



**BAUM+WHITEMAN CONSULTANTS PREDICT  
HOTTEST FOOD & BEVERAGE TRENDS  
IN RESTAURANTS & HOTELS FOR 2022**

[Baum+Whiteman's](#) highly opinionated 2022 forecast explores next year's food and restaurant trends: Robots and automation top the list ... Vegan chicken everywhere ... Ghost kitchens' runaway population explosion ... Quirky fast-food trends from Asia ... Heritage cooking in the spotlight ... What's a boozetarian? ... And NO, fine dining is not dead! Plus 17 buzzwords for the year ahead.

**Baum+Whiteman creates high-profile restaurants around the world for hotels, restaurant companies, museums and other consumer destinations.  
Their annual hospitality predictions follow ...**

October 30, 2021 FOR IMMEDIATE USE  
Contact: Michael Whiteman [mw@baumwhiteman.com](mailto:mw@baumwhiteman.com) 718 622 0200

**THE YEAR AHEAD FOR RESTAURANTS:  
FIRST ROUGH. THEN BETTER.**

This past summer, restaurateurs jubilantly welcomed customers as business roared back. In a sharp reversal, here's what those customers are being told today:

"Where's your vaccination card?" "Sorry, the menu's been cut in half." "Good luck finding a waiter." "We stop serving at 9 pm; two cooks walked off the job." "We're out of chicken tonight, and scallops are unaffordable." "Don't order the Sancerre; our shipment's stuck in Savannah." "Yes, you'll have to use QR codes even if you hate them; the staff can't get verbal orders straight." "We think half our workers will quit after their (hoped for) year-end bonuses." "We've raised our surcharge again to account for rising food costs."

We believe that after two hellish years, supply chains will untangle by mid-year. Vaccinations will increase, more resisters will relent, and Covid will abate ... assuming we're not plagued by yet another variant. Warm weather will again encourage outdoor

dining after customers resist eating indoors ... even in winter. Chicken wing prices will finally fall ... and if not, we'll switch to trending vegan nuggets (see pg 00).

Menu price hikes plus surcharges, all accepted by consumers so far, will offset rising wages. Profits will grow because delivery demand continues unabated ... and restaurant operators will learn to do more business with fewer employees. Something like an equilibrium between prices, profits, inflation and labor shortages could be attained ... if fewer restaurants survive the turmoil. There ... we've said it out loud. All this assuming that energy prices don't throw a wet blanket on consumer spending.

**TREND OF THE YEAR: WHEN FLIPPY MET SALLY ... or ...  
THE ROBOTS AREN'T COMING. THEY'RE HERE!**



**“Take me to your pancakes”**

Accelerated adoption of robots and other forms of automation in the restaurant industry will be the #1 trend for 2022 ... and for years beyond. Look at what's coming

# BAUM + WHITEMAN

INTERNATIONAL FOOD + RESTAURANT CONSULTANTS

soon: [https://m.facebook.com/GIGadgets.Fans/videos/automatic-cooking-robots-for-restaurants/1305837766483463/?\\_rd](https://m.facebook.com/GIGadgets.Fans/videos/automatic-cooking-robots-for-restaurants/1305837766483463/?_rd) Here are four reasons why:

- 1) Social attitudes towards working conditions have shifted since the onset of Covid-19, causing severe restaurant labor shortages ... even with fewer restaurants open.
- 2) 890,000 people, fed up with working conditions, quit the hospitality industry in August. The quit rate hit 6.8%, more than double the national average. Kitchens across the country are on average short about six cooks.
- 3) The industry hasn't been able to raise wages enough for employees to return ... and constantly increasing payroll costs pushes employers emphatically into the age of robotization.
- 4) Vaccinated or not, restaurant customers continue maintaining social distancing, so they are seeking contactless ways of dining ... including not interacting with human employees.

*For this forecast we're focusing on how restaurants will integrate food-making machines alongside human employees. For example:*

-- Miso Robotics' robot named **Flippy** has been working alongside real people, flipping burgers and now automating french frying at 11 **White Castle** locations. It dunks baskets into the fryer, shakes loose the oil and monitors cooking for french fries, tater tots and chicken tenders. Riding on a rail above the cooking equipment it avoids tripping over other employees ... and guards them from splattering fat. See it here: [White Castle Reveals 'Flippy', A Robot that can Cook Burgers & Fries | 93.9 LITE FM | Melissa Forman in the Morning \(iheart.com\)](#) **Buffalo Wild Wings** is testing the system for its chicken wings.



