government and small business owners to make a success of Brexit in the coming months has intensified."

EAME

New app aims to build a healthier, happier, hospitality industry

Not-for-profit company Healthy Hospo has turned its platform into a digital web app, available 24/7, to give hospitality professionals support and resources to build a happier, healthier life.

The new platform includes training on topics such as sleep, nutrition, mental health, exercise, social connection, financial health and business management and is available to hospitality professionals looking to improve their health, no matter where they are in the world for £2 a month. Businesses can also sign up their entire staff in one go.

Tim Etherington-Judge, founder of Healthy Hospo, said: "Ever since I launched Healthy Hospo back in 2017, I've always sought a way to get our pioneering training into the hands of as many hospitality workers and businesses around the world as possible. The launch of our digital training platform is the next stage in that dream of a healthier, happier hospitality industry."



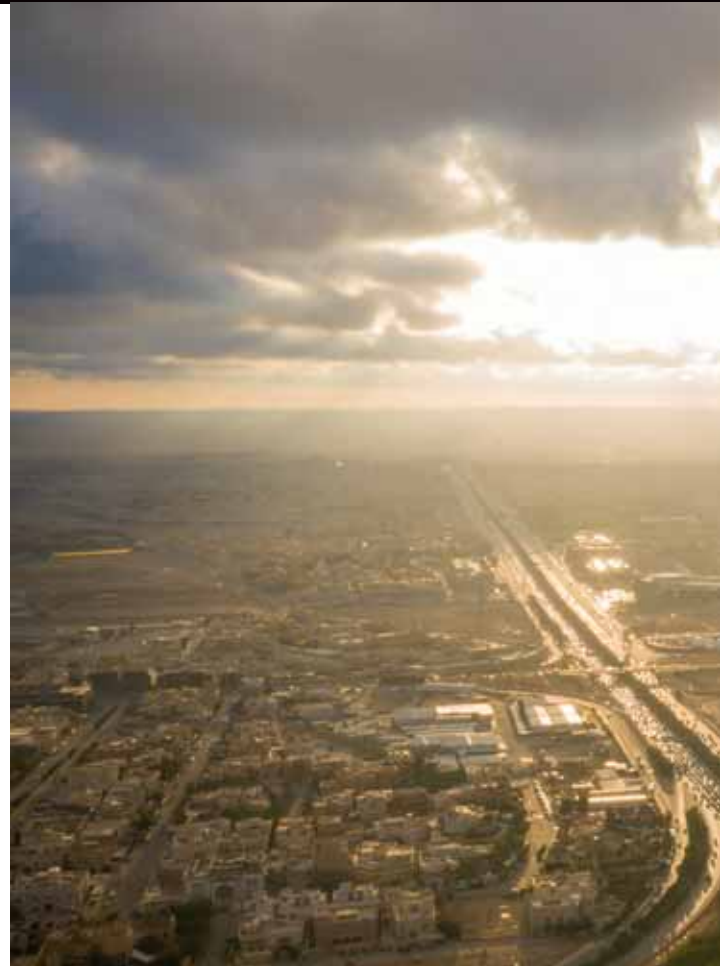
Saudi Arabia is “the next frontier” for F&B operators in the GCC, according to KPMG

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been on the verge of a generational shift for the last few years, according to KPMG’s latest report on the F&B industry in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Given numerous reforms, coupled with Vision 2030’s investments in leisure and entertainment, the F&B segment is set to see major benefits. Indeed, the report described the nation as “the next frontier in the region for F&B operators.”

The Vision 2030 program will see US\$64bn invested in leisure, entertainment, and culture in Saudi Arabia in order to boost tourism and encourage spending in the local economy, while cultural changes, such as the presence of women in the workplace, have also supported F&B spending. KPMG’s report found that although 85% of respondents have reduced or eliminated dining out in the near-term due to the coronavirus pandemic, two-thirds are expected to resume their eating out habits by early 2021.

More and more international brands have announced their intention to open in the Kingdom next year, including Zuma, Roka, La Serre and German Doner Kebab (see our GDK operator profile on page 66). While the Kingdom does not boast tourism demographics as favorable as the UAE’s, operators were highly optimistic about KSA’s potential in 2019, the report said. In fact, 100% of operators surveyed were bullish on the market, expecting growth over the medium term.

And while the pandemic, coupled with the increase in VAT, has stalled expectations, it has not completely eradicated them. Operators in the Kingdom are still hopeful, with nearly 37% of respondents expecting high medium-term growth and 38% holding out for low to moderate growth over the next 12 to 36 months.



Covid rocks the German hospitality sector

The German Hotel and Restaurant Association (DEHOGA) conducted a survey in November that found that over 70% of businesses in the hospitality industry doubt their ability to survive – and one in six is already at the brink of insolvency.

“The desperation in the industry is growing. The new lockdown in November further unsettled the companies,” said DEHOGA president Guido Zöllick, adding that the industry urgently needs the Covid aid promised by the government, with 78.6% of establishments stating that the compensation payments would be enough to survive November.

“The help will only work if it is now made available quickly and unbureaucratically,” Zöllick stressed. 8,688 businesses took part in the survey from 2-8 November.





South Africa's hospitality industry wins in court

A South African court ruled in November that insurer Santam should pay coronavirus-related claims made by two South African hospitality companies, hotel group Ma-Afrika and Stellenbosch Kitchen, which it had previously rejected.

The court's judgement ordered Santam to pay out on the group's claims made under an extension of its business interruption (BI) policy.

The win is being seen as a victory for all tourism and hospitality businesses with outstanding BI claims. Santam was ordered to pay Ma-Afrika Hotels and Stellenbosch Kitchen for losses for an 18-month period.

OPENINGS

Scottish brewer BrewDog is to open its first beer hotel in England next year. Due to be located in Manchester, the brewer has applied for planning permission to turn an office block into a hotel, which will boast 18 en-suite rooms and a rooftop bar. BrewDog already operates hotels in Ohio in the US and Aberdeen in Scotland.



Elonique Dalhuisen, executive director, FCSI EAME

Keeping positive

The past few months have been tough for everyone around the world and the situation is still uncertain. In these times, it is especially important to share knowledge, success, struggle together and inspire and motivate each other. That fits our motto: 'we share, we support, we inspire'.

The world is changing and FCSI EAME is changing with it. For 2021 our program is completely flexible. We still dearly wish to stage an in-person conference in Chantilly, France, and we hope to meet each other during HostMilano 2021. For both events we will offer a hybrid option, and if even a hybrid is not possible we will switch to a completely virtual version.

We do not only see Covid as a threat – we can also take opportunities from the situation. The EAME region is very big. Online meetings and webinars can bring us closer together. We will focus on that connection.

I am proud that I, along with my fantastic team, have been trusted to implement these changes. We do this in great collaboration with the FCSI EAME board and our local units. Together, we maintain a strong EAME region with local initiatives and global knowledge sharing. Our region is one of business cooperation and strong friendships among members. Please follow our webinar calendar on LinkedIn and our website to stay connected.

Covid-19 made history in 2020. Let us also make history together in a positive way in 2021. In the meantime, stay safe and healthy.

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THE BIG PICTURE



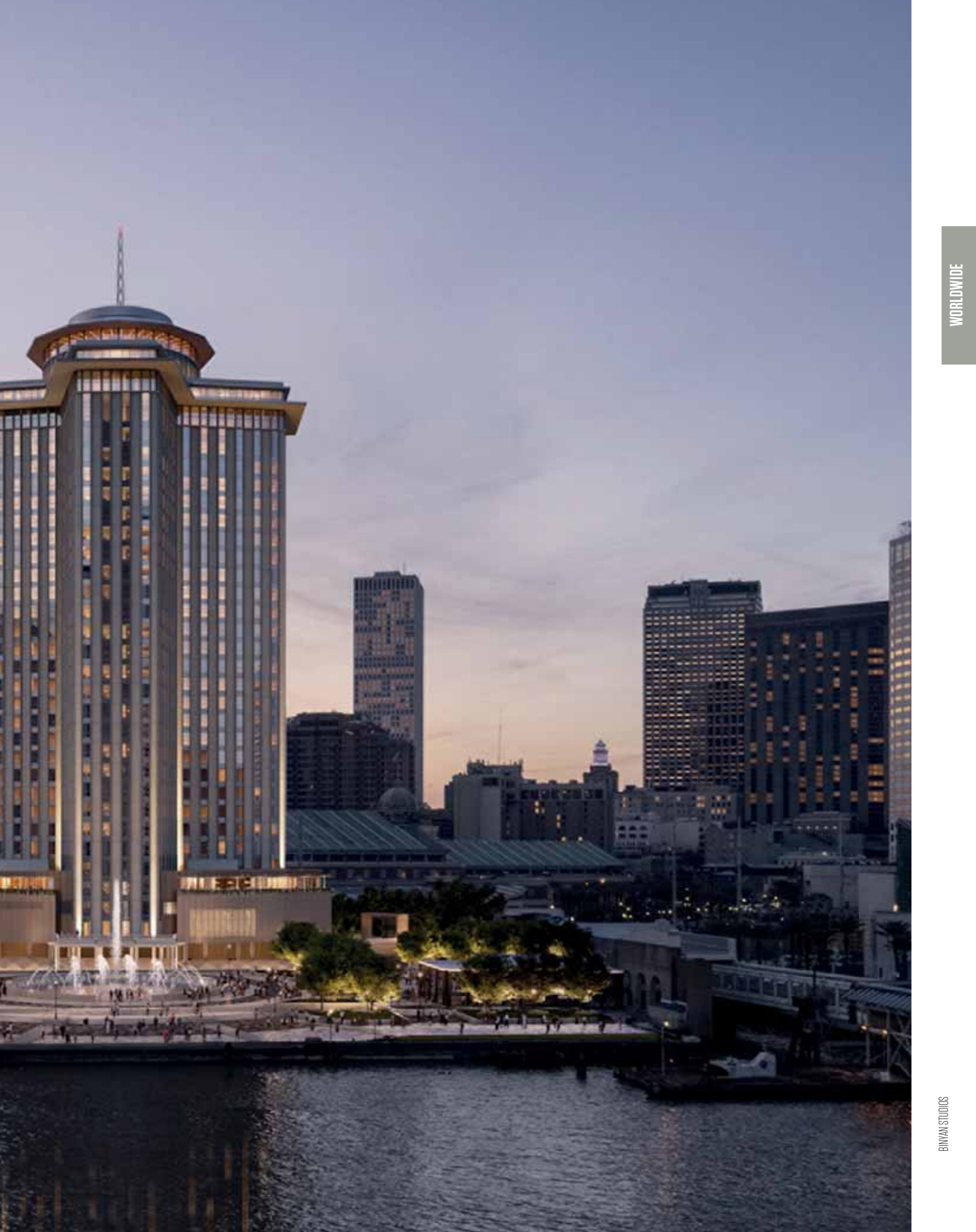
Project
**THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL
& PRIVATE RESIDENCES,
NEW ORLEANS, US**
Architect **Cambridge Seven Associates**
Builder **Carpenter & Company and Woodward**
Opens **2021**

The former World Trade Center tower at 2 Canal Street was designed by the celebrated Modernist architect Edward Durell Stone, whose iconic buildings include New York's GM Building, Radio City Music Hall and the Museum of Modern Art. It's now being redeveloped by an all-star team of New Orleans-based companies to open in 2021 as the Four Seasons New Orleans, one of the largest hotels in the brand's portfolio with 341 keys and over 22,500 sq ft of amenities.

This includes a full suite of food, beverage and cultural programming, most notably the property's flagship restaurant created by award-winning Israeli-American chef Alon Shaya, who is best known for bringing inventive Middle Eastern cooking to his adopted home of New Orleans.

The yet-to-be-named restaurant will see Shaya expand beyond the Middle East into something more regional. Dubbed his "love letter to Louisiana," the restaurant will be Shaya's take on Gulf Coast cuisine and will feature famous New Orleans dishes with an emphasis on Gulf seafood, vegetables and other ingredients that have been sourced from his extensive network of local fishermen and farmers. ■







THE WOW FACTOR

Chef **Masaki Sugisaki** tells Tina Nielsen about building his career while navigating the cultures of Japan and the UK on a quest for “the wow”

Standing out from the crowd is what Masaki Sugisaki, executive chef of Japanese fusion restaurant Dinings in London, has done all his life, though not always comfortably. He does not appear to be a man to whom swimming against the tide comes naturally.

His world has been one of contrasts – his upbringing in Japanese society and growing into adulthood in the UK. Stuck between two cultures, he has grappled with issues of belonging and identity most of his life.

This year, the Covid lockdown has afforded him the time to reflect on this and his journey from being a young chef faced with racism and hostility in 1990s London to his position today as a successful restaurateur with a strong sense of his place in British society.

Born in Saitama, near Tokyo, Sugisaki made his restaurant debut early as he started working in his parents’ traditional kaiseki restaurant aged 15. “When all my friends were playing around after school, I was working as a slave,” he says, you suspect, only partly in jest.

Making it as a chef in Japan is all



about mentality, he explains, and many enter the kitchen at a young age to start learning. “It’s not about the skill on its own in the kitchen, it is a test to see if this person has the strength to go through the training over the next 10 or 20 years,” he says. “The Japanese kitchen is extremely strict, it’s like the army. You need to follow instructions from your senior and they are not going to tell you twice,” he says.

Sugisaki did not harbor any cheffing ambitions in those days. “I always wanted to do something else,” he says.

Above: Seabass carpaccio with truffle

That something else was music. “I wanted to go in that direction, but my parents were obviously against it so we were always fighting. When I turned 20 our relationship became complicated because I was working in a kitchen as a chef already, but my heart was not in it,” he says.

His musical ambitions were suspended for a while, but eventually he decided to follow his idol Gota Yashiki, a Japanese musician who had achieved success in London, to the British capital. He arrived in 1994 in search of two ambitions: to be a musician and to find something “wow” in the food culture.

The first dream came true shortly after arriving when he signed a contract with a small record company; for the next few years he played acid jazz and ambient music while working in small Japanese restaurants around the capital.

As for the second hope, it was not quite as immediate. Anyone who was in the UK in the early 1990s will know that its food scene did not provide the “wow” he was after; the city was a long way from becoming the internationally known vibrant restaurant destination it is today.

Sugisaki arrived in London before big name restaurants made Japanese cuisine mainstream and the dining public was ignorant of the cuisine of his home country; sushi and sashimi, so widespread in our vocabulary – and our high street – today, were yet to enter the vocabulary. “People would come into the restaurant and mix up Japanese with Chinese. They’d ask for Peking duck or fried rice,” he recalls.

He spent five years on the circuit of Japanese restaurants; then his visa expired. The timing coincided with a plea from his family to return home to help out with the family business – the country had been through a devastating recession and the economy suffered. “My parents asked for help and I thought, ‘OK, let’s go, this is the time to give up music and start taking this chef industry seriously.’”

By that time, the family had debts >

and had to close some restaurants while Sugisaki focused his efforts on the principal restaurant. “I worked six and a half days a week for two years, with no holidays,” he says. The hard work paid off, the family settled the majority of the debts and could relax a bit.

Another pivotal moment came when his parents proposed that he take over the restaurant. It was the moment of truth, he says. “Was I going to take over this business and grow it to the next level? To be honest, I was exhausted and I just couldn’t feel any ‘wow’ from it.”

There was something else nagging at the back of his mind. Before leaving London, he’d visited the newly opened Nobu, the Japanese fusion restaurant that was making waves on the culinary scene. The “sensational dinner” stuck with him. “In a way it wasn’t Japanese, but from the chef’s point of view all the dishes are built on traditional Japanese philosophy,” he says of the singular experience that had intrigued him.

In the end he persuaded his parents to sell their restaurant building and suggested they at last pursue their dream of moving to the countryside. “I made myself free, basically,” he says.

He had his freedom and no firm plans, but moved back to Tokyo where he focused on an ambition to take on a more operational role outside the kitchen and joined sushi restaurant Hyakumangoku.

Determined to learn about the business side of restaurants, he didn’t tell his new employer about his history as a chef, but it didn’t take long before he was made the head chef. In the kitchen, his attention was drawn to a highly skilled colleague, Masaru Ishikura, who became his mentor. They spent one and half years working side by side until one day Nobu in London finally came calling.

Offered the chance to join the opening team of the new Berkeley Street restaurant, he soon headed back to the UK.

“I didn’t have much knowledge of European cuisine. In fusion cuisine you need to mix it up with something, but I lacked that part”

It was a “lifechanging incident,” he says.

“I had no experience of being creative and I didn’t have much knowledge of European cuisine. In fusion cuisine you need to mix it up with something, but I lacked that part, I was purely trained in the traditional side of Japanese cuisine,” he says. “To be honest, the first year was just a time of confusion.”

A methodical and studious approach to learning this way of cooking saw him filling his house with books covering basic Spanish, Italian and French cooking. All he cooked at home was European food. “I studied everything in those books and I discovered that the ingredients and techniques are different but the structure of the flavor is the same,” he says.

He found a shape in his head, identifying ingredients that European cuisines would use to replicate flavors from the Japanese cuisine he knew better. Tomatoes would replace kelp and chicken or veal bone was used instead of bonito flakes. “It’s all about these combinations with the same umami asset,” he explains.

He points to one of his signature dishes in Dinings today as an example of what he learnt along the way: the seabass carpaccio with truffle features classic Japanese fish craft with truffle added from his European playbook. Truffle was used a lot in the Nobu kitchen. “I had tasted it but never used it, so I studied how the French and the Italians use it.

I put all the information together and analyzed it,” he says.

He was having the time of his life – having started as one of the Nobu sushi chefs he soon found himself overseeing the VIP customers. At the time this was the dining destination of choice for models and Hollywood stars; the Berkeley Street branch was the busiest branch of Nobu in the world. “It was a dream. Nobu had 250 seats, we did 600 or 700 covers each night and with many VIPs who made crazy requests,” he says.

The moment to move on from Nobu came in 2008 when he left for Dinings, which he launched with colleague Tomonari Chiba who became co-owner of the new venture. They hit it off from the start when they met in the Nobu kitchens.

“We got on well from the minute we met and this was the dream; to set up the company together,” he says. “That was the best time for me as a chef; I had so much passion, energy and physical ability. “It was always in the back of my mind that I wanted to be independent.”

Sugisaki committed to helping his friend with the project while he continued at Nobu. “I was still gaining so much experience and I appreciated the opportunity to work there and being granted my visa as part of the experience,” he says. “I needed to pay maximum respect, so I gave them a year’s notice and asked for permission to work on Dinings on my days off and holidays.”

Though he wanted to pay Nobu due respect, there was never any doubt that he would move on. “The minute we started this [Dinings] to settle on the project concept, my hat was already there,” he says.

Sugisaki settled into the first Dinings restaurant, a 28-seat room with an ever-changing blackboard menu, offering what he calls a “rustic, simple concept”.

He spent seven or eight years there finding his feet running the menu and the

kitchen on his own. “In that time I built the confidence to confirm my basic frame of constructing the dish or understanding the ingredients,” he says. “It was a very valuable experience for me.”

Nearly 10 years after the first Dinings opening, he was ready to grow. “Over time I had so many business offers; people would say: ‘Chef, you have the product, I have the money let’s do business,’ but that was not my concept so for the first 10 years I said no,” he says. But there came a point when he started considering how he would be able to continue to push the restaurant. “It was getting to the point where we couldn’t push any further.”

So, he asked the team, why don’t we start something new? “The minute I

opened the door to new offers, one guy, Jonathan Lourie, got in touch,” he says.

This was 2015 and Lourie had a dream to open a hotel in Tel Aviv to honor his father’s heritage. He asked Sugisaki to head the restaurant in the hotel. “I didn’t know anything about Israel or Tel Aviv but I liked his passion and the project was something exceptional, really wow. It was beautiful and sophisticated,” he says.

The two started to speak seriously of opening another bigger restaurant back in London and it wasn’t long before Lourie got in touch to discuss a prospective site. “Jonathan called me and asked me to meet him at the restaurant, he later met with the owner and then he called to say it was ours.”

His dream for the second, larger, restaurant – Dinings SW3 – was to be more approachable for the public. The original site had become known as a foodie destination; he wanted to attract a broader crowd.

This open approach is not restricted to the dining room; in the kitchen he has thrown himself into shaping the young European chefs. “I want to train them and I want to let them know how to be friendlier to the environment, for example,” he says. “I see a lot of European experienced chefs are so aggressive towards the ingredients, they don’t pay much attention to wastage, it is painful for me to watch.”





Responsible behavior comes up frequently over the course of a conversation with Sugisaki. For some time now he has been working with fishermen in Cornwall sourcing local seafood for the restaurant and supporting a local community that needs it badly.

This, more than a business relationship, is a partnership between the restaurant and local suppliers. “They support their local communities, they have sustainable fishermen, they care about the condition of the seabeds and the fish population in their seas,” he says.

“As a Japanese restaurant, yes, we import a lot of things from Japan because it is made in Japan and a higher quality, but just think about the carbon footprint and think about the freshness,” he says. Where possible today he sources locally; a drive that has led him to serving wasabi grown in Dorset in England.

There’s a deeper purpose to this move to engage with local communities. After feeling like an outsider for so long, his decision to engage in a partnership with a local community in Cornwall, has at

“I always felt at a disadvantage to be Japanese in this city and in this country. I love London and the UK but I always felt isolated”

last made him feel like he belongs in the UK. “I always felt at a disadvantage to be Japanese in this city and in this country. I love London and the UK but I always felt isolated,” he says.

In the 1990s when he first worked in the Japanese restaurants of London he experienced the hostility towards foreign workers. “It was racism every day, arriving at the restaurant in the morning to find ‘Japs go home’ spray-painted in yellow on the window. Or somebody had gathered all the rubbish bags to pile them up in

front of the entrance to the restaurant.”

The thought that his daughter might suffer the same discrimination caused him to think more deeply about it. “I am a person from a foreign country who has lived here for more than 20 years, so why don’t I commit something to this community? Regardless of how people act towards Asian people, this is my city now. I might hold a Japanese passport, but it doesn’t matter, this is where I live.”

Complicated feelings of inadequacy whenever he returned to Japan did not help in this quest to find his place in the world. The responsibility to represent Japanese food abroad weighs heavily. “I always had this trauma that I worked in Japanese cuisine, but if I go back to Japan I wouldn’t call myself a Japanese chef because I have been away from the Japanese kitchen for so long,” he says.

A fusion-style restaurant is not going to have success in the eyes of Japanese chefs, he says. Japanese restaurants tend to specialize in a focused part of the cuisine, say sushi or tempura, in a quest for purity and perfection.

This year’s period of lockdown caused him to stop thinking about this as his disadvantage. At last he has had the space to process these complicated emotions of belonging and identity. “Until the lockdown I was too busy to properly consider these things, but during these times every single element came together,” he says.

So more than two decades after first leaving his home country and embarking on his career and adult life in the UK, he has reached a destination of sorts.

“In Japanese society from childhood you are taught that it is all about the group, you have to make yourself fit in to a group and follow the other people, that is the mentality. But outside of Japan is completely different; I was trying to keep the Japanese mentality, but I didn’t know who to follow. That was part of the confusion,” he says. “I have my own strengths – it literally took me 20 years to figure this out.” ■

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THE PUZZLE SOLVER

An obsession with design and fixing problems, allied with a desire to help those around him, has given **Dick Eisenbarth** FCSI a career he is thankful for, but never expected. "It's just what I do," he tells Michael Jones

Since his childhood, Dick Eisenbarth FCSI has maintained a fascination with design and construction. "I was always into anything to do with building. It stemmed from liking to solve puzzles and figuring out how things are put together – the assembly of things and the organization of spaces. That has always really fascinated me," he says.

And solving puzzles and problems isn't just a theme that can be applied to his storied, multi-award-winning career as a foodservice designer. For Eisenbarth it's a guiding principle that informs how he interacts with clients, colleagues and peers in the FCSI community in a 40+ year career – and how he has led Cini-Little International as CEO, a role he stepped down from earlier this year. He likes to help others solve their puzzles and problems too.

"My parents were both school teachers and I got my love for teaching, helping and mentoring people from them," he says,

As a young man though, Eisenbarth's future career path was not so clear to him. "I didn't know what I wanted to do. I decided to go to school in Indianapolis, my hometown. I went to Indiana vocational Technical College and got a degree in Architectural Engineering. But I couldn't really find a job in the architectural community. I thought, 'What do I really want to do? There's three things I could do: healthcare,

"I took every design-related course. I focused all my attention on design"

finance or foodservice and hospitality. I didn't like healthcare, because I didn't want to deal with blood. Finance wasn't my thing, because I don't really like balancing my checkbook. So, I thought 'foodservice' – because I love to eat. That's how I started," he laughs.

Eisenbarth made the decision to attend Purdue University and study restaurant design. "I told my mom, and she said, 'Well, can you make money doing that?' I said, 'Well, somebody has to do it'. But that's what I wanted to do. I took every design-related course I could and focused all my attention on design."

At Purdue, one of Eisenbarth's professors, Arthur Avery, who passed away in 1998, proved to be an influential mentor. Avery had worked for the US Navy, advising on the facility design for the first development of nuclear submarines. "Kitchen facilities in

submarines have to be very tight and structured. He really looked at form and function of the kitchens to maximize space. He fueled my desire to tinker with design and to organize things. He was just a natural for that," says Eisenbarth.

When he graduated from school, Eisenbarth began interviewing for jobs in consulting. "That's how I came to Cini-Grissom, as it was called at the time. I started there as a draftsman in 1978, hired by Harry Schildkraut FCSI – we still joke about that – and moved my way up."

Fresh beginnings

A new career meant a new mentality. "I was just like a sponge. When I got out of Purdue, I felt I knew everything, because I had studied under a renowned professor and pretty much straight A'd everything. So, I learned really quickly that I didn't know anything. I had to relearn everything that I had learned. I still tell our staff that, when I first started in my career I would make all my mistakes during the day and then go home, have a quick dinner, and come back to the office and correct all the mistakes. That's just how dedicated I was to it."

