MENU

CANADA'S FOODSERVICE MAGAZINE

RC Show
Restaurants Canada
2024 PREVIEW



THE COLUMN:

GUSTO 54's ANGELA LAWRENCE

ON FRIENDSHIP, COMPANY CULTURE AND A BRAND NEW IDEA FOR HOSPITALITY

4 FOR 2024:

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Despite the turbulence of recent years, the Canadian restaurant industry is stepping into the new year poised for a period of strategic renewal. As the industry reflects on past challenges, there is a palpable sense of rejuvenation—a chance to forge ahead with recalibrated strategies that are in tune with the evolving tastes, cultural norms and economic realities of our times.

This edition of MENU, themed "Trends & Trailblazers," is a reflection of the mindset for this new era. It's a trove of insights and ideas, aimed at sparking innovation in your business. Ipsos shares key consumer insights to help align your operation with changing demographics, behaviours and social attitudes. We delve into beer, wine and cocktail trends with preeminent Canadian bartenders and sommeliers, offering a preview of flavours and experiences to kickstart your bar menus, and we hear from Executive Chef Juriaan Snellan on the flavours that will rule menus and resonate on palates, as predicted by the McCormick Flavour Forecast. David Hopkins of The Fifteen Group shares strategies for turning industry trends into restaurant profit.

The issue also focuses on amplifying those many industry voices that have tirelessly championed its growth yet remain underrepresented in its leadership tiers. You'll gain inspiration from women leaders like Angela Lawrence, Arlene Stein, and Nicki Laborie, who are helping shaping the future inside and outside their organizations with conviction and vision. You'll hear the business decisions and secret skills of women leading hospitality and their picks for the next generation of sector front-runners. Theirs are not just personal success stories, they inspire action and show how women hospitality leaders think, lead and most importantly, activate.

Looking ahead, RC Show 2024 is back April 8-10, when Toronto becomes the heart of the foodservice industry, pulsating with innovative ideas and products to level up your business. Particularly groundbreaking is an RC Show first, The Black Experience pavilion, a collaborative effort sponsored in part by Kraft Heinz. Here, the spotlight shines on the richness and dynamism of Black entrepreneurialism and food culture, showcasing Black-owned farms and F&B brands. This pavilion is more than just a showcase; it's a catalytic hub for learning, tasting, and engaging with a diverse spectrum of Black-owned F&B brands, and celebrating the ingenuity that fuels them.

We also connect with Maximilien Roy, Restaurants Canada's new V-P Federal and Quebec to hear what's going on in Quebec foodservice and learn more about how the province is inviting the rest of the country to discover its growing roster of F&B brands, technology companies and more.

These narratives reinforce the significance of our collective endeavour and the communities we strive to uplift. As MENU's editor-at-large, I remain committed to this dialogue, and I encourage your engagement—your feedback, stories, and the issues that resonate with you, sent to media@restaurantscanada.org.

As we step into this year, let's infuse our industry's hallmark resilience with a renewed spirit of innovation and creativity. Together, we are charting a course toward a future where Canadian foodservice doesn't just survive but thrives, reaping the benefits of a diverse, profitable, and vibrant culinary landscape.



Kelly Higginson
President & CEO

Winter 2024
Volume 9 Number 1

Restaurants Canada
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THE PASS

RC Show
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Conference & Trade Expo
LEVEL UP
April 8-10, 2024

Clear your schedule, pack your bags and get ready to Level Up at RC Show 2024 in Toronto, where the industry comes together to connect and access insights, ideas, products to inspire minds and accelerate growth. RC Show is a can't-miss game-changer for anyone in sector, with an expanded Show floor, outstanding networking opportunities and events, new competitions, pavilions and features and a captivating lineup of speakers and panels.

RC Show registration is free for Restaurants Canada members.

Learn more and register now.

The annual Pinnacle Awards recognize outstanding foodservice and hospitality industry contributions "through civic, educational and community involvement, as well as their efforts in establishing innovative concepts in foodservice or hotel management." MENU would like to congratulate the Restaurants Canada members on earning this impressive and inspiring distinction:

Company of the Year: Osmow's

Supplier of the Year: Maple Leaf Foods

Supplier of the Year (Hotel industry): Nespresso





MENU UNPLUGGED PODCAST

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Restaurants Canada's new podcast MENU Unplugged, hosted by Jay Ashton, examines the hot topics, dynamic industry thinkers and emerging opportunities impacting Canadian foodservice and hospitality. Check out these recent episodes:

A New Path: Sonia Mondino's Journey on Helping to Heal Our Industry

For anyone in the hospitality industry standing at the crossroads of lifestyle choices or those merely wishing to sprinkle a bit more wellness into their daily routine, Sonia Mondino's rich tapestry of experiences offers profound insights. As Sonia articulates, the essence of true affluence lies in our health and well-being.

Local Foods Revolution: A Conversation with The Hon. Lisa M. Thompson Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, OMAFRA

Get ready to dive into the local food movement in this captivating conversation with The Hon. Lisa M. Thompson. Minister Thompson provides invaluable insights into the transformative role that local foods play in today's restaurant industry.

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Decoding Canada's Plastic Regulations for Foodservice
with Talia Gordner, Commercial & Regulatory Partner of McMillan LLP

MENU

CORRECTION NOTICE

In the Fall 2023 issue of MENU, the article *Taste, Tradition and Transformation* credits the cookbook *Out of Old Ontario Kitchens* to the wrong author. *Out of Old Ontario Kitchens* was written by Lindy Mechefske, a 2019 Taste Canada Gold Prize Winner.
MENU magazine regrets the error.

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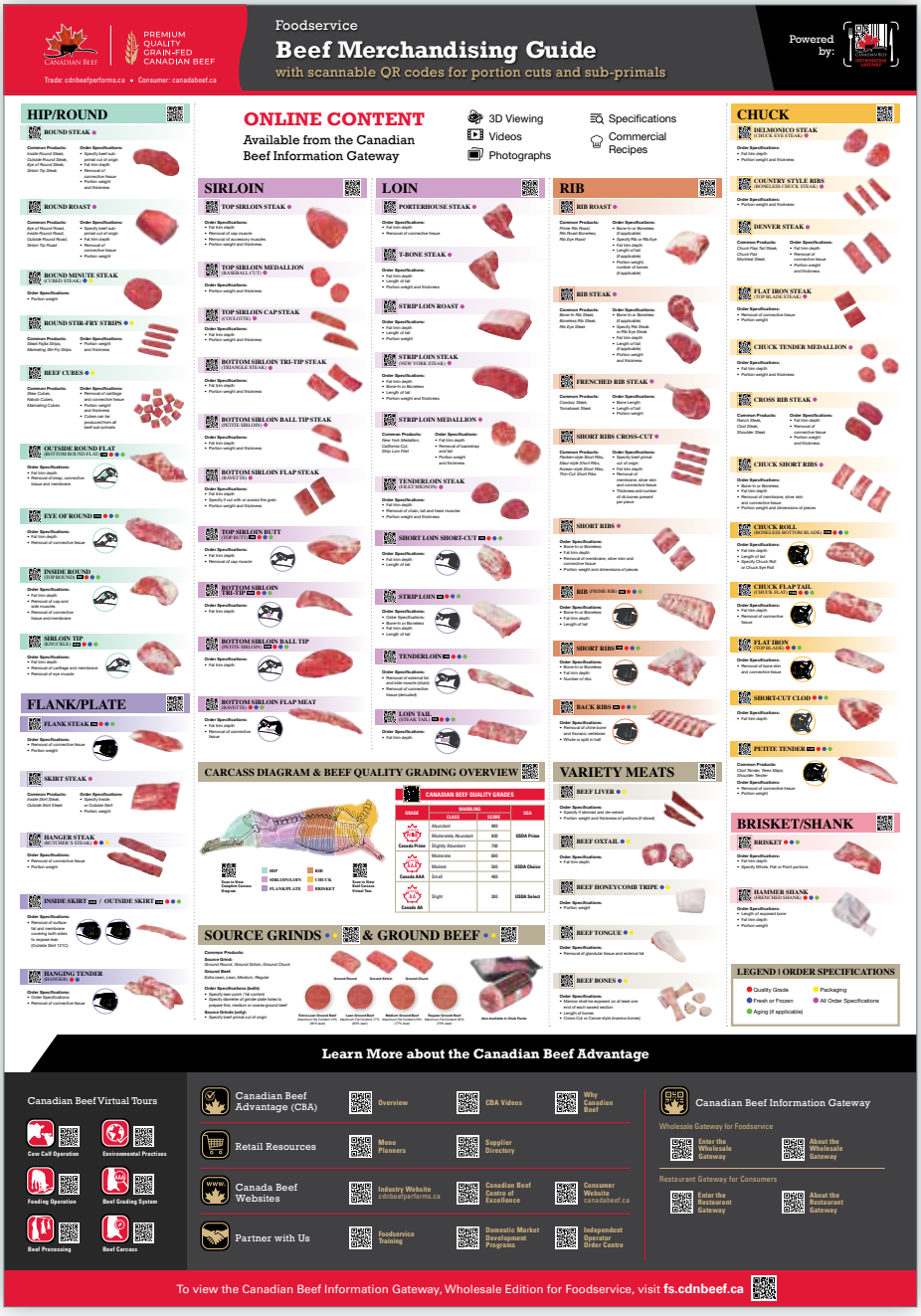
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MENU in conversation with

Angela Lawrence, Chief Culture Officer at Gusto 54

Angela Lawrence is the dynamic Chief Culture Officer at Gusto 54, renowned for her tenacious spirit, creativity and visionary leadership. With roots in magazine publishing and a penchant for storytelling, Lawrence's career took a serendipitous turn from editor to the epicurean world as a natural extension of her long friendship with Gusto 54 Founder and CEO Janet Zuccarini.

Lawrence blends her creative flair with an entrepreneurial edge, fostering a vibrant workplace and championing accountability, not only across Gusto 54's restaurant portfolio, but across the Canadian hospitality industry. As co-founder and brand director of Chubby's Jamaican Kitchen, her role extends beyond head office as she curates not only exceptional dining experiences but also an inclusive environment where self-expression is encouraged, and potential is recognized and nurtured.

Angela Lawrence and Janet Zuccarini

MM We're always interested in hearing the story of how influential leaders found themselves in the restaurant industry. When you were starting out, was this part of the plan or a happy accident?

Angela Lawrence: *In my 20s, after graduating from university, I was really keen on being a magazine editor. I worked on the university paper and on a community paper during the summer. I've been fascinated with magazines from the time I was 12. I got a job working on Marquee, the movie magazine. Initially I worked for the company that published the magazine, but someone went on maternity leave, and I took over her role as the managing editor. It was great.*

MM From there, I understand you worked in Transcontinental's magazine division and then moved into custom publishing for a marketing company that produced Home Depot's magazine.

AL: *Yes, and from there to working on the magazine for Kraft Foods, So I always saw myself working in magazine publishing. That was the vision, because I loved magazines and working in environments with smart people in a creative space.*

I was managing a team and doing a lot of personal development and leadership training. I was getting better insight into what makes people happy at work, and how to tap into people's creativity and talents.

I was also the founding president of the Canadian Association of Black Journalists at the time. I did a lot of things that were just really helping to build my leadership. At no time was I seeing myself working in the restaurant industry.

MM So, you basically had a full career in publishing before even thinking about restaurants... At what point did the plot twist?

***AL:** I met Janet Zuccarini. We were in a leadership course together and became best friends. That was 23 years ago.*

I got to watch her in the restaurant business over a long period of time. She hadn't ever worked in a corporate environment, so she would come to me with questions about HR and other things, and I would give her advice from a corporate perspective.

I got to watch how she was able to use the training we had done around team building, management and leadership to create an amazing life for herself by empowering leaders in her restaurant. She was able to teach her team to run the restaurant like it was their own and that gave her a lot of freedom to travel.

MM So, you were a kind of informal consigliere to Janet at that time, bringing aspects of what you knew to her journey, while she was exposing you to the restaurant industry. How did you end up working together? Was this something you talked about for a long time or was there a moment of mutual realization that this was right?

***AL:** We had talked about working together for a long time, but we never thought it was going to be in the restaurant industry because at that time, Janet didn't have any plans to operate more than one restaurant. The idea was more like, "Let's start a business together – wouldn't that be fun?" We had all kinds of crazy ideas.*

Eventually, Janet bought the building Gusto 101 is in now. She told me she'd open the restaurant in a matter of months, but it took three years.

The restaurant was immediately successful–so so successful that she needed help answering the phone. I had some time, so I said, "Yeah, I can come for two weeks or so and help you answer the phone and I just never left.

> "I said, "Yeah, I can come for two weeks or so and help you answer the phone and I just never left."

MM Wow. That must have been an intense time.

***AL:** I started out consulting, and within a couple of months Janet asked if I would join the business as part of the leadership team. When I officially joined, I was the marketing communications manager, working with Janet and Demetrio Bianco, who is now Gusto 54's Chief Operating Officer. I was doing social media, which was non-existent at the time. We had a Facebook account for Gusto 101, and then Beyoncé and Jay-Z decided to go for lunch with Blue Ivy at Nervosa and we reacted to that situation and started a Facebook account for Nervosa.*

MM That's a hell of a launch post...

***AL:** Yeah, it was crazy. Now we have a whole marketing department, a president, and director of operations. We have opened so many more restaurants and grown so much over the decade. It's bananas.*

MM You appear to have a stable and interconnected leadership team with a lot of powerhouse women. Was that an accident of social connection or a deliberate build?

***AL:** I've always seen Janet as someone who is acutely tied to her intuition. And I've learned a lot from her because she's amazing at speaking things into reality. And she's also made most of her decisions based on what feels right.*

Janet wants to work with people she trusts. She immensely trusts Demetrio. He's been with her pretty much the whole time she's been in business for herself. Our president and CFO, Juanita Dickson was also a friend prior to working at Gusto 54, and Janet saw her highly successful skills in the marketing space. Janet felt that if she was going to do business, why not do it with people she knows, trusts and enjoys?

As far as selecting women as leaders, Janet obviously understands what it's like to be a woman in this industry. She felt ignored for a long time. Even with the success of Gusto 101, she wasn't getting noticed. You'd have to ask Janet if she deliberately chose women for all of these positions, but I can say she definitely is a champion for promoting women in the industry and within the business.

MM How has your role at the company evolved over the years? What was the genesis of your role as Chief Culture Officer?

***AL:** The title came before the role, because Gusto 54 is a very entrepreneurial space.*

Originally, we saw some gaps in the business that I could fill. We looked at the business and I knew we needed to develop a master brand that would be the umbrella for the business associated with it. I knew we needed to have a clear vision of what our master brand was, so we'd have a clear map to follow. We found an agency, Jackknife, and we developed Gusto 54 and were able to start to structure the company under that vision.

I also worked on setting up the business systems we needed. There was no one else to do this stuff, so I would work on finding people to help us with different systems like our email system or file storage system or online training system.

MM So, when you came into the business you were aware of Janet's vision and plan for growth?

***AL:** When Janet and I had that original conversation about joining the business, I asked her if we were going to do the*



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Team members, Chubby's Jamaican Kitchen

Jamaican concept restaurant. As friends, we'd traveled to Jamaica together and she's very close to my family, as I am to hers. It's something we'd talked about before I was ever in the restaurant industry. She'd gone to New York and visited this amazing Jamaican restaurant there called Miss Lily's. We went back and checked it out and I thought, "We could do this in Toronto." That was my true vision of us working together.

MM And it happened. You're co-founder and brand director of Chubby's Jamaican Kitchen. What was it like to get that hands-on in the restaurant business, to build out and launch such a concept?

***AL:** It's very stressful, and I still can't believe Janet gave me such a huge opportunity. It wasn't just an opening; it was a property development project. I'd never done that before and the budget was very large, but she trusted me to do it. She believed in me, and it was an amazing opportunity. We pulled the trigger in 2015, and my job was to find a location and a chef.*

Going from looking for a commercial space with a kitchen, HVAC and all those things to purchasing a residential building and turning it into a working restaurant is a feat in itself. It took three years.

MM That's a long time...

***AL:** Chubby's is in a Victorian row house, but we wanted to maintain a sense of authenticity. We ended up restoring a building and adding a building behind it, which is what Chubby's is. It's an addition attached to an old building.*

MM Chubby's is up and running, and it's made the Michelin list. What's on your plate now?

***AL:** I'm responsible for the Gusto 54 team member experience. I focus on the things that make their lives easier at work and make them love their job, so I work on the overarching culture of the company, and how to bring it to life in every single workplace.*

Within that, I am responsible for our online training system. I don't think there are any companies in our industry with such a robust system. We have Gusto University, which is an integrated learning system that trains people to become certified coaches and train others in their role.

The foundation of our training is an online, micro-learning system. Once a team member has moved beyond the orientation stage, they spend five minutes before the start of every shift answering three to five questions to reinforce their knowledge.

MM Employee training and leadership development are huge, but just part of the total employee value proposition and culture. What about community initiatives?

***AL:** Gusto Gives Back is another area I focus on. We've been doing Mini Chefs now for a number of years, but we've changed the format. It's grown from a one-day program where we partnered with a specific school, to a six-week, after-school program. On the last day, the kids cook a whole dinner and serve their parents.*

Our catering chef proposed doing a coat drive, so we did it. We'd never done one before, but one of our company values is "We are entrepreneurial." We really like to encourage people and help bring their ideas to fruition.

The charitable partner for Chubby's is Helping Hands Jamaica and I work a little bit more closely with them along with the team at the restaurant. We've done some really good things with them including their walkathon.

MM When a company grows the way that Gusto 54 has, it quickly becomes crucial to work on culture as a key brand driver. What are the tangible goals of having a strong culture in place? How does culture add dimension and purpose to the total business?



Chef Dadrian Coke, Chubby's Jamaican Kitchen

> "I think one of our greatest strengths is that we came into the industry with a different way of looking at everything."

AL: *Our culture is built on the foundation of our values. When we had just two restaurants, we operated inside of values, but we didn't have anything formally crafted that team members could align to or train on. When Juanita came in the company, she and I worked on the first version of the values and then in 2022, we reworked them. It's a living document and we tweak them now and again as the business evolves, but we've always had seven values.*

We use them for everything. We recruit and hire against our values. Our training aligns with our values and we reward according to our values. I found the original values we had and it was all about being awesome–Awesome, Awesome, Awesome–and that's why our peer recognition program is called the Awesome Awards.

What I'm working on right now is engaging people through recognition and acknowledgment. It has a lot to do with retention and lowering turnover coming out of the pandemic. It was difficult to find people and so when we found good people, we wanted to retain them. I created training that integrates acknowledgement and recognition into team members' everyday. It just creates a different workspace with a lot of positivity and a feeling team members are actually making a difference and contributing to the overall success of the company.

MM When it comes to culture building, one of the biggest topics in the industry is how to persuade people to consider restaurants and hospitality as a long-term career.

AL: *When we developed the vision for our master brand, it was about asking how we could revolutionize this industry and make people see it as a career option. How would we revolutionize it as women? What's cool about our company is that Juanita and I both had careers doing completely different things.*

I think one of our greatest strengths is that we came into the industry with a different way of looking at everything. We brought different experiences in publishing and marketing — I think that's what sets us apart. Juanita's a master marketer, and her experience led us to being named as one of Canada's Best Managed Companies.

We've always looked at ways to revolutionize, so during what I call "the summer of George Floyd," we asked ourselves how we would respond. We wanted to respond in a way that aligned with our values and really looked at what we could be doing more of and better. We had lots of work to do, but it wasn't enough to do it within our four walls. We felt that to walk the talk, we needed to be at the forefront of making change happen.



Team members, Gusto 501



Mini Chefs, Fall 2023



Helping Hands Jamaica Walkathon

People turned on the hospitality industry, saying we had dropped the ball of DE&I, on sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace, especially in kitchens, and the general experience of women. People were looking at the leadership teams and a lot of them are male dominated. The ownership and power structures are male dominated. There are very few People of Colour at the top.

We asked ourselves where we were failing and where we could do a better job, where could we create opportunities, so people see opportunity to move up, be promoted and see hospitality as a career and not a stepping stone to something else.

MM IDEA Hospitality is a brilliant concept. Rather than focusing inward and investing in solo DE&I efforts, the program is developing comprehensive leadership development training available to the entire hospitality industry. Gusto 54 is working with Kostuch Media and a Canadian Black- owned and led Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism (IDEA) consulting firm to develop a full-spectrum program that includes an employee and consumer-visible verification program. This is an enormous undertaking. Why did you choose this approach?

AL: *We decided to go big or go home. The vision was to create something that focused on accountability. In order to create that, we needed to have the actual owners, CEOs and leadership open themselves up to self-examination. This could even lead to a paradigm shift they could get excited about, create and implement within their organization.*

Part one of the IDEA program is helping and empowering leaders. Part two, IDEA Certified, is all about accountability. Once a company achieves certification, they keep that status by becoming part of the community, helping others and maintaining the certification standards through regular re-assessments.

We see engagement in IDEA Hospitality and then IDEA Certified similar to Canada's Best Managed Companies—it's something to be proud of and promote both inside and outside your business.

A lot of people believe they have fundamental knowledge of what DE&I is, but they just don't. We want to prepare them, then help them create and successfully execute a vision. That's what this program is about.

I'm excited, but I also know it's going to take time.



Team members, Gusto 501

> "DE&I is part of culture, it's about creating an environment of respect, recognition and belonging."

MM What's the value of successfully integrating the IDEA Hospitality vision into a company or restaurant?

AL: *A culture within a company has lots of touch points, and right now there are two things that are important to me in our company culture right now: people need to want to be at work, contributing in valuable ways they are acknowledged for, and IDEA Hospitality and DE&I in general are very important parts of any company culture.*

The whole point I would like to see us get to is that these are not actually two, separate things. DE&I is part of culture, and it isn't a quota system, it's not only about skin colour or about visible diversity. It's about understanding what it really means to create a culture and environment of belonging. Where everyone knows that where they work is a place where they can fully express and be their authentic selves. When people are able to do that, they bring a lot of value to businesses.

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4 for 2024:

Ipsos shares their top four consumer insights to build restaurant profitability in 2024

With Asad Amin, Head of Syndicated Solutions at Ipsos



As the world steadily adapts to the post-pandemic era, consumer behaviour in Canada has undergone significant transformations. Asad Amin, Head of Syndicated Solutions at Ipsos, delves into the evolving consumer trend landscape to identify and unravel four predominant trends that are shaping the Canadian restaurant industry in 2024 and beyond.

From the fight to tease consumers out of their homes and back into restaurants and demographic shifts to a surge in digital ordering and brand management, these trends not only reflect the changing priorities of Canadian consumers but also offer a roadmap for businesses looking to stay ahead in a dynamically evolving marketplace.

FSM FOODSERVICE MONITOR SYNDICATED

1. The Push & Pull of Retail vs. Foodservice

Societal impacts attributed to the residual effects of the pandemic and recent inflationary pressures have left consumers focused on retail and in-home food experiences. The silver lining may lie in the measurable rebound in foodservice sales and pent-up demand for dining out.



Like any industry, the foodservice sector can get a little myopic. While assessing the state of the industry, it's important to keep in mind that what people consume goes beyond restaurants. There's no question it's a push and pull of both higher prices at the grocery store and discretionary spending getting tighter.

We've now been in our homes for three-plus years, and many of us continue to be. There are new habits that have developed over this period, and that's had an obvious impact on the foodservice sector.

That first summer where people weren't scared of getting infected and there were fewer restrictions–we saw in our data a clear indication of pent-up demand. I mean, it had been a while. It's a very simple thing to go out to eat, and people wanted to enjoy themselves. Soon though, prices started to creep up and our data showed that people began to trade down on how much they spent and what they consumed as opposed to how often they went out to eat. Centre-of-the-plate items were the ones that remained steady or grew, with peripheral items like beverages, desserts and sides all taking a hit.