-- **SavorEat's** 3D printing robot simultaneously extrudes and cooks plant-based burgers. Piloted by Burgus Burger Bar in Israel, the machine's ordering app customizes consumer preferences for size, protein and fat contents, and degree of cooking. Sodexo, which feeds students at major US universities, says it'll trial the system in 2022. Another Israeli company has a similar system in the works.

-- We're impressed by a semi-automated **Sushiro** restaurant in Tokyo. Working alongside machines, low-skilled employees spew out (they claim) 1500 dishes per hour ... mostly sushi but also ramen and fried chicken ... in 130 variations. There are machines cooking rice, infusing rice with vinegar, and then molding it ... so that humans can layer on a proper piece of hand-cut fish. Using artificial intelligence, the system projects customer traffic for the next 15 minutes ... and tells the staff which dishes to start preparing.

-- **Creator**, a shuttered robotic burger restaurant in San Francisco, reopened in Daly City, with more humans supplementing the machines. Famous for meat-grinding, cooking burgers and toasting buns to order ... this time people



will add lettuce, tomato and cheese, tasks that evidently flummoxed the previous iteration. The revamped system will mix-and-match your preferred sauces and seasonings ... which you store as your own private brand on your smartphone. For flavor junkies, there are preset options like Tsunami Burger topped with creamed smoked oyster aioli, shiitake mushroom sauce, pickles and onions (\$8.50). Here's the original version: [Robot Makes a Burger at Creator Restaurant San Francisco - Bing video](#)

-- Tech-savvy **Sweetgreen** acquired Spyce ... an automated restaurant outfit in Boston that cooks and serves warm food and salad bowls using superheated steam and robotic planchas. By integrating Spyce's know-how, Sweetgreen will advance the notion of combining automated components into kitchens staffed by humans. Spyce's ingredients are prepped in-house, then stored in a robotic device that can prepare 350 individual dishes an hour ... several at a time. Next: robotic delivery thingees.

-- **DoorDash**, the US's biggest online food delivery company, this year acquired **Chowbotics** ... which makes **Sally**, an automated salad bowl vending machine. Sliding one of these machines into, say, a delivery-oriented burger restaurant, would allow a full menu of entrée salads without the complex assembly that otherwise would occur. This could give DoorDash a competitive edge against its major competitors ... such as GrubHub, Postmates or Uber Eats ... in signing up and providing services to restaurants beyond just delivery. Imagine Sally and Flippy in the same kitchen!

-- **Nice Day**, an exciting Chinese-American takeaway startup in New York, is experimenting with automated woks into which workers toss pre-prepped ingredients; the woks spin, cook and toss (for example) General Tso's Chicken to order, then dump the ingredients into a serving bowl ... while a kitchen worker assembles other components of an order. *It is similar to the photo, right.*



-- **Food ATMs coming fast.** In addition to working alongside workers, we're seeing a wave of complex vending machines ... basically robots in decorated boxes ... serving pizza, salads, coffee, blended juices, hot and cold meals in bowls, and various pastas. They'll be located in supermarkets, office buildings, hospitals, schools ... and some restaurants will supplement their own hand-labor production with these vending machines (shhh ... customers won't know).

## **PLANT-BASED CHICKEN EVERYWHERE IN 2022**

After knocking themselves out in the chicken sandwich wars last year, fast food chains will move the battle to another level: Plant-based chicken nuggets and tenders.

With prices of animal protein so volatile ... and shortages of real chicken boosting prices well into 2022 ... the timing is right. Impossible Foods launched vegan nuggets with a bunch of high-profile chefs last August ... followed by Burger King.

A&W trialed Beyond Meat's vegan version across Canada ... selling out at 1000 locations. Panda Express quickly exhausted its Beyond Meat orange chicken during a test in Los Angeles and New York.



Many of these menu add-ons are *tryouts* rather than national rollouts. Why so much testing is a mystery because supermarket

### **The Colonel's not committing yet**

freezers are crammed with at least 50 brands of vegan chicken. So consumer acceptance seems high for the concept. But fast-food chains know chicken intimately ... and it appears they're uncomfortable with imitations. Which is why McD's been agonizing over various chicken McPlant recipes for years ... and finally may tiptoe into the market in early 2022. (Leading from behind, it is testing its McPlant burger at a handful of US locations. It began testing last March in Europe.) KFC's been fiddling with vegan chicken since 2019 in China, Canada, England, at spots around the US and their only teaser today is ... "they're coming."