Alongside some business and industry (B&I) and employee dining projects, Eisenbarth primarily focused on healthcare foodservice projects in the early years of his tenure at Cini-Grissom. Ron Kooser FCSI (PP), who passed away earlier this year, ran the Cleveland office and was an early mentor, having exceptional healthcare experience. >

It was a period of rapid growth for the consultancy, which added to its established Maryland, Cleveland and New York offices with further staging posts in Toronto, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles as well as London, Tokyo and Sydney after James Little FFCSI (PP) joined the firm and it became Cini-Little International Ltd. Little passed away in 2015, but like fellow founder John Cini FFCSI (PP), who passed away in 2018, the foundations they set for the business are firmly established, worldwide.

“Jim was always swinging for the fences,” says Eisenbarth. “He had no fear of going after work, but he had a really keen eye for both design and management advisory services. He had a brilliant mind as far as putting the mechanics of an operation together. I complemented Jim. I was the one who made it work. I was able to put his thoughts on paper and get it developed.”

Eisenbarth worked his way up in the firm, from draftsman to the presidency. “Soon after I joined until 1986, I was a project manager. Then, when I went to Florida to start up our Miami office, I became a director.”

Sports, illustrated

Having a well-rounded education, including an engineering-oriented background has, says Eisenbarth, helped him immensely in “being able to cover all the bases.” It certainly helped in his first foray into stadia projects, when Cini-Little won the contract for the Miami Dolphins Stadium, now known as the Hard Rock Stadium, in 1986.

“I learned an awful lot as it was the first stadium project the firm had ever done. We really parlayed into that. All together I have been either the project manager or project executive on 27 stadiums around the country. Everything from NBA and NHL to NFL and Major League Soccer – we developed the first designs and have gone back to many of the projects and redesigned them a couple times too when they needed to be

updated. Most of my stadium work was really done from the late 1980s to the late ‘90s. Then it morphed into a lot of theme park work,” he says.

“I think what I have always really liked about working for a large, multi-discipline firm is you can draw on the experiences from work we have done in, say a hotel, and apply it to a stadium or a university employee dining facility. A lot of the same aspects flow from space to space. I’ve really enjoyed just being able to use that to solve new problems. Good

“Good design is good design, but you’ve got to be able to talk the talk”

design is good design, but you’ve got to be able to talk the talk.”

The Dolphins Stadium project set Eisenbarth apart, making him one of the leading, go-to consultants for stadia and arena design. “At the time, suites were non-existent. They didn’t have club areas. We really applied a catering aspect to stadia design. It wasn’t just concession stands anymore.”

As well as working in the 1990s on the Georgia Dome stadium, home of the Atlanta Braves NFL team, another career-defining project for Eisenbarth was the Centennial Olympic Stadium, an 85,000-seat main stadium of the 1996 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in Atlanta, Georgia. “We did that in 1994. Everybody was so proud that the US got the Summer Olympic Games. So, for us to be able to design the stadium and then also to be involved with its conversion to

the Atlanta Braves [MLB] stadium was something that took a lot of tinkering – making the puzzle fit. That really was one of my favorite projects of all time.”

His success in sports stadia, helped define the next part of his career: theme park work. “We were fortunate to be involved with Universal Studios in Orlando on the original planning and design of both of the Islands of Adventure, Hollywood and the City Walk projects. We did all the foodservice venues and the commissaries.”

Eisenbarth and his team subsequently worked for Disney and Warner Brothers before the firm was awarded the Universal Studios Beijing project – a theme park that will open in 2022 as part of Universal Beijing Resort. “That is a huge project – probably the biggest project the firm has ever taken on: 27 foodservice venues; 100,000 sq ft commissary employee dining and apartments for 10,000 employees, serving 6,600 meals at a sitting... I ran it as a project executive and I’m proud of our team. We’ve pretty much had all the offices doing different, coordinated aspects of the project. But we pulled it off. It’s the pinnacle of my career.”

Back to the drawing board

In 2005, having made senior vice president, primarily focused on design, Eisenbarth got “a wild hair” to try something different and left Cini-Little to become vice president of preconstruction and design build services for four years at Baring Industries, at the time a division of Electrolux.

“I look at that as a pivotal [moment] in my career and part of making me a really good consultant, because I learned the dealer side of the business. That has helped me well – understanding the mechanics of how the dealer/manufacturer network works. It’s a give and take business and if you don’t understand what happens on the other side, you can’t really structure the project to maximize the results for the client.”



Left: Dick Eisenbarth at home in Jacksonville, Florida. Top: Miami Dolphins Stadium, now the Hard Rock Stadium. Above: The Olympic Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, was later converted into Turner Field, home of the Atlanta Braves

WORLDWIDE

Back at Cini-Little, Eisenbarth made COO/president in 2015 and CEO in 2018. He has implemented a strong succession plan for the company, which enabled Kathleen Held, CPSM, to step into the CEO role in May, 2020. “I’ve always looked forward, I don’t really like to look back and reminisce. Having a good succession strategy has been a driver of mine throughout my career,” he says.

Eisenbarth has always possessed a keen interest in helping people. I’ve had many of our clients call and say, ‘Can you look at this, and tell me what we should do with it?’ I’ve always loved those situations. Since I announced my cutting back and acting as a special consultant to the firm, I’ve been blown away with the number of people that have reached out and said how much I meant to them or helped them in their career. I had no idea. It’s just what I do.”

Will he miss the cut and thrust of running a business? So long as he stays involved on the design side, he’ll be just fine, he says. “I’m a designer at heart, so I always want to keep my hand in on designing or reviewing projects. I’ve really missed sitting across the table from a client and working with them to solve a problem. My wife Polly would always say, ‘You’ve had a good day today, haven’t you? Because you were designing.’”

The Eisenbarths will get to enjoy some of their newfound freedom, though. “We just bought a new Subaru Outback and a friend of mine gave me a book on fun things to do in all 50 states. We’ve been looking at that and planning our road trips. My daughter works here in Jacksonville and we’ve got a seven-year-old granddaughter, who’s wonderful. She’s the love of my life. So, I’m spending a lot of time being close to her.” ■

PAYING IT FORWARD

Giving back to his profession is something Dick Eisenbarth values immensely. He “did two stints” on the FCSI The Americas board of directors as a trustee and served on the FCSI Icon Committee.

For four years he has served as a Kitchen Innovations Awards judge for the NRA and speaks regularly at Purdue (serving on its hospitality school’s Strategic Alliance Committee for the last 30 years and was honored with its HTM Hall of Fame ‘Distinguished Alumni Award’ in 2017) and University of Central Florida. As well as being a founding faculty member and steering committee member of the Foodservice Design Boot Camp, Eisenbarth is also a board liaison for the Electric Foodservice Council (EFC) and the Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education (CHRIE).

“Paying it forward is in my DNA,” he says. “I look back at the educators that helped make a good life for me and think, ‘Why wouldn’t I give back?’”

INTEGRITY FIRST

Salvajor is an equipment manufacturer that takes immense pride in craftsmanship and believes in getting things “right the first time,” general manager **Arnold Hernandez** tells Amelia Levin



Arnold Hernandez, general manager of The Salvajor Co kicks off the story of this now 76-year-old, third-generation, American company with the words: *“The world was at war.”*

Manufacturer of one of the first waste scrapping systems in the US, Salvajor’s founder George Hohl first started selling his then cast iron creation to restaurants and hotels in 1944 as a way to help them save money by reclaiming accidentally discarded silverware and other non-soluble items, even jewelry, that would otherwise literally go down the drain.

An ensuing contract for 600 units with the government at the time helped propel his business forward.

The name Salvajor, as the company’s website tells us, was partially, coined from the word SALVAge – in that “one of the main benefits of the company’s original product was saving silverware from being lost during the process of scrapping and pre-flushing soiled tableware”.

Today, the same hand-crafted collector is still manufactured in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, along with disposers and more advanced systems introduced over the years.

Salvajor’s 100%, commercial-only line of products can still be found in the nation’s leading restaurants and hotels as well as in hospitals, cafeterias, schools,

factories, sports arenas, catering facilities, universities and correctional institutions across the country.

It was in the 1960s that the manufacturer switched to using stainless steel for the products, and in the 1970s when disposers were introduced. Most recently, the company launched a line of smart controls.

Born in the USA

A truly American-made story, Hernandez points to craftsmanship as the core of the company brand. “We are not in the commodity business,” says Hernandez, who joined Salvajor in February 2016 after years with a large-scale packaging company in New York.

“We are a small business with the professionalism and production capability of a large corporation, but without the bureaucracy,” he says. Salvajor has a self-reliant, self-sufficient manufacturing process that sets us apart from many competitors in the industry. Our strategy is to maintain this autonomous structure as it has proven to be very successful along with our many skilled and talented employees.”

“There is not too much that we cannot make within our four walls. Salvajor has forming presses, stainless steel punching and CNC equipment, welding, and assembly departments. It’s a rare company that still takes pride in craftsmanship and in getting things ‘right the first time.’”

What also sets Salvajor apart is its family history. Current president Chris Hohl took over the company from his father, George Hohl, Jr, who passed in 2011. He, in turn, had taken over from his father and founder George Hohl (senior), in the 1970s. Chris Hohl’s brothers Matt and Gregg Hohl also work for the company in leadership positions.

“I am very fortunate to be surrounded by tremendous staff,” says Hernandez, noting that many of Salvajor’s employees have worked for the company for decades, even starting as young as 16.



Arnold Hernandez, general manager of The Salvajor Co since 2018



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Above: An early Salvajor building. The company is about to move into a new state-of-the-art facility where it can continue innovating in its sector



WORLDWIDE

“For many years I have had the opportunity to work for large corporations and the two-way street of loyalty is often missing. At Salvajor this is a main part on how business is conducted daily.”

Innovation and green standards

Innovation is key focus at Salvajor. “We are continuously improving our products by implementing green standards and ease of operation, but we also feel that operations innovation is equally important,” says Hernandez.

Over the past five years, the company has implemented new production reporting and tracking systems, and these new methodologies were instrumental in achieving zero lead times for customers. “We have also streamlined the data within our corporate database which provides information and metrics to analyze our business and the industry.”

Having partnered with LEED professionals, Salvajor products are specifically designed to save water and energy by using a recirculating system, and to provide a low maintenance, sanitary alternative to other methods of food waste disposal.

Just two years ago, Salvajor launched a new line of smart controls intended to

take its water and energy-saving goals even further. Spearheaded by Tim Dike, engineering manager, who has been with the company for 36 years and calls Salvajor his “second family,” the team was able to patent new technologies that can detect when an operator is away from the machines in order to stop or reduce water flow and power. The controls can be retroactively added to existing products.

“Saving energy continues to be a big concern for most,” says Dike. “All too often, the disposal systems get pushed to the wayside and people don’t give it much serious thought, but we do, and we see it more than just grinding garbage and sending it down the drain. We’re focused on doing that as smartly as possible.”

The new controls also feature optional time and water limits that will automatically reduce flow or shut off the machine based to maintain minimal water and energy use during non-peak periods. “This panel is also a little smarter than past ones because it constantly samples the condition of the machine without the need for constant calibration,” Dike says, adding that his team is “not done yet” in terms of the engineering capabilities of controls for the future.

Outside of the smart controls, Dike’s >

SALVAJOR’S LINE AT-A-GLANCE

Food waste disposers and disposer controls – Salvajor food waste disposers are a simple, efficient and economical way to dispose of food waste. Best suited for a typical restaurant with a single-door dish machine, today’s Salvajor disposers are the results of a half century of innovation.

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COLLECTOR SYSTEMS

Rather than grinding food waste or collecting every scrap of garbage in a trash receptacle, Salvajor Collectors wash soluble food waste harmlessly through the sewer while holding fibrous and non-soluble food waste in the scrap basket. Salvajor Collectors recirculate water at a rate of 30 gallons per minute. (Scrap Collector™ and Pot/Pan Scrap Collector™) to 70 gallons per minute (Trough Collector™) resulting in a savings of thousands of dollars in wasted water each year. Again, as the operator has both hands free to work, scrapping speed is often doubled or even tripled. All three models are safe for use with grease interceptors or septic systems, depending on local codes.



Above: The current building. Left: The company takes pride in its craftsmanship and getting things 'right the first time'

team has focused mostly on quality improvements to existing products that already work well. “We totally enclosed all of our motors to create a safer kitchen environment,” he says. In addition, other basic components have been fine tuned to improve horse power with less stress on the machines while enhancing their efficiency.

Guiding philosophy

From a leadership perspective, Salvajor’s main company philosophy, Hernandez is keen to emphasize, is to take care of the team first, so they can take good care of customers – kind of like when a flight attendant tells you to put your mask on first in an emergency before helping others. “We follow an ‘integrity first’ philosophy. There are no short cuts; we follow safety, accounting and other protocols to a ‘T’. We feel that in following the smallest of rules and policies, following the bigger more important ones will come easier, which will have a big impact on quality and ensure success of our business,” says Hernandez.

Number two on the list of company priorities is “excellence in all that we do.” That goes back to the craftsmanship discussed earlier. And number three is “treat people with dignity and respect.

We try really hard not to focus on the negative, I think it only gets in the way of doing what’s good and productive.” Hernandez has a recent example of that: when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, company executives closed down the plant and offices, giving the team a month’s worth of paid time off to ensure everyone’s safety, even though Salvajor was deemed an essential place of business and allowed to remain open.

Upon returning, Hernandez says the company has implemented “many safeguards, such as masks and social distance mandates, to ensure that we continue to serve our clients fully during this time of uncertainty and as a result have further solidified our place in the industry as reliable resource for our vendors and customers.” Again, it’s all about treating the team well so they can treat others just as well, or better.

Salvajor’s primary customer channels flow through buying groups and consultants, so it’s no wonder they maintain solid relationships with both. “I believe that the more we can educate consultants on our products and our sustainability efforts the more we can grow together,” says Hernandez, who notes that the company has a long history of inviting consultants to visit the plant

for training and networking. The sales team also regularly travels (or used to, prior to the pandemic) to consultants and other industry partners to conduct on-site training around the country.

Hernandez says he hopes to bring back some of those visits with consultants and others, especially after they move into a brand-new facility – a transition that’s been two years in the making. The company was able to score prime real estate in the Kansas City area at three-times the size of the current building they’ve occupied for decades. “This will be a ‘state-of-the-art’ facility with demo rooms and labs and will accommodate larger groups for sales, training, and demonstration purposes. We are also very excited about creating a larger research and development space, which is needed to continue to provide the industry with our latest innovations and products.”

Of course, the scenarios of Covid-19, potential vaccines and changing regulations around gatherings will dictate what those training sessions will look like. The long-term view, Hernandez says, is to use this new facility to secure the business for future generations, adding: “The same commitment to quality and service that made this company special is what will continue to drive its success.” ■

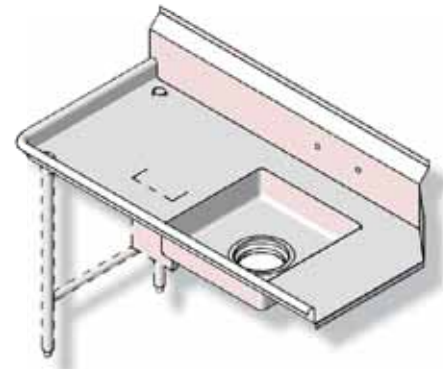
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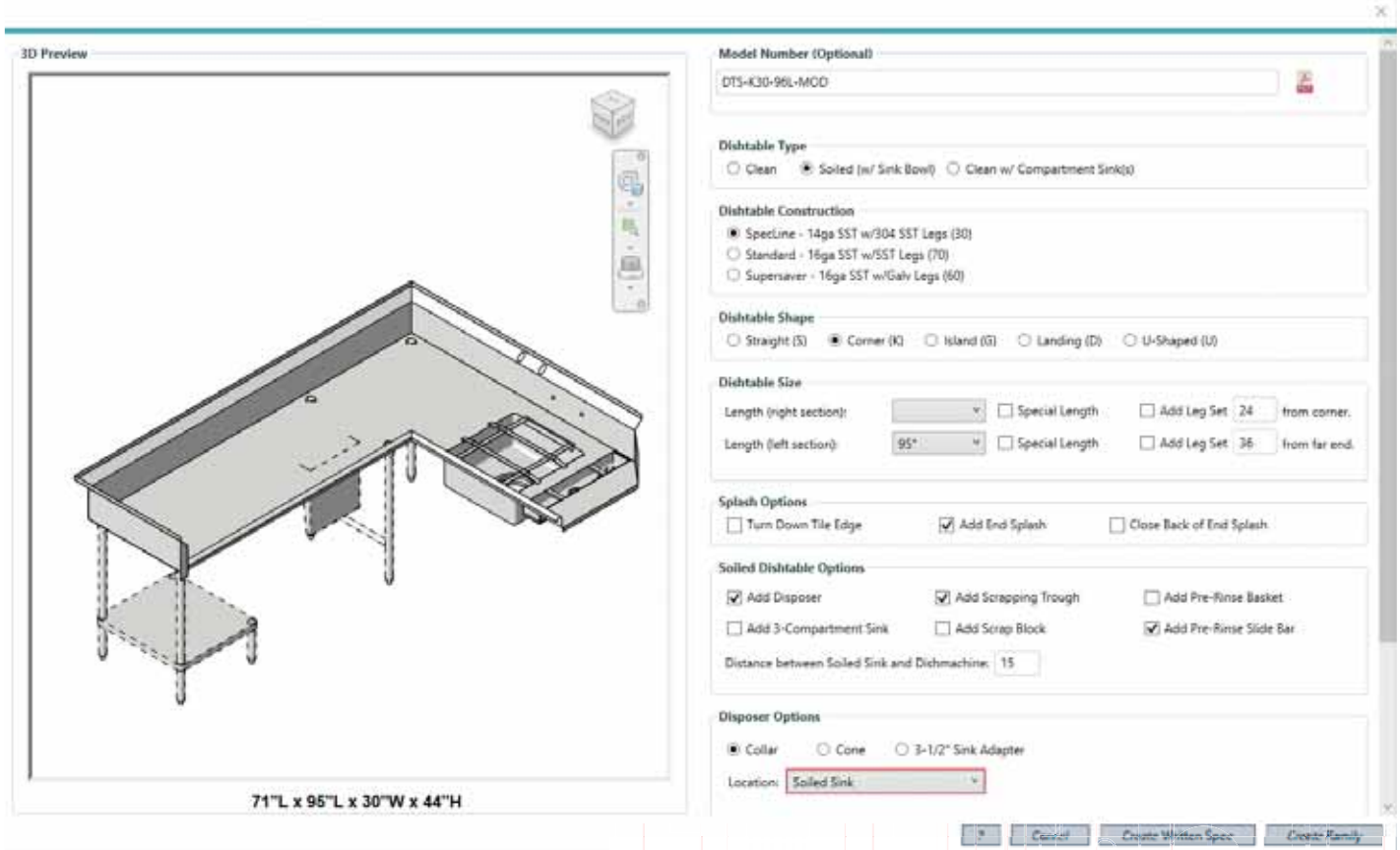
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FOODSERVICE 2021: THE CHECKLIST

As the foodservice sector emerges from a year of disruption and devastation, Tina Nielsen speaks to professionals around the world about priorities and possibilities for the new year

Please, note, all details correct at time of going to press. For latest updates visit fcsi.org

To many the start of 2020 seems like a different lifetime. This year has been like none before and certainly nothing that any of us expected. In January, few would have even spoken of any sort of lockdown; as we approach the New Year, it has been named the word of the year. Societies, all over the world, have taken a battering – with (at the time of writing) nearly 60 million Covid-19 infections recorded and a staggering 1.4 million deaths worldwide.

The foodservice and hospitality sector has been particularly hard hit, as governments have imposed strict rules on its practices and behavior. Reduced capacity, smaller group numbers, curfews and an apprehensive dining public have combined to decimate the sector as tens of thousands of operators have had to close completely. The pandemic continues to cause the postponing or scrapping of industry conferences and trade shows across the world.

But there is a hint of light at the end of the tunnel – a vaccine has become a realistic prospect and with it the hope that we may soon return to a more normal life. As we enter 2021, we have asked professionals from across the foodservice spectrum all over the world for their thoughts on the priorities for the next year.

The big picture

Claudia Johannsen, business unit director at Hamburg Messe & Congress, who organizes the Internorga trade show in Hamburg, says little has changed in terms of priorities for the industry. “Topics such as sustainability and organic practices are still major drivers in the catering industry, but they are certainly in even greater demand now,” she says. “And, of course, digitization is not new, but it now needs to, and will, be developed even faster. No restaurateur can escape the need to invest in digital processes and measures.”

As operators are starting to embrace new ways to market – setting up temporary grocery stores, offering delivery and take out services – manufacturers are looking to diversification too. Steve Hobbs, the chair of Foodservice Equipment Association (FEA), says adaptability is key. “Manufacturers are already looking to diversify through new channels, new opportunities and areas that are showing recovery and growth, such as the grab-and-go market, convenience stores and independent pubs,” he says.

While the issues top of the list have not changed, the conditions in which operators work for them have, according to Colleen Vincent, vice president of community at the James Beard Foundation (JBF).

“Restaurants are trying to survive. They are focused on keeping staff employed and safe while building structures to provide outdoor dining, distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) for guests and staff, pivoting business offerings to include to-go or delivery, and continue to provide good quality food. It is an extremely trying time,” she says. “Prior to Covid, the industry was already paying attention to important issues across the spectrum, from employee healthcare and paid leave to the big tipping debate and general cost of food.”

Now, she says, is the moment to take stock, identify the inequities and try to fix them as restaurants come back. “Changes to pay disparity, racial and gender equity, basic human resources’ needs – all of these things should be examined as we move forward.”

“Digitization is not new, but no restaurateur can escape the need to invest in digital processes and measures”

People

Across the world thousands of workers in foodservice have lost their livelihood. Operators who have been lucky enough to hold on to their teams have an opportunity to solidify during an enforced quiet time.

Anticipating another wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring, Alexander Hofer, CEO of H44 Team in South Tyrol, Italy, believes by that point the worst might at last be behind us. He says this time could be used well to focus on employees. “In the current business there is now enough time and resources to train the employees and bind them to the company and its identity. From my point of view that’s a unique opportunity that will not come [again] anytime soon.”

Adding quality to the lives of his staff is also on the mind of chef Ángel León who plans to go from a five-day week to four at his three-star restaurant Aponiente in the south of Spain, giving his team three days off. “I understand that having three days instead of two can be life-changing and it will allow my team to smile throughout their weekend,” he says and adds that just because things have always worked a certain way, it doesn’t mean we have to keep them that way. “This has always been the sector where people put in most hours, but we have to change the paradigm. Making this change will allow me to demand more from my team and, importantly, we’ll all be happier and have more time for our lives,” he says.



A renewed focus on equality

Vincent of the JBF, points to the “disheartening” situation experienced by black and indigenous Americans as a consequence of the pandemic. “The impact of Covid-19 on the industry as a whole is devastating, but it is often found that businesses owned predominantly by black and indigenous Americans are disproportionately underfunded,” she explains. “What’s more, since Covid hit, more businesses led by these communities have shuttered and revenue fell more starkly than their white counterparts.”

JBF has launched its Food and Beverage Investment Fund for Black and Indigenous Americans to provide financial resources for food or beverage businesses that are majority-owned by black or indigenous individuals. The grants make up part of the Open for Good campaign that was put in motion in April to rebuild a

more resilient and sustainable independent restaurant industry. “We believe it’s time for us to take intentional and aggressive action to help create a more equitable industry for communities that are disproportionately impacted by systemic racism,” says Vincent.

Ricardo Chaneton, chef owner of Mono restaurant in Hong Kong, agrees. “All eyes are now on the economy and the profit margins and it’s so easy to overlook the more human and social factors of the fall-out. Discrimination was prevalent in the past, but the gap has widened significantly with the pandemic, people have become less kind.”

“Discrimination was prevalent in the past, but the gap has widened significantly with the pandemic”

Financial stability

The industry may have been caught unprepared by Covid, but there’s consensus that a priority for 2021 and beyond must be to prepare for this to happen again. “It may not be possible to anticipate the nature of the next macro-threat, but one underlying factor that helps the operator beat the odds for survival no matter what is thrown at them is holding a strong financial position. Going forward, a top priority should be strengthening the P&L and balance sheet,” says Don Fox, CEO of the American sandwich chain Firehouse Subs.

Denis Daveine FCSI, general manager of Alma Consulting in France is straightforward: “Without hesitation, the priority is to avoid bankruptcy and closure of restaurants,” he says “If these do not present a risk in public foodservice (institutions such as schools and hospitals need to be open), commercial catering, corporate catering and all activities related to events and cultural venues are in the red and must find alternative ways to make money, at least for a while.”

Before the pandemic, restaurants were often based on flimsy financial foundations and this is set to change. Those who make it through the year will count themselves lucky. Others may rethink the way they fund their restaurant ventures.

As Hans Neuner, executive chef of Ocean Restaurant at Vila Vita Parc Resort & Spa in Algarve in Portugal, says, this is not an industry that puts aside money for a rainy day. “Many of us have not experienced a pandemic before, so if you have money left over you invest – in new chairs or in the kitchen. You are never going to keep half a million to one side in case Covid strikes,” he says.

“Many restaurants have not been built on super stable financials and people take out loans from the bank and then they open the restaurant and if they can’t pay back one month they are finished. That is a problem worldwide.”





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Sustainability

Before Covid-19 hit, the drive for sustainability was already building momentum. From this sharp focus on eliminating single-use plastic and reducing food waste emerged clever solutions – this is set to resume as the sector, acutely aware of environmental challenges, moves on. Chaneton predicts sustainability will go from a nice-to-have to becoming a business imperative. “There has been a surge of single-use plastic in disposable packaging as restaurants pivot to the delivery/take-out model,” he says.