These things indicate that people are looking for some level of affordable indulgence, some level of enjoyability that trumps the need to be able to fully afford it. It's analogous to the "lipstick effect", a term coined by Leonard Lauder of the cosmetics company Estée Lauder. When times are tough, people will buy less, but still find money for affordable luxuries like lipstick. This is possibly the best way to describe how people are managing pent-up demand, even with all the forces and headwinds going up against their ability to eat out.

So, we do see a bit of a rebound after the pandemic. Traffic is up. Sales are up, though higher menu prices play a role in that.
To maintain this positive direction, restaurants need to reconnect consumers with the value of dining out.

Convenience.

The first lever to pull is convenience. If you don't want to cook at home and you just want to grab something to go, restaurants are there. If you want the experience of an elevated meal—something you can't cook yourself at home – or want to socialize and have a memorable night out. These are big pluses foodservice can use to dial up the differences between going out to eat versus choosing retail or grocery purchases.

Deals and specials continue to be effective ways to promote and encourage people to spend at a restaurant, but how these offers are promoted and marketed is important. This could be as simple as pivoting to prix fixe menus and bringing the "combo" concept into full-service and fine dining restaurants. Showing value on the menu can be effective. Combos are still the most popular type of deal in foodservice, driven by QSRs. Full-service has been pivoting and is now focused on off-premise, which is something it's never done. Is a tasting menu going to be as popular? Maybe not for the masses. I think it's more important that customers who are not buying beverages to save money are given a way to get what they want that shows value for money. The art lies in positioning the deal in a way that doesn't diminish your product or offer and that provides the right value.

For example, a restaurant could offer special house-created beverages as a "special of the week", or these drinks could be paired with specific dishes at a discount as a limited-time offer as a clear way to drive up cheque size. Creating value-based offers addresses a clear need for the consumer market, and some customers will say, "If I can have an elevated experience at just a slightly higher price, then why not?"

Craveability.

Craveability is the number one emotional driver in foodservice. It's that "I have to have it" signal in people's brains. Depending on the quality and location of the offer, whether it's a local restaurant that trades in nostalgic value or it's your favourite dish you haven't enjoyed in a while, it's a powerful way to convince people to go out–even stronger than convenience.

It's a matter of finding out what people are looking for and building those items on your menu. Obviously, taste is great, but beyond that there are flavours and spices. There are unique offerings you can provide to differentiate and ensure it's not something the average person could easily prepare at home.

A great example of this we saw during the pandemic was the explosive growth in fried chicken sandwiches. They were on every corner, even in this day and age with

attitudes toward health and wellness, protein alternatives and plant-based diets. Fried chicken sandwiches were pretty indulgent, very craveable and highly portable. It was also the antithesis of the burger at that time, and Popeye's success stands out. They broke the Internet with a simple chicken sandwich.

Authenticity and making sure your food is as real as possible is another key component that can encourage frequency and differentiate your product.

Experience.

Experience was the fastest growing need we saw in foodservice following the pandemic. Part of that is about socializing, just getting together and hanging around with friends and family. The other part is about the specific environment and ambiance of a dine-in experience. When you're stuck at home, you're working, living and eating in the same place. You're missing an elevated experience. Restaurants have the edge on that. Experience is the biggest selling point for dining in and how an operator delivers that experience will depend on the brand objective. Many QSRs and chains have invested in improving and elevating their stores, at significant expense for corporations and especially franchisees, without guarantee that in-store dining would fully return. We are still very much in a climate where the takeout and delivery continue to lead sales for many restaurants.

For many full-service restaurants though, the dine-in experience and environment remain significant aspects of the value proposition and one of the main elements influencing success. It's ultimately about taking a serious look at your business performance and priorities and exploiting the advantages and competencies most natural to your operation.



FASTEST GROWING VISIT DRIVERS AT FOODSERVICE VS THE START OF THE PANDEMIC

1. **Satisfies/fulfills my craving**
2. **Looking for a convenient location/easily accessible**
3. **Wanted something that could be eaten quickly**
4. **Could enjoy food/beverage in a nice atmosphere (seating, lighting, clean environment)**

MENU

Grow restaurant vs. retail market share by emphasizing craveability, convenience and experience.

CRAVEABILITY:

Menu Design: Focus on creating unique and delicious dishes that customers cannot easily replicate at home or find in stores. Limited time offers, signature dishes, and using quality, fresh ingredients can enhance craveability.

Sensory Tools: Emphasize the sensory appeal of food through appealing descriptions, mouth-watering images, and through social media to create buzz and demand.

CONVENIENCE:

Off-Premise Development: Offer efficient online ordering systems, delivery and pick-up options and implement a user-friendly app for ordering, payments and loyalty programs to streamline the process and incentivize repeat visits.

Resto Retail: Offer meal kits or heat-and-eat versions of popular dishes to provide the convenience of retail with the unique quality and taste of the restaurant.

EXPERIENCE:

Environment: Provide an ambiance and dining experience that cannot be matched by eating at home including social enhancements like live music, themed nights or exceptional service.

Engagement: Offer cooking classes, wine tastings or other interactive experiences to draw in customers looking for more than just a meal.

Programming: Collaborate with local artists or host community events or theme nights to enhance the sense of experience and community connection.

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2. Passing of the Baton from Older to Younger Diners

The generational shift has impacted everything in foodservice from growth in tech adoption, health and wellness factors (plant-based foods, moderation) to diverse taste palates and non-traditional dining concepts.

When we talk about different cohorts, we used to look at Boomers vs. Millennials. Now, it's all focused on Gen Z.

These are very, very different individuals and that applies to everything that they do. In general, older people tend to know what they want. They know their brands. They know their restaurants, their items, their taste palates, and they don't necessarily want change. They also typically have a higher disposable income and are looking to enjoy their lifestyle more.

For younger people, there are a lot of additional layers. First, social media has impacted their experience of foodservice and what they crave. They drive a lot of growth and change in the sector. Their values are different from older generations, and that's impacting lots of things, like health and wellness beyond fundamentals like nutritional intake. Environmental, social and other governance factors, like where and how you or a company you purchase from are sourcing food as well as the plant-based movement. This generation also likes variety, experience and trying new things, so they are less tied to one chain or food brand. The dichotomies between these cohorts are really having a massive impact on a lot of changes in lots of sectors, but definitely in foodservice.

So, how does a restaurant retool its offering to engage younger diners? The first thing to know is that this is a cohort that prioritizes authenticity. They've got a strong nose for bulls**t. Whatever a restaurant is selling or saying must be "real" because young people can sense what is and is not genuine, and who is walking the talk. So, if a restaurant is promoting or offering certain social or environmental needs, it must be authentic to hit the mark and resonate.

While you'll often hear the Gen Z cohort characterized as "fickle", it's more accurate to say they're not necessarily loyal. They are very open to trying new things, so the sweet spot might be to aim to be a brand or have a product they're willing to experience on repeat, rather than attempt to become their "one and only" identifying brand or restaurant.

A great example of this is Tahini's. It's an Ontario-based, Middle Eastern restaurant chain with a huge social media presence based on humour that's connected really well with young people. I heard an anecdote about people on a hockey tour where all the kids on the bus flipped when they drove by, and they had to stop and go and eat there. It's just a shawarma shop, which these days are a dime a dozen. However, they have good quality food, they position things well and they have all the standard dishes as well as some experimental items like a blueberry shawarma. Tahini's is a great example of how restaurants can break through the noise in an authentic way and stand out.

The most successful restaurants move beyond traditional, rigid ideas of brand to merge into authentic dialogues with younger generations across all touchpoints. It's not about logos and colours anymore; it's dynamic. The reason this cohort may seem a little fickle is because of the environment they're growing up in, their habits and their attention spans. I have a 10-year-old and she's never watched TV; she's always online. I don't allow her on social media, but I know the instant gratification factor is something that's bleeding into young peoples' ability to stay loyal to products and brands. This is part of what's driving their trial levels and openness to move on. The job for restaurants is to find a way to communicate that moves fluidly through digital channels to stay relevant and ideally achieve virality.

Take the growth in the popularity of soccer among young people. It's not our national sport. A lot of that growth is driven by social media, which provides a dynamic platform to break through and influence users in an authentic way on the right channels to meet them where they are. Restaurants can do that through a social media influencer or on their own. The Popeye's chicken sandwich example wasn't necessarily targeted to Gen Z, but certainly social media helped amplify that volume because that's where discovery and adoption really happens for younger consumers.

I've never seen a more visible generation of foodies than I do now. I don't know if it's because it's become commoditized, but everyone seems to have an opinion about food and foodservice. It's important for restaurants to make sure they have authentic generational voices advising on social media to ensure



authenticity and credibility within the space. They'll bring that authentic voice and help restaurant brands convey the cultural nuances of their generation.

Another important aspect of the Gen Z consumer is the role their personal values and beliefs play into their consumption habits. Our data shows that conscious consumption drivers definitely do skew younger. For older consumers, it's all about nutritional intake, whereas younger people may consider factors like whether a product is sustainably sourced or organic, or whether a restaurant uses recycled packaging. They also skew higher in saying they will purchase products from or support companies that are committed to these principles and represent the highest numbers of vegans and vegetarians. Even if you look at the middle-roaders we call lessitarians or flexitarians who have reduced their intake of meat, it's all driven by younger people who say they're doing so to reduce the impact on the environment, in addition to health reasons. Perhaps for some, these assertions are aspirational, but I think there's a level of reality and permanence to it evidenced by the growth we're seeing in related sectors. And, because social media habits are so ingrained in younger cohorts, these ideas are likely to continue to feed into each other and create perpetual echo chambers.



TOP CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION DRIVERS OVERDEVELOPED (>120 Index) AMONG GEN Z

- **Environmental Impact**
- **Climate Change**
- **Organic**
- **Fair Trade**

TOP CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION DRIVERS OVERDEVELOPED (>120 Index) AMONG BOOMERS

- **Product Freshness**
- **Quality of ingredients**

MENU

Younger consumers crave food, spaces and experiences that cater to their preferences and values.

Technology: Younger generations are tech-savvy and appreciate technological integrations. This can include offering online reservations, digital menus, mobile ordering, and contactless payment options. Social media presence is also crucial, as platforms like Instagram and TikTok can be used for marketing and engagement.

Menu Innovation: Updating the menu to include contemporary, globally inspired or fusion dishes and on-trend, Insta-worthy food options can draw a younger crowd. This includes catering to health-conscious diners with vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free options.

Sustainable Practices: Younger diners often prefer businesses that demonstrate environmental responsibility. Using locally sourced ingredients, minimizing waste, and implementing sustainable packaging can be attractive to this demographic.

Ambiance: A modern, vibrant, comfortable ambiance with a share-worthy interior design can draw younger customers.

Events and Entertainment: Hosting events like live music, themed nights, or culinary workshops can create an experience beyond just dining. This can turn a restaurant visit into a social event, drawing groups of younger people.

Loyalty Programs & Promotions: Implementing loyalty programs that reward frequent visits or offering promotions through social media can help in retaining younger customers and encouraging word-of-mouth advertising.

Collaborations & Pop-Ups: Collaborating with local businesses, influencers, or hosting pop-up events can generate buzz and attract a younger audience looking for unique experiences.

Feedback & Adaptation: Actively seeking feedback from younger customers and being willing to adapt based on their preferences is key. This shows that the restaurant values their input and is committed to improving their experience.

3. Evolving Flavour Preferences & Profiles

The fact that New Canadians account for 25 per cent of the population will clearly have an impact on society and on foodservice. This demographic shift has spurred the growth of new flavours, restaurants and chains, menu items and more. This vitality and variety not only serves the culinary needs of communities, it intersects with the preferences of younger consumers who are far more opening to trying new foods and experiences.



We're a unique country. Right? We've got an accelerated growth rate driven by immigration, and that's a double-edged sword. Unless we want to see it shrink the way it has in Japan. If we look to big Canadian cities like Toronto, we see that visible minorities are now nearly 56 per cent of the population, and we're seeing the effects of that shift on foodservice.

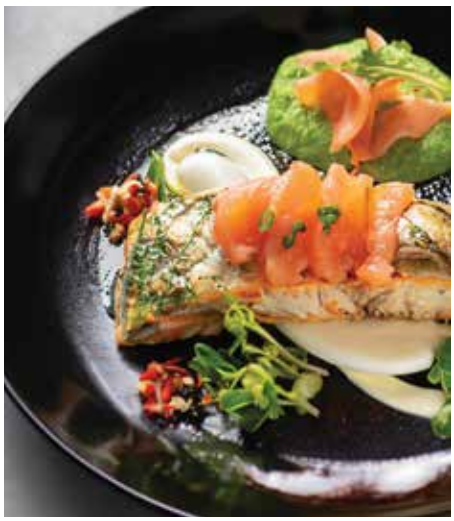
Just two decades ago, I used to have to go out of my way to find decent Pakistani food at Lahore Tikka House on Gerard Street. They offered everything I was looking for then and that restaurant is still open, but in the last five years we've seen an explosion of growth in authentic ethnic restaurants. From mom and pops and independents to chains, they're putting down roots and concentrating in Mississauga for Middle Eastern cuisine and Markham for East Asian food. International chains are opening up because they see the growing demand. The franchise fees are fairly reasonable, so we're seeing New Canadians take the risk and open a restaurant that's familiar to them.

Younger people who may not necessarily be New Canadians themselves but are open to trying new things are supporting a significant part of this growth. They watch and follow influencers they see experiencing delicious foods and dishes from across the world and, when they see it in their own neighbourhoods, they're eager to try it. That's really evolving the food landscape and we're seeing pockets of density in world cuisines pop up, like Korean food in North York. It's fascinating.

Some younger consumers also have a fair amount of disposable income, and the restaurants cater to that. They're accustomed to delivery channels and, while our labour costs are much higher than they may be in operators' home countries, you have third-party apps like Fantuan, which specializes in Asian food delivery thriving in this environment. It's an exciting place to be if you're open to trying new foods.

The other aspect is that many New Canadians come to the restaurant sector with the mentality that they've got nothing to lose, and they're opening and really helping to rebuild the sector. Part of the story that emerged from the devastation of the pandemic was this theme of "creative destruction"; where many old establishments might close, but a new generation came and changed things. I can see that happening now in an exponential way. Certain favourites aren't going anywhere–smash burgers don't die. The tried-and-true staples and favourites are still here, but we're seeing a new take or twist on these offerings or an authentic fusion.

Despite the struggle, I believe it's still a good time for foodservice and there's a lot to be excited about. It's just a bit of a reset.



Multicultural/New Canadians are far more developed at consuming out of home (132 index) versus Established Canadians.

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MENU

New Canadians and young consumers seek authentic cuisine and are driving sector growth.

Authentic Experiences: New Canadians often seek out authentic food from their home countries. Restaurants specializing in authentic cuisines from various regions can attract a loyal customer base seeking a taste of home as well as young people interested in exploring new foods.

Hiring: Restaurants can benefit from hiring staff from diverse backgrounds, which can improve communication with customers from different cultures and enhance the dining experience.

Market Expansion & Franchising Opportunities: There's an opportunity to expand into areas with high newcomer populations, catering specifically to their culinary preferences. This could involve franchising or opening new locations in these areas.
Authentic Catering Services: Offering catering services for cultural celebrations and events can be a new revenue driver for restaurants.

Educational Opportunities: Cooking classes or cultural food nights can attract young people interested in learning about different cuisines, increasing engagement and revenue.

Tourism: Authentic and diverse culinary offerings can attract tourists looking for unique dining experiences and can open new marketing channels.

4. The Influence of the Influencers

Technology and its impact on dining habits have had a strong growth trajectory, with exponential growth in digitized orders over the past five years, but who are the users, how is digital ordering best leveraged and what are the challenges?

The digital channel will continue to grow, and taking advantage of that growth is about having the right people and a strong digital strategy in place to connect with your audience. If your restaurant caters to younger consumers, it's smart to have members of that cohort on the team to communicate directly and authentically with them.

Some restaurants are exclusively focused on digital and the off-premise because overheads are comparatively low, but the benefits are open to every restaurant. If you want to target young people that fit your restaurant profile, it's a channel you don't want to dismiss. If you're an exclusive, fine dining establishment, it may not make sense to focus on digital for orders, but you should still have a curated and targeted digital strategy to promote awareness and encourage discoverability.

It's also important to remember that many younger people have money and discerning tastes, so in overlooking digital, you may be losing an opportunity to grow your next guest cohort. In the on-premise, we have single-digit growth and traffic is just coming back, yet off-premise growth is in the triple digits in terms of usage and utility. At that high level of adoption, you don't want to miss out, so the more and earlier restaurants learn to adapt to and maximize digital channels, the better.

Digital ordering also opens up new development that can help restaurants provide and promote loyalty programs, events and special offerings including influencer and brand collaborations, pop-ups and limited-time menu items. When operators think about their digital strategy, they should see it as a vital and all-encompassing way to connect with customers, from facilitating orders to expressing the value proposition of the brand to the marketplace.

The downside of the digital market is that it can take operators down rabbit holes. Managing digital channels can take a lot of time, so it's important to stay focused on efforts that drive traffic and that make sense and are manageable for the operation – not every restaurant needs to add influencer-led activations to their digital marketing plan. Again, authenticity should guide the strategy.

There are many ways operators can be effective on digital platforms and combine evergreen consumer behaviours with emerging trends, but ultimately it comes down to the goal. If it's all about promoting orders, evoking craveability is key, but with a layered approach. Association, making sure you have the right people promoting your products, and creativity, making sure your product looks delicious are top of the list tactics. Brand persona development, or how you communicate the culture and personality of your restaurant or product are also very important to winning in the virtual space. What is the brand projecting? What does it care about? Is it funny, approachable or sarcastic? Convenience is built into the platform, but what value does the brand deliver beyond price?

It is less about spinning a dozen plates at once than it is about understanding how your restaurant aligns with the needs and values of





the audience you want to attract and communicating these attributes consistently and authentically. Whether you're working with an influencer, building a brand collaboration or just promoting a new menu item, audiences will call you out if it doesn't feel right or pass you by if it doesn't resonate.

There are authentic influencers who cater to certain niches and certain demographics. Working with local influencers can also drive traffic as their specialized focus tends to enhance their authority with their audience and for foodservice, local is where you're driving your traffic. It also tends to cost a lot less. If you're targeting the South Asian or the Caribbean community or a certain neighbourhood, use an influencer familiar to that audience. For operations with a smaller footprint who don't need to drive mass traffic, it's not about finding the biggest influencer, but the most relevant and authentic.

30% of Individuals use Technololgy on a daily basis for their consumption decisions. Top usage is related to product/restaurant reviews.

MENU Digital has revolutionized restaurant marketing and revenue-generating opportunities.

Website Optimization: Ensure your restaurant's website is user-friendly and mobile-responsive. Keep it updated with current menus, prices, and hours. Use search engine optimization (SEO) to improve visibility on search engines.

Online Ordering & Delivery: Partner with popular local food delivery platforms or develop your own online ordering system to expand your customer base and increase convenience.

Social Media Engagement: Maintain an active and authentic presence on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Share quality photos of dishes, behind-the-scenes happenings, and special promotions. Encourage customers to post their experience.

Email Marketing: Collect email addresses, with consent, to send newsletters and special offers. Personalize these communications to increase engagement.

Loyalty Programs: Create digital loyalty programs to encourage repeat business, which can be integrated into your website or mobile app and promoted on delivery platforms.

Online Reviews & Reputation: Monitor and respond to online reviews on platforms like Yelp and Google. Addressing both positive and negative feedback can improve your reputation.

Influencer Partnerships: Work with authentic local food bloggers or influencers to reach a broader or targeted audience.

Digital Advertising: Use targeted ads on social media and search engines to reach potential customers based on their interests and location.

Content Marketing: Capture and create content that establishes your restaurant and your food and resonates with your audience.

Technology Integration: Consider using AI for customer service, augmented reality for menus, or QR codes for contactless interactions.

Community, Sustainability & Transparency: Share community events, sustainable practices or social responsibility initiatives online.



About Asad Amin...

Asad Amin is Head of Syndicated Solutions at Ipsos, focused on the Food and Beverage and the Financial Services verticals. This includes the Foodservice Monitor (FSM), which is subscribed to by market leaders across all alcohol categories in Canada and the US.

Asad specializes in the setup and launch of large, syndicated services. In his 20+ year tenure in the Canadian and US market research industries, he has worked for a wide variety of Fortune 500 companies across multiple verticals. His area of expertise is in understanding consumption behaviour and uncovering insights to derive future trends.

Asad presents at numerous food and beverage industry events and contributes across several media publications. He is an annual speaker at the Restaurants Canada Show and with Wine Growers Canada.

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PUCKER UP FOR 2024

Executive Chef Juriaan Snellen of McCormick & Company on the flavour trends restaurants need to spice up their menus.

McCormick Flavour Forecast 24th Edition



Executive Chef Juriaan Snellen of McCormick & Company

The McCormick® Flavour Forecast® has been a trusted resource for identifying emerging culinary trends and flavors since its launch in 2000. Each year, this forecast provides a tantalizing glimpse into the future of food and flavour, highlighting innovative tastes and ingredients that are poised to inspire both professional chefs and home cooks. With insights from a global network of chefs, culinary professionals, trend trackers and food technologists, the McCormick Flavour Forecast is an essential guide for anyone looking to stay ahead of the culinary curve and add exciting new flavour to their menu.

At the end of 2023, McCormick released the Flavour Forecast for 2024, announcing the tamarind as the Flavour of the Year. Intrigued, we connected with Chef Juriaan Snellen, Executive Corporate Chef for McCormick Canada to learn more about what goes into the development of this report and how restaurants can use flavour trends to engage their guests and drive profit.

MM How did the Flavour Forecast get started and what goes in to choosing the flavour of the year and developing the flavour trends behind the scenes?

Juriaan Snellen: *Well, McCormick & Company is the number one spice producer in the world, so it's only fitting for us to produce this annual report. It's our 25th anniversary next year.*

The process starts about 18 months to three years out, depending on where an organization fits. Some of the trends we forecast might be more applicable sooner for fine dining, whereas family dining might pick up those flavours later.

In 2000, we began with forecasting single flavours and verged into flavour pairings and linked that into complete cuisines. Today, we're focusing on the full-blown trends that really shake up the way we flavour, cook and eat. It's been very transformational, and I think one of the cool things is that we even use the Flavour Forecast ourselves to funnel our pipeline of innovation as a commercial spice

company. We've actually already started launching our flavour of the year, which touches on all three of the flavour trends in the report.

We take a holistic approach to putting the forecast together, with a culinary team of 42 global chefs. That gives us a unique vantage point as to what's happening in the beautiful world of flavour across the world.

With such vast input and different perspectives, how do you arrive at a shortlist?

JS: *There's no fight – no one gets hurt – but it is a bit of a process. We've been working behind the scenes on this edition of the report for about a year with a global team of taste experts including chefs, marketers, food technologists and product development specialists. Each regional group presented trend signals from their region and that gave us over one thousand signals to dig through and analyze to see if there was anything there. This exercise led us to 10 different "dig sites" to further explore with our team, and ultimately, we arrived at three key trends to highlight in this year's Flavour Forecast.*

A cool part of our process is what we call "global food safaris", where teams in the field visit different parts of the world to experience the trends themselves. We had safaris in Toronto, New York, Melbourne, Singapore, London and France. Then, we came back and shared our insights and experiences with the group. If there was overlap, we knew these were trends we would diver deeper into, and the most significant of those are the trends that made the cut.

What are the criteria that set a flavour apart? How do you ultimately choose the Flavour of the Year?

