

Trends - 2010

Keep It Simple

As life gets more complicated, menus are moving back to basics. Expect more focused recipes this year, with dishes highlighting one or two high-quality main ingredients.

- As much as possible, use whole, unprocessed foods such as fruits and vegetables
- Go fresh—skip the canned and frozen ingredients for a greater flavor profile, deeper color, and higher nutrients
- Buy from reputable companies that use growers with safe, sustainable practices
- Use cooking methods that enhance natural flavors like braising, baking, grilling, and stewing
- No more book-long menus: offering fewer dishes gives restaurants cohesion and allows chefs to perfect recipes
- Forego fancy garnishes; instead rely on vibrant ingredients and clean, natural presentations



Healthy ethnic comfort food like this Japanese soup combines many of the year's trends, including low cost, the distinct flavor of umami, and vitamin-rich greens.

Recession-Proof Dining

Comfort food waxes and wanes in popularity, but never has this genre been so dominant. Because the restaurant industry was hit hard by the recession, operators have had to reinvent their menus with updated classics and nostalgic recipes with inspirational twists.

- Price-point matters more than ever; weekly specials, happy hours, and shared plates are back en vogue
- Quality and value are not mutually exclusive: don't skimp on fresh, flavorful ingredients
- Make the old new again: think sweet potato fries, panko fried chicken, and caramel apple pie

Green Is In!

Diners increasingly insist on sustainable measures from the places they eat. They want to know where and how their food was grown, how it affects the world and their bodies, and how the restaurant contributes to the community.

- Organic use continues to grow despite the recession, even in the fast food sector
- Spread the word: use table tents and menus to let your customers know where you buy, what you make in-house, and how you give back

2010 Trends At A Glance

- Tightened menus with fewer, yet higher-quality ingredients
- Comforting, updated classics for uneasy economic times
- Wellness Eating—focus on healthy bodies, healthy planet
- Umami, the so-called fifth taste, comes to the forefront
- The once lowly street truck is now a source of culinary inspiration
- Not just Indian, Italian, or Mexican but Punjabi, Tuscan, or Oaxacan
- A