In recent years, chefs launched zero-waste restaurants – London’s Silo and Amass in Copenhagen being two examples – and the public embraced a new approach to eating what would usually be considered off-cuts destined for the kitchen bin.

But Covid-19 and the increased hygiene restrictions as well as the surge in delivery and take-out have brought along a new wave of single-use plastics.

“Recent years had seen incredible momentum in reducing the use of disposables for foodservice in contract catering environments, but Covid has seen an overnight reversal of this at many operations as they move away from self-service to pre-packaged product,” says Ed Bircham FCSI, director at Humble Arnold Associates in the UK.

He predicts one of the mega-trends that will become more dominant in future years is so-called net zero targets and these will affect how operators and designers plan operations. “We are at the embryonic stage of companies and organizations divesting themselves from fossil fuels as part of ‘net

“There’s been a seismic shift in understanding the importance of sustainability”

zero’ targets. This laudable environmental initiative will present operators and designers with a real challenge to fulfil the consumer demand for authenticity for certain cuisines,” he says. “The theater and flavor associated with open flame cooking such as grilling and wok cooking is compromised by ‘all electric’ solutions so this might start to influence development of concepts in some environments.”

Sustainability and economics will require a sharper focus on equipment, according to FEA’s Steve Hobbs.

“There’s been a seismic shift in understanding the importance of sustainability. Thus the focus has to be on energy efficiency and labor saving, through advanced technologies such as connectivity,” he says. “With a glut of second-hand equipment likely to enter the market, the temptation may be to buy cheap rather than invest in the long term. However, it’s new, modern equipment that will deliver the productivity and running cost savings that foodservice businesses will need. Operators who are doing relatively well at the moment will wish to further leverage their market position, and will be likely to invest in the new technology.”

A renewed drive on combating climate may see restaurants implementing changes to their menus. Neuner in Portugal took the opportunity to eliminate meat from the menus at Ocean during the pandemic. It was something he had wanted to do for a while, having reduced his own meat consumption considerably in recent years. Covid provided the perfect moment.

“I am from Austria and when I was a kid we’d eat meat every day, but the last two or three years if you look at the planet I think everybody has to start with himself,” he says. “The whole world has to change the way it eats.”

Limited capacity for change

At the start of the pandemic when large parts of the world were in enforced lockdown, there were signs that this might change us for the better. Covid-19 would give us all the time to reconsider how we live and come out of a challenging time different – better, even – people.

As planes disappeared from our skies and videos of wildlife taking over urban centers went viral, there was a wave of human goodwill for our communities. Hope, perhaps, that this could be the dawn of a new, improved world.

Chef Ángel León does not hold out hope that human beings will have changed much by the time we can all get on with our lives again. “On a basic level, I don’t think human beings change that much. Those who were sensitive to their surroundings before will continue to be so; those who only care about money, will still care mostly about money and those who help out socially, will continue to do so,” he says. “I understand that we all are different and we all have our own ways of seeing life, but it is clear that we have much to learn.”



Local responsibility

At Ocean restaurant, the practice has been to buy regional and local produce for several years now. “I don’t want my products flying all over the planet and I think today more people think like this,” says Neuner. “It was a trend before but I think Covid made it more a priority. I think many restaurants will change.”

Chaneton in Hong Kong says the entire sector needs to increase the focus on the local market and community on all levels and throughout the entire domestic supply chain, including suppliers, producers and the artists. “When you lock down the borders, it throws a wrench into the works, especially for places that are used to exporting their produce elsewhere, like South America,” he says. “So even if it means choosing to source from local purveyors by 10% more, partnering with small businesses to support them, every bit helps. There is strength in unity, and we have a collective onus to support the communities that need to be rebuilt in the wake of the pandemic and create a sustainable economy.”

This resonates with Javier Ollerros, chef owner of Culler de Pau, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Galicia in northern Spain. He says it’s time to move away from certain aspects of gastronomy. “We don’t want to go back to the excess and that disconnect with nature,” he says.

He prefers to talk of being responsible more than sustainable. “I think we need to get back to committing to nature; we had got to a point of anything goes, where we forgot where our produce came from and importantly we stopped looking after our small suppliers,” he explains. “If we can take anything positive from this time, it is that it has forced us to look closer to home at our local communities.” This, he adds, is where we start to build a better society.

It is a philosophy that has been developed during the past 11 years at Culler de Pau, that focuses on people, environment and finance – and responsibility for the world around them. “We are still learning, but we see our path clearly.”

“Establishing an environment that offers the guest a sense of protection from Covid-19 will be paramount”

Rebuild customer trust

A year is a long time in the relationship between restaurants and customers and many diners may have formed new habits – delivery to their home might seem more convenient or safer. Fox of Firehouse Subs, warns that customers will be cautious in their approach to dining out. “Restaurant brands where on-premise business is more important to the success of the concept will need to stay in touch with the needs of the consumer relative to the dine-in experience,” he says.

Sanitation will have a major part to play. “Establishing an environment that offers the guest a sense of protection from Covid-19 will be paramount. Some of the steps required – especially maintaining social distancing in the dining room – may work against the restaurant’s recovery to pre-pandemic levels.” For some, he adds, 2021 will still be a year of being in survival mode, with no prospect of meaningful recovery until 2022.

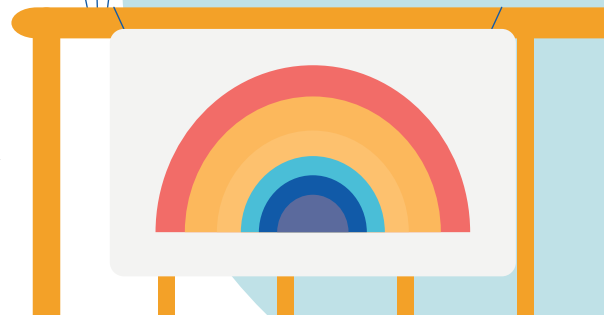
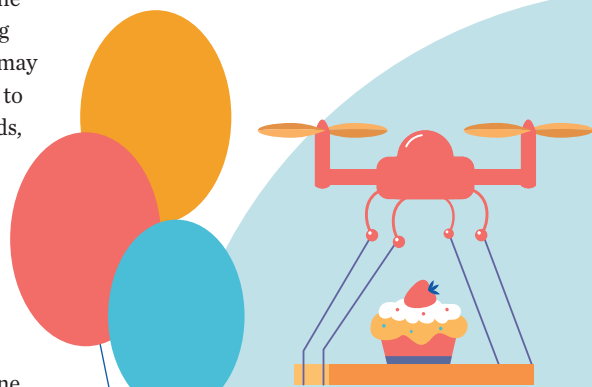
Where hygiene is concerned, double down on the basics. It’s time, says Daveine, to ask: “Were things done properly before? This crisis has brought fundamental notions of hygiene back to the forefront.”

“Now more than ever, customers’ trust needs to be boosted by restaurateurs making sure that a visit to their premises is safe for their guests, and also becomes fun again. A comprehensive, well-thought-out hygiene and safety concept provides the basis for that,” says Johannsen.

Bircham believes foodservice is already in a good place. “Arguably, after healthcare, foodservice is the most conscientious

and attentive industry when it comes to matters of hygiene. Operators are required to document processes to demonstrate hygienic processes are followed,” he says. “There may be benefit in trying to emphasize this point to the general public to regain confidence in dining out. This aspect has led to an accelerated adoption of touch free equipment including connectivity with devices of some customer facing equipment; also of kitchen technologies such as air sterilization equipment.”

While foodservice is a leader in hygiene, Bircham says it will have to be more obvious in the future. “The nature of food displays is reverting to more enclosed styles with a move back to fully enclosed sneeze screens rather than open displays with suspended decorative heat lamps that were becoming more prevalent to achieve more residential feel, less institutional solutions,” he says, but adds there are benefits to be gained from this too. “The positive is that these solutions by necessity will be assisted service, offering operators an opportunity to improve guest experience through engagement with customers, albeit at an increased labor cost.”





Digital and diversified

The wisdom of adopting a multichannel approach to any operation is beyond any doubt now. When the pandemic hit and foodservice operations were forced to close across the world, new sales channels including take-out and delivery made the difference between permanent closure and survival.

“Mastering off-premise channels and having a solid digital platform have risen to the top of the priority list,” says Fox. “This was a trend that was in play well before Covid-19, but the pandemic greatly accelerated it.”

Sam Ward, managing director of Umbel Restaurant Group in the UK, says diversification has been key to the group of restaurants, headed by chef Simon Rogan. “We launched Rogan at Home from day one, starting off with £5 lunches and then we built it from there and now we are doing £95 Christmas lunches with five courses nationwide,” he says.

There are extensive plans to keep this new business channel open and

“Off-premise channels and having a solid digital platform have risen to the top of the priority list”

expand it after the pandemic. “We are only just getting started,” he adds.

This means embracing technology, according to Juan Matamoros FCSI, CEO of Food Gurus in El Salvador. “Customers use more apps, order online and look on the web for information from restaurants. Technology helps foodservice teams work faster in kitchens and decrease the cost of labor,” he says. “The profitability of a business is now focused on a new reality with fewer customers and fewer locations available. My advice is to focus on innovation in packaging and technology. Right now it is important to make decisions quickly and strategically.”

In the drive to put out an appealing offer Ward adds it’s crucial to keep brand values top of mind.

“Diversify, but at no point sacrifice brand values,” he says. “I have seen a lot of places that in normal times send out world-class products and then all of the sudden you are doing something very basic and you are not representing yourself truly. You still have to do something that you would stand by whether it is during a pandemic or not.”

This means looking for smart and sustainable solutions for packaging too. “We can use plastic to pack things up, but there are so many great businesses out there who have come up with great sustainable solutions to stop the sector using the plastic. I have seen amazing businesses with great brand names sending stuff out in polystyrene and plastic and I think ‘you can do better than this’,” he concludes. “A little bit of thought is important; you can come up with ideas and still represent yourself well.”

Thriving long-term

Inevitably a seismic event such as the Covid pandemic will leave lasting change on society and the foodservice sector. Things will have to evolve.

Being at the mercy of a variety of dining restrictions, has thrown into sharp relief restaurants’ need for agility and adaptability and this will be of great benefit, says Chaneton. “We’ve had to take a magnifying glass to every aspect of our restaurant, from menu, guest relations and what we put into the takeaway bag to how we behave as employers and employee welfare etc. It has provided a time for introspection, as we’ve had to examine and be considered about every cog in the restaurant, because it will affect the end result in a tangible way. The silver lining is that we’ve learned to always look forward and appreciate life a bit more. We are in a moment of humanity that will make history.”

“The biggest long-term issue is the impact the pandemic has had on the operator’s view of restaurant size. Conventional wisdom has been that operators can downsize, or even eliminate dining rooms all together,” says Fox. “The wisdom of this decision remains to be seen. It could be that over the longer term, pent up demand creates greater use of dining rooms once permitted by the government. Brands that over-reacted to Covid-19 by greatly reduced dining rooms may end up regretting it in as little as 18-24 months.”

This adaptability will be crucial to everybody across the sector, according to FEA’s Hobbs. “Wherever you are in the supply chain, manufacturer, consultant, reseller or operator, adaptability is key. There may be difficult decisions to make for the long-term benefit of your business and the colleagues who work with you,” he says. “Analyze your operations and shed the elements that don’t add value. Take a strategic view of your position in the industry and think disruptively – as we’ve seen over many years, disruptive ideas and unconventional strategies lead to innovation and opportunity.”





Onwards and upwards

For all the challenges Covid-19 has brought the foodservice sector, it also offers restaurateurs an opportunity to stay competitive and capitalize on new opportunities. “In the future, the delivery service sector will play an even greater role for restaurants, and it will have to be expanded and further developed in order to retain existing customers and appeal to new ones,” says Johannsen. “The focus should also move to a well-functioning database and communication with guests – that means customer loyalty programs.”

Will foodservice as we knew it before Covid return? Daveine believes so. “If different models – take-away and delivery – have progressed, I think that catering where the customer comes to live a culinary experience is going to last. Health issues will not last forever,” he says.

This after all, is a sector that is propelled by collaboration and collegial support.

“This is a hard time, but the bottom line is that it will make us stronger,” says Hofer. “Stay true to yourself, persevere and retain your team as much as possible. The time will come when things will get better, at least that’s what I wish everyone in our sector.”

His words of advice for colleagues is to stay positive and agile. “Remain optimistic so that you can respond

“The time will come when things will get better, at least that’s what I wish everyone in our sector”

flexibly to the challenges of these times. And don’t be afraid to stray from the paths you have become familiar with, rethink things and find creative solutions for your business,” he adds.

Above all, says Bircham, don’t lose sight of the purpose of what you do and how to achieve this: “The key requirement is unchanged – to remain focused on customer experience. The experience requirements may have changed slightly to ensure comfort of guests, but ultimately repeat business and strong recommendation levels will be led by this.” ■

What’s to come in 2021?

Technomic, the US market insight company, has released its predictions for the new year.

Menu cleansing

The trend for a clean diet is expected to continue. Diners were already focused on a purer free-from diet, and this is expected to continue. Boosting immunity to stay healthy will be front of mind for many.

Investing in digital differentiation

The push for advanced digital operations, will speed up. Facial recognition, touchless and contactless ordering will provide a safe and convenient experience for guests.

The big three international hotspots

According to Technomic our current inability to travel will spark a renewed interest in Mexican, Chinese and Italian cuisines.

Social justice beyond the buzzwords

A younger and more socially aware generation of diners will carry forward the campaigns for social equity that have accelerated in the past couple of years.

New-mami flavor exploration

Every year brings buzz-word flavors and 2021 is no different. Technomic cites non-traditional fruit vinegars, new unfamiliar mushrooms, next level non-dairy “milks” such as corn and tamari sauce as some of the products expected to make waves in foodservice in the new year.

What will stay and what will go?

Dining concept hits of recent years – communal tables and food halls spring to mind – are likely to be cast aside for a while. Social interaction is having to reckon with a new reality that sees operators enforcing social distancing and strict sanitation.

An industry unleashed

The wider industry is reeling from disruption caused by the pandemic, but foodservice will be looking to the eventual recovery and those who make it through this challenging year will adopt a positive approach.





FOODSERVICE CONSULTANTS SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL
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June 2021 (date TBC)



FCSI EAME CONFERENCE

FCSI Europe, Africa, Middle East (EAME) has revealed new plans for the postponed FCSI EAME Conference, which will see delegates heading to France next year

The conference, originally slated to take place in Autumn 2020, has been rescheduled for June 2021 (date TBC) and will take place at the Hyatt Regency Chantilly, a short distance from Paris

“Hyatt Regency Chantilly is a venue with an interesting history and a lot of space, so the team can guarantee sufficient distance, should these requirements remain,” says Elonique Dalhuisen, executive director, FCSI EAME. “Beside the conference there are a lot of possibilities for the partner program and also for the Friday afternoon tours and the Gala Dinner. The hotel is really great, with good restaurants, a very big garden outside and great wellness facilities, among other things.”

Sustainability and Covid-19

As well as a top-quality venue, delegates can look forward to excellent speakers and content. The program will mirror that of the Rotterdam conference in 2018 and will feature key-note speakers and masterclasses. “The main theme of the conference is sustainability and, of course, we will discuss the impact of Covid-19 on the world of food and hospitality,” explains Dalhuisen. “At the most recent FCSI EAME board meeting in September we discussed the program further and will shortly announce a line-up of excellent speakers.”

Recognizing that this is a tough time for the industry, the conference will be organized in a suitably prudent manner. As to what Dalhuisen is most looking forward to, she is clear: “To meet all our FCSI friends and family in June 2021, to share knowledge and to inspire in this difficult and strange time,” she concludes.

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One kebab at a time

Since opening the first store in 1989 in Berlin, German Doner Kebab has aimed to change consumers' perception of kebabs with its premium quality ingredients and dine-in experience. Elly Earls asks Daniel Bunce, the MD for UK and Europe, about the brand's rapid recent growth and how it adapted its offer during the pandemic



Here's a fact you might not know: the doner kebab is said to have been invented in Berlin. There's still debate over which Turkish immigrant came up with the dish – made up of thinly sliced meat cooked on a vertical spit, wrapped in pita bread and topped with salad – around 50 years ago. But whether you believe Kadir Nurman or Mehmet Aygun's story, one thing is for sure: their small 1970s stalls paved the way for what has become a €4bn trade in Germany, across 40,000 kebab shops. With two million kebabs consumed each day, it's safe to say the doner kebab is a major staple of the German diet.

Since the 1970s, the dish has spread around the world, but not always to its most salubrious addresses. In many countries, a kebab is thought of more as a 2am post-night-out alcohol-absorber than a dish you'd enjoy with your family in a sit-down restaurant, which is a shame, because, when done well, it's perfectly suitable for the latter.

That's the message fast-casual brand German Doner Kebab (GDK) has been espousing since it opened its first store in Berlin in 1989. "Doner kebab shops are a big

business in Germany, however these tend to be street takeaways and what we wanted to do was give an elevated restaurant experience," says Daniel Bunce, managing director for GDK for the UK and Europe.

"We wanted to create a more premium product than was generally available, which is why we use the finest cuts of meat and our waffle bread is different from the recognized pita bread that everyone else uses. We've perfected our offer since we opened our first store in 1989 and now as we go further afield, we're proud that German guests come in and say, 'Wow, this is a taste of home'."

GDK was initially a slow burn when it came to growth. Most of the 1990s and 2000s were spent perfecting its policies and procedures and fine-tuning its unique blend of traditional spices and exclusive products. It wasn't until 2008 that the brand expanded beyond Germany, opening first in Dubai and then in Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. GDK launched in the UK in 2014, but growth only really started to take off in 2017, when the brand changed hands and its new owners saw its international potential.

Athif Sarwar had been on holiday with his family in Dubai in 2016 when he discovered GDK and loved it so much that he took his family for lunch there >

"Doner kebab shops are a big business in Germany, however these tend to be street takeaways and what we wanted to do was give an elevated restaurant experience"



Daniel Bunce, managing director for GDK for the UK and Europe



“When you come into one of our restaurants, you place an order and then you see your food being cooked, shaved and served to you”



Consistency across the globe and staff training have been cornerstones of GDK's success

three times in a week. Since acquiring the worldwide franchise, his company Hero Brands has grown the UK footprint of GDK from seven stores to 48, with another five to open this year and plans to double in size in 2021. GDK has also expanded into Sweden and North America, opening stores in Ottawa and Vancouver during the coronavirus pandemic, and has five franchisees signed up for a development pipeline of 75 restaurants across North America including sites in New York, Houston and Toronto.

Focus on training

GDK's food offer has changed very little over the decades, according to Bunce. “Because we started off quite slow, from the very beginning we focused on our food and the quality of our food has stayed the same throughout our growth,” he says.

Chefs use succulent beef and pure chicken fillets imported directly from Germany as well as fresh, locally produced vegetables that are delivered and prepared daily along with GDK's special waffle bread and secret sauces, closely guarded recipes that the brand says sets them apart from their competitors.

“Our meat is cut fresh, cooked to order and we don't use microwaves or hot hold.

When you come into one of our restaurants, you place an order and then you see your food being cooked, shaved and served to you,” says Bunce.

The menu doesn't change when GDK launches in new markets. “We do keep an eye on the market to see if there are any products we could introduce and we look at what's selling at other kebab shops, but we believe we're individual as a brand. The menu you find in the Middle East, the UK, Sweden, and North America is currently the same,” Bunce says.

What has evolved over the years is GDK's focus on guest service and team training. In 2020, GDK teamed up with UK training provider Code Academy to develop the GDK Academy, a bespoke training program covering three levels – entry level team members, supervisors, and management.

“We believe this will be a cornerstone of our future,” Bunce says. “Often people come into hospitality from university or work part time in the hospitality trade and there's a churn, but we want to encourage people to take up hospitality as a career.”

Currently, just over 300 team members are enrolled at the academy, which offers a mix of at-work learning and assessments and off-premise courses for everyone from >



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German Doner Kebab took the food off the street and into a restaurant setting

Once a franchisee has signed up, the GDK team holds their hand – from site selection through design and build, staff recruitment, training and marketing

cashiers to servers to ‘kebab masters’. “It’s early days but we’re looking forward to developing the academy further,” says Bunce.

Experienced franchise community

He credits much of GDK’s recent success to its experienced head office team and franchise community, many of whom are veteran hospitality operators with a number of other brands in their portfolios. “The great thing that’s allowing us to grow,” Bunce explains, “is that they’re seeing success with GDK and therefore have the confidence to open more stores with us.”

To continue this trend in North America, GDK has appointed a new franchise recruitment director, Michael Bruno, who joins the group from Focus Brands with over 25 years’ experience in the sector opening approximately 1,000 restaurants in North America while supporting franchisees in site selection, design and build.

At GDK, he’ll be tasked with recruiting franchisees who are prepared to take on at least three restaurants, which can be opened over a period of two to three years. “We don’t sell individual stores,” Bunce explains “We feel a minimum of three is the right commitment for someone’s time when

they join us and it also gives them the right return once they have all the businesses up and running.”

Once a franchisee has signed up, the GDK team holds their hand – from site selection through design and build, staff recruitment, training and marketing. “We stick close to them until we feel they’re ready to swim on their own,” Bunce says. “Then over the following weeks and months we continue to be on call, identifying any challenges and helping them drive their business forward.”

Growing during the pandemic

While the coronavirus pandemic has been a major setback to the growth of many foodservice brands, GDK has continued to expand in its existing markets and opened its first two restaurants in Canada. Bunce says the success of the Canada launch was partly down to the fact that a lot of work had been done in 2019; equipment had been approved by the FDA, builds had been started and franchisees had visited the UK to go through the full GDK training program. Head office also sent some of its trained team to Canada to give the new stores extra support.

Clearly, though, GDK also had to adapt to a situation where they couldn’t rely on >





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their main selling point – the kebab as a dine-in experience as opposed to a late-night takeaway. “We had to be very nimble,” Bunce admits. “We already had a delivery business and we expanded that, working with Deliveroo, Just Eat and Uber Eats.”

Prior to the coronavirus, delivery and takeaway was around 25% of GDK’s business. Now it’s 75-80%. “We didn’t close at all during the pandemic while others did, and as a result we had a lot of new guests, as well as our original guests, coming to us,” he says. In the UK, GDK delivered 30,000 free meals to National Health Service staff, keeping them top of mind for local communities. “That allowed us to grow too,” Bunce continues. “By staying open, we were able to get our product into communities, people loved it and they came back.”

Packaging was also an important factor when it came to making their delivery arm work. “We needed to keep the food as fresh and hot as possible so when it was delivered, it was as close to an in-store experience as it could be,” Bunce explains.

During summer 2020, GDK developed the Boss Box, initially because people were asking for something they could eat outside in the park. “It’s literally a meal in a box,” Bunce says, “You can open it in the park and all your food is compartmentalized; it’s not messy. But it’s also a deliverable product and it keeps the food fresh and warm. In the end, it was so popular that when we opened for dine-in, we made it available in-store too.”

GDK also invested in screens rather than simply removing tables to meet social distancing regulations in stores. “We believe people will try new places at the moment and if they feel safe they’ll come back,” Bunce says.

In 2021, GDK will open in Saudi Arabia, expand its other Middle East territories and continue to grow its footprint in the UK, Sweden, Ireland and North America. Longer term, the brand is aiming for 700 stores in the UK and 1,000 in the US within 10 years. “We have a little phrase; we want to change the world one kebab at a time,” Bunce laughs. They’re certainly on their way. ■

“We didn’t close during the pandemic while others did, and as a result we had a lot of new guests, as well as our original guests, coming to us”



Adapting to a takeaway model led GDK to develop the Boss Box



Smooth operator



FCSI Associate **Joey Navarro** tells Karen E. Thuermer that team work was key to pulling off the bold concept at Bottles & Bones restaurant

The timing of the opening of Bottles & Bones may not have been ideal – its grand opening took place three weeks before Atlanta went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. But for several years, owner Rob Taranto recognized a need for a new restaurant in Suwanee, Georgia, that offered legendary dining with a connecting energetic presence. The loyalty of his clientele since proves he was right.

Billed as “a modern American chophouse”, the restaurant features prime cuts of meat prepared on an innovative Jospier oven showcased in a relaxed atmosphere, complete with lively nightlife at its expansive horseshoe bar and adjoining piano lounge. “From the ground up the project was designed with every square inch in mind,” says Taranto.

Besides finding the perfect location for Bottles & Bones, creating the physical restaurant met with few challenges. “Once we found the right space, we designed it correctly for everyone’s comfort and productivity,” Taranto says.

Desiring to locate in the Suwanee suburb outside of Atlanta, real estate options were limited. Taranto settled on a building that was under construction. The space began as “a concrete shell with a floor of concrete above and four stories of apartments above us,” he outlines. The space, which totals 6,000 sq ft, has 20-ft ceilings and an all-glass store front that is part of the real estate developer’s main level retail concept.

A team was assembled, including an architect, interior designer, as well as foodservice consultant Joey Navarro, FCSI Associate and principal at Whitestone Food Service Design. Over the next year the team



worked together with Navarro designing the kitchen, prep and dish area, as well as other areas concerning the back of house workings of the restaurant. “Everything was designed to be as efficient as possible,” Taranto says.

Clear vision

Navarro recalls how Bottles & Bones was a culmination of thoughts over many years, given Taranto’s experience as an owner of other themed restaurants. “The team was provided a scope that didn’t deviate from start to finish,” he says. “Rob told us his vision and we ran with it.”

Most important, however, was the team spirit across the project. “We had all worked together on other projects from a peripheral point of view, but not from beginning to end and never with the sort of business intimacy we found ourselves in with Rob’s project,” says Navarro. “It’s extremely unusual that we all connected the way we did and certainly complemented each other’s strong points. We didn’t have gaps. Almost everything went smoothly, all things considered, the transitions happened with minimal loss



Joey Navarro, FCSI Associate and principal at Whitestone Food Service Design

“It’s phenomenal how we pulled this off so well. I’ve worked on hundreds of projects and this one happened to be one of the smoothest from start to finish”

of time between engineers, designers, architects, and so on.”