JS: *The flavour of the year for 2024 is Tamarind. It's a complex flavour that allows chefs to introduce a real global flavour and feel into their menu. For the North American market, we're bringing tamarind together with pasilla chiles, which are originally from Mexico, for an extremely versatile seasoning. Tamarind has a lot of fruity, sour notes which really tap into our Sour Power trend and marries beautifully with the pasilla chiles,*







which have a little bit of a malt – they're kind of earthy, lightly fruity almost raisin-like with a mild heat. Having these two flavours together allows operators and chefs to put an interesting, funky ethnic twist on pretty much anything – barbecue sauce, chicken wings, dumplings or pork chops and even in drinks and beverages.

MM Was your team involved in the Flavour Forecast recipe development process?

***JS:** Yes, we take a lot of pride in representing Canada or North America by developing the recipes. I was familiar with Tamarind, but I hadn't really worked with it in varied applications. It was a lot of fun to head into our test kitchens, play around with food and brainstorm ideas you think might work. When you land on a recipe, share it out with the larger team, and get the initial feedback, it's very rewarding. We have a variety of different recipes on our Flavour Report website. They're absolutely phenomenal, and you should try them.*

MM Do you have a favourite?

***JS:** I really love the Japanese Milk Bread Pizza recipe, which reflects our "Thoughtfully Borrowed Trend". That's one of my favorites. The unique experience of the dough with the spiciness of the soppressatta and the earthiness of the mushrooms really come together, beautifully. For our Sour Power trend, the Duck Egg Rolls are incredible, rich and pair beautifully with the with Chipotle Tamarind Sauce in the recipe.*

MM What are the flavour trends for 2024?

***JS:** There are three, and the first is Sour Power. So, the fundamentals of flavour are salt, fat, heat and acid. Salt is a flavour enhancer and acid is a craveability enhancer. It literally makes your mouth water and want to come back for more. Throughout our dig phase we heard a lot of people talking about acids and vinegars, flavours like lemon, lime and calamansi, passion fruit, finger limes with their texture and little bursts of acidity then, of course, tamarind. Sour Power is really about layering those different flavours and calling out the different acidic ingredients in there.*



The second trend, "Thoughtfully Borrowed", is actually one of my personal trends, and it goes back to home-style, heritage cooking. Obviously here in Canada, we have a high immigration level and we're seeing chefs bringing recipes that have been passed on from through generations with them when they come to Canada and putting a North American spin on those recipes to create original flavours. Sometimes, we refer to this as Fusion 2.0, but it's about creating intentional mashups and experimenting at the flavour level.

The final 2024 trend is "Indulgence Redefined", which is all about expressing yourself through food and customizing it the way you want it. Indulgence is very personal – what is indulgent for me may not be to you. One aspect of this trend is flavour maximalism, or the intentional layering of textures and flavours to create a craveable experience, and "newstalgia", which is revisiting and reinventing nostalgic flavours. Our Cinnamon Cereal Milk Punch Cocktail recipe is a great example of this. It really brings you back to your childhood where you were eating your sweet cereals with milk, and but it's elevated into an adult beverage.

MM How can restaurants and chefs successfully introduce flavour trends on their menus?

***JS:** The Flavour Forecast is designed to inspire. If you put the tamarind and pasilla chile seasoning on a chicken wing, you'll transform traditional comfort food into a kind of global flavour exploration. Typically, seasoning represents only one or two per cent of overall food costs, so adding new flavours can bring some excitement to everyday menu items in an affordable, labour-neutral way.*

To view the full McCormick Flavour Report, visit mccormick.com/flavor-forecast-2024.

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Check out the interactive test kitchen presented in part by Club House for Chefs in the RC Show Pop Up Experience at RC Show 2024.



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WHAT'S WET & WILD FOR 2024

Worth-Your-Time Beverage Trends from Some of Canada's Top Sippers

BY HANNAH WIGGIN

As we raise our glasses to the new year, we look forward to the exciting bar and beverage trends that 2024 will bring. While a classic and balanced beverage menu will always be the cornerstone of your bar business, leaning into new trends can be an easy and exciting way to shake things up this year.

These 2024 bar and beverage trend predictions from some of Canada's best bartenders, owner-operators and social media influencers can provide you with some inspiration on how to capitalize on beverage menu profitability. From cocktails on tap, sustainably produced alcohol to trial mini-cocktails and the continued growth of the low- and no-alcohol (NoLo) beverages, there is a trend for every customer whether they are a casual sipper or a cocktail enthusiast. This gives every operator to the opportunity to engage and grow their customer base to the benefit of their bottom line.



COCKTAILS ON DEMAND

Civil Pours, a Toronto-based cocktail distillery, makes kegged ready-to-drink (RTD) and bottled cocktails available for sale in Ontario bars and restaurants. With continued growth last year, the company increased their catalogue by adding new cocktails and ingredients, and expanded their restaurant customer base ten-fold. This year, Civil Pours continues to grow their business to include at-home consumption with online sales and brick and mortar retailers.



CHRIS WILLIAMSON, head of marketing, sales and operations at Civil Pours, anticipates their company's growth continuing in 2024 as more bars and restaurants realize the numerous benefits of cocktails on tap. This cocktail program, developed with the Civil Liberties (consistently named one of Canada's best bars) bar team, has created shelf stable, top-selling cocktails in draft-ready kegs ready to be served. With the increasing demand for high quality cocktails in ready-to-consume formats, Williamson is excited for 2024. "We're expecting to increase the variety of cocktails we produce while expanding the availability of our products at retail for consumer purchase," Williamson explains.

With a business that offers products to both businesses and consumers, Williamson is always staying on top of trends. "Restaurants are generally looking for established, classic cocktails that are frequently ordered and typically require time and effort to make, so they can increase margins by freeing up time for their staff to provide more hospitality," says Williamson. Civil Pours also offers bottled cocktails for at-home consumption, Williamson notes. For at-home consumers, Williamson notes that, "Regular customers are hunting for the best possible version of their favourite classics to consume off-premises." He predicts consumers will continue to explore new spirits when perusing bar menus and discover cocktails that will in turn drive new beverage trends for 2024. "Look out for rum, brandy, and fortified wine to get increased exposure as the current waves for regional whisky and mezcal begin to peak and subside," Williamson advises.

With a robust R&D roadmap, Civil Pours is, "focusing on developing cocktails that consumers are looking for based on bar and restaurant sales, search engine data, and social media conversation trends." With hotels like Fairmont, The Drake Hotel and Hotel X, restaurants like Cactus Club, retail giants like Eataly, and entertainment venues like The Rec Room already on board, it is easy to see the appeal of RTD cocktail programs and the benefits they bring. They not only deliver ease of service and a seamless customer experience, but also increase bar margins.

DIGITAL INFLUENCE



KAITLYN STEWART has bartended for some of Vancouver's best cocktail bars for nearly 18 years. Named "Best Bartender in the World" by Diageo's World Class in 2017, she now works as a beverage consultant and recipe developer as well as an educator and mentor. Under the handle "Like·a·ble Cocktails," Stewart showcases a variety of different cocktail techniques, recipes and step-by-step tutorials for those who want to learn more about the world of cocktails via Instagram and TikTok. Looking forward to 2024, Stewart remarks, "Trends come and go. I don't see any of them in particular declining, but shifting." She does acknowledge she will occasionally hop on trend if she sees sufficient demand among her nearly 500K TikTok followers.

With social media making information more accessible and influencing consumer behaviour, Stewart believes, "trends will start coming and going a lot quicker." With the shift towards more conscious alcohol consumption, Stewart notes she would love to see cocktails in "mini" formats. "Sometimes when I'm out at a bar I want to try three or four drinks, but I don't necessarily want to finish full-sized drinks. A cocktail sampler platter would be amazing!"

DEVELOPING RTDS



JAKE CLARK started her popular Instagram page, "Girl Named Jake" as a way to stay connected. After moving away from a well-established beer community in Calgary, Clark moved to a small, remote island in B.C. in 2018. With photos of idyllic backdrops, Clark shares her "Currently Drinking" feature with her 40K followers alongside pictures of her hanging out with her dog and enjoying the Great White North. Clark is now taking on new ventures and is part of the founding team for The Strait & Narrow, a B.C.-based distillery focusing on ready-to-drink, canned cocktails.

The Strait & Narrow team aimed to find a lower sugar and lower calorie option to the RTD coolers. "We developed options with a bit more depth versus what was currently on the market with an emphasis on cocktails with unique flavour combinations," says Clark. "We don't want to have any flavours that 'die' in the back of someone's fridge," she says. "We've noticed customers are looking for bigger, bolder flavours and variety, which led us to ensure that all of our mixed packs are designed to complement each other, as the competition for retailer shelf space grows in this category."





> “High competition and margin compression will drive significant innovation and breweries are going to need to embrace technology to drive down costs.”
>
> – Jake Clark

When asked what she hopes to see in the RTD and cocktail space for 2024, Clark anticipates massive growth in non-alcoholic and low-alcohol RTD offerings. As well, she sees the continued growth in tequila-based cocktails peaking as the market makes space for other spirit bases to dominate.

With high-quality ingredients, unique and intriguing flavours, options between low-calorie, sugar and alcohol or premium spirits, complemented by unique, eye-catching and convenient packaging, RTD cocktails look like they will have a long-lasting impact on overall retail beverage and bar sales across the country.

WHAT’S BREWING?

With a second foot firmly in the world of Canadian beer, Clark is forthcoming with her views on beer trends in 2024 following a tumultuous year for breweries across the country, with rising taxation, increasing product costs and closures.

Clark believes these challenging circumstances will create urgency for many brewery owners. “High competition and margin compression will drive significant innovation and breweries are going to need to embrace technology to drive down costs.” Clark also senses recipe development and procurement will spearhead beer industry innovation, with more brewers experimenting with new hop products including extracts and oils. She characterizes this shift as a necessary means to, “expand aromas and flavour profiles, but also to support increasing yields and thus greater profit.”

With rising ingredient costs, maximizing extraction potential is important. She also hopes to see sustainable business practices becoming more beneficial to breweries and their consumers. Clark added that, “finding ways to drive efficiencies within the brewery footprint, reduce energy consumption and costs, improve packaging and increase the drive to local” will work to force this shift towards enhanced sustainability in brewing and brewery operations.

On a more somber note, Clark mentioned another trend she predicts will continue to grow is brewery closures. As craft beer continues to be overshadowed by growing alcoholic beverage categories alongside the rise and popularity of low- or no-ABV options, the accessibility of cannabis products, and the younger generation continuing to limit their consumption of alcoholic beverages, Clark believes, “the beer world is going to need to really buckle down and ensure their business practices are well-thought out and solid.” Clark is still positive overall though, believing there is space for meaningful change in the industry. “The need for beer to build a longer table and invite new faces and perspectives to it is something that cannot be overlooked or overstated, and tap room initiatives, marketing considerations, consumer engagement and business values will all play an integral role.”

LOCAL GRAPES



ANDRÉ PROULX is a Toronto-based sommelier, journalist and co-founder of the 80x Wine Company, spun up as a “learning exercise to gain a better understanding of how the Ontario wine industry works.” Proulx and his team make small batch wines that they distribute mainly to restaurants.

His hands-on understanding of making and selling wine in Ontario has informed his desire to see more people drinking Ontario VQA wines. Proulx responds to data that suggests



70 CALORIES. 3% ABV.

CELEBRATE RESPONSIBLY

*MUST BE LEGAL DRINKING AGE. PRICE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.



VQA market share has been stagnant for over a decade, saying, “there are plenty of exciting new producers that are pushing for quality.” He is also excited to see grape growers that do not own wineries, like Mio Vineyard and Grimsby Hillside, pushing for higher quality fruit from their vineyards. This helps define high-quality wines from Ontario wineries.

Proulx shares he is noticing people starting to talk about quality as consumer consumption declines. While people may be drinking less, they’re focusing on quality when they do enjoy a glass. He recently attended a Côtes du Rhône tasting with a panel of industry leaders from France where they also seemed intent on pushing quality, which Proulx believes will be a winning strategy in the long run, adding that this movement towards higher quality will be a long-term victory for all wine lovers.
“If the benchmark for quality at the entry level rises, everyone is going to win.”

A MORE SUSTAINABLE FOCUS



STEPHANIE CAMERON is a wine sommelier and content creator based out of Calgary, Alberta. Under the handle @stephthesommelier, Cameron is successfully “making wine fun” and approachable for her 56K followers. With wine and grilled cheese or ‘Bubbles and Brie’ pairings to die for, Cameron demonstrates easy-to-make recipes served with a side of wine education and accessible and value-driven wine recommendations.

Cameron tries to not let current trends dictate her content, but she is passionate about supporting women-owned wine ventures from other digital creators, winemakers, store owners and importers, adding that she likes to say “Women ARE wine, vs. Women ‘in’ wine.”

As a vocal advocate for sustainability in wine, Cameron hopes to see more discussions around alternative wine packaging, despite its poor reputation amongst wine enthusiasts. Proulx also anticipates big shifts as we head into 2024, emphasizing he’s noticing the definition of sustainability in wine beginning to change. He hopes growers and producers start to paint a better, more detailed picture

of what actually goes into the making of wine, starting with sustainable growing practices (notably organic and biodynamic farming) and expanding to include the behaviours of the people who bottle it.

Williamson notes more clients are asking questions about their sustainable bar practices. "Using our kegged or bottled cocktails can save up to 17-25 bottles from being thrown out or recycled," he shares. These formats not only benefit the environment, they also have a positive effect on bar margins and food costs. Civil Pours takes a "closed loop" approach to production. The citrus distillates found in their cocktails come from upcycled fruits that have been zested for garnish in bars, while the amaretto-like flavour in their Whisky Sour comes from distilled avocado pits sourced from a Mexican restaurant in the Greater Toronto Area.

Civil Pours both hopes and predicts sustainable products and practices will continue to be a major trend in 2024. "It's paramount for producers to put their money where their mouths are," Williamson believes.

> "If the benchmark for quality at the entry level rises, everyone is going to win".
>
> – André Proulx

LOW- AND NO-ALCOHOL BEVERAGES ARE HERE TO STAY

With the incredible growth of low- and no-alcohol (NoLo) beverages in 2023, innovative, delicious and varied NoLo options have become a regular menu feature and a consumer expectation.

With the growth of NoLo options across all beverage sectors, customers aren't willing to sacrifice taste and quality when it comes to choosing non-alcoholic options. To stay at pace with their customers' tastes, restaurants and bars should treat the NoLo movement as a long-term industry shift rather than a trend.





More people are seeking out a middle ground between experience and indulgence and high quality and convenience. As both a content creator and bartender, Stewart has seen well-crafted, non-alcoholic cocktails and zero alcohol by volume (ABV) spirits gaining a larger presence on cocktail menus across the country. "I hate calling it a 'trend', because it has always been there," she says, identifying that the demand for quality, well-thought-out NoLo cocktails will continue to increase in 2024.

Civil Pours has also included non-alcoholic cocktails in their R&D roadmap and have sold them at past activations, including a melon and whey cocktail that was incredibly well-received by their customer base. They also anticipate growth in this sector and see it as an important and watch-worthy category.

Proulx also noticed the movement towards NoLo alcohol products from quality wine producers, mentioning he spent dry January last year researching zero alcohol wines. While he believes the quality of non-alcoholic wines is quite low, he anticipates the growth of higher quality, zero alcohol wines reaching more fridges in the next year.

HOW RESTAURANTS CAN ADOPT TRENDS IN A FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE WAY





BY DAVID HOPKINS
PRESIDENT, THE FIFTEEN GROUP





Working in the hospitality industry involves a constant stream of new trends, innovations, technologies, consumer behaviours and more. There seems to be an influx of change in the New Year – as is outlined in this issue – which can present a challenge for operators: deciding whether food and dining trends should influence their restaurant and how to choose, incorporate and promote those trends. But simply introducing new ingredients or menu items is easier said than done and can have detrimental effects on profitability if not done properly.

At The Fifteen Group, we're the experts in restaurant profitability. We believe that a well-run restaurant should be able to make at least 15% profit on sales, so much so that our whole company is named after that target. Having worked with more than 1,000 clients over the last 20+ years, we have extensive experience helping restaurants de-risk changes to their operation and maximize profitability.

BUDGET

The most important thing to do is start with a budget. Budgeting is vital for any business – it's your roadmap to success and helps you figure out your profitability for the year. Consider how much you want to allocate for certain promotions, menu changes, trend research, etc, then look at your end-of-year profit and ensure you're happy with it in advance. Don't start the year if you're budgeted to be somewhere you don't want to be. Think through solutions and changes to ensure you're happy with what your budget is projecting in advance. This way, you'll have a plan for the year and be able to jump on things in advance rather than constantly playing catch up.

PRICE INCREASES

No matter what new item or trend you incorporate in your restaurant, it must be priced in a way that is profitable for your business. Let's say you're revamping your steak entreé to add a bed of protein-rich buckwheat (one of Whole Foods' 2024 Food Trend predictions) and miso butter.

Obviously, these changes will increase your food cost and the price of this dish will need to be raised. When you increase prices, all of that revenue flows straight to bottom-line profit. However, this must be done wisely, and our approach is called Margin Menu Pricing.

Often, restaurants are so hung up on hitting food cost percentages that when they raise prices to align with this, they are thrown out of whack. As seen below, when the food cost of a steak dinner increased by $6.00, the guest cost would increase by $17.50 to maintain a 34 per cent food cost – that's a massive increase for consumers to shoulder.

		Increase $	
Steak Dinner Cost	$ 16.80	$ 6.00	$ 22.80
Guest Pays	$ 49.50		$ 67.00
Food Cost Percent	34%		34%

Focusing on maintaining the bottom-line profit margin rather than food cost percentages is much more important. As seen below, if you raise the menu price by $6.00 instead, you can make the same profit without disrupting the guest experience as much.

		Increase $	
Steak Dinner Cost	$ 16.80	$ 6.00	$ 22.80
Guest Pays	$ 49.50		$ 55.50
Food Cost Percent	34%		41%
Profit	$ 32.70		$ 32.70

Consumer awareness of inflation has allowed restaurants to raise prices more easily. At The Fifteen Group, we conducted a consumer survey post-COVID-19 and found that 70 per cent of respondents would support a price increase at restaurants. This kind of consumer support would have been unheard of in the past.

EVALUATING OPPORTUNITIES

It's important to remember that not all trends will be a good idea for your operation. We recommend evaluating changes based on profitability and how they align with your brand. For example, the Specialty Food Association recently unveiled its 2024 food trends, one of which is Tahini. While this is a popular ingredient right now, it may not make sense for a sushi restaurant to introduce a special item with tahini – they will now have to stock tahini for use in just one item, and it doesn't really align with the restaurant's value proposition. On the other hand, a Middle Eastern restaurant that already stocks tahini could use it in new and interesting ways, aligning with its larger brand.

This all ties into the guest experience, the most critical thing to restaurant success. It's all about delivering a value proposition, which is the difference between the experience and how much a person is paying for an experience.

All said, keeping up with trends in the foodservice industry is an important thing for restaurants. It helps you stay up to date with consumer behaviours and what the competition is doing. But that doesn't always mean it's a smart move for your operation to adopt them. Evaluating your options and instating new promotions in a fiscally responsible way will help your restaurant stay relevant and profitable in 2024.



The Fifteen Group is North America's leading hospitality consulting company. For more than 20 years, they have helped over 1,000 restaurants make a lot more money. Restaurant Profit maximization is one of the core functions of their business.

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THE DISH

Women hospitality leaders illuminate some of the key decisions and skills that shaped their careers, and share their picks to lead the next generation.

BY CHRIS SZEGO

Women make up 58 per cent of the foodservice workforce in Canada. Their entrepreneurialism and creativity have kept the industry growing and evolving, particularly during the tumultuous pandemic years. MENU recently had a chance to chat with some of the far-sighted women whose drive, engagement and leadership is currently stretching the boundaries of the sector.

ANNA LAZARE

Owner, Messy Kitchen
Kahnawà:ke, Quebec.
@messykitchenkahnawake



In 2016, Anna Lazare and her cousin decided to turn their delicious hobby of making cakes and other baked goods into a catering business. They called it Messy Kitchen and worked out of their apartment until a commercial space became available in 2018. Moving to the larger space gave them the opportunity to expand their offering and they decided to open a restaurant, combining it with a broader catering menu.

Messy Kitchen catering recently celebrated its eighth anniversary and the restaurant its sixth. Lazare is now the sole owner. Over the years her business direction has evolved, leaving baking behind in order to concentrate more on catering and restaurant options. Although the restaurant closed for a while during COVID-19 shutdowns (it reopened in early 2022), Messy Kitchen catering carried the business through the pandemic.

Messy Kitchen offers food for a variety of tastes. Wild game and other Indigenous foods feature heavily, but are given a contemporary twist, like braised moose tacos and strawberry juice made with maple syrup. Combining the familiar with the unique is Lazare's specialty, and her Back to Our Roots menu regularly offers new Indigenous flavours to try.

Lazare is a member of the Mohawk First Nation, and Messy Kitchen is located in the Kahnawà:ke community. Though many of her clients come from nearby Montreal, she did not register Messy Kitchen as a Quebec business. Mohawk and English are the main languages used in her community. Aware of the importance of language, Lazare elected to keep the name she had chosen rather than switch to a French name.

Studying cooking at the Pearson School of Culinary Arts in Pointe Claire first ignited Lazare's passion for food, particularly desserts. She further honed that passion apprenticing with a donut maker. She has continued contact with Pearson, working with the school on a project with the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal (NFCM) in which she helped students prepare 3,000 meals.

MM What's the most important business decision you've ever made?

To never give up, and to keep pushing forward. The restaurant and catering business has to be one of the most unpredictable and demanding professions out there. I had a few moments where I did want to give up and quit but I didn't. I pushed through and now I have a flourishing restaurant and catering business and I get to work with an amazing team every single day!

MM What's the most unusual job on your resume?

Once my team and I did catering for inmates at a prison. It was the first time for us, but it was a great experience. We were able to reconnect the inmates with their culture through food.

Do you have a secret skill?

I can smell when food or baked goods are ready. No timer needed.

Who would you say is an up-and-coming Canadian foodservice leader?

All the Indigenous chefs!

ALIDA SOLOMON

Chef & Owner, Tutti Matti
Toronto, Ontario
@alidasolomon | tuttimatti.com



For more than two decades, Tutti Matti Ristorante Toscana has been known as the place for robust Tuscan food in downtown Toronto. At the helm is Chef Alida Solomon, who first opened her doors in 2002. After more than two decades spent serving fresh, seasonal and entirely in-house handmade Tuscan cuisine, Solomon is still going strong.

Being a chef was the only thing Solomon ever wanted to do (except for a childhood dream of being a marine biologist). She inherited a passion for food from her father, a lawyer and appreciative foodie. She studied history and geography, but after traveling with friends, Solomon became passionate about Italian food. Eventually she moved there to immerse herself in the Tuscan culinary environment.

Solomon spent more than six years working in Montalcino kitchens, from a small osteria to the Michelin-recognized Boccon di Vino. She credits her skills to the nonnas who demonstrated their methods and taught her a reverence for primary products and their provenance. When she returned to Toronto, Solomon brought her desire to share the hearty simplicity of Tuscan tastes along.

In 2002 Solomon opened Tutti Matti, with the bank as the only other investor (in fact, women bankers approved the loan). Since then, she has given Toronto unparalleled access to Tuscan cuisine, like creamy burratas paired with seasonal accompaniments, rich handmade pastas and thick and flavourful wild boar ragout. To keep her passion fresh, she makes regular return journeys to Italy, sometimes accompanied by her staff.