We're guessing fast feeders aren't yet confident with side-by-side comparisons of vegan nuggets vs. those from birds. Nevertheless, they'll be forced into action.

Meanwhile, R&D for faux fish is ramping up. Nestle is testing a shrimp-ish product in Europe. A lookalike vegan raw tuna is making inroads in some poke restaurants and supermarkets. A firm in Thailand makes an unbreaded slab of protein resembling a fish fillet that you can sauté. As for cell-based meat and clumped-up mushrooms cultivated in laboratories appearing on restaurant plates ... there's some in Singapore and Israel ... maybe 2024 in the US.

### **CHILI CRUNCH: CONDIMENT OF THE YEAR**

Never underestimate America's attraction to gastronomic pain. Oily, spoonable chili crisp or crunch or crack is on fire ... a varying amalgam of tingly szechuan chili flakes, fiery hot pepper flakes, fried garlic, often fermented soybeans, sesame seeds, a smidgen of sugar and something umami-ish like seaweed or dried mushrooms. Standard pizzeria shakers of crushed chili peppers don't stand a chance. You'll see restaurants dabbing it on pizza, spooning it over all manner of dumplings, drizzling it over ice cream, spiking spaghetti bolognese or mac-and-cheese, enhancing scrambled eggs and omelets, mixing it with kewpie mayonnaise for a memorable sandwich spread, smuggling the hot stuff into chocolate cookies ... well, you get the idea. Lots of brands are showing up on food market shelves and direct-to-consumer mail order marketing.



**FOOD WILL GROW 'ROOTS'**

There'll be deep explorations of narratives, histories and roots of cultures and cuisines hitherto neglected by mainstream media ... but not by restaurant customers who've enjoyed "exotic" ingredients on mainstream menus and in "ethnic" restaurants for ages. Afro-American foodways will dominate, but expect more coverage of Filipino cooking, and Thai, Korean, Indian, Haitian, Brazilian ... many dauntingly complex for non-native chefs. First- and second-generation restaurant chefs and cooks ...

exploring food traditions of their immigrant parents' homeland ... will lead the way. Black chefs and women chefs will get the most media and financial attention as they become top toques and restaurant owners and sign more cookbook deals.

This can be self-reinforcing, giving the country more dining options ... and at the same time enhancing culinary and cultural cross-pollination of both skills and ingredients.



**"Hands off my heritage cooking"**

At the same time, "ethnic" may be purged from culinarians' vocabulary ... because it smacks of "colonial oppression." Replacing generic "Asian" or "Middle Eastern" with specific national or cultural identification will cause menu rewrites. Curry, to use a favorite scapegoat, is vastly different in China than in Japan, Malaysia, Burma or Jamaica, not to mention India (where the word rarely appears) ... so dishes like them will properly identified on menus. What to call American curry dishes? Purists will shout "cultural appropriation" and insist the word and the dish have no place on "American" menus. One wonders what will happen to the hapless restaurateur who puts Bombay chicken curry on his chilaquiles ... and then gets cancelled on Facebook and Twitter because he has no Indian or Mexican cooks on staff.

**GHOST KITCHENS' RUNAWAY POPULATION EXPLOSION ...  
STEPPING ON EACH OTHER'S TOES**

*In our 2017 forecast we wrote about "Restaurants without Seats and Seats without Restaurants." Now we're seeing the upshot of that prediction:*

The Covid pandemic sent consumers scurrying for food deliveries. It also released a flood of funding for dozens of startup ghost kitchens aimed at grabbing a big share of that demand.

For 2022 we're predicting a competitive free-for-all as ghost kitchens throttle up expansion. There's certainly room to grow ... especially between the coasts ... but one has to wonder ...

-- whether too many ghost kitchen companies will stumble over themselves competitively ...

-- and whether too many ghost kitchens will create a sea of vacant dining seats in restaurants across the country ...

-- and at what point saturation kicks in ...

-- and how already-skeptical consumers will react when they discover that food brands they've found online don't actually exist in the real world, emanating instead from culinary black boxes ... and often made by robots. This equally will apply to well-known restaurant brands. What should people ordering ribs from TGIFriday believe when there there's no such restaurant within 100 miles?

Euromonitor says ghost kitchens could be a \$1 trillion industry by 2030. Grand View Research puts the number at reach \$139.4 billion by 2028. If you believe the press releases, the numbers are staggering:



**Reef Kitchens** plans 700 ghost kitchens with Wendy's over the next five years. Also with Reef, fast-casual pizza 800 Degrees plans 500 ghost kitchens in five years ... and Friday's with about 300 globally. Friday's has taken equity in the company ... which could be an early step toward vertical integration in the food biz.