From the signing of the lease, ground up idea to design, engineering, and building approximately 12 months passed to get the doors open. “It’s phenomenal how we pulled this off so well, all things considered with respect to the building process,” Navarro says. “I’ve worked on hundreds of projects and this one happened to be one of the smoothest from start to finish.”

A few challenges

Navarro reveals that he designed the kitchen on paper at least six times, largely because the building was built for mixed use with retail below and residents above. The space was also chopped up with columns making a design that accommodated and made the dish drop off area and wait station problematic. The goal was to make them work and function without too much exposure to the clientele.

“The dish drop-off area and wait station was reworked numerous times to keep a positive employee flow while maintaining the needs each of these areas must provide,”

Navarro recalls, adding that there was also a need to find room for a line hood, prep hood and walk-in cooler.

“The other challenge was taking this concept and making it functional while exposing an open kitchen,” he adds. “Open kitchens are great, but we needed to somehow keep the kitchen available to the diners while hiding the dish area. That wasn’t easy because we didn’t want to short the staff access to the dish drop off.”

Another challenge, Navarro points out, was the preparation space, again because its design had to be worked around the shape of the kitchen and the columns. “I needed to design this area taking in the requirements of the chef, as well as the owner, to make the space work, be functional and have the space to work with the necessary equipment chef wanted,” he says.

While the Josper charcoal ovens are a major feature to the restaurant, Navarro points out that they did not present any problems because this specialty equipment was always specified in the design. One of the biggest issues to be overcome, however,



The open kitchen faces the public while keeping the dish drop off area hidden





“A fan system was needed to pull exhaust out from over the grills. Everything had to be fire rated to the nth degree. And everything had to be retrofitted on a roof that was 40 ft above the restaurant”

was ventilation given the four stories of apartments above. “A fan system was needed to pull exhaust out from over the grills,” Taranto says. “Everything had to be fire rated to the nth degree. And everything had to be retrofitted on a roof that was 40 ft above the restaurant. Equipment had to be ordered the right way.”

This is where Accurex stepped up to the plate, Navarro says. Accurex manufactures dual-purpose integrated systems that provide ventilation and feature a self-contained fire suppression system.

Team work

But ultimately, the most unique element was how the many Type A personalities involved in the project were able to check their egos at the door and come to the table with an open mind. “The word ‘team’ was carried through the entire project from beginning to end,” Navarro says.

As for words of advice or lessons learned, Navarro concludes: “Hang in there. Hold up your end of responsibility and have accountability with your portion of the project. The more time you spend communicating with the team the greater the likelihood of being relied upon. You need to produce. It’s great getting to the table but once there, you need to hold up your end and not be the one everyone is waiting on for information.” ■



The team included an architect, interior designer, as well as Joey Navarro

Being part of a success story

Boutique hotel the Jackalope in Melbourne's wine region has become among Australia's most lauded. **Andrew Brain** FCSI tells Tina Nielsen about his work on the hotel's food and beverage facilities

Asked to name his most significant projects, Andrew Brain FCSI, director of MTD Hospitality Consulting in Melbourne, Australia, points to the Jackalope boutique hotel, despite the project being completed four years ago.

"It still stacks up and it is a brilliant project to be able to quote to anybody," he says. It is easy to see why – vast in ambition and creativity, the Jackalope is a no-expenses spared hotel crossed with an art gallery set in the expanse of agricultural land in Victoria.

Recalling the start of the project, Brain thinks back to 2014 when he received a call from fellow consultant Stephen Kelly FCSI in Sydney. "Stephen is a MAS consultant and he called to tell me about a client of his who had a winery project on the peninsula," he recalls.

He was referring to the Mornington Peninsula. For those unfamiliar with Melbourne, the Eastern suburbs taper to a tip, which is called the Mornington Peninsula.

"One side is a bay beach and the other side is surf coast. Down the middle is all this agricultural land, which is now becoming more and more popular," explains Brain. Standing on this land was an old winery called Willow Creek, which had been purchased by Chinese hotel developer Louis Li as his first project.

Kelly had started work with Li on the management consulting side and suggested bringing in Brain and his team to take on the development of food and beverage facilities. As Brain says: "This is FCSI supporting FCSI."

The brief

The plan for the Jackalope, named after an artwork Li had seen in a Berlin museum on his travels, was a 40-room boutique hotel.

For Brain's team, the initial brief was vague. The task was to develop a ground floor kitchen, a cellar kitchen, a heritage bar and a tasting bar. "Sometimes a client's brief is really detailed and it can be almost too much, but Stephen had put together the basic brief and helped the architect to come up with some spatial planning," he says. "Our brief was to further develop the project based on the iteration at the time."

Brain and his team were engaged for concept design, design development and tender documentation. The project started in 2014 and they completed the tender documentation August 2015. "For the amount of detail, it was a quick project," says Brain.

Li was heavily involved from the start and his contribution was welcomed by the design team. "He really wanted to impart his vision of the project as it was being developed," Brain says. "It can sometimes become difficult if the owner is very involved, but in this case it was brilliant."

The cellar kitchen at 220 sq m, is the main preparation kitchen and where all goods come in; it's where all the mise en place is done and also home to warewashing and glass washing. The ground floor kitchen, meanwhile, is the show kitchen set just off the 80-cover main dining room. The Doot Doot Doot restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner overseen by executive chef >



Top: Jackalope Hotel.
Right top: The hotel's cocktail bar – Flaggerdoot.
Right below: Doot Doot restaurant



“Often you find there can be a lot of barriers between consultants and interiors or property managers and builders, but this was a really harmonious project to work on”



Above: Andrew Brain FCSI says people are impressed when he mentions his team designed the Jackalope's F&B

Guy Stanaway. There is further a 150-seat function room.

Much thought went into creating a compelling project that respected existing buildings and the surroundings. One of the bars is in the old farmhouse, which has been preserved with the exterior intact and all internal walls stripped out. “It is something they could have just bulldozed, but they preserved it,” says Brain.

Smooth collaborations

“There was no budget initially so in our design we had to give them an estimate of what the budget would potentially be, and work with the architectural team to manage that,” he says. “As far as the equipment was concerned they were very open to anything we recommended.”

The emphasis in the back of house was more on ensuring the equipment could deliver the volume required, but front of house was different. Brain settled on a 5.5 metre Charvet bespoke cooking suite, imported from France. “It was a single piece cooktop, set in to a snug nook behind the hot pass, so it was quite a challenge to make sure the construction fit to the space when the unit came in,” he says and admits to a few sleepless nights worrying about it. Needless to say the suite fitted beautifully when it arrived and was unpacked.

Throughout there was close collaboration with other teams involved, notably with Carr Design on the interiors and Medley Property Management Group. “Often you find there can be a lot of barriers between consultants and interiors or property managers and builders, but this was a really harmonious project to work on,” says Brain. “That is why it is one of my significant ones.”

The local environment and rural setting of the Jackalope Hotel meant they had to work with resource challenges. “There was limited gas supply, so we had to work with electricity, but saying that, the electricity supply was intermittent too,” say Brain. Add to this inconsistent water pressure and the fact that the land is in a high fire danger zone.

Even dealing with these sorts of practical challenges, Brain and his team still pushed

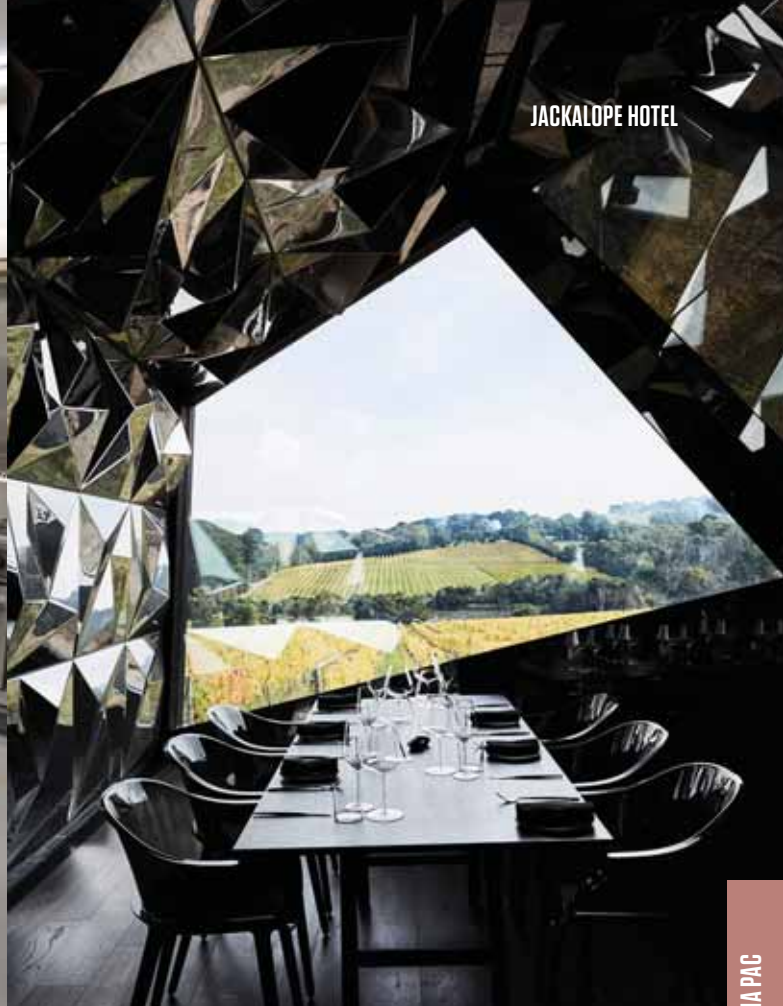


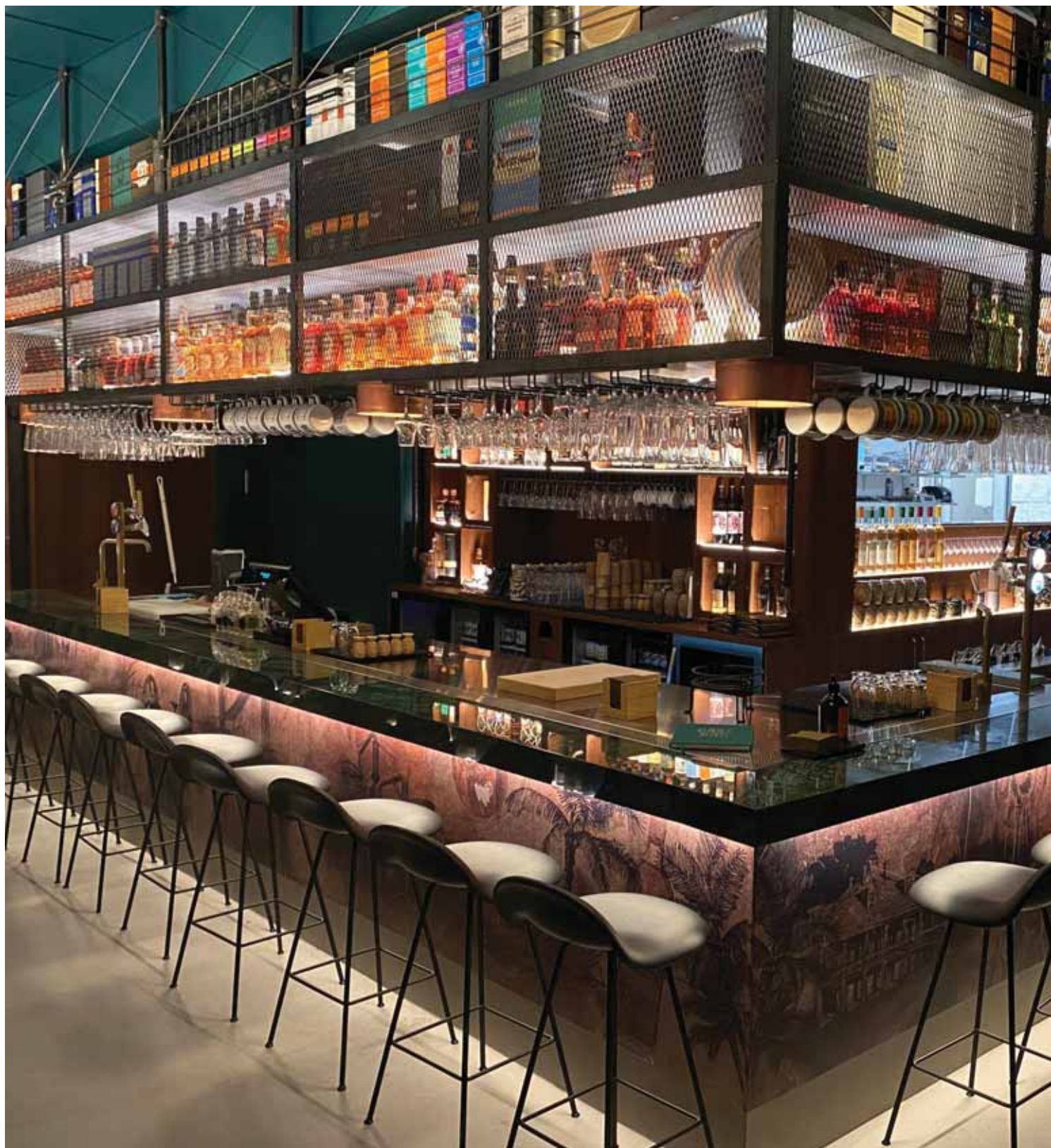
the client to embrace initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint. “We are a global network of people and what we do here in Australia has to be accountable,” he says. His team suggested three initiatives that Li went for: electrolyzed water for cleaning and sanitation; secondary refrigeration to reduce refrigerants and variable speed fans on canopies. “They are all things that are not that sexy but when it comes to energy savings and climate they are significant.”

After completion, the Jackalope has become Australia’s most awarded hotel, including being named Boutique Hotel of The Year by *Gourmet Traveller* and included in the *Condé Nast Traveler* Hot list. Brain and his team have watched in wonder. “The awards are not won because of anything to do with us; it is the success of the people who have set it up,” he says. “But this was a project we all loved working on and when they kept winning awards we said, ‘wow, we were a part of that’.”

The project has become much bigger than any of them had imagined. “Today, when we mention that we designed the F&B of the hotel people are impressed,” he says. “We must have done something right” – MTD has gone on to work with Li on two further projects, one of them a bakery.

“Li ended up buying a pastry company in Sydney and when he set up the bakery in St Kilda in Melbourne he got us to design it,” he says. “Clients have more than one project on their mind, they have ambitions and the end of one project doesn’t have to be the end of working together,” concludes Brain. ■







Bringing a taste of the Caribbean to Sweden was the aim of the Cane Rum Society's owners. They called on the services of **Johan Öberg Larsson** FCSI, owner and CEO of Storköksbyrån. He talks to Jamie Fullerton about why he considers it one of the consultancy's most interesting projects

Suggest to Duane Shepherd that 2020 was not a great year in which to launch an expensive new restaurant and bar concept in Sweden, and the co-founder of Stockholm's Cane Rum Society will return a hail of analogies.

"Out of the fire the phoenix rises," says Shepherd, who opened the rum and Caribbean food venue in September with F&B entrepreneur and fellow rum obsessive

The rum guys



Niklas Blomquist. Then, in November, much of Sweden's restaurant industry experienced an economic nosedive following new government advice to avoid eateries due to the latest rise in Covid-19 cases.

"Out of every bit of s**t there's a diamond found in the rough," says Shepherd, adding that Cane Rum Society's revenue dropped by 80% in the three weeks since the government advice was issued.

Such figures sound stark, but Shepherd and Blomquist have big plans for their inaugural Cane Rum Society venue and brand once they get through the dark winter of Covid. In the first few months of opening, Shepherd says, it was running at capacity on weekend nights, quickly gaining a reputation as Stockholm's swish spot for rum lovers.



Duane Shepherd (left) and Nicklas Blomquist

Johan Öberg Larsson FCSI, owner and CEO of Stockholm-based foodservice consultancy Storköksbyrån, picks the 150-person capacity venue as one of the most interesting of the approximately 300 F&B projects his firm worked on in 2020. "We're the only bar in Stockholm with this range of rums, and the only restaurant in Stockholm that does Caribbean food," says a steadfast Shepherd. "We've chosen the right time."

Shepherd, who was born in Trinidad and worked as a drinks consultant in London before moving to Sweden, is known as the Stockholm bar industry "rum guy". Blomquist owns perhaps the largest private rum collection in Europe. Their brief to Larsson was a venue with more vibrancy than a lounge, with much focus on a large bar, plus a section for rum classes that became the Rare Rum Library, holding over 1,200 rums.

Reaching goals

Larsson welcomed the clarity of vision. "Duane and Niklas had a goal for this project, and it's easy to reach that goal if we have customers who know their needs," he says. "It's not often we have that kind of customer. I work with the Google main office in Stockholm; they know what they need, but it's hard to work with them because they have so many people that think in different ways."

Cane Rum Society opened in Hagastaden: a fast-developing area home to much of Stockholm's life science industry, providing >



“This bar is made for Duane. It’s his way, how he works with Caribbean drinks. If they change the concept in two or three years, the bar won’t fit”



Vibrant color brings a Caribbean vibe along with a comprehensive collection of rums



an increasingly populous and well-heeled customer base. Alongside a café and patisserie named RC and Indochine, another restaurant, Cane Rum Society comprises a trio of openings spearheaded by Blomquist in a new build connected to the Karolinska Solna Hospital.

Larsson, who works as part of a team of 14 consultants at Storköksbyrån, consulted on all three venues, as Blomquist secured some of the best F&B spots in the area ahead of an anticipated rise in Hagastaden's worker population. Larsson designed a small open kitchen for the Caribbean food plus a large bar designed to encourage a host bartender-driven vibe. The bar is manned by Shepherd, who is something of a local booze influencer.

Shepherd says that the brief was to create a "Caribbean paradise" in Stockholm. Beyond the food – Jamaican-style jerk chicken and Trinidad-style lamb curry are on the menu – Alexander Wolfe, architect with Guringo Designstudio, brought Caribbean style with wooden furnishings and vibrant color.

Better solutions

The kitchen proved challenging for Larsson. The owners wanted an open island-style kitchen with no areas hidden from the field of vision from the guests' bar area. Although Cane Rum Society was the first occupant of its space, the building was largely designed for office rather than F&B use.

This meant staff movement paths had to be designed to flow around a designated ventilation room in the bar/restaurant that could not be moved. Installing the nitty gritty of electricity, gas and ventilation for this kitchen style was also fiddly. Larsson says that if he could work on the project again, "I would try to get in earlier, to find better solutions from the start [of the wider building's design and construction]. So maybe that [ventilation] area could be put behind, instead of in the centre [of the Cane Rum Society site]."

To prevent unsightly rubbish bags being on view Larsson put in a waste disposal system for food, to be used alongside a separate non-food bin deposit – although this made fitting everything in the kitchen

even more challenging. So did Shepherd's cocktail demands – his insistence on using elaborate (or "crazy", as Larsson calls them) Tiki cocktail glasses meant a separate glass washing machine was required. Initially the bar had its own glass washing machine, before it was taken out of the design as it would be too noisy for customers.

Designed for Duane

The main bar, which can seat around 18 customers, was also a challenge. "Every piece of equipment needed to be fitted in exactly the right place," says Larsson. "If bar staff begin putting things on the bar top it will create quite a messy feeling, so we had to have a solution where everything is put inside the bar area." Bottle storage areas were mirrored rather than replicated further along the bar, as they would in a more conventional design.

The design hits Shepherd's briefing points, but the meticulous storage design and bottle layout is unique. "This bar is made for Duane," says Larsson. "It's his way, how he works with Caribbean drinks. If they change the concept in two or three years, the bar won't fit. As long as Duane works in the bar everyone will be happy, but if they change people... it's not flexible."

There are no signs that this will prove a problem in the near-future. The owners have invested a huge amount of time and passion into Cane Rum Society, with Shepherd running tastings and masterclasses with brands such as Diplomatico and 1423 World Class Spirits.

Covid travel restrictions have forced innovation. For the 1423 event, customers gathered in the Rare Rum Library after the 1423 experts shipped the booze to the venue and led the tasting via Zoom. "That was four hours long," says Shepherd. "We did 11 rums. We had to take a break as it was getting to be a bit much."

The owners have ambitions to scout new potential Cane Rum Society locations elsewhere in Sweden plus perhaps in London and Hong Kong, once the pandemic is over. Shepherd, salesman-slick, has a final analogy for the bar's intended vibe: "Like Cheers, where everybody knows your name." ■

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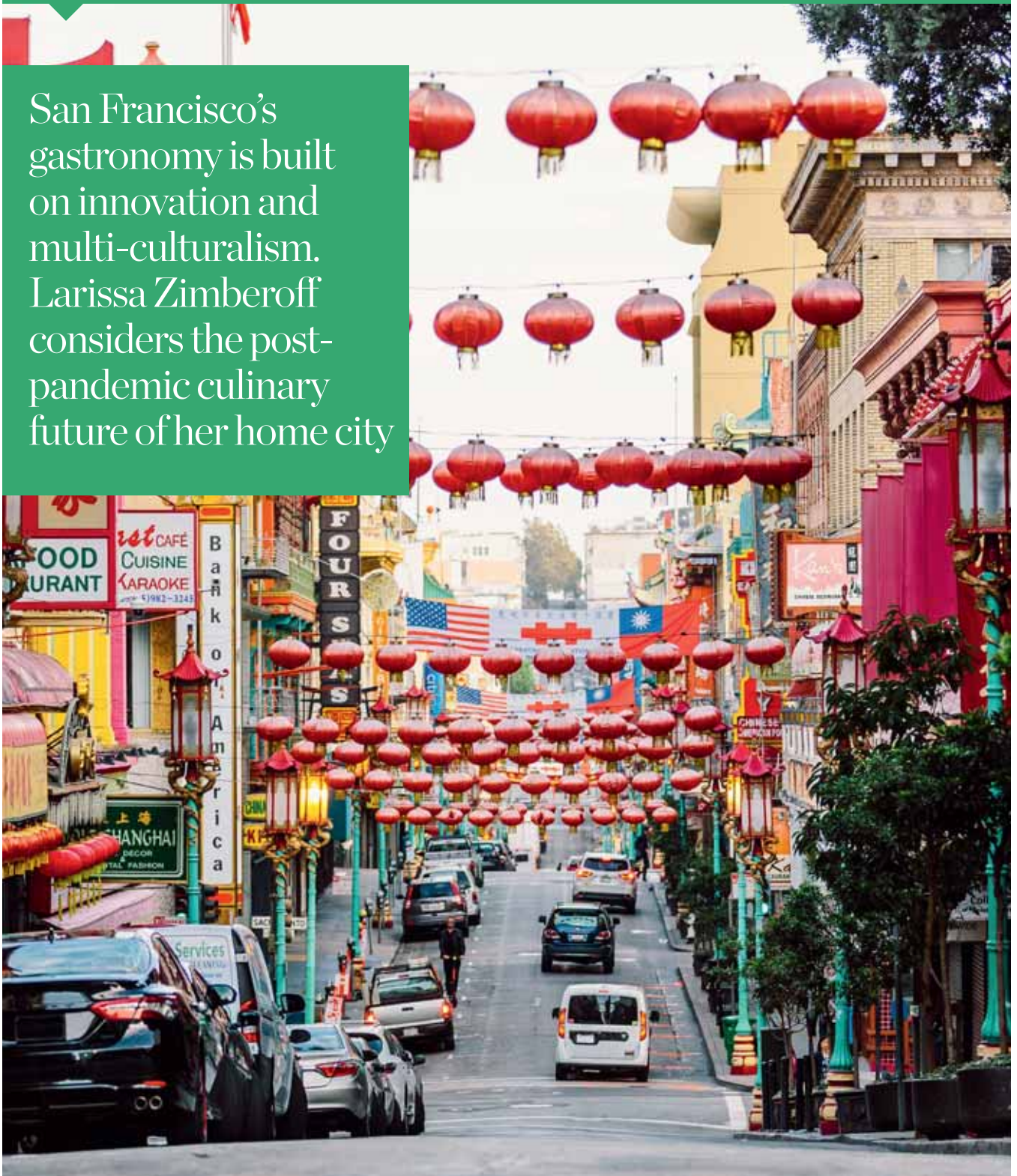


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CITY FOCUS SAN FRANCISCO

San Francisco's gastronomy is built on innovation and multi-culturalism. Larissa Zimberoff considers the post-pandemic culinary future of her home city



Visitors come to San Francisco to eat. There's just-caught fish coming in off the piers, espresso brewed from beans roasted on site, fortune cookies folded atop ancient metal plates, and sourdough bread baked with a starter that goes back over a century. After they eat, visitors crest our hills and admire our fog.

My first trip to San Francisco was to see my dad. He cooked up spicy Chinese food in his small Glen Park kitchen before sending me back home to Mom in Los Angeles. I was 11 or 12 at the time, and flying into San Francisco International Airport was as thrilling as traipsing around the city tasting new delicacies.

But who's traveling these days? Along with every other city, San Francisco's vibrant restaurant scene is troubled. It's hard to find a silver lining during this pandemic, but it's there. In early March, San Francisco restaurateur Doug Biederbeck, owner of iconic restaurants Bix and Florio, was renegotiating the lease for MarketBar, his casual American eatery located in the San Francisco Ferry Building.

MarketBar held an anchor spot in the Ferry Building – a food lover's paradise – for over seventeen years. It was a stone's throw from a weekly farmers market that was lauded by chefs, and frequented by tourists and locals alike. Biederbeck didn't want to shutter the business,



“Closing MarketBar was a real loss for me, and my staff. But it would have been one more horrible headache in the midst of this”

“but the landlords were asking for a huge rent increase,” he said. This was mere weeks before Covid-19 required everyone in San Francisco to shelter-in-place.

