



## **BAUM+WHITEMAN PREDICTS 2021's HOTTEST FOOD & BEVERAGE TRENDS IN RESTAURANT & HOTELS**

It seems absurd to wonder if kalettes will be next year's hit vegetable, or whether square plates are still trendy when many restaurants are serving on paper. Amid swirling economic and social upheavals, [Baum+Whiteman's](#) 2021 trends report will concentrate more on big changes in how we'll eat in 2021 ... *and where*. For this year's forecast, we promise not to use the words "New Normal".

**Note: Some forecasts depend on mass effectiveness of a Covid vaccine**

### **-- 1 Dining Will Be Different in 2021. And Beyond.**

When restaurants get back on their feet you can expect: highly limited menus, no table cloths, lots of masks and safety barriers, pouring your own wine, no more sharing platters, simpler food, diminished service, fewer celebrations, goodbye buffets ... and you'll probably be distracted by delivery people hustling through dining areas as restaurants of all types strain for off-premises revenue. Emerging from the abnormal condition is this monster of a problem: Radically reduced human interaction between

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Baum+Whiteman creates high-profile restaurants around the world for hotels, restaurant companies, museums and other consumer destinations.

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customers and servers, and even among tablemates. *Apart from staying alive, restaurants' mammoth challenge in 2021 will be to somehow re-invent a warm, happy social experience ... which is why most of us eat out in the first place.*

## **-- 2 Expect Far Fewer Restaurants. Why Is That Good?**

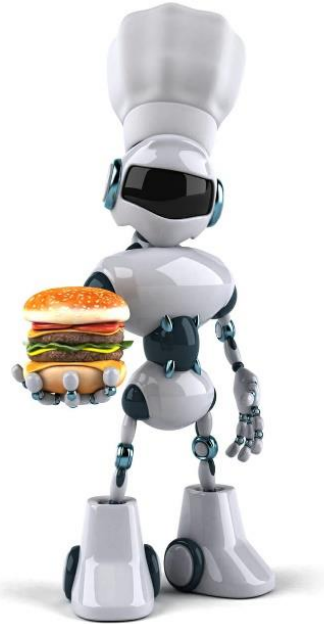
Saying this in public will get us in trouble, but fewer restaurants will be a good thing. No one disputes that, like shopping centers, this country has had too many restaurants chasing too few consumers ... and Covid exposed that underlying weakness. It'll 2022 before fast food/drive-thru/delivery restaurants fully recover ... and 2024 or later before sitdown restaurants prosper. But prospering depends on ruthless winnowing of operators, and this includes chains (closing restaurants in big bunches) and independents (going under one by one).

*The upshot, eventually, should be higher menu prices charged by fewer restaurants.* And: Responding to unstoppable calls for gender-racial-class equity ... and operators' fears of being called out, cancelled, and shamed for the slightest misdeeds ... wages will go up. This also should be a good thing. Because why should waitresses in some states work for \$2.13 an hour ... and why should kitchen (and slaughterhouse) laborers earn less than half a living wage while taxpayers subsidize the difference via welfare payments?

*If higher prices mean fewer people dining out, then there's a reckoning and rebalancing to be done for the industry's business model.*

We see the no-tipping concept getting another trial run. We see redistribution of payroll dollars among restaurant workers. We see landlords rethinking inflated rents... often with their bank's agreements ... as "restaurants" gravitate to offline presence only.

-- **2 Say Bye-Bye to Printed Menus.** Learn to tolerate those dreaded QR codes on restaurant tables. Restaurants save printing costs and get better accuracy of orders hitting the kitchen since the customer does the work ... bypassing the waiter. And QR codes are good for touchless ordering and speedily settling your bill. But for consumers, tomorrow's tech-driven torture will be punching your teeny smartphone keys to assemble complex meals for a group. A partial solution ... from your mouth to a robot's ears ... lies in voice recognition's ability understand various accents in our global population. When that happens, you'll be talking to your phone ... *but the phone connects not to a cook, but to a robot running the kitchen.* More robots in kitchen will be a years-running trend. "Mommy, what's a waiter?"



-- **3 Your Favorite Chefs Aren't Cooking There Anymore.** With thousands of restaurants shuttered and more to come, star chefs are doing gigs. They're opening popup restaurants in vacant spaces ... cutting short-term rent deals with pliable landlords. Or their doing popups in friends' restaurants or from their home kitchens. At the same time, they're abandoning fancy photogenic food ... focusing instead on making, for example, the best possible barbecue, or the Platonic hamburger, or knock-your-socks-off salsa for their ultimate roast chicken. *High-quality comfort food that's priced right for these specific times.*

#### **-- 4 How Permanent Are Behavioral Shifts in Eating Habits?**

This is an enormous issue! Pre-Covid, American's led fractured food lives, became a country of solo snackers and desktop diners. Now, the focus is on the home: kids not in school; workers not in offices, travel plans shunted ... so Covid is a catalyst for families re-gathering around the dinner table. Perhaps two-thirds of families are eating more home-cooked meals. Many are nostalgic in nature ... *call them throwback comfort foods* ... that make no effort to mimic what you'd get at the drive-thru or your corner bistro. Equally important, rising home delivery from restaurants and online stores exposes consumers to specialty ingredients typically used by restaurants ... and they're learning to use them in online cooking schools.

