



FOODSERVICE CONSULTANT

SPECIAL REPORT: cutting-edge hot-side and cold-side innovation

A focus on the cooking equipment and refrigeration technology set to lead the industry into a post-Covid world – future-fit and ready for the next challenge



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This bump in the road has not stopped us

In my past messages I have touched on the themes of hope and resilience as we go through this pandemic. It's a bump in the road that will be past us in the not too distant future, folks. Funny, how something like this brings out not only the best in people, but also the individual and collective strength and fortitude to push on and succeed no matter what. That's what we are as a group, as individuals and as a Worldwide society. Talk is cheap, but instead, we continue to put our results out front to prove this point.

I would like to share some great news of the accomplishments that are ongoing throughout the world by all of our divisions. Our divisional leadership and each group of members continues to astound me with new and creative ways to share, support and care for one another. Here are some examples of what is occurring and has occurred already around the FCSI world:

Our Asia Pacific Division has focused on its member project expertise through the recent launch of a *Project Excellence* supplement, which will publish in Q4. It will highlight members and their firms and specific projects that its members have accomplished. The division is also

People are working hard at making the best of a difficult situation... and no one is giving up

focusing on a number of new webinars that highlight the fact that members are the lifeblood of FCSI and that continued learning and reaching higher goals is the objective of membership in the Society. Personally I'd like to congratulate the Division on their hard work in gaining a number of new members, which has, in turn, energized the division to continue to move forward on a number of new fronts over the last year.

The EAME Division has launched a great program of initiatives including podcasts, webinars and member updates that focus on different sectors of the industry that its members serve.

The Americas Division has launched two creative and unique programs: The On Tap video series and its monthly/bi monthly member Happy Hour initiatives. Each strives to bring member news and face-to-face Zoom interaction between members to enhance the sense that we are all working together, to solve our problems and ultimately beat this pandemic.

On Tap features short interviews with a selected member each week, focusing on the person, their background and career. It's a personal, one-on-one discussion with TAD executive director, Wade Koehler.

The Happy Hour is an open forum Zoom meeting that has, on multiple occasions, brought 70-100 members and industry people together as a singular on-screen 'family', to talk to one another as friends, colleagues and industry experts.

Meanwhile, the Worldwide Board's promotion of various industry roundtables continues, including FCSI's new Future-tech roundtable series, as well as the publishing of individual whitepapers on hot topics surrounding the industry. These



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

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we support,
we inspire**

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have garnered great responses from both members and the industry alike, on an ongoing basis.

So, here we are a year into this thing – but we are doing great things. People are working hard at making the best of a difficult situation... and no one is giving up. I hope by the time I speak to you next that I can say, "we are almost out of this thing, we now see a bright light at the end of the dark tunnel we've been through and *times, they are a changin'!*"

Gang, what we've all learned from this will be a game-changer for success in the future for each of us as individuals and for our Society as a whole. I am positive of that. Be well and stay safe and healthy my friends.



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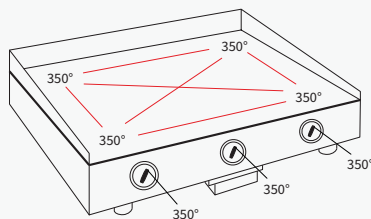
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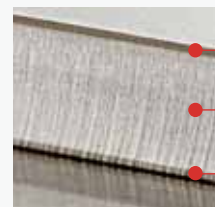
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Vitally important steps



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

Entering 2021, I feel a sense of optimism and am very hopeful that we will soon be back to more normal times. I am excited about the talk surrounding possible upcoming tradeshows and events later this year.

It has been about a year now since we were last able to gather together and celebrate our collective industry. We are an industry that relies on personal connections and relationships and that

lack of interaction with all of our peers has been one of the hardest things about this pandemic. Sure, we can do Zoom meetings and catch up with each other on the phone, but nothing can replace the face-to-face socializing and networking that we all enjoy so much.

Along with the networking, I also look forward to getting a glimpse of new exciting products from manufacturers, exploring educational

opportunities, and continually looking for those better ways that I can serve my clients.

It is my hope that the vaccine rollouts continue around the globe and people continue to maintain their social responsibility.

These are the vitally important steps that will (hopefully) allow the foodservice and hospitality industry to regain its footings and start the path to recovery and growth in 2021.

While the year 2020 will go down in history for whatever reason, we in the FCSI Asia Pacific Division (APD) eagerly look forward to the opportunities that 2021 has in store for us. I am writing this on the eve of Chinese New Year 2021 wishing all our members and their families, good health, and prosperity.

We have a few new initiatives planned for 2021. With the assistance of our media partners, Progressive

Good health and prosperity



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

Content, we will be launching the Professional members' *Project Excellence* publication this year. We strongly urge our members to submit their entries of new and innovative projects that they have been involved in.

We are also working on the potential possibility of hosting Allied members' new product launches. With the uncertainty around trade shows, FCSI APD are looking to offer our Allied members the opportunity to

launch their new products to all our members via an online webinar.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Ms Clara Pi FFCSI for her many years of service and dedication to FCSI APD and at the FCSI Worldwide level. Clara has fittingly been awarded Emeritus status and on behalf of the APD board, I wish her the very best in the next chapter of her life.

Facing the challenge



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

As I write these words it is the middle of February. In the past week, 'King Winter' has arrived in a large part of Europe – the landscape is white with snow. Despite the fact that the weather can be a nuisance and creates its own challenges, it also seems that people are able to briefly forget about the Covid-19 situation. It has been wonderful to see people enjoying sledding and ice-skating – it seems like a small gift from nature.

Otherwise, our state of lockdown continues and the whole world of food and hospitality is looking forward to a sunny spring. All of our members in FCSI EAME are experiencing significant challenges, so it is vital we help each other now – more than ever before.

Some of you have done great things already, developing brand new concepts, while others have pivoted to open digital

consultancy websites. There is a lot of creativity going on. We are happy that the vaccinations have started to roll out and we hope that everyone who works in this sector can see their business restarting very soon.

We will continue hosting EAME webinars every six weeks and, at this moment, the EAME Conference in Paris is postponed to October 2021. It all depends on the developing situation in Europe. For now though, I wish you all the best.



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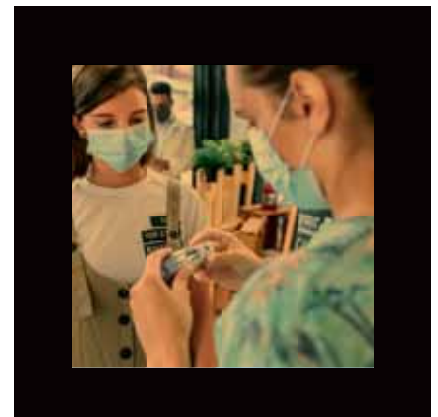
COVER STORY

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Foodservice businesses worldwide have taken a few knocks over the past year – thanks to measures taken to combat the spread of Covid-19. Now,

in the light at the end of the tunnel offered by the various vaccines that have been developed, Ely Earls has spoken to foodservice consultants and restaurant owners and operators all over the globe to find out what positive takeaways they have from this time of enforced lockdown and innovation

"This situation has been great in some regards as we have all rallied together to innovate our offer"



WORLDWIDE

THE AMERICAS

ASIA PAC

EAME

WORLDWIDE

THE AMERICAS

ASIA PAC

EAME

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We also take a look at how the refrigeration manufacturers are stepping up to help in the pandemic; from the fight against food waste to the safe storage of vaccines

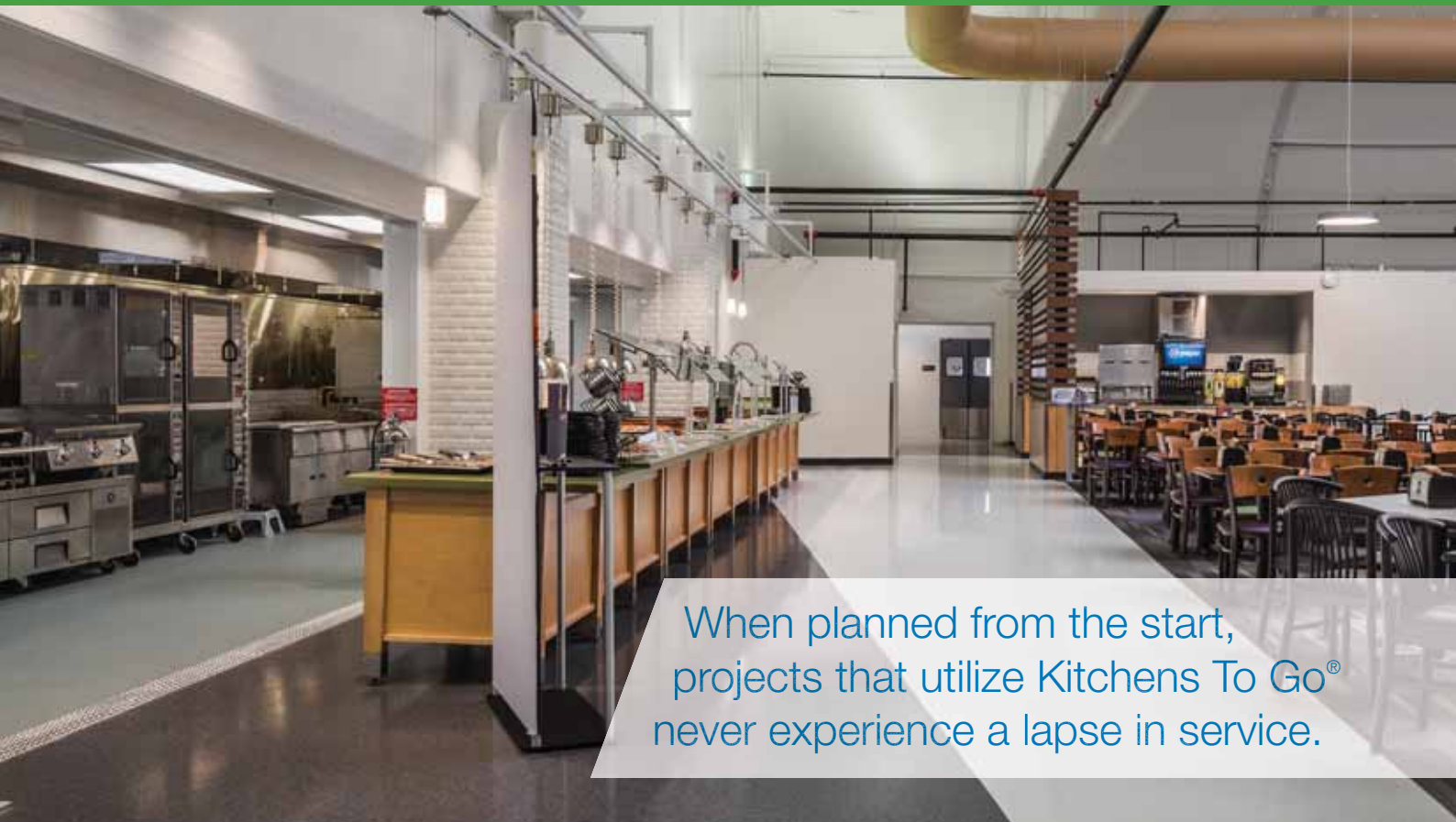


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DIGITAL UPDATES

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:

- Tina Nielsen writes on International Women's Day and looks at how the industry is working harder to further

break down barriers and open up new pathways for women to succeed.

- Regular blogs: Marius Zürcher tackles more thorny issues head on; Consultant Bill Main FCSI writes about the industry's "once in a lifetime opportunity to 're-think' its profitability", outlining a management hypothesis



built on survival leading to prosperity; FCSI Associate John Reed shares how he adjusted his own business from one focusing on the success of others through advisory services to becoming an operator (pictured); Sascha Barby looks at how to start a successful business using food labs as incubators for new concepts.

- Regular updates on FCSI Asia Pacific's *Project Excellence* campaign, which celebrates outstanding design from members in the region (see page 31). We meet the judges and hear from FCSI APD chair Mario Sequeira on why now is the right time to celebrate design excellence.

FOODSERVICE CONSULTANT

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FCSI WORLDWIDE

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WORLDWIDE

THE AMERICAS

ASIA PAC

EAME

AROUND THE WORLD

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

Hotel Green Solution House, Rønne, Denmark

Architect **3XN**
Builder **TBC**
Opens **2021**

In 2021 Hotel Green Solution House, located on the Danish island of Bornholm, will open a new wing with 24 rooms, a conference room and roof spa – all built, clad and insulated using wooden materials. It is expected to provide a positive climate footprint when built, something that has not been seen before in a commercial building in Denmark. The hotel is already home to a restaurant, Restaurant GSH, where guests can enjoy traditional Italian cuisine made from the best organic and sustainable ingredients from Italy and Bornholm.



Le Dôme, Bordeaux, France

Architect **Foster + Partners**
Builder **TBC**
Opens **2021**

Nestled in the rolling hills of Bordeaux, the new Le Dôme winery aims to blend seamlessly into the UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Landscape of the region with a state-of-the-art facility. Visitors approach the winery along a tree-lined avenue, at the end of which is a circular-plan building. The social heart of the building features tasting tables, an elegant wine bar and entertainment spaces – all wrapped in 360-degree views of the adjoining vineyards. A circular atrium allows people to look down onto the wine production and storage spaces below.



The One, Toronto, Canada

Architect **Foster + Partners**
 Builder **Clark Construction Management**
 Opens **2023**

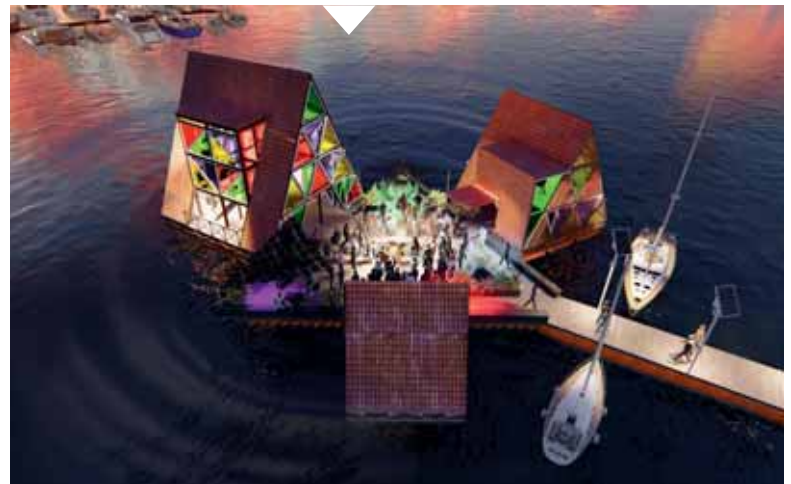
A bold new development in the heart of Toronto, the 84-story structure of The One is set to be the country's tallest building and the second tallest manmade structure after Toronto's CN Tower. It is a clearly articulated building that differentiates the commercial units at lower levels from the residential apartments above. One of the key parts of the development is a range of restaurants in the podium, from casual to elegant, which will offer international cuisine.

Floating Music Hub, Cape Verde, West Africa

Architect **NLÉ**
 Builder **SINA, KRJS, AISTER & OCF**
 Opens **2021**

Floating Music Hub, Mindelo, is a cultural and creative platform located in the beautiful bay of Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente. The platform is based on NLÉ's innovative Makoko Floating System – a simple way to build on water-using lightweight, prefabricated, modular timber elements that can be assembled and disassembled easily.

The three floating vessels – a multipurpose live performance hall (in the large vessel), a state-of-the-art recording studio (in the medium vessel) and a food and beverage bar (in the small vessel) – form a communal cluster around an isolated triangular floating plaza, creating an open space for small to medium sized gatherings.



Patina Maldives, Fari Islands

Architect **Marcio Kogan**
 Builder **Pontiac Land**
 Opens **2021**

Operated by Capella Hotel Group, Patina Maldives, Fari Islands, is a radical new example of biophilic design from the award-winning Studio MK27. Public spaces are open, light and inviting, while inside earthy color palettes, subtle textures and matte surfaces are complemented by arcadian materials to create a dialog with nature. There are 12 dining concepts, each a destination in itself, ranging from fine dining to casual and all focusing on green practices such as minimizing food waste and reducing carbon footprint.

Interest and enthusiasm

FCSI Educational Foundation president **Jay Bravinder** outlines recent developments and plans for the foundation in the next year



The FCSI Educational Foundation is preparing to press the re-start button on our educational initiatives and fundraising after weathering a bruising 2020.

The pandemic created a major roadblock to our fundraising efforts. A number of fundraising initiatives were scheduled for The Americas Division conference in April 2020 and we were not able to reschedule them. Between the downturn in the market and the lack of fundraising activities, our reserves took a significant hit.

One of the bright spots in 2020 was a donation from the Birchfield Jacobs Crab Fest. The annual event was not held because of the pandemic, but several of the sponsors came through for the Foundation. Instead of seeking a refund for their sponsorship of the event, they donated the funds to the Educational Foundation. The Foundation is so appreciative of these donations from Birchfield Jacobs Foodsystems, Eagle Group, Lane Marketing, Halton and Squier Associates.

We kick off 2021 with a new board of directors. This group has been functioning as a cohesive unit since October 2020, which is three months before their official terms start. Ed Norman FCSI (PP) has moved to the immediate past president role on the board. We thank him for his leadership



and guidance, especially during these trying times.

New board members include Richard Dieli FCSI, Garrett Lennon FCSI, Kevin Kochman of KCL, Shaunya Noble and James H. Petersen Jr FCSI (PP).

One of our bright spots in 2020 was our partnership with the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI) Professional Fellows Program. This program connects mid-career entrepreneurs from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada with American businesses for a month-long virtual fellowship any time between January 11 – March 26, 2021. YLAI Fellows are innovative, emerging business leaders from 37 countries across the Americas

who are working to promote economic growth and positive change in their workplaces, communities, and countries.

At the time of the writing, YLAI was working with several FCSI consultants to place interns. We believe the US Department of State will be an excellent partner for the Foundation moving forward.

I am excited about what the future holds and I look forward to a year full of renewed interest and enthusiasm for the FCSI Educational Foundation. ■





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TALKBACK

Three foodservice professionals give their views on one question



Mauricio Rodriguez,
restaurant manager at MONO, Hong Kong

Restaurants are facing unprecedented challenges given the social distancing measures imposed by the Hong Kong government. With limited space to start with, the impact is remarkable when the venues are limited to holding 50% capacity and with 1.5 meters between tables.

Counter and communal dining have remained in high demand during the pandemic however most operators have opted to put an empty space between diners and install partitions to ensure that social distancing is observed. But high-end venues and pubs continue to be filled. I think interaction-driven dining formats will do well because diners are craving human connection more than ever.

Food safety and sanitization has always been front and center in the industry, we are used to following strict procedures for cleanliness and safety. There are now extra precautions added but it shouldn't feel too stressful for chefs and operators. We have our staff tested every two weeks. The most important thing is that management and leadership support the team on taking care of the guests as well as themselves.

Dining out is such a major part of a city like Hong Kong, it endures and flourishes even in the pandemic. Guests will focus on hygiene and sanitization when they go out for meals, and we'll continue to see hand sanitizer and other hygiene measures in venues and in the pockets of dining guests.



Tim McDougald,
project manager, Clevenger Associates, US

The biggest issue for operators is how can we show we are serious about cleanliness? And then from there, how can we eliminate high-touch things and how do we make the diners feel safer.

I think counter dining will return to normal at some point, though I'm not sure when. If you say counter dining will never return then what you are also saying is bar seating will never return, because it's basically the same thing. You can't allow someone to sit at a bar and drink a beer without allowing someone to sit at a counter and eat a burger. Communal dining will come back too – if you can sit at a bar and drink a beer next to someone you don't know, then why not sit at a large table next to them too?

I don't think the enjoyment of eating out will be compromised by added safety precautions. Foodservice workers are amazingly resilient, they will adjust and will understand that it's part of the new job description, and if you're going to work in this industry, this is what's now involved.

I believe this pandemic has pushed transparency in restaurants. Everyone wants to know where their food is at all times, how it's being handled, what's being done to keep them safe. Take the fallout from the E-coli scares we've had in recent years and ramp that up by a factor of 10, that's where we go from here and it's not going to go back down for a long, long time.



Harriet Mansell,
chef/owner of Robin Wylde in Lyme Regis, UK

Space is one of the main obstacles to contend with as result of the changing regulations. Restaurants have been unable to avoid disrupting the ambiance. At Robin Wylde, reshuffling the tables left us with some empty space, which detracted from the cosy vibes. Things that weren't previously a part of the aesthetic, for example cautionary and official signage, also had an impact on the space. Pre-Covid anything like this would have caused diners to turn their noses up but these days customers want it and expect to see it. It reassures them and employees that we are taking the necessary measures.

I anticipate counter dining and communal dining, once restaurants reopen again, will divide people; many will have become accustomed to the distance and feel naturally more comfortable avoiding any possible sources of 'contamination', and want to take things slowly. On the flip side, I do believe we will experience a real surge in dining out, a post-prohibition feeling, where people want to socialize with other people – communal dining is a platform for that.

In terms of hospitality staff there are so many people out there who miss their work, miss being sociable and all the wonderful things that drew them into the industry in the first place – I know the Robin Wylde team do. In this case, I strongly believe the value of being able to work properly again will override any dissatisfaction or difficulty with any added safety measures in place.

Long term, the pandemic has shone a light on the importance of supporting local business. Aside from that, I think people just want to get back to normal.

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LARRY GREEN, PEAK EVENT SERVICES

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CUSTOMERS MILLIONS



The clean solution

*Based on the M-iQ's first year of operation, it is estimated that PEAK Event Services (formerly Rentals Unlimited, the first owner of a M-iQ dishwashing machine in the U.S.), has saved more than a million dollars.

KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL

Despite some trepidation, **The Secret Chef** is optimistic we will experience a new Roaring Twenties

TIME TO SHINE

It has been hard to chisel out even the tiniest nuggets of creativity and positivity from the coalfaces recently. By ‘recently’, obviously I mean the last 12 months – a time period that has played with our perceptions. Planning for the future is something we all do, we need activities to look forward to, but this persistent turbulence has left us unable to do so. Consequently, we exist in a frustrating continuous present, a state of being where the novel and the joyous is agonizingly out of reach.

But if history has taught us anything, it is that eventually life will ease back into something that at least resembles normalcy. The apparent success of the vaccination programs across the globe is enough to ensure that there is at least a glimpse of light amidst the darkness, and gives me some hope that we will soon be able to remove ourselves from the frustrating carousel of opening and closing, of indoor

If history has taught us anything, it is that eventually life will ease back into something that at least resembles normalcy

and outdoor dining, of plating onto crockery or into takeout boxes.

But how will the experiences of the early 2020s color the profession for the next 10, 20 or 50 years?

My honest answer is that I have no idea. If I was able to predict the course of events I wouldn’t be earning my living in a kitchen. What I do know is that there are reasons to be cheerful, some small shiny treasures to chip away from that dark mine.

Chiefly, I’ve been amazed by the grit, determination and downright resilience our profession has shown over the last 12 months. The ability of operators to turn on a dime and make enormous changes to established business models – often with minimal governmental or financial assistance – has been truly incredible.

The lessons learned from this flexible approach to hospitality will be vital as we move into the post-Covid world, especially if it is going to take several more years to fully get the disease under control.