“I take a certain ironic pleasure in this,” he told me. In the same breath, he expressed regret. “Closing MarketBar was a real loss for



Above: Two star chefs in San Francisco's firmament; Dominique Crenn and Joshua Skenes



me, and my staff. But it would have been one more horrible headache in the midst of this.”

An economic hit

The numbers aren't good. San Francisco's travel association estimates that there will be a more than 50% drop in travelers to our fair city in 2020. Spending will plummet too. In 2019, visitors spent \$9.6bn. In 2020, it's projected to be \$3.1bn. Hotels, conferences, downtown San Francisco, the airport, independent restaurants, you name it, the economic hit is an equal opportunity bearer of bad news.

But San Francisco is a



town that is built on ingenuity. Today, we see it in the countless startups funded by Silicon Valley investors, but the city's origin was first lit up by the California Gold Rush, a period in the mid 1800s that brought miners, explorers, and entrepreneurs to the area. Almost 300,000 people from the US and beyond made their way to the west coast in hopes of bagging their fortune.

Savvy Chinese merchants operated the majority of the restaurants. In 1885, San Francisco had a dozen Chinese restaurants. In comparison, New York only had six. While the food wasn't true to the East, the predominantly male



New revenue streams, such as cocktails to go from Bix, will probably be retained post-pandemic

The look was serene Chinese temple minus the flash: “No gold. No red. No dragons. No lanterns,” Chiang famously decreed

workers lined up to grab a bite. This laid the groundwork for the city's small but thriving Chinatown district located along Grant Street.

In her book *San Francisco: A Food Biography*, Erica J. Peters tells of ships bringing exotic ingredients from all over the world. The manifest for one Chinese boat in the 1860s included cinnamon, coffee, dried fish, rice, preserved fruit, salted melon seeds, dwarf oranges, ginger, smoked oysters, and tea. “Americans were fascinated by all the different kinds of foods Chinese people ate,” wrote Peters.

World cuisine

This fascination set the stage for our multicultural approach to cuisine. In his book, *Ten Restaurants That Changed America*, Paul Freedman, a history professor at Yale University, included the Mandarin Restaurant, Cecilia Chiang's paean to her home country. It served Mandarin cuisine instead of the Cantonese food typical at the time. Chiang opened her first location on Polk Street in 1961. After Herb Caen dined there, he wrote in his newspaper column that Chiang was serving “the

best Chinese food East of the Pacific.” That endorsement brought the crowds.

One of the few female restaurant owners at the time, Chiang moved the Mandarin a few times before landing in an understated, modernist address in Ghirardelli Square. The look was serene Chinese temple minus the flash: “No gold. No red. No dragons. No lanterns,” Chiang famously decreed. Her design aesthetic became a template for many future San Francisco restaurants.

Chiang's ripple effect lasted for decades. PF Chang's, an Asian bistro with over 300 locations, was opened by her son Philip. (He dropped the ‘i’ in their last name to make it easier for Americans.) And a former chef of Chiang's opened his take on Chinese cuisine in Pasadena, Los Angeles called Panda Inn; his son went on to launch Panda Express, a QSR with over 2,000 locations.

Chiang died in October. She was 100 years old.

The best ingredients

Along with Chinese food, the city's culinary heritage was built on pristine ingredients. Nowhere was that more evident than at Chez Panisse – another one on Freedman's “*Ten Restaurants*” list. Alice Waters opened her neighborhood bistro in 1971 in an old wooden house in Berkeley. By 1980, Chez Panisse was the most famous restaurant in the country. We owe much to Water's casual but exacting vision along with the chefs that worked >

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“The margin for feeding people outside of your restaurant is better than for people eating inside your restaurant”

Above: David Nayfeld, chef and co-owner of Che Fico (left) offered meals to people in need

for her. She was a staunch supporter of locally sourced ingredients, daily changing menus and what many like to call “California cuisine,” but Waters preferred to call “Mediterranean” or “New American.”

Regardless, Waters’ landmark restaurant is still open today serving food that has had an overriding impact on San Francisco’s dining establishment. Chefs that worked in her kitchen went on to open their own famed locations including Zuni Café, Stars, Quince and Foreign Cinema.

With the exception of Stars, which was opened in 1984 by Jeremiah Tower, they

are all still operating. Tower, a chef and co-owner of Chez Panisse in the 1970s, wrote of “the powerful synergy between restaurants and freshly harvested ingredients” in his book *California Dish*.

When we zoom ahead to the aughts, we come to Silicon Valley’s impact on our restaurant culture. Investors looked for passion projects, and their money helped turn up the volume on fine dining. Not only did our restaurants actually get louder, but ambitious chefs found the funding they needed to build out high-end restaurants in spite of astronomical rents. To support their bank loans, and lux ingredient habits – house-

cured caviar, grass-fed butter, antelope tartare – chefs opted for opulent tasting menus.

Season, opened by chef Joshua Skenes in 2009, was declared to be the most expensive bill in the country. Benu, opened by chef Corey Lee in 2010, was another. Lazy Bear, opened by chef David Barzelay in 2014, was a third.

Gathering stars

By 2017, you could count more three-Michelin star restaurants in San Francisco than anywhere else in the country. This included Atelier Crenn, which was opened in 2011 by chef Dominique Crenn. When she first arrived in San Francisco in 1988, Crenn considered herself lucky to land any cooking job at all. Thankfully, Tower saw her potential and gave her a job at Stars. In 2019, Crenn became the first woman in the US to earn three Michelin stars.

But stars or no stars, fine dining is mostly on hold because of the pandemic. When things open up, if they open up: “It’s going to be an entirely different world,” said Crenn. Change is good though, and every chef in San Francisco has been forced to evolve.

With indoor dining on hold or at limited capacity, business owners got creative. Three-star Crenn adapted, too. She sold meal kits nicknamed Crenn Kits, offered takeout, and delivery. Her team also helped feed frontline workers. In the future, Crenn is planning to add an épicerie, selling high-end goods such as olive oil, marmalade, and tea.

Local chefs matched her in stride. David Nayfeld, chef and co-owner of Che Fico, talked his tech investors into funding his reopening so he could offer meals to those in need. Eventually he added dinner takeout, brunch sandwiches, pastries, and a selection of hard-to-find Italian provisions. Brandon Jew, chef and owner of Mister Jiu’s, partnered with World Central Kitchen, José Andrés’ non-profit, to feed those hit hard by the pandemic. Then he added on his own list of to-go snacks such as cold silken tofu with Sungold tomatoes, young ginger, smoked sherry and black sesame oil.

Adapting to survive

These mini businesses helped chefs stay afloat, and the infrastructure they’ve built isn’t going away. Things like meal kits, to-go packaging, branding, QSR codes, and online cooking classes. “The margin for feeding people outside of your restaurant is better than for people eating inside your restaurant,” said Nayfeld. “I doubt restaurants will take these revenue streams and ratchet them down.”

And what of Biederbeck? He continues to operate his two remaining restaurants that are “limping along with only outdoor dining.” Soon, he’ll be able to seat (some) people indoors, but for an owner/operator whose been in the business for almost 40 years, it’s yet another silver lining: “It’s gratifying to be able to take care of our customers, and to employ a few of our staff.” ■



Sophisticated sober sipping

As the drinking public becomes more aware of health and wellness, countries in Asia have experienced a boom in no- and low-alcohol beverage programs. Melinda Joe tracks the trend

Mocktail flavors can be inspired by the food offering

Amid the bars and clubs in Tokyo's nightlife district of Roppongi, 0% is an outlier. Behind the copper bar, a convex mirror encircled in a nimbus of amber light hangs in lieu of wall-mounted liquor shelves. The gleaming interior, with its shiny surfaces, neon art and Scandinavian-inflected wooden furniture, conjures a futuristic vision of socializing in the post-pandemic age – one in which alcohol is increasingly less prominent.

The first bar in Tokyo to serve exclusively booze-free cocktails and other beverages, 0% is the brainchild of Mayumi Yamamoto, 31, who launched the venture in July to offer fellow teetotalers sophisticated alternatives to the disappointing options typically found on non-alcoholic drinks lists.

“Many non-drinkers love good food and going out, but few places give the alcohol-free drinks menu the same consideration as the wine or cocktail list,” she says.

0% is the third establishment specializing in spirit-free drinks to open in Japan this year. But all across the country, restaurants, bars and hotels have been expanding their non-alcoholic drinks programs to cater to the growing number of sober-curious customers.

Led by health-conscious Millennials and Gen Z, the trend toward drinking less has been gaining momentum around the world for the past decade – particularly in the UK and US. A survey published in the UK



Antonio Lai was influential in bringing the trend to Hong Kong



journal *BMC Public Health* revealed that the proportion of Brits between the ages of 16 to 24 who abstain from alcohol rose from 18% in 2005 to 29% in 2015.

More recently, the phenomenon has taken off in Asia, where many people lack the enzyme to metabolize alcohol and the wellness industry is booming. Rising health consciousness, coupled with growing demand in Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, is the main driver. Data from Global Market Insights indicates that the low- and no-alcohol beverage market in the Asia-Pacific region is poised to grow more than 7% in the next five years, while the global market, estimated at \$20bn in 2018, is expected to reach \$30bn by 2025. Increased availability of premium zero-proof spirits – such as the UK's Seedlip, as well as new products like Japan's Nema “whiskey” – and booze-free wines, in addition to the surge in non-alcoholic beers and other beverages, is expected to further drive the trend.

Hong Kong was one of the earliest Asian cities to embrace the trend, thanks in part to innovative bartenders such as Antonio Lai. In 2012, when he opened the cocktail bar Quinary, which ranks 16th on the 2020 list of Asia's 50 Best Bars, he made no- and low-alcohol tipples part of the drinks program.

“I'm a little sensitive to alcohol, so I've never been a big drinker,” he says, explaining that he “wanted (the Quinary mocktails) to >



“Many non-drinkers love good food and going out, but few places give the alcohol-free drinks menu the same consideration as the wine or cocktail list”



Above: Vicky Cheng pairs his food with low alcohol cocktails at Michelin-starred Veve, Hong Kong. Opposite: Alistair Minty of Andaz Tokyo with one of his no-alcohol creations

“Whereas wine-pairing courses are usually a set pattern, mocktails give them a taste of the unexpected”

be more than a combination of juices.”

In 2015, his expertise was essential when he partnered with chef Vicky Cheng to open Michelin-starred Veve, where cocktail pairing is at the heart of the concept. From the start, he focused on making drinks with relatively low levels of alcohol to avoid overwhelming the flavors in Cheng’s Chinese-French cuisine. A few years ago, he introduced non-alcoholic cocktail pairing courses and says that up to 30% of guests now choose the booze-free option.

Zero-proof cocktails, however, can be 10-15% costlier to develop. For example, to make the “oak water” Lai uses as a substitute for whisky, he used Jack Daniel’s barrels, as well as a SonicPrep – a machine that uses ultrasonic sound waves to infuse liquids with barrel-aged flavor and can cost thousands of dollars. The juniper berries he uses in the gin-like juniper water must be imported, adding to expenditure.

Still, he sees growth potential for the spirit-free cocktail trend in Hong Kong: “It’s a new experience for people. Whereas wine-pairing courses are usually a set pattern, mocktails give them a taste of the unexpected,” he says, noting that about half of the guests who order mocktails are occasional drinkers, rather than strict abstainers.

Although the trend has been slower to take off in traditionally hard-boozing Tokyo, Japan is poised to become a leader in the

movement. A 2018 health ministry survey discovered that 56.5% of people in their twenties didn’t drink in 2017 – up from 41% a decade earlier – while 54.5% of those in their thirties avoided alcohol. Experts estimate that the non-alcoholic beverage industry is worth ¥300bn (US\$2.7bn), and the financial impact even has its own nickname: gekonomics, a portmanteau of geko, the Japanese word for teetotaler, and economics.

Two years ago, Andaz Tokyo began offering seasonal fruit-based spirit-free tipples at its swanky Rooftop Bar in response to increased requests from guests. Shortly after, food and beverage director Alistair Minty rolled out the drinks in all of the hotel’s dining outlets, and sales have been significant.

Given the choice between standard and no-alcohol cocktails at the same price (¥1,400 or US\$13), 90% of afternoon tea guests select the booze-free option. Since the Covid-19 crisis, Minty has noticed a 10-20% shift away from alcohol consumption, particularly during lunchtime.

“People are being more cautious about taking care of their health,” he observes, adding that the pandemic’s effect on the economy may have an equally – if not more – significant impact on spending habits. “Companies are trying to be more mindful of expenses. Some may have policies that prohibit business dinners, but if there’s no



“A lot of places don’t understand how to incorporate these kinds of drinks into their beverage programs”

alcohol involved it might be OK to order some snacks with drinks and call it a meeting.”

In March, veteran bartender Eiji Miyazawa opened Low-Non Bar in Tokyo’s financial district, serving a mix of zero-proof cocktails and drinks containing less than 4% alcohol, because he wanted to create a space where drinkers and abstainers could “be on the same wavelength.” Despite the pandemic, which has emptied the city’s business centers of office workers, the bar is fully booked on the weekends – popular among younger women and couples – and he has recently started a series of non-alcoholic drinks pairing pop-ups featuring local chefs.

Miyazawa also sells his upscale mocktails online via the specialty liquor website Bartenders General Store and Nolky, his new online platform devoted to non-alcoholic beverages. Shoppers can purchase domestic and imported products such as Shrb fruit-based vinegar shrubs (an infusion of fruit, vinegar and sugar), and the website also features a selection of recipes from bartenders in Japan and overseas.

He’s currently in the planning stages of launching a consulting service for operators wishing to start a non-alcoholic beverage program. The company will offer menu development and bartender education, as well as a recruitment service to match bartenders with prospective clients.

“Technique is necessary,” he says, because spirit-free cocktails are completely different from alcohol-based drinks. “A lot of places don’t understand how to incorporate these kinds of drinks into their beverage programs. But if they do, the spend per customer will go up, bringing prices in line with alcohol-based drinks.”

While pricing is less of a barrier in markets such as Hong Kong and Tokyo, where high prices for fresh ingredients are generally accepted, it presents an obstacle for operators in southeast Asian countries like Malaysia.

“People still think that non-alcoholic drinks should cost no more than US\$5. Breaking that mindset needs to be supported by novel products such as Seedlip, which has cachet as a UK-made product and is perceived as premium,” explains bartender Shawn Chong, who began promoting no- and low-alcohol drinks three years ago.

However, as Brandon Kua FCSI, foodservice consultant with Citrus Consult in Malaysia, points out, pandemic-induced restrictions on the sale of alcohol across southeast Asia have been devastating for bars and restaurants. Going forward, developing a strong zero-proof beverage program is smart for business.

“If we are to anticipate these kinds of changes, then non-alcoholic drinks could be a solution,” he says. ■

STARTING A NOLO PROGRAM

The first step to starting an alcohol-free beverage program is knowing what products are available.

“Quality is improving all the time. These (readymade) products make easy-to-use mixers,” says sommelier Yoshinobu Kimura, who recently introduced non-alcoholic beverage pairing at his restaurant Sushi M. “You can also use teas as a base. Let chemistry be your guide.”

Homemade syrups, infusions and dehydrated fruits, which can be prepared in advance and have a longer shelf life than fresh ingredients, are time-saving essentials, notes Andaz Tokyo’s Alistair Minty.

If you work at a restaurant, Antonio Lai recommends consulting the chef to identify key flavors and components, and apply techniques used in the kitchen to develop creative drink recipes.

As Brandon Kua and Shawn Chong point out, consumer education is needed to demonstrate the value of non-alcoholic cocktails. “Operators will have to put a lot of effort into developing substantial offerings so they are not perceived as an after-thought,” Chong concludes.

“People think that non-alcoholic drinks should cost no more than US\$5”



Bartender Shawn Chong has been promoting no- and low-alcohol drinks



After the storm

In a year where we have all been flying less, Andrea Tolu looks at the impact on the airline catering sector



As the worst year in the history of aviation comes to an end, estimates of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) reached \$419bn of lost revenue and a 66% decline in air traffic for airlines.

For the airline catering sector, that meant huge revenue and job losses, and reducing kitchen operations to a minimum, or even shutting them down completely.

“It was a nightmare,” says Fabio Gamba, managing director of the Airline Catering Association, which groups together seven of the largest airline caterers. “Our activities in 2020 were just a tiny fraction of what they were the previous year. During the first lockdown, a lot of kitchens had to be mothballed. After a relatively good month in July, the second wave brought with it new restrictions, with dire consequences for our sector. The little air traffic remaining in Europe or the US wasn’t enough to compensate for these losses.”

Financial help granted to airlines by governments did not bring any improvements: “We were thankful each time help was given, but these funds were mostly used to keep airlines in operation throughout the crisis. Only a tiny fraction of that trickled down to our own activities.”

The consequences of the pandemic were felt across the board, says Gamba. “The size of catering companies didn’t matter that much. While it’s true that larger caterers are more flexible, they’re also more exposed to international flights, which were the most affected by lockdowns. It depended on whether or not they were doing business with an airline that could continue to fly.”

For those kitchens that remained open, ACA published detailed Covid-19 safety guidelines to minimize the risk of infection. The guide is freely downloadable from the association’s website and provides a series of checklists and controls for four different areas, called the 4Ps: people, premises, procedures, and procurement. Measures change depending on the severity of the pandemic in a given region. “It’s a living document that we’re constantly updating and sharing with airlines, so they understand what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, and how,” says Gamba.

The value of food

Although airline catering kitchens looked very different this year, inflight menus remained quite the same. The only trend, explains Gamba, was a higher preference for simple retail foods such as sandwiches and snacks, especially for shorter flights, which were the majority.

And yet, even with menu options reduced to the bare minimum, Gamba could see how positively passengers reacted to onboard food: “People were so happy to be served food. Even though it was nothing special – in my case I had a waffle and a bottle of water for a two-hour flight – they were excited and even asking for more. Food has a value that people hold dear, which bodes well for how people will welcome fancy onboard meals in the future.”

Even a simple waffle can be a moment of comfort in this unprecedented situation. As Gamba says: “Flying is not fun these days. You’re sitting 50 centimeters from a stranger, even though you’ve been hearing >

“Funds were mostly used to keep airlines in operation throughout the crisis. Only a tiny fraction of that trickled down to our own activities”

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“All airlines offer the same seats, the same movies and the same music. The only thing that really makes a difference in passengers’ experience is what they eat”

about social distancing for months. People just want to go from point A to point B in the least cumbersome way. So, when food arrives they think: at least I can eat something now.”

The big differentiator

The positive value that food always had, became even stronger during the pandemic. With all of the fears, the doubts, and the new habits on hand washing and sanitizing, social distancing, and masks, the one thing we never had to worry about was becoming infected from the food we eat.

That gives Gamba hope for when things return to normal: “I am relatively optimistic about the resilience of the airline catering sector. In my opinion it’s heading towards a positive change.

“In the end, all airlines offer the same seats, the same movies and the same music. The only thing that really makes a difference in passengers’ experience is what they eat. The differentiator role of food will become ever more important, especially after a period when people couldn’t fly.

“As always there will be two philosophies,” he continues. “One says: I want to give passengers the minimum

amount of food, to make the flight sustainable. The other says: I want to give them some choice of tasty meals, so I need to be creative. For most of the airlines that we’re talking to, the second option is still the one prevailing.”

As people return to flying with a heightened sense of the value of food, they will make fewer concessions to what they are served on board, expecting the same choice and quality as their favourite restaurant.

This, explains Gamba, will raise the bar for airlines: “They will have to show passengers that they’ve made extra efforts in order to restore, I wouldn’t say confidence, but certainly comfort. They will have to indulge and nourish them, coming up with new menus that trigger their imagination.”

“People need to have some basic truth, they want to know that what they’re eating is good, tasty, free from allergens and produced locally just hours before the flight. With the help of technology, we’ll go for on-demand menus that passengers can choose online when they’re buying their tickets.”

Gamba’s view is confirmed by a report published by the LSG Group last October, about how the Covid-19 pandemic is influencing global food trends. In the catering sector, and airline catering in particular, digitalization has become a priority, not only to reduce costs, but also to respond to travelers’ increasing demand of personalized menus.

A slow recovery

Between the present and the time when this positive change takes place, there will be a recovery period. Here, Gamba’s vision is >

INFLIGHT CATERING: THE FUTURE

Vic Laws FCSI spent years working in the airline catering industry. He shares his thoughts on the way forward for the sector

I started working with inflight catering in 1971. In those days they actually had a trolley and carved the meat for you as they went down the aisle. They'd have a fillet steak on there, which would have been cooked on the plane.

Before thinking about the catering aspect, you need to consider the future of aeroplanes and catering. Because we have got so used to video conferencing, business travel will drop, which is where airlines make their money. I think first class will carry on the same and premium economy is the area that will grow.

I flew to Turkey with British Airways in the summer and we were given a packet of crisps, a packet of biscuits and a bottle of water. The salt and sugar content was huge – contrary to the government's aim to reduce this.

Much of the inflight food is loaded at each end, so you have to consider if people are going to be happy with picking food up from a country where they don't know the standard.

Airline catering hygiene has always been to very high standards, but it is about people's perceptions, I know it is a high standard, but the general public doesn't. They see stuff left on trays, and wonder: does it get sorted, does it get thrown or reused?

I believe that the boom will be in catering in the airport terminal. As more food is picked up in the airport how is that going to affect the airline catering? If there's good food in the airport terminal, and you are traveling economy and have to pay for your inflight meal, are you going to wait to eat on the plane?



less optimistic: “Once the vaccine is widely available, passengers will have less fear of sitting next to someone they don't know. The counterbalance to that, however, is that while people were not allowed to travel for several months, they realized they could still do their job at home.”

Because of these two opposite trends, Gamba thinks that recovery will be slower than the industry would like it to be: “I'm afraid things will take longer than initially expected. I don't see any full recovery before a couple of years.”

As they help airlines win back passengers with outstanding menus, caterers will also want to grow less dependent from their ups and downs. “The aviation industry is very cyclical, with a major crisis every 10 years. This will lead caterers to diversify their portfolio, focusing also on similar activities such as rail and sea travel. A few of them had already started to do so and now they are happy they did.”

Several airlines tried to find different ways to sell their food this year. Thai Airways started to serve onboard menus in an airline-themed restaurant at its headquarters in Bangkok, Finnair sells business class meals in supermarkets. Perhaps more strategically, last September LSG Sky Chefs closed a contract with French train operator iDTGV and with a private train operator in Italy.

The other key word for the airline catering industry will be consolidation: “Right now, the industry is still relatively fragmented with a lot of stakeholders. I think that the airlines that are keeping inflight catering as a subsidiary of their

“The industry is still relatively fragmented with a lot of stakeholders”

own activities will dismiss it, giving rise to a second wave of consolidation,” says Gamba.

A revolution awaiting

Before Covid-19 took over all conversations, in the airline industry there was a lot of talk around sustainability. According to Gamba, once we regain some normality, this theme will be back: “The need for sustainability will create a number of difficulties for the current aviation industry as we know it. There will be more taxes, and customers will be more aware of its importance.”

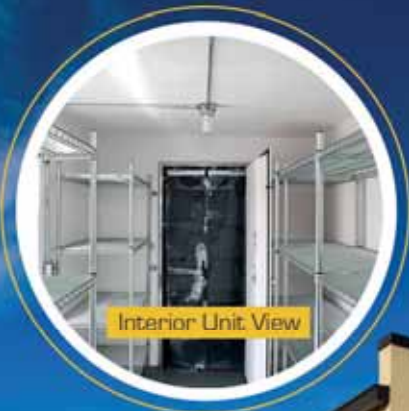
This change, however, will be the foundation of a complete transformation in the years to come: “I think the future of this industry, whether it's flying or providing food, will be for companies that produce a sustainable business and are able to communicate that.”

“In the coming decades, aviation will be considerably different from what it has been for the last fifty years, and the profile of people who fly will also change. There have already been a lot of revolutions, but the one that is awaiting us will be major. And that will have consequences on inflight catering too. I think these are very interesting and inspiring challenges for the industry.” ■



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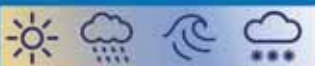
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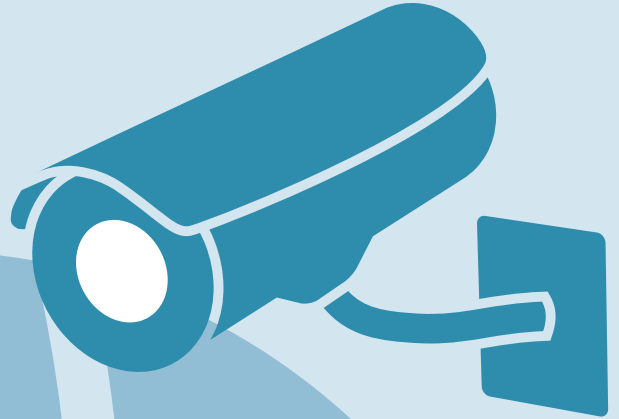
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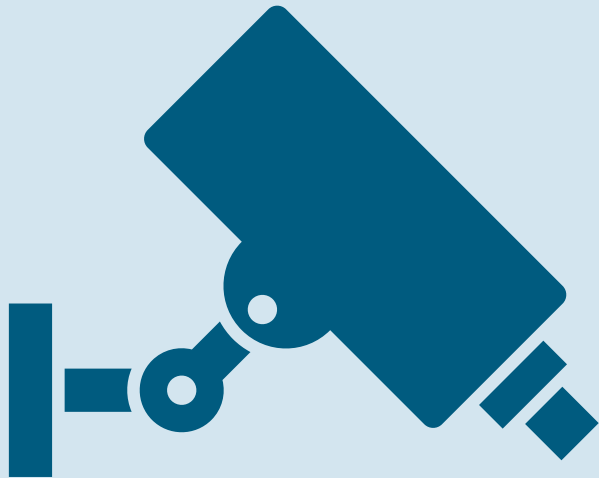


THROUGH

A LENS

The advent of artificial intelligence and facial recognition is bringing cameras into the front line of foodservice. Jim Banks looks at these new applications and their future in a society that is, more than ever, camera ready





Cameras are everywhere – in the street, our homes, our phones. Estimates of the number of photos taken since the advent of the smartphone vary, but it is no surprise to find that the generally accepted number is more than one trillion every year – and rising.

