



## **BAUM+WHITEMAN ISSUES ITS HIGHLY OPINIONATED 2025 FORECAST OF FOOD & BEVERAGE TRENDS IN HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS**

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**Ten hot trends and 18 buzzwords about how we'll be eating in the year ahead.**

**Sandwich of the year is ..... ?  
Fruit of the year is ..... ?  
Cocktail of the year is ..... ?  
Beverage of the year is ..... ?  
Flavor of the year is ..... ?**

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

### **BACK FROM THE DEAD: REVIVAL OF DINERS AND LUNCHEONETTES**

Old fashioned diners (aka luncheonettes, coffee shops) suffered one cardiac arrest after another during the Covid crisis, their numbers dwindling daily. But they're making comebacks, often revived by younger entrepreneurs taking over existing diners, or by chefs looking to make their marks without any pretentious folderol. Two successful paths are:

--- Ethnic Diners: Little Grenjai and Thai Diner, Golden Diner (Chinese) in NY; St. James French in San Diego and Revelie in NY; Dove's Mexican in Chicago, Japanese noodle counters everywhere ... all thrive. *But there's another group to examine:*

--- Eco-Chic Diners: Youngish entrepreneurs are refreshing the bones of classic mom-and-pop diners and carefully moving menus up a notch: trimming lots of dead wood dishes ... adding grass-fed burgers and skirt steaks, espresso beans from local coffee roasters, homemade slaws and dressings, no more pancake mixes or scoop-and-bake muffins, decent wines, sometimes an in-house pastry chef ... prominent veg dishes, an occasional shakshuka, and a bit of fermenting on the side to attract a hipper crowd. But nothing like kimchee french toast or caviar bumps to frighten old-time customers.

This younger entrepreneurial cohort is picking up dying diners from older operators who are so economically pressed ... even before Covid ... that they've all retrenched, cut staff, hours and quality ... until the endgame inevitably arrives. These older diners also are being beaten by popular



breakfast-and-lunch chains with snazzier offerings and better economics of one-shift payrolls ... like First Watch, Broken Yolk, Hash Kitchen with its boozy breakfast cocktails, et. al.

And it isn't just moms-and-pops under pressure: As we write this, Denny's is scrapping 150 locations by end of 2025 to improve cash flow ... even though partial closings rarely are a solution for conceptual and gastronomic obsolescence.

**COCKTAIL OF THE YEAR IS A NEGRONI**

**REPLACEMENT!** All around Lake Maggiore and Lake Orta last summer people were ditching their boozy-bitter trendoid Aperolas and their Negronis for something childishly comforting – the Limoncello Spritz. No complexity, no herbal undercurrents to challenge the palate. Just lemony, sparkling indulgence. This aperitif appears irresistible and is spreading across the US. It's also an odd but smart substitute for dessert.

**Limoncello spritz will be 2025's cocktail of the year.**



**BRANDING WITH THE STARS**

Not content with grafting their brands on hotels' restaurants, top chefs now are aiming for the entire hotel. Jose Andres has agreed to hang his sign on Bazaar House, opening in 2027 in Georgetown. Jean-Georges Vongerichten has licensed his name for the [Jean-Georges Miami Tropic Residences](#) in Miami, also opening in 2027.



Why not? If Giorgio can license his life-style name to super-luxe Armani Residences in New York and Miami ... and Donald can brand The Bible ... well, then, why not chefs? Nobu long ago paved the way. So, Wolfgang, Daniel, Michael, Eric, Martha ... answer the door! There's a fellow outside with a contact for your next hotel.

**HOW TO MAKE A HOAGY SANDWICH TRENDY: PUT IT ON FOCACCIA.**

Focaccerias are trending, driven notably by brand recognition of All'Antico Vinaio ... a sandwich shop in Florence perennially besieged by tourists, and now colonizing the US.

Here's how to transform a humble hoagy into **the sandwich of the year**: First, scrap the long hero roll (about 30 square inches). Then spread the formerly stacked ingredients more thinly on slab of focaccia (about 50 sq. in.). Add a big smear or a squirt of what's called "crema" or "condimenti" and poof ...



you're a fancy focaccia sandwich. Those sandwiches are famed for their massive appearance ... and also for flavor add-ons -- artichoke cream, fig jam, melted cheese sauces, pistachio spread, garlic crema, truffle cream, pear mostarda, pecorino crema.