Her passion and commitment have earned Solomon many honours, including the Leccio D'Oro for Osteria of the year in 2009, being made a Fellow of the Institute at the Ontario Hostelry Institute's Gold Awards in 2016, and being named Chef of the Year there in 2018. Alida makes regular appearances as a judge on Wall of Chefs, and is also co-founder of Tutti Matti Montalcino Inc, a privately owned Canadian-Italian hospitality venture.

What's the most important business decision you've ever made?

It's less a decision and more an attitude: dedication. That's what it comes down to. We've been open 21 years now. It's one thing to make an entry onto the scene, but you have to stick to it to be successful. Being here every day is what makes it count.

After all, we survived the pandemic. I was here every single day, most of the time alone. If I didn't throw in the towel then, well, I'm not going to start over and do it for someone else.

What's the most unusual job on your resume?

Picking cotton! I was 16 and on a kibbutz in Israel. After three days I asked if there was anything else I could do instead. After that, I went to work in the kitchen. It was the first place I ever cooked. Everyone had a huge breakfast, all of us together; it was the largest meal of the day. I learned how to make mayo for 400 people. That's where I fell in love with cooking.

Do you have a secret skill?

I can hang drywall. When we first built the restaurant, I was so broke I joined the construction crew. At this point, I can do pretty much anything. I'm really good at plunging toilets.

Who would you applaud as an up-and-coming Canadian foodservice leader?

Chef Crae Kohne, who has been with us for six years. I've never seen anyone grow so much on the job. Like me, he isn't Italian and has worked so hard to learn. He educated himself – it wasn't just me pushing him. He's the first chef in 21 years whose name is on the menu with mine. I have so much respect for him as a chef and a leader.

NIKI HODGSKISS

Assistant General Manager, Venture Food Trucks
Napanee, Ontario
@venturefoodtrucks



Niki Hodgskiss grew up in the food truck business. Her father, William Hodgskiss, had a fleet of hot dog carts. She remembers countless childhood afternoons playing under condiment tables at event grounds. After completing a degree in professional writing at York University, Hodgskiss' entrepreneurial spirit led her to co-found The Loft Girls, a mobile fashion boutique. Today, she is the Assistant General Manager of Venture Food Trucks.

Headquartered in Napanee, Venture Food Trucks sells and custom builds mobile kitchens of every description. This includes food trucks, concession trailers, shipping container conversions and more. Venture completes almost every aspect in-house in their 32,000 sq ft manufacturing plant. With an eye to innovative and unique designs, they serve clients in both Canada and the U.S.

Her lifelong experience in the field means Hodgskiss' view on the potential of food

trucks is both wide and deep. Today's diners are interested in a variety of cuisines, and food trucks are prepared to meet that need. Size and space constraints might mean truck menus are limited, but they can also rapidly evolve, adapting to suit any crowd or event and giving operators a chance to demonstrate their creativity and innovation.

Venture's clients range from first-time business owners and experienced chefs to marketers expanding their ad campaign options. An entrepreneur herself, Hodgskiss understands her clients' enterprising spirit. Venture's website is designed to guide budding mobile operators from the rush of the first big idea through the details of design, permits, licenses and more.

Hodgskiss has watched the mobile food landscape change over the last decade. With the need for outdoor dining kicked into high gear as a result of the pandemic and reinforced by current economic volatility, cities have relaxed the permit process, allowing for a much richer, broader array of food truck options. From small vans to huge trailers and seasonal locations to special short-term pop-ups, Canada has opened up to outdoor dining, and 'mobile' has taken on a whole new meaning

MM What's the most important business decision you've made?

An incredibly important business decision in recent years was to open up an American subsidiary to Venture Food Trucks called All American Food Trucks (AAFT). We launched it during the pandemic, when we were unable to attend U.S. trade shows for two years. Being unable to travel made us realize how important those trade shows were when it came to attracting American clients. AAFT filled that void for us. Today, it's how many of the U.S. companies and organizations we build food trucks for find us.

MM What's the most unusual job you've had?

I've had a handful of strange jobs. I ran a mobile second-hand store, and a hot dog cart. I worked at Tim Hortons too, for years—and I loved that job! It really taught me so much about work ethic, workflow structures, people skills and more.

MM Do you have a secret skill?

I can weld! Although you won't see any of my craftsmanship in our food truck builds.

MM Who would you applaud as an up-and-coming Canadian foodservice leader?

I love seeing more food companies focusing on ethical and sustainable production practices. Scout Canning is a Canadian seafood brand that really embodies this, and their tuna is so good! Their founder Chef Charlotte Langley creates and shares fantastic recipes on Instagram as well.

INEZ COOK

Owner of Salmon n' Bannock, Vancouver, British Columbia

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@salmonnbannockbistro

salmonandbannock.net



The 'Sixties scoop' was a decades-long policy that saw Indigenous children forcibly removed from their homes and adopted into primarily white, middle-class families. Inez Cook considers herself one of the lucky ones. Although she was adopted away from her Nuxalk Nation family at age one, she was raised in a loving home. She developed a life-long enjoyment of good food and worked in foodservice in many different capacities from her teenage years onward.

But as she grew older, Cook recognized something was missing. She went looking for her roots, researching the food traditions and techniques of Indigenous peoples. When the Olympics came to Vancouver in 2010, Cook knew the time was right to showcase Indigenous cuisine to the world. She and Remi Cauldron opened Salmon N' Bannock in 2010 (as of 2019, Inez is the sole owner).

Rather than choosing to highlight a specific Indigenous cuisine with Salmon n' Bannock, Cook wanted to give people the chance to experience traditional Indigenous ingredients, meals and methods to share cultures and tell stories with food. Her pemmican mousse filters tradition through a modern lens, pairing smoked dried bison with cream cheese and blueberries.

Like many independent restaurant owners, Cook found herself doing all parts of the job: cooking, sourcing ingredients from Indigenous suppliers, and organizing both the front and back of house. These days she leaves much of the day-to-day kitchen work to her all-Indigenous staff, while she runs her expanding business. In February 2023, Inez opened Salmon N-Bannock On The Fly, the first Indigenous restaurant in a Canadian international airport.

Salmon N' Bannock connected Cook not only with her culture, but also with her birth family. She has met hundreds of her extended relatives in the Nuxalk Nation, proving that culinary traditions can truly cross boundaries and connect lives. Inez is also the author of two children's books, *Sixties Scoop*, with Jason Eaglespeaker, and *Sixties Scoop: Reconnection*.

MM What's the most important business decision you've ever made?

Definitely opening Salmon N' Bannock Bistro. It feels like Indigenous cuisine is finally getting noticed internationally.

MM What's the most unusual job on your resume?

I used to teach ballroom dancing. It's not on my resume anymore, though. I have definitely forgotten how all these decades later.

MM Do you have a secret skill?

My strangest secret skill is speaking English in different ways and accents, enough to be understood in different countries. To say things the way people of those lands would say them.

Who would you applaud as an up-and-coming Canadian foodservice leader?

Chef Shane Chartrand, who was the first Indigenous chef to win gold at the Canadian Gold Medal Plates Championships. A member of the Maskêkosak people from Enoch Cree Nation, Chef Chartrand has appeared on Chopped Canada, Iron Chef Canada, and Wall of Chefs, and, with Jennifer Cockrall-King, is the author of tawâw: Progressive Indigenous Cuisine.

JENNI LESSARD

Owner, Inspired by Nature Culinary Consulting, Lumsden, Saskatchewan

@chefjenni | jennilessard.com



Métis chef Jenni Lessard has been a foodservice entrepreneur most of her life. Her very first venture was a snack cart called Flight Delight which she operated with friends at the La Ronge airport in Saskatchewan. At the time, she was only 14 years old.

Her culinary enterprises continued to develop and, in 2005, Lessard opened New Ground Café in Birch Hills, which provided art space and live music in addition to a daily menu. Eight years later, she sold the building and moved to Saskatoon. She developed a business, Chef Jenni Cuisine, which offered catering, culinary speaking and teaching. Lessard was also the Chef in Residence at the Saskatoon Farmers Market from 2013 to 2016.

In 2019, Lessard became the first woman and Métis Executive Chef at Wanuskewin Heritage Park. Wanuskewin is a unique Indigenous Interpretive Centre, which offers visitors the opportunity to explore Plains cultures of the past and recognize how Saskatchewan's Indigenous peoples are represented today. As culinary expert and chef for the Han Wi dinner series, Lessard has created an experiential dining adventure that is both celebration of and education about Northern Plains culture.

Lessard started Inspired by Nature Culinary Consulting after leaving Wanuskewin Heritage Park during the pandemic and moved to the Qu'Appelle Valley near Regina. If life as a visionary chef and culinary consultant was not enough, Lessard also served on the Slow Food Saskatoon steering committee and as Vice-President of Métis Local 126. Currently, Lessard is the interim Executive Director of the Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations (ICAN).

What's the most important business decision you've ever made?

I bought my restaurant building when I expanded from a rented, 14-seat coffee shop into a 36-seat space with room for art and live music. This was made possible with help from the Clarence Campeau Development Fund, which supports Métis entrepreneurs, and by my local credit union.

Now, almost 20 years later, the real estate situation is far more difficult for new businesses to navigate, but the sale of that building financed my move to Saskatoon and the start-up of my catering company. If you can find a way to own the building in which your business is located, you'll have more security, an investment and an incentive to work even harder.

What's the most unusual job on your resume?

My first contract with Inspired By Nature Culinary Consulting was with the Saskatchewan Health Authority, creating patient menus using local and Indigenous ingredients for the Jim Pattison Children's Hospital in Saskatoon. I was recovering from COVID-19 and had to wait a couple extra weeks to start recipe testing, until my taste and smell returned.

My husband was my test subject, and he did his best to answer questions like, "If you were a four-year-old having trouble swallowing, would this roasted carrot and sunflower seed purée in the shape of a sunflower make you feel better?"

Do you have a secret skill?

I can nap anywhere, anytime. As a teenager, I worked for my uncle at his fruit stand in Jasper, Alberta and after a 12-hour day there would often be a train blocking my path home. I'd toss my backpack on the ground for a pillow and get a satisfying 15 minutes of sleep while the earth shuddered, and the bells clanged. Great training for future chef/restaurateur cat naps!

Who would you applaud as an up-and-coming Canadian foodservice leader?

I had the opportunity to work with an incredibly creative and talented young person named Phoenix Isnana at their high school's food and tourism pathways program and at the first-ever Northwest Territories Culinary Festival in Yellowknife in July 2023.

Phoenix is from the Zagime Anishinabek Saulteaux Nation with ties to Standing Buffalo First Nation. They have plans for a sweets business using Indigenous ingredients to sell at pow wows and eventually in a retail setting. I've taught Phoenix a few things that might smooth their foodservice path, but I'm in awe of their wisdom and foresight. I think the new generation of cooks, chefs and food producers will be more successful at work-life balance and setting boundaries.

March 8, 2024 is International Women's Day (IWD). This aim of this year's theme, **#InspireInclusion** is to collectively forge a more inclusive world for women. Visit **internationalwomensday.com** for more information.

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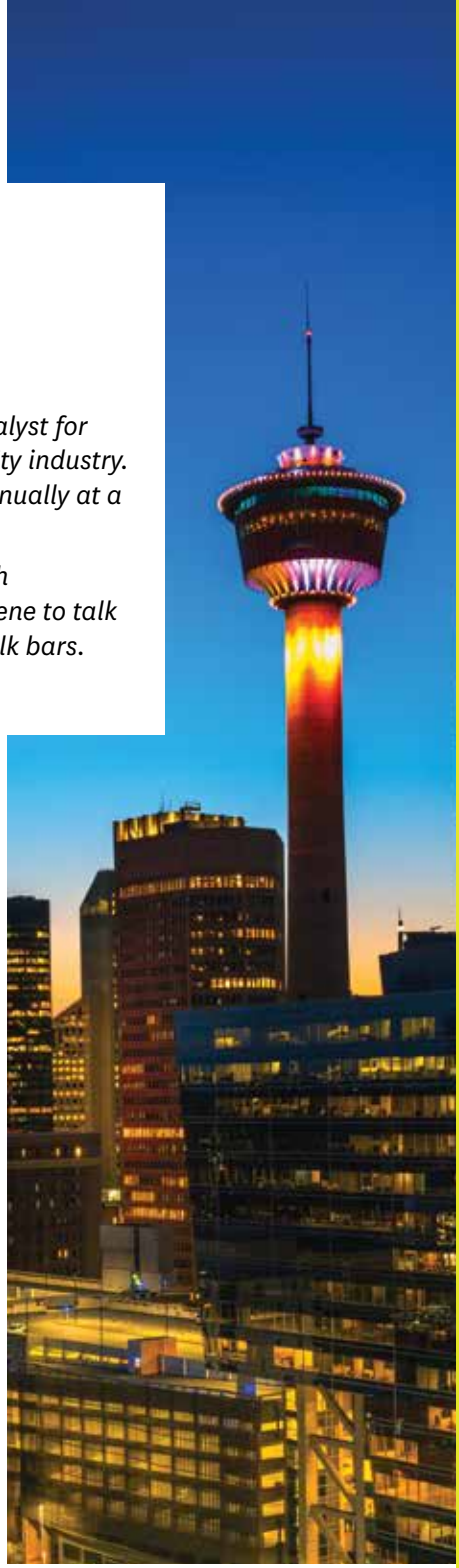
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The Conversation: with Arlene Stein

Arlene Stein is the founder and Executive Director of the Terroir Symposium, a catalyst for creative collaboration and social and environmental responsibility in the hospitality industry. Since 2006, Terroir has convened international and Canadian industry leaders annually at a two-day event, first in Toronto, Ontario and now in Calgary, Alberta.

From her current home base in Berlin, Germany, Arlene travels globally to research responsible food systems and gastronomic innovations. MENU connected with Arlene to talk about Terroir, the Calgary restaurant scene, the future of hospitality and Polish milk bars.



MM A couple of years ago, you rehomed the very popular Terroir Symposium in Calgary. What led up to that and how has it been?

Arlene Stein: *During the pandemic, our Ontario partner decided they didn't want to continue with virtual events and wanted to focus on their own initiative, so we parted ways. Because I live in Berlin, I need an on-the-ground Canadian partner for Terroir to succeed. I had been in conversation with Food Tourism Strategies in Calgary for a number of years about the potential to bring the symposium to Calgary through the Alberta Culinary Alliance, which didn't transpire. During the pandemic we reignited that conversation and we were really confident we could make something successful with their passion and commitment. They're two brilliant women, Tannis Baker and Rheannon Green, working in culinary tourism development in Calgary who want to shine a spotlight on the city and the calibre of the culinary professionals who work there. We have a great partnership. We just finished our second year and are moving into planning our third. There are two of us at Terroir and two of them at Food Tourism Strategies and the combination has been kind of magical.*

MM Was there a reason you focused on Calgary in particular?

AS: *It could have been anywhere – we were even talking to people in Chicago. What we needed was a partner with the capacity, passion and infrastructure to actually pull off a symposium for six or seven hundred people. We had a longstanding relationship with Tannis and Rheannon, and they work across a variety of culinary programming and specifically have experience with culinary tourism, which is a sort of tertiary agenda to what we do in Terroir.*

MM Has the vision for Terroir evolved over the years?

AS: *Terroir is built on a legacy of community building and connecting people for the benefit of our industry. It's about business development at its core. Education, inspiration, community development and business development – those are its pillars and that's how we've always maintained it as a symposium. The content thematics change from year to year, but the pillars are constant. We evolve based on what's going on in the industry, but we're planning minimum of 12 to 18 months out, so we've got to predict the future and imagine what's likely to be affecting people at the time we will actually deliver the symposium. Pre-pandemic that forecasting exercise was much easier. Post-pandemic it feels a little bit like standing on shattered ice, which is how I can best describe our industry right now.*

MM Do you find there's some benefit of that precarity in terms of Terroir attendance in terms of people actively seeking community, business development and insight?

AS: *I think the biggest benefit of the times we're in is that a lot of professionals are more open and flexible in terms of how they prescribe to things. There's no "institution"*



anymore, if that makes sense. It's an open field and people are more willing to take chances and get involved. That said, the flip side is that there's no clear leadership anymore; there's no clear superhero anymore. That's devolved.

Young people have taken up a space that they're not willing to concede to us old folks anymore. They're just owning it, and they're really creating boundaries and determining how they will and will not engage with this industry. I would add "youth" to the list of priorities for this industry, alongside women in leadership, diversity, equity and inclusion and mental health. My older daughter works at a fine dining restaurant in Berlin, and I can tell you that she's fundamentally more secure in her position than I was, ever, until I was well into my 30s. She's not willing to compromise. We, as older people, had to concede to everyone, didn't we? I wish I had had that courage.

But we taught these young professionals to set boundaries and respect themselves in the workplace; they didn't learn that on their own. We deserve at least a small pat on the back for that.

MM So, if the institution is in pieces on the floor, are we trying to rebuild it the same way or create something new that works better for the people who will run it? What moment do you think we're at and what's the opportunity for the future?

AS:** I think the beautiful thing that exists in the younger generation is the passion to really commit to this industry. Our generation really didn't. We were moving through this space because we were going to be something "better" – an artist, a dancer, a lawyer, a singer, a writer. Young people have really leaned into the industry. They love food, they love drink, they love the experience of hospitality. There's an engaged community, we just have to figure out how to meet them in their space and treat them well so we can retain them. The biggest disappointment for me, in terms of lessons we didn't learn through COVID, is this labour issue. We went into the pandemic with a massive labour issue because no one wanted to work in hospitality, and we had too many places. No one was willing to concede that we needed to pay more and treat people better. Then we went through three years of the pandemic, and everyone was like, "F this industry. We need to be treated better, and paid better and, you know what? This job is detrimental to my mental health." Many owners took a woe-is-me kind of attitude and in my opinion, we haven't learned our lesson. We have this captive audience of people who are super passionate and really engaged. All you need to do is work out a business model where you can pay them fair wages and treat them like human beings, and you'll keep them. You'll keep them in this business, and you will thrive.*

***AS:** Restaurants are not going to go away; they're just going to shift to reflect our current economic status and our ability to provide. People don't have as much disposable income and they've had a really crappy few years, but restaurants have always been the foundation of community. People want to go out to eat. They want to celebrate, do something a little bougie or they just don't want to cook. I'm leaning into the idea right now, which isn't mine, that people want to experience "fun dining, affordably". That doesn't mean going out to McDonald's, it means going out to middle-range restaurants where they can get the biggest bang for their buck. People don't want to spend huge amounts of money on multi-course tasting menus. Those experiences are being definitively pushed into the realm of the elite and only the elite. People don't have the money, nor do they want to be bound by that experience. They want to be able to take whatever disposable income they have and spread it as far as they can, going to cheaper, easier and more fun establishments. What people really want is conviviality – being entertained and eating and drinking good food with friends.*

MM So, you have faith in the core purpose of hospitality.

***AS:** Absolutely! People aren't going to stop wanting to go out, it's how we create sociability. In Calgary, food writer Christine Sismondo was talking about the bar space and about how we have to have a "third space" in our lives. It was brilliant. It's the idea that you have home, you have work and then you need a third space. What cocktail culture and bar space allows is a third space of community or gathering. You can have this space virtually anywhere, but most of us do it in a bar or restaurant environment. It's not fine dining. And no one's giving that up or we'd all be stuck at home. We need that space.*

MM It's your Local. It has a low barrier to entry, it's familiar, comfortable and fits into your neighbourhood routine.

***AS:** We had a place in Toronto we used to go to before we moved, and it was a mediocre pub, but we loved it. It was down the street, and we knew everybody there. The food was decent and reasonably priced. I think we're going back to that.*

MM So, what about Calgary? There's a lot going on in terms of economic and social development. How has that affected the local restaurant scene?

***AS:** It's been a very interesting experience to work in Alberta and realize how different we are from province to province. I kind of love it. Albertans are hugely devoted to their province and to each other. People are super supportive and community-oriented, and they have money to spend.*



Calgary is very wealthy, and has a laid-back, down-home culture where they're less afraid to spend money than other provinces. It may be a smaller population than Toronto or Vancouver, but you have a lot more people going out to very affluent places than other cities.

We work with JP Pedhirney from the Concorde Group, and I think about them in comparison with Oliver & Bonacini. Every one of their properties is really delivering. They're really unique, they give people an exceptional experience and value for money. They're the quintessential of what Calgary and Alberta hospitality is all about. They're world class. Connie DeSouza and John Jackson from CHARCUT and charbar have really elevated Alberta and their experiences are on par as well as accessible. What Alberta is doing that many other provinces are not is delivering these world-class experiences and products in a very accessible, open and down-home way.

MM How has the move to Calgary changed Terroir?

AS: *We've shifted to embrace the Alberta community. We're highlighting their environment and what's going on in their professional world. One of the things I didn't know before the first Terroir in Calgary is how committed they are to their Indigenous community and that comes through in our content and the people we connect with. There are so many opportunities to connect with Cultural Carriers or people who do herbal remedies, teas, Indigenous arts. In Ontario, we had to really pull to bring Indigenous culinary into the consciousness of the hospitality community, but in Calgary it's part of the fabric of who they are.*

Calgary is a smaller, more accessible community, which has made planning a little easier. When I bring people in from international locations, Calgary and the surrounding regions offer more of a surprise because they're not familiar. They don't know it's the plains, they don't know it's on the edge of the Rocky Mountains, so for our international guests, it's more curious and unusual.

MM What are the most pressing challenges and concerns for Calgary operators?

AS: *They're impacted by all the same things the rest of us are in hospitality, but one of the biggest local challenges is recruitment. With that comes questions of whether they can pay enough and keep people interested enough to stay in the industry as well as whether they need to look at the impact of this industry on people's wellbeing. Because Calgary is wealthy, the mental health aspect may not be as significant as cities like Toronto that also have out-of-control living costs.*

I've been back to Canada once a year for the last three years because of the pandemic. Every year I come back, the rise in your prices is staggering, and it gets increasingly worse. In Toronto, people seem to be experiencing more of a crisis. In Calgary, people seem to be more accepting of the cost of things.

MM Are you seeing an evolution in ownership and leadership roles in Calgary?

AS: *Definitely. Chef Liana Robberecht works at Trico Living Well, and she does so much to convene the women in that space. She's a powerhouse and has been instrumental in helping Terroir succeed. Sal Howell, who owns River Cafe is an institution there and she's not even from Canada; she's from England. She has a great story about how she travelled around the world and when she got to Calgary, she just fell in love with it. She loves that community and has done everything she can to invest in the Terroir space, the community. Connie DeSouza and John Jackson again come to mind. They're such a driven couple who have really helped shine a light on Calgary – not just on the work they do, but on people they've managed to drag into that community. I also only just met Chef Nicole Gomez this year, and she's doing Cluck and Cleaver. She's fascinating. She did Top Chef Canada and her goal with that was to bring visibility and an identity to the Calgary scene, but to also create an equitable business model for herself in her fried chicken business.*

There's a significant Mexican community in Calgary, which may come as a surprise to some. Chef Elia Herrera has opened up a stunningly beautiful Mexican restaurant called Milpa. It's something that could be in New York City. It's of that calibre. We went to her restaurant for dinner, and it blew my mind.

MM The theme for this year's Terroir Symposium was Transformation. What do you think the future of the industry looks like; what would you like to see?

AS: *I would like to see more people invested in the traditional disciplines attached to hospitality – bakery, butchery, cheese making – more of the artisanal production methods that surround restaurants and could even be incorporated into restaurants. I see these things as playing a role in the future development potential of the industry.*

I would like to see restaurants become more democratized; even more so than now. My favourite thing when I moved to Europe was when I went to Poland and discovered the "milk bar" concept. It's an institution that was developed by the Communist government to provide healthy, nutritious meals to workers during the day. It was built on a system of social responsibility, so the workers were paid fair, living wages by the government and food was provided to milk bar consumers at a super-cheap cost. It's a little like the canteen model, and they still exist. It's such a thoughtful, beautiful model. We don't have that in North America; we have food malls and food courts. This idea that food is part of the structure of society and that restaurants should be able to create and convene community and provide delicious, healthy meals for people at a sensible cost would be the way I would like to see things move forward.