People alive now are the most photographed in human history. We have become accustomed to being on camera, whether we are taking selfies or being monitored by security cameras.

Surveillance for security purposes is nothing new and is a familiar function in shops, hotels, restaurants and even some homes. The deployment of cameras, however, is starting to go far beyond passive monitoring.

“The use of cameras has changed over the years,” says FCSI Associate **Jay Bandy**, president of Goliath Consulting Group, based in Georgia, US. “Initially, they were used at the security level to keep track of what people were doing. Then they were linked to the POS systems, watching servers ring up orders, and as part of anti-theft measures.

“Cameras then moved outside the building, particularly in the QSR market,

to look at the number of cars queuing for the drive-thru or tracking licence plates on cars to identify customers,” he says. “Now, they are starting to come back inside. With facial recognition capability, it is possible to instantly recognize a customer and suggest orders, upsell and gather more data about that individual.”

The new applications of cameras in foodservice derive from the rising tide of technological innovation – not so much in the cameras themselves, but in the software that analyzes the images they capture. Artificial intelligence (AI) is utilizing its ability to crunch vast amounts of data.

“Cameras are clearly linked to AI,” says Bandy. “As wages are going up – the minimum wage has risen here in the US – restaurants need to stay profitable and the use of technology, including AI will become more palatable as a way to improve their P&L. We have seen it in voice recognition technology, which already ties into POS and ordering systems pretty seamlessly.”

Behind the scenes

With AI, cameras are becoming the eyes of smart systems that are increasingly

“IF RESTAURANTS CAN ONLY AFFORD FEWER EMPLOYEES, THEN THEY MAY TURN TO CAMERAS AND AI TO INCREASE SALES WHILE CUTTING BACK ON LABOR”

focused on driving productivity and efficiency.

“The baseline for using cameras is security and monitoring, but we have much more sophisticated systems now,” says **Juan Martinez** FCSI, principal at industrial engineering consultancy Profitability in Florida, US. “We are hearing that it is possible to measure labor efficiency before and after changes are made to restaurant design and workflow.

“Cameras can track bodies and shadows, so they can sense when people are active or idle,” he adds. “It is not widely used, but it is a big conversation that is going on in the industry about cameras and AI, though



we are not yet sure how it will be used.”

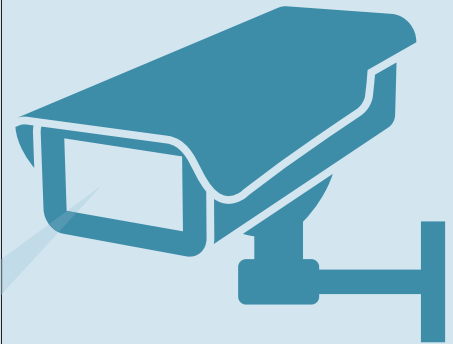
Facial recognition capability is, for now, the high point of the marriage between cameras and AI. The ability to pick out an individual with no other information than a picture of their face has been seen in a thousand spy films, but in foodservice it offers very powerful and much less sinister opportunities.

Cameras can already identify a particular vehicle by its licence plate, which helps to track orders and, potentially, personalize service. Facial recognition capability takes the same principle even further. Yet, at a time when many people are wearing masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19, this may not yet prove to be the killer app.

A technique similar to facial recognition is, however, being implemented to check that people are wearing masks. Dragontail Systems has launched a Covid-19 enhancement for its QT AI camera, which monitors food preparation processes.

Dragontail, which optimizes restaurant order and delivery process for global brands such as Domino's and Pizza Hut, has updated its AI-based computer-vision quality management system to detect cleanliness and sanitation. The existing QT AI camera system monitors the quality and accuracy of ingredients, as well as the temperature of the food. The latest iteration now detects the presence of gloves and masks, as well as keeping track of how often equipment and workspaces are cleaned.

With Covid, less contact and better food safety are top priorities, and Martinez points out that such a system could be used to help with adherence to sanitisation protocols. Logging when someone has washed their hands and sending a reminder if it has not been done within a specific timeframe is just one potential application. It is his firm belief, however, that camera technology will have the biggest impact in the area of efficiency.



“In Florida, the minimum wage is rising from \$9 per hour to \$15 over the next few years, so the cost of labor is rising,” he remarks. “If restaurants can only afford fewer employees, then they may turn to cameras and AI to increase sales while cutting back on labor.”

“The technology could help boost efficiency both internally and externally,” he adds. “It could help to reduce labor costs and, at the same time, improve the speed and quality of service, order accuracy and throughput. There is a need for that kind of efficiency.”

Consumers embrace the camera lens

Domino's, Chipotle's and McDonald's have been quick to move on AI, voice and camera technology. Although not all have implemented AI-enabled cameras, it is clear that big brands in the QSR segment will lead the way in adopting such technology.

McDonald's is acquiring Apprente, a company that uses artificial intelligence to understand speech, and could implement its technology in drive-thru, self-order kiosks and its mobile app. Big chains are also using licence plate recognition for drive-thru or kerbside delivery, and it is a small step from there to recognising a customer's face to personalize orders.





“OLDER GENERATIONS, AND SOME SEGMENTS OF THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS, DON’T TRUST FACE RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY”

“This is an area where AI could be used to suggest an order and we will certainly see this use of camera technology more in the future,” says Martinez. “Facial recognition is a technology I can see being used more and more.”

PopID cameras have already become popular as a contactless means of payment in some parts of the world. Once a user signs up and take a selfie, the camera in a kiosk can recognize their face in its cloud database and enable ordering, payment or entry through a security gate without a password or a debit card.

“Older generations and some segments of the younger generations don’t trust face recognition technology,” notes Bandy. “But with payment applications like PopID it is becoming more familiar.”

“With PopID, the camera identifies you and charges your card, so all you have to do is look into the camera and

pick up your food,” he adds. “People are very enthusiastic about the ease of use and it could not fit better with the current Covid-19 environment. Everything is contactless until you pick up your order. You don’t even have to hand over your card.”

Beware big brother

Surveillance and facial recognition technology do carry authoritarian overtones for some customers. There are moral and ethical dilemmas that arise, not least around the right to privacy. In the US, there have been facial recognition protests and a handful of cities have banned use of facial recognition technology, at least by the government.

“Here in Florida, they introduced cameras on traffic lights, so if you ran a red light you got sent a fine,” notes Martinez. “People complained and the cameras were outlawed. But facial recognition is very important and if you’re not doing anything wrong, why would you object to it? Many people already volunteer so much information about themselves on social media.”

While some are vocal in their opposition, the truth is that most of us have become so accustomed to cameras that we no longer notice them.

“Over the years, people working or dining in restaurants have become so used to cameras being there, so they ignore them. The use of cameras and AI will continue to expand and will be seamlessly integrated into the restaurant infrastructure. Domino’s and Chipotle are leading the way, but it will steadily filter down to smaller chains,” says Bandy.

“You want to be leading edge, not bleeding edge,” says Martinez. “You want to be in the first wave, but not the first to make a move. There is a cost to the technology, not just the upfront cost, but also repair and maintenance. If it were cheap, it would be used everywhere already. One thing is for sure, you can’t ignore the progress of technology.” ■





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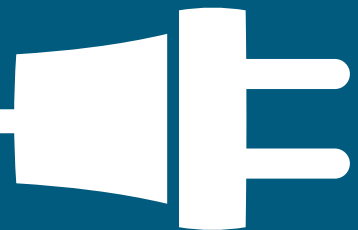
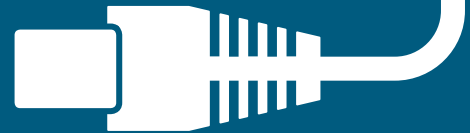
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SMART POWER FOR THE SMART KITCHEN

Ethernet cables transfer data between devices, but their capacity to carry power is affording the hospitality sector advantages in efficiency. Jim Banks examines the potential of Power over Ethernet (PoE) in the commercial kitchen

Snapping from the back of PCs, internet routers, phones and other network components, Ethernet cables are a fundamental part of the IT infrastructure in offices and homes. In a wired network, they carry the data that is the lifeblood of most businesses. It is their capacity to carry electricity along with that data, however, that is driving their adoption by foodservice operators and in the hospitality sector as a whole.



Power over Ethernet (PoE) offers the convenience of power and data provided over a single cable connection. Electric power can pass alongside data on twisted pair Ethernet cabling, sufficient to power low-voltage devices such as phones, IP cameras, routers, lighting controllers and network switches.

“Like most innovations, PoE started as the solution to a problem,” explains George Zimmerman, member of Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802 Executive Committee, which wrote the industry standards for PoE cabling. “People were accustomed to a phone being a standalone device that did not need a separate power supply.”

First introduced for phones up to 7W in 1999, the ability to power wired Ethernet devices has steadily increased and PoE now eliminates the need to find or wire up a separate power outlet for network devices including not only IP phones, but wireless access points, cameras, and access control mechanisms, using up to 71.3W. In the last 20 years, around a billion PoE ports have been installed.

“I am a foodservice consultant and we are always looking for the latest and greatest technology,” says **Stephen Young FCSI**, executive principal at YoungCaruso based in Colorado, US. “We have to look at what the future will be, as our projects often won’t be completed for two or more years.”

Young always specifies Category 6 (Cat 6) Ethernet cables – the latest generation – for his projects. “We use PoE for the POS system for data collection,” Young adds. “We specify Cat 6 and, eventually, the POS will retrieve power from that cabling.”

At the moment, there is a limit of 90W on Cat 6 with a low voltage level, which is not yet enough to power the POS, but it soon will be.”

“We think in terms of sustainability, so we won’t specify a technology that is obsolete,” he says. “We specify Cat 6 and the client might not use all of that cabling right away, but six months down the line they will realize that it was a good decision.”

The connected kitchen

PoE is already in use in enterprises of all sizes, with small offices and hotels often using it to power cameras, IP phones and wireless access points. Some even have

“WE HAVE TO LOOK AT WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BE, AS OUR PROJECTS OFTEN WON’T BE COMPLETED FOR TWO OR MORE YEARS”

PoE-powered access control, signage, clocks and lighting. These applications are already present in smart homes and hotels, as well as in the hospitality, healthcare and industrial sectors.

So, where does PoE fit in the commercial kitchen? Igor, a company that builds PoE-enabled intelligent building solutions, is beginning to answer that question. The company has

developed an Internet of Things (IoT) platform, Nexos, that uses PoE to connect and power remoted devices, bringing them within a single systems architecture.

“PoE is part of our work to digitally and sustainably improve the human condition and to create competitive advantage and customer loyalty for our clients,” says Dwight Stewart, founder and CTO of Igor.

Though it is just starting to work with commercial kitchens, Igor already has a broader presence in the hospitality sector. For instance, Nexos intelligent disinfection uses ultraviolet light technology to sanitise individual hotel rooms.

“In a kitchen, it can be used with cameras, motion detectors and other sensors to track assets, monitor cleanliness, track temperature or adjust lighting,” says Stewart. “In hospitality, PoE is already used for telephony, access control, IP cameras and other sensors. When you put everything in one platform, the cost to add more applications falls sharply.”



“WE ARE ALREADY SEEING PoE USED FOR PERIPHERAL DEVICES, BUT IN THE FUTURE IT COULD POWER THE KITCHEN ITSELF”

“Using a node spreads the infrastructure cost across many applications, so the cost per application comes down,” he adds. “The payoff comes straight away, but there is also the futureproofing capability it provides. As devices such as lighting systems become more efficient, they can operate with less power, so they come within the capabilities of PoE.”

Futureproofing and cost-efficiency are two key drivers for Young’s backing of PoE, even if its full potential in a new project will not be realised immediately.

“It helps with retrofits where there is no electrical cable or where there is limited opportunity to put that cabling

in,” says Young. “We are already seeing PoE used for peripheral devices, but in the future it could power the kitchen itself.”

“Temperature probes or alarms on walk-in refrigerators fall within the current 90W range of Cat 6 cabling, so we can already use it for data collection and monitoring systems,” he adds. “That is a conversation we are already having with customers.”

Powering the future

For now, PoE does have its limitations. Stewart points out that the current

power output is at the limit for installation by someone who is not a certified electrician. Zimmerman notes that distance is another limiting factor.

“PoE can only be distributed over the distances that wired ‘BASE-T’ Ethernet supports and is limited by the resistance of the copper cabling,” he says. “Nominally, this is 100 meters. Going further generally requires either a device to power a second PoE link or proprietary cabling implementations.”

Within those limitations, however, there are few barriers to adoption, whether in kitchens or more widely in the hospitality sector. PoE is easy to deploy and fits into existing wiring infrastructure.

For this reason, Young sees the potential in future to power digital menu boards and POS systems using PoE, and he agrees with Stewart that more devices will eventually

be compatible with PoE.

“We could soon see more equipment, perhaps lighting systems, powered using PoE,” he says. “There is a trend towards equipment that requires less energy as part of the strong move in the industry towards sustainability.”

“Cat 5, introduced five years ago, had a 15W maximum, then Cat 6 pushed that up to 90W, which is a huge jump in a short space of time,” he observes.

“The technology could improve exponentially in the next few years.”

The slowdown in the foodservice sector caused by the Covid-19 pandemic provides some opportunity for the industry to think about refitting and refurbishing, and PoE could be a big part of that.

There is, however, the issue of cost in a low-revenue market, but Young believes seizing the opportunity is too important.

“You have to work within a budget, but it is short-sighted to take out such technology early in a project,” believes Young. “Technology will only make our lives better. So, we always specify Cat 6 and we will, of course, look at it again in the future. In a year or two, we could be talking about Cat 7.”

“This is a future-thinking industry and most consultants are futurists,” he continues. “They want to put in the best technology for the client. If we could power the POS system using PoE then we could save them a lot of money. The savings could be huge.”

As foodservice businesses plan for the future and what many term ‘the new normal’, it is important to look beyond existing needs and constraints.

As Young reminds us: “You have to remain in a future-focused frame of mind.” ■





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BRIEFING

Trends and events shaping foodservice around the globe

THIS ISSUE

112

Rule changes easing the way for hospitality's recovery

116

A strong website is a must have for foodservice businesses today

122

Covid-19 has made ventilation and air sanitation a top concern



126

The world watches China's post-pandemic recovery

131

Looking at the ways Beirut is picking itself up after the devastating port blast

134

FCSI TAD consultancy focus: YoungCaruso

138

FCSI APD consultancy focus: Kitchen Inc

142

FCSI EAME consultancy focus: BEGC

146

My kitchen: Lenny Martinsen





As governments around the world acted to limit the impact of Covid-19 on foodservice, many introduced new measures to aid the ailing sector. Tina Nielsen looks at some that are set to become permanent

RELAXING REGULATIONS TO AID RECOVERY

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the foodservice sector is well documented. Forced to close as we battled to contain the spread of the virus, many will never be able to open again.

Each country around the world has had its own way of supporting an ailing sector – furlough schemes to enable operators to retain staff on pay during the closures have been widely implemented. Other countries saw authorities support restaurants by guaranteeing rent is paid.

When restrictions were relaxed following the first wave of Covid-19 and bars and restaurants were able to open again many governments decided to relax long-standing regulations to enable restaurants to start earning again.

Relaxing liquor laws

It didn't take long for state rules to change on alcohol regulations in the US. With high profit margins, sales of alcoholic beverages are important for foodservice operators.

When foodservice operators were restricted to delivery and take-out many states allowed restaurants and bars to sell cocktails to-go and in March New York added beer, wine and spirits to this.

Iowa was the first state to make the temporary policy, allowing operators to sell cocktails to-go, permanent in June and Ohio followed this path in October when the governor gave it the green light.

“During these unprecedented times, governor DeWine listened to the plight of Ohio’s restaurants and bars as they struggled to cope with the challenges posed by Covid-19,” the Hospitality Recovery Coalition, an initiative led by the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, said in a letter. “Cocktails to-go provided a much-needed lifeline for struggling on-premise locations and prevented the permanent closure of many of these businesses. Now that this measure is permanent, hospitality businesses have increased stability despite the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic.”

More than 30 states have implemented temporary policies on the sale of alcoholic beverages to help the foodservice sector thrive and several are considering following states such as Iowa and Ohio in making these permanent.

Allowing takeout

In March, the British government relaxed the rules to temporarily allow pubs and restaurants to operate as hot food take-away outlets as part of its responses to the coronavirus crisis. Before this intervention by the authorities, foodservice operations needed to apply for planning permission in order to >

allow a change of use of premises to a hot food takeaway.

When the measures were first announced they were set to expire in March 2021, but they have now been extended for a full year to give operators more flexibility as they recover from a very challenging year.

Kate Nicholls, chief executive of UKHospitality said the ability to provide takeaway services had provided a lifeline to many businesses and this extension will undoubtedly help many. “For pubs, restaurants and cafes to operate as takeaways gives them a previously untapped revenue stream and a much better chance to survive what will be a tough winter,” she said. “It will help avoid waste and allow businesses to retain a valuable link with their customers and communities.”

An official stamp of approval

In the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, part of the challenge for the foodservice industry is to rebuild relationships with customers who might be apprehensive about returning to the dining room.

Some countries have launched an official initiative to build that confidence. In Portugal, the government launched the Clean & Safe stamp, which is applied across the tourism sector – so far almost 22,000 stamps have been issued to hotels, restaurants and other leisure facilities in the country. Businesses that have been awarded the Clean & Safe stamp have committed to comply with health and hygiene recommendations issued by the

“The Covid-19 virus is likely to be with us over the winter... People’s health remains paramount, but so is the need to keep the economy open”



National Tourism Authority according to National Health Authority guidelines. The stamp is free of charge and will be valid until 30 April 2021.

Making outdoor dining permanent

When the foodservice sector in the UK reopened after the first period of enforced closures due to the Covid-19 lockdown, local authorities across London move to relax licensing rules in order to allow operators to recover from a three-month closure. The City of London Corporation launched its Al Fresco Eating and Drinking Policy.

As social distancing rules reduced the number of diners allowed into a restaurant, using sidewalk and road space helped operators recoup some of the lost earnings. Over the summer, streets in the British capital were busy with diners enjoying outdoor dining in spaces never before imagined as eating space.

Now, authorities have announced an extension of the policy. The City of Westminster, covering the central London areas including Soho, Covent Garden and Mayfair, has approved 40 winter al fresco hospitality schemes that will continue to operate until 30 April 2021. The council is also making allowances for heaters and canopies to protect guests from the elements.

Similarly, the City of London has kept its programme alive. “The Covid-19 virus is likely to be with us over the winter and so we need to find a way of living with it. People’s health remains paramount, but so is the need to keep the economy open,” said Alastair Moss, chair of the Planning and Transportation Committee at the City of London Corporation. “We hope these improvements will enable more City cafes, restaurants and pubs to safely and comfortably cater for residents, workers and visitors.”

In New York City, mayor Bill de Blasio took this to another level as he made the Open Restaurant Program permanent. First, introduced as a temporary measure in June De Blasio announced in September that it is set to stay. Under the measures operators can extend seating on to sidewalks and road while including a clear path on the pavement. For the notoriously cold New York winter period they are allowed to heat outdoor spaces and build tents to provide cover for guests.

“Open Restaurants was a big, bold experiment in supporting a vital industry and reimagining our public space,” said de Blasio. “As we begin a long-term recovery, we’re proud to extend and expand this effort to keep New York City the most vibrant city in the world. It’s time for a new tradition.” ■

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FIRST LINE COMMUNICA

Howard Riell explores how now, more than ever, a great website makes good business sense for all foodservice businesses

We take websites for granted today, but they were once an innovation. And innovation remains at the core of what they can do for a restaurant, a consultant, or a manufacturer. Covering the basics of what current and potential customers and clients are looking for while standing out in an increasingly crowded online universe represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

A foodservice website should offer the information and functionality current customers need. “It should

also have information that attracts new customers,” suggests Kevin Kochman, president of foodservice design software firm KCL, who is now based in Orlando, Florida.

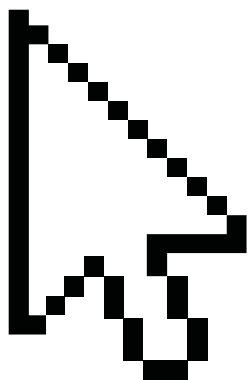
“You can help new customers find you with blog posts related to the type of information they are likely searching for,” Kochman adds. These posts should be written with search engine optimization (SEO) in mind. Content can be structured to create “sales journeys or funnels. One popular way to do this is through

lead magnets, something that encourages people to provide you with their contact information.” Examples of magnets are a product discount, a whitepaper, free consultation, or other unique item in exchange for a sign-up.

Ken Schwartz FCSI, the principal of SSA Foodservice Design + Consulting in Tampa, Florida, believes a website should offer visitors “solutions,



OF TION



solutions, solutions (and) a clean, crisp, concise message. We have rebuilt our website to reflect how our firm is a solution provider. Solutions can be great design and utilization of space, design that reduces the labor resource requirements, or design and specification that can reduce operating costs." He also likes the addition of video. "We will be launching a video blog element to our website that will provide useful



information to all segments of the foodservice industry."

Sam Mitzman, web developer for My Custom Software Inc. in Henderson, Nevada, emphasizes that fast-loading and mobile-optimized websites are critical now. "Especially in the foodservice industry, people expect to see what your contact me delivery options are, as well as health protocols. They want to know how they can order from you with food-delivery apps they already use, or be able to figure out your ordering system quickly if that's all you offer."

As Mitzman has found, 50-90% of visitors will be working from a mobile device. "People's attention spans have diminished. They quickly lose patience with slow or hard-to-navigate websites." This makes having a mobile-friendly, easy-to-navigate and "a straight-to-the-point website with great images and easy-to-order features critical."

Must-haves

To begin with, a website must have the basics that consumers have come to expect. Among the key elements, says **Rudy Miick FCSI**, founder and president of Miick Companies LLC in Boulder, Colorado, are:

- What we do.
- Why we do this this way.
- Connections to partners, other parts of the industry, and to groups to which it gives or participates.
- The company's role in sustainability and global health/wellness "is smart if you choose to go here."
- Background on personnel. "Ever more important is who's on our team, and are we diverse."
- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) covenants, Miick notes, are "a

must for US and Canada, likely other nations, too."

- A site should also be "playful as well as serious" and feature "thinking as well as products; what's driving us as a brand."

Businesses must also answer questions, Miick says, such as: "What do I get by visiting your site? What solutions do you provide, not just what do you sell?" Make the answers easy to find."

Websites must also be able to seamlessly integrate with POS and third-party apps like DoorDash, Grubhub and Uber Eats, explains **Arlene Spiegel FCSI**, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. They also must be able to generate online ordering directly from the restaurant. "E-commerce capabilities are a must for delivery, shipping and integrating with FedEx and other mail services," she says.

Small businesses and their digital infrastructure "have been forced to find ways to sell things online in ways that most businesses haven't addressed pre-Coronavirus," says Shawn Walchef, the founder of Cali BBQ Media, based in Spring Valley, California. He and his colleagues believe in audio, video and written content, and images. "We also believe the content needs to be first for your website, and then distributed to social media."

According to Walchef, the number-one thing a company of any kind needs is the ability to customize its site. "You need an open-source ability for you or your team running your restaurant or business to update the content." Technology platforms are evolving quickly, so it is "vitaly important that somebody is responsible for updating content. That could be taking photos with >



your iPhone and uploading them to the menu that's on your website, and then updating Yelp, Google, Facebook and Instagram. All of these things are important, but it starts with your ability to update your website, but also to be able to sell from your website.”

As for consultants, restaurant operators look to them “to have their finger on the pulse,” says Alexis Kukuka, director of operations for JBH Advisory Group in New York. Offering thought leadership or whitepapers is a good way to share how they view the industry and methodology without discussing specific details of client engagement.

Optimal information

How much information is too much remains an open question. There is a balance to be struck, and those behind the website want to hit it squarely for optimal results.

“A website is now, more than ever, a selling tool,” suggests Mark Laux, managing partner of HotOperator Restaurant Marketing in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, which offers expertise in social media and branding. “Only tell until you sell. Anything more is a waste of energy and will push customers away.”

Spiegel makes the point that Americans today “live in a visual world where pictures and stories and videos are more important than the number of words used.” Hyperlinks can be used to allow viewers to get deeper and detailed information they may deem relevant. The site should be easy to navigate and user friendly, as well as easy to read on computers, iPads and mobile phones.

A foodservice consultant's website must, in Spiegel's view, include the story of the founders and key team members, complete with headshot photos. Also needed is background on the company's approach to projects, case examples

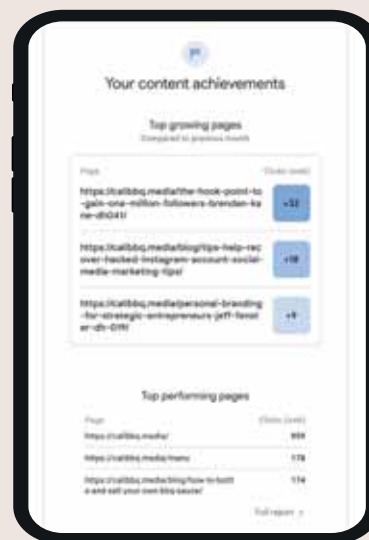


“A website is now, more than ever, a selling tool. Only tell until you sell. Anything more is a waste of energy and will push customers away”

with photos, services and programs, client testimonials, published articles and feature stories, contact information and icons for LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram.

According to Ari Cantor, president of Insinger Machine Co. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the latest trends for foodservice equipment websites include configuration tools – for example, designing your appliance or custom-fabricated products. Others are CAD libraries; specifically Revit files for drag-and-drop design, embedded videos on such things as product demonstrations and tutorials, and product-comparison guides.