FOODSERVICE ON THE FRONT PAGE

Moreover, the spotlight that has been shone onto the workings of the hospitality sector has highlighted more systemic problems within the profession. Placing these issues (many of which I

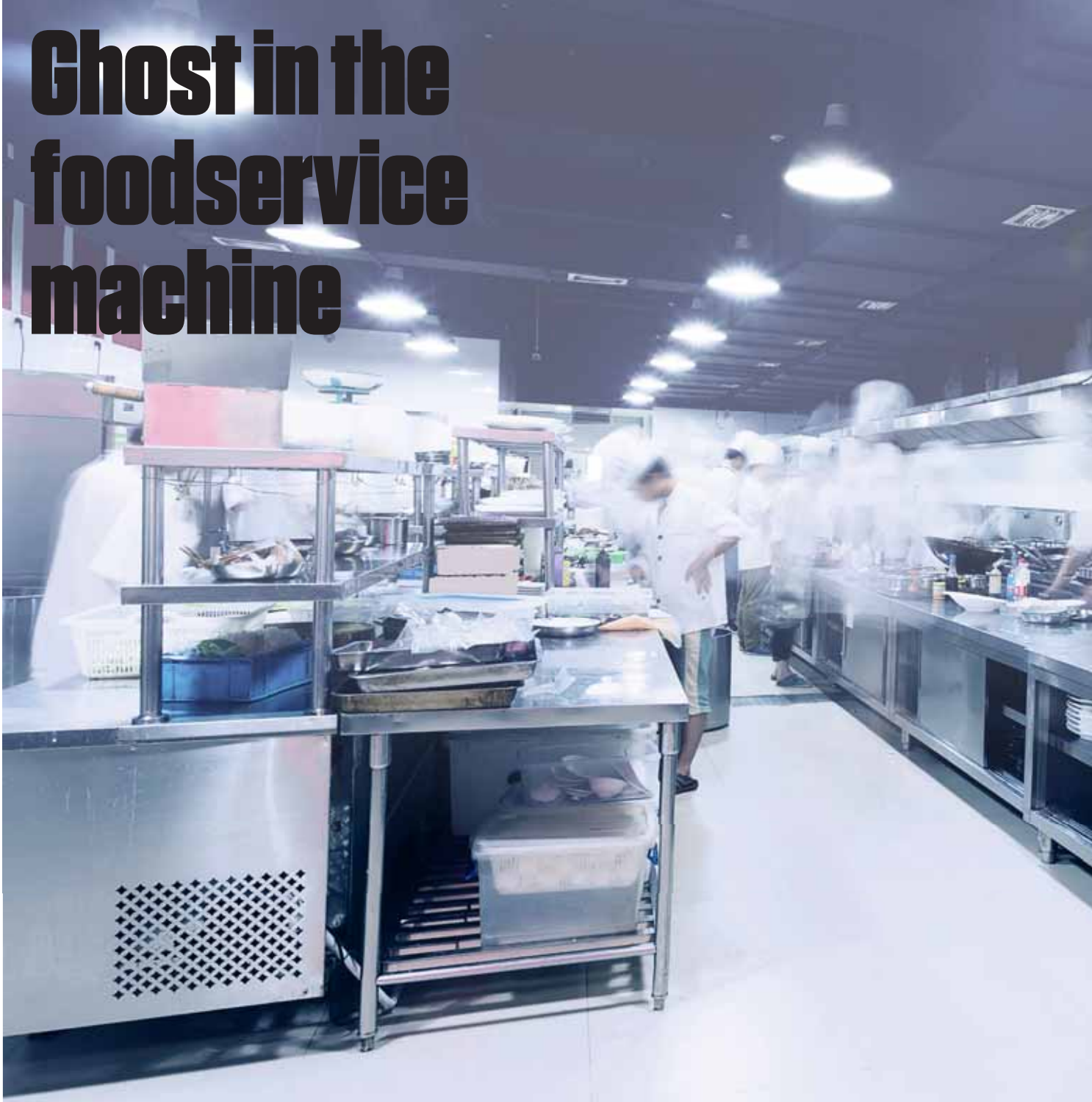
have previously talked about on these pages) onto the front pages of national and international publications can only have a positive effect in the future. We’ve long known that there is an inherent fragility to many of the systems that have become pervasive within the restaurant and hospitality trade, I hope wider acknowledgement within the public at large will, hopefully, move the needle in the direction of resolving them sooner.

Closer to the ground, I’ve been buoyed by the democratization and connectivity that has swept through the profession, both between operators and with the dining public. Embracing social media to engage with each other, and our customers, is a step in the right direction – especially at the high level of haute gastronomy. Personally, being able to create an offering that allows me to connect with, and cook for, hundreds more people over the course of a month than would have been possible under normal circumstances, has been liberating. I’ve also been staggered by the way operators have turned their offering into something that can be sent through the mail, both in terms of the online ordering process and the physicality of the food. I cannot now see a future where this doesn’t become a standard addition to nearly every business plan.

Finally, despite much noise to the contrary, I have high hopes for Main Street and the resurgence of city center dining. We are seeing a slow, but significant and long-reaching, shift in the balance of power between tenant and landlord. A swift recovery is dependent on property owners being accommodating to those who are willing to take a risk establishing new businesses. With traditional retail seemingly in a death-spiral, there will be plenty of spaces for food, drink and hospitality. It is with some degree of trepidation, but also with an air of optimism, that I say bring on the Roaring Twenties. ■



Ghost in the foodservice machine





With restaurants pivoting to keep going through pandemic restrictions, Amelia Levin explores how the value of ghost kitchens is estimated to swell to \$1trn globally by 2030

Amid coronavirus pandemic dine-in closures last year and many shuttered businesses, restaurant companies and chains, both in the US and globally, have had to find new and expanded ways to feed customers outside of their four walls. Ghost kitchens – the concept of offering a menu or multiple menus for take-out and delivery only, and without any customer-facing dining or retail – is set to grow further as indoor dining remains unavailable.

A recent report from Euromonitor predicts cheaper, faster and more reliable delivery

could help this segment capture 50% of drive-thru service (\$75bn), 50% of takeaway foodservice (\$250bn), 35% of ready meals (\$40bn), 30% of packaged cooking ingredients (\$100bn), 25% of dine-in foodservice (\$450bn), and 15% of packaged snacks (\$125bn). Globally foodservice delivery sales more than doubled from 2014 to 2019, and 52% of global consumers are comfortable ordering from a delivery-only restaurant with no physical storefront, says the report.

“The coronavirus pandemic, will drive a change in how physical restaurant formats are being used, especially as shuttered businesses leave empty real estate behind,” said Michael Schaefer, Euromonitor’s global food and beverage lead during a webinar presentation of the report.

The US currently has 1,500 ghost kitchens, putting it ahead of the UK market (750) but behind China (7,500+) and India (3,500+), according to Euromonitor. Kitchen United, one of the first, more successful ghost kitchen companies, announced plans for aggressive expansion throughout the country in 2021, partnering with Panera Bread to test a virtual kitchen concept for the brand. There are also Cloud Kitchens, Kitopi and third-party delivery platform Uber Eats, driving ghost kitchen development. Last year McDonald’s opened a virtual restaurant in London while Chick-fil-A continues to experiment with the concept in Nashville, Tennessee and Louisville, Kentucky, as part of a partnership with DoorDash.

Joseph Schumaker FCSI, president and CEO, FoodSpace, and a seasoned catering, corporate and commissary kitchen designer and

frequent commentator on the topic of ghost kitchens, points out the differences between “true” ghost kitchens and restaurants acting like ghost kitchens as they expand off-premise service while dine-in remains closed or reduced.

“Once Covid clears up, consumers are going to be thirsty for the dining experience again,” he says, predicting that the divide between no-retail and retail-facing concepts will continue.

One strong benefit of ghost kitchens – and a feature that’s likely to push their continued success in the take-out and delivery space – is that they can satisfy the tastes of multiple people in a single household or office, all delivered at the same time via the same vehicle. “If I want Italian and my wife wants sushi and my son wants pizza, we can all get what we want from a ghost kitchen concept,” Schumaker says, adding that ghost kitchens are essentially “virtual food halls.” These concepts differ from traditional restaurant working with third-party delivery companies, which currently only deliver one package from one restaurant at a time.

The future of ghost kitchen design, Schumaker notes, could include a delivery truck loading zone, where kitchen staff load food into vehicles through a window or covered drive-thru without the need for drivers to get out of their cars.

As such, a more robust ghost kitchen market could also usher in advanced restaurant automation, according to Schaefer. “In five to 10 years, this shift could translate to full automation for the production of menu items, such as pizza, ramen or high-end coffee, to speed up service and lower production costs.” ■

INDUSTRY NEWS

National Restaurant Association releases annual trend report

The National Restaurant Association released a tailored version of its food trend report this year, highlighting operational "trends." The key findings were:

- **Streamlined menus** Full-service restaurants, in particular, pared back menus, focusing on best sellers and items that could be prepared with a reduced staff. This trend should continue into 2021.
- **Off-premise** Prior to the pandemic, 80% of full-service dining took place on the premises. This quickly shifted in March, with takeout and delivery becoming the only way to generate business.
- **Blended meals** Consumers did more home cooking, but still relied on restaurants for part of a meal. A dinner entree may have been made at home, but the sides and dessert ordered from a restaurant.
- **Individual and family meal packages** These popular packages in 2020 were composed of an appetizer, main dish and dessert, and offered value and no-fuss prep to housebound consumers.
- **Meal kits** Operators offering the components and instructions bundled in a kit made it possible for customers to prepare a restaurant meal at home. Millennials and Gen Zs were the biggest fans of these.
- **Meal subscriptions** This is another way operators attracted customers, offering a discount on a weekly or monthly subscription of restaurant meals for takeout or delivery.
- **Selling groceries** Back in March and April, restaurants started selling groceries. This petered out in summer and fall, as the supply chain readjusted to demand. But this winter, as Covid-19 cases started spiking, restaurants are again stocking up on groceries as a convenience to customers.
- **Alcohol to go** One-third of 21+ customers ordered beer, wine or cocktails with a delivery or takeout order. With state laws still relaxed into 2021, the Association said alcohol to go will continue to trend.
- **Comfort foods** There's been a surge in desire for comfort foods during the pandemic, and one-third of fine-dining operators added more of these items to the menu to meet consumer demand.
- **Healthy and diet-specific food** Consumers balanced comfort food with more healthy choices, and gravitated toward restaurants that also offered these. But gluten-free or vegan items, are losing traction.



Nutritional Guidelines

The US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Health and Human Services released the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which can be customized to accommodate people of all ages and cultures. The new guidelines emphasize nutrient-dense foods to meet nutritional needs without excess calories from added sugars, sodium or saturated fat.



The future of travel

A report from the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA), AHLA's State of the Hotel Industry 2021, predicted that business travel will not return to full force until 2024. The report examines the economics of the hotel industry's recovery, the impact on and eventual return of business travel, and consumer travel sentiments. Among frequent business travelers who are currently employed, 29% expect to attend their first business conference in the first half of 2021, 36% in the second half of the year and 20% more than a year from now.

Leisure travel is expected to return first, with consumers optimistic a national vaccine program will enable leisure travel again in 2021. The report found that 56% of Americans are likely to travel on vacation in 2021. While 34% of adults are comfortable staying in a hotel, 48% say their comfort is tied to vaccination. Hotels will add 200,000 direct hotel operations jobs in 2021 but will remain nearly 500,000 jobs below the industry's pre-pandemic employment level of 2.3 million. Half of US hotel rooms are projected to remain empty.

CHAIN NEWS



Del Taco released a new, 'Fresh Flex' prototype, which reconceptualizes the restaurant inside and out. The design features third-party delivery pick-up stations, double drive-thru lanes dedicated to mobile orders or delivery driver pickups and parking lot areas for those who want to park, eat and go. Inside the restaurant, built-in freshness coolers display of the ingredients that are prepped daily. Visibility extends to the brand's working kitchen format where guests can see staff prepping food. With sizes ranging from 1,200 sq ft to 2,400 sq ft, the new design expands real estate opportunities to help lower net investment costs, while also providing convenience for guests and optimizing operational efficiencies.



Alto-Shaam executive change

Alto-Shaam named John Ulrich the new vice president of national accounts. With more than 25 years of industry experience, Ulrich has dedicated his career to supporting key accounts, most recently serving as vice president of key accounts for Rational. In his new role, he will lead the strategic development and tactical execution of Alto-Shaam's targeted regional and national chain and multi-unit account growth.

Inspire Brands' \$11.3bn acquisition of Dunkin' Brands positions it as one of the largest restaurant operating companies in the country.

Dickey's Barbecue Pit signed a deal to expand its ghost kitchen concept in the US and throughout the world. After launching the non-traditional franchise model in August, Dickey's opened its first two of eight ghost kitchens in the San Francisco Bay area in November. In December, Dickey's opened three more ghost kitchens in Chicago, Oakland, and Orlando. In Q4 alone, the Texas-style barbecue brand opened 18 new locations and signed 16 franchise deals to add 14 ghost kitchens, one brick-and-mortar and one delivery carry-out model to its portfolio.

Friendly's Restaurants announced it was acquired by the investment firm Amici Partners Group, LLC. The chain has 130 locations. Amici is an entity affiliated with BRIX Holdings, whose franchise portfolio includes Red Mango® Yogurt Cafe Smoothie & Juice Bar, Smoothie Factory® Juice Bar and others.

Capriotti's Sandwich Shop acquired Las Vegas-based, fast-casual sandwich chain Wing Zone, rounding out its portfolio to include 115 Capriotti's restaurants (18 opened in 2020), and 61 Wing Zone restaurants.

Centre Lane Partners, the owner of Saladworks, has acquired Garbanzo Mediterranean Fresh out of bankruptcy for \$1.2m. A new holding company, WQWorks, oversees the two concepts as well as Frutta Bowls, which was also recently acquired.

BurgerFi recently announced it went public in late 2020 on the cusp of its 10-year anniversary this year. Named one of the nation's fastest-growing better burger concepts with approximately 125 restaurants domestically and internationally, BurgerFi also announced the appointment of new executive chairman is Ophir Sterberg.

NEW OPENINGS



Fogo de Chão signed a lease agreement to open a new, flagship restaurant in Coral Gables, Florida, slated to open by the end of 2021 in The Plaza Coral Gables, South Florida's highly anticipated mixed-use shopping, dining, office, hospitality and entertainment destination. The location will feature The Butchery and Next Level Lounge, two destinations new to Fogo in the US, designed in partnership with architecture and design firm Harrison.

Ghost Bar, the brainchild of Ning (Amelie) Kang and Yishu He, owners and partners of Málà Project, opened in January as an online cocktail bar offering convenient and fairly-priced cocktails for stay-at-home New Yorkers. Drinks are available for delivery through various third-party delivery services.



The Valley Hotel, a Curio Collection, 129-room hotel by Hilton™, opened in early 2021 in Homewood, Alabama, featuring three dining concepts, including Ironwood Kitchen + Cocktails, The Terrace Bar and The Valley Coffee Co.

Chicago-based **Aloha Poke** opened its first ghost kitchen operation in downtown Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The menu is available via third-party delivery platforms like Uber Eats, Grubhub and DoorDash. The chain currently operates 19 locations in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Florida, and Washington, DC.



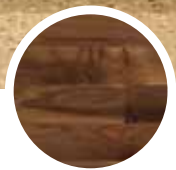
Mici Handcrafted Italian, family-founded, five-unit fast casual chain based out of Denver, Colorado, announced its first location in Colorado Springs, set to open in late February. The location will be owned and operated by Mici corporate; Mici launched their National Franchise program earlier in 2020. Housed in a previous Smashburger space, the restaurant will have 46 seats and dedicated pickup and delivery stations, as well as offer delivery and catering.



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Butcher Block



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ARE PERMANENTLY
CLOSED

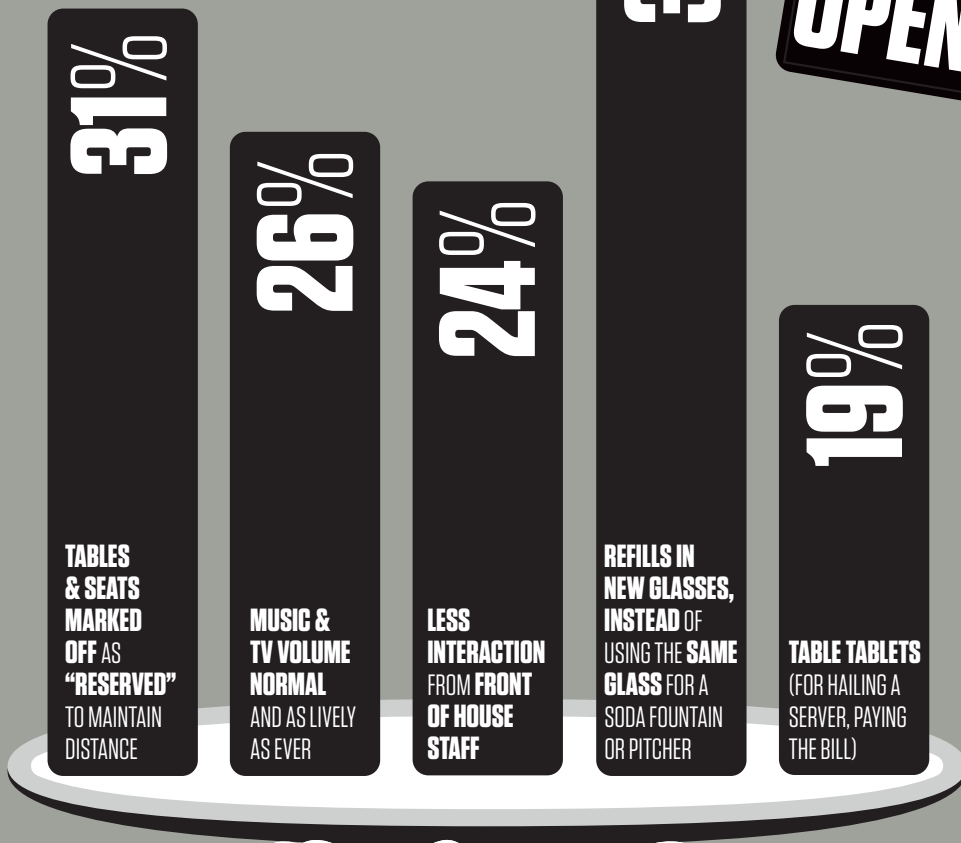


1.0%
ARE TEMPORARILY
CLOSED

11,884

RESTAURANTS OPENED
DURING COVID-19
(AS OF JANUARY 2021)

WHEN RESTRICTIONS ARE EASED, WHAT AMBIENCE AND SERVICE WOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A BAR OR RESTAURANT?



38%

RESTAURANTS WILL INITIALLY REDUCE OPERATING HOURS WHEN THEY OPEN

24%

OF PEOPLE DINE INSIDE AT A RESTAURANT MORE OFTEN

0.3%

OF RESTAURANTS OPENED DURING COVID-19 ARE FINE DINING

14%

OF PEOPLE ORDER A MEAL KIT FROM A SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE MORE OFTEN

NEWS & VIEWS:

Reopening: key facts and figures for restaurants/bars

SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL CORONAVIRUS REPORT, JANUARY 2021 (US)

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PRE-FABRICATED GREASE DUCT



Recognition for street food legend

Bangkok street food chef Supinya 'Jay Fai' Junsuta has been announced as the recipient of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2021 Icon Award. Junsuta has cooked at her open-air shophouse for more than 40 years and has built it up to become a destination restaurant for foodies, chefs and celebrities alike who visit from across the world.

William Drew, director of content for Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, says Junsuta embodies the spirit of Asian gastronomy and describes her as "a purist with a passion for blending culinary traditions with innovation." The Icon Award is voted for by the members of the Asia's 50 Best Restaurants Academy and recognizes culinary figures who have made an outstanding contribution to the community. Previous recipients include Japanese chefs Seiji Yamamoto and Yoshihiro Murata.

"I am grateful to be recognized for my hard work and craftsmanship. This is truly the reward of a lifetime for an ordinary chef like me. But most importantly, I hope everyone can learn from my story that dedication, hard work and patience can help you achieve your goals."

This year the unveiling of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants will take place on 25 March in a virtual ceremony broadcast on Facebook and YouTube.

Campaign for silent eating in Japan

Restaurants in Japan, struggling to deal with the impact of Covid-19, have issued a plea to customers to refrain from speaking while eating in a desperate attempt to keep diners coming during the pandemic. The campaign for mokushoku – or silent eating – was started by a restaurant in Fukuoka while others have advocated for tanshoku, which means eating in a short time.





Clara Ming Pi FFCSI to retire

After many years of a highly distinguished consulting career, Clara Ming Pi FFCSI has decided to retire and focus her time and attention on her family. Among many other achievements, including an FCSI Fellowship, Pi was instrumental in the development and support of FCSI members in China and served as FCSI Asia Pacific chair for five years, and on the Worldwide board for 16 years.

“Clara’s valuable experience and knowledge will be greatly missed,” says FCSI APD chair, Mario Sequeira, of Pi, who has been granted Emeritus membership status of FCSI.

Pi’s decision to leave the Worldwide and Asia Pacific boards creates an opportunity for another FCSI Professional member in the Asia region to take on this role. Please contact one of the APD board members should you wish to be considered: apd@fcsi.org.



Starbucks eyes strong recovery in China

China is the second biggest market for Starbucks and the US coffee company has forecast strong growth there as the world continues to emerge from the global pandemic.

After opening 259 new stores in the fourth quarter of 2020, the company is working on opening 600 new stores in the region and expects comparable store sales growth of 27-32% in China during the full fiscal year of 2021.

Starbucks ended Q4 with 32,660 stores globally, with stores in the US and China comprising 61% of this portfolio. At the end of Q4, the company had 4,706 stores in China.

Part of the growth drive in 2021 will come from the Starbucks Now retail concept, which integrates Starbucks physical and digital customer touchpoints.

2021 trends colored by the impact of Covid

New research from Ai Palette, a start-up using artificial intelligence to track consumer food preferences, has outlined what it expects to be the dominating food trends in Asian markets next year.

Data from a variety of sources – including retail, menus, recipes, social media conversations, and search engine queries – was collected in three markets: China, India, and the Philippines.

Given the Covid-19 context, consumers are increasingly concerned about the health of the body as well as the mind. Findings were sorted into one of six categories – Dormant, Emerging, Growing, Mature, Declining, and Fading – based on its penetration in a given market.

The study found that foods and beverages that can address 'sleep quality' represent a growing conversational trend. In China, 'sleep disorder' is an emerging trend in food purchases, growing 46% year-on-year.

Similarly, foods that might help with 'mental health' (in India, up 75% year-on-year); and 'meditation' (China, +62%); are identified as emerging trends.

'Immunity' is a growing trend in both India (+119%) and China (+44%) while 'fasting' and 'intermittent fasting' are emerging trends in China (+63%), indicative of interest in weight loss strategies.

'High protein' is a growing trend in China (+205%) and India (+39%) as consumers explore protein-rich diets and try to reduce their intake of carbohydrates and fats.



New Zealand hospitality helped by working holiday visa extension

Around 100,000 foreign workers will benefit from the government decision to extend working holiday visas, many of them employed in foodservice. According to Restaurant Association NZ, up to 40% of hospitality staff are currently migrant workers with local workers showing little interest in taking up a career in hospitality. The country has dealt exceptionally well with the pandemic and has effectively eliminated the virus allowing the foodservice sector to operate normally while a track and trace system remains in place.

Celebrating APD Project Excellence

FCSI APD is proud to launch its inaugural *Project Excellence* publication to celebrate outstanding design projects recently completed by Professional members from the region. The publication, which will mail with the Q4 2021 edition of FCSI's *Foodservice Consultant* magazine, will showcase in print the three member projects deemed to be worthy winners by an independent panel of judges from the region.

Submitted projects from FCSI APD Professional members, which must have been actively worked on by members since January 2019, will be scored by judges based on the following criteria and weighting: Innovation/technical excellence (20%); Design excellence (20%); Originality and 'thinking outside the box' (20%); Overcoming specific challenges/restraints (20%); and Sustainability credentials (20%).

The judging process will take place in Q3 2021 and the winners revealed in print in October 2021. The three winning projects will also be showcased across all FCSI digital platforms (the fcsi.org website; weekly newsletter; all social media channels). Think your project has got what it takes to be selected by our judges, or you'd like enter a fellow FCSI APD Professional member's project? Then please submit the entry at surveyMonkey.co.uk/r/D6WWT6Z.

Members have until 1 August 2021 to enter. Terms and conditions apply. Best of luck!



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Brexit triples transport costs

The UK's Foodservice Equipment Association (FEA) has warned that some of its members' import/export transport costs have tripled with Brexit, due to the complex paperwork issues.

One member reported that it would have cost £85 to ship a single unit, valued at £600 – making the transaction unviable. Typically, the extra cost is £100 per load, whether for single or multiple pallets. Meanwhile, bottlenecks and log jams are causing businesses even more problems, with stock held up in distribution hubs and at borders.

"It's to be hoped that as things settle down, crossing the borders will speed up" said Keith Warren, chief executive of FEA. "However, even if it does, those extra shipping costs are a big concern. They are yet another blow to the foodservice equipment industry."

The problems are more acute in Northern Ireland where paperwork is even more complicated. "We've heard of hauliers holding back from accepting foodservice equipment shipments, because they can't deliver them, due to the backlogs," said Warren.

Covid-19 restrictions have added another layer of complexity to trade, with lead times from outside the EU also increasing. Those from China have risen from 2-4 weeks to up to 12 weeks.

"Manufacturers, importers, dealers, design houses – we are all under huge pressure. Credit ratings are being downgraded everywhere, credit insurance is becoming more difficult to get, and despite concerted lobbying by FEA and many other groups, such as UKHospitality, the government is still not giving the supply chain the support it needs," said Warren. "It's a situation that must be addressed immediately, and it's likely to get worse before it gets better."



Europe's appetite for insects

Insects are inching closer to European plates after the EU's food safety agency (EFSA) proclaimed the yellow mealworm safe for people to eat.

Though the European Commission has yet to endorse the decision, which came following an application by French insect-for-food production company Agronutris, it is expected to lead to EU-wide approval within months, and could pave the way for other similar applications that are in the pipeline.

As of January, over 20 applications had been submitted for the authorization of insects as a novel food, covering species such as migratory locusts, banded crickets, and black soldier flies.

One of these applicants is Ynsect, which uses proprietary technology to produce Molitor mealworm in vertical farms. "This breakthrough is a major achievement that rewards the work that has been done for years by the entire European insect industry gathered under the IPIFF umbrella. We hope that this positive assessment will be the first of many" said CEO Antoine Hubert.

Yellow mealworm's main components are protein, fat and fibre, offering a potentially sustainable and low carbon-emission source of food for the future. There are several potential uses for the larvae; they can be dried and used whole in dishes such as curries, or ground down to make flour suitable for biscuits, pasta and even bread. When roasted, they are said to have a nutty flavor.



Rivalry between delivery giants

The latest company to join the big players is Finnish startup Wolt, which raised \$530m in January and is preparing for a potential 2022 stock market listing. The Series E round led by Iconiq Growth brings the total raised by Wolt to \$856m. New backers include KKR & Co., Tiger Global Management, DST Global, Prosus NV and Coatue Management.