@arlenestein | terroirtalk.org

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TERROIR

Grit & Grace



Let's Talk Womxn is not for "ladies who lunch". It's a powerful and growing movement for women restaurant owners and entrepreneurs who are demanding change and taking back their economic power. The first Canadian chapter just opened in Toronto, and they're looking for new members.

Let's Talk Womxn (LTW), founded by Chicago restaurateur Rohini Dey, Ph.D., is a pivotal, action-based movement addressing unique challenges faced by women in the restaurant industry, including marginalization and lack of economic power. Now in 15 cities in the U.S. and now Canada, LTW fosters collaboration among women restaurateurs and entrepreneurs. It aims to amplify their visibility and scale in an industry traditionally dominated by male counterparts, promoting empowerment through shared knowledge, innovation, and collective action.

Rohini Dey owns Vermilion restaurant in Chicago. During the lows of the pandemic, a period that highlighted the vulnerability of independent, women-led restaurants, she developed and launched LTW. Dey's vision was to create a network for these women to collaborate, share resources, and support each other, transforming them from isolated entrepreneurs into a powerful, unified force. This initiative rapidly expanded to include hundreds of women across America,

organized into local, city-based "chapters" that mirror the goals of the movement.

This summer, LTW launched its first Canadian chapter in Toronto. Led by city co-hosts Angela Lawrence of Gusto 54, Jacqueline Nicosia of ARDO and DOVA, Kate Taylor Martin of nutbar, and Nicki Laborie of Reyna Hospitality, the movement is open and ready to welcome like-minded
women hospitality entrepreneurs in the greater Toronto area.

The story of how the movement made its way to Canada is a testament to Rohini Dey's personality and drive, Nicki Laborie recalls. "Last June, Rohini reached out to me – I think mostly because my restaurant's name is "Reyna", which means "queen", and so very much fits the LTW brand and vibe. My personal goal is to empower women through my restaurant and, wherever I take the Reyna brand, be it restaurants or hotels, I want to empower women in hospitality. On the call, Rohini told me, "You know, we opened in 14 cities, and this is exactly why we did it." We talked for over an hour – her energy is intoxicating."

Rohini wasn't very familiar with the Toronto market, so Nicki suggested the names of three other women owners she was familiar with to come on as chapter co-hosts. "I brought each of them to the table for different reasons," Nicki shares. "I have huge admiration for Angela; she has helped me many times when I've hit roadblocks. Her experience in marketing, business development and management are so valuable. I worked with Kate at Assembly Chef's Hall (now Chef 's Halls), and I have watched her journey – I'm so impressed with her. She's got her niche market and she's putting out great product and a unique, multi-location health food store/restaurant concept. I've known Jacqueline and Roberto for over 12 years, and I just love their food, so I brought Jacqueline to the table."

One of LTW's core goals is to improve the visibility of women owners in the industry. Rohini sent Nicki a list provided to her by Sysco, the LTW Toronto Chapter's launch partner. She was astonished to see that the list had 132 names. "I was floored to see so many women owners - I think maybe 20 of us are known," Nicki recalls. "This was just another reason it was so enticing to me to help bring this to Toronto and to Canada because there are a lot of women in the industry, and it's a hard industry."

At the end of 2022, Nicki opened Reyna New York in Union Square. "I can't even explain to you how hard the year was," she shares. "Being a female alone in this industry can be brutal. Having to still struggle with misogyny and landlords who can't even look you in the eye because you're a woman... When women get together, which isn't very often because we're always in our restaurants, we talk about our problems. Let's Talk Womxn gets us together online once a month. It's completely candid and not recorded. No employees are allowed; it is strictly owners talking about their challenges with other owners who offer solutions based on experiences they've had – things they've tried that were successful, and others that failed."

Nicki had never attended an LTW session prior to coming on as co-host. Rohini led the first Toronto session and Nicki helmed the second. The third was a national session with representation from chapters across the U.S. "I found it really helpful to hear other owners' stories from different cities and the obstacles they'd come up against. It makes you think about what you would have done differently. I love the concept because there's no hierarchy. It's almost like a bunch of friends sitting at a table talking about their problems."

The Toronto chapter is growing and seeking new women restaurant owners and entrepreneurs to join the group. Each session has a focus topic, called a "Deep Dive" centred on a shared challenge or issue in the industry. The December session was about succeeding in difficult times. "This is a place where you can grow and learn; we're not looking for your money," Nicki emphasizes. "Having a place to talk about the things we're all going through makes a huge difference. I have made time for this because I've struggled this year, and I've encountered difficult relationships with men in business. I really do feel women are more candid with other women, and that you can be honest and say what you're thinking and feeling without being judged. You're not alone."



"Let's Talk Womxn gets us together online once a month. It's completely candid and not recorded. No employees are allowed; it is strictly owners talking about their challenges with other owners who offer solutions based on experiences they've had – things they've tried that were successful, and others that failed."

Let's Talk Womxn is an organization that makes no demands of its members other than their time and perspective. "You can come to the table and just listen, if you just want to learn," Nicki says. "It really is a supportive, open space for women to help each other grow. There are big changes happening in the world of women in business, especially in the hospitality industry. It's time to see some superstars out of Canada."

LET'S TALK WOMXN
CREDO

- The goal of Let's Talk Womxn is to build the camaraderie, counsel, visibility, bargaining and economic power of its women entrepreneurs. Together.
- Let's Talk Womxn launched in the thick of the pandemic in 2020 for women restaurateurs to learn from & support each other. It has explosively evolved to much more. It is a magical, innovative B-cube model of "competitors as collaborators." Started for women restaurateurs, it has grown to include all women entrepreneurs and makers of food and drink.
- Started with 15 restaurateurs in Chicago in 2020, LTW has grown to 850+ women entrepreneurs in 15 cities in the US and Canada, with three additional city offshoots. Many more US and international cities are in the LTW waitlist and pipeline.
- LTW launched 3 additional cities in 2020 that morphed to offshoots: Let's Talk Womxn Philadelphia, Let's Talk Womxn DC and Let's Talk Womxn LA. These morphed into Philly Sisterly Love, DC Women in Food & LA RE:Her.
- This action movement is entirely voluntary. And kept lean deliberately with no dues, overheads, bureaucracy, fancy office, CEO. The frills and financial drain of many conventional entities in our industry. All LTW support and revenue flows to its women entrepreneurs to boost their core businesses.
- The crux is monthly sessions by city with "Deep Dives" into business issues to learn from each other, share counsel and referrals. "Pulse" is to know and help each other. Complete candour & confidentiality underlie these business sessions.
- Each Let's Talk city is cohosted, nourished and led by leading city women restaurateurs. Founder Dey cross-pollinates learnings across all LTW cities & nationally, founds new cities, runs the sessions, seeds initiatives and builds sponsors & external national forums for LTW.
- Additional LTW collaborative initiatives - apart from ongoing, all-year learning and counsel - focus on amplifying visibility, boosting aspirations, cross-promoting each other, bolstering revenue, and unstinting referrals and access. Much more is afoot on both the city & national levels.
- Let's Talk Womxn participate actively in keynotes, talks, panels & forums to share their collaborative, positive, empowering B-cube model for parity. This model extends across sectors, applies within corporations for "intrepreneurs," and across countries.
- For entities, corporations and cities who champion women entrepreneurs, backing Let's Talk Womxn is a natural choice. All LTW members are owners, employers and tastemakers with a mass following at the intersection of dining, consumer and retail. We are sponsored directly or via our 501c3 fiscal sponsor. LTW works actively with its city CVBs, SRAs, COCs, corporations and other partners.
- The X factor in Womxn is an algebraic expression of explicit openness to women owners of all sizes, stripes, color, creed, format, scale, race, orientation, identities, startups or celebrities. All are peers.
- Within six months of inception, LTW was included in NRN Power List Top 50 for inclusive impactful leadership alongside industry giants. A multitude of awards, accolades and media has followed organically along the way.
- Women entrepreneurs in culinary are tired of the deluge of manuals, guidelines, conferences & webinars. Positive intentions that cause glacial change.
- Women owners are tired of being on the fringe of involvement, whether on boards, policy, the media spotlight, or financing. This is dictated by economic power, PR heft, the fawning-over-the-beloved-few "TV celebrity" herd mentality. Let's Talk aims to redress this.
- Let's Talk Womxn deliberately has no mission statement, no statement of values and no five-year plan. The universe abounds with these well-meaning, murky, unaccountable, lofty articulations.
- Let's Talk Womxn is founded and led by Rohini Dey, Ph.D. Vermilion restaurateur in Chicago. Formerly McKinsey & Co., former World Bank, and former trustee/founder/chair of the James Beard Foundation Women's Leadership Program for a decade (2011-2021).

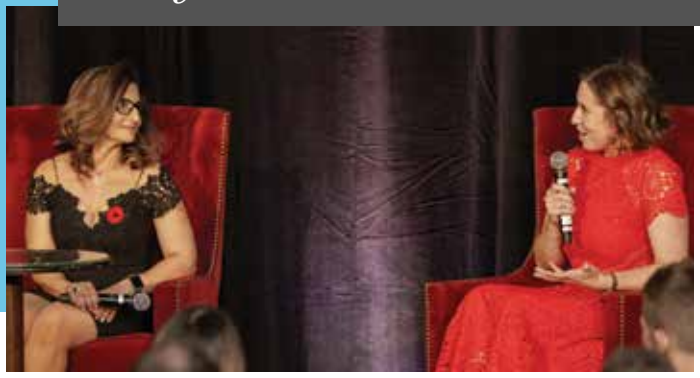
LET'S TALK WOMXN
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For more information on Let's Talk Womxn or to inquire about joining the movement, visit:

letstalkwomxn.com
or letstalkwomxn.com/#join

La Tablée des Chefs

Making a difference, one meal at a time, one youth at a time.



La Tablée des Chefs is a social movement of chefs and cooks who use their skills and expertise in the fight against hunger. Founded in 2002 by Jean-François Archambault, the organization has served more than 15 million cooked meals and contributed to the education of more than 50,000 youth, all in the spirit of its mission: feed and educate.

Every fall, La Tablée des Chefs hosts their flagship fundraising galas, Les Grande Tablées, in Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City. This year's theme, "Looking towards the future," united chefs who pass on their culinary knowledge and passion to the next generation of young and talented cooks.

La Grande Tablée Toronto was held at the Fairmont Royal York this past November, to great acclaim. Gala co-chairs, Jana Sobey, Senior Vice-President of Fresh Merchandising and Sourcing at Sobeys and Naniss Gadel-Rab, General Manager of Nutrition at Unilever Canada, worked together to support and grow the success of the event, noting the importance of La Tablée des Chefs and emphasizing their organizations' support for the non-profit.

"Co-chairing La Tablée des Chefs for two years has been a profound honour," says Sobey. "As a mom and proud grocer, I understand all too well the challenges and halo effect food insecurity have on our society. That is why La Grande Tablée is more than an event. Teaming up with renowned chefs and local talents to showcase the transformative power of food enables their mission to combat food insecurity and promote culinary education."

Sobeys has been a partner in Québec and English Canada through IGA since 2018, and the organization's mission is one that Sobey connects with. "We have a collective responsibility to intervene and take action to create meaningful change through programming that builds capacity from the ground up. By being socially innovative, we can leverage the collective expertise of the culinary community to tackle food insecurity."

Gadel-Rab agrees, "This event gives me lots of energy, hope and pride of the powerful outcome we can deliver when we all work together. But it also reminds me of the urgency to accelerate the agenda of driving positive change to the food system globally and locally. Unilever Canada's partnership with La Tablée des Chefs goes back to 2017. Their purpose and mission align perfectly with Unilever's vision to build a sustainable future by being a powerful 'World-Class Force for Good in Food.'

A portion of the funds raised at La Grande Tablée supports Kitchen Brigades, an after-school program focused on educating high school students on food, cooking and healthy eating options. Kitchen Brigades has been offered in Quebec high schools since 2012 and expanded into other provinces in 2019. During the 2021-2022 school year, more than 4,000 students attended workshops with more than 5,500 students expected this year. Not just a workshop. This program also hosts inter-school cooking competitions where the top five schools face off by creating recipes judged by Richardo, La Tablées des Chefs' spokesperson.

"Our goal with La Tablée des Chefs is to expand this program to reach 10,000 students in over 450 schools across Canada by 2025," states Gadel-Rab. "Teaching young Canadians about the love of food while instilling in them that food is too precious to be wasted is one of the ways we can create a sustainable future."

"While our partnership with La Tablée des Chefs started small, together we were able to save and distribute over 500,000 meals from sports arenas that would have been thrown out as food waste," comments Gadel-Rab. "These meals went to people who needed it the most. The Food Recovery Program has expanded over the years, and it is a great move forward toward minimizing food waste in Canada." Sobey encourages more companies to get involved. "By participating, individuals and companies become agents of positive change, contributing to a vibrant community dedicated to reducing food waste, providing meals to those in need, and building connections."

"Supporting this organization provides meaningful volunteer and recognition opportunities for companies that want to have a positive impact on their communities," states Sobey. "By using their reach and influence, companies can generate more interest in the cause, drum up more financial support, and help put a spotlight on the fight against food insecurity." Gadel-Rab agrees, "No organization can create a big difference alone. We need everyone to partner together towards a better future."



Jana Sobey
Senior Vice President, Fresh Merchandising and Sourcing



Naniss Gadel-Rab
General Manager Nutrition Canada

La Tablée des Chefs

For more information on La Tablée des Chefs and how to get involved, visit: tableedeschefs.org/en

For more information on next year's Les Grande Tablées, follow La Tablée des Chefs on @tableedeschefs

RC Show

Restaurants Canada

Conference & Trade Expo

LEVEL UP

April 8-10, 2024



Photo Credit: Wandering Eye Photography



Photo Credit: Wandering Eye Photography

CANADA'S LEADING HOSPITALITY & FOODSERVICE EVENT



Photo Credit: Wandering Eye Photography



Photo Credit: Chris Savage Photography



Photo Credit: Chris Savage Photography

RC Show is the ultimate celebration of food and beverage, serving up trend-forward ideas and inspiration to the industry.

Brought to you by Restaurants Canada, this annual event is THE destination for solutions-oriented presentations and suppliers, peer-to-peer networking, and exciting flavour experiences.

Our theme this year is 'LEVEL UP'! In this ever-evolving industry, continuous improvement and growth are key for a profitable business. Learn how to push the boundaries of what's possible and embrace innovation. Whether you're aiming to start or expand your business, foster a winning team, boost efficiency, or enhance overall quality of service, you can learn how to LEVEL UP at RC Show 2024.

This year's show offers everything you know and love, with exciting new Pavilions, Competitions and an expanded and re-imagined RC Show floor.

NEW AT RC SHOW 2024:

EXPANDED RC SHOW FLOOR

- Over 375,000 square feet
- 1,000+ booths
- New meeting spaces, rest and lounge areas
- New Speaker Stage design and prime location in Heritage Court
- Unlimited, tasting, networking, learning and discovery opportunities!

FIRST-EVER RC SHOW MOBILE APP

Never miss a moment with the in-hand RC Show concierge with in-Show matchmaking, limited-time offers, scheduling, push notifications and more!

FEATURES:

RC POP UP EXPERIENCE

The all-new and expanded RC Pop Up Experience features a la carte tastings showcasing Indigenous flavours and innovative F&B brands, as well as a range of next-level equipment. Don't miss the all-new opportunity to reserve your full-service private meeting table for daily breakfast or lunch menus. Reservations open March 1, 2024 on the RC Show mobile app.

PAVILIONS:

RC Show's two new and exciting pavilions complement top global brands from China, Brazil, Italy and Peru and local flavours from Quebec and Ontario.

The Black Experience Pavilion
sponsored by Kraft Heinz | curated by The Re-Seasoning Coalition and Foodpreneur Lab

Get ready to level up your menu! Explore a curated selection of incredible, foodservice-available products from emerging Black-owned brands.

The Buy Indigenous Pavilion
sponsored by FCC | curated by Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations (ICAN)

Top Indigenous-owned F&B brands converge at RC Show 2024 for the first time. Meet the entrepreneurs behind buzz-worthy products from across the country.

COMPETITIONS:

The RC Show 2024 competition lineup features favourites like the Garland Culinary Competition, the Beyond the Rail Cocktail Competition and more, with new opportunities for ambitious competitors to throw down and win big:

- Latte Art Competition
- Cesve (Turkish Coffee) Competition
- Coffee & Good Spirits Competition
- Two-Days of Pizza Competition – Fantasy & Traditional
- All-New Fried Chicken Sandwich Competition

SPEAKERS & PANELS:

Studio Ex | New Business Series

Nevermind the naysayers: foodservice is hot. New entrepreneurs can level up with special, in-Show sessions on food safety, licensing and permits, building strategic and successful business plans, financial literacy, loan applications and grant writing, creating additional revenue streams, exploring unconventional foodservice jobs, and more!

Speaker Stage | Keynotes & Panels

The Speaker Stage is back and stacked with inspirational and educational keynotes, panels and can't miss sessions in its new Heritage Court location. Bookings are ongoing, so check the Show website for updates as the date approaches!

Food Safety with Bill Marler, Food Safety Attorney and Advocate

Featured in the documentary Poisoned: The Dirty Truth About Your Food.

How to Publish A Cookbook (From Kitchen Creation to Cookbook Sensation) with Taste Canada

Knife Skills Masterclass (Chef and TikTok star Wallace Wong shows you how to wield a kitchen knife like the best chefs in the world.)

With Wallace Wong

Elevating Wine Sales with Vinyl Sounds

Exploring the curious and compelling connection between sound and wine sales: considers the impact of music on customer experience and provides practical tips for integrating vinyl records into a wine-focused establishment to drive sales.

+ NEW LEADERSHIP PANELS:

Remaining Profitable Amidst Inflation

Ipsos presents the current economic landscape and gives data-backed inflation-fighting strategies for foodservice

+

Empowering Women for Leadership Success

Gen Zs and the Speciality Beverage Revolution

(Think CosMc's, Chatime and Starbucks)

The Business Case for Integrating Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) Principles

Black Entrepreneurship in Food & Hospitality

Mastering Kitchen Design for Maximum Functionality

REGISTER NOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SPECIAL PRICING AND TRAVEL OFFERS!

Don't miss RC Show's legendary satellite events. Register now:

- **Opening Night Reception**
- **Breakfast With Champions**
- **Industry Night Out**

SCAN TO LEARN MORE:

Restaurants Canada

The voice of foodservice | La voix des services alimentaires

RESTAURANTS CANADA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE:

Recognizing & Celebrating the best of Canadian Foodservice

Restaurants Canada Awards of Excellence celebrate professionals who embody the best of our industry through their extraordinary vision, leadership and skill, and their unwavering spirit.

These awards are much more than a formal recognition—they inspire, ignite ambition and set a benchmark for excellence.

The Awards ceremony takes place each year at RC Show, before an engaged audience of industry peers. "It's so important to acknowledge and promote exceptional people and actions in our industry," says Anna Pham, director of content and programming at Restaurants Canada. "We tend to work within our own little worlds, so elevating the best, brightest people and most lasting contributions helps motivate, inspire and connect all of us."

This recognition is not just about honoring current success; it inspires the entire foodservice community to reach further and think differently, pushing the envelope of leadership, creativity and operational excellence. Each category of the awards underscores crucial industry values—from culinary skill to social advocacy, and leadership to ingenuity. "Several of the Awards of Excellence are awarded by a judging panel; however, the Culinary and Emerging Leader Award nominees are solicited through an industry peer nomination process," Pham explains. "Nominating a peer or employee for an award is easy to do and a great way to acknowledge excellence in your own workplace or region."

The prestige of being nominated or winning one of these awards can significantly enhance a winner's public image, extending beyond the award ceremony, offering visibility and the potential for further growth. It can also attract attention from media, potential partners, and industry leaders, creating opportunities for those recognized to stand out in a competitive market.

"The Restaurants Canada Awards of Excellence are not just a celebration of industry achievements," says Pham. "They're an expression of our potential. They're a milestone that marks our progress and keeps us moving forward together."

Peer nominations are open now for the Emerging Leader and Social Advocate Awards at: www.rcshow.com/rc-awards-of-excellence/

Don't miss the Restaurants Canada Awards of Excellence ceremony at RC Show!

Learn more and register now

RC Show Restaurants Canada

RESTAURANTS CANADA AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

CULINARY AWARD
PEER NOMINATIONS OPEN JANUARY 15, 2024
Honouring those who harmonize culinary expertise with unparalleled creativity, celebrating a wide array of flavours and cuisines while prioritizing sustainability, local ingredients, and ethical sourcing in their kitchens.

LEADERSHIP AWARD
Honouring those who have made an indelible mark and game-changing contribution to the Canadian foodservice landscape, helping others grow to reach new heights and potential.

LEGACY AWARD
Honouring those whose careers inspired, elevated and transformed the Canadian foodservice industry, leaving a lasting blueprint for generations to follow.

EMERGING LEADER AWARD – PEER NOMINATIONS OPEN JANUARY 15, 2024
Honouring those who, from early on in their career, have embraced foodservice as their passion and vocation, reaching new heights of personal potential, while blazing a new path for others to follow and thrive.

ESG AWARD
This award is dedicated to honouring an organization recognized for their commitment to fostering sustainability, ethical business practices and positive social impact.

INNOVATION AWARD
Honouring individuals and companies that challenge the status quo, using ingenuity and vision to develop game-changing products and services that drive foodservice forward.



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Fully trained and ready for action!

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GEAR UP FOR THE BLACK EXPERIENCE PAVILION AT RC SHOW 2024

The Black Experience Pavilion is an RC Show first.

Sponsored in part by Kraft Heinz, The Black Experience Pavilion is an innovative space where brands can learn how to strengthen their DEI programs and buyers can connect with a diverse array of offerings from Black-owned farms and food and beverage (F&B) entrepreneurs. The Pavilion promises to be a vibrant and dynamic area where visitors can explore, taste and engage with a variety of products that reflect the depth and breadth of Black F&B brands and meet the creative minds behind them.

Despite being the second-largest industry in the country, Black Canadians are underrepresented across the board in F&B, with many entrepreneurs pigeonholed into opportunities to create a few types of products and employees facing little to no career growth or relegated to back-of-house restaurant positions. This initiative is a step forward in recognizing and celebrating the rich culinary, beverage and foodservice contributions of the Black community.

Pioneering this effort is The Re-Seasoning Coalition (TRSC). Known for its commitment to growing the representation of Black Canadians across all levels of the food industry through research and innovative programming and Foodpreneur Lab, a visionary incubator dedicated to levelling the playing field for F&B professionals in underserved communities, with their current project focused on Black food entrepreneurs creating consumer packaged goods.

The Pavilion will not only serve as a platform for Black-owned businesses, but also as an eye-opener for restaurants and foodservice distributors about the critical importance of including the perspectives and experiences of Black consumers, employees and brands in their strategic plans and long-term business strategy. TRSC co-founders and Pavilion developers Elle Asiedu and Philman George have emphasized the importance of this representation and believe there's an opportunity for every industry player to benefit from understanding and welcoming the Black experience. The jointly curated initiative underscores the understanding that Black-owned products bring unique flavours, stories and culinary traditions that can enrich and diversify the food industry. Their presence in mainstream markets is not just about inclusion and access; it's also about offering new, exciting and high-quality options to consumers to enhance the overall foodservice experience.