Gino Panino in Denver enlivens mortadella focaccia with honey-pistachio mascarpone. In DC, Fossette anoints rib sandwiches with horseradish and parmesan fonduta. Sarasota's Focaccia bakery loads its prime rib sandwich with smoked horseradish crema and jus. In Florence, Antico Vinaio uses truffled pumpkin crema on its pancetta sandwich. Mamie's in LA goes whole-hog on condimenti ... gilding its guanciale sandwich with fig jam and crema di gorgonzola and chopped pistachios.

Prediction: With cheffy aioli spreads now boringly ubiquitous, watch condiments like these spread to other sandwiches, *and pizzas*, where they'll function as distinguishing and competitive accents. And should you see a chap resembling Joe Bastianich behind an Antico Vinaio counter, it's probably him.

## **ARE DIRTY SODAS THE NEXT FOOD INDUSTRY BOOM-AND-BUST?**

Haven't had a dirty soda yet? Won't be long before there's a franchise operator around your corner -- because purveyors of these infinitely customizable cold drinks are spreading like ... (choose one) locusts, wildfire, Covid.

Spawned in Utah, a dirty soda consists of an off-the-shelf beverage (Coke, Dr Pepper, Mountain Dew) into which you pour something fruity (crushed pineapple; strawberry syrup; watermelon juice; passionfruit, pomegranate juice, boba pearls, guava ... or all of these); stir it up with something creamy (could be cream or half-and-half, coffee whitener or creamy coconut); throw in some cookies for texture ... and top it with caramelized whipped cream or raspberry foam. **Dirty soda is the drink of the year.**



In Utah, where Mormons don't drink booze or coffee, TikTokers' discovered the Swig chain of dirty soda shops and took it viral. Swig plans 70 stores by year's end. Fiiz, a competitor, already has about 60. Sodalicious has a couple of dozen. Sonic drive-ins modified their soda heads to spew cream should customers demand dirty sodas (or their lurid-pink Red Velvet Cake Batter Shake). Jack in the Box is big on "twisted sodas." Other competitors and numerous startups are talking about thousands of "virgin soda" stores by the end of the decade ... calling them Mormon Starbucks (*see next trend*).

Once your imagination comes unglued, the possibilities are endless. A mutant flavor bomb added to a standard root beer might contain butterscotch, coconut, guava, and

toasted marshmallow. An addled fan added cotton candy syrup and half-and-half to a chilled Sprite, topped with whipped cream, sprinkles, and marshmallow Peeps.

Reminds us of the stampede into frozen yogurt in the late '70s when perhaps one-hundred startups boomed ... and then busted, leaving hordes of franchisees holding the bag. After that carnage, today there remain about a dozen fro-yo brands ... a history that could easily repeat itself with dirty sodas. But not before they litter the landscape.

### **UNCOMMON GROUNDS: COFFEE FLAVORS GO OFF THE RAILS**

Crazy coffee startups with wackadoodle drink concoctions are running circles around Starbucks. In truth, they have little to do with coffee and more to do with “extreme personalization” – meaning the ability of customers to create their own frankenbrews by tossing unlimited flavors into cups of hot or iced mediocre coffee.

Since they're not Utah-based, these chains can apply the “dirty soda” treatments (see Dirty Soda trend, above) to hot beverages ... devising super caloric and super complicated hot and cold drinks. Most are drive-thrus and some won't bother selling you a plain cuppa ... because they're more engaged with consumers' untrammelled creativity. Most also serve dirty sodas for good measure.

You might order, for example, a watermelon-raspberry horchata chai “breve” with a pumpkin pie soft top, a caramel drizzle and PSL-flavored sprinkles. You can have it warm, on ice, or blended.

Breve? What's a breve? While the world was absorbing flat white espressos ... the breve has arisen ... in which you substitute half-and-half for regular milk. Makes an extra-rich, extra-foamy beverage. Some aficionados actually use heavy cream, damn the calories.



The largest ... and only publicly held ... is Dutch Bros with 900+ stores. Upstart competitors include Scooters Coffee (770), 7Brew (about 1000), Human Bean and Foxtail Coffee. You can see how these fast-growing chains might pretty soon crowd Starbucks (about 16,000) in some parts of the country.

These outfits also are big on energy drinks ... some sporting so many espresso shots as to require warning labels.

All this tells you ... which many of us have long known ... that most Americans really don't like unadulterated coffee, and that no flavor combinations are beyond temptation. As long as they're sweet.