Food delivery companies have recently been flooded with cash from investors convinced that the pandemic will permanently alter dining habits. UK startup Deliveroo raised \$180m in January, while US based DoorDash is valued at \$51bn after its public trading debut in December. Delivery Hero, a Berlin-based online food delivery company, also raised £1.12bn in January by issuing new shares to institutional investors.

Wolt, which launched in 2015, is available in 23 countries and more than 120 cities. In the past year, it has expanded its services beyond restaurant takeaway to delivering groceries and retail goods including pharmaceuticals.

Miki Kuusi, CEO and co-founder of Wolt said, "We operate in an extremely competitive and well-funded industry, and this round allows us to have a long-term mindset when it comes to doubling down on our different markets. Despite the turbulence of 2020, we've remained focused on growth, tripling our revenue to a preliminary \$345m against a net loss of \$45m. Compared to the \$662m in new capital that we've raised during the past year, this puts us into a strong position for investing in our people, technology, and markets when thinking about the next few years ahead."

Hospitality task force

The heads of 13 European hospitality bodies and trade unions have jointly called for the immediate setting up of a hospitality task force across EU institutions to discuss the impact that Covid-19 has had on business and jobs and to deliver a road map for recovery.

Signatories, which include The Brewers of Europe and Hospitality Europe, want “predictability for the hospitality sector and its supply chain, through a safe, timely and sustainable reopening as soon as the economy starts to open up again”.

“Hundreds of thousands of businesses have had to close due to the various lockdowns, shutdowns and restrictions,” the statement said. “Some restaurants were able to focus on takeaway or food delivery services, but this can only help save a small percentage of traditional income streams.”

The statement also cites Eurostat research, which found that during Q2 2020, the hospitality sector’s turnover in the EU dropped by 63.25% compared to Q2 2019. In employment terms, hospitality services employed 1.84 million fewer people in Q2 2020 than in Q2 2019.

Pierre-Olivier Bergeron, secretary general of The Brewers of Europe said: “The pandemic has taken lives and livelihoods. At the right time and when it is safe to do so, we must do all we can to reconnect the hospitality value chain and avoid further knock-on effects. With bars, pubs, cafés and restaurants so integral to our society and economy, we call on the EU institutions to ensure that the hospitality sector has strong and dedicated support to help its recovery”.



Vegan ‘dairy’ producers face EU laws

In 2017, the European Court of Justice ruled that dairy terms, including milk, cheese, butter and yogurt, could only refer to products derived from an animal and not plant-based alternatives such as almond milk or vegan cheese.

But a new set of stricter rules currently under consideration could also ban any dairy based descriptors and the use of packaging associated with the dairy industry. Amendment 171, which is currently under discussion in the European Parliament, would also prevent vegan producers from discussing the health or environmental benefits of their products by comparing them to their dairy equivalents.

Vegan producers are not taking this lying down. In an Instagram response to Amendment 171, Oatly (producers of dairy alternatives made from oats), called this move a “wacko, incomprehensible direction to take in the middle of a climate crisis.” Oatly, Upfield and other plant-based brands have also launched a petition to overturn the new rules, which they call ‘plant-based censorship.’

Although the amendment has been voted in by MEPs, it is not yet set in stone. The next step is trilogue negotiations, which involves a conversation between the European Parliament, the EU Council of Ministers and the European Commission.



OPENINGS

Olluco, Moscow

A new project by Virgilio Martinez and the team behind Central, Kjolle and Mil, three of the hottest restaurants in Lima, Peru, will explore Russian biodiversity at a new restaurant and experimentation center in the center of Moscow. Olluco will work with Mater Iniciativa, the group's research arm, which is run by Malena Martinez, to connect with local producers and promote Russian ingredients in as-yet-unseen ways.

Nobu Hotel & Restaurant, Marrakech

The brand's first foray into Africa will be located in the Hivernage district, steps from the historic heart of the city. The hotel will house 71 guest rooms and suites, a selection of dynamic dining venues and rooftop spaces, a luxurious spa and fitness center with in and outdoor swimming pools and meeting and event spaces.



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THE BIG PICTURE



Project
**ZULAL WELLNESS RESORT,
QATAR**

Architect **Msheireb Properties**

Builder **Msheireb Properties**

Opens **2021**

Created by renowned wellness brand Chiva-Som, Zula Wellness Resort will tap into Traditional Arabic Islamic Medicine (TAIM) to give guests a sustainable and holistic wellness experience at a private coastal location in the north of Qatar.

The resort is made up of the family friendly Zula Discovery, with 120 rooms and suites, and the adult-only Zula Serenity, offering 60 rooms and suites.

Its architecture draws from biophilic design, incorporating natural materials and elements of its coastal desert setting into indoor spaces. Pathways are engraved with Sidr leaves, a tree known for its healing properties, and windows are carved with traditional Arabic and Islamic designs.

Eating well is an integral part of wellbeing, a philosophy reflected in Zula's F&B offering. Fresh, organic produce grown close to the resort features. There are six restaurants: these are Aizoon, a formal dining restaurant; Kenar, a regionally inspired restaurant; Casuarina, a spa cafe, and Malbu, a beach club. Zula Serenity offers Al Sidr for formal dining, and the Tea House.

True to Chiva-Som's core principles, the resort adheres to environmentally friendly practices, such as minimizing single-use plastics, utilizing organic produce, energy conservation and water preservation technologies. ■





With the opening of his London restaurant, Santiago Lastra's journey from globetrotting chef to restaurateur is complete. He tells Tina Nielsen about opening Kol during Covid and sharing Mexican culture with the world

In *Hungry*, the 2019 book about the Mexican pop-up of Noma, Santiago Lastra is described as 'the fixer'. Author Jeff Gordinier spent years traveling with Danish chef René Redzepi and his team and had a front-row view of Lastra's transition from nomadic pop-up chef to project manager of the temporary home of the world's best restaurant.

As Gordinier outlines in the book: "It was up to him to lay down the groundwork before Redzepi came to town. His mission was simultaneously clear and impossible: find the best. The best ingredients. By any means necessary."

When Redzepi first approached him to project manage Noma Mexico, Lastra, having left for Europe at 18 and with no experience cooking the cuisine of his home country, was not sure. "I didn't know anything about Mexico even though I was Mexican," he says, recalling the first meeting sharing tacos with Redzepi in Copenhagen. "I had never even spoken to a supplier, so I told him I was not the right person for the job."

But the Danish chef must have seen something in the young Mexican; instead of looking for another

candidate, he suggested they embark on this journey of discovery together. "So, I said yes," says Lastra.

A cooking epiphany

If it was a leap of faith for Redzepi, for Lastra this jump into the unknown was not an entirely unfamiliar experience. By the time he joined Noma, he had spent years cooking his way around the world with no real plan other than to pursue adventure.

Today Lastra is better known as the man behind Kol, the hottest restaurant opening in London last year. We first speak on the phone shortly after London enters tier 3 of the Covid-19 restrictions, mandating all restaurants to close. At that time Kol had been open for just two weeks. The second time, we meet in the restaurant during the short time before Christmas when restrictions eased and allowed hospitality to reopen. At the time of writing, so far in 2021 Kol is yet to receive any diners as the country remains in a third lockdown.

The stop-start opening has been stressful, but it gave him time to review things with the team. "We have had some time off to work on things, just thinking about different ways to make the restaurant more efficient," he says.

Even if Kol only opened for a matter of weeks due to the pandemic, it reaped a slew of approving reviews and enjoyed a full reservations book.

A cooking career was not on the cards for Lastra when he was growing up in Cuernavaca, about 45 minutes from Mexico City, a place he describes as "the sort of town where people from the city would have their weekend houses and visited for holidays." >

Putting down roots





"I realized I could make them happy in a moment when we were so sad by cooking for them and I thought if I could achieve that with other people it would be the most amazing feeling"

Cooking entered his life when he was 15 and picked up a packet of Ritz crackers in the supermarket; he saw a recipe for a crab dip on the back of the box and, with little else to do that day, he bought the ingredients and went home to make it for his family.

At the time his was a pretty average teenage life. "I played in a rock band, I painted, I wanted to be a mathematician and I was in the football and basketball teams," he says. His foray into cooking, however, meant all those interests took a backseat. Next, he bought a small Italian recipe booklet. "I cooked all the recipes, I really enjoyed it and my family enjoyed eating them," he says.

Encouraged by his mother and brother, he got a job in an Italian restaurant. He says it was like finding the love of his life. "I remember going into the kitchen and people making pizzas and pasta and all of these things were amazing, it was the best place I had ever been. I loved working there."

He went to school 7am to 2pm and at 3pm he'd go to the restaurant where he worked until 1am. "I was so happy," he says.

In that year his father, grandmother and grandfather all passed away in the same month. For a while he stayed away from school, but he kept going to the restaurant. "It was difficult to speak with my peers about what had happened, but I felt safe in the kitchen," he says. He would bring food home to cook for his mother and brother and eating together was a happy time for them.

"I realized I could make them happy in a moment when we were so sad by cooking for them and I thought if I could achieve that with other people

it would be the most amazing feeling. I decided to dedicate my life to do that forever as a profession," he says. "At that moment I stopped everything else."

From Mexico to the world

Lastra continued to work in the Italian restaurant for another three years while finishing high school. A brief spell in a Mexican/Asian fusion restaurant was followed by his first move abroad in 2009.

Spain had always been on his radar – his father and grandfather were from Galicia in northern Spain and the idea of modern Spanish cooking appealed to him. A colleague set him up with a job in the kitchen of Europa, a Pamplona restaurant with one Michelin star. There was just one problem: the chef didn't know he was coming. "I turned up with my suitcase and she had no idea who I was. I was 18 and it was the first time I had left Mexico, I was so scared and so excited. I had saved for six months for my plane ticket and had €50 in my pocket," he says.

He had no plan B, but the chef Pilar Idoate gave him a chance. "I didn't know anything about Spanish food; all I knew was Italian food and some weird fusion of Mexican and Asian, but they gave me a chance to learn," he says.

He'd later return to Spain to do a master degree in modern gastronomy at Basque Culinary Center (BCC) in Bilbao. He was awarded a scholarship after completing three years at culinary school back home.

At the same time he did a stage at Mugaritz, the ground-breaking restaurant in San Sebastián, at the time the third best restaurant in the world. If Restaurant Europa taught him about natural



Clockwise from right: Kol Lastra's London restaurant; from the menu lamb leg tostada; Lastra (left) sourcing the very best Mexican ingredients for the Noma pop-up in 2017

ingredients and hospitality, Mugaritz and BCC taught him that there were no boundaries in food. “You can create anything you want as you learn how the food works chemically and physically,” he says.

This time marked the start of his traveling. First stop was Copenhagen – he wanted to work at Noma, among the most famous and best restaurants in the world and the birthplace of New Nordic cuisine, but the offer to stage came without accommodation so he had to turn it down. Instead, he joined nose to tail restaurant Bror, and then came a detour into research when he took a job with Nordic Food Lab.

“I wanted to open a research and development center in Mexico, I love cooking chemistry and after Mugaritz and the BCC I wanted to learn more about being academic,” he says.

A project making tortillas with different Nordic grains and seeds took him to the European Parliament in Brussels. Another revelation came as he prepared tacos and tostadas while talking about his project. “I thought, ‘oh, my God, I’m cooking and traveling, meeting incredible people and sharing my culture with them,’” he says. It planted a seed.

Another pivotal event was a small private dinner he cooked with a friend in Sweden. The theme of the dinner was Mexican Nordic and photos on Instagram caught the eye of Carousel, a London restaurant with changing chef residencies, and the team invited him to cook there. “It was the first time I was cooking my own food,” he says. It was also his first time in London and the experience made him imagine what it would be like to have his own restaurant one day.

This was 2015 and Instagram was still in its formative years, but it was widespread enough to make people take notice of his food. Soon Lastra was invited to Italy to cook, then Russia and then Hong Kong, Taiwan, Portugal and back to Russia.

More by chance than design, his life became about travel and in the space of a year and a half he went to 27 countries. “I lived nowhere, I wasn’t paying rent in one place and I was just going to those places to make pop-up restaurants. Sometimes they paid me a little bit, sometimes nothing,” he says. Any money went on flights. “I traveled the world and I came to understand cultures, I’d go somewhere, explore the local culture and food and then in the third week I’d do a pop-up,” he says.

Everything was done by Instagram and word of mouth. “I’d go somewhere, do my cooking and then I’d wait for somebody to contact me; it always happened,” he says.

A big idea

He was in St Petersburg, Russia when Noma got in touch to discuss the Mexico project in the summer of 2016. Rosio Sanchez, who was then the head pastry chef, invited him for a meeting. Pretending to already be in Copenhagen, he dropped what he was doing and jumped on a flight to Denmark.

Things moved very fast after accepting the role. He was under enormous pressure. “It was so stressful; I understood it was an opportunity for me to do something relevant in my life,” he says.

They gave him nine days to prepare the first research trip. “They told me not to waste any time so we went on 16 flights in 14 days traveling around Mexico meeting indigenous communities and visiting markets. It was mind-blowing.”

When the project finished he understood he’d



be welcome to join the team at Noma but he was ready for something different. “I decided I wanted to open a restaurant that could share and promote the meaning of Mexican culture in the world,” he says.

Lying on the beach on his week off he tried to decide on where to open it. He made a list of the things he needed this city to have. Multicultural and open minded were both important. “I also wanted people to like spicy food and it needed to be central because I have friends in so many countries and it had to be easy for them to visit.”

It would need to be English speaking, allowing the restaurant to be more impactful and it was important for him to be in a country with different landscapes and weathers. London ticked all the boxes.

In the summer of 2017 Lastra moved into the spare room in a friend’s London apartment, >



“This is food and this is culture, it is not just the culture of Mexico but also the culture of the UK. The approach and the flavors are Mexican but the ingredients are British”

determined to learn about his new country. He’d spend a year traveling around, meeting people, learning about new producers. “I’d take a train to Wales and get to know the pig farmers, just stay there for a while. The next week I might focus on learning about the history of Great Britain.”

He then started doing pop-ups to try out the ideas that he’d imagined during his travels. A mutual friend introduced him to Jake Kasumov and Marco Mendes of MJMK Restaurants who were keen to invest. “They understood what I wanted to do and they loved it,” he says. That was March 2018 and from then the focus was on getting ready to open a restaurant. They had hoped to open in March 2019, then October that year, but due to snags with the site and Covid it eventually happened in October 2020.

A singular approach

Innovation is what first drove him to make the move to Spain, but he has since come to understand that it is hard to grasp. “I thought Spanish molecular food, was the new thing and in Spain they said it was New Nordic cuisine, but when I went Copenhagen they said, ‘the new thing? It’s Mexican food’. As soon as you know something, it is old,” he says. “If you want innovation you have to make it yourself.”

The desire to do things differently is a big influence in Kol and he has set out his stall with a singular approach. “This is food and this is culture, it is not just the culture of Mexico but also the culture of the UK,” he says describing his London restaurant. “The approach and the flavors are Mexican but the ingredients are British.”

Here diners won’t find ingredients typically associated with Mexican cuisine – avocados are out, so are limes. “Of course, I can buy avocados and limes from the suppliers, but I understand how the ingredient flow works. By the time a lime arrives here it might be a month old. It is not just about freshness but traceability – it is impossible to know who grows those limes,” he explains.

Adding the Mexican touch to the process is his brother who joined him to help with R&D. “I haven’t been to Mexico for so long but he has a really Mexican palate and he will tell me the truth,” he says.

The majority of the rest of his team – 80% – are from the UK, including head chef Ben Morgan, and their British approach is important for Lastra. “I have been here three years but I don’t know everything that is available, so they make suggestions.”

So, after a life of moving around, how does it feel to be anchored to a restaurant in London? “It feels great,” he says. “At one point traveling was too much, I’d wake up and I wouldn’t know where I was or what day it was. I’d be in three or four countries in a week. It is very tiring. You belong nowhere.”

He sees exciting opportunities as he puts down roots in his new city. For one he will be able to make plans, get to know the community around him. But there is also the chance to improve and develop. “In the beginning it was about what I could cook and what people thought about it but now it is about developing and evolving,” he says. “If you are driving the ship you can take it anywhere you want and if you have everything in the right place you can actually drive somewhere that is amazing” ■



Right: The bar at Kol Mezcaleria in the restaurant’s basement. Above: A dish from Kol restaurant, chocolate tamal

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TO BE FRANK

Frank Wagner FCSI, managing partner of K'DREI in Germany, has built an enviable, global reputation as a designer, but his attention is firmly on the future, he tells Michael Jones

Frank Wagner FCSI is a man who prefers to look forward, not back. He's perhaps more comfortable discussing the future – for his company and the industry he clearly loves – rather than dwelling nostalgically on his past achievements, and indeed, life. But it's a fascinating past, even if Wagner spent much of his youth dreaming and reading about alternate realities.

It's no surprise that Wagner's reading material of choice as a young man growing up in post-war, communist Berlin, East Germany, was science fiction. The imagined worlds of Jules Verne, Stanislaw Lem and Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, intertwined with childhood fantasies of becoming an actor, astronaut or pilot, offered Wagner a sense of escape while he and his friends "played in the ruined buildings from the war."

Yet, within that testing environment, the influences that would shape Wagner's professional future – and his celebrated association with design, engineering and hospitality – were all being forged. Wagner's mother trained as an art teacher, while his father was an engineer in a government bakery plant. The family lived above a pub. "People were beating each other; furniture being thrown around – everything you can imagine," he laughs. He has fond memories of carrying two-litre glass bottles of beer upstairs for his grandfather, snacking on the pub's

currywurst while he listened to the juke box through the floorboards and watching the meter-tall ice blocks and wooden beer barrels being delivered to the pub every Sunday morning.

Yet at that stage at least, the idea of pursuing a profession in hospitality, or engineering like his father, was not under consideration. "I thought engineering was such a boring job because my father would sit in his room, studying and studying... But I could read those [technical] drawings. I was able to do that from childhood – I think that's the main thing my parents gave me."

That innate ability eventually won through and Wagner studied to become a chartered engineer at Humboldt University of Berlin between 1985–1989. "I was already good at organizing things, but at university I learned that, if you can't write something out on a single sheet of A4 paper you haven't thought it through enough. You need to refine things again and again," he says. "My professor of thermodynamics, Professor Fleischer,

"I thought engineering was such a boring job. But I could read those technical drawings. My parents gave me that"

encouraged us to question everything. He taught us that technology and science are not defined by letters and data. You have to understand the process."

Walls come tumbling down

After graduating, Wagner worked in the engineering office of a food institute. "My first job was building a mini factory to produce an algae-based red coloring used for medicine products," he says.

That period coincided with a seismic event in recent world history – the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. "My wife and I could not believe the news. We listened to it all day on the radio," says Wagner.

While the fall of communism brought with it huge opportunity and increased freedoms as Germany reunified, it also necessitated a change in career, says Wagner. "Our monthly rent went up by 100 times or more. The company let me go because their projects got canceled. My daughter was only one at this time. I had no driver's licence. We had a lot of fear and needed to earn more money."

Under pressure, Wagner put an advertisement in the local newspaper. He received a number of different offers before taking a sales position at Stock Conceptinrichtungen GmbH, working on market halls, food courts and bakery shop concepts. In the role for three years, it gave Wagner a strong appreciation for the value of quality kitchen design – and a dislike for those dealers and kitchen >



“Everything is changing. It’s like a game, trying to predict the future. I like change very much. Otherwise life is boring”

houses that gave away designs for free. “Those designs were stolen from other companies. I hated that,” he says.

Wagner quickly became immersed in different foodservice concepts and also traveled extensively, including tours of malls and food courts in the US and Canada organized by the International Council of Shopping Centers.

He returned to Berlin hugely

enthused. “I came back from these tours high with endorphins and full of stupid ideas,” he says, but soon found his ambitions to deliver similar concepts in Germany were not always matched by clients. “They told me: ‘Calm down: We’re in Germany – we don’t want to be so big’. That hurt a lot.”

Riding the rails

At this point, Wagner, frustrated at seeing his kitchen designs stolen and used elsewhere for free, decided to create his own design company. He and fellow consultant Helge Peter Pahlke FCSI, his long-term K’DREI colleague, staged a management buyout from the former owner of Profil Concept Planungsburo GbR in 1994 (later to become Profil Concept GmbH in 1995). The firm offered project management and interior and kitchen design.

“We were working for two years, then we got a very nice contract with [German

railway company] Deutsche Bahn AG to renovate 500 staff canteens. It was difficult to do that as a two or three-person company, so we had to build up,” says Wagner.”

The project lasted four years and was a major learning curve for the team. “First, we developed the concepts, then took over the project management before hiring interior designers, kitchen designers, architects, mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) designers, trying to get them on the project as fast as possible.”

Wagner says he and the team learned not to panic, and to feel comfortable asking another expert for help when required. “If you don’t know how to do something, ask somebody who does. I tried to find someone with the special discipline of ‘multi project management’, because not many people can do that, especially, if you have 500 projects all over Germany, Austria, Switzerland and a DM 500mn budget.”

That expert, was Peter Neumann, who excels in project planning, says Wagner. Together, Wagner, Pahlke and Neumann transitioned the company into K’DREI, the three partners playing to their individual strengths and knowledge of different territories. “The three of us together manage the whole thing. What we are good at glues us together,” says Wagner.

“For the Deutsche Bahn project, we divided Germany into the north and south and then seven districts. Helge was responsible for the internal work, organizing the company. Peter was responsible for the North and all the project management. I was based in Frankfurt at the Deutsche Bahn headquarters, trying to get the ball rolling. It was difficult because it’s a public company and you had to follow rules. All these people were saying, ‘In the last 100 years we have done it this way; why would you want to change it?’” laughs Wagner.

K’DREI continued to also work on

shopping malls, food courts and bakery shops (“That was what I really wanted to do,” says Wagner), but resources were very much focused on the Deutsche Bahn project. They were, however, able to flex their wings further into the hospitality market once that was completed.

“We are very open to new concepts,” says Wagner. “We don’t do things the same way for 10 years. We’re changing constantly and trying to integrate new things; getting better concept-wise. [Paying attention to] the details is what makes you a good designer. If you make mistakes you have to learn from them.”

Wagner says he is most proud of how K’DREI was able to change its profile “from canteen design to hotel design. That’s the best achievement. The German railways project was nice, but it’s in the past. New life experiences are always coming. New things you can concentrate on; things that are changing the way you do business.”

Africa and beyond

In 2006, a significant new ‘thing’ came in the form of international work in both Russia and South Africa. “That was a big achievement,” says Wagner. “My colleague Fritz Lemme met the corporate chef for Radisson Hotels in Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt, Urban Denk, who now works with IHCL in Mumbai. He urged us to ‘go international’.” Wagner went to South Africa and began working with Herman Coertze on The Radisson Blu Hotel Sandton, Johannesburg. “It was a big dream for me to go to Africa,” he says.

That project and Lemme’s connections meant more international work followed. “Fritz introduced me to Flatow & Drews Consulting. Jürgen Drews helped us with the design for the Intercontinental in Sanaa, Yemen, while Michael Flatow FCSI was always so supportive with all my questions. He helped me without hesitation. This is what we celebrate in FCSI Germany/Austria: we support each other.”

The team learned quickly and



Opposite: Wagner representing FCSI at HostMilano. Above: K’DREI’s design work at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company (Berlin) GmbH; Photo: Robert Balogh-Csapar

soon built up a storied reputation for contemporary design excellence for four-, five- and six-star hotels. “We were working in Russia, Africa and the Middle East from 2006 onwards. We are very good at solving those hotel problems,” says Wagner, who had to learn English while working in South Africa. Since then, he has also learned to understand Spanish, Italian and Russian.

For Wagner, K’DREI’s reputation has enabled him to gain mastery of his own destiny – and certainly his own schedule. “I’m the boss of my time,” he laughs. “I can decide when I wake up. I cannot work from 8am. That’s too early for me – but I can work long into the evening.” Wagner also feels blessed that his work has taken him to places he only used to dream about as a boy. “I’m lucky that I have seen the world: bad places, good places, luxury, no luxury. I like that very much.”

When asked what the secret of K’DREI’s success is, Wagner feels it has a lot to do with the differences, rather than similarities, between himself, Pahlke and Neumann. “The three partners all have different interests and a different way of working. When we’re working, we still fight, but we come back together again. With our different strengths we have a good mixture that keeps us running well and motivated and positive towards projects. We are all allowed our own opinion and air our views. Then we make decisions when everyone has had

their say. I’ve worked with Helge since 1991 – he left us for 10 years to work for a contractor but we were reunited in 2008 – and Peter since 1994. It’s like a long marriage. But if we were not together, we might not have been so successful.”

The past though, is not where Wagner prefers to dwell. Looking forward is what excites him. “Everything is changing – that’s unbelievable to me. It’s like a game, trying to predict the future.”

Figuring out how Covid will impact an industry already in flux fires Wagner even more. “It’s a great time now because we have to speed up a little bit. That’s riskier, because changes are coming faster than expected, but I like change very much. Otherwise life is boring,” he laughs. ■

THE WIDER VIEW

Frank Wagner became chair of FCSI Germany/Austria in 2013, a position he has held ever since. He joined FCSI in 2005 in order to be part of an international society, becoming a divisional board member in 2008.