MENU connected with TRSC co-founders **Elle Asiedu** and **Chef Philman George** to learn more about The Black Experience Pavilion and what they hope to see happen for their exhibitors at RC Show 2024.

MM Please share the vision behind The Black Experience pavilion.

EA and PG: *We want the pavilion to be a space within RC Show that captures both sides of the Black experience in foodservice: the realities of being Black in corporate food spaces and the challenges and achievements that come from being a Black entrepreneur in F&B.*

When you walk into the pavilion, you'll be able to peruse the featured products and creators as well as learn more about the power of the Black consumer and employee, and what that means for your business' bottom line.

Canada has the most diverse Black population in the world outside of Africa, which presents a rich opportunity for all sectors and disciplines in foodservice, especially considering the growth projections for the Black community in Canada over the next 10 years. Innovative products are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the benefits resulting from including such a multicultural group of people in one of the nation's strongest industries so if it hasn't already happened, at some point, brands, independents, and everyone in between will need to take concrete steps to prepare for the consumers of tomorrow. Our Pavilion is a great place to start.

MM What are you most excited about the experience you're curating in the pavilion?

EA: *I'm particularly excited about the one-day mass networking session that we'll be hosting on the second day of RC Show. Our research has shown that despite strong familiarity with the term systemic racism, less than 20 per cent of operators and corporate foodservice leaders have a program in place for attracting, retaining and promoting Black employees. Our aim is to start chipping away at this particular flavour of inequity by connecting Black talent with brand managers, recruiters and people leaders in foodservice ready to make good on their diversity, equity and inclusion promises.*

PG: *There are so many things to look forward to: connecting operators and distributors with innovative Black-owned products and farmers, being the conduit to access more diversity in our supply chain, promoting TRSC's equity and anti-Black racism e-learning programs and taking up space and creating history at the RC Show!*

MM What outcomes do you hope to see from this initiative?

EA and PG: *Connections! Our Pavilion is an unprecedented opportunity that will only grow in size and impact, so for this first year our ROI is focused on the number of connections fostered between TRSC and brands looking to optimize their DEI programs, entrepreneurs and buyers, and job seekers and opportunities. We are working on having cross-provincial representation within the Pavilion as well but know that a strong presence from across the country will depend on the success of this year's effort.*

We also want to inspire the industry to think bigger about how to elevate and support equity-deserving groups. Handouts are helpful but a hand up leaves a lasting impact.

Foodpreneur Lab's Start and Scale paths are an essential component of its mission and consist of a diverse group of aspiring and established food entrepreneurs who are selected through a rigorous process to participate in a comprehensive program. This program includes mentorship, training and access to invaluable resources including industry connections and business and marketing strategy development workshops. These cohorts are tailored to address the unique challenges faced by diverse food entrepreneurs, offering personalized support and guidance. Through Foodpreneur Lab, participants gain not only the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the competitive food industry but also become part of a supportive community that encourages collaboration, innovation and mutual growth. The aim is to empower entrepreneurs to turn their culinary visions into sustainable and successful businesses, contributing significantly to the diversity and vitality of the food and beverage sector.

The rotating exhibitor list featured in The Black Experience Pavilion is still being confirmed, but MENU is excited to share just a few of the Black-owned brands to experience at RC Show 2024 and watch grow across Canada and beyond.

THE RE-SEASONING COALITION

Ready to diversify your talent pool?

Email **elle@thereseasoning.org** to register for **The Black Experience Pavilion** networking session on April 9, 2024 at RC Show.

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE PAVILION PREVIEW

foodpreneur lab

Check out these exciting Black-owned F&B innovation brands from the Foodpreneur Lab alumni community:

A+ SMOODEES
ANTHONY PERERIA
Products: All natural, organic, non-GMO, vegan, gluten-free smoodies (customizable), protein almond shakes, boosters, shots, snacks and pumpkin seed protein powder.
www.aplussmoodees.com
@aplussmoodees **Smoodees**



Photo courtesy of Marilyn Ariosa of Artistic Intuition

As a clinical physiologist, Anthony Pereria views health from the perspective of restorative care. "When people come to see me, I ask them questions about how they take care of their body from the inside out. I learned people were not going to see dieticians or nutritionists, so I basically started creating smoothies for people."

"I never had any intention of it being a business," says Pereria. "What ended up happening was people would come back to be and say, 'Hey Anthony, I love my smoothie, but my husband keeps taking sips out of it.' Demand just kept on going up."

Eventually this led Pereria to create A+ Smoodees. "It evolved from a service into a business. I hired a team including dietitians, nutritionists and a microbiologist to help." The result? "We are an all-natural, vegan and gluten-free company. We take the best of what nature has to offer and deliciously present it, with a measure of awareness. That's what A+ stands for – awareness. We don't use sugars, chemicals or preservatives."


Photo courtesy of Marilyn Ariosa of Artistic Intuition

For Pereria his dedication comes from the desire to give his ancestors a voice and to hear their wisdom. "Food is joy. Food is love. The

great thing is that when people see our products and they see ginger, turmeric alongside blueberries and green apples, it's something they can resonate with easily."

"Foodpreneur [Lab] reached out and said, we have a program, and we think you'd be great for it," says Pereria. "I was four or five years in, and I didn't start the business with an entrepreneurial resume. I did it as a practitioner. So, there were a lot of gaps for me. The great thing about Foodpreneur is they asked me where I wanted to start – marketing, product development, video development. There are so many courses they provide."

"The most important thing is they basically do it with a measure of altruism. They're doing it because they want to help. It has been such an absolute blessing to be able to do to this."

HEALX FOODS
BIOLA OLUWAJUYIGBE
Product: Cauliflower Fries
(offered in Garlic Herb and Smoked Spice)
www.healxfoods.com
@healxfoods **healxfoods**



Photo courtesy of MissisGoodLooking

Growing up in Nigeria, Biola Oluwajuyibge has always been an entrepreneur. After starting businesses in Nigeria, living in Qatar and in the Netherlands, Oluwajuyibge made her home in Canada in 2016. "I've always had my own businesses and being an entrepreneur is who I am. I have always had an interest in health, science and education so in school I earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and a master's degree in food nutrition and health."

Oluwajuyibge thought about food that's quick and easy but not just for a specific market. "I thought about products people eat regularly – not just special food for special diets. Everyone likes fast food because it's tasty. How can I find a better replacement for a product everyone knows isn't really healthy."

Putting her education and interests to work, Oluwajuyibge developed Cauliflower Fries. "We boil cauliflower to make it stable so people can get the nutritional value cauliflower provides since not everyone can tolerate it. Then we mix cauliflower with rice and spices. There's no gum. There's no stabilizer. Then, we form it into the shape of a traditional French fry, bake it and package it. We want to make sure people eat this cauliflower without knowing that they're actually eating cauliflower," says Oluwajuyibge.

The process is inspired by Oluwajuyibge's African roots. "We believe in authentic food. That's why the development process took so long. I wanted it to be a food that didn't need stabilizer. That's how we make food in Africa. That's how I saw my grandmother's meals – food my grandmother would transform into different meals and dishes and snacks. The effort might be intensive, but it was pure food."

With the same satisfying crunch as potato French fries, Cauliflower Fries passed the most stringent tester, Oluwajuyibge's son. "He doesn't eat any vegetables. He doesn't even want to try. One day I made him Cauliflower Fries and I said casually, 'Oh here are some fries.' He finished everything."

Oluwajuyibge continues, "I see the trajectory of fast food intersecting with healthy food. That's why our name is Heal X. The X and the heal is pronounced helix – representing DNA. What we want to do is change the DNA of fast food from food that isn't healthy to healthy. I see Cauliflower Fries as a universal product."

Through Foodpreneur [Lab], Oluwajuyibge has a community of people to help navigate the journey to bring her ambitions to life. "From this program we have a small community where we keep talking to each other, encouraging everyone to just go for it."

NETTIE'S NAH JOKE HOT PEPPER SAUCE
NETTIE CHARLES-OWEN
Products: Small batch, artisan made hot pepper sauce available in four flavours: Original, Merry Cranberry, Mango Tango and Calypso Craze
nahjoke.com **@nahjokepeppersauce**



Photo courtesy of Sarra Elgalal from Roycevisual

Nettie Charles-Owen founded Nah Joke Hot Pepper Sauce after picking up hot pepper plants at a local nursery. "I was so excited because I'd never seen hot pepper plants in a nursery. But I had this bumper crop and I didn't know what to do with all the peppers, but I knew I couldn't let it go to waste." Using her mother's recipe, Charles-Owen started making hot sauce. "I made my first batch of hot sauce as I remembered my mom doing it. I'm not going to lie. The first batch was so hot, the friends and family I gave it to said, 'This is good, but really hot. Can you temper the heat a little bit?' Over the years, I've found the right level of heat that allows you to enjoy the flavour of the food, not just sit there with your lips burning."

Her mother's hot sauce recipe hails from Dominica. "We have some French influences in how we cook, and the French are noted for their sauces, and they know how to extract flavour. This is what I believe gives me an edge. I know exactly how and when to add my ingredients to get the ultimate flavour." With Scotch bonnet peppers sourced from Jamaica, Charles-Owens' hot sauces are free of ingredients like xanthan gum and other additives.

The company's tenth year of operation coincides with Charles-Owen's third year of retirement. "I worked for 42 years for one of the large financial outfits," Charles-Owen

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remarks. "But I always loved cooking. I'm happiest when I'm in the kitchen. When I retired, the pandemic meant I couldn't travel, so I thought maybe I should take the sauce to market. That's how my journey started in the hot sauce industry."



Photo courtesy of Cecil at Natural Image Photography

For Charles-Owen, Nah Joke Hot Pepper Sauce isn't just about making money. "I'm a retired banker, so the money has to make sense. I enjoy what I do but I'm doing this for a few reasons. I want to build my mom's legacy. I want to help build generational wealth for some of the younger ones in my family. It is my intention to bring those who are interested into the business at the right time."

SIIKA FOODS
SARAH SEKALALA

Products: African-inspired cooking sauces available in four flavours.

siikafoods.com

@siika_foods **siikasauceplusspices**



Photo courtesy of Sarra Elgalal from Roycevisual

Sarah Sekalala was born and raised in Uganda and founded Siika Foods on a love of cooking and a determination to simplify the cooking process. She recalls, "I have memories of seeing women from my community, my family members, my aunties, my grandmothers – everyone staying in the kitchen for hours. Our sauces simplify the whole process."

Leaving Uganda together with her husband and two sons, the family made their home in Canada in 2001. "Before I left Uganda, I had three goals. The first was to have a better life and provide opportunities for my children. The second was to earn a degree and the third was to build an empire."

After having two more children, Sekalala soon realized how different life was in Uganda. "Back home we had a lot of help. After coming home with my third baby with just myself and my husband, we had no one coming over. We were both students at the time as well, working with a young family. We knew we had to find a way to make things easier."



Photo courtesy of Veronica Kucherov

Shopping at local grocery stores, Sekalala was never able find what she was looking for. "Coming to Canada I could not even find a simple, easy sauce 'helper'" Siika Foods produces handmade African simmer sauces and marinades. "Ugandan cooking has been influenced by the many people coming into the country," says Sekalala. "We have British and South Asian flavours in our cooking. The whole idea is you can use our sauces in any dish. Our sauce is really thick because it's full of vegetables. You can see the texture of our sauces and as a result it has more pronounced flavours. I think that's our unique selling proposition."

Sekalala sees Siika Foods as a company to help bring new flavours to the market. "Coming from a country which has so many tribes, it's difficult to say, 'This is African and this is Ugandan.' Our idea is to help bring people's voices through food to Canada. For me, building an empire is trying to include as many people as possible to learn, change and prosper. Because when my neighbour is good, I'm also good."

EIGHT50 COFFEE
MUNA MOHAMMED



Photo courtesy of Emma Haidar at Photographyby Emma

Product: Certified organic and fair-trade coffee as well as responsibly sourced micro lot coffee products.

eight50coffee.com

@eight50coffee **Eight50Coffee**

Recognized by the Wall Street Journal as one of The 10 Best Global Coffee Brands to Order Online, Eight50 Coffee is another of Foodpreneur Labs' success stories. "Eight50 is a purpose-driven coffee that I started, to continue my own family legacy in coffee. My grandfather was a proud coffee farmer," says founder Muna Mohamed. "It is also the year coffee was discovered in Ethiopia."

Last summer, Eight50 coffee signed a distribution deal with Sobeys and now three of their signature coffees are available in select stores across Ontario. In November 2023, the Coffee Association of Canada awarded Eight50 Coffee the Innovative Achievement of the Year award for their Cascara Hashara beverage. Made from dried husks of coffee cherries, the award recognizes the use of the upcycled coffee cherry in a sparkling ready-to-drink beverage.

Eight50 coffee sources coffee from many different countries. "Each country has their own flavour notes," says Mohammed. "Ethiopian coffees and African coffees have a fruit-forward flavour profile. South and Central American coffee has deeper, chocolately notes."

"That's the beauty of coffee in general, it's a journey of discovery."

Kraft Heinz Doubles Down on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging

Kraft Heinz is a major player in the global and Canadian markets. With a diverse product portfolio that includes iconic brands such as Kraft Peanut Butter, Heinz Ketchup, and Kraft Dinner, the company caters to a broad range of consumer tastes and preferences. Operating under the global Vision "To sustainably grow by delighting more consumers globally," Kraft Heinz emphasizes innovation, quality and sustainability in its operations and is known for its active participation in community initiatives and philanthropy, often engaging in partnerships and programs that support food security and nutrition education. This commitment to community engagement and corporate responsibility reinforces the company's position not only as a market leader in the food and beverage industry but also as a responsible and forward-thinking corporate citizen.

Amidst this backdrop and track record, the company is doubling down on its commitment to lead the industry in its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEI&B) across its operations. MENU reached out to Kraft Heinz to learn more about the company's DEI&B journey and their commitment to bringing Black-owned F&B brands and the industry together in an all-new Show pavilion: **The Black Experience**.



Crystal Andrews-Banks, Head of Global Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging at Kraft Heinz

MM What is DEI&B, and what are its purpose, touchpoints and ultimate goals?

Crystal Andrews-Banks: *At Kraft Heinz, we believe diverse perspectives and backgrounds make us stronger, more thoughtful, and more innovative, so we're setting a plate and welcoming everyone to our table.*

Our DEI&B vision is to harness our collective power across all dimensions of diversity so we can disrupt, innovate and better serve our people, business, and communities.

Simply put, we're on a transformational journey to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace that facilitates positive change across our people, business, and communities. Through dedicated and purposeful actions, we're aiming to welcome more people to our table where they can be their authentic selves; we're working to reflect the consumers who love our brands; and we're eager to harness the power of food to nourish the communities in which we live and operate."

MM What led you to embark on your DEI&B journey?

CAB: *Since the beginning of our company's story, we've been on an exciting transformational journey to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Starting in 2016 when our first Business Resource Groups (BRGs) were formed, to today, we've witnessed a lot of progress in DEI&B. In 2021, we announced our aspirations to have women comprise 50 per cent of global management and people of colour to comprise 30 per cent of the U.S. salaried population by 2025. To date, we have made significant strides toward our aspirations, including our refreshed vision statement and an expanded focus on equity.*



How does the company's commitment to values-led commitments like DEI&B touch and motivate current and prospective employees?

CAB: *Creating a culture where everyone feels comfortable bringing their full selves to work requires a community of changemakers to champion this work. Everyone has a role to play in creating and nurturing a diverse and inclusive workplace.*

To make meaningful change, we're providing opportunities for our leaders to learn how to be more inclusive and create safe spaces and experiences for teams and team members. We've introduced development initiatives such as interrupting bias in our Organizational People Review process to help managers identify and address unconscious bias in their assessments and ensure fair evaluations.

Our Business Resource Groups (BRGs) play an invaluable role in advancing our efforts and motivating action among our employees. These groups offer learning and development opportunities, assist in talent recruitment, create a network of support for employees and play an active role in providing counsel to leadership during challenging moments. Our Global Inclusion Council is also a key component to DEI&B. The cross-functional group of leaders is responsible for creating the strategy, providing governance, oversight, and reporting on our DEI&B efforts and initiatives.

How has a focus on DEI&B benefited Kraft Heinz?

CAB: *DEI&B is part of the fabric of who we are and how we show up as a company, and a core component of our company culture – which is our competitive advantage. The different backgrounds and perspectives of our employees help enable our innovation. This diversity of thought allows us to develop new ideas, challenge the status quo, push the boundaries on creativity, and make the best, well-informed decisions. This is giving us a real and measurable advantage as we lead the future of food.*



Kevin Royal,
Vice President and Head of Away From Home at Kraft Heinz Canada

What led Kraft Heinz to the decision to sponsor the first-ever Black Experience Pavilion at RC Show 2024?

Kevin Royal: *It's important that we live our values, and our value 'We Demand Diversity' provokes action, ownership, responsibility, and importantly, leadership. We know there are real representation gaps in the Canadian foodservice industry, from the boardrooms to the back-of-house kitchens and, as an industry leader, we believe that we must use our influence, power and scale to help centre some of these important discussions.*

What is Kraft Heinz saying to restaurants and the broader foodservice industry?

KR: *As the industry continues to face challenges in the rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to ensure that diversity and inclusion representation and conversations continue to be amplified. Everyone in the industry has a role to play to be an ally and help initiate and support positive change. As one of the largest food and beverage companies in the world, we feel a responsibility to ensure these conversations and actions are taking place.*

What outcomes does the company hope to see at RC Show?

We look forward to seeing the connections that are made at the 2024 RC Show. We hope to see people not only listening to one another, but truly engaging in conversations that help us identify and unlock new opportunities and partnerships. The future of the foodservice industry is incredibly bright, and we're excited to be a part of the growth and transformation in the years ahead.

"Before joining the Kraft Heinz team, I did a lot of research on the company to see if they were truly living up to their values. I was pleased to see that the executive leadership team had Black representation and that the team I was joining was very diverse as well. Black representation both in leadership and on my team gave me a sense of psychological safety and helped me take a leap of faith to join Kraft Heinz."

– Philman George, Corporate Chef, Canada Foodservice

"I am very proud to be a Kraft Heinz employee and live its value, "We Demand Diversity". DEI&B is crucial in every organization to foster a productive work environment that operates effectively. I am excited to continue to partner with the organization to build towards a workforce that reflects the society we live in today."

– Boniface Oye-Adeniran, Associate Finance Director, Retail & Away From Home, Kraft Heinz Canada

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Proprietors: Tyler & Nicole Gable | Groupex member since: before 2007 | Penticton, British Columbia





When Tyler & Nicole Gable received notice that townhomes were going to replace the stretch of land where their old restaurant, Villa Rosa Ristorante, had stood for more than 26 years, they decided that they better have a plan in place. "We owned and operated Villa Rosa for 16 of the 26 years it was in business," Tyler says. "We live in Penticton, we're part of the community and understand how seasonality affects business. We saw an opportunity for a new place that was related to what people like (Villa Rosa), but in a different way."

That's where Sociale Enoteca came in. "Socialē is Italian for 'social' and that's what we want this place to be, a place where people can meet, drink, eat and be together."

Tyler Gable has been in the restaurant industry for more than 25 years and started as many young people do, working at a restaurant because it's a job, not necessarily a career. But as he progressed from the kitchen to server to manager, he knew there was a way to convert his passion for the industry into a full-time career. "I've ran other people's restaurants and was able to take the good and learn from the bad and adapt it when we took over Villa Rosa," says Gable.

Originally from Alberta, Gable and his now wife Nicole, attended the town's famous Peach Festival in 2005 and knew this was a place where they could make a home. "Nicole visited Penticton when she was younger and had great memories of the place. So, when we visited, we thought about life in the Okanagan. A place where we could be our own boss, buy a house and raise a family. And that's what we did!"

The couple eventually came across Villa Rosa Ristorante, an Italian restaurant in its tenth year of operation. While it wasn't officially for sale, they made an offer which was eventually accepted and they began a new life as restauranteurs in the Okanagan. For 16 years, Villa Rosa was, as Penticton now notes, "one of Penticton's favourite restaurants."

When the Gable's were served notice that the land was going to be developed, they switched gears and founded Socialē Enoteca. "Sociale was purpose-built," notes Gable. "We completely renovated a 1960s motel's lakefront into a full service café, restaurant and bar. We created what was missing on Lakeshore."

"We have Caffé al Socialē by day, which serves coffee, drinks, sandwiches and desserts. Then, it converts into Socialē Enoteca by night, where we serve an Italian-inspired tapas menu," says Gable. "We have a smaller kitchen, so by designing a tapas menu we can continue to bring out smaller, freshly made dishes in a more timely fashion. We wanted to create a vibe of shareable and social."

The South Okanagan takes full advantage of the social nature of the menu and vibe of the restaurant. "We built a long bar top, along the water, that people can sit at and socialize, with a patio that has a gorgeous view of Okanagan Lake."

Penticton is a popular summer destination, not just for the mountain biking, rock climbing





and kayaking, but as one of the largest hubs for the wine industry. The South Okanagan is home to over 200 wineries, with the town located in the heart of wine region. According to Visit Penticton, the Okanagan Valley produces more than 75 grape varietals and there are close to 80 wineries within a 20-minute drive of Penticton. With a further 30-minute drive south, the town of Oliver is touted as the "Wine Capital of Canada," with the highest concentration of wineries than anywhere in Canada. With Okanagan Lake to the north and Skaha Lake to the south, the summers are a busy time in the town.

"From about mid-June until Labour Day, we increase our core staff from 20 staff members to 60, because of the influx of tourists," remarks Gable.

This past summer brought a new set of challenges. With forest fires in Kelowna and a rockslide closing the main highway into Penticton, the usually busy season was the opposite. "The travel ban with the forest fires was difficult, mainly because our area wasn't affected by the fires. Tourism was decimated this summer and so many businesses suffered. Especially after COVID-19 where so many restaurants and businesses didn't make it through, this summer was rough. And now, Penticton is seasonally quiet."

Like many entrepreneurs, Gable looks for and sees opportunities outside of the traditional restaurant box. Looking at all the great artisans and wineries in his community, Gable offers Socialē Enoteca as an event space. "In December, a local artisan hosted a candle making workshop which sold out the first time we hosted it. We just had kids visit to build gingerbread houses and it was a hit. Throughout the colder months we're hosting a series of Winemaster Events. Guests enjoy a five-course meal that's perfectly paired with a different local BC winery every two weeks all winter long," remarks Gable.

"We know it's important for us to be exposed to different demographics in Penticton, and by bringing in these wineries and artisans, we're hoping that people who may not have visited us before, will visit us again."

With years of experience running restaurants, Gable sees the value in partnering not just with local producers, but also with larger companies to stay competitive. "My produce comes from a local farmer who drives an old farm-truck with over 800,000 kilometres on it," laughs Gable. "There are good quality ingredients within a 15-minute drive of Sociale, who we support and therefore we also support the local economy."

But Gable notes, "There are products that aren't locally produced that we use daily and that's where Groupex provides me with competitive pricing. They give little guys an edge on the major chain restaurants." As a Groupex member of over 16 years, Gable sees the benefits, "We have access to products that we would not have used if we weren't able to use Groupex's preferred rates."

He continues, "I was opening my monthly Groupex rebate cheque and with it you also receive a 'What's new' insert. One of the products I found was a non-alcoholic vermouth. I know there is a trend toward upscale non-alcoholic cocktails so seeing this made me think about what could be good for Sociale."

"The customer service is great and they're easy to work with. If you don't have Groupex, you're at a disadvantage compared to your competitor."

groupex CANADA

Established in 1984 by a small group of independent restaurants, today, Groupex is the largest foodservice account in Canada with some of the leading branded suppliers such as Pepsico, Diversey, Canada Bread and Gordon Food Service. Groupex uses the buying power of its national membership base to negotiate savings on essential restaurant supplies and services. Members save thousands of dollars on beverages, food, operational and financial programs.