## WHY "SWICY" FLAVORS ARE HOT

The marriage of sweet and spicy flavors has been around forever –but today the word “swicy” is semantically hot. **Swicy is the flavor of the year.** The mania for sweet-hot Asian or Mexican food didn't start yesterday: hot honey's been around for more than a decade, honey-mustard for 40 years, as has Panda Express ... and remember the '70s fuss over jalapeno jelly?

Consumers have latched onto the word “swicy” because – like dementia or depression – it is good to have names for things. That way, your awareness blossoms: “Hey, my gin-and-tonic is actually swicy!” And “Wow, they've put honey in my chili crisp. “

Sometimes it takes a clever journalist to clarify life for us.

Not all swicy concoctions are on-trend. Coke quickly canned its swicy beverage, and wasabi ice cream never took off. But at least now we know why we've always been addicted to barbecue.



**MICHELIN DISCOVERS THE TACO. TACO BELL DISCOVERS THE WORLD. WHAT'S IT MEAN?**

Someone led a Michelin inspector up back alley in Mexico City and, wouldn'tcha know, they bestowed a star upon El Califa de León ... a well-regarded local taco stand. Their tacos cost \$3 - \$4, high for Mexico City – but you get hand-cranked tortillas and actual slabs steak griddled to order, not mystery chop-ups from your local taco truck.

On the other hand, Taco Bell taste-tested multi-culti Crunchwrap Supremes in Brooklyn. A Thai-ish version lumps together grilled chicken, curry-flavored mayonnaise and crunchy noodles with avocado basil ranch sauce. An Indian version (chicken tikka masala expelled from Mumbai?) has tomato curry chicken with mint sauce, spicy rice and pico de gallo. A version sells well at Velvet Taco with raita cream and tikka sauces.



The contrast between these El Chifa and Taco bell is astonishing – one unquestionably authentic, intensely personal; the other a marketing department's sassy cross-breeding of regional and ethnic flavors. It shows that despite professing otherwise, American consumers don't give a hoot about authenticity. So Taco Bell is (as usual) right on trend, mixing and mismatching flavors for maximum sensory impact.

*Meanwhile: Tacos el Franc in Tijuana was awarded a Michelin Plaque last year for its classic gyro-style products. It will open in a San Diego shopping mall in 2025.*

Such is the state of America's restaurant business that one wonders how soon El Califa or Tacos el Franc start franchising.



## **VIRTUE SIGNALLY WITH GRANDMA'S CHINA**

Upscale casual (and even not-so-casual) restaurants are stocking their tabletops with yard sale finds, closeouts and second-hand sellers. Mismatched cutlery and a chipped saucer or two supposedly suggest to customers that the owners skimped on setting the table so they could put more money and energy into their “honest” food. There’s nothing wrong with this sort virtue signaling. And while it seems like old news, fact is that some big-name crockery manufacturers have printed grandma’s china patterns onto sturdier stock for restaurants that want to have it both ways.

## **FIGS ARE THE FRUIT OF THE YEAR**

Go figure ... this biblical fruit is popping up everywhere. You’ll find it topping pizza (along with blue cheese), in trendy focaccia sandwiches (sometimes with trendy mortadella), on charcuterie platters, in a salad (with goat cheese and arugula) ... even in pasta when tossed with prosciutto or guanciale and some pecorino. Subtle when fresh, they pack more punch as mostarda or simpler preserves. Bacon-and-fig “jam” is a winner on a cheeseburger. You can’t eat the leaves raw, but they make a sweet-grassy syrup for use in ice cream and an infused oil to drizzle over grilled fish. You might stuff a quail with a fig and pancetta and roast it wrapped in fig leaves.



## **BUZZWORDS**

Tajarin ... old-fashioneds ... everything au poivre: swordfish, lobster, pasta ... call-outs will arrive on menus signaling specific GLP-1 dishes ... Hong Kong- and Shanghai-style diners ... stracciatella makes a comeback ... lurid pistachio martini concoctions ... giardiniera (especially in sandwiches) ... healthier snacking ... focus on Sweetgreen's and Chipotle's smart kitchens will tell us where automation is going ... fried gnocchi ... Caribbean and Indian-inflected pizza (sweet chili oxtail, jerk shrimp, achari chicken) ... forget the reservationist: you're talking to a chatbot ... disappearing prices among online menus ... chopped salad sandwiches ... manti ... arctic char (softer, blander) replacing salmon on upscale menus ... dukkah ... gochujang ketchup ... pickled pink onions

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