“FCSI gave me a vital, wider view,” he says. “I went to the FCSI Worldwide conferences in Beijing and Edinburgh and thought, ‘This is unbelievable. Getting to talk to consultants from Australia, America, Britain, France and so on, and seeing how they worked and sharing knowledge. It’s about opening your perspective to other people’s views and learning from them.’”



Pioneers, specialists, innovators

Irinox is a company obsessed with providing freshness and exceptional service. CEO **Katia Da Ros** talks to Andrea Tolu about the company's future plans

When Irinox was founded in 1989 near Treviso, Italy, its current tagline 'The Freshness Company' would have been unthinkable for a producer of blast chillers and shock freezers.

At the time, no respectable chef would use a blast chiller: "Back then, if you asked a chef if they had one in their kitchen, they would tell you 'of course not, we only serve fresh food,'" says Katia Da Ros, Irinox's CEO and daughter of co-founder Florindo Da Ros. "Blast chillers were seen as machines for preventing food from getting spoiled, suitable for high-volume kitchens like canteens, but not for restaurants."

Resistance on the chefs' side was not just prejudice, however. As it turned out, cold did not have the same effect on all

types of food. So Irinox dug deeper. “We studied the impact of air and humidity and found out that it’s not enough for a blast chiller to bring temperatures below zero, it has to do it in the right way, because certain types of food would not withstand aggressive cold,” says Da Ros.

That is how, in 1996, Irinox invented the differentiation between hard and soft chilling. It was the company’s first ground-breaking innovation, which opened the door to Michelin-starred restaurants and has since become an industry standard.

“If you ask a chef if they use a blast chiller today, the answer will be: ‘of course I do, we produce quality here.’ Now a blast chiller is seen as part of the process to produce fresh food. Our contribution was fundamental for this cultural change,” says Da Ros.

In three words

The invention of the hard/soft functionality is a good example of one of the three words Da Ros uses to describe Irinox: ‘pioneers.’

Another is ‘specialists’: for more than thirty years since its inception, Irinox has produced only blast chillers and shock freezers, with no concessions to other types of foodservice equipment – that is definitely not in the company’s DNA.

The third term is ‘innovators’: “As blast chillers specialists, we make premium products that are not cheap. If we want to be the best, we need to make them obsolete before others do it for us,” says Da Ros.

The list of Irinox innovations includes a slow-cooking function (added in 2009) for when blast chilling is not in use,

“Now, a blast chiller is seen as part of the process to produce fresh food. Our contribution was fundamental for this cultural change”

internet of things (IoT) technology to communicate with other equipment in the kitchen, and cutting-edge green refrigeration gasses, such as R290, to increase power and consume less energy.

As a result of this constant effort, the functionalities of Irinox blast chillers grew from 12 to 150, paving the way to the different customization levels of the latest seventh generation model, the MultiFresh® Next. “There are probably functionalities that some customers need more than others, so they can personalize their machine as if they were buying a car,” says Da Ros.

Although not all of these innovations were disruptive, she explains, they accumulated one on top of the other over the years, helping create a wealth of experience and knowledge that for Da Ros is Irinox software: “With us, customers buy that too, not just machines,” she says.

The luxury of patience

This process of painstakingly improving a single type of product, which Da Ros calls “an obsession for freshness,” may be slow sometimes. But it is a patience that Irinox can afford to have.

“Irinox is a family company. The second generation has just joined, while I consider myself as the first generation and a half, as I started three years after the foundation,” says Da Ros. “We are independent and capitalized, so we can grow on our own more patiently, without any pressure from financial partners.”

Without this patience, in 2011 Irinox would not have launched a line of blast chillers for the home (one of its business units), a product where the company was once again a pioneer and an innovator: “We were the first in the world to produce a domestic blast chiller. The market is very small and has great potential, but there are also many cultural hurdles, more than in the professional sector. Luckily for us, there are other companies making the same product now,” says Da Ros. >



Opposite: Irinox CEO, Katia Da Ros.
Above: the cutting-edge MultiFresh® Next

Ambitious goals ahead

Irinox closed 2020, the annus horribilis of foodservice, and everyone else, with -8% growth. It was better than expected, says Da Ros, considering that other businesses suffered 30% or even 50% losses.

During the emergency of the last year, Irinox embraced smart working, replacing business trips with virtual meetings, organizing more than 100 digital events, and getting more than 2,000 people involved.

“The goal of these events was to educate customers about our products, but also to share experiences or simply ask how everyone was doing,” she says. “Overall, the Covid-19 crisis was also an opportunity to accelerate the switch to digital channels.”

With 2020 behind us, in the three-year period 2021-2023 Irinox is planning to grow by 50%. “It’s a very ambitious goal, but we think we have the resources to achieve it,” says Da Ros. “The market is far from saturated. Up until five years ago, 40% of the hospitality industry [in Europe] didn’t have a blast chiller. In the rest of the world, it’s even 60-70%. There’s still a lot to do.”

Europe and the US will still be the markets of reference, but the Australasia region has good potential too. New segments to explore will be takeaway food, which became more important during the pandemic and forced many kitchens to reorganize, semi-industrial kitchens that produce food for other businesses, ghost kitchens, large restaurant chains, and supermarkets with deli counters.

The growth plan will have two main guidelines. One is sustainability. “It’s not just about products, but about the way of doing business too,” says Da Ros. “There needs to be a paradigm shift, from extracting resources to regenerating them, from having zero impact to having a positive impact on society and people. We’re going to invest a lot in this. I believe this is a wave that will become stronger and stronger over the next 10 years.”

“The market is far from saturated. Up until five years ago, 40% of the European hospitality industry didn’t have a blast chiller. In the rest of the world, it’s even 60-70%. There’s still a lot to do”

The other thread will, of course, be digitalization. The company is making significant investments to automate production and make products ready for smart kitchens with IoT and a proprietary cloud, called FreshCloud®, that allows blast chillers to be monitored remotely with a smartphone.

Firm roots

Growing can be a problem, though, especially when it is not done organically. Da Ros acknowledges that this is the eternal dilemma for businesses: the more you grow, the more you need to get organized, the more you lose flexibility. However, she is confident in the company’s ability to avoid that trap. “The life of a company is similar to that of a person. When it’s young and



Above, top: Luigino Granziera, partner and executive board member with Katia Da Ros; Above: Irinox’s state-of-the-art production facility. Right: Irinox’s headquarters in Treviso



COMPANY TIMELINE: IRINOX THROUGH THE YEARS

- **1989** Irinox is founded by Florindo Da Ros (pictured, left), Luigino Granziera and Claudio Tonon in Corbanese, near Treviso, Italy
- **1992** Katia Da Ros joins the family business as vice president of the board
- **1996** Irinox invents the soft/hard chilling functionality
- **2005** Irinox expands to North America
- **2009** Irinox adds slow cooking to its blast chillers, that can now operate between -40°C and +85°C
- **2011** Irinox launches the first blast chiller for the domestic market
- **2019** Irinox adheres to CODIF, a voluntary code of conduct that provides family companies with the same level of best practices of listed companies.



“We are genuinely interested in the success of our customers... Our most satisfying feedback is when they tell us that, thanks to our machines, they improved their bottom line or the way they work”

still small, but with a lot of energy, as an entrepreneur you want to take care of everything. Then comes adolescence, when, perhaps reluctantly, you have to delegate if you want to keep growing. The third stage is when you reach maturity and learn how to delegate and only keep control of what’s essential. I think this is where we are today, with a group of capable people carrying on

the founders’ vision,” says Da Ros.

While Irinox is adapting to ever-evolving markets and technologies, certain things in the way it operates will remain the same.

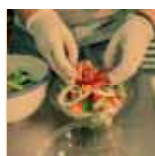
One is their obsession for freshness and the desire to innovate: “We are genuinely interested in the success of our customers,” says Da Ros. “We get our hands dirty with them, go to their shops and observe how they work, and whether there’s any particularly time-consuming step or any functionality they might need. Our most satisfying customer feedback is when they tell us that, thanks to our machines, they improved their bottom line or the way they work.”

Production will still be in the north-east of Italy: “We are in an industrial district called the stainless-steel valley,

so we have all the suppliers and the expertise we need. In fact, there are many foodservice companies in this area. If we moved our production abroad, we would probably save on shipping costs, but it wouldn’t be worth it,” says Da Ros.

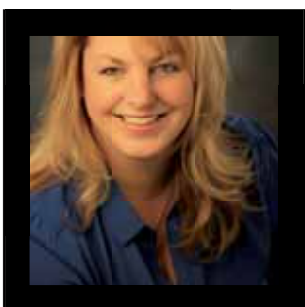
Working with consultants is another thing that is not going to change for Irinox. The consulting world is something Da Ros knows very well, having served on the board of FCSI Europe, Africa, Middle East (EAME) from 1999-2005 and one of the founders of FCSI Italy. “We have always worked with consultants and we’ll keep working with them, possibly even more. Their contribution is crucial because they know the needs of the customer really well. You know when a kitchen is built with the help of a consultant, because it works,” she says. ■

**POSITIVE
TAKEAWAYS**





ARYA RAZI
Owner, Caldera restaurant, London, UK



KRISTIN SEDEJ FCSI
Owner, S20 Consultants, Illinois, US



CHRIS TRIPOLI FCSI
A' La Carte Foodservice Consulting Group, Texas, US



MARCO AMATTI FCSI
CEO, MAPA Assessoria, Brazil

No foodservice business has escaped unscathed from the Covid-19 lockdown, but some positive lessons can be taken from this period. Elly Earls speaks to foodservice consultants and restaurant owners to discover the pandemic's silver lining

It's crazy to think that back in March 2020, many of us thought we would have seen the back of the Covid-19 pandemic by summer. Now, almost a year later, it's worse than ever, with hospitality one of the hardest hit industries.

In the UK, more than a third of hospitality firms fear collapse, with trade body UKHospitality saying the sector has already lost over 600,000 jobs. 2020 was the worst year on record for US hotels; it surpassed one billion unsold room nights for the first time in history, while more than 110,000 restaurants have closed permanently or long term. That's one in six US eateries.

Even the operators that have managed to survive, or in some cases thrive, over the last year – many through pivoting to delivery and takeaway – would hesitate to point out too many positives. Everybody in the industry has suffered in some way due to the pandemic. And yet, there are many ways in which they will emerge stronger from this dreadful time, whether they were ready for it or not.

“Covid was basically a gallon of gasoline poured onto a fire that was

already there,” says hospitality specialist Chris Tripoli FCSI of A' La Carte Foodservice Consulting Group based in Houston, Texas. “Customers were already taking us towards convenience, technology, smaller spaces and more limited menus. Then Covid comes and everyone had to do it,” he says. “Some operators believe that when Covid lightens up, after most people get vaccinated, after people feel more comfortable leaving home, that we're going to go back to being just as we were. But we're not going back to our habits of old because consumers don't go back.”

Convenient service

An example of technology making service more convenient that most people will have noticed is QR codes. From tiny beach cafes in Portugal to high-end hotels in Zurich and central London restaurants, these are now firmly in the mainstream and Tripoli believes they're here to stay. "It's easy and customers have gotten used to it," he says.

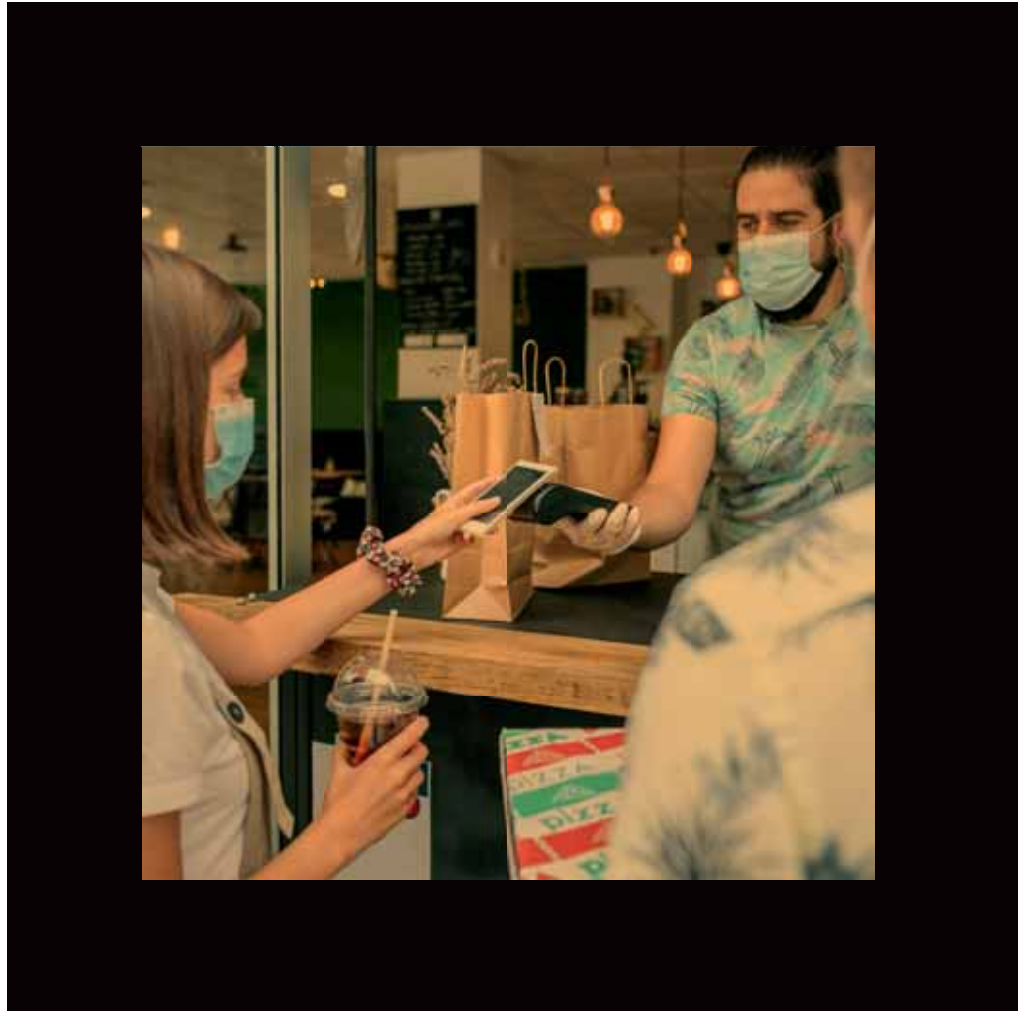
Owner and GM of Caldera restaurant in Hackney, London, Arya Razi, agrees. "After the first lockdown we opted to use a QR code to avoid printing hundreds of menus and this has been received well by our guests. It has significantly reduced paper usage and it also allows us to update the menus with ease

"Service now needs to include convenience and it has to be part of the service profile for all restaurants"

and introduce new offers," he explains.

The use of contactless payments – particularly through mobile phones – has also unsurprisingly skyrocketed during the pandemic. Indeed, between July and September 2020, research from Zonal Retail Data Systems showed that contactless food and drinks orders increased from 7.3 million to 13.5 million. The technology was available and some operators had embraced it before 2020, but it's now becoming standard and will likely translate to pay-at-table facilities once the industry moves back to dine-in.

"Independent restaurant operators, no matter where they are, are going to have to realize that some of the demands we've



been answering during the pandemic – with contactless payments and handheld ordering – are not temporary at all," Tripoli says. "If you take a hard look at your consumers' preferences, you'll see people were preferring anything that was convenient before this. Restaurants have been fighting the word 'convenient' and saying it didn't necessarily translate to 'service', which they see as being eye to eye, smile to smile, person to person. But I've been teaching them that service now needs to include convenience and it has to be part of the service profile for all restaurants."

Hand-held ordering systems also make it much easier to manage outdoor seating areas, which have grown significantly in

popularity during the pandemic, a legacy Kristin Sedej FCSI, the owner of S20 Consultants in Illinois, US, is convinced will endure. "Operators have had to get creative and figure out how to make outdoor dining work, which has extended the season," she says. Solutions have ranged from outdoor heaters to pop-up igloos and yurts.

Customers are embracing the convenience of contactless payments



Designing for the future

Sedej is also excited by two other technological solutions she predicts will gain ground post-pandemic – Just Walk Out Technology and self-service food lockers.

She gives the example of a yet-to-be-constructed professional sports facility to explain how the former works. “The concept was started before Covid; the entire thing is Just Walk Out technology,” she says. “You pick what you want and when you walk out through dedicated exit lanes, it automatically charges it to a card. It’s a cashless, touchless transaction.”

Self-service food lockers were also growing in popularity before Covid. Customers order food on a kiosk or on their phone and when it’s ready and put in the locker, they receive a combination and they can pick it up. “This is moving into sports venues. It started before the pandemic but Covid has accelerated the speed at which things are implemented,” Sedej says.

The challenge for operators that want to embrace new ordering and payment methods is that the technology advances so rapidly. “When designing infrastructure for a building that might not open for two or three years, what do we need for the

technology to work on opening day? That’s a moving target and that’s why not too many people are doing it,” she notes.

Tripoli also predicts changes in the way kitchens are designed. “The open kitchen will remain visually open – people love the food being the show. But I think in future, there will be glass walls; we may have seen the last of the actual open kitchen,” he says.

Behind the glass, Marco Amatti FCSI, CEO of Brazil-based consultancy MAPA Assessoria, expects long-term changes back of house too. “The robotics trend was

“Covid has accelerated the speed at which things are implemented”

already happening before the pandemic. Now we don’t want people working so closely together in the kitchen, so robotics and automation becomes more interesting. You cannot have more space in the kitchen but you can have fewer people,” he says. >



Self-service lockers (left) were a growing trend before the pandemic



THE CONTRACT CATERER'S PERSPECTIVE Ian Thomas, CEO of UK-based contract caterer Bartlett Mitchell

“Throughout the whole pandemic, we have continued to flex and adapt as each societal change has been thrown at us,” Mitchell says. “Whether it’s changing the format of a restaurant to accommodate social distancing, creating new tech for click and collect concepts, setting up a delivery mechanism, or launching our new Mosaic contract model, we have constantly changed and innovated.”

Mosaic is a new subscription-based model, which enables Bartlett Mitchell’s clients to flex their services and use credits based on what they feel the workplace needs at any given time. “They can tap into catering, hospitality and front-of-house services at a rate and volume that reflects their current occupancy,” Thomas explains.

Similarly, while employee engagement and communication have always been high on Bartlett Mitchell’s agenda, Covid has amplified this. The company now runs whole team Town Halls every six weeks. “This helps our engagement with teams, and also makes us more productive. While people initially loved the idea of working from home, evidence now suggests we are not as productive as we would be if we had ‘office time,’” Thomas says.

Throughout the pandemic, management has kept talking to their teams. “We have done this not only to ensure business continuity, but also to support our collective mental health through social events,” explains Thomas.

The good news for hospitality, Thomas believes, is that throughout the pandemic, he’s learned people still see food as that ‘social glue.’ “People need human interaction and I’m sure we will see this translate to working practices once this pandemic is behind us,” he says. “Caterers will play an integral role in the transition back to the new version of the workplace, and subsequent engagement thereafter.”

Pivoting dining concepts

Many foodservice venues quickly realized that pivoting to delivery and/or takeaway would be the only way to keep cash flowing into the business during lockdown.

Fast-casual kebab chain German Doner Kebab (GDK) grew the delivery part of its business from 25% to 75-80% in 2020 and introduced various pieces of technology to smooth the transition.

At the beginning of the pandemic they introduced a system that told customers the status of their order, both in store and on a screen outside, and more recently GDK has been working with its technology

“Technology develops to match big thinking and Covid has created a need that wasn’t there before”



Businesses with an engaged staff are in a better position to adapt to post-Covid changes

providers to include a promise time when customers order through the click and collect system, which will remain available after the pandemic.

Sedej hopes this move towards delivery and click and collect will also lead to better integration between third-party systems and EPOS. In many cases now, staff members must key in the information twice. “Technology tends to develop to match big thinking and Covid has created a need that was not necessarily there before,” she says.

Back at GDK, the food offer has also been adapted to be more suitable for delivery. The brand’s new compartmentalized takeaway Boss Box was so popular that GDK will continue to offer it after the pandemic, for dine-in as well as takeaway customers.

They’re far from alone, according to Tripoli. He’s talked with restaurant owners in Florida, Texas, California, Connecticut and Pennsylvania who have



developed new, more limited menus for curbside pickup, which they intend to keep because customers have grown used to them. “The smart operators who have made a quick pivot won because in the short term it created revenue, but in the long term it’s broadening their brand,” he says.

Some brands have also started packaging their items to be sold in local markets and major supermarkets. “Again, it was probably seen as a nice local temporary promotion initially. But because it’s working so well, many restaurants are going to keep some retail packaging of their products,” he predicts.



Focus on staff wellbeing

Around the world and across many industries, Covid has brought greater focus on staff wellbeing and mental health, although some experts, like Sedej, are sceptical about how much will change in the long term. “The guy who cared about his staff before is going to care afterwards,” she believes. “It’s not going to change the industry overnight; it’s going to take a lot more than this to shake up how things are done.”

Tripoli is more optimistic. “I’ve always said that necessity is the mother of invention and in every bad situation there’s always a silver lining,” he says. “I don’t care what adage you want to use about Covid, but I do think one good thing to come out of it is that restaurants that may always have thought they had a good people program – because they had motivational meetings and gave staff some input on their schedule – have realized they weren’t doing enough.”

Meanwhile, operators who already valued their staff were the ones that were able to quickly pivot and survive the pandemic. Tripoli believes the most successful have followed the three Es: embracing change, engaging staff and empowering them to take charge.



“This situation has been great in some regards as we have all rallied together to innovate our offer”

London’s Caldera is one example of a restaurant with an engaged staff. “This situation has actually been great in some regards as we have all rallied together to continue to innovate our offer,” says Razi. “We are constantly discussing new ideas and how we can improve the guest experience. Given how challenging the situation is, we are doing what we can to ensure that we are all being as flexible as possible to support each other.”

At GDK, one of the biggest staffing changes during the pandemic has been creating work bubbles. “We introduced the work bubbles to reduce cross contamination, but we’ve found that if the same team works together in a small group more often, there’s more joint responsibility and they build a more cohesive workforce within the bubble,” says MD for the UK and Europe Daniel Bunce. “It’s something we want to extend as much as possible.”

As Tripoli concludes: “When you empower your management and staff, you find that they take charge and accept responsibility for their actions. I think the treatment of staff and the valuing of staff is probably the single greatest positive to come out of this awful pandemic.” ■





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Focus on the positive

Beto Guajardo tells Samantha Lande how he took the reigns as president of FOCUS brands International and created a blueprint for years to come

Beto Guajardo joined FOCUS Brands in September 2019 as president of Schlotzsky's but less than a year later that he was tapped to become president of FOCUS Brands International. In April 2020, smack in the middle of the global Covid-19 pandemic, he assumed his role at the parent company that includes Auntie Anne's, Carvel, Cinnabon, Jamba, Moe's Southwest Grill, McAlister's Deli, Schlotzsky's, and Seattle's Best Coffee.

Guajardo is no stranger to working with brands internationally. Prior to joining FOCUS, he served as senior vice president of global strategy for Starbucks for just over five years. His career has also brought him international experience with major brands like McKinsey, Levi Strauss, and Avon, even living in Hong Kong for a time. He has experience of working with over 40 countries, so even in the midst of a pandemic, he was well-suited to the role.

FOCUS Brands currently has six of its brands – Cinnabon, Auntie Anne's, Carvel, Jamba, Seattle's Best, and a small portion of Moe's Southwest Grill in 60 countries, 1,700 stores and growing. When Guajardo assumed the role in April, many countries were in a state of full lockdown. His first priority? Getting to know the franchisees and build relationships.

"Covid-19 made this so much more difficult to do," says Guajardo, "It was hours and hours of Zoom calls. It felt like it was 24/7." But he knew it was imperative to his success to build trust and understand quickly how they could best support the individual businesses.

"All parts of the world were going through the pandemic at different phases and treating it in a different way," he says, and it was challenging. "Information coming out of a country wasn't always clear about what they were dealing with and how consumer behaviors had shifted or changed without having the boots on the ground."

In many cases they had to rely only on information from public news sources or information passed along by their



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FOCUS Brands has 1,700 stores and is still growing

franchisees. “Taking this on during a pandemic added layers of complexity you never would have expected,” he says.

Regardless of the state of the world, it was a priority to help franchisees shift into this new normal. They set up a royalty deferment program and allowed them to have a payment plan moving forward.

Many of the FOCUS brands locations were in high traffic areas – malls, airports, lobbies of buildings – often the places that were shut down first during the pandemic. And unlike the US, in many countries, if an employee was let go, there was no federal economic support, so naturally, they went to look for jobs elsewhere. Losing the majority of your employees when a closure is announced, and then ramping back up when you reopen is difficult if your workforce disappears.

A shift in strategy

Across the world, an uptick in delivery started happening as consumers were leaving their houses less. Pre pandemic less than 25% of the international locations were doing delivery. This is where Guajardo’s experience at Starbucks, leading a team on international delivery, came in handy.