Canadian invader **Ghost Kitchen Brands** will open 30 multi-brand ghost kitchens in Walmarts over the next two years. Their first location is in Rochester and the company claims they'll soon have 800 US locations.

**DoorDash** ... already dominating restaurant deliveries ... owns two ghost kitchens in California, and now offers to take on all its tenants' operations ... including supply chain management, staffing, cooking and logistics. Note that DoorDash also owns **Sally** ... the salad-making robot (*photo right*) that could slip into an existing restaurant's kitchen ... or become its own virtual brand.



**Kitchen United's** ghost operations include brands like White Castle, Wendy, and Panera; it will open a flock of multi-brand ghost kitchens within Kroger supermarkets. As with Walmart, shoppers can e-order food for pickup as they leave the store or for later delivery.

*But: This is not just about restaurants and supermarkets. High-traffic sites like airports, hotels, office buildings and colleges are ripe for ghost-kitchening. Shopping centers ...with vacant stores and lagging restaurants desperate for revenue ... are getting into*

the ghost kitchen act. Kitchen United has a deal with a Santa Clara mall that allows shoppers using an app to order a consolidated package from all the mall's food court tenants. A conveyor belt connects to ground floor lockers where food waits for pickup or delivery.

Hotel-entertainment giant **SBE** has a similar deal with malls owned by Simon ... that have money-draining vacant or underused kitchen spaces; and with Accor Hotels whose food businesses are clobbered by declining tourism.

What's all this mean?

**If** ... and we're only speculating ... if DoorDash or one of its competitors launched a ghost fleet of its own invented brands ... that were sold on its own digital platform ... cooked in its own phantom kitchens ... and shipped out by its own delivery people ... if this happened, we'd be seeing these delivery specialists (who already take a financial bite out of conventional restaurant revenues) competing with their own restaurant customers in a very big, overlapping manner.

Do we think something like this will happen? Yes ... because too many players inevitably means consolidation; think about dot-com boom or the airline business. Some will be shotgun marriages. But many will be stabs at *vertical integration* ... with various players merging and joining virtual and real restaurant brands along with robotics and digital ordering systems linked to restaurants' computer systems ... managing everything from buying food to cooking meals to getting food to your doorstep.

We're looking at two banner years for the mergers-and-acquisition brokers. And a tough time for small independents who still cook by hand.

**SIMMER DOWN, FLAVOR FIENDS. GET A GRIP!**

***Korean Hot Dogs***

Grandma, these are not your state fair hot dogs! Korean Corn Dogs (aka K-Dogs) have street food cognoscenti lining up around the country. An Instagrammable import from Seoul, K-Dogs are impaled on a stick, dipped in a thick, gloppy batter (usually a mix of rice and wheat flours; rarely corn meal) then fried crisp... after which they're enrobed in a range of wackadoodle coatings.



You'll find french fries stuck to the outside, or bread cubes or crunchy ramen noodles or bits of pork belly ... occasionally Froot Loops or Flamin' Cheetos. Sometimes there's squid ink in the batter. For pescatarians, they come with fish cakes inside instead of hot dogs ... for vegetarians there's a supremely gooey mozzarella stick ... and a half-cheese/half sausage for the non-committed. Because there's never enough flavor ... is there? ... you then top these creations with cheesy mustard sauce or sriracha aioli bulgogi sauce, pico de gallo, kimchi, mango-habanero sauce ... or even powdered sugar and parmesan cheese.

Several outfits have national chain aspirations. You'll need napkins.

### ***Korean Scrambled Eggs***

Not yet sweeping the US, these butter-saturated egg sandwiches are taking root in Hong Kong, Singapore, Manila, Los Angeles, and a few Canadian cities ... but not New York yet, strangely.

They're known generally as Egg Drop Sandwiches ... garnering global attention on Netflix's drama "Hospital Playlist" a year ago.

Their gastronomic attraction lies in a mashup of buttery-crunchy-sweet-salty-savory-eggy-spicy flavors and textures ... so what could be bad about that? A bit laborious, Egg Drop sandos are not quite fast food. Double-thick bread slices are partially split ... like giant hot dog buns ... griddled in butter, spritzed with a sauce or two, stuffed with a choice of fillings, then topped with scrambled eggs, more sauce and a dusting of dried parsley.