Learn more at:
groupex.com

VP Federal and Quebec Maximilien Roy on what's happening in Quebec Foodservice



Maximilien Roy recently joined the Restaurants Canada government relations team as Vice-President Quebec and Federal. Max brings vast and diverse experience encompassing several influential government relations and political roles including Senior Manager, Public Policy with Amazon, CEO of Regroupement des jeunes chambres de commerce du Québec, Director of Operations with the Office of the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Constituency Office Director to the Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, and Strategic Advisor at NATIONAL Public Relations. He also holds a double EMBA from ESG UQAM/Université Paris Dauphine and is a PhD Candidate in Business Administration at ESG UQAM/HEC/Concordia/McGill in Montreal.

Max has already hit the ground running, connecting with and advocating for Restaurants Canada members and growing the association's influence and membership in Quebec while strongly supporting advocacy at the federal level. MENU connected with Max to learn more about his agenda and get his take on the food and restaurant scene in his home province of Quebec.

MM What attracted you to the VP, Federal and Quebec role with Restaurants Canada, and what are you hoping to make happen?

Maximilien Roy: *I grew up on my cousin's farm. There were 12 kids, and I was the 13th kid. I was always involved in agriculture in one way or another and I also had a passion for politics. I chose politics eventually, but I wanted to stay close to agriculture and food. I also have family members who are quite involved in the restaurant industry, so for me it was a passion and a vocation.*

I'm joining Restaurants Canada during the post-pandemic period, so there are a lot of significant challenges. This is compelling to me because I want to make a difference in the lives of all the Canadians who rely on restaurants and on foodservice in general and the 1.1 million people who work in the industry.

MM What does your new role entail and what do you plan to focus on first?

MR: *Most people would describe my work as advocacy; speaking on behalf of restaurant operators and foodservice workers to the government, and that's true. Government figures are extremely busy with a thousand things. They don't always have time to really analyze how issues and policy might affect restaurants or even figure out how the foodservice industry works. My job is to put the issues and concerns of the industry at the top of their minds and make them understand why something might be an issue and why even a small change in their policy can make a huge difference in the lives of a lot of people.*

We all know 2023 has been a year of uncertainty. Everyone started trying to provide predictions about the economy, but we've been spinning in all directions. So, as much as restaurant operators know a thing or two about anxiety, this year has probably been even tougher than before. Right now is an interesting time to work for Restaurants Canada and make sure the government knows the impact of their actions.

Ultimately, I want to make sure that there is a clear connection between our members and

the government, not just me speaking for them and being the voice. I really want to create a space and a dialogue for everyone.

MM From an outsider's perspective, restaurants and food in general seem ingrained in the cultural fabric and identity of the province.

***MR:** It may be because of our heritage. For us, going out with friends in public spaces is part of who we are. A lot of our community living happens in front of a good meal, and Quebec is still number one in terms of the number of drinking places. We do like to go out and have a few pints to connect and find out what's happening with friends. It's a big part of our culture.*

It used to be that diverse cuisines were mostly centred in Montreal. In the past 15 years, there's been a lot of growth in world cuisine in smaller cities across Quebec. In contrast, the more traditional French Canadian cuisine you would find in smaller places is really making a comeback in Montreal. You can find some really traditional dishes you would have had a hard time finding there before. It's an interesting feature of what's happening in the restaurant scene in Quebec right now.

MM The Bonjour Quebec website describes Quebec gastronomy as a "broth of culture". They're actively promoting the diversity of culture and cuisines available across the province in an inclusive, exciting way. What do you see happening in terms of the restaurant and culinary scene?

***MR:** The social fibre of Quebec is changing, and you can feel it. It's creative and innovative. I don't know if "fusion" is the right way to describe it, but there's a lot of experimentation. You see chefs with deep knowledge of French cuisine trying their take on a traditional Indian or Haitian dish, for example. There's a mix that's happening and that creates amazing experiences for sure.*

MM Amidst this growth and evolution, how are the challenges facing restaurants across Canada manifesting themselves in the Quebec industry?

***MR:** Inflation is a big issue and in terms of labour shortages in Quebec, there are a lot of similarities with what you see across the country, but a couple of differences. In Quebec, we have the Charter of the French Language, which can add to the burden of trying to find customer-facing employees because they require a certain level of French proficiency. Also, we have a unique, round table commission called the CPMT (Commission des partenaires du marché du travail), where provincial union leaders and employers meet to discuss labour market issues and find solutions. It's an innovative and collaborative effort to address labour challenges in Quebec.*

At the end of the day, Quebec restaurants are enduring similar pressures to their counterparts across Canada.



MM Are you able to share any innovative, future-forward ideas from within the Quebec industry or areas where you feel the province has an edge?

***MR:** I think we're in a moment in Quebec where there is recognition of the importance of exporting the experiences and products we're creating to other parts of the country and elsewhere. The idea of "survival" is somewhat entrenched in the way we do business, the way we look at the economy and the way we try and sustain and grow what we do.*

One of the products we make in Quebec that's making a lot of inroads elsewhere is an ice cream brand, Coaticook Ice Cream. It started in a small town, but it's really making inroads across Canada and in the U.S. as well. There is this idea that if we do something different in Quebec, we need to make sure people hear about it. There's a focus in government to not only make sure our culture survives, but thrives. So, entrepreneurs are now thinking about their business model in terms of expansion beyond the borders of Quebec. It's really great to see.

There is a Chef named Martin Picard who opened Cabane à Sucre au Pied de Cochon, which is a sugar shack, but very fine dining, and focused on traditional French Canadian recipes you won't find anywhere else. And, it's not in downtown Montreal – it's about 45 minutes away in the North Shore in St-Benoît-de-Mirabel; a beautiful area. I think we're starting to see people realize we need to open the doors and have people come and take advantage of what Quebec has to offer.

Also, in terms of travel, Quebec is a huge province. To encourage travel and discovery, the Quebec government created the Regional Air Access Program wherein, once a year, people can take advantage of $500 return flights to a variety of provincial regions.



Normally, these trips would cost a few thousand dollars. This has been great because now you can see regions and try foods you wouldn't otherwise have access to and the backbone of tourism is restaurants.

MM What's the mood within the restaurant industry in Quebec right now?

***MR:** There's certainly some disappointment with the recent federal government's decision not to help them with their CEBA loan repayment. You can feel some anxiety. There was a lot of optimism heading into the holiday season, but there's still a lot of uncertainty. The pandemic is still being felt deeply, and you can see it.*

I had a couple of friends in the industry mention they're looking or moving to smaller locations to focus more on pick-up and take-out. There is uncertainty about what the post-pandemic market will look like for the food service industry and it's prevalent in all of the discussions I have with operators.

At the same time, they're entrepreneurs. They put their head down and try everything they can. It's quite special to see them stay motivated and keep going; even though there are setbacks, they keep moving and "trucking along" as you say in English.

MM A few years ago, Quebec had fewer QSR brands and chains than other provinces. Has that changed at all?

***MR:** During the pandemic we saw menus shrink in general and I think there was a lot of interest in grabbing food at chains and QSRs, but possibly because there wasn't a whole lot of choice.*

In the past year or so there's been significant change in QSR menu items. We're seeing them offer items targeted to people who wouldn't typically eat at QSRs. There's a real effort to try and make the segment more interesting and attractive to Quebecers.

I don't think we're seeing a lot of new chains coming in, but more restaurants from the existing chains are popping up all over the place.

MM Restaurants Canada is actively working to grow its Quebec membership. What does the association do for and offer to Quebec operators?

***MR:** Restaurant operators in Quebec are focused on what the Quebec government is doing, and sometimes see what the federal government is doing as an afterthought. They're equally as important in terms of the different policies they can put in place that impact the industry.*

We can add value to provincial operators to push for policies that help them. I have a lot of work to do in communicating the effect federal policy has on their bottom line. That's priority number one. The second is to show that we can get results. It's on my shoulders to make sure the right policies are being proposed and adopted to help Quebec restaurants.

There are a lot of good opportunities as Quebec is really looking to open itself up to business, not just across Canada, but internationally. Restaurants are the hero and the backbone of community and tourism experiences. People will remember those food experiences when they leave and I think there's a lot of opportunity to help grow that and elevate our restaurants.

For that to happen, I need to do my job well, eliminate road blocks and make sure the polices that are in place help operators deliver those experiences. That's why it's so interesting to join Restaurants Canada now.

Max welcomes Quebec operators to contact him with any questions or just to say hello MRoy@restaurantscanada.org

Restaurants Canada
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BONJOUR QUEBEC

Restaurant & F&B Innovation in La Belle Province



From her office in Toronto, Catherine Tadros, Chief Representative of Quebec, spearheads the province's mission to foster robust inter-provincial trade and solidify political ties, with a special emphasis on the agri-food sector. Her team is dedicated to the lofty ambition of catapulting Quebec's companies onto the Canadian, ensuring they are export-ready and poised to penetrate new markets in Ontario and Western Canada. Martin Vèzina, as the Vice-President of Public and Government Affairs at the Association Restauration Québec (ARQ), aligns with Restaurants Canada in advocating for and supporting Quebec's foodservice operators. Both are devoted to championing the culinary and commercial spirit of Quebec.

The culinary tapestry of Quebec is a vibrant reflection of its deep-rooted history, weaving together French and English influences with the rich traditions of the First Nations and the diverse palates brought by immigrants from every corner of the globe. This melange of flavours is ever-evolving, as articulated by Tadros, who sees gastronomy as an indelible part of Quebec's identity. Quebec's food scene is marked by a celebration of life and a leisurely appreciation for the art of dining, epitomized by beloved chefs like Ricardo who foster a shared food culture. From an enduring fascination with healthy and novel foods introduced by New Canadians to a growing intrigue in Indigenous cuisine, Quebec's gastronomy is a journey of taste and discovery at pace with its foodservice and F&B innovation industries. Tadros and Vèzina delve into the dynamics of local consumption, the pride in Quebec-produced goods, the status of the provincial restaurant industry and the culinary innovations that keep the province's food identity distinct and dynamic.

Quebec food identity.

The rich history of Québec cuisine goes far beyond poutine and the « pâté chinois ». Quebecers are proud of their culinary heritage, which includes traditional recipes inherited from the French and English long before the founding of the New France, as well as recipes handed down by the First Nations and by immigrants from all over the world. Quebec gastronomy is an amalgam of these roots, but it is also constantly evolving. "Quebec has forever been attached to gastronomy, and it's a big part of our identity," Tadros explains. "We've also been agriculturally based as a means of survival since the beginning of our existence. When we think of Quebec food in more modern times, I think we're a culture that loves and appreciates good food. We're bon vivants and we love to take our time to eat, to taste and cook. We have many chefs who are well known by a large segment of our population, like Ricardo, who help unify and connect us through a common food culture. Quebecers have also long been interested in healthy foods and curious about new foods we experience through immigration. There's also growing interest in Indigenous cuisine – what foods they eat and the techniques and seasoning they use.

Quebecers are proud of their food and beverages, and it shows in many ways. Aliments du Québec, a non-for-profit organization, manages the certification of Quebec-made products and brands with a visual seal of authenticity. The organization's two flagship brands - "Aliments du Québec" and "Aliments préparés au Québec" - are recognized by nine out of ten consumers, and two out of three Quebecers say they look for local certification logos when shopping for groceries. The Aliments du Québec mark is used by more than 1,700-member companies and more than 25,000 products. The organization also manages "Aliments du Québec on the menu", a recognition program for restaurants and institutions that promote Quebec products on their menu, which is present in 891 restaurants and 637 institutions. Tadros attributes the success of the verification program to entrenched values around supporting their community, pointing out that, "70 per cent of Quebec consumers believe buying local is important and actually, 34 per cent of them are willing to pay from one to five per cent more for local products. That demonstrates the commitment of Quebecers."



The ARQ sits on the Aliments du Québec board, and Vèzina highlights the importance of the labelling and "Aliments du Québec on the menu" programs. "The restaurant program identifies restaurants where 70 per cent of their menu is comprised of Quebec ingredients. We have also developed a catalog that identifies products that are made in Quebec to make it easier for operators to order local through their distributor."

Tadros acknowledges that maple syrup is still one of the most recognized and sought-after imports. "It's a classic. It was discovered by Indigenous people and today more than 70 per cent of the world's maple syrup comes from Quebec. For us, maple syrup is an interesting cultural phenomenon. In March, it's still common to go to the sugar shack and enjoy those special foods. It's not as ingrained in Ontario, but it's a really unifying event and after a long, brutal winter, we need the sugar. What's really unique about the province, and what we see continually is the curiosity of the consumer and their willingness to try new things all the time. Even though we have maple syrup and poutine, there's a great openness to trying new food and new restaurants."

"In the last few years, we have really developed a specific and new Quebec culinary identity," Vèzina points out. "Also, for Montreal, there's something about a gastronomic or "bistronomic" restaurant scene that is very on-trend, but affordable. It doesn't cost that much to eat in fine dining restaurants, which is fortunate. In Quebec, it's very important to buy local. We have boreal produce, and our chefs develop that to create boreal cuisine on the plate."

Boreal cuisine is a style of Nordic cuisine that's been popularized in Quebec. It elevates ingredients native to the boreal forest, the province is known for. "Many chefs have been exploring boreal cuisine," Tadros agrees. "It's part of the natural, local food movement in the province and it ties in many aspects that are important to the consumer in much the same way people are looking toward Indigenous culture and food knowledge. Some of our great chefs like Jean-Luc Boulay and Arnaud Marchand have centred their culinary development around boreal cuisine. It's a big theme and with that, Indigenous entrepreneurial ventures are also growing, particularly in the agri-food space. For example, The Warrior



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Blends is an Indigenous-owned company in the community of Wendake, and they make spices from traditional herbs and plants grown in the boreal region of Quebec.

Quebec restaurant industry.

Quebec restaurants deliver $16 billion in revenue, which translates to about two per cent of the provincial GDP, and over 230,000 people work in the sector's roughly 17,000 restaurants spread across the province. "Restaurants are everywhere," Vèzina says. "We are the place where the community regroups and comes together to talk and connect. We estimate that foodservice buys about $4 billion in Quebec-produced food, so we are major impact players. The Quebec restaurant industry is mainly composed of independents – about 60 per cent of restaurants are independent - which is very specific to the province. People in Quebec like to really sit down to have a meal and interact with everyone, so there's not as many fast food or counter-style restaurants."

Vèzina shares that the experience of Quebec operators was much the same as the rest of Canada over the pandemic. Post-pandemic, takeout, delivery and meal kits have stayed as operators seek to grow their off-premise business, and just 18 per cent of Quebecers are looking to minimize meal delivery services. Pandemic restrictions led to the rise of ghost kitchens and the format



continues to offer relief from overhead and operating costs.

"We are seeing a new way of thinking in the sector," says Vèzina. "Maybe it has to do with the labour shortage we have in Quebec, but operating hours have changed and we're no longer seeing restaurants open every day of the week. If you want lunch on a Monday, it can be difficult to find a restaurant to accommodate you."

Quebec had labour challenges even before the pandemic, but they came to a head by the winter of 2021. According to Vèzina, during the lockdown employees began to exit the sector and found better-paid roles with more favourable hours elsewhere. "I knew cooks who left for the construction industry, we've lost many key employees, and managers are always in training mode."

The industry had a good year in 2022, but the weather was terrible throughout the summer of 2023 and fall was soft. Vèzina is concerned about cost increases, and traffic decreases as he waits to see what 2024 will bring. "It rained every day last summer," he says. "Quebecers like to eat outdoors during the summer. It's part of our identity. But bad weather, inflation and interest rate hiking mean there are fewer people in restaurants."

Quebec restaurants are responding to the new suite of challenges through menu innovation, and Vèzina is cautiously optimistic. "We're seeing a new trend in fine dining with prix fixe tasting menus this year. It's more manageable because you're training fewer staff and it's easier to manage your food stock, because you know how many scallops or steaks you will need. Other restaurants are streamlining their menus to reduce cost and manage their inventory and food cost. We're seeing growth in restaurants offering diverse cuisines in Montreal – we have a lot of Thai and Vietnamese food – and we're seeing a new, market-style cuisine as well as vegan and vegetarian."

Tadros believes that, even though consumers in Quebec cook at home 57 per cent the time, which is more than in Ontario (35 per cent) or Western Canada (28 per cent), they're also a little less likely to reduce their visits to restaurants as 51 per cent of Quebecers say they will reduce their visits in restaurants compared to 54 per cent for the rest of Canada[1]. "Eating is a huge part



of Québec culture," she says. "And many chefs like Ricardo, Marilou and Martin Picard are huge celebrities in Québec and influence the consumer's choices."

Eating out remains deeply rooted in Quebec's culture, especially in Montreal. Consumers might prefer reducing the number of items they ordered or the cost of their average bill to giving up regular restaurant experiences.

Sustainability is also a big trend, that's likely to stay, as 53 per cent of Canadians say they are buying more green and sustainable products in the last few years[2]. The trend is also evidenced in consumption habits as more than 70 per cent of Quebecers have bought or eaten foods containing plant proteins, despite only 27 per cent reporting a diet other than omnivore or carnivore, suggesting many Quebecers are consuming plant-based products for non-dietary reasons[3].

"Many restaurant owners are thinking about their environmental impact," says Vèzina, "from food packaging to food waste to their overall operation. We're seeing changes and investments in alternative energy and usage reduction to a growing emphasis on local sourcing to a resurgence in canning and preserving produce."

Quebec innovation.

Quebec, like everywhere else, is entering a sustained period of innovation and transformation as the restaurant technology and F&B industries reinvent themselves and rise to



the occasion. Entrepreneurs are jumping in with new and unique products and services purpose-built to fill gaps in the post-pandemic business and consumer landscape.

AI is on the rise in restaurant tech and is being used to personalize consumer experience by Quebec companies like Tastet.ca, which offers personalized restaurant recommendations based on consumer preferences and location and can even help restaurants manage and reduce waste and optimize operations. Alfred Technologies' AI solution is a virtual sommelier that facilitates the procurement and inventory management of wines and spirits in the restaurant, hotel and entertainment industries. UEAT, an online ordering system uses an exclusive, QI-powered recommendation module, RAI™, that allows restaurateurs to create highly relevant, personalized, and non-intrusive online ordering experiences for their customers and provides operators with customer data and deep analytics.

Quebec F&B companies are also innovating to create solutions for the foodservice industry, with many working to develop sustainable products often by applying circular economic principles to create cost efficiencies or actual cost-saving products that reduce the need of labour or training. Local companies are also creating products from what would have been considered waste, like produce that doesn't meet consumer aesthetic standards or edible by-products from the manufacturing of another F&B product. A related pocket of innovation is seeing new technologies implemented across the whole food supply chain to increase traceability, productivity and reduce the final cost of the products.

"I think we'll become better and better and better on many different aspects of consumer experience and trying to tie the consumer and the restaurant together in a more efficient way," says Tadros. "That will include a mix of technology and sustainability-focused innovations. Quebec entrepreneurs and businesses are working on how they can help improve the utilization of resources that will make us more efficient as an industry. Quebecers are very open to trying new things and producing the technologies and products that are needed to meet and deliver those efficiencies."

Vèzina points to more pedestrian changes in the restaurant technology landscape, but that promises to have a huge impact on foodservice businesses in the province. "Automated ordering and other efficiencies on the ordering side, like software development, delivery management and the flow of ordering and delivery are very big things in the industry right now," he shares. "Restaurants learned they needed to be on all of the online ordering apps for takeout and delivery during the pandemic, but now they want to have their own online ordering systems they manage themselves."

Another significant, near-term change is the implementation of a new, cloud-based reporting system for Quebec restaurants. Since 2010, the Quebec Revenue Agency has mandated that all bars and restaurants use hardware – a big blue box - that integrates with their POS to record and upload their daily sales transactions. "There will be a new, cloud-based model coming in 2024," says Vèzina. "Many owners will need to change their POS to alternative options that work on a subscription basis. This may be more efficient, but it also may be more costly. It's something the industry is watching."

The multi-cultural fabric of Quebec and its Indigenous, French and English history make for a very creative society and dynamic industry. The province has seen extraordinary success with cultural exports like Cirque du Soleil which have provided a blueprint for new F&B brands to follow. "I think that Quebec can offer restaurants across the country new, innovative products and experiences to help them differentiate themselves," Tadros says. "We don't just eat to survive – there's a social function to food."

RC Show Restaurants Canada

Meet F&B innovation companies from Quebec in the Quebec pavilion at RC Show 2024.

Québec

GROUPE EXPORT
Agroalimentaire • Agri-food

[1] NIQ Canada, Home Meal Replacement Trend Syndicated Report 2023
[2] NielsenIQ Canada 2023 Sustainability Study
[3] Léger, April 2022



SHOWCASE Quebec

Café Castelo

Saint-Nicolas

Web: cafecastelo.com

@cafe_castelo

Contact: info@cafecastelo.com



Founded in 1996, Café Castelo is a family business specializing in coffee roasting. This Quebec-based business developed The Universal Grind, a coffee that is ground through a series of mechanical processes, making it compatible with all coffee makers on the market. Depending on the brewing method, The Universal Grind allows for a reduction of 20 to 40 per cent of the amount of coffee needed for each cup. This innovation is advantageous for restaurateurs, as it guarantees a 100 per cent success rate for each cup of coffee, regardless of whether a lower or higher quantity of coffee is used. The ideal customers are single-cup coffee purveyors as the likelihood of errors is reduced without sacrificing quality.

Les Fromages Latino Inc.

Val-des-Sources

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Les Fromages Latino Inc. is a Quebec-based cheese factory specializing in Latin American cheeses in both retail and food service packaging. Les Fromages Latino Inc. offers fresh, semi-firm and shredded cheeses including Campesino, Costeno, Andino, Asadero and authentic Mexican crema. The owners, Isabel Correa and Eduardo Ibanez, hail from Buga, Colombia and they put all their knowledge, expertise and passion into making cow's milk cheese, inspired by Colombian, Mexican and Salvadoran dairy products. Latino Cheeses Inc. has given itself the mission of introducing a varied clientele of all ages to different Latin American cheeses to experience a part of Latin American culture.

Fumoir Grizzly

Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures

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Founded in 1991, Fumoir Grizzly is Canada's leading processor of sustainably sourced fish products. Their supply of top-quality raw materials and cold-smoking technique allow Fumoir Grizzly to offer tender, moist fish. The company is able to produce private or distributor brands and offer several types of package sizing, from retail to food service format to club format. Their 19,000 square foot plant is one of the few in North America to have its own automatic slicer and complies with HACCP standards to limit the risk of contamination linked to the consumption of seafood products. Fumoir Grizzly also holds ASC Food certification, the MSC Sustainable Fishing label, the Ocean Wise Sustainable Seafood eco-certification and the SQF level 2 (7th edition) accreditation, recognized by the global food safety body GFS.





Grazy Foods

Quebec City

Web: Grazy.co

@grazyfoods

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Contact: sales@grazy.co

Grazy™ is a Canadian food tech company founded in 2020 specializing in dairy alternatives. The company transforms Canadian, non-GMO, gluten-free and glyphosate-free oats into desserts that are plant-based, vegan and without the top 10 food allergens. Grazy has been selling products to restaurants and institutions across Canada since its inception (formerly under the Séva brand). The plant-based desserts are available in various formats. Grazy's vegan soft serve mix (9 x 1.89L) and frozen desserts are available in various flavours and formats (100 mL, 500mL, 11.4L). In its range of cooking products, the company offers a plant-based cream, the perfect alternative to 15 per cent cream. Grazy's products provide options for dairy-free foods to meet the growing demand for plant-based, allergen-free and sustainable products.