Snacking is up, too ... a mechanism for coping with boredom ... but those snacks increasingly are fresh fruit and healthful packaged goods.



*These new eating trends will continue through the year ahead and beyond ... because working from home isn't going away ... because who knows how long colleges will stay online-only, or how much online education will expand ... and because families just might get to like each other, especially now that drinking's on the rise, too (up 15%-30%, depending on whose data you read). For more on in-home dining, see next item.*

## -- 6 Restaurant Brands in Home Kitchens

After forced shutdowns, thousands of restaurants pivoted to selling homemade pantry items and sweet goods ... even opening their own bakeries ... offsetting the pain cause by shifting shutdown rules. That trend accelerates in 2021 because operators love the incremental revenue... and, more

importantly, these items represent brand extensions to existing businesses. So proprietary spice mixes, dumplings, noodles and pasta sauces, inventive breads and signature pastries, fancy cheeses and charcuterie, rendered duck fat, CSA boxes, fresh meat and fish ... even professional cookware, meal kits and prepared dinners ... are invading home kitchens emblazoned

with restaurants' logos. Some restaurants are selling their own china and flatware. Since consumers, pre-Covid, visited restaurants about twice as often as food stores, this strategy will be great way to win back customers lost to supermarkets in recent years.

Recognizing that the Covid bump in online ordering is here to stay, it's increasingly easy for restaurants to grab extra sales along with regular meal orders ... and now that online booze ordering has spread, throw in a bottle of wine (possibly private label) where regulations have loosened.



## -- 7 Global Adventures for the Hunkered.

While avoiding public spaces, home cooks will seek culinary thrills by exploring exotic ingredients from faraway places. They'll be shopping locally but eating globally.

Trending flavors (that you can make yourself or buy) are:

-- Dukkah, a smoky-salty Egyptian mix of ground sesame seeds, various nuts, cumin, coriander, fennel and other spices, that you sprinkle on fish, poultry, even over

-- Jerk Seasoning from Jamaica's Black diaspora, an incendiary mix of cumin, nutmeg, allspice, smoked paprika, cinnamon, garlic and lots of hot peppers. Great on grilled or barbecued chicken and ribs.

-- Tempero Baiano, a cross-cultural African-Portuguese-Brazilian medley of parsley, chili peppers, oregano, nutmeg bay leaves and turmeric, used in soups, stews and fish. Also called Bahian seasoning, its unlike anything else on your spice shelf.

-- Tajin, a zingy, mildly spicy flavoring from Mexico composed of lime, chili peppers and sea salt (some people add sugar). You sprinkle it on fresh fruit, use it as a citrusy spice rub for chicken and fish, coat the rim of your margarita glass, or perk up a bloody mary.

‘-- Berbere, a high-fragrance, high-heat blend from Ethiopia: chilies, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, allspice and coriander. Cook with it or use it as a finishing sprinkle.

-- Chili Crunch, a trendy Chinese condiment that our partner Rozanne Gold calls “chili crack.” It’s an oily mix of chili flakes, garlic, sometimes sugar or vinegar or sesame seeds that you spoon over anything that needs a flavor lift. Turns mundane pizza into a celebration.





-- **8 African and Afro-American Cooking.** Spurred by racial unrest and demands for equity, Black chefs are gaining access to capital, new media exposure, and more chances to open their own restaurants (even in Covid times). We'll also see, in 2021, a bumper crop of Black chefs' cookbooks, renewed focus on ingredients of Southern cookery, and an exploration of the cuisines of West Africa. For soul food in America read "Rise" from Marcus Samuelsson ... and for African cuisine bordering the Indian Ocean, read "In Bibi's Kitchen" by Hawa Hassan and Julia Turshen.

-- **9 Diet of the Year: Flexitarian, with the Edge on Veg**

Surprisingly, the percentage of vegans or vegetarians in the US remains pretty stable. But sales of vegan and vegetarian products are soaring. That's because Americans are rethinking consumption of animal protein and seeking more balance in their lives by increasingly mixing-and-matching more vegetables into non-veg meals ... with the edge on veg. Look for hundreds of new plant-based and even cell-based meals on supermarket shelves in 2021 ... many of them "faux food" because they don't exist in nature.



Large numbers of consumers are convinced these processed products are better for their health and better for the environment ... but that might end up a dubious assumption. They're certainly better for animal survival.