It takes patience; watch the process here: [best Korean breakfast toast egg drop sandwich street food . - Bing video](#). Fillings vary from Spam with mango and nori, chicken teriyaki, tuna pesto or bulgogi. Call this a trendlet.



***Derangement of the Year: Amusingly Bizarre Ice Cream***

In a burst of post-Covid derangement, our country was stunned by Kraft's mac-and-cheese mashup with Van Leeuwen ice cream ... a wildly successful PR stunt that sold out within three hours.

Lest you consider this an innovation, recall that Escoffier invented asparagus ice cream back in the 1800s ... and forgot to tell us why. More recently, a mac-and-cheese ice cream recipe with noodles topped with candied bacon was published in 2014 (Here it is: [Macaroni and Cheese Ice Cream with Candied Bacon | Fat Girl Trapped in a Skinny Body](#)).



Did mac-and-cheese ice cream trigger copycats? You bet! Sugar Hill Creamery in Harlem unleashed ramen-flavored ice cream, with sweet-salty miso, pickled ginger and yuzu. Heritage Restaurant and Caviar Bar in Chicago concocted a cheddar-sour cream-potato chip ice cream with an optional crown of Siberian caviar ... And someone in Lisbon has mushroom ice cream with candied barley.

Meanwhile, Kraft is inserting flavor packets so you can skew the flavor of your mac-and-cheese at home to taste like pizza or ranch dressing or buffalo sauce.

Is this a real trend? Will they graft these flavors onto ice cream next spring? Winter, mercifully, is upon us ... so we won't know until the swallows return to Capistrano.

**NEVER EAT DINNER IN A PLACE THAT SERVES BREAKFAST?**

Truism? ... Savvy restaurant-goers never eat dinner in a place that serves breakfast ... that's why people shun traditional hotel dining rooms. Now there's a demand shift: Growing numbers of people working from home ... well-paid and sophisticated ... are seeking more daytime meals. No, they're not going to hotels. Instead, they head to neighborhood restaurants for breakfast and lunch ... and weekend brunch is morphing into a seven-day affair.

Restaurants that cut back to one meal a day during Covid (or none at all) now serve two or even three ... because work-from-homers need to spend money saved by not commuting or vacationing in Europe.

Restaurants build windows into their façades, selling food and drink to carry away ... even if they're not fully open. A fish restaurant, closed for lunch, builds a sushi takeaway window to capture local midday revenue. An Irish bar pivots to breakfast. A bunch of holes-in-the-wall sell only

breakfast tacos ... in Brooklyn, of course ... until they run out. Upscale brunch food is grafted onto dinner menus. Even classic diners are restructuring their morning menus.

What's in demand? Creative egg dishes, complex sandwiches, breakfast pizza, Mexican and Israeli breakfasts ... healthful bowls, veg-heavy frittatas, chicken and waffles, short ribs (smoked or not) repurposed for breakfast burritos and benedicts. Might corned beef hash make a comeback?



## **ORDERING AT THE BAR**

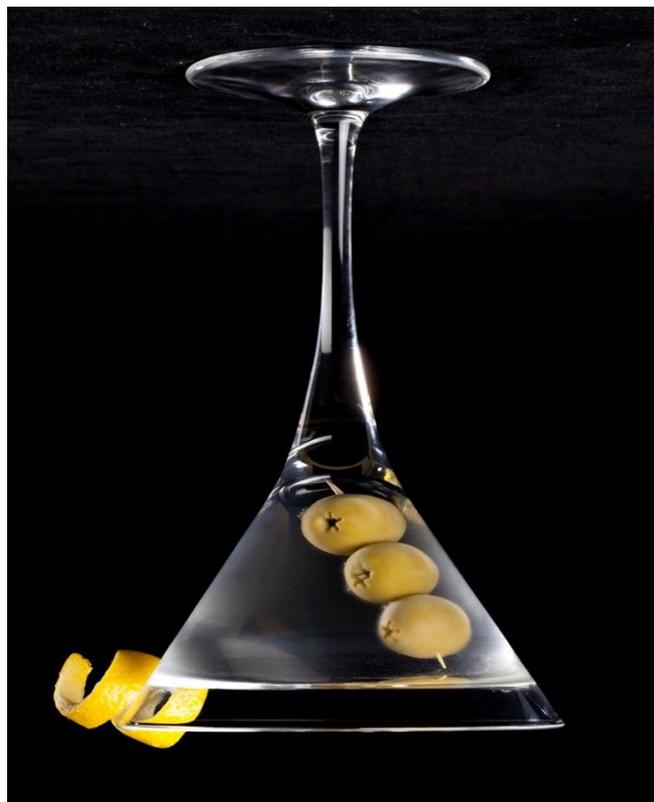
We're seeing lots of really casual restaurants welcoming you at the door ... sometimes with a sign, sometimes a person ... instructing you to order and pay at the bar.