They decided to go the third-party delivery route and negotiated to get the lowest pricing possible while working with the franchisees to price correctly to recover cost. It was imperative to also look at labor costs to offset some of this. They asked questions like: “Do you need to have the



Above: Beto Guajardo, president of FOCUS Brands International. Left: FOCUS brands around the globe

“Information coming out of a country wasn’t always clear about what they were dealing with and how consumer behaviors had shifted or changed”

same hours if people aren’t walking in the store? And “Do you need to staff a lobby if nobody is walking in?”

They also worked to meet standards of packing for delivery with tamper proof packaging implemented across the board.

“We’d much rather have first-party delivery if we could, but third-party delivery is where consumers are going to go to satiate their desires,” he admits.

Delivery was very well received across the world and to date, now 97% of units that can deliver are doing so and for some locations delivery has accelerated past 30% of the business. Delivery did particularly well in Malaysia, Russia and Indonesia.

One of the challenges with product delivery for their brands – particularly Auntie Anne’s and Cinnabon – is the delivery radius. For FOCUS, the radius isn’t measured in distance, but in time. “Time is the enemy of quality when it comes to food,” he says. “Getting a hot cinnamon roll or a hot pretzel is key.” They set under 20 minutes as an ideal delivery time.

Cinnabon has been the strongest performer in the delivery market since the pandemic began. “We found that people seek out those experiences with a strong emotional response,” he says. Many people >

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cite the strong smell of cinnamon wafting from any location, many of them in places people would gather with family and friends.

“We found consumers using delivery to invoke those experiences of sharing and caring and being together,” he says. “They started sending Cinnabon as gifts.”

Challenges

Many of the challenges they faced concerned setting up safety protocols in each country. “Domestically, FOCUS brands stuck to some of the strictest protocols out there – social distancing, masks, hand sanitizing etc.” Although they shared the strict protocols with international franchisees, ultimately the decision fell to the minimum operating standards in each country. “We didn’t force it and left it to local regulations,” says Guajardo, “We need to be culturally sensitive and sensitive to the pace of change the pandemic brought on in different parts of the world.”

For example, in Taiwan, people are shopping and going to restaurants, while countries such as the UK and the Philippines have experienced multiple surges and lockdowns. Where they haven’t struggled much is with supply chain. They

credit that to using local as much as possible.

“When we decide to enter into a market, even before we figure out our investors, we go to that country and lay the groundwork for supply.” He says. That includes having both primary and secondary sources locally, minimizing the amount they need to ship across borders.

Growth and closures

Even in a time of disarray and uncertainty they’ve been able to keep many of their opening goals. Of course, closures were inevitable, but, according to Guajardo, “the number of closures we had due to Covid-19 was only slightly more than we’d expect any given fiscal year.”

The team opened more than 100 units this year, sticking more or less to their global development schedule. A few notable openings included Auntie Anne’s in Taiwan and Jamba Juice in Japan.

Early in the pandemic when lockdowns were prolific around the world, the team redirected their efforts towards an exhaustive research study with their markets and brands to find where the potential was. This detailed analysis, which looked at consumer preferences, >

“We found consumers using delivery to invoke those experiences of sharing and caring and being together. They started sending Cinnabon as gifts”

The Saudi Arabian market is an area of interest for FOCUS brands

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risk factors, economics, and ease of doing business allowed them to create a pretty solid priority list for the next 5-10 years.

Part of that strategy is realizing “convenience is the new luxury,” and that will include central delivery facilities, or ghost kitchens. “How do we get our product closer to the consumer with an experience that’s still a delight from a quality and experience perspective, but limits the distance between where we finish production and get it to the consumer,” he says.

It also became clear that global locations that can act local have a leg up on the competition. “Those stores that built strong relationships in the community they operate in and don’t just rely on traffic intercept, they are the survivors,” he says.

Moving forward they will focus on products, promotions and marketing campaigns that are really targeted at the local store level. Knowing that after the pandemic there will be some changes in consumer behavior, they are monitoring new real estate points – planning to open in a new outdoor drive-thru mall in Egypt and recently opening a Cinnabon in the UK’s Euro Garages.

Even if things have been rocky during

the pandemic, the strategy at FOCUS is solid and it was able to weather the storm better than other companies. Guajardo reflects: “Some of those tried and true strategies working closely with your partners to execute, leaning into data and analytics and only spending money where you know you’ll get a return and that return is measurable.”

So, FOCUS’s growth plans will remain as aggressive as before the pandemic. It will look to grow its current international brands. That will include expanding the international footprint of Moe’s Southwest grill in a market like Australia where Mexican food with a Southwestern flair has caught on. It is considering potential expansion in the UK as well. It’s starting to look at other domestic brands such as McAllister’s and Schlotzsky’s for international expansion in both the European markets. China is a target as well for any FOCUS brands. New innovations on the horizon for Auntie Anne’s and Cinnabon will make them attractive for further expansion as well.

“We have a priority list for the next 5-10 years for new market entry and aggressive expansion where we already exist,” he says. “We are very hopeful and excited.” ■

“Those stores that built strong relationships in the community they operate in and don’t just rely on traffic intercept, they are the survivors”

Many FOCUS brand locations were in malls or airports – the places shut down first during the pandemic

Prime residence

Senior living community The Springs Living wanted an appealing and interactive foodservice setting for residents. **Ray Soucie** FCSI talks to Howard Riell about turning design challenges to advantages and communicating clearly for better results

The Springs at Lake Oswego, a senior living community in Oregon, is not just a wonderful place to live but also, according to Ray Soucie FCSI, LEED AP, senior project manager for Webb Foodservice Design in Portland, Oregon, a window into what is possible in this increasingly important institutional segment.

Located on 4.5 acres, the community consists of 216 units with residences ranging from independent living to assisted living and memory care. It features dining and social amenities including a pub, private dining room, wine tasting room, indoor pool, fitness center, cinema, rooftop patios, putting green and bocce court.

Its main floor features multiple ADA-accessible foodservice venues including an intimate lounge called Fanchos offering a full-service bar and seating for 42. The main dining room seats 142 and includes a full display kitchen offering views of the center island chef's cooking suite and a private chef's table room with a full wall dedicated as a wine vault.

The budget for the community's construction was approximately \$65m. The project started in March 2016, and residents began moving in during January 2020. It was back in March 2016, right at the start, that executives from The Springs Living contacted Ray Yancey of MGA architectural about the project, recalls communications director



Clockwise from above: An open counter overlooking the cooking island attracts diners; The

attractively landscaped frontage; Fanchos's Public House is designed to encourage social interaction



“Chris wanted to work with the same team who successfully collaborated on Greer Gardens. He trusted Ray’s insight and wanted to deliver a successful sustainable building for the community”

Tracy Darchini, “after having had a successful experience working together on one of the company’s other senior living communities.”

According to culinary director Sam Currie, The Springs Living has had a long-term relationship with Soucie. “He was the foodservice consultant retained to design The Springs at Greer Gardens community in Eugene, Oregon. Our director of design, Chris Shelby, appreciated Ray’s experience and insight.”

This is the largest of the company’s communities to date, says Currie, “and Chris wanted to work with the same team who successfully collaborated on Greer Gardens. He trusted Ray’s insight and wanted to deliver a successful sustainable building for the community.”

Design challenges

Management wanted to offer a unique choice for senior living with the quality amenities and services commensurate with the lifestyle of the greater community. Locating the property in the heart of the town also enables family members to easily spend time with their loved ones.

Soucie identified several primary challenges for foodservice design. First the space is a multi-story building with a unique shape. There are two kitchens: the main on the ground floor and an assisted living kitchen on the second floor. While each operates >



PROJECTS



independently, the assisted living kitchen relies on the main one for food storage and banquet catering support. When required, batch cooking is done in the main kitchen and transported via staff elevator to the assisted living kitchen.

Locating a display kitchen at the end of a long rectangular dining room was also a challenge. The dining room's shape changed angles at the end. As Soucie recalls: "Instead of fighting the architecture of the building we accentuated it and used the end of the dining room as a way to lure residents in. That is where we located the display cooking island and welcomed residents to view it by providing a grand open counter."

Early interaction between the operator and the consultant should always include both a representative of the architectural team and the owner, Soucie reflects, adding: "Making sure everyone on the design team understands the goals and limitations is key to a successful outcome."

Clearly writing out guiding principles and cross-checking to see that the design team adheres to them throughout the process contributes to a positive collaborative effort. If changes are made without cross-checking with the other design disciplines, expensive last-minute construction change orders can cripple the budget. "We want to avoid putting the owner in a position of having to choose between their vision and the realities



From top: The display cooking island; The Pacific Ridge dining room

Two focal points include an open flame pizza oven and the glass-fronted display fridge



“Making sure everyone on the design team understands the goals and limitations is key to a successful outcome... We want to avoid putting the owner in a position of having to choose between their vision and the realities of construction costs”

of construction costs,” Soucie explains.

The Springs Living wanted to ensure that the dining experience was both entertaining and interactive. Opening it up not only enables interaction between the staff and residents, but offers the opportunity for cooking classes, chef demonstrations and display cooking. Another key interactive component was the location of the chef table room. A glass wall is all that separates the dining table from food preparation. The opposite wall features a glass wine vault for residents, creating a striking visual.

A second design element used to draw people in is a custom-built all-glass display refrigerator. “We located it at the end of a long hallway that residents would walk down before turning towards the dining room entrance,” says Soucie. The refrigerator was inserted into an arch cut out into the wall between the hallway and kitchen. This ensured residents would see seasonal produce and artisanal products through the back of the refrigerator as they approached the dining room.

Innovation enhances design

Other innovative features include:

- Combining multiple exhaust systems through the five-story building without impacting residence living space. As Soucie recalls, “We specified a Gaylord Demand control system, which enabled us to combine

duct shafts and reduce both air volume and the number of exhaust fans on the roof.” This reduced noise impact on the residence and contributed to sustainable savings overall.

- Sustainable combined remote refrigeration was also implemented where applicable. One refrigeration rack was specified to handle both the larger walk-in coolers in the back of the house and the refrigerated drawers underneath the cooking island. This removed heat and noise from the display kitchen while providing much-needed refrigeration space directly under the cook tops.

- An espresso and hot tea café features locally roasted, sustainable coffee and world-class tea offerings combined with walk-up quick-service bakery and food options.

- Soucie and his colleagues also eliminated waste disposers using a Salvajor waste collector and specified a Hobart heat-recovery dish machine. This drastically reduced water consumption and electrical draw by eliminating a water heater.

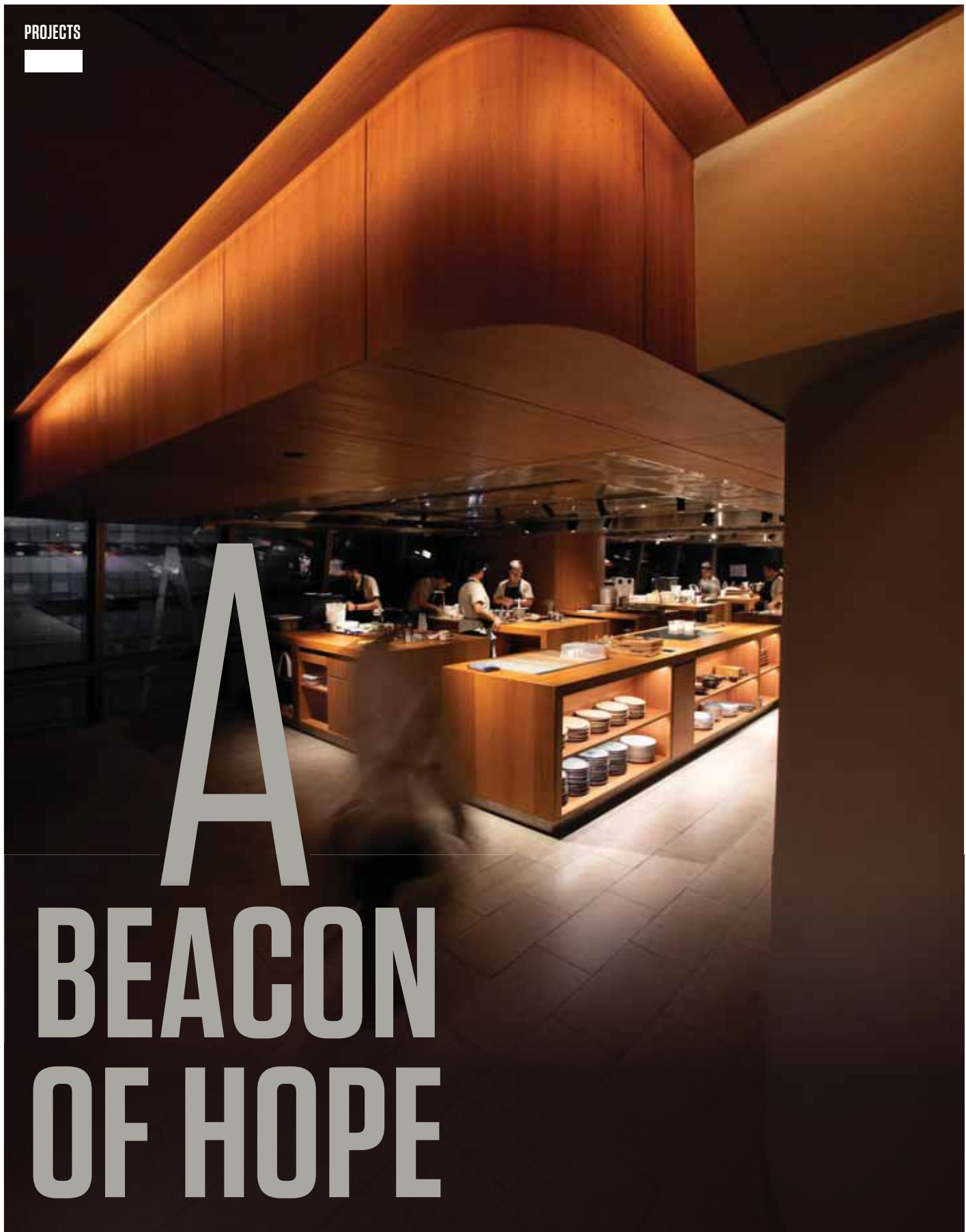
Fancho’s, centrally located near the main entrance, is intended to enhance community interaction and serve as the residents’ den. Portland Trail Blazers basketball fans can congregate to cheer their team while maintaining a family atmosphere for a quick snack or light meal. During the day the island bar features a coffee and breakfast stop or a quick take-out for those visiting.

The display kitchen offers multiple focal points of interest. There is an open-flame pizza oven that can be seen from the dining room; a counter-top walk-up area that invites residents to interact with the chefs; a European-style chef’s cooking suite; a small bakery in the background; and a view to the private chef’s table room.

When designing complicated, yet sustainable, mechanical design systems, Soucie says: “Work closely with the MEP engineering team early on. Make sure coordination of building systems is thought out in advance. Focus on mechanical maintenance shutdown options that may affect operating procedures. This is not only a foodservice facility but also a residence. Family dynamics can be affected by design choices made.” ■



Above: the display refrigerator viewed from the hallway. Top: Various dining options encourage residents to welcome friends and family to visit the facility



A BEACON OF HOPE

Running Malaysia's top high-end restaurant has been challenging over the past year. Jamie Fullerton speaks to Dewakan's chef Darren Teoh and consultant Brandon Kua FCSI about the troubles and triumphs in lockdown

The government just announced another two weeks of lockdown," says feted Malaysian chef Darren Teoh, speaking on Zoom from the quiet surrounding of his Kuala Lumpur restaurant, Dewakan. "We've been on and off for the whole of last year."

"Seeing the restaurants that I consulted on struggle does affect your mental health," says Brandon Kua FCSI, consultant with Kuala Lumpur-based food consultancy firm Kitchen Inc. "Thankfully we're still able to stay in touch with friends, share our issues and encourage each other."

In late 2019, Teoh worked with Kitchen Inc to relocate Dewakan from the campus of Kuala Lumpur's UOW Malaysia KDU, the private university that

funded the restaurant. After five years on the campus, the high-end, Malaysian ingredients-focused eatery moved to the 48th floor of Naza Tower in the upscale, centrally located Platinum Park.

Sourcing the best local ingredients

Placed 46th in the 2019 Asia's 50 Best Restaurant list – the only Malaysian entry – Dewakan was already Kuala Lumpur's hottest high-end restaurant. Then Covid-19 hit and bookings at the venue, which can host around 50 diners, halved, as the influx of foreign foodies, comprising much of the clientele, halted.

With re-focusing to delivery tough for a restaurant known for high-end, wine-paired tasting menus, the downturn is a familiar story for many in the southeast Asian elite-dining sector. However, with vaccines providing a potential path out of the pandemic, and Dewakan upgrading its set-up just before the pandemic hit, Teoh is hopeful of an uptick in the narrative.

Some of the Malaysian ingredients used by Teoh, who previously worked with Noma and Singapore's three-Michelin-starred French restaurant Les Amis, are rarely seen in high-end restaurants in his home country. He has sourced tarap, a fruit similar to the jackfruit and native to a few Malaysian regions. Bario rice for risotto is sourced from Borneo. Namu namu, a legume mainly found on Malaysia's northern peninsula, has been used for desserts.

Teoh often traverses Malaysia, managing his supply chains first-hand. "At the first Dewakan location the iconic dish was duck aged for three months," says Joe Tan, Kitchen Inc's founder. "He'll drive to talk to the farmer. For that rice, he went to Borneo and met an old lady making special rice – she's only able to harvest 200kg a year."

Technique drives the equipment

Kua took Teoh's unique ingredients demands into account when fitting out the new kitchen. "Darren's technique drives the equipment: MKN combi-oven, Jospier oven, open-flame charcoal grill and induction cookers," says Kua. "For example, using the combi-oven to do sous-vide, to dehydrate food. It's applying technology to your technique. This is the difference between modern cooking and conventional cooking."

Despite this focus on Malaysian produce the original set-up of Dewakan, according to Tan, was >



Left: Bambang Sorbet with wild flowers and baby coriander



suiting to European rather than local cuisine. “That kitchen was a typical French setup: a U-shape kitchen, that runs like a French laundry,” he says.

That kitchen was designed by CKP Hospitality Consultants. For Dewakan’s relocation the new team designed a set-up based around eight standalone cooking stations, with three featuring hob areas. “Having multiple modular stations, versus the conventional ‘French-style’ configuration, means that each station is flexible. It can be a hot station one moment then turned into a cold station. Modern kitchens are moving towards modularity, flexibility and simplicity,” says Kua.

Kitchen movement had to be smooth in appearance as well as workflow. The design is largely open-plan, with many cooking areas completely on show to diners. To keep things slick and pretty, each of the eight stations has its own waste unit, and waste water is jettisoned via pipes heading up to the ceiling.

“Most restaurants think of kitchen and dining places as distinct areas, and don’t look at them cohesively. That excludes guests from an experience, and is counterintuitive to our culture,” explains Teoh. “In a Malaysian home the best discussions are over tea or dinner and happen in the kitchen, so it’s a central part of our fabric. That was something I wanted to have reflected in the restaurant.”

One of the most interesting challenges for the team was designing a ceiling that acted as a ventilation system, rather than having extraction hoods, which could be noisy and intrusive, towering above each cooking station. A stainless-steel ceiling with multiple small ventilation points was designed, also incorporating air conditioning and



“Modern kitchens are moving towards modularity, flexibility and simplicity”

fire sprinklers. “I think it’s really sexy,” says Teoh, showing off the gleaming metal finish.

“Typically, in a kitchen you have extraction hoods,” says Kua. “But by running exhaust ducts in the conventional way, there’s only certain sizes you can accommodate, and it [smoke flow through pipes] has to run across the entire space. By doing a ventilating ceiling we reduced that need and incorporated everything into the ceiling. In Malaysia it’s rare.”

Inspiring young Malaysian chefs

Dewakan has made Teoh a hugely respected chef beyond Malaysia’s borders, and internships in his kitchen are in demand. Like many businesses and individuals around the world, though, he has seen his ambitions paused by Covid-19. He says Dewakan has avoided non-voluntary staff redundancies, but pivots to food delivery have had mixed results. The restaurant offers a service delivering partially cooked meals, with customers cooking the final stages at home.

The real Dewakan experience is about a proper visit, though, and its pre-pandemic success proved inspirational for many young Malaysian chefs. Kuala Lumpur’s fine-dining scene is behind that of rival cities such as Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong – something Teoh hoped to chip away at by promoting local ingredients at an elite level.

“The plan was to stay relevant for the next two years – with Kuala Lumpur not doing so well as a tourist destination, we were hoping to be a pull factor,” says Teoh. And in 2021? “We just want to be a very good restaurant,” he says with a laugh.

Kua is perkier on the issue. “I don’t think there’s any restaurant in Malaysia, in terms of understanding, technique and capability, comparable to what Darren and his team is capable of,” he says. “I believe Dewakan will continue to be a beacon for Malaysia in the fine-dining scene.” ■



Opposite page top: Darren Teoh (second left) with his team. Below: the kitchen.

Left: the restaurant’s private dining room overlooking the city. Above: Brandon Kua FCSI

No boundaries to excellence

Optimization was at the core of a project to convert a former army barracks into government offices. Tom Rietveld FCSI from Dutch foodservice consultants HTC Advies and colleagues talk about collaborating with multiple partners to pull it off

In the city center of Utrecht, in the Netherlands, the former Knoop barracks have been transformed into a government office and expanded with a conference center for thousands of visitors. HTC Advies and Atir worked together to optimize the guest journey in this sustainable building, where hospitality is approached holistically. What does this collaboration look like?

In 2015, the Dutch Central Government Real Estate Agency contracted R Creators VOF consortium for the redevelopment and management of the De Knoop government office on behalf of the Directorate-General of Government Organization (DGOO) and the Tax and Customs Administration. The consortium consists of Strukton Worksphere, Ballast Nedam and Facilicom Business Services as shareholders. There was a shared responsibility for creating a hospitable building with optimal service.

HTC Advies worked alongside a number of expert firms. "We aim to invest in our position as expert





partner in the field of hospitality, flexibility and effectiveness, and to use this in anticipating changing market needs and requirements,” says HTC Advies senior consultant Tom Rietveld FCSI.

Keeping each other sharp

Thomas Wijermars is a facility manager at Facilicom. He explains that the 20-year contract between the government and R Creators VOF consortium placed high demands on this collaboration. “The needs of the building’s users were our common starting point,” he says, comparing it with a prenuptial agreement. “It is good that agreements are there, but if every evening you discuss the division between you and your partner, your relationship will not improve. It’s about what you want to achieve together.”

At the start of the contract, standards that must be met were agreed on. The way this is done, is up to the service providers. Atir and HTC Advies were engaged as independent experts at the opening of De Knoop in 2018. Together, they provided insight into the quality of the facility services and the hospitality level. Efficient and continuous improvement together is central. “By combining the different perspectives of team members, creativity is optimized and that leads to successful services,” says Lisanne Korfage, consultant with HTC Advies. “We moved with the ambition and dynamics of R Creators, which is the strength of our collaboration.”

The team at HTC Advies believes in an integrated concept of hospitality, which is concerned with the design of the environment, the service level of all facilities and the personal approach that goes with it. “Hospitality starts with a clean, functional and safe environment. This is a primary requirement,” says Rietveld.

The next step is creating a welcoming and surprising environment, he adds. “You achieve this next step of hospitality by looking at it with an integral view, responding to the changing needs of the target group and to new possibilities in the field of technology, materials and experience.”

Based on this overarching vision on hospitality, Wouter Raijmakers was chosen as the hospitality & cleaning coordinator. “De Knoop chose a manager >

with a broad background in the hospitality industry, thereby securing the integrated approach. The coordinator focuses specifically on hospitable behavior from all service providers,” says Rietveld.

Wijermars agrees: “The Covid-19 crisis teaches us again the importance of living in the moment, to do something extra for guests, connect and maintain relationships with them,” he explains. “This means our colleagues do their best to get to know the guests and go the extra mile, for example, bringing their cappuccino to the workplace when they need it.”

HTC Advies and Atir make an important contribution to the continuous improvement of the hospitality concept through facility audits and mystery visits. “This is how we give the service providers insight into the process, so they understand their added value better and thus are motivated to make improvements,” says Korfage. The periodic measurements consist of quality measurements on cleaning (VSR-KMS), HACCP audits, a test on residual management and mystery visits where the hospitality experience of the complete facility concept is assessed.

All audits are conducted with the help of an online application, so the output is visible in real time in the KPI dashboard of GRIP Facility (the online tool for contract management). This online tool shows the results of the different disciplines in one overview, with scores on the predetermined KPIs. Based on this, you can immediately see which disciplines need attention. GRIP Facility also provides management reports that visualize to what extent housing and services are in order and which business processes may need to be optimized.

For the mystery visits, the experts from HTC Advies and Atir discussed in advance what scenarios would be investigated. “Based on our experience, the mystery visits were organized in such a way, that the difference between the visit and reality is minimized,” says Korfage. “For example, what happens if our visitor drops a cup of coffee in the office pantry? How do cleaning and catering employees respond to this and how do they work together? From their response we can deduce how they cooperate with each other.”

Anna Casemier, managing partner at HTC Advies,

says the project confirmed the importance of data. “It can empower hospitality businesses to learn more about their guests, helping them fine-tune the guest services, and with the personalization of the guest experience,” she says.