Other than faux burgers, bits of chicken, and coffee whiteners, *restaurants are mostly behind the faux food curve* ... because they're scared of menu complexity ... and worried that lots of people won't rush out for plant-based Christmas feasts. We look for (but not

necessarily forward to) greater menu migration away from food with legs as restaurants start offering faux cheese options for pizza and burgers, faux eggs for breakfast, phony baloney, and alt ice creams smothered in alt chocolate ... because restaurants are straining to capture every possible customer.

Note: McDonald's has trialed an all-vegetarian menu in Hong Kong based on a plant-based Spam. KFC is adding alt-chicken nuggets and hamburgers at restaurants in China. And famed chef Heston Blumenthal is using (and backing) Fable ... a shiitake-based substitute ... in some braised meat dishes. Could be harbingers.



## -- 10 Immunity Is the New Sustainability

There's a realignment regarding health and sustainability. "Immunity" is the new buzzword for sustaining the body ... because consumers are avid about repelling viruses and other infectious assaults. So, we'll see more packaged food using turmeric, zinc, ginger, green tea, specialty honey, mushrooms and mushroom extracts, chia seed, CBD, plus "healing" herbs and fermented foods such as kimchi, kombucha and sauerkraut ... even though no one knows which, if any, actually works. *Restaurants haven't figured out how to latch onto this trend ... because menu claims generally are turnoffs for consumers.* (We can't imagine a menu touting grilled sardines as a good source of omega-3.) But we foresee menus highlighting many ingredients with healthy halos ... well, perhaps not so fast with CBD.



## -- 11 The New War on Waste

From farm to dumpster, Americans waste about 40% of their food ... shipping 130 billion pounds of edibles annually into landfills. Now, the visible shock of Covid-induced hunger is spurring a two-front war on waste. At home, self-isolating families are cooking lots more. So they're newly aware that wasting food is ideologically amoral and financially costly. Leftovers are becoming respectable (do we sense a cookbook



trend here?) ... and produce trims, last night's dinner and limp greens are going to the stew pot instead of the trash. Meanwhile, during the worst ravages of Covid, hundreds of hotels and restaurants are sending surpluses to food banks. Down the road we see a proliferation of new apps that *connect overstocked local restaurants directly to nearby hungry residents* ... offering meals for free or at steep discounts, sinking deeper roots into their communities.

## -- 12 Whose Street Is it, Anyway? Bursting through Four Walls

No question ... consumers have a new love for outdoor dining, especially when indoor sneezing can be (even psychologically) toxic. This winter, every restaurant that can will be serving outdoors ... even if they just do fondue. So cities around the country are making permanent the makeshift shelters and patios that are springing up on sidewalks and into roadways that once were the preserves of automobiles. With galloping failure rates in shopping centers, we foresee restaurants spilling into parking lots ... hoping to attract a fading number of shoppers. There's pushback against restaurants leaping beyond their four traditional walls. Even advocates of urban streetlife discover that

competition for curb frontage can be inflammatory when restaurants try to colonize public space. Parked cars, cafes, delivery vehicles, pickup zones for online orders, bike lanes, walk lanes, e-scooters, wheelchair access, winterized bubbles ... all seeking a share of finite square footage.

Do street vendors get a portion? Robots delivering dinner? Will cities deploy outdoor dining as a strategy to discourage clusters of the



homeless ... or will that be an unintended consequence? How can retailers also take advantage of outdoor streetlife?

And with maybe one-third of parking meters unusable, do cities get a share of restaurant revenues?

Come warmer weather, we foresee a blizzard of municipal regulations ... and hope the bureaucrats don't kill off this vibrant transformation of urban life. Survival of dozens of neighborhoods hangs in the balance.

### **Buzzwords for 2021**

Changing of the guard for food journalists with more BIPOC writers and editors shifting their publications' focus ... never-ending spicy chicken promotions (thanks, Nashville) ...

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... steamed rice noodle wraps ... seaweed as snacks, dietary supplements and in plant-based products ... African jollof rice ... restaurants selling multiple online-only food brands, creating their own ghost food halls ... return of comfort food ... new vegan main courses in food stores but not restaurants (yet) ... telemedicine from supermarkets and health organizations ... chickpeas beyond hummus: in flour, chocolate-covered snacks, pasta, plant-based food ... hard seltzer not potent enough? now it comes with CBD ... private outdoor dining bubbles .... branded restaurant products from t-shirts to chicken fat ... meal kit revival may outlast



Covid ... popup restaurant menu posting and ordering via Instagram ... ajvar. a piquant tomato-pepper condiment from the Balkans ... celebrities tacking their names on overpriced wine... more hemp and CBD as a bunch of states legalized use or possession during the 2020 election ... stay-at-homers opting for better coffees, better brewing paraphernalia ... sugar alternatives derived from fruits and vegetables ... unnecessarily flavored and colored gins ... rebellion over online delivery charges hogging 30% of revenue ... restaurants selling blankets and sweatshirts for winter dining outdoors.

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