“For manufacturers, websites act as information resources – the more, the merrier,” Cantor points out. “However, today, especially in light of Covid, manufacturers' websites are



also digital showrooms.” For consultants and design-build dealers, sites now offer “extensive project galleries with interactive experiences.”

The way ahead

Two of the most frequent questions today are whether or not to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic and if we should ditch websites in favor of Instagram. Unsurprisingly, opinions vary.

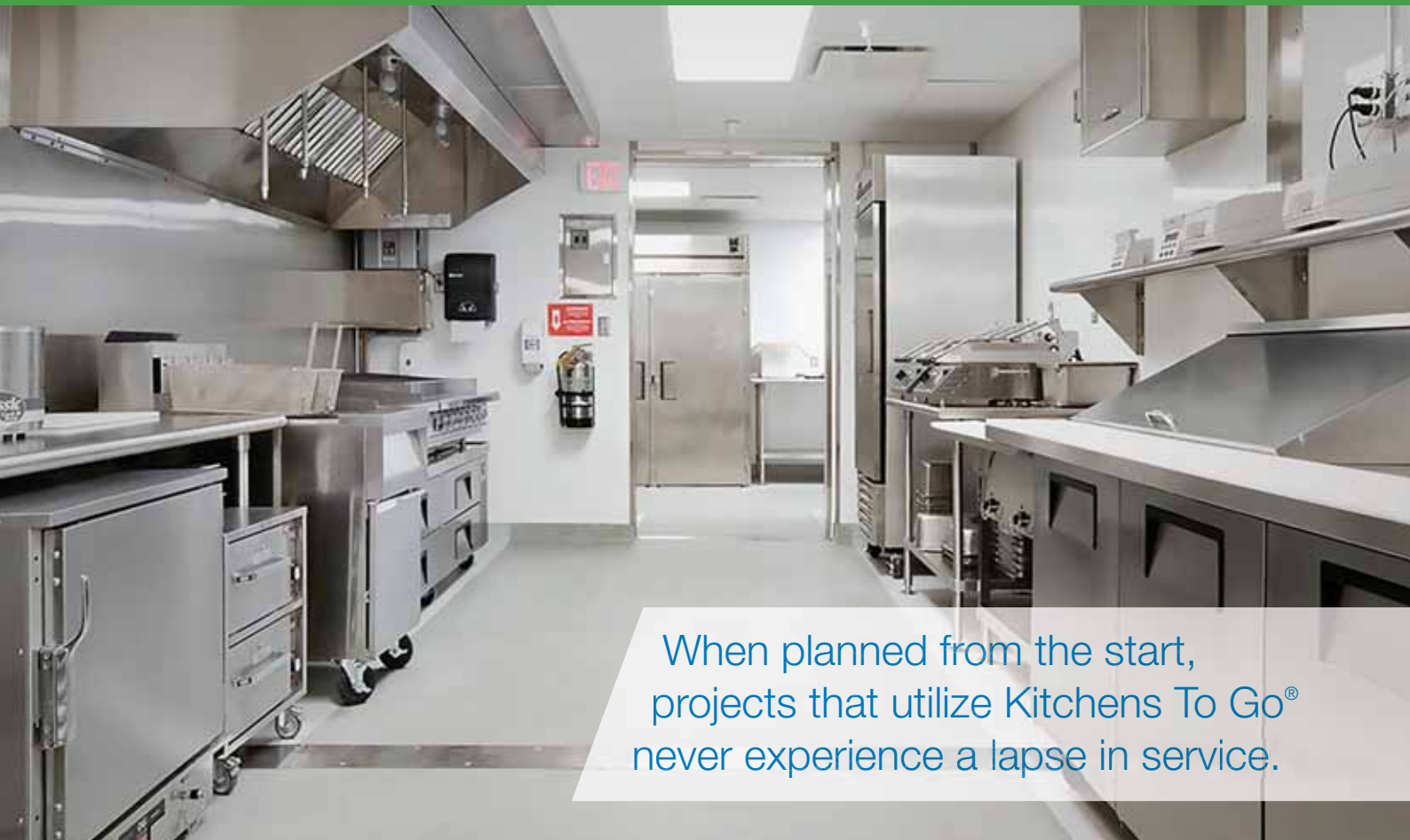
Referencing the pandemic on a foodservice industry website is seen >

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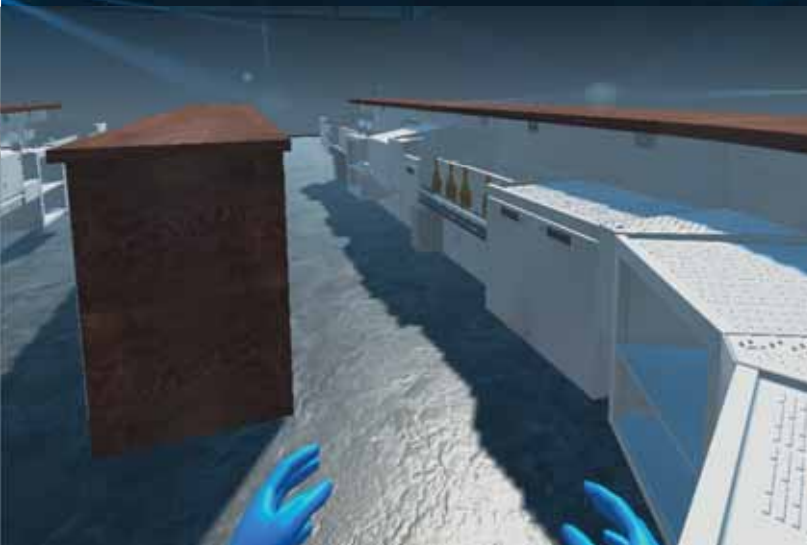
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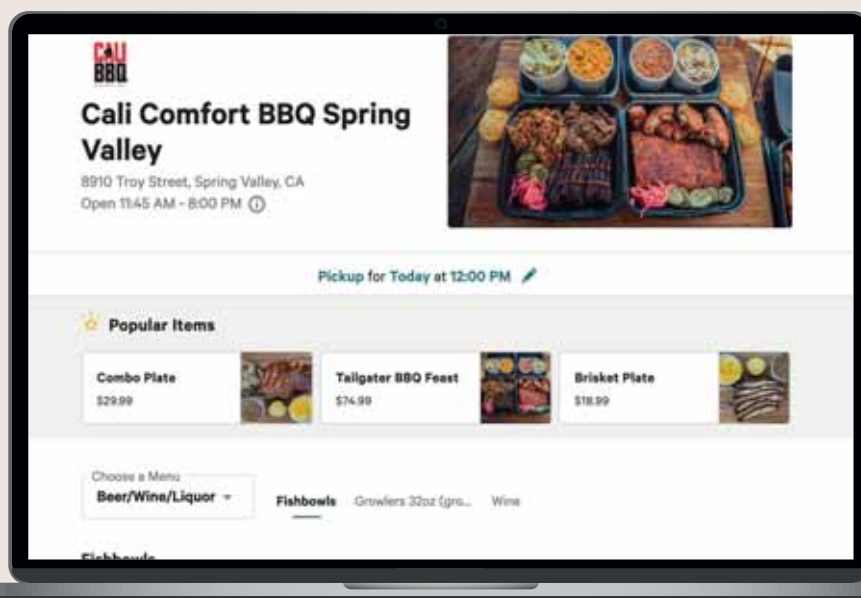
by some as an opportunity to reassure and even impress visitors with a company's dedication to health and safety. As manufacturers typically market direct to operators or distributors, Kukuka points out, outlining their safety protocol and supply chain is "extremely important, especially in the Covid-conscious environment where so much disruption has occurred."

Not everyone agrees. "Unless you are providing services that assist an operation with their procedures relative to Covid safety, then I am not sure of the relevance of mentioning Covid on your website," says SSA's Schwartz. "I do not recall SARS consulting, or cough-and-cold-season consulting, ever mentioned on anyone's site other than a physician's, so I am not sure how it would benefit someone in the foodservice industry."

Should businesses substitute Instagram for a website? "No," Walchef says flatly. "We would highly recommend people never do that. You have to own your content. Just because everyone's attention is on Instagram doesn't make it the be all and end all. Just because so many people are on Facebook globally, and Facebook continues to grow, doesn't mean that creating a website on Facebook is going to save you money."

Russell Stilwell FCSI, founder and principal of Next Step Design in Annapolis, Maryland, says his firm uses Instagram to regularly engage with his clients and collaborators, and that the chef community is "particularly active. However, it does

"You have to own your content. Just because everyone's attention is on Instagram doesn't make it the be all and end all"



not replace our website as a powerful sales tool. Our ultimate goal is to drive clients to our website with exciting Instagram content that entices them to learn more," he says.

"If you only offer delivery through an app such as GrubHub you can show off your menu items through Instagram highlights and add a profile link directly to the ordering app," says website designer Mitzman. "However, you will lose out on traffic from people searching for your website on Google and not finding it." Also lost will be people who don't use Instagram regularly and just want to see a menu and get answers to their questions. Whatever choices businesses make, the key is to create a website that serves as a useful tool.

Walchef concludes: "Nothing is more important than a restaurant addressing their website and updating it onto a platform like WordPress so they can update it as they see fit, because it's a living and breathing thing. It's the thing that will drive customers and it will drive revenue into your business."

And revenue, once all is said and done, is what it's all about. ■

Web extra features

Not necessarily essential, but nonetheless worthwhile considering, extra features can often add to a website's effectiveness. Here are some suggestions:

Embedded hosting: What Kevin Kochman calls a "cool tool" for manufacturers is a time-saving foodservice design technology. "Our embedded hosting makes it easy for consultants and designers to access spec sheets, CAD blocks, and Revit families without having to leave the manufacturer's site (and possibly get distracted by a competitor's equipment)."

Interactive menu: Sam Mitzman suggests an interactive menu that makes ordering variable items – like choosing the toppings and the contents of your salad – quick and easy. "Integrating with your POS system and sending people deals that are relevant to their previous orders and preferences will get you higher conversion rates and more reorders."

Templates: Ken Schwartz FCSI points out that many of the web-hosting services such as Wix and Squarespace have a variety of templates available to help users create or recreate their web sites. "Additionally, they offer several tools for enhancing and maintaining your website."

Videos: According to Richard Weil, MCFP, MCFE, chief executive officer of National Restaurant Consultants in Denver, Colorado, videos are "huge today. Homemade videos that are reasonably well scripted with good quality sound and quality video. It does not have to be fancy, but long enough to cover the subject and short enough to make it interesting."



SOMETHING IN THE AIR

The US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention stands by its original statement – SARS CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid-19) is an airborne virus. Amelia Levin reports on the equipment helping hospitality businesses mitigate this

*DISCLAIMER Covid-19
airborne declaration could
impact ventilation decisions*

The novel coronavirus, studies show, is primarily spread through droplets when people cough or sneeze, but can also transmit to others through smaller aerosols when a person talks, sings and breathes. Though the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says close contact and larger droplets pose the highest risks for infection, transmission can also happen in crowded indoor spaces with poor ventilation, especially when spending extra time in those spaces. That means places such as schools, nursing homes, religious institutions, gyms and – you guessed it – restaurants and bars pose the highest risk for this latter type of infection, especially since masks are not always required or might be removed at certain times.

There was evidence as far back as spring 2020 that SARS CoV-2 could potentially be airborne, based on reports out of China that showed infection

transmissions occurred in enclosed businesses, including in a restaurant where infection patterns made it clear the Air Handling Unit was blowing air from an infected person at one table to others at the next. While outdoor dining lifted worries during the summer and early fall, as the weather continues to cool the CDC's latest report is likely to pose greater concern among consumers, at least in northern climates, as they begin to move more activities indoors. The spotlight will most certainly center on restaurants and whether they have or have not made changes to their indoor ventilation systems.

Specifically, when it comes to improving air circulation, AHRAE released a report in May with some guidelines on stepping up ventilation and filtration. The report, *Guidance for Building Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, by Lawrence Schoen, P.E., president and principal engineer at Schoen Engineering, Inc., in Columbia, Maryland, includes recommendations such as increasing building ventilation system outdoor fresh air intake rate; disabling base building demand-controlled ventilation; opening building ventilation system outdoor air dampers as much as 100%, which eliminates recirculation (acknowledging that this becomes difficult in extreme weather); improving central air filtration to the MERV-13th or the highest compatible with the filter rack and sealing edges of the filter to limit bypass; keeping systems running longer hours, if possible 24/7 to enhance the two actions; considering portable room air cleaners with HEPA filters, and considering ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) while also protecting occupants from exposure to ozone, which is also a known harmful respirable particulate. All this in addition to recommended CDC guidelines of wearing masks and maintaining social distance.

That last bit, considering UVGI, is an important one, and one shown most

effective to fight other airborne viruses in the past, including MERS-CoV, SARS-CoV-2 and tuberculosis. Ultraviolet light in the form of UV-C low-pressure mercury bulbs has had a long history in combatting diseases through room disinfection, ASHRAE's report points out. This includes the first UV water treatment plant established in 1909, followed by overhead systems applied in hospitals in 1936, schools in 1937 and HVAC applications in 1940. In 1999, the WHO recommended UV for tuberculosis control and in 2003, that usage was sanctioned by the CDC.

In 2009, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health released guidelines for environmental control for tuberculosis using basic upper-room UVGI. UVGI in the form of upper-room disinfection – in the form of “in-duct” air and surface disinfection, is the oldest type of air disinfection system approved

by the CDC. In-room air and surface disinfection can also be accomplished through portable UVGI or return grill units.

When it comes to some newer or “emerging air cleaning and disinfecting technologies” the ASHRAE Epidemic Task Force suggests ensuring compliance with UL 2998 and that the technology be supported by evidence reflecting efficacy performance based on the as-used conditions and third-party data. Not all technologies have been specifically tested for Sars-CoV-2, even though manufacturers might still make claims that their products are “99.9% effective” in killing other airborne viruses. “There's not one single approach that's going to rid the world of indoor airborne viruses, and manufacturers offering products for disinfection must be able to quantify a product's effectiveness based on clean air delivery rate (CADR) as calculated using >



similar formulas used by the CDC or WHO to identify infectious disease rate of spread,” says Ray Schmidt, regional manager, Halton. “The collective goal should be about a holistic approach to improving indoor air safety. Anything less could potentially give patrons and building guests a false sense of security.”

Schmidt says that Halton agrees with ASHRAE recommended guidelines and apply the Wells-Riley infectious disease rate formulas when developing new UVGI disinfection products. “HEPA filtration alone doesn’t address aerosolized viruses, they only remove smaller particles such as dust that may have surface contagions,” he says. Simply installing UV-C bulbs into duct work and pulling air across does not necessarily mean that a system is effective.

Consumers are encouraged to exercise caution, do their homework, secure quantifiable supporting data

and make sure that the data includes the product’s CADR.

It’s also important to note there are overhead UVGI systems available, which are only activated during unoccupied periods for eradicating infectious diseases that have attached themselves to hard surfaces such as student desks or exercise equipment. An “after hour” programmable control system with integrated emergency shut down occupancy sensors will ensure that no one is exposed to the UV-C light. Typically, the operating period only lasts a few minutes before those surfaces that are exposed to the light are disinfected. It’s no wonder, then, Schmidt says Halton’s portable units have been flying off the shelves for integration into schools and businesses, including restaurants. These units first filter out larger particles such as dust before the airborne viruses are exposed to the internal UV-C bulbs.

The disinfected air moves about the space and towards the building ventilation return grill before being returning into that space along with fresh outside air.

Another option is to adjust or install HVAC units to constantly draw out indoor air and bring in fresh, outdoor makeup air as in the case of planes and healthcare facilities, but as one can imagine, the subsequent energy costs can be debilitating to smaller businesses. There are some tabletop filters on the market, but many of these are simply HEPA filters that do not combat aerosols. Tony Priolo, chef/owner of Piccolo Sogno, in Chicago told us he installed an air purifier using photocatalytic ionic oxidation technology, proven to be effective in combatting other respiratory viruses such as MRSA, in the central ductwork of his restaurant. This type of “capture and contain” technology adds another level of support in controlling the mitigation and reduction of airborne contaminants.

Unlike mechanical engineers, foodservice consultants may not be charged with having to specify kitchen or dining filtration equipment. “But, I do see that consultants are being put in the position to identify Covid-related solutions with end-users and architects for front and/or back-of-house guests and employees,” Schmidt says.

Furthermore, consultants that have expanded their UVGI knowledge base enrich their value proposition to the design team as they bring viable solutions for the improvement of indoor air quality and occupant safety. This knowledge will certainly go a long way towards bringing patrons back into restaurants and make them feel good about dining indoors once again.

Schmidt adds: “Be mindful that a holistic approach will provide for the best level of occupancy health against infectious airborne and surface related diseases so incorporate all recommended mitigation strategies, including masking and social distancing.” ■





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As the rest of the world is struggling with outbreaks of Covid-19, China has quietly been creating its new normal life. *The New York Times* reported how normal life looked last August with the crowds in Shanghai's bars and restaurants, students heading back to school for the fall semester in Beijing, and the water parks and night markets of Wuhan packed with people. During Golden Week, a week-long holiday in October to celebrate National Day, over 600 million people traveled in China. With international border closures, they had no choice but to travel domestically. Wuhan Tourism Bureau reported 8 million tourist arrivals from 1 to 8 October. At the time of writing there are no major outbreaks of Covid-19 in China. This is in stark contrast to many countries around the world struggling to control the Covid-19 outbreak in their own countries.

"Everything is back to normal now in China," says Hong Kong-based Clara Ming Pi FFCSI.

Daisy Li, food and drink associate director of Mintel China says: "There is no major impact on food industries in China as the pandemic is under control and people go back to their normal life. Some categories suffered a drop of sales during the lockdown period; however, these impacts were only temporary. The food and drink industry is expected to maintain its growth in 2020. With consumers' stronger demand for healthier eating after Covid-19. The food industry has huge potential for growth in the long run."

Since the first reported case of Covid-19 case in Wuhan in 2019, there have been many changes in the food industry in China. First, China banned the trade and consumption of wild animals. The rules now forbid the sale and consumption of species from both wild stocks and those bred

CHINA: Back in (foodservice) business



Foodservice in China is picking up and experiencing major growth. Maida Pineda examines how this is being achieved along with strides towards greater food safety and less food waste



in captivity. More than 10,000 animal markets and businesses have been shuttered since February in mainland China, and nearly 500 crimes relating to illegal wildlife trade have been processed. The outbreak has also brought attention to stricter food safety regulations. Pi says: “Recent discoveries of coronavirus found on imported meat and seafood in various markets in China sounded alarms on the importance of testing these imported food items.”

Must-haves

The outbreak has raised the awareness of food waste in China, and the urgency of reducing the country’s food waste. On 11 August, president Xi Jinping raised concern about the “shocking and distressing” amount of food wasted in China. Xi explained that despite China’s bumper harvest, it is still necessary to have an awareness of the food security crisis. The pandemic

“‘Operation Clean Plate’ is in effect in all eateries in China. This raises consumer awareness not to waste food when they eat out”

sounded the alarm for China. The president called for more efforts in legislation and supervision to establish a long-term mechanism to stop food waste. According to WWF China, around 17 to 18 million tons of food were wasted in China in 2015, enough to feed 30 to 50 million people annually.

Heeding the president’s call, the Wuhan Catering Industry Association urged the city restaurants to limit the number of dishes served to diners. The system

dubbed as “N-1” means a group of 10 people can only order 9 dishes. In a culture where huge banquets are a norm for celebrations, this can be considered a harsh restriction.

One restaurant in central China took the national campaign to reduce food waste to a whole new level by asking customers to weigh in before entering the restaurant. The result was plugged into an app then a menu was recommended based on the customers’ weight. Many were offended by perceived fat shaming, and the restaurant has since apologized.

Pi explains: “‘Operation Clean Plate’ is in effect in all eateries in China. This raises consumer awareness not to waste food when they eat out.” President Xi’s orders on food waste leaves it up to local authorities and individual restaurants to interpret his words on their own.

Processing profit

Despite the pandemic, China’s major food processing companies still recorded strong profit growth in the first nine months of the year, according to the data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Enterprises with annual revenues of more than 20 million yuan (over US\$3m) from their main operations saw combined profits reach 440.32 billion yuan, up 10% year on year, according to the data. Food manufacturers reported 131.69 billion yuan in combined profits in the same period, an increase of almost 12% year on year. The combined profits of liquor, beverage and tea manufacturers rose 4.4% to 175.91 billion yuan.

Yum China, the company behind KFC and Pizza Hut stores and the largest restaurant operator in China, based on 2019 revenue, surpassed 10,000 total locations in Q3 2020. In >

November Yum China and the Hubei Provincial government signed a strategic cooperation framework agreement to support local businesses in Hubei and to promote sustainable development of the local economy. By doing so, Yum China will increase procurement of food ingredients from Hubei, develop and promote local produce, and contribute its expertise in formulating local catering industry standards in this province.

A recent forum addressing the state of China's dining industry gathered experts and industry insiders to brainstorm the development of China's food industry and the survival of food businesses after the epidemic. The speakers identified a healthy green supply chain, food-tracking system and an intelligent central kitchen model as the current trends. The pandemic exposed loopholes in the food supply chain and the fact that many catering businesses are weak in the areas of risk prevention and organizational capabilities.

According to Xia Lian Yue, director of leisure meal committee of The China Cuisine Association, there is a need to beef up the complete tracking system covering food sources, qualification of relevant parts and tracing management. For the next 10 years, future trends in China will include healthy canteens and restaurants along with smart central kitchen system combining food processing, distribution and new retail functions. He also foresees the introduction of technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing and big data introduced into the food industry to lift efficiency.

Pi has started to observe some positive changes such as food businesses now equipped with traceability mechanisms to ensure



they can track the source of their food supply chain, a detail consumers are concerned about. Food in the market is also now labeled with QR codes. "There is also increased production and sales of plant-based meats, as so far no coronavirus has been found on these products," Pi adds.

Accelerated changes

Li foresees this as a period of growth, "Both opportunities and challenges exist. China is going through rapid development in these years and the pandemic has even accelerated some of the changes. Moreover, with the development of 5G and AI, China is going to transform into a highly digitized society to which people, products, and services are connected. Brands have to capture the changing consumers, market, and society, and

"China is going through rapid development in these years and the pandemic has even accelerated some of the changes"

explore new opportunities along with the changes."

The pandemic's action word for businesses around the world has been pivot. For China, it has been no different. All is back to normal now and the food industry continues to grow. The key is to pivot, that is to innovate to survive the challenges of food security, food safety and food waste. Innovation is key to surviving these challenges, and turning them into opportunities. ■



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GETTING BEIRUT BACK ON ITS FEET

The massive explosion in Beirut earlier this year added to the problems of Lebanon's hospitality sector. Jon Horsley speaks to some of the country's key people about the path back to business as usual for foodservice

At 5.40pm local time on 4 August, a fire was reported to have started in the port in Beirut. Ten firefighters were sent out to tackle the blaze, which was starting to pump smoke out over the city.

Shortly afterwards at 6.08pm, a terrifying blast occurred, destroying the port instantly and sending shockwaves through the city. Windows were smashed up to 5km away, while the explosion was heard 200km away in Cyprus.

Over 200 people were killed and thousands were injured. An estimated \$15bn of damage was done in a split second. A humanitarian crisis had begun.

Shocking videos of the blast spread quickly across social media – but soon the attention of the world

had shifted. However, Beirut continues to rebuild and deal with the fallout.

Hospitality is a decent measure of a country's economy – and a look at Lebanon's foodservice industry shows how bleak the situation is.

“We are facing three major problems,” explains Roger Obeid FCSI. “First there was an economic disaster with the currency crisis, which began the year before in August 2019. The Lebanese pound devalued and suddenly there were no dollars to spend, which we had always been allowed to use in tandem with Lebanese pounds.”

(Wikipedia statistics show that the currency crisis alone led to 785 cafes and restaurants closing and 25,000 job losses.)



The spirit of Beirut's vibrant food scene is slowly being rebuilt after the devastating explosion last August

World Central Kitchen in Lebanon

One of the first relief organizations into Beirut after the explosion was World Central Kitchen. WCK call themselves "food first responders" and since September 2017 have been cooking for people in need every day. When disaster strikes they send teams of experts and chefs to the area to use local resources to make as many meals as possible. WCK provides freshly made, nutritious meals to survivors of disasters, thus helping them both survive and be able to help others. "We have shown that there is no place too far or disaster too great for our chefs to be there with a hot plate of food when it's needed most," says WCK founder José Andrés.



Recent deployments

- Across the US and Spain: 30 million meals in response to the Covid-19 pandemic
- California and Oregon: 68,000 meals after multiple wildfires
- Louisiana: 162,000 meals after Hurricane Laura
- Beirut: 190,000 meals after the explosion at the port
- The Bahamas: three million meals after Hurricane Dorian

Above: Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visiting José Andrés' World Kitchen in Washington, DC

“Second, we had Covid, which the rest of the world was also dealing with, but we had to face the issues with no money and political upheaval,” says Obeid. “And then we have this explosion. It’s a terrible, sad time for Lebanon. It is a tragedy.

Covid, currency and the explosion

Maroun Daou, vice president and COO of GHIA Holdings, who run a group of 12 restaurants, including Abd El Wahab, which has branches in London, Qatar and Egypt, and casual dining restaurants Ahwak in Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, is equally pessimistic.

“I don’t know where the hope is,” he says. “We have these three issues: Covid, currency and the explosion that we’re fighting and we have not much progress on any of them.

“We had two restaurants that were damaged by the blast, which we just cannot afford to rebuild. The insurance has paid nothing because still, five months on, no one has given a proper cause of the explosion, so there is nothing coming from them.

“Others were damaged and we’ve managed to do some repairs but we’ve just had to shut two. And building firms are busy and the cost of work because of currency devaluation has gone up to five times what it would be. So you know, it’s just hard to see a way out at the moment – and that is one issue.”