Improving the guest experience

During the mystery visit, visitors often go through the entire guest journey, from entry to departure. An important goal is to reduce the number of drop-out moments. “A moment of withdrawal can be an empty shelf in the restaurant or an unattractive waiting area, but also unclear information about the products or glass walls that are not clean,” says Rietveld. “Our advice is: explain, make it easy for people and always confirm that they have made the right choice. In this way you prevent guests from dropping out.”

Facilicom’s Wijermars says it is often difficult for service providers to determine what areas can be improved, particularly where guest experience is concerned. “We may think everything is in order, but does the guest experience it that way?” he asks. “This is the reason we opt for facility audits and mystery visits by an independent third party.” Recommendations from mystery visitors form an important guide to help the providers to continually improve. De Knoop aims to be the meeting place for the national government, which is quite an ambition. “Such an ambition requires an integrated approach with clear agreements and goals. The periodic measurements provide evidence and indicate how we can achieve the next step in hospitality together. The optimization potential that we make visible in this way gives us the positive energy to get started in concrete terms. It really helps us to innovate in the world of PPP.”

Reflecting on the project, Rietveld says a holistic approach proved vital. “Hospitality is key for creating a working environment in which people perform at their best while enjoying networking, brainstorming and making powerful decisions in an excellent environment,” he concludes. “We don’t define the role of hospitality, but by best practices and scenarios, we try to encourage the client to explore the boundaries and to challenge them where possible.” ■



“We may think everything is in order, but does the guest experience it that way? This is the reason we opt for facility audits and mystery visits by an independent third party”

Above: Tom Rietveld FCSI, senior consultant with HTC Advies and his colleague Lisanne Korfage



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CITY FOCUS BUENOS AIRES

The Argentine capital might be synonymous with steak, but in recent years its culinary diversity has captured the attention of the global gastronomic community. Buenos Aires native María De Michelis tracks the edible heritage of this Paris of the south



Founded as a port and settlement in colonial times, this most European of Latin American metropolises is now home to some 15 million people.

Sectioned into a hundred neighborhoods, endless avenues, a towering obelisk, a Chinatown where one can buy the freshest fish, and the boundless Río de La Plata – the widest river in the world.

Buenos Aires, the city, is a cosmopolitan capital with a dazzling array of bookstores, cinemas, theaters and milongas, where tangos are danced. It's a beehive that never sleeps, driven by boundless cultural aspirations and an ever-expanding array of culinary offerings. Just two short decades ago, the city began to abandon its status as the ugly duckling of regional cuisine, led by the talents of world-renowned chefs who bet on innovation and a national identity amenable to its roots and the eclecticism inherited from various ethnic origins such as Indigenous foundations, gaucho traditions and those from early 20th century immigrants: Spanish, Italian and, to a lesser extent, French. From the Mediterranean to the River Plate, products, aromas and flavors arrived that filled the taverns and kitchens of the conventillos – tenement houses – where our cuisine was founded. Then Germans and European Jews added theirs. And later, with the wave of Latin American and Asian immigrants, our



Clockwise from right: Alegria; steak from Don Julio; Ulúa serves great value food and drink; Filipino favorite Apu Nena; Naranja Bar





culinary kaleidoscope was completed. Today Buenos Aires is a harmonious chaos where one can enjoy Italian, Spanish, French, Jewish, German, Peruvian, Colombian, Venezuelan, Mexican, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian and Filipino food. Travel the world with every dish. And so much of it is terrific.

Our once narrowly carnivorous palate was broadened thanks to contributions from the global village, improvement in the quality of our food products, plus the vegetarian and vegan wave that has swept through here and, pretty much,



Our once narrowly carnivorous palate was broadened thanks to contributions from the global village

everywhere else. And yet, beef is beef. Sacred. According to restaurateur Pablo Rivero: “We are not just about beef, but we are not without beef. There’s no point. This raw commodity, especially when barbecued, identifies us geographically, culturally and historically.” Rivero is the owner of bodegón El Preferido – a temple of milanesas and chips, lentil stew, and dulce de leche flan, among other updated classics – and of Don Julio, a simple neighborhood parrilla, or grill, that became a white tablecloth restaurant and took the top spot in Latin America’s 50 Best Restaurants ranking for 2020.

Many wonder why this protein is at the center of our culinary scene. Anthropologist Patricia Aguirre argues that initially beef was the typical food for gauchos, later becoming the reward that immigrants found on the other side of the Atlantic. Those disembarking in our port quickly realized that the promised land’s bounty wasn’t milk and honey but, rather, wholesale steak. Soon, other beef cuts naturally found their

way into Old World recipes and then this country’s richest and most accessible staple, prohibitively expensive in Europe, was swallowed up from the first bite to the rest of the beast. Urban pizzerias – more generally frequented by those with crisis-stricken purses – may sprout up like mushrooms and far outnumber parrillas, but beef persists as a metaphor for our culinary identity, even sneaking its way on to the contours of our map. If you take a fresh look at it with ravenous eyes, Argentina is shaped like a steak.

To understand Buenos Aires’ current culinary scene, we must take note of the changes brought about by the pandemic, and the trends that have boomed because of it. Of the latter, none has exploded as much as sourdough, a trend that ignited during the early quarantines and a guaranteed staple in trendy bakeries such as Atelier Fuerza, L’epi and Salvaje Bakery. Apart from that, there’s been a demand for Neapolitan-style pizzerias: never has southern Italy been so well-represented in the city as it has in the past year.

Today’s bakeries and patisseries are experiencing a revival thanks to pastry chefs who are revisiting the classics. “There is a hunger for medialunas and alfajores – crescent rolls and biscuit sandwiches, respectively – our favorite treats. And also savoury biscuits and palmiers, the best friends of mate (a bitter herbal infusion that can take some getting used to for foreign palates)”, >

says Jacqueline Albajari of Labán Pâtisserie, in the neighborhood of Las Cañitas.

More twists

During the pandemic, the words sustainability and agroecology hit home. But it's not too long ago that the city's vegetarian and vegan offerings were a woeful collection of boring, gray, sad dishes. There's new life in what's now available, and there's an audience with an appetite for it. Plant-based restaurants and cafés are flourishing, such as Mudra or Casa Nueva, veggie-based dishes are no longer the usual combinations – Narda Comedor, by chef Narda Lepas, never fails – and special menus sprouted up in many restaurants: Casa Cavia is highly recommended, housed in a Belle Époque house with a garden, outdoor bar, bookshop and plenty of charm. It's located in Palermo, of course. With its Plaza Cortázar and its design shops, the district is the concentrated yolk of Buenos Aires' gourmet egg, although now the area of Chacarita is staking its own claim. In this less-pretentious neighborhood, flags have been planted by newer taverns that are also wine shops, such as Alegra, and natural wine bars, such as Naranja Bar, where finding a seat can be an adventure. Here gastronomy is celebrated. There are vermouth bars and taquerías – Ulúa was among the first – places with great food, informal atmospheres and friendly prices, such as Picarón. As for Asian



Clockwise from right: Apu Nena for Filipino flavors; Chila – excellent food with wine; 878 – one of Buenos Aires' favorite bars



restaurants, Korean Nanum and Filipino Apu Nena have their legions of fans.

May the wine never run out

In this part of the world, there is no food without wine, our national drink. It's at our table and plays a starring role in the city's fine-dining restaurants. Pairings are de rigueur in places like Tegui, Chila, El Baqueano (in San Telmo, the old part of the city) or Aramburu, which have top-flight sommeliers. "There are more and more and better bottles with an outstanding quality-price ratio. Malbec is the most recognized varietal, we're known throughout

There's new life in what's now available (in vegetarian and vegan offerings), and there's an audience with an appetite for it. Plant-based restaurants and cafés are flourishing

"Argentina is a great, big vineyard. And I love that there are so many wine shops and wine bars where you can have a bite to eat and share a glass with friends. Wine brings us together"

the world for it, but there is a variety of styles and many producing regions," says wine journalist Elisabeth Checa. "Argentina is a great, big vineyard. And I love that there are so many wine shops and wine bars where you can have a bite to eat (and where neither the wine nor the food is lacking), and share a glass, or better, several, with friends. Wine brings us together."

And the cocktail scene? It's found its place in bars, restaurants and homes. It inspires books, articles, regular radio guest spots, and devotees. "Immigrants carried over cocktails, which form part of this culture. Our cocktail scene had its heyday in the 50s and 60s, began to wane in the 70s and, luckily, it's regained its shine", says Julián Díaz, owner of 878, one of Buenos Aires' favorite bars, along with Florería Atlántico – 7th in The World's 50 Best Bars 2020 – Presidente Bar and The Harrison Speakeasy; all run by professionals who are ever mindful of the quality of their primary ingredients. They love exploring combinations of garnishes

and the use of vinegars. They prepare their own syrups, vermouths, bitters and spirits. And now, they are marketing ready-to-drink cocktails.

Coffee, a shared moment

Buenos Aires has always had cafés. Literary and bohemian hideaways, spots for artists and students to gather, with a history of good poetry and lousy coffee. It took us a long time to really appreciate the beverage itself and finally demand quality. A decade ago, no one here could have imagined that specialty cafés would now be trendy, selling scrumptious pastries and sandwiches.

The Colombian baristas who visited Argentina's capital did a lot for the coffee scene, most of them in shops spread across the neighborhoods of Belgrano and Palermo; Café Lattente was a pioneer in this regard. It's clear this brew is central to a ritual that invites conversation. When we porteños, as citizens of Buenos Aires are known, want to get together we ask: "Shall we have a coffee?" Also, many of us are now interested in a coffee's origins and flavor profile. We might choose an espresso, macchiato or filtered, but just a "coffee" doesn't cut it anymore.

It's a time for reinvention, for audacity and adapting to the new rules in Buenos Aires. There is so much to discover and explore here. It's a city suffering from the present Covid crisis just as the other cities in the world. However, our city is bubbling with energy and creativity. ■



Catering for the new workplace

Workplace dining was hit hard by Covid-19 as offices shut down across the world. Howard Riell hears from consultants how office catering might look in a post-pandemic world

The business and industry (B&I) segment was doing fine until a certain pandemic appeared on the scene and impacted just about everything. Now, as non-commercial operators continue to pick up the pieces, consultants are helping them reimagine and retool parts of their businesses – and discover opportunities they may never have considered.

“The non-commercial sector has been hit very hard,” notes Karen Malody FCSI, founder and president of Culinary Options in Portland, Oregon. Early in 2020, she and colleague Russ Benson FMP, founder and CEO of DayOne Hospitality Consulting in Chicago, Illinois, began a series of virtual discussion groups with non-commercial foodservice managers. “With 95%-plus of employees working from home in B&I and thousands of students not returning to campus, it turned the foodservice programs upside down, to say the least.”

The pair worked closely with several of these thought leaders to support their efforts in getting through the pandemic. “Many will not see employees returning to their offices until June, if we are lucky,” Malody says. “Meanwhile, we have cafes sitting dormant,

employees working at home without this amenity available, and foodservice managers and contractors wondering what the future will actually be. Some of us consultants have had our noses to the grindstone too, working with accounts to help them to re-envision their foodservice program from top to bottom.”

Panic, amazement and shock

Both faculty members of the Foodservice Design Bootcamp sponsored by *Foodservice Equipment Reports (FER)*, Malody and Benson began their virtual foodservice focus groups at the beginning of April. “We were in the middle of the Bootcamp Conference in New Orleans in March when several of the College & University attendees began getting messages to cancel huge orders that had been placed,” she recalls. The universities had decided not to have students return from spring break due to the outbreak. “We saw the panic, amazement and shock at what would become the biggest shutdown of foodservice in American history.”

The pair immediately decided to organize the virtual focus groups to create a safe space for clients and food program managers to share discoveries, frustrations, solutions and problems. “We also included manufacturers who offered ideas and innovations,” says Malody. The response to and attendance at the groups was “phenomenal, and continued to be as 2021 began.” On average, 30 or more attendees take part in each of the calls, which have become a forum for non-commercial clients/food program managers to learn, share and grow.

Participants came away with insights they could utilize right away. One is Damian Monticello, FMP, CMP, GTP, senior manager of corporate hospitality services at GuideWell (formerly Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida) in Jacksonville, Florida, and president of the Society for Hospitality & Foodservice Management (SHFM).

“The necessity of minimizing touch points and utilizing concepts

such as ghost kitchens and mobile ordering technology is actually providing us with the ability to offer more variety to our employees when they return to the office than what we could before the pandemic,” Monticello explains. “It’s a different way of looking at the operation; more like a quick-service restaurant than a traditional employee café.”

Demand down

The road back to normalcy will continue to be uphill. The B&I segment “was robust prior to Covid,” recalls Arlene Spiegel FCSI, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. Real estate, corporate and cultural organizations were investing in modernizing cafes with equipment and technology to keep tenants and employees engaged. “Today, the occupancy of these buildings is 0% to 25%, and the demand for food is down. This has left many foodservice contract-management companies with the need to revise their agreements for the short term until occupancy is back to pre-Covid numbers. Contracts that were fee-based arrangements may now switch to a P&L or percentage deal.”

Benson considers it “paramount >

“With 95%-plus of employees working from home in B&I and thousands of students not returning to campus, it turned the foodservice programs upside down”

THE AMERICAS





“Many clients have begun meal kits for families. These can be picked up or delivered. Some have turned cafes into grocery stores”



Karen Malody FCSI,
Culinary Options

that clients/food program managers re-evaluate their programs while aligning with the company’s culture.” Ideally, the process should start at the top “and ask why do you have foodservice within your workplace? Drilling down to the answer will steer leadership onto a path that allows onsite foodservice to make an impact on productivity, safety and socialization within their respective firms.”

“Revisioning is critical,” Malody says. “The new path must ensure that all decisions made with regards to program alterations fit within the financial, ethical and philosophical goals of a new program.”

Indeed, Benson says clients will have to decide what role foodservice will play in their “return to workplace” strategies, and whether to re-bid current terms with the incumbent, go out to bid in a formal RFP process, or do nothing. “Doing nothing is probably not an option. It is critical the clients adapt to the struggles their operators are facing, and vice versa; it must be a win/win solution.”

With so many employees still at home, many B&I spaces will be repurposed, depending on each client organization. Some will be converted to office spaces. “Some

organizations are considering converting the dining room to collaborative workspaces,” Malody says. “If some of the kitchens in B&I spaces are not in secure areas of the building, some are considering renting them to outside restaurants or caterers.”

Others are considering turning closed kitchens into ghost kitchens that prepare pre-ordered, prepaid food only. “This can also provide a centralized pick-up area that keeps bodies away from more crowded dining areas.”

Get to know customers

By implementing technological solutions in both the front and back of the house, says Malody, “not only can sales be grown via efficiency and speed of throughput, but customer connection can be improved. The analytics that are available through enhanced POS programs today can help operators know their customers better.”

She suggests strategically sending out messages for certain specials based on customer histories. “Being diligent about menu engineering provides a huge opportunity to reduce inventory and food waste, both of which lead to improved food costs and thus profit growth.”



Like Malody, many of her FCSI colleagues are working closely with clients to find a way forward, helping them rethink strategies and innovate in order to recover from the damage inflicted by the shutdowns.

“We are currently designing spaces for a future that returns to a normalcy,” says Lynn Sadusky FCSI, principal of RAS Design Group in Martinez, California, “but helping with interim changes toward an opening with protective measures.”

Helping B&I clients re-envision their foodservice programs “would require minimal input from design consultants,” says Tim Agosti FCSI, principal of Arctic Food Service Design in Anchorage, Alaska. “Changing to a grab-n-go concept requires only new pieces of equipment with minimal utility requirements.”

Facilities that can afford it are remaining open after hours so small local businesses and non-profits can utilize their kitchens to support those on the front lines, according to Howard S. Stanford FCSI, senior vice president of SSA in Tampa, Florida. “Other companies that have the ability are purchasing facilities and businesses that have closed in prime locations, which may just

require a face-lift, bringing life back to communities.”

Both smaller and some larger businesses “now see the value and savings of merging purchasing power for supplies, sharing facilities for central refrigerated and dry storage to save on costs,” Stanford adds. “There are so many facilities being underutilized that have increased their bank accounts by helping smaller businesses stay in business.”

Some clients have provided monthly stipends for working-at-home employees to spend on meals, Malody reports. Since the amenity of reduced-price or, in some cases, free food is not available when working from home, “they felt this was the right thing to do. Many clients have begun meal kits for families.

These can be picked up or delivered. Some have turned cafes into grocery stores.” This latter option only works if a significant number of employees are on site to participate.

Pre-Covid, employers kept the company café open to their employees exclusively. With occupancy down, says Spiegel, they are opening up the service to other tenants in the building. “When possible, operators are turning their foodservice into a ‘grocerant’ concept providing take-home meals, groceries and sundries to meet the needs of the employees still in the building.”

Going forward, Spiegel expects foodservice salad bars and buffets will need to be modified. Safe-distancing, signage, acrylic guards and full PPE compliance will allow guests to approach a food station, where an attendant will do the serving and plating. “This of course will increase the amount of labor required, adding pressure on the already slim margins.”

“This isn’t the last time something like this will happen,” Stanford concludes. His advice is to prepare now for the future. “Partnerships are the lifeline of your business when the bottom falls out. No one is a success overnight; help those around you.” ■



Covid crisis in Australia's commercial kitchens

Australia's hospitality sector has long had a challenge in finding enough staff, a crisis that has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as Maida Pineda reports



Due to lack of support from government many hospitality workers had no choice but to leave Australia

This is the busiest time of the year for us,” says chef Jorge of The Mint, a beer garden, restaurant and event space right at the heart of Melbourne’s central business district (CBD). Swamped with company holiday functions every day in December, he is short-handed in the kitchen. When the city was released from lockdown a few weeks before Christmas after an unsettling eight months of surviving two hard lockdowns, restaurants and bars were scrambling to find staff. The Mint is just one of many restaurants, bars, and cafes in Australia suffering from staff shortage in Australia.

The hospitality sector is desperate for workers. Hospitality jobs in Australia were previously filled by foreigners on working holiday visas, international students, and skilled overseas workers all on temporary working visas. During lockdown, with no jobs and no support from the government, many of these foreign nationals have gone home. As international borders remain closed, there are no foreign workers, international students, or working holiday visitors stepping foot into Australia.

For Naomi Orsillo, owner of Copper and Stone Café in Melbourne, staffing woes are nothing new, “In hospitality, it is always a struggle. You’re constantly recruiting and training because it’s not the sort of industry that people stay in for a long time in most positions, especially here in Australia,” she says. “It’s always been a struggle. The industry has always been reliant on a transient workforce, so a lot of positions were held by people on a working holiday or student visa.”

She laments the fact that the government was lacking in its support during the lockdown, “We didn’t support any of them during Covid. If you’re not an Australian citizen or permanent resident, you were not entitled to anything. So, a lot of them [hospitality workers] had no choice but to go home.”

Orsillo points out they’ve spent a lot of money for their visas, and the international students have paid higher tuition fees than a citizen would pay for the same courses. She says: “The dollars that they bring to Australia, especially in Victoria, are a big part of the state’s income. And now, we are suffering because we don’t have the workforce. They were treated like they were so dispensable.”

Spotting unicorns

While many are scrambling to get their staff together, Orsillo considers herself to be one of the lucky ones with a team assembled, “I’ve picked up two through a training college. For my front of house, I’ve picked up inexperienced people and needed to train them myself which is not necessarily a bad thing. I don’t see a lot of people floating around that are highly experienced. Thank goodness, I’m not looking for a chef because anyone I know who is, is really struggling at the moment.”

Finding a chef is akin to spotting a unicorn, Orsillo says. “In some areas, they are doing interesting things to get people to come and work for them. I saw in one Facebook hospitality groups, there’s a bakery/café in Sorrento in the Mornington Peninsula offering AU\$500 for referring >

“I don’t see a lot of people floating around that are highly experienced. Thank goodness, I’m not looking for a chef because anyone I know who is, is really struggling at the moment”



Above: Stephen Kelly FCSI, owner and MD, Hospitality Management Australia. "We've had a skills shortage for a significant length of time"



a friend to work there and AU\$9,000 relocation if they stay three months."

Poaching chefs is not unheard of. There have been news reports of signing bonuses of AU\$1,000 offered to chefs in Western Australia, with the promise of AU\$2,000 retention bonus if they stay for at least three months. According to Wes Lambert, CEO of Restaurant and Catering Australia: "For every 10 jobs in hospitality, there is only one applicant. For skilled jobs in hospitality, around the country, they're certainly having a very difficult time finding skilled employees. Because many skilled employees left Australia when there was no stimulus available to them. And many holiday workers and students also left because their visas expired."

Operational changes

The shortage is widespread in Australia. Lambert says: "It is everywhere. It is exacerbated in the CBDs and the regions. The regions would obviously have fewer people. They normally have backpackers in the regions working multiple jobs in agriculture and hospitality. It's always difficult to find skilled employees in the regions, and in the CBD's you have the larger venues that require many more employees." With more food establishments opening up again, Lambert anticipates this problem getting worse, "The more the industry opens, the worse it gets. There are more people leaving Australia every day than are allowed to come in. There are no caps to the number of people who are getting on a flight to leave Australia. It is the flights coming into Australia that are capped. At present,

only returning Australian citizens or permanent residents can enter Australia."

Unable to find sufficient staff, restaurants are forced to make changes in the way they operate. Lambert says: "They're not open for all their shifts or they do not have their full menu prior to Covid." He cites a clear example: "If there's no sushi chef to make sushi, then the restaurant can't serve sushi. Ultimately, there are a lot of food types that are very specific to preparation. If you're an Ethiopian restaurant and your Ethiopian chef went back to Ethiopia, you can't hire an Italian to cook. And Victoria has one of the most diverse food cultures in Australia. When you lose all of those qualified chefs, you lose the diversity." In the long run, he sees the rise of quick-service restaurants and the big box restaurants. It will be challenging for non-homogenized restaurants.

This staffing problem is not new. Stephen Kelly FCSI, owner and managing director of Hospitality Management Australia recalls, "I think it was probably 20 years or more ago when I was the VP of the Catering Institute of Australia, the then president Bill Galvin was petitioning the government at that time. 'If you look at the increase in our industry in hospitality, we will not have enough people trained up as chefs, or cooks, or apprentices, that will survive by the time we get to 2020,' he said. That was way ahead of Covid. Our skill shortage has always been there, but Covid has put an accent on it for sure, but the reality is we've had a skill shortage for a significant length of time."

The problem is Australians don't see

hospitality as an industry they would grow old in. Kelly asks, "If you stop and think about the restaurants you've been to in Melbourne recently. Have you seen the chef? I bet there aren't many of them over the age of 40." He sees the physically demanding job, the long hours, and the low wage structure with the base award at only about AU\$20/hour.

Kelly paints a clear image of the current financial picture in hospitality, "Our industry margins are already so small. When you look at the money from cafes, restaurants and those businesses in particular – the bottom line is 3-5% before owner's salaries. Right now, in the Covid-19 pandemic, there are a lot of owners not paying themselves." The overhead to run a hospitality business is high in Australia. He explains, "Labor is our biggest cost. Everyone traditionally adheres to 30% cost of goods, 30% labor, 30% everything else. That's been the rule of thumb for the past fifty years. Now, about 40 to 50% of the revenue goes to labor."

The government has provided financial support with JobKeeper Payments from the time the lockdown started in March 2020 until the end of March 2021. When it ends,



“Our industry margins are already so small – the bottom line is 3-5% before owner’s salaries. Right now, there are a lot of owners not paying themselves”

Kelly anticipates many businesses won’t be able to give their staff enough shifts. Instead of five shifts a week, they will only be giving them one shift a week, because businesses aren’t there.

Better working conditions

Efforts have been made to address the skills shortage in the short-term. According to Lambert, the federal and state governments are financially incentivizing individuals and businesses to trade up, to take as many courses as possible. He says, “There are a lot of hospitality courses such as barista, responsible service of alcohol, knife skills. There are quite a few short courses and micro-courses and credentials you can take to build up your experience to make you more valuable to employers.”

Yet he recognizes that talent and skills are not easily replaceable in this time of the pandemic “Those highly skilled chefs from around the world, they left Australia because there were no stimulus and no grants or payments available to them. And they just can’t return to Australia,” he says.

Lambert believes as long as net migration is negative, more people are leaving than returning, then it is going to get

harder, “It will be offset by the graduation of students from hospitality courses and taking micro-credentials and short courses going forward. We also see apprenticeships, and we can encourage workers to get their certificate three or four in commercial cookery or hospitality. But it will be a problem we will be facing for 1-3 years.”

The Australian government is working to incentivize New Zealanders to come for agricultural or hospitality work with a AU\$2,000 bonus. However, this may not work with New Zealand struggling with a shortage of staff too. A Western Australian town is campaigning for its residents to take on a second job in hospitality to look after the high volume of tourists during the summer months.

Kelly suggests better working conditions and lasting careers for those employed in hospitality, “We need to get smarter about having older employees at certain roles. We need to recognize that they can’t necessarily do a 10 or 12-hour shifts. When we have good people, we should be creating better career paths for them.”

Filipino-Australian chef Ross Magnaye hopes the long working hours in the kitchens will be replaced with healthy work-life balance. This may entice a new generation of chefs to work in Australia.