Olimega Signé Caméline

St-Édouard

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Contact: Julie Lécuyer, Sales Director, jlecuyer@olimega.com, 450-301-0122, extension 104

Family-owned Olimega Signé Caméline offers a local and sustainably grown alternative to olive oil with its virgin camelina oil and an alternative to sesame oil with its roasted camelina oil. Camelina oil contains 35 per cent omega-3 polyunsaturated fats, remains stable up to 475°F and has a shelf life of over 24 months at room temperature. The company's roasted camelina oil was recently awarded the SIRHA Innovation Bocuse d'Or award, the first Canadian product to receive this distinction and is also an ingredient of the Canadian Bocuse d'Or team. Olimega Signé Caméline's products are available in institutional sizes and is currently on the menu at La Cage, the largest restaurant chain in Quebec and has SQF certification.



It all starts with an honest potato.

It may have taken a pandemic, but local food has come of age and is proving to be good business.



Chef Carl Heinrich stands out as an early advocate of the growing farm-to-table movement. Richmond Station, his acclaimed restaurant in Toronto's downtown financial district, was designed around Carl's unwavering belief that local food was not only the "right" way to do things, but possibly the most long-sighted, prescient approach to a successful restaurant. Dining room guests are delighted daily with tableside stories of locally sourced and raised ingredients and inspired integration of seasonal flavours. But the dining room is really only the showroom for an operation that is centred in the back of house and winds its way out the kitchen door to Richmond Station's garden at the 100-acre organic New Farm in Creemore, Ontario, with many stops at local, Ontario farms along the way.

Carl Heinrich is a stand-out figure in the local food and culinary tourism scene in Ontario. Just a few weeks ago, the Top Chef Canada winner was in Hastings County to speak at a Culinary Tourism Alliance event that brought chefs, restaurants and producers together for a session on the positive economics of building direct partnerships across the local food value chain. "It's just funny to me how people are still saying they're having a hard time buying locally. In the scheme of things, it's not even close to the hardest thing we do, it's very feasible, especially if you're outside the city and close to producers. Buying local has been a hallmark of what we do at Richmond Station since we opened 11 years ago, and we buy a lot of local food. We only buy whole animals, do our butchery in house and make our own charcuterie. We spend a lot of time driving around Southern Ontario visiting farms and learning more about soil, breed and feed and distance-to-abattoir. When we get to pay producers directly, it leads to better quality food on the plate."



In an industry struggling to regain momentum following the pandemic, food costs and labour challenges have added new layers of doubt and uncertainty for many operators. Against this backdrop, Heinrich is seeing his investment in local, organic food pay off. "I can't talk to anyone in the restaurant industry without them telling me how hard it is to buy food because it's so expensive. We've certainly noticed it in our restaurant, but it's things like imported oils or Kosher salt, which went from about $3.00 to $10.00 a box over the past five years. We've also noticed that, while the price of local, regenerative, organic foods has gone up, those increases don't begin to match the rate of inflation for conventional foods sourced from elsewhere in the world."

This, Heinrich suggests, is because local, organic foods are grown with far less (if any) supplements and implements, which are extremely expensive. So, while the food itself may cost a little more, you're saving on many of the additional expenses built into the international and conventional food system. "We've been playing this trumpet for 11 years," says Heinrich. "It's nice to see such an enormous benefit coming to full fruition now. For sure, our food costs have gone up a little bit, but nowhere near what they would have if we were a Spanish restaurant and had to rely on food coming from elsewhere in the world."

Seeing your philosophy and cuisine come of age and align with the economics of our time could make some a little smug, but Heinrich is focused and committed to sharing his success with industry peers. "I've done many, many presentations where I try and explain the benefits of healthy soil and buying food that's grown in a regenerative practice, but people will resist it if it costs more money and is harder to find. I've been telling producers and suppliers that none of these movements – local, regenerative or organic – can scale until those foods are closer in price to conventional foods. If we want this movement to mean anything, we can't continue to charge a premium for these products. You have to make them accessible and affordable. What I'm seeing now is more restaurants are just calling their suppliers and having local and organic foods shipped because they're the same or closer in price to conventional. It's starting to make bottom-line sense."

Beyond the tangible benefits that come from profitability, Heinrich has also seen many intangible benefits in his restaurant, particularly on the labour and retention front. "Retention is better when you buy real food that is whole," he asserts, noting that Richmond Station staff find their work more purposeful and meaningful when it's integrated into the dirt-to-plate process. "When your produce comes in with dirt on it, when your animals come in whole and your staff is responsible for knowing more about the product, breaking that product down and treating that product better, the more they're invested. It's no longer just steaks and fish, it's an honest potato or carrot. That extends ever further when you put the seeds in the ground, take care of the crops and then bring the produce into the restaurant. Maybe not everyone wants to learn how to butcher or bake bread, but there are plenty who do and those who do stay longer and get more out of the experience."



It's something we've always practiced and preached," Heinrich shares. "I believe people want to work in our business because they value the way we buy food and operate our business. The next generation of people getting into this industry want to work for bosses who care about progress and leaving the world a better place. In this industry there are people saying food is too expensive and people are too hard to find and they don't have the skills they need. I think there are clear answers to those things and it starts with integrity."

RICHMOND STATION
@richmondstation

Foodland ONTARIO
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@culinarytourismalliance



MUCH ADO ABOUT AI

HOW EARLY ADOPTION OF AI CAN ACCELERATE THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY.

BY JAY ASHTON

In the restaurant and foodservice industry, we've only just begun seriously talking about artificial intelligence applications, but functional AI has actually been around for more than a quarter century. Maybe even longer.

Artificial intelligence or "AI" has been integrated into an incredible array of different programs and applications used the world over, every day. Traditionally, we reserved the "idea of AI" for focused professions like coders, developers and the like, but today, we no longer need to be a coder to use and benefit from the technology. For everyday users, getting on the AI train is easy. Using an open source, using simple language, you can engage AI as a brainstorming partner to create programs or find information through user-friendly chat interfaces, bypassing the old-school language of coding and asking for help to find or learn what we need. Functions that used to take days or weeks can now be accomplished in seconds.

This facility has innumerable applications across a broad spectrum of industries. For restaurant operators, we're seeing it used in menu innovation, forecasting and waste reduction. It's helping us manage our time and focus on more productive marketing and culture-building functions. It's helping early adopters become more streamlined in the direction they want to go and connect with the audiences they want to attract with more precision and creativity. We're seeing the effects of AI beginning to impact new and different areas of the business and become a larger part of our world.

It's really that simple… and that important.

AI is not an abstract concept anymore. Increasingly, it's becoming a part of the language we are beginning to understand. As impressive as it is, it's only at the starting point and we're really only just getting to know what "it" is.

AI is not an abstract concept anymore. Increasingly, it's becoming a part of the language we are beginning to understand. As impressive as it is, it's only at the starting point and we're really only just getting to know what "it" is. It's like the first time we "Googled" something and saw for ourselves how powerful the technology really was—that it could locate the information we really wanted or needed. So, when you look at restaurants, I believe AI is going to help us simplify the search and access points to the information and efficiencies the industry is really looking for.

AI AS A CREATIVE PARTNER.

With the stack of things to get excited about, I think the ability for chefs and operators to use AI as a sort of non-human "assistant" is at the top. AI can be used to brainstorm, bringing a data-rich perspective to the creative process. You can bounce ideas off AI and get an informed return in moments. That's exciting to me, because so many of us in this industry work in isolation and we get so tied up in our day-to-day functions we don't have time to reflect at length or to find and feel comfortable in a group to share ideas or talk them through.

Being able to leverage AI as that "little chef" or "little buddy" is a huge part of the innovation I think we're going to see. For example, when was the last time you were able to brainstorm and refine menu ideas before you went to your chef or that chef went to ownership and said, "Here are some ideas I'm thinking about?" It's a great tool for our industry.

Today—as in right now—you can take a picture of a menu and ask AI to help create ideas for new dishes based on the ingredients you already use or have on hand. You can start building your menu based on demographics, researching your community profile to develop a menu that responds to data-based food trends and consumer behaviour. This can have an enormous, positive effect on profitability as it helps eliminate guesswork and trial and error-based costs.

AI FOR MARKETING AND CREATIVE PRODUCTION.

Most restaurants don't have the funds to use an advertising agency or hire an internal marketing resource. AI can be used to help focus on our marketing and messaging to our target audience—if we can guess less in our marketing and messaging and really connect with the audience we're hoping to attract, we're going to save money.

It can be difficult to ideate and structure a marketing campaign around a goal. AI can help get the process started in seconds, providing ideas and audience insights the user can then start to narrow and refocus until the strategy and plan feels customized to the specifics of the business. The technology isn't intended to replace human ideas and work, but to augment and accelerate it. It can do some of the heavy lifting, but great work requires the nuance of human thinking to bring yourself, your brand or your purpose to the finished work.

There's so much you can access through AI, like scraping the internet to analyze social media trends and understand who your competition is, what they're doing and what they have on their menus you should maybe think about adding. If you want to do something different in your restaurant, you can ask it to generate unique ideas based on cost, inventory and trends to leverage in your menu development.



While many of us are aware of the trending foods, drinks and experiences, it can be challenging to know how to incorporate those ideas into our offerings. AI can help integrate these marketable, higher-traction elements into our menus and our marketing, cutting down the guesswork that, until now, have been an undeniable part of the function.

If you're active in the social media space, you've probably been approximating lists of keywords and gaming algorithms. AI can really help beef that up by streamlining the process and aligning our strategy with effective tactics and keywords and increasing our understanding of key website or social media factors that influence audiences and introduce virality. It can help you understand what you're doing well and where you can improve against the constantly shifting parameters of the internet marketing space.

AI can also be a good starting platform for ideating and drafting articles, emails and social posts for human editors to refine and fit to purpose and brand.

AI FOR WASTE REDUCTION.

One of the less obvious but extremely meaningful aspects AI can help with is managing waste by helping operators forecast better. We often forget to set our yields and our prep properly, but we can now use AI to really look into our operation, analyzing our sales over a set time period to ensure we are optimizing our products and ingredients across our menu to minimize waste and loss. It can help us find uses for restaurant waste and by-products by helping us develop recipes or create new, revenue-generating products from ingredients we would otherwise have been wasting.

AI FOR SUSTAINABILITY.

Packaging cost and environmental sustainability have become key considerations in the industry, and that's likely to grow. Finding affordable, accessible and sustainable packaging that performs can be difficult. AI can be used to efficiently find products and compare their cost, quality and features, saving operators significant time.

OK, BUT HOW DO I ACTUALLY START TO USE AI? WHAT DO I DO?

I tend to use ChatGPT, which is an artificial intelligence chatbot you can engage in dialogue, much like a human. You create an account, log in and start typing questions you'd like it to answer, which it does in seconds. If you aren't satisfied with the response—maybe you'd like more details, or the answer inspires a more focused question—you can type in your response and request further information or clarification. Like sitting with a friend in a bar or restaurant, this conversation can be as short or as long as you like.

ChatGPT is essentially a highly sophisticated form of autocomplete. Created by Open AI, it uses machine learning to algorithms to process and refines the vast stores of information it is trained on from the publicly available Internet, including books, magazines, articles and human forums as well as licensed materials and information provided by its trainers. GPT-3's 175 billion parameters announced in 2020 was staggering; however, the new GPT-4 is said to have 1 trillion.

The most daunting part of using ChatGPT is knowing where and how to start. There isn't really a clear process for this. My best advice is that you start like I did—just open a session and start asking questions to see where it goes. It's about playing with it, using it and seeing how far you can stretch it out and where it takes you. You'll notice that you're starting to think about things that never occurred to you before.

The art for the user is in figuring out the questions you most need answered and how to use the interface to return ideas and results that are relevant, effective and actionable. You can even ask it what questions you should be asking to achieve a certain result, and I promise the responses will be useful and impressive.

EMBRACE THE POTENTIAL OF AI BUT UNDERSTAND ITS LIMITATIONS.

AI does not replace human creativity, ingenuity and intuition—it's a generative tool and it's still "learning". Rather than feeding it a list of problems, the better approach is to treat it as an iterative tool or partner with a capacity to lead you in directions and toward solutions you may never have reached on your own. It's a starting point for me, but a very promising one with the power to expand our capacity to innovate and grow our revenue.

Perhaps the greatest potential benefit of AI is time.

When Google launched, it took a while for users to "trust" the technology, and it's no different with large language models like ChatGPT. ChatGPT broke 1 million users less than five days after its launch in November 2022. One year later, at the end of November 2023, ChatGPT had 180 million users.

Increasingly, we are realizing that AI can free us up to focus on the things that matter most in the restaurant business, from menu design to leadership and team development and support. It will take time for the industry to adopt to it and accept AI as a system we can believe in and trust the information and insights it can provide.

AI does not replace human creativity, ingenuity and intuition—it's a generative tool and it's still "learning". Rather than feeding it a list of problems, the better approach is to treat it as an iterative tool or partner with a capacity to lead you in directions and toward solutions you may never have reached on your own.



ABOUT JAY ASHTON

Hospitality leader and innovator Jay Ashton lives by the mantra, "Creativity is genius having fun". Jay continues to be a leading expert, influencer and trailblazer in Canada's foodservice and hospitality industry, consistently pushing boundaries and initiating fresh trends. His passion for championing innovation and amplifying the industry's voice is unwavering.

TUNE INTO THE MENU UNPLUGGED PODCAST, HOSTED BY JAY ASHTON

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A Patio for all Seasons

BY CHRIS SZEGO



As we head into the depths of winter, the heady, relaxed nature of patio season feels like it's receding into the misty depths of memory. But the feeling of warmth and convivial connection doesn't have to end. Summer may be short, but today, restaurant patios have a longer life than ever before.

Innovative operators may have turned to patios when on-premise dining restrictions were in place, but even as those restrictions eased, the advantages of patios remained. Recognizing the need to shore up local businesses and give communities a safe place to gather, many municipalities have implemented new bylaws.

CaféTO, Toronto's city-wide sidewalk dining initiative, recognizes that patios benefit not only individual restaurant owners but also everyone in the area. Increased consumer traffic, heightened employment and permit fees combine into a sizable advantage for cities. According to an economic study led by the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, CaféTO patios delivered an economic benefit of almost $203 million to the city in 2022.

In 2023, CaféTO helped Toronto restaurants offer another 1,000 outdoor dining spots. Those spots included dozens of patios on private property, upwards of 330 curb lane cafés, and 500 sidewalk cafés which are now allowed to remain in place through the winter. In November 2023, the City made CaféTO zoning bylaws permanent to encourage and enhance the vibrancy of outdoor entertaining. Plans are in place to fast-track approvals in 2024, and also to have curb lane patios ready to open by the Victoria Day weekend.

Tracy Macgregor, Restaurants Canada Vice President, Ontario, worked with the City for months, advocating for local operators. She was on hand to welcome the announcement. "With these changes, including year-round and seasonal CaféTO patios that allow for sidewalk and curb lanes, the City of Toronto has enabled more space for outdoor dining, that will in turn generate more revenue and provide more spaces for people to gather, celebrate and enjoy what Toronto restaurants have to offer."



> **With these changes, including year-round and seasonal CaféTO patios that allow for sidewalk and curb lanes, the City of Toronto has enabled more space for outdoor dining, that will in turn generate more revenue and provide more spaces for people to gather, celebrate and enjoy what Toronto restaurants have to offer."**
>
> **– Tracy Macgregor, Vice President, Ontario Restaurants Canada**

Whether in a back courtyard, on a side deck, or right out on the sidewalk, patios expand your reach throughout the year. But there are some important things to keep in mind:

- **Comfort:** Canada is never in short supply of variable weather, ranging from one extreme to the other. Umbrellas and awnings provide welcome shade and protect customers from precipitation. Heaters can extend the outdoor season, giving people a place to gather even in the colder months.
- **Placemaking:** Patios are not just seasonal overflow seating, they are a unique extension of your dining experience. Outdoor spaces provide an opportunity to offer unique menu items that capture the outdoor vibe or bring seasonality and specialized programming more directly into your offering.
- **Marketing:** A great patio is a next-level marketing opportunity, giving people a chance to cruise your food and your vibe. Taking the time to plan and maintain an inviting, comfortable and well-lit and attended outdoor space can bring in new customers and offer more options to regulars.
- **Modular Furnishings:** Patios require an adjustable approach. Moveable tables, chairs and benches mean you can arrange your layout in multiple ways. Additions like cushions and blankets for chilly days allow for even more options.
- **Lighting:** As the nights get longer, a bright, well-lit patio becomes a welcoming beacon, and can also add seasonal cheer and decor, not to mention Instagram-worthy photo opportunities.
- **Music:** A patio space can be a performance space, turning dining into a special event and attracting new customers. But even without a concert, music can make an outdoor space more special, blocking out sounds of traffic and creating an oasis for like-minded guests.
- **Accessibility:** In patio terms, accessibility applies both within and without, so customers can enjoy easy access and passersby aren't abruptly displaced.

Patios offer benefits across the spectrum: approachability, community and flexibility. No one understands the need to be flexible better than Jeffrey Van Horne, co-owner of Dear Friend, The Clever Bar Keep, and Drink Atlantic. “We opened Dear Friend July 4th, 2020—only a few months into the pandemic. My business partner and I did the majority of the design and build of our space, so we just focused on finishing the last 10 per cent to get the doors open. This is always the hardest part.”

When the doors finally opened, the partners quickly realized that adhering to provincial COVID restrictions meant they were going to have a difficult time generating the kind of revenue they imagined when they set off on their adventure. “We are dreamers and have always thought about how much we loved outdoor spaces and beer gardens. Maximizing our space and the opportunity we have been given is a guiding principle for us. We are always trying to squeeze every drop from the lemon.”

Their new location had an unexpected bonus they hadn’t previously considered because it wasn’t directly their own: a huge parking lot behind the bar with beautiful sunset views. Seeing those views was all it took. They called their landlord to rent five parking spaces, which was a very reasonable investment. After another call to a contractor friend at Larc Properties, they doubled their capacity in two weeks.

“Each year after that, we invested more to upgrade our patio. Now it’s a deck oasis with a patio bar hut.” The success of their back patio space inspired them to add a patio in the front of the bar on Portland street. “In the summer, it allows us to accommodate more of our awesome patrons and gives our guests two options: inside or outside.”

Patios can help restaurants expand their operations, bring in more customers, and hire more staff. They also help strengthen community ties by blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor spaces. The chic appeal of street café culture is admired the world over. It’s time to make patios a permanent feature on Canadian corners and sidewalks.



> **“We are dreamers and have always thought about how much we loved outdoor spaces and beer gardens. Maximizing our space and the opportunity we have been given is a guiding principle for us. We are always trying to squeeze every drop from the lemon.”**
>
> **– Jeffrey Van Horne, Co-Owner, Dear Friend**



Washroom hygiene: enhancing guest experience beyond the table

Hygiene is an important factor in today's competitive food industry. In the restaurant industry, the dining experience extends beyond what's served on a plate—and if you think that the state of your washrooms escapes it, you're wrong.

Consumers say it best

Recent findings from a survey[1] spotlight the emphasis consumers place on washroom hygiene.

A staggering 97% of respondents opined that the state of a restroom reflects a business' attention to detail—and care.[1]

If perceptions are sculpted in washrooms, there truly is no room for establishments to ignore the statement.

60% of respondents shared that their overall dining experience was enhanced when establishments opted for paper towels, especially from touchless dispensers.[1]

What's more, within this group, 61% of respondents cited using them as a barrier against germs on door handles post-wash as a reason behind their choice.[2]



Some noteworthy distinctions are quickly revealed if we dive deeper into the paper towel vs. air dryer debate. Not only does wiping hands with paper towels create friction, allowing for a more effective germ removal process, but it also serves as a direct counter to some prevalent misconceptions about air dryers. Contrary to popular belief, air dryers might inadvertently disperse germs throughout washrooms.[3] Additionally, the noise from said dryers can sometimes disrupt the overall ambiance, as they can be loud. In contrast, a touchless dispenser offers a solution that isn't simply hygienic, but also aligns with the modern consumer's expectations.[1]

The impact of online reviews

Moreover, a diner's experience reverberates far beyond their time spent in the restaurant. Online reviews have become an important part of a restaurant's reputation.

Platforms like Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Google Reviews give voice to each patron, magnifying their praise or amplifying their discontent. Given this influence, ensuring a consistently positive experience has never been more crucial. A subpar restroom experience, which may seem insignificant, can catalyze a negative review, impacting potential patronage. It's in these details, like offering a clean and well-equipped washroom, that establishments can truly stand out.

Where comfort meets design

Another growing trend is to invest in design-forward washrooms, as the visit there is also a (huge) part of the dining journey.

As early as 2011, it was proven that providing a thoughtfully designed washroom with durable materials leads to better evaluations.[3]

In today's age, where aesthetics reign supreme, a washroom's design and overall vibe can elevate a diner's experience and reflect an establishment's commitment to detail. Cascades PRO® dispensers offer a sleek, award-winning design,[4] making it more than just a dispenser but a true part of the restroom's overall aesthetic; after all, why can't functionality meet design?

Meet the Tandem dispenser

With No-Touch tech at its heart, the Tandem dispenser is designed for today's hygiene-conscious diner. The transparent strip provides a clear view, allowing low levels of paper towels to be identified, therefore preventing an unfortunate run-out. The customizable features actively reduce waste, marrying sustainability with efficiency.

Committed to sustainable development

While paper products often raise environmental concerns, Cascades PRO is proud to stand tall with its unwavering commitment to sustainable practices, as proven by its rank as 20th most sustainable company in the world.[5]

Our dispensers are designed to minimize waste, and the paper towels developed for use in the Tandem® dispenser line are certified compostable, helping to reduce the impact on the environment with every use.

Ready to redefine your guests' dining experience all the way to the washroom? With our wide distribution networks across Canada and the US, your next game-changing dispenser is a call away.

pro.cascades.com

Sources:

1 Top Hygiene Concerns in Public Spaces 2022 Poll by G&S commissioned by Cascades PRO®

2 2015, University of Westminster, study commissioned by the ETS.

3 Continuing education, BPN media, Bathroom Design: The Differentiating Factor, June 2023, John Goins, Center for the Built Environment, University of California, Berkeley, and Mithra Moezzi, Portland State University.

4 2019 Good Design® Award.

5 Corporate Knights, 100 most sustainable companies of 2023.



Tandem® Elevate hygiene

No matter where they're installed, Tandem dispensers can change a customer's experience for the better.

That's especially true in restaurants, where washroom hygiene is a major factor. In a survey, 67% of respondents said that they're concerned about restaurant hygiene.*

Tandem elevates the hygiene experience with features like:

- No-touch mechanism for reduced spread of germs
- Stub roll feature that can use up to 100% of every roll
- Quick-check design for faster maintenance
- Certified compostable hand towels**

Made in North America, our dispensers are recipients of the GOOD DESIGN® Award for design excellence, so you're sure to find one that suits your establishment – and your customers.

*Poll, 2022, Top Hygiene Concerns in Public Spaces. See details at (bit.ly/thcipp22).

**This product is suitable for industrial and municipal composting facilities, not home composting. Please check to see if facilities exist in your area.

Cascades PRO®

Discover our dispensers at
pro.cascades.com

THE MARKETPLACE

INSPIRE · INNOVATE · EMPOWER



SilverChef Rent-Try-Buy, the most flexible finance option for your equipment

With such a wide range of restaurant equipment available, making the right choice can be difficult. And what if your business rapidly outgrows the equipment or switches direction and requires different equipment?

Paying a chunk of cash or locking into a long-term lease for equipment that doesn't work for your business is the last thing you want.

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