Standing alone

When it comes to Covid-19, the restaurants have been bitten in the same way they have been globally.

“We had an 8pm curfew, which was bad for business,” continues Daou. “We did carry on and also do takeaway, but it is still tough, particularly as there isn’t as much money as there was, due to the devaluation. There are capital controls, even if the government and



“We had Covid, which the rest of the world was also dealing with, but we had to face it with no money and political upheaval. And then we have this explosion”

banks say there are not. We can’t get money out of the bank – and if you can’t get as much as you need, you cannot spend it in restaurants.”

Obviously this has follow-on effects. “We used to employ 600 people,” Daou says. “Now we are down to 300 employees and they’re working fewer hours. There’s no government assistance here. It’s not like the UK, where there has been some assistance and the government has stood side-by-side with our business. Here, we are on our own.”

Serving staff in particular have been badly hit, according to **Roger Obeid**. “There are hundreds of waiters going hungry,” he says. “They lost their jobs at a stroke and they have no money. Or even if they are working, there are no tips because no one has any cash to give. It’s a disaster for them.”



Hunger is a problem, and there are no easy solutions. “Lebanon imports 90% of its food, which makes everything worse, because if your currency devalues, you simply don’t have enough money to pay for it,” explains Daou. “Poverty has grown exponentially. It’s difficult to watch, how hard everyone is trying. There’s not much they can do.”

Food charity Foodblessed have stepped in to help but acknowledge the scale of the task in front of them. “We’ve been helping map the people who were affected, making meals, and delivering food boxes,” says Maya Terro, co-founder and director of Foodblessed, “The nature of what we do hasn’t changed [since the blast] as much as the load.”

Foodblessed has a waiting list of people requesting food boxes that now numbers in the tens of thousands.

Working together

The hospitality industry has come together to form a syndicate of owners of restaurants, cafés, nightclubs and patisseries in Lebanon and are working together with a construction charity called Nusaned to attempt to rebuild the shattered industry.

“Nusaned believes that the power to create change comes from working collaboratively,” explains Ghaida Nawam, co-founder and president of Nusaned. “That is why we dedicated a sufficient budget to support the reconstruction of the damaged establishments, and so far, we have rehabilitated 21 restaurants.”

These attempts to regrow the sector are yet to really scratch the surface of the problem, and Daou searches hard for positives.

“I don’t know when it will get better,” he says. “It’s an uncertain time and I wish I could give you some ways forward, but honestly, at the moment, I don’t see anything.” ■



The public plaza at Westin
Denver International Airport

BUILDING ON A SOLID FOUNDATION



After 30 years, William Caruso & Partners has become YoungCaruso, led by business veteran **Michael Caruso** and longtime partner and respected designer **Stephen Young** FCSI. They talk to Amelia Levin about the firm's past, present and future

Michael Caruso and Stephen Young worked closely with William (Bill) Caruso FFCSI, who founded the firm in 1987, on a transition plan last year. "Michael and I took over the business," says **Stephen Young**, who has been with the firm for 28 years and remains as principal design consultant, spearheading the design department. Michael Caruso, who has an MBA degree, joined the firm three years ago after a career in corporate finance. He started off as the corporate controller, but now runs the day-to-day finances and business administration, and he oversees the company's MAS portfolio.

While Bill Caruso has "passed the proverbial baton" to his successors in retirement, he continues to serve as an independent consultant and advisor to the firm as needed. In addition to Young and Caruso, the leadership team includes Marcin Zmiejko FCSI, associate principal, and Ted Groeger, senior associate.

"After almost 50 years of practice, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to leave the firm's legacy in the very capable hands of such consummate professionals," **Bill Caruso** says. "Steve was with me and the firm for over 30 years and I consider him one of the great designers of our industry; he does magic with a felt tip pen and onionskin paper and his creative ideas jump off the paper into reality. Michael is a financial wizard and a great operations-oriented consultant whose expertise is both the management of money and people. He leads the ship on the financial end of the organization."

What has – and continues to – stand out about YoungCaruso is its diverse portfolio; something that has helped them weather the economic downturns and slow periods, such as the one that Covid-19 induced. The firm has served more than 10,000 clients around the

globe, and has projects in 42 segments, from sports and entertainment to healthcare, restaurants, education, corporate dining and correctional as well as non-foodservice industries such as laundry and waste management.

Just this year, the firm completed its work on the brand-new Texas Rangers' stadium (Globe Life Field), and finished

two mega hospitals in Singapore; one with 2,700 beds and one with 1,000 beds, costing \$6bn and \$3bn respectively.

"Because we continue to be busy, Michael and I have been able to take a step back and do some rebranding as well as reach out to friends and peers in the marketplace in order to create strategic alliances," says Young. "We continue to work all over the world, and thanks to these strategic partnerships and virtual

meeting technology, we can continue doing business every day without an issue" – even if physical travel is not possible because of the pandemic.

Michael Caruso adds that continuing to "push the envelope" with projects when it comes to flexing creativity and innovation in terms of both facility and operational design has also been the key to their ongoing success, beyond the foundation that Bill Caruso created.

"We are rooted in tradition, but driven by innovation," he says.

"We have three decades of expanding the boundaries of what is possible and serving clients at the highest level imaginable."

Indeed, Young and Caruso share a modern vision, creating system efficiencies that take advantage of technology and talent as applied to foodservice design and planning, focusing on a diverse and inclusive work environment. Case in point: outside of work, Young is an avid artist and hot rod builder who lends his creative muscle



to the firm, while Michael Caruso brings discipline and stamina, having served as an NCO in the US Navy Reserves and is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn.

Now, in the midst of a pandemic, leveraging and integrating technology in projects has become more important than ever. “In a post-Covid world, we have to develop spaces where customers won’t necessarily have staff interacting with them as they did in the past; companies will have to pivot to a model that’s less full-service and more self-service.”

Young agrees: “We have been tasked on numerous projects to push the envelope with technology, whether that relates to equipment production or POS technology to make projects more efficient, or making security systems more robust and figuring out ways to enhance the guest dining experience,” he says. “We’re constantly researching and looking at new technologies and being asked what will be the emerging innovations in the next five years.

MAS and more

YoungCaruso is also unique in that it’s always offered management advisory services (MAS) in addition to design work. In fact, both services are fully integrated into a process that includes planning; design and follow-up. The firm’s strong reputation, Michael Caruso and Young say, boils down to attention to detail. “Combined with our methodical planning and thorough process, our clients have repeatedly told us we are ‘in a category of our own’ when it comes to our planning services.”

This attention to detail includes listening to the client; understanding goals and objectives; determining the best solutions; catering to the budget and timeline; considering sustainability goals; and striving to exceed expectations on every project. “What has made us stand out is that we do a lot of pre-design work with culinary staff to develop menus and programs as well as master planning that



From top: Oklahoma State University training kitchen. Little Caesars Arena, Detroit, US. Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Canada

evolves into the design,” says Young. “At the end of a project we’ll bring our MAS services back and offer culinary assistance, training, audits or other follow-up.”

Michael Caruso points out a current project that started out with the MAS team conducting a feasibility study, and then turning it over to the design team to do the design work. The project has now ended up back with the MAS team to assist with operational development and training. “We have a very collaborative environment,” he says. “If someone on the design team has a question for us, we can help, and vice versa. I also always make sure to have a design team member on our MAS calls.” Caruso notes that the firm is divided into an 80/20 split between design/MAS work.

Sustainability is a high priority on every project, from equipment selection to utility usage to long term global stewardship. The firm defines sustainable design as “being able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the next generation.” This includes installing waste management systems that include sustainable controlling of waste streams; implementing modern laundry systems that may include on-premise facilities or



Above: Legacy Hall and Box Garden, Texas, US

high-production processing plans; and developing innovative storage solutions for managing complex inventory.

These days, YoungCaruso's menu of services continues to expand rapidly "because clients want to do different things, and they want help in figuring out how to get back in business after Covid," Young says. For instance, that has involved putting together a plan to open safely and maintain the highest levels of safety and sanitation.

When it comes to the future of the firm, Michael Caruso forecasts that the design work will continue, but that the firm will also likely conduct more feasibility studies to determine whether projects should and can move forward. "The majority of what we had in the past was mostly design work because the economy was great; I don't see us scaling back on design, but I do see our clients are more concerned with moving forward, or at least they will be looking for a higher level of comfort if they do decide to move forward." Strong, strategic and collaborative alliances around the globe will help meet those needs.

As Bill Caruso, in regards to Michael and Stephen Young, says: "I can think of no one else better positioned than this dynamic duo, to continue to lead the firm into the future. They will continue to develop an already well-known and highly accomplished firm on a worldwide level, and with rousing success." ■

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS

Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Canada

YoungCaruso has been fortunate to work with Metro Toronto Convention Centre over many years to provide renovation and new facilities design expertise as well as culinary support service. New and renovated facilities included a new 15,000 SF main kitchen with state-of-the-art cook-chill technology implemented, a new chef's table/tasting kitchen, a new dish room and china storage space, new beverage storage and warehouse storage, new ballroom and meeting room support elements, new retail outlets, and a new mobile program. The consultancy provided operational culinary support services to assure new technologies and facilities were implemented to their full extend. Numerous publications were done on the success of the renovation.

Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, US

YoungCaruso was called upon to "create top-class experimental lab spaces featuring the latest in foodservice equipment technology to train food industry professionals of the future." The firm created five distinct culinary, classroom, dining and studio areas for the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management's 300 students to receive a "real world" education.

Legacy Hall and Box Garden, Plano, Texas, US

YoungCaruso was commissioned to program and design the new Legacy Hall and Box Garden concert venue in the Legacy West complex outside Dallas. Legacy Hall is a food hall complex with 22 independent food stall outlets operated by local vendors, dining spaces on two levels, a signature restaurant and a craft brewery featuring six two-story holding tanks. The brainchild of the Dallas-based Front Burner Restaurants, the food hall celebrates the diverse tastes of Texas. YoungCaruso was also the design partner for the Box Garden 1,500-person concert venue "container" bars and food outlets, including an ice house ice production unit display "big cube" cutting, the ice house bar, and a barbecue venue.

Singapore General Hospital, Singapore

YoungCaruso was chosen from a list of international design firms to provide programming expertise and design for the new Singapore General Hospital. The facility, with a foodservice budget of \$14m out of a \$3bn project budget, now has 1,700 beds in addition to the previous 1,000 beds. Foodservice facilities include a new 45,000 sq ft main kitchen with the latest in cook/chill meal preparation technology to serve all 2,700 beds on campus. The patient meal delivery system will also be the latest in rethermalization technology with an autonomous (unmanned) delivery systems, using automated guided vehicles (AGVs) to move patient trays between the main kitchen and patient wards.

The Westin Denver International Airport, US

YoungCaruso was chosen as the foodservice and laundry consultant for this prominent and complex project consisting of all Westin hotel amenities, a public transit center to accommodate a train line from downtown, and a public plaza for community programming and events. The foodservice elements consist of a lobby lounge, 24/7 restaurant, 24/7 room service, ballrooms and meeting rooms, pool deck and mobile thematic service elements.

Little Caesars Arena, Detroit, Michigan, US

YoungCaruso was the design consultant for the new 20,000 seat multi-purpose Little Caesars Arena in midtown Detroit. Hailed as the third largest arena in the world, this state-of-the-art venue boasts the latest in foodservice production technology and service. The foodservice design elements include commissary kitchens, central beer distribution, premium clubs and suite kitchens and bars, premium and general admission thematic and branded concessions, as well as branded, portable bars and concessions. Exclusive bar and food venues populate every concourse. The arena even has a practice ice venue with concessions and accommodations for community events and youth hockey.



The new consultancy worked on restaurant Gen in Penang, an area of growth in the region

Through much of 2020, the year of Covid-19, travel bans halted the tourism industry in southeast Asia, and many new builds in the region stuttered due to lockdowns and restrictions.

Brandon Kua FCSI (bottom right), head of Kuala Lumpur-based food consultancy firm Citrus Consult, spent much of the year chasing missing payments from clients and dealing with projects being parked. He speaks on the phone from the Malaysian capital during a movement control order, curbing the professional face time that has been core to his business.

“It’s partial lockdown,” he says. “Luckily much of our database is on the cloud, so we can work from home. But nothing beats meeting up and having good discussions and interactions.”

Joe Tan (right), principal director of Kuala Lumpur-based consultancy firm Kitchen Inc, is chirpier when asked about Covid. “I was talking to the director of leasing at KLCC [the Suria Kuala Lumpur City Center shopping mall],” he says, also on the phone from the capital. “He told me that Chanel clocked an all-time high in their 20 years of tenancy there.”

Still spending

Tan is in food rather than fashion, but increased local spending by the richest Kuala Lumpur residents during the Covid era has reassured him in these uncertain times. Although much of Kitchen Inc’s business comes from



consulting on large kitchens for corporate clients, plus institutions such as hospitals and nursing homes, high-end restaurants remain core to the business.

Rather than following a global trend for medium size businesses downsizing,

Tan is expanding, with Kua, who was born in the Malaysian capital in 1984, core to the move. Kua is winding down Citrus Consult, having joined Kitchen Inc in 2019, and will soon work in a new design-led consultancy arm of the company.

Kua studied in the UK, earning an electronics and communications engineering degree at the University of Nottingham before working in telecommunications. He joined Kuala Lumpur’s Par Synergy consultancy firm in 2009 before starting Citrus Consult in 2011, at a time when pure food industry consultancy agencies were a relatively new concept in the country.

Largely inspired by his mentor Sidney Ng, who he worked with at Par Synergy, Kua and Citrus’ team of around five professionals consulted on projects as diverse as the VE Hotel, Hospital Shah Alam and fashionable café LOKL Coffee CO: all in or close to Kuala Lumpur.

Keeping that curiosity

Kua is quick to praise Ng for his early career development. “Because of him I would always throw questions: ‘Why, why, why?’,” he says. “What he imparted to me was the spirit of never stopping asking, and never ceasing to question, because when you stop, you stop learning. Because of that, he kept that curiosity: are there certain standards? Why can’t we just change certain dimensions?” >

Preparing for success

Brandon Kua FCSI prepares to wind up Citrus Consult to head up a design division at Kitchen Inc where he will work with principal director Joe Tan. They talk to Jamie Fullerton about the partnership

He mentions his work on the VE Hotel, which is connected to conference centers, as a time when this questioning mentality reaped benefits. “They wanted a production kitchen able to supply and support multiple venues,” Kua says. “We planned a main kitchen as a production kitchen that was a supply and support to other satellite kitchens. Because of this we reduced the size of all the satellite kitchens, compared to what would have been conventional. That set a precedent to how we approached design for all our subsequent projects.”

Over the past decade Kua has resisted the temptation of more secure work within a big consultancy. “If you join a larger company you [just] learn that company’s culture and ethos”, he says, “but Kitchen Inc seemed a great balance.” The company now has 16 full-time staff, and Kua will work with around five staffers within the new design-led arm.

Although his move to Kitchen Inc and the winding down of Citrus Consult came before Covid, Kua admits that the

“We reduced the size of all the satellite kitchens.... That set a precedent to how we approached design for all our subsequent projects”

stability it offers now is a relief. At periods prior to Covid he struggled to recruit talent that allowed him to delegate work, instead running himself ragged between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, where he’d taken over a firm called Innovative Project Solutions.

Work-life balance

He says the workload contributed to the breakdown of his marriage and gave him mental health concerns. “I didn’t have a very solid team back in KL... I was working on two companies, running projects both ends. I went through a period of depression, it took





The new expanded consultancy is working on high-end projects from Singapore to Penang

me quite a while to pick myself back up.”

The process made Kua reassess his working life. He’s optimistic that his new venture with Tan will give him a good work-life balance, without giving up working with the big guns. “We share a lot of values,” Kua says of Tan. “Friendship, family, being professional, drawing a line between work and private life. We appreciate that you should place family and wellbeing above work.”

“We’re doing restaurants, production kitchens, and the food delivery trend will see more people jumping on that bandwagon”

Kua immediately began working with big accounts with Kitchen Inc, in 2019 helping to fine tune designs by US firm NGAssociates, with which Kitchen Inc was collaborating, for a LinkedIn staff facility in Singapore’s Marina Bay Financial Centre. He also worked on facilities in Kuala Lumpur for Google and AirAsia, consulting on the airline’s RedQ staff cafeteria at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 then the brand’s Santan restaurants launch.

With LinkedIn, Kua had to be flexible and free thinking, as the facilities had to be built in a high-rise building not designed to primarily be a food venue. “For drainage we needed to know where we could discharge,” he says. “We couldn’t penetrate the floor below, because Barclays were there and wouldn’t allow hacking. If there was a leak to the floor below, that would have been it – I think their data server was located there. We had to pump out the water to the nearest discharge location.”

New focus

Tan prefers to discuss the more refined elements of food consultancy, and remains confident of the long-term health of the high-end dining sector. Recently he and Kua worked on feted Kuala Lumpur eateries such as Dewakan in Kuala Lumpur and Penang’s Gen, by chef Johnson Wong.

Penang is set to become even more of a focus of Kitchen Inc, with the company planning a new office on the island, where a free trade zone is becoming attractive to foreign companies while the US wages a trade war with China.

The island’s increased industrial output, Tan believes, will mean more staffers to feed, compared to sectors such as tech and media, in which more workers are now working from home. Indeed, Kua acknowledges that the recent remote working shift will probably mean that new huge corporate staff cafes and kitchens, such as Google’s and LinkedIn’s, are unlikely to be incoming.

“Maybe there’ll be a 60% reduction in terms of staff coming into offices [of big companies in cities such as Kuala Lumpur],” Kua says. “But we’re doing restaurants, production kitchens, and the food delivery trend will see more people jumping on that bandwagon.”

Kua is looking to increased amounts of delivery services, that were on the up in Asia even before Covid-19 hit. He identifies ghost kitchens – coworking space-style kitchens rented out by small vendors instead of them renting their own full kitchens – as another growth area.

Tan and Kua were speaking when hopes of Covid-19 vaccines being approved were boosted by the Pfizer, BioNTech and Moderna companies. Investing in new staff and Penang may have seemed like a bold move before that announcement, but suddenly 2021 is looking like it could be infinitely more productive than 2020.

“The road to success is given to the people who are prepared,” says Tan. ■





The heart of a project

French consultancy BEGC prides itself on a personal approach to each project, as Nolwenn Laroche and FCSI Associate **Xavier Brochard** tell Sandra Haurant



The company refreshed the kitchen of La Mare aux Oiseaux for chef Eric Guérin

BEGC works on assignments across France, as well as overseas, and has a client base that ranges from small local creches catering for 15 children to immense centralized kitchens making 10,000 to 15,000 meals each day. The firm covers a broad range of market segments, too, including schools and universities, hospitals and care homes, large corporate canteens and small commercial restaurants. Its philosophy is simple: if there is a kitchen or a laundry to be created, BEGC can help.

Passion and skills

As the company's range of clients suggests, this is a company that thrives on diversity – a fact that is reflected in its recruitment practices as much as its scope of projects. The 18-strong team has a broad range of skills and backgrounds, including design specialists, refrigeration experts, chefs and even a landscape architect. Today, the director is **Nolwenn Laroche**, who is the daughter of the founder. She explains: “We choose people based on their passion and their skills, rather than simply their qualifications. As a consequence we have a varied set of competences that leads to a very creative team, and on a human level it means we have a team full of interesting people to work with.”



Associate chief project manager **Xavier Brochard's** background is firmly rooted in the restauration trade – he studied for a diploma in hospitality and catering, specializing in cuisine, and went on to study engineering for the catering

industry in Grenoble. He then began working for a different design office where he stayed for five years, before joining BEGC in 2005.

Laroche brings a different set of skills to the company. She took over as director two years ago, and her professional background is in accountancy and finance, but the industry has always been very much part of her personal history. “I was brought up surrounded by the business – it’s been part of my life since I was a child, and the company has always felt like part of the family to us,” she says.

“We always aim to be very present from start to finish, and to work closely, as a team, with the architects and other design offices. We never work alone in our corner; we always see ourselves as part of the whole”

A holistic approach

Whatever the project, whether a commercial restaurant or a large-scale public facility, BEGC has the same priorities. “We always aim to be very present from start to finish, and to work closely, as a team, with the architects and other design offices. We never work alone in our corner; we always see ourselves as part of the whole,” says Brochard. While different clients have different budgets, scales and centres of interest, BEGC aims to meet their needs by approaching the project in a holistic way.

By the same token, the firm always seeks to put the kitchen at the heart of a project, resisting the idea that it should be hidden away in a basement. “Often, clients will think of the dining area or the office, but not necessarily the kitchens, although of course the people working in the kitchen need the same consideration as everyone else. We try to bring that to the fore, to show the importance of the kitchens and encourage them to think of



the ergonomic aspect,” says Brochard. “I have worked in dark kitchens for eight to 10 hours and I know what that’s like; we want people to feel good in their workplace, and for us that means natural light. We are trying to remove this idea that kitchens should not be seen.”

“Sometimes it’s hard for clients to understand this,” Laroche says. “They want to put their kitchens somewhere at the back of the building, or think about them at the end of the process. We try to explain to them that it’s a really positive step to place these elements at the center of the project, that they will have a much better turnover of staff if people working in the kitchens are happy and satisfied in their workplace.”

“We have to think about the cleaning too,” says Brochard. “We need to consider ways to keep kitchens clean as part of our designs, it’s an extremely important aspect. Cleaning time in a kitchen is long and thankless – in a 10-hour working day



Top: BEGC is proud of its diverse, talented team. Above: The state-of-the-art campus for Ducasse catering school



Above: The Alain Ducasse catering school outside Paris is set within a 5,000 sq m building

“We need to consider ways to keep kitchens clean as part of our designs, it’s an extremely important aspect. Cleaning time in a kitchen is long and thankless – in a 10-hour working day you can easily spend two hours cleaning”

you can easily spend two hours cleaning, so it’s a vital part of the design process.”

Creative attitude

So, too, is a personal approach, which is why BEGC begins with a clean slate for every single project. “We make kitchens to measure; it’s very much tailor-made for each client and we never copy and paste a project from one job to the next,” says Brochard. “Our creativity is really important to us.” It’s this attitude that has helped BEGC to respond successfully to many tender requests, while also

maintaining enduring relationships with clients and architects who select them to work on new assignments, not just in France but across the world.

“A good proportion – 15-20% – of our projects are in Paris, but we have worked on assignments as far away as Cuba, China, and Congo as well as Marrakech in Morocco and Abidjan in Côte d’Ivoire,” Laroche explains. “We go where our clients ask us to go. If a client, who has worked with us in France, wants to bring us into a project overseas, we will go there.”

The broad range of skills and experience within the team means that BEGC is in a strong position to combine an in-depth understanding of the needs of their clients, with a unique combination of people able to find creative solutions and think beyond conventional ideas. ■

LANDMARK PROJECTS

The most demanding assignments can often be the most rewarding, and there are few clients more demanding than a Michelin-starred chef. La Mare aux Oiseaux is a gastronomic restaurant and hotel in Saint Joachim, at the heart of the Brière regional park in Loire Atlantique, western France. Chef Eric Guérin, who has owned the establishment since 1995, wanted to breathe new life into his successful business, and BEGC was entrusted with the redesign of the kitchen.

The project required a top-of-the-range design in a relatively small space, so BEGC set about creating a cutting-edge kitchen that would sit well within this charming cottage. The emphasis was firmly on producing a kitchen of the very best quality, while also bringing personality and creating a space in which people were happy to cook. “We worked very closely with Eric Guérin to find the best use of space, using 3D mock-ups and focusing on creating something that was completely ergonomic,” says Xavier Brochard.

While the restaurant was short on space, another project presented the opposite challenge when French chef and national institution Alain Ducasse created a new state-of-the-art campus for his renowned catering school in Meudon, just outside Paris. BEGC took charge of the kitchen designs. Here was a project on a formidable scale: the school boasts 10 kitchens with space for 14 students working in each, set within a 5,000 sq m building.

Both projects were demanding for different reasons, but in each case there was a need to be on top of every detail. “We used the same sets of skills but with very different results,” says Brochard.

MY KITCHEN

Lenny Martinsen

Centerplate executive chef at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans tells Tina Nielsen about catering to large crowds

The Superdome is home to the New Orleans Saints and the heart and soul of business in our building is football, but we also do trade shows and other catered events. We also look after the Smoothie King arena, which hosts a lot of concerts. From November to April we're crazy because both buildings are going full tilt.

The catering team handles everything from feeding the cheerleaders and players to the media and TV crews. We have 152 suites that need to be catered for and then there are the concessions, where the public get everything from hotdogs and hamburgers to pizzas. The fourth area we look after is clubs and some of those are premium dining. It's a daunting task.

This will be my 13th season at the Dome. Before I came here I worked at Sea World and Disney World in Orlando.

In normal, non-Covid times, we cater to 70,000 on game day – we are grilling 1,800 hamburgers and 2,000 hotdogs. We order 1,800 pounds of fresh shrimp for our shrimp po' boys and we go through probably 500 gallons of gumbo.

If there's a game on Sunday, we start setting up Monday. By Wednesday, all my kitchens have their product and Thursday and Friday we go into full production mode. During the game I have anywhere from about 75 to 80 cooks that work various stations throughout the dome. All in, it's a 15-hour day on game day for us.

The workhorses of our kitchen are the tilt kettles, like big skillets, where we cook everything from burgers to pasta.

The general population knows what good food is, so we can't just put out any hot dog or burger. We have to look at the quality of the food we serve people. It's not just about the football game, people come here for the total experience.

Nothing we do here is hard. We just do a lot of it and we have to plan accordingly. It can be challenging, and it can be stressful, but in a good way. When we do the big championship games everybody is so excited and there is a buzz in the air. Just like any other performance, you have to be ready and then execute it perfectly. ■

The kitchen provides simultaneous dining to 152 suites

On game day, 80 chefs work to feed 70,000 guests

Chefs grill 1,800 hamburgers and 2,000 hotdogs, as seen here on this Middleby grill, on a typical game day





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