Popular food ... smokehouse cuisine, chicken specialties, burgers, ribs, taquerias, souvlaki-gyro joints. You seat yourself ... with a drink already in hand. Highly efficient: Food is delivered by a minimum wage person; one or two waiters cover the entire floor for additional drink orders ... since you've already downed their first one that you carried from the bar. Prices are in the fas-cas chains' range but there are fewer interior design details and comforts.

## **BOOZING IT DOWN**

Stir-crazy during lockdown, Americans ramped up their at-home alcohol consumption. This reversed a pre-Covid trend toward less intoxicating beverages ... but now we're back to hitting the bottle less frequently. Low-alcohol products are projected to grow 31% ... mostly beer ... across ten global markets, says IWSR, a London research organization.

Many factors drive this "boozing down" trend: more mindful eating and drinking, snazzier packaging and marketing, improved products that taste more like the real thing, and restoring physical fitness that went downhill during Covid. Some think that cannabis products are stealing market share.



Look for more organic and biodynamic wines on restaurant lists. Don't be surprised by packaged tea products spiked with beer-strength alcohol. Hard kombucha ... which is fermented tea enhanced with alcohol ... is getting a play in package stores, and we see more bartenders experimenting with the stuff. Interestingly, more than half the people who drink the low-alcohol stuff alternate with full-strength drinks. Call them "boozetarians."

### **NO! FINE DINING IS NOT DEAD!**

It happens every crisis: Moralists and well-fed critics declare the death of fine dining. In the face of destruction by Covid, fancy restaurants are "irrelevant," they claim. They're an "insult in our economic distress."

They serve obscure ingredients that "no one cares about anymore." Haute cuisine is "disconnected from the real world." No one wants to get "dressed up." Who is willing to fork over \$250 because "the pigeon is cooked sous vide; butter is churned to order and the captain's wearing better clothes than you are?" People should be "ashamed to pay nose-bleeding prices" for "dollhouse food assembled with tweezers."

But: There's an echelon of American consumers who carry on regardless of disasters like Covid and economic collapses such as a dot.com bust. Madison Avenue, Rodeo Drive and various Miracle Miles persist and rejuvenate ... and so does fine dining. Sure, there's been headline-making attrition among four-star establishments in the last two years ... but proportionally fewer of them collapsed than restaurants lower down the price scale that disappeared in droves.



Be real ... fine-dining exists on five-percenters, on business travelers spending someone else's money ... and, most of all, by patronage of developers and vanity investors. The five-percenters, to judge from the S&P, came out way ahead during and after the pandemic and are happily spending their gains. Developers of office buildings, grand hotels, mixed-use complexes ... even luxury apartment houses seeking greater marketing visibility ... open their purses to underwrite or help finance many of these upscale money pits. This allows them to carry on with culinary finery, expensive napery and professional service ... offering food that's beyond the reach and means of "lesser" but still excellent restaurants.



**Lobster mac & cheese: luxury or necessity?**

Coco Chanel trenchantly observed that *"luxury is a necessity that begins where necessity ends."* We will not be confined to bare necessities, and fine dining continues to survive ... at least during this economic cycle.

## **BUZZWORDS**

Labneh

Birria everywhere

Mexican brunches

Pan-Asian smokehouse restaurants

Boutique fruit vinegars



Pot pies from upscale restaurants

Multi-culti khachapuris

Chili crunch/crisp/crack

Salsa macha (a variation on chili crunch from Veracruz)

Jackfruit

Ethnic breakfast sandwiches

Churros (*again!*)

Tater tots (*again!*) smothered with birria or with truffled cheese fondue or raclette, as a topping on pizza or a base for breakfast bowls

Espresso martinis (*again!*)

Fusion ramen

Extreme hummus variations

Tiger nuts

Pasta alla gricia (basically carbonara without eggs or caccio e pepe plus guanciale)

---

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

October 30, 2021 FOR IMMEDIATE USE  
Contact: Michael Whiteman  
[mw@baumwhiteman.com](mailto:mw@baumwhiteman.com) 718 622 0200