Ultimately the biggest shift must be how Australians perceive the hospitality industry. Lambert states simply, “Overall, it is the responsibility of the both the industry and the government to change the hearts and minds of people to see that hospitality is a profession. Because it is a well-respected profession around the world.” ■

Ensuring there are staff in the future may mean emphasizing hospitality is a well-respected profession

France fights food waste



Five years after the introduction of France's pioneering food waste law, Amy Snelling considers how far France has come and what more needs to be done to combat food waste

A global leader in the fight against food waste, all eyes turned to France in 2016 after it became the first country to pass a law specifically addressing the mounting issue. The legislation, initially targeting food retailers throwing away edible food, was widely viewed as a landmark moment in the country's battle.

The Garot Law

An ever-pressing environmental, social and economic concern, it's estimated globally that a third of food ends up as waste; France alone creates roughly 10 million tonnes of food waste annually, valued at €16bn according to the French Environmental Agency (ADEME).

To address the issue, in 2013 France launched a National Pact to reduce food waste 50% by 2025. A step towards achieving this target, the landmark 2016 anti-food waste law – also known as the Garot Law, written by the former food industry minister Guillaume Garot – prohibited large supermarkets (over 400 sq m) from destroying or throwing away edible food, instead compelling them to establish donation agreements with food assistance organizations for redistribution. Operators not complying with the law are liable to fines.

Focusing on the impact of public policy on food waste, zero waste specialist Marie Mourad believes legislation is moving things in the right direction, however she finds the regulation isn't all as stringent as it appears from the outside. "There's actually a lot >

in 2013 France
launched a National
Pact to reduce
food waste

50% by
2025



Marie Mourad, zero waste specialist

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of misconception around the [Garot] law. Generally people think it's a very strong ban on food waste, but it's never been a total 'ban' on throwing away food," she explains.

Looking at two parts of the law that have drawn a lot of attention since its introduction – food donation agreements and fines – Mourad says: "What's mandatory is to have an agreement, but it doesn't say how much food you have to donate." With this in mind, she believes cooperation is also based on voluntary commitment and other benefits including tax breaks. "Even before the introduction of the regulation, there were strong incentives for donation via tax breaks offering up to 60% of the food's inventory value." As for the fines, she finds it more symbolic. "I don't think any businesses have been fined so far; it's not very tightly controlled."

Gaps aside, Mourad emphasizes the policy remains important. "It's strong in itself to have the regulation. Symbolically, it gets a lot of attention, it creates social pressure, and changes the norm – I think that's as strong as the enforcement itself."

Another milestone, signaling an important shift towards food waste prevention as well as redistribution, is the 2019 extension of the anti-food waste law to include collective catering (prisons, hospitals, schools, etc), requiring diagnostics, tracking and plans for waste reduction initiatives. Even more recently, last year policymakers strengthened legislation again as part of the anti-waste and circular economy bill that called for collective catering and food distributors to reduce their food waste 50% by 2025 compared to 2015 levels, with commercial catering and more to follow by 2030.

The impact can be seen trickling down to foodservice operators. In public schools, for example, Mourad has seen progress in tackling issues with portion sizes. "There were a lot of rules that saw kindergarteners being served the same portions as teenage students, which they've been working on changing and tracking waste." While in commercial restaurants, operators are now compelled to give doggy bags to customers



for leftovers – a concept that Mourad explains is "not at all in French tradition". "A lot of these could be seen as little actions, and there is room for improvement, but I think the combination helps reduce waste."

Innovation, innovation, innovation

Beyond policy, efforts to reduce waste are being felt within France's innovation ecosystem. From food tech startups to multinationals, there's a lot of entrepreneurial energy being directed towards anti-waste initiatives.

French startups are making their impact felt across the continent. Leading anti-food waste app Phenix advocates the circular economy to redistribute unsold products by connecting businesses and consumers, reportedly saving 40 million meals in 2019. Specifically targeting collective catering, another startup Meal Canteen is ploughing its own furrow. Setting out to 'revolutionize the canteen', the app allows diners to pre-select meals giving operators additional insights to prepare accordingly.

Large corporations are also out to shape the agenda. Food waste prevention technology company Leanpath has been working closely with Paris-headquartered foodservice giant Sodexo on what Leanpath CEO and president Andrew Shakman >

Phenix redistributes
unsold products
reportedly saving
40 million
meals in 2019



Andrew Shakman, CEO and president, Leanpath

USING FOOD WASTE FOR GREEN ENERGY

While prevention and redistribution are essential in the fight against food waste, another issue operators must navigate is what to do with waste that's still created. "Disposing of food in landfills is not only problematic due to a lack of space, but also a huge cause of carbon emissions being released into the atmosphere due to the methane produced," says Mick Jary, the UK specification director for Meiko Green – warewashing manufacturer Meiko's eco food waste management system. As countries work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with Paris Agreement targets, food waste-to-energy initiatives "have to be on the agenda."

Driving this forward, last year Meiko Green introduced BioMaster, an innovative disposal unit designed to convert restaurant food waste into homogeneous biomass primed for use as renewable energy. Currently the only company offering such solutions Jary explains: "The homogenization process maximizes the calorific value of the food waste, so that when it all goes to anaerobic digestion it maximizes the energy to transform it into biofuel."



Paul Montégut FCSI, Restauration Conseil



explains is, "the largest commitment to automated food waste tracking in history by a foodservice organization." The companies are working together to roll out measurement and tracking at thousands of Sodexo sites with a program said to cut food waste by 50% on average by capturing and using data on waste to implement structural and behavioral changes.

Shakman is on a mission to establish food waste tracking as an everyday occurrence across the world's kitchens following the ethos that "measurement is the mechanism to drive change" – a mission made even more pertinent in today's climate as the Covid-19 pandemic disrupts food supply chains and threatens foodservice, creating what Shakman says is a "fertile ground for food waste" as operators navigate through "chaos and uncertainty".

Looking at France's waste reduction efforts, he thinks the country is taking the right approach by following the 'Target, Measure, Act' model established by Champions 12.3. "First, France has set targets for food waste prevention. The second move to accomplish this target is measure, because you can't know if you're making your target if you have no data. And then once you know what your waste levels are, you need to act by making changes to

Covid-19 has created "fertile ground for food waste"

your operation to reduce that waste. That's the model we see."

Looking forward

A long-time fixture in French foodservice operations, associate consultant of Restauration Conseil, chair of FCSI France and vice-chair of FCSI EAME, Paul Montégut says food waste reduction initiatives have been part of the conversation over the past decade and today are a "major subject in everybody's head – even at home."

Still, he recognizes restaurants face challenges translating targets into measurements and actions. "Operators need to calibrate production to avoid food waste. They need to know precisely how many clients they will serve and client preferences to manage production in an efficient way... This is a difficult goal, but they're working towards it."

From legislation to innovation, France is a pioneer in the fight against food waste. However, there's still a long way to go. As Montégut says: "As is often the case in France, we take time to act, but when an issue is identified and the country is behind it, we work towards it and don't turn back." ■

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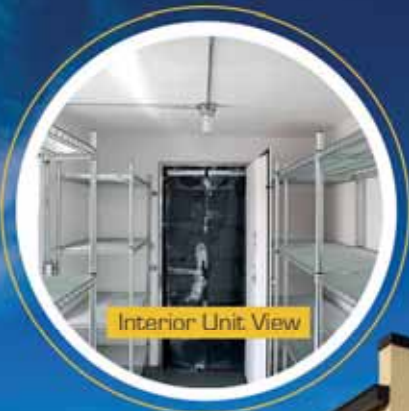
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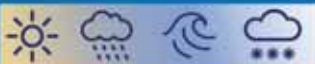
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REFRIGERATION IS WORKING
IN THE PANDEMIC

HOT-SIDE TECHNOLOGY



Cooking tech for a post-Covid world

Sustainability, energy efficiency and smart cooking technologies are nice to have on the hot side, but the operators' single goal now is to survive until business returns. Jim Banks considers how cooking technology is evolving, because of the pandemic – and despite it

The Covid-19 pandemic has focused the attention of the foodservice industry on short-term priorities, pushing long-term investment onto the back burner. Survival is now the priority for many businesses.

The pandemic has, to some extent, put the brakes on innovation, with operators looking to cut labor costs, improve flexibility to respond to changing restrictions on socializing and dining, and to gain a competitive edge by producing the best food in the shortest amount of time. With less revenue coming in, many are trying to do so with the cooking equipment they already have.

“The past year has been devastating for manufacturers and the entire equipment and supplies market, so there hasn’t been a ton of new innovation, but there has been a continual arc of innovation over the last few years towards smaller, more modular, and more flexible equipment,” says Denis Livchak, senior designer at Frontier Energy. “This will probably continue to expand as operators move towards more flexible menus, strategic allocation of labor over longer hours, and off-premises dining.”

Fortunately, the cooking equipment already in place can, in many instances, deliver more than its owners had realized.

“Chefs have been learning how to use the combi oven creatively to their advantage,” says Kip Serfozo FCSI, design director at Cini•Little International Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia. “In the past, they didn’t know how to use the combi technology correctly. It is like someone using a computer just for word processing without understanding its other features.”

A FOCUS ON FLEXIBILITY

The arc of innovation seen in the last few years has served the industry well in terms of preparing it for restrictions on indoor dining and a growing drive to be resource efficient at a time when

revenues have fallen sharply. “It has been a continuum of induction and other kit that’s anything other than the old days of pots and pans,” says Chris Stern FCSI, managing director of UK-based Stern Consultancy. “Ventless cooking is massively important. As sites are downsized, having self-vented front cooking is a way of doing hot food with minimal back-of-house facilities. It brings savings on ventilation, though fire suppression is a whole new challenge especially when it’s front cooking.”

Ventless cooking is now widespread, and the flexibility it offers is an advantage when outdoor dining and cooking is more prevalent. Indoors, however, it does present challenges.

“If you are cooking you need some ventilation and fire suppression – regardless of whether you are using an exhaust hood or the room’s HVAC system,” adds Livchak. “Nothing is free – and that includes getting rid of all the heat in the kitchen. With ventless, that heat remains in the kitchen and has to be removed with your air conditioning, which is expensive. Research shows that it is always more cost-effective to put the larger equipment under a traditional exhaust hood where possible.”

Among manufacturers, the desire to innovate remains as strong as ever, and many recognise the need for versatility and the need to increase production capacity and menu options without taking up valuable space.

“We have seen interest in four areas of innovation: flexibility, reliability, simplicity and cost savings,” says Dan Montgomery, senior manager consultant services at equipment manufacturer Vulcan. “Operators are keenly interested in equipment that can be used for multiple tasks or that can be adaptable.”

“No one wants to invest in an entirely new range line-up each time a menu adjustment is needed,” he adds. “So, we

“RESEARCH SHOWS THAT IT IS MORE COST-EFFECTIVE TO PUT THE LARGER EQUIPMENT UNDER A TRADITIONAL EXHAUST HOOD WHERE POSSIBLE”



Above top: Kip Serfozo FCSI, design director at Cini•Little International; Above: Denis Livchak of Frontier Energy

use a modular design and manufacturing approach to heavy duty range line-ups. This allows individual top or base components to be changed if needed.”

Vulcan has also developed ways to make enhancements to existing equipment, especially griddles. It has, for example, developed a versatile heavy-duty clamshell that can be added to a griddle to reduce cooking times, while enabling greater productivity and flexibility without adding width to the cookline.

“One notable piece of equipment that was released this last year is the Rational iVario,” says Livchak. “This promises flexible production in a small space. We have also seen innovation in the induction range world and we now have one of the new Garland FlexiHob units in our facility. Combination ovens continue to evolve, and the new breed of small combis is really gaining traction.”

JUGGLING PRIORITIES

Though short-term considerations occupy operators’ minds, manufacturers are keen to develop new concepts in preparation for the market’s recovery.

“As the foodservice industry bounces forward there is a greater sense of urgency around innovation,” says Rick Caron, chief innovation officer at Welbilt, the company behind brands such as Convotherm, Frymaster and Lincoln. “Our design centers are more focused, working faster and stepping up the game with open innovation where ideas not only come from inside our organization but outside as well.”

“Key technologies being transferred into foodservice range from advanced controls to new sanitation solutions to new platforms for heat generation and heat transfer,” he adds. “Combi ovens are raising the bar with hygienic disinfection programs, which are being deployed through software upgrades. There is also more demand for unvented hot-side equipment. These innovations will help the industry as it re-emerges in 2021.”

Sustainability is a key driver of



innovation and, though still pushed forward by regulatory change, it has given way to other priorities for now. Larger chains may still be focused on sustainability, but for small independents, survival comes first. There is an influx of low-cost, Chinese-made equipment, for which efficiency gains are less important than lower cost.

“The biggest impact from a regulatory standpoint is the mandate for all-electric kitchens that is now built into the building reach codes for many cities,” notes Livchak. “The all-electric kitchen requires advanced, integrated design in order to be cost-effective. There is also an amazing amount of immediate carbon reduction that can happen by simply using the high-efficiency gas equipment available on the market today, which could be a bridge to the zero-carbon kitchens of the future.”

Along with flexibility, reliability is now the concept at the top of many operators’ minds. “Cooking equipment must be durable and trouble-free,” says Montgomery. “A manufacturer’s ability to manage and deploy their service network has never been more critical. Operators need to minimize down-time.

“Simplicity is key,” he adds. “Controls need to be easy to understand and operate with little or no training. We have found there are frequent challenges with >

“AS THE FOODSERVICE INDUSTRY BOUNCES FORWARD THERE IS A GREATER SENSE OF URGENCY AROUND INNOVATION”



Above: Rick Caron, chief innovation officer at Welbilt

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labor and turnover. Operators prefer controls that offer simple command of the functionality desired – from basic control to digital readouts and timers.”

COOK SMARTER

The need for simplicity, consistency and quality will stimulate more interest in smart kitchens in the post-Covid world.

“We will see more investment in intelligent ovens,” says FCSI Associate Heraldo Blasco, a foodservice consultant based in Argentina. “They can be operated by anyone, they can be programmed from a cellphone, and the programs allow for standardization, which means a consistent menu can be rolled out across a small chain very easily.”

“There is a growing demand for programmable cooking technology, which is simple to use and delivers consistent quality,” says Laura Lentz FCSI, design principal at US consultancy Culinary Advisors. “Restaurants are looking to increase sales without hiring more people, and intelligent ovens are among the technologies that can help with that.”

For Welbilt, multi-purpose cooking technology with smart capability is central to its pursuit of innovation. “Ovens that are flexible, that can connect to the cloud and upload the digital information necessary to enable a wide range of cooking functions continue to

get smaller and more flexible with more widespread adoption of accelerated cooking,” says Caron. “Cognitive automation is emerging fast, enabling the operator to make better decisions about what and when to cook to fulfil the omni-channel demands that Covid has created.”

This technology is fundamental to the rise of ghost kitchens, which are set up for the preparation of delivery-only meals. Furthermore, the growing use of data and connectivity in the kitchen plays a key role in food safety and energy efficiency, as it enables the precise tracking of temperatures and cooktimes.

“In the near term, it is obvious that off-premises will be the dominant model for a while,” says Livchak. “The pandemic’s biggest influence on the marketplace has been the emergence of off-premises dining as the dominant business model. We anticipate that as the industry starts to rebound, this trend will continue. We will see more small, flexible and ventless table-top equipment such as high-speed ovens, induction, and high-speed panini presses. There may also be more small, high-speed pizza ovens.”

As always, the market will respond to the needs of the people designing the kitchens and buying the equipment. For consultants in these testing times, it is vital to know all the hot-side options and to continue helping kitchens to evolve. ■

“THERE IS A GROWING DEMAND FOR PROGRAMMABLE COOKING TECHNOLOGY, WHICH IS SIMPLE TO USE AND DELIVERS CONSISTENT QUALITY”



Above: FCSI Associate Heraldo Blasco is based in Argentina

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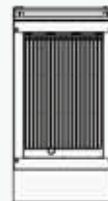
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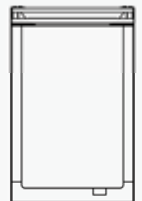
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COLD-SIDE TECHNOLOGY

Cooling in the time of Covid

Efficiency and versatility have dominated the development of cold-side technology for years, but Covid-19 is changing the way the industry operates and forcing operators and manufacturers to reassess their priorities. Jim Banks looks at how refrigeration technology will evolve through the pandemic.



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The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the foodservice sector. Social distancing, lockdowns, restrictions on indoor seating and a huge swing towards takeaway and delivery have left some operators struggling to adapt. The rules of the business are changing, sometimes from one day to the next, so planning for the future is a big challenge.

As always, technology will play a part in how the industry reinvents itself, as it is essential to work in both smarter and safer ways to survive.

“Restaurants have had to close then open then close again, and the rules can change overnight,” says Laura Lentz FCSI, design principal at US consultancy Culinary Advisors. “Covid makes people more thoughtful about technology and makes them appreciate it more. Restaurants managing inventory in an inconsistent situation are grateful that they can blast chill food rather than throwing it away.”

“We all saw our entire lives flipped upside down in the last year,” notes Brett Daniel FCSI of consultancy Camacho in Georgia, US. “Before the pandemic we were all trying to reduce the footprint of kitchens as well as increasing efficiency. Now, with social distancing the norm, we’re still increasing efficiency and looking to do more with less, while, at the same time, also trying to minimize contact between employees.”

Many kitchens are being retrofitted for takeout and delivery, often with areas that operate almost independently of the regular kitchen. Ordering systems, menus, storage and food ordering are all adapting to a different business model.

“One thing is for certain, necessity is the mother of invention,” says Daniel.

THE INNOVATION EXPRESS

In some sectors, notably healthcare, normal service has continued. In some regions, the corporate sector is looking

at a return to work and is ramping up catering services. In these, and other parts of the industry, technology is essential in adapting to change.

“Operators are asking how they can leverage technology to improve customer service and quality,” adds Lentz. “Designers of new projects now realize that they need to look at technology upfront, whether it is for ordering, payment, cooking or chilling. Technology must be a foundation of the planning process.”

“Large commercial foodservice chains can demand equipment manufacturers design more customized refrigeration equipment that fits their needs and smaller specialized spaces,” says Denis Livchak, senior designer at Frontier Energy Inc. “The rise and rapid growth of off-premises dining is really dictating how space is used, the notion being more food from operations that have smaller production spaces but larger hot and cold holding areas.”

Manufacturers have worked closely with their customers to understand the changes that the pandemic has brought. In some ways, priorities have not changed, but the ability of some operators to invest in new technologies has been severely limited.

“The choice that people face is to close because of Covid or to close because of bankruptcy,” says FCSI Associate Heraldo Blasco, based in Argentina.

The number of cases of Covid is growing rapidly in Latin America, in a trajectory indicative of the global pattern. There, as in Europe and the US, restrictions on operation have hit the profitability of foodservice businesses, so operators are looking at ways to innovate, in terms of both technology and business practices, to maximise efficiency and remain sufficiently profitable to survive.

“Only the biggest companies are thinking about investing in new >

**“RESTAURANTS
MANAGING INVENTORY
IN AN INCONSISTENT
SITUATION ARE
GRATEFUL THAT THEY
CAN BLAST CHILL
FOOD RATHER THAN
THROWING IT AWAY”**



Above top: Laura Lentz FCSI, Culinary Advisors, US. Below: Brett Daniel FCSI, Camacho, US



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technologies,” says Blasco. “Their goal is to work with fewer people because labor is one of their biggest costs. The focus of investment in new technology is to require fewer people to do the same job in less space. The problem, however, is that many businesses lack the cash flow to invest.”

“Since chains have done better in the pandemic, they will be replacing any existing refrigeration equipment that goes down, but it will be a few years before the industry shows any significant rebound or expansion,” says Livchak of the global situation. “Meanwhile, kitchens that are open at partial capacity are recommended to consolidate their refrigeration space. Ghost kitchens are becoming more prevalent and they may have more centralized refrigeration, such as walk-in coolers, than smaller reach-in coolers.”

Only large QSR chains may be in a position to invest in new equipment, but manufacturers are still focused on delivering next-generation technology, in readiness for an uptick in business.

“On the cold side, a lot of the trends that we expect to prevail in 2021 will be continuations of changes that began in 2020,” says Chance Hunt, product manager at stainless steel equipment manufacturer LTI Inc. “We and many other industry experts expect several

of the short-term adaptations to stick around. Some dining habit changes, such as relying more on pick-up and delivery, are expected to be permanent even when foodservice returns to something resembling the pre-pandemic normal.”

“As with almost any kind of crisis, Covid-19 has accelerated innovation in cold side equipment,” he adds. “In addition to the growth and advancement of cold food lockers, the industry has also seen a lot of creative thinking around cold merchandising. Manufacturers have had to consider how to showcase the pre-packaged foods that dominate a lot of today’s foodscape, allowing consumers to still ‘eat with their eyes’ while also feeling their food is safe and secure.”

STAYING SUSTAINABLE

Overall, the pandemic has slowed the pace of foodservice R&D, with manufacturers focused more on providing equipment parts and improving reliability.

“Sadly, Covid has dominated everything, but eventually environmental considerations will return,” says Chris Stern FCSI, managing director of Stern Consultancy, UK. “However, using equipment flexibly is an ongoing trend, as it ensures equipment can be adapted over time for varying uses and layouts.”

Nevertheless, sustainability remains >

“ON THE COLD SIDE, A LOT OF THE TRENDS THAT WE EXPECT TO PREVAIL IN 2021 WILL BE CONTINUATIONS OF CHANGES THAT BEGAN IN 2020”

Larger, walk-in coolers will be more popular due to the rise of the ghost kitchen with its centralized refrigeration



a high priority for the industry, driven in part by regulatory standards, such as mandatory EPA low global warming potential (GWP) refrigerant regulations or ENERGY STAR.

“On the commercial kitchen side, more and more refrigeration equipment categories are adopting low GWP refrigerants including ice machines, soft serve machines and prep tables,” notes Livchak. “Blast chillers are slowly gaining more traction in the US market – a trend partially led by experienced foodservice consultants who understand how important it is to use this equipment to modify and modernize kitchen production strategies.”

POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITIES

The post-pandemic world may see more intense efforts to improve resource efficiency, as lower operating costs and a greener footprint will always be among the industry’s priorities.

“Everyone wants refrigerants to be zero GWP, so it will be interesting to see how that can be achieved with larger refrigeration systems while staying safe,” adds Livchak. “Zeotropic refrigerant blends like R446, R447 and R451 are close to being accepted, so manufacturers may already be trying to integrate them into walk-in coolers and ice machines.”

In many parts of the foodservice

sector, revenues are tight, and it is a brave move to invest in new technology when no one is sure when the pandemic will end or when business might return to pre-Covid levels, given the impact of the virus on the broader economy. Nevertheless, the spark of innovation never goes out.

In the post-pandemic world, new technology will be needed to help the industry adapt to a new way of doing business, but for now, the short-term priority is survival.

“Independent restaurant operators are just trying to stay open and any health code violation could set them back, so they are more vigilant about keeping food at a safe temperature,” believes Livchak. “However, most independent operators don’t have the capital to invest into new refrigeration equipment and will probably nurse their existing equipment along, even if their old equipment is on its last legs.”

For cold-side equipment, the market needs reliable equipment that can operate efficiently in a time of changing demand patterns. When revenues return, investment in new technology will become a priority, so manufacturers must work with their clients, and with consultants, to ensure the new breed of chillers, refrigerators and freezers is what the industry needs. ■

Covid: playing a part in the vaccination program

Vaccination programs for Covid-19 are under way in earnest around the world and keeping the vaccines cold is of vital importance. While the Pfizer vaccine must be stored at -70°C, and the Moderna vaccine must be kept at around -20°C, the AstraZeneca vaccine developed in the UK can be stored and transported at normal refrigeration temperatures of between 2°C and 8°C.

The latter opens up the potential for commercial refrigeration to play a part in the vaccination rollout.

“Mainly for the healthcare industry, the ability to keep medicines and vaccines cold in remote areas, as well as added emergency refrigeration and storage, is important,” says Camacho’s Brett Daniel. “The Covid-19 pandemic has driven the need for more readily available, mobile refrigeration.”

Some companies have offered their refrigeration capacity, although there has been little response so far. Indeed, some manufacturers have urged caution.

Kitchen equipment manufacturer Hoshizaki, for instance, has stated that, while the AstraZeneca vaccine can be stored in its Climate Class 4 rated or higher refrigerators, a domestic, Climate Class 3 (or lower rated) refrigerator cannot provide a temperature range stable enough.

“Medical refrigeration is a totally different sector,” notes Frontier Energy’s Livchak. “We cannot say with any certainty that commercial foodservice units will be adequate to do much vaccine storage based on extremely low-temperature vaccine requirements, however, that may change with newer vaccines that may not require such intense storage.”

“Still, the mixing of food and medicine is a tricky area and perhaps the closest it will come is the use of pharmacies in grocery stores for administration of the vaccine.”

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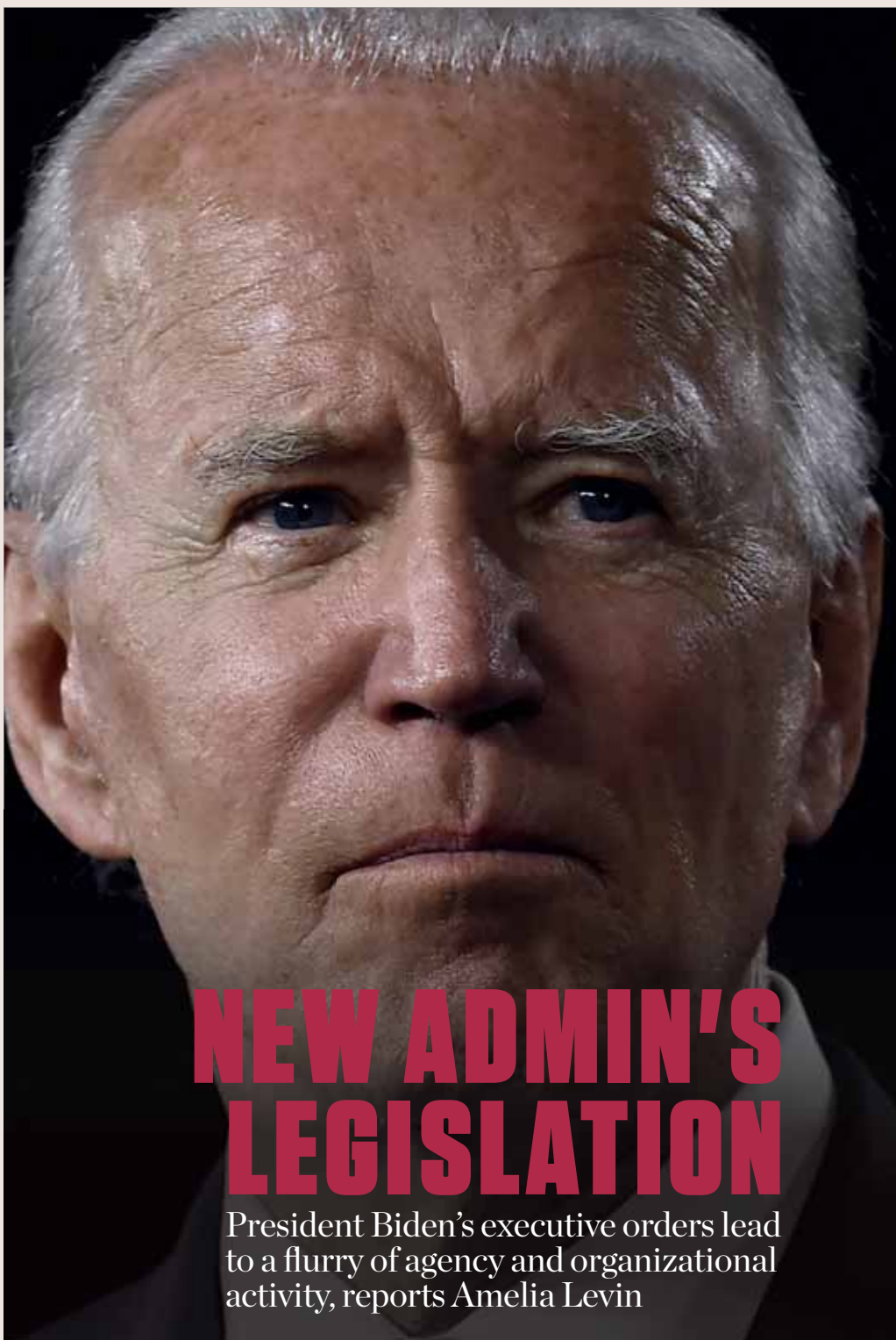
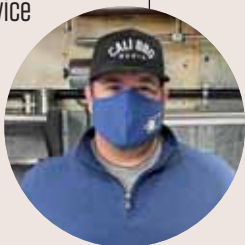
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My kitchen: Shawn Walchef explains how he is adapting the kitchen at his restaurant Cali BBQ to cater for foodservice after the pandemic



NEW ADMIN'S LEGISLATION

President Biden's executive orders lead to a flurry of agency and organizational activity, reports Amelia Levin

During his first 100 days in office, President Biden signed a series of executive orders intended to speed up vaccine distribution and ensure that businesses reopen safely, which has spurred various agencies and organizations to meet and address these calls to action.

Safety and sick employee protocol

The National Restaurant Association's Restaurant Law Center recently released guidance on what to do when staffers fall ill with Covid-19. Employers should ensure their employees know they should not come to work if they are sick and should notify their manager or other designated Covid-19 point of contact.

If an employee becomes sick with Covid-19 symptoms while at work, tests positive for Covid-19, or has been exposed to someone with Covid-19 or its symptoms, the employee should notify his or her supervisor or other designated Covid point of contact.

Employers need to immediately separate employees who have Covid-19 symptoms, according to the guidance. Sick individuals should go home or to a healthcare facility. Employees should not return to work until they meet the criteria – in consultation with their health-care provider – to discontinue home isolation.

Critical Infrastructure employees who have been exposed but remain asymptomatic could be asked to stay home for 14 days from the last exposure, or they may be allowed to return to work following these precautions:

- A designee takes the employee's temperature and assesses symptoms prior to starting each shift
- The employee self-monitors throughout the day, on alert for symptoms
- The employee wears a face mask while in the workplace and washes hands often
- The employee practices social

The National Restaurant Association has pushed for priority testing and vaccination for foodservice and restaurant workers to ensure food security and a safe food system

distancing and maintains a six-foot separation as work duties permit

- The operation increases the frequency of cleaning commonly touched surfaces
- If the employee becomes sick during the day, he or she is immediately sent home

Contact-tracing employees exposed to Covid-19 should begin immediately. Employers are allowed to ask a Covid-19-positive employee which coworkers he or she was in "close contact" with (within six feet for more than 15 minutes) during the prior two weeks, or check shift schedules.

In accordance with state and local laws, operators should notify local health officials and staff of any case of Covid-19 among employees, while maintaining confidentiality in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Those who have had close contact with a person diagnosed with Covid-19 should stay home, self-monitor for symptoms, and follow CDC guidance if they develop.

In terms of cleaning and disinfecting an area where a positive tested colleague worked, employers should close off areas used by a sick person and wait at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting.

Employers may ask for a "fitness for duty/return to work" medical clearance note prior to a sick employee returning for work. Some jurisdictions, such as New York, do not allow employers to ask for notes from asymptomatic employees. If an employee tests positive for Covid-19, it isn't the end of the world. The public will be forgiving if an operator shows it

handled the situation properly, followed all protocols, and that the restaurant environment is safe.

Vaccine distribution

As of press time, there was no guidance for foodservice businesses in terms of vaccine distribution (or enforcement) specific to their type of operation or industry. However, the federal government has identified those in foodservice as essential workers.

Foodservice workers are recommended in phase 1(c) of the CDC's lists of who should be vaccinated when supply is limited, falling just behind high-risk healthcare workers, the elderly and frontline essential workers. The National Restaurant Association has pushed for priority testing and vaccination for foodservice and restaurant workers to ensure food security and a safe food system.

Starbucks was among the first businesses to announce plans to push its home state of Washington to speed up vaccine rollout and distribution. According to reports, Yum! Brands and Chipotle do not plan to mandate vaccinations for its workers, but they will strongly encourage them. However, few other businesses have come forward with clear directives on that issue.

Outside of the US, JA Resorts & Hotels stated in early January that it had completed an employee vaccine drive in which of 80% of all eligible employees across seven Dubai hotels and resorts, had received the first dose of the Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccination.

"We wanted our team to receive the vaccine as quickly as possible and we were delighted that huge numbers of eligible team-members volunteered to take it," Robert Mikaelian, VP of human resources, said in a statement. "This vaccine not only protects our team but should also reassure guests that we do all we can to keep them safe and comfortable." ■



AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

Where many restaurants have struggled to stave off disaster in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, convenience stores are juggling new foodservice opportunities, as Howard Riell outlines



Convenience stores, known colloquially as c-stores, with foodservice programs have a chance to benefit from the blows dealt to their restaurant competitors, but they need to adjust their approach to align with new realities.

“The hardest change any operator has to make is to change the mindset of ‘business as unusual,’” says **Arlene Spiegel** FCSI, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City.



“Everything that was part of ‘normal’ operations has to be looked at and modified through the lens of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state regulation guidelines. That includes all of the basics – purchasing, receiving, storing, preparing, merchandising and selling products. It includes safety and sanitation of equipment, staff and contactless packaging.”

C-stores, Spiegel notes, have a particular challenge in that their premises are often small and lack the necessary space to allow for adequate safe distancing of staff or customers. “Many have been able to create a safe line-up outside their venues, including in parking lots,” she says.

Technology has made business possible through the use of QR codes, mobile ordering, third-party delivery apps and safe curbside pick-up. “Those operators who adapted actually thrived in this environment, especially the drive-thru c-stores. The ‘new normal’ for operators that embrace and master the new challenges can lead to a new prosperity model,” Spiegel adds.



Whether or not c-stores in general have thus far adjusted well “depends on the level of foodservice that they had in the first place,” suggests **Armand Iaia** FCSI, the Chicago-based regional manager for Cini•Little International in Des Plaines, Illinois. “Some just had snacks and

did not have to do much at all. Others that had more elaborate food ended up decommissioning equipment items because they just would not meet the new regulations.”

With the presumption that vaccines will allow things to return to normal in a year or so, Iaia says: “Any changes should be enough to get through the year providing enough minimal service to the patron. Most people understand the reason for the change.” He advises operators not to offer self-serve food that is not pre-packaged.

Ironically, the Covid pandemic can serve as a “great equalizer” when it comes to foodservice, according to **Rudy Miick** FCSI, founder and president of The Miick Companies in Boulder, Colorado. “With limited access into a store, or curbside/at-the-door service, suddenly a Subway/Jimmy Johns, a Panera, a Golden Corral, an Olive Garden, a five-star restaurant and a 7-Eleven, Mini-Mart or Chevron partner all have the same guest experience opportunity. The customer has to walk up, open a door – or not – give an order or pick something up quickly and go,” he explains.

“Strategically, stores need to morph even faster to foodservice as more and more restaurants close,” says **John Matthews**, president and CEO of Gray Cat Enterprises in Raleigh, North Carolina, a strategic planning and marketing services firm that specializes in the restaurant, convenience and general retail industries. “There is clearly a race for share-of-stomach, and the starting gun has already sounded. Consideration needs to be made in the safety procedures around foodservice handling, social distancing queuing, pickup/delivery options and non-traditional concepts. Could the store-of-the-future be a mini warehouse?”

“How this all plays out will be a moving target, but c-stores need



to overhaul their strategic capital expenditure going forward.”

CHANGING OPERATIONS

While c-stores always adapt to local market areas, the following strategies are common to all locations that can advance foodservice programs.

Expanded transactions: With safety in mind, c-stores need to expand their transactions to include a combination of alternative checkout options. “Touchless via an app, curbside pickup keeping the customer from entering the store, and delivery all need to become viable options to address the wide-ranging perspectives of our customers,” says Matthews. “Many customers will feel fine coming into the store while others won’t go near you with a 10-ft pole. Options are a must.”

Cooking and food prep: Buddy Gillespie, director of culinary for JBH Advisory Group in New York City, recommends c-stores “get out of the cooking game entirely and be reheat-only. Convenience stores should do all they can to reduce any and all raw food production or cooking within their store locations and food production facilities. Utilizing the convenient, fully cooked proteins, such as those cooked with sous vide, is not only safer but reduces overall labor and skill levels needed. Purchase foods that are ready to heat and serve, such as fully cooked pastas and rice for bowl bases or completed sauces that need no additional cooking or mixing.”

Meal solutions: Another opportunity for c-store operators to take advantage of is the increased demand for good quality prepared foods and meal solutions, says Spiegel. “Operators have expanded their current offerings and/or have partnered with restaurants and caterers to provide



packaged meals to sell at their stores.” Equipment and supply companies have helped by supplying wayfinding signage and contactless serving equipment for hot and cold beverages, as well as PPE supplies and sanitation dispensers.

Sanitation: Eric Patterson, merchandising manager for Quick-Sav Food Stores in Flint, Michigan, which operates 25 Beacon & Bridge Market convenience stores across the state, believes c-stores “are going to have to really focus on cleanliness and have dedicated personnel to cook and prep food. The days of one clerk being able to service customers and maintain foodservice are gone because customers are paying closer attention to the quality of the food and the procedures taken to prepare that food.” In fact,



items can be limited to individually packaged products. There has also been an uptick in retailer desire for touchless equipment such as soda dispensers.

Curbside service: This will be a huge point of differentiation post-Covid, says Patterson. “If we want to reach a new customer base and maintain current customers it will be absolutely necessary to have this ability. If customers did not see the value in curbside before Covid, they do now. If they took/take advantage of other retailers’ curbside option during Covid, they will expect it post-Covid.”

Delivery: Patterson feels the options for delivery will continue to be limited in the c-store arena since traditional operators lack the capability to pay additional associates to be available for delivery service. “Single-coverage stores would turn into double-coverage stores, and there would not be any guarantee that delivery requests would come in.”

Apps: Retailers without an all-encompassing app in 2021 will be at a disadvantage for multiple reasons, says Patterson, missing out on opportunities from cigarette discounts and loyalty to digital coupon offers and curbside delivery.

Barriers: Physical changes such as barriers are “a definite yes,” says Iaia. However, “they need to be able to be removed easily when all of this is over.”

Employee training: Training programs must be upgraded to accommodate new realities. “Most definitely, if these employees have to do any kind of food handling,” says Iaia.

Signage: Shoppers, Iaia feels, “will appreciate a message that apologizes for any inconvenience and explains that the changes are in response to the virus and the store is doing this to ensure the safety of the customer.” ■



Patterson is convinced c-stores are held to a higher standard when it comes to cleanliness and sanitation. “It will be a driving reason for customer retention. If your stores are dirty and you aren’t taking all steps necessary to maintain a healthy environment, customers will notice and go elsewhere.”

Air: Open kitchens with maximum air flow are preferred in cooking areas. HVAC systems should also be maintained to ensure they are operating at maximum efficiency for best air flow.

Contact: Effort should be made to reduce physical contact wherever possible. Digital-ordering kiosks and ordering via smartphone can replace face-to-face contact, and grab-and-go self-service

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SIGN UP FOR A NEW CULTURAL REVOLUTION

After receiving the world's first regulatory approval for cultured meats, Eat Just made the first commercial sale of its cultured chicken product in Singapore last year >



It's known by many names: cultured meat, synthetic or in vitro meat, cellular agriculture or lab-grown meat. Whatever the label, it's all the same product; meat that is created directly from animal cells.

Eat Just, the US company that combines science and technology to create sustainable meat from animal cells, launched the cultured chicken product at a commercial dinner in Singapore at the end of 2020.

The commercial launch of the GOOD Meat cultured chicken took place at a dinner in the city's club 1880. The event came weeks after the company received regulatory approval for sale of the ingredient in chicken bites as the first in the world.

Josh Tetrick, co-founder and CEO of Eat Just, the owners of the GOOD Meat brand, hailed the regulatory approval in Singapore after the announcement. "Singapore has long been a leader in innovation of all kinds, from information technology to biologics to now leading the world in building a healthier, safer food system," he said. "Working in partnership with the broader agriculture sector and forward-thinking policymakers, companies like ours can help meet the increased demand for animal protein as our population climbs to 9.7 billion by 2050."

Eat Just creates meat directly from animal cells for human



The dinner in Singapore's 1880 where the Eat Just GOOD Meat cultured chicken had its commercial launch

“My father dedicated his life to the idea that human ingenuity could take this concept from the realm of science fiction to real food that nourishes our bodies”



consumption, a process that has accelerated in recent years.

The progress and development of cultured meat has built in recent years in response to fears about the environment. At the same time, meat production has risen, and by 2050, consumption is projected to increase over 70%. It is believed that major public health crises have been linked to patterns of conventional meat consumption, so safer, more efficient and less environmentally harmful ways of producing meat are urgently required to satisfy growing consumer demand.

Man of vision

Though the process and product may be relatively new today, the idea of developing meat without rearing the whole animal goes back decades and the identity of one early proponent may surprise some. Former British prime minister Winston Churchill speculated in a 1931 essay, published in *Strand* magazine, that one day meat substitutes would enter our kitchens. “With a greater knowledge of what are called hormones, the chemical messengers in our blood, it will be possible to control growth,” he wrote. “We shall escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat the breast or wing, by growing these parts separately under a suitable medium.”

He can’t have envisaged the wild

popularity of the lab-grown burger but his vision was subsequently pursued by the Dutch researcher Willem van Eelen (see box right) who spent his life researching the possibility of making lab-grown meat from cells for human consumption.

Doing things better

When van Eelen passed away, Eat Just acquired his patents as part of a broader intellectual portfolio and his daughter Ira became a friend and adviser to the company. “My father dedicated his life to the idea that human ingenuity could take this concept from the realm of science fiction to real food that nourishes our bodies,” Ira van Eelen said. “This launch and future developments in the field will impact our relationship with the food we eat and the planet we inhabit. This marks the beginning of us doing things better than we have done for thousands of years.”

“This historic accomplishment is not the result of a single company’s actions – far from it,” said Tetric. “It’s the result of the imagination and tenacity of Willem van Eelen as well as the many scientists, educators and entrepreneurs in the field who believed in the power of this idea before most of the folks at my company were even born, including me. Today, we’re thankful for them and will continue to carry on their important work.” ■



The godfather of cultured meats

Though lab-grown meat is widely referenced today, few know about its origins – or the man who pioneered its development.

Willem van Eelen was born in Indonesia and went to medical school in the Netherlands. It was during his medical studies that he came across a group of researchers in the laboratory using stem cell technology to grow cells in a tank, ultimately hoping to create skin for burns victims.

It planted a seed in the mind of van Eelen: Can this be used for food?

He made it his mission to develop safe, sustainable meat production from cells instead of live animals, earning him the nickname of the godfather of cultured meat. Securing investment for his quest was a challenge, but due to his determination, by the early 1990s he had raised an impressive \$750,000 and started filing for his first patents in 1994, by this time in his mid eighties. Later, he joined forces with the American Jon F. Vein who had filed for a US patent. Together they continued to further the project while fundraising.

By 2005 van Eelen had launched a cultured meat research program in the Netherlands and in 2009 scientists announced they’d grown meat using cells from a live pig.

MICHAEL HUGHES

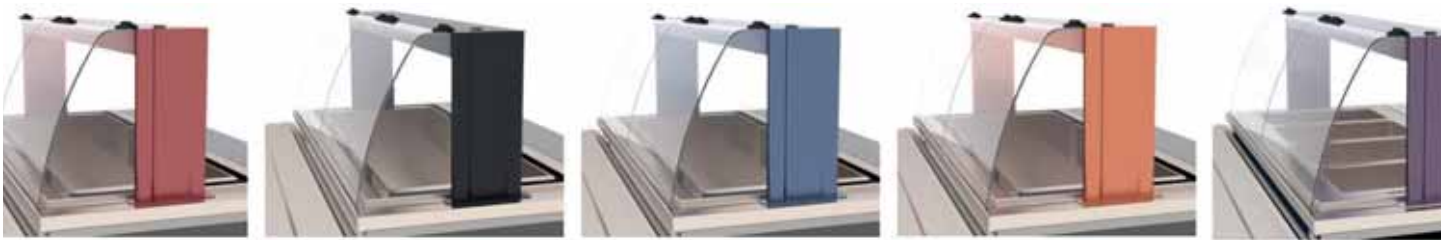
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ALERT TO ALLERGENS

A new, more rigorous, requirement to list all ingredients on food packaging comes into force in the UK later this year. **Julian Edwards FCSI** tells **Jon Horsley** how **Natasha's Law** came about

On July 17, 2016, 15-year-old Natasha Ednan-Laperouse was about to take off for a dream trip to Nice, France, with her father and her best friend. For a snack to keep her full on the British Airways flight, Natasha picked up a vegan sandwich, the artichoke, olive and tapenade from fast-casual chain Pret A Manger at Heathrow Terminal 5.

She and her father were aware that she was severely allergic to sesame – but as they both checked the label and as no sesame was listed, they decided it would be fine. They had no idea that the sandwich bread

was made with part sesame flour.

Half an hour into her flight, she began to feel ill, by the time the flight landed she had suffered a heart attack and by 8pm, she was pronounced dead.

Ever since her tragic death, her parents have pushed for legislation to require producers of pre-packed foods to list all their ingredients and because of this the so-called 'Natasha's Law' will come into force in the UK on 1 October 2021.

It requires that all PPDS (pre-packed for direct sale) food items have a full ingredients list on their packaging – including the composition of other items that are sourced ready-made elsewhere. This means the label must have the name of the food as well as a list of ingredients of each constituent part with allergens emphasized. >

labeling, it's going to be a lot of effort.

“You can't just make a homemade cheese sandwich and slap a wrapper on it with cheese and bread as the ingredients. You need to list everything – and that's an extra layer of work. And then of course you're going to need someone to sign off on that label. That might mean it's easier to buy from a manufacturer, who does it all for you. And if you're doing that, it defeats the object of having freshly prepared items in a sandwich.

“You can sustainably procure them, have diligent checks to get the best ingredients, but then the labeling might be too much, and that would be a shame. We could lose a lot

“It should have no impact on hotels, restaurants and pubs. And there's no change in takeaway labeling, you still have to request the allergens at the point of order”

of ‘homemade’ items that will go forever, as they're simply not sustainable. That would obviously be a big shame and we hope that it doesn't happen. We'd encourage operators to start preparing early to beat the rush. You can't just start the day before.”

Many producers will not face any of these issues, however because the legislation is mainly aimed at the pre-packed market.

“It should have no impact on hotels, restaurants and pubs,” adds Edwards. “And there's no change in takeaway labeling, you still have to request the allergens at the point of order. But things that are pre-packed for a rush – say McDonald's breakfast sandwiches in the morning – they will have to be labeled.”



BEFORE

GrabbaCiabbatta

Cheese & Homemade Pickle Sandwich

Contains (Allergens): **Wheat, Milk**
Use by: xx/xx/xx

AFTER

GrabbaCiabbatta

Cheese & Homemade Pickle Sandwich

Ingredients: strong white flour (**wheat**), calcium carbonate, iron, niacin, thiamine, salt, yeast, olive oil, water, cheese (**milk**), butter (**milk**), onions, non-iodised salt, golden castor sugar, **mustard** powder, **mustard** seeds, **celery** seeds, dried chilli, turmeric
Use by: xx/xx/xx

There could also be possible loopholes for producers to exploit – the legislation does not require hot dogs presented in an open container to have all ingredients labeled as they count as food that “can be altered without opening or changing the packaging”. Also, foods ordered by the consumer, such as a sandwich, which is then prepared in a deli, do not require the labeling.

“Some of the legislation with regard to half packaging is open to interpretation,” says Edwards. “And that is a worry. They think it makes sense for hot dogs because you can put ketchup on yourself – and that is a change – but it's a shame they weren't a bit more explicit about what you can and can't do with partial packaging. The government did try to have a conversation. Unfortunately, not many foodservice operators contributed.”

There may well be issues around enforcement as Environmental Health Officers who would uphold the law are stretched across many issues in the UK. “It is subject to fines, but in a way the enforcement society is in catch up mode,” explains Edwards. “Because of a greater remit for environmental health officers – who now have to deal with noise pollution and more.

“I hope operators get behind it more because it is the right thing to do and the allergen market is a huge market. The more positive PR you get, the more access to this market you will have.”

And Edwards believes that where Britain goes now the world will probably follow.

“From an FCSI point of view, this is best practice,” he says. “And we're all about sharing that. There could be other countries doing better than us, but I think we're doing very well and this law is a further step in the right direction.” ■

EAME

MY KITCHEN

Shawn Walchef

The owner of Cali BBQ tells Howard Riell about adapting his California restaurant and creating friendly ghost kitchens

Since opening Cali BBQ in 2008, my wife Rositsa and I have incorporated the Bulgarian traditions of hospitality into every facet of our business – from evolving our restaurant for 2020 and beyond to publishing podcasts and other digital media through Cali BBQ Media.

The full-service restaurant model is broken. We can no longer provide the type of hospitality at costs that are sustainable. That's why we will be converting our existing full-service restaurant and sports bar and taking away 60% of our dining room to build a master smokehouse to not only facilitate the seven to 10 ghost kitchen locations we plan to add, but also operate future virtual brands.

A master smokehouse means we will have all our pit-master labor in one location, which will ensure a high level of quality across all remote kitchens. We are planning to open our first ghost kitchen in the first quarter of 2021. The next six to nine will be built within three years. We estimate it will cost \$75,350 to open each.

Our ghost kitchens are digital restaurants; customers order on their phones or computers for pickup or delivery. It's safe and simple. Each one will measure 200 sq ft in a commissary kitchen with 19 other brands that are also operating out of 200-sq-ft kitchens. It's a virtual food court for takeout and delivery.

The biggest challenge is building new

repeat customers who order directly from us and believe in our brand. We will accomplish this as we always have, by being a part of our community where our kitchens are located. That's why we call our ghost kitchens friendly ghost kitchens."

We believe that utilizing the latest restaurant and hospitality technologies are the keys to growth.

We will focus, as we have for the last year, on our award-winning slow-smoked barbecue, cocktails to go, retail BBQ sauce and other e-commerce. Our most popular dish is The Tailgater. It includes all of our slow-smoked barbecue meats and a selection of sides, including wedding beans and our homemade jalapeño cornbread. ■

The latest restaurant and hospitality technologies will help us grow

We are building a smokehouse in our existing restaurant

The full-service restaurant model is broken. We can no longer operate profitably into the future

Each of our planned ghost kitchens will measure 200 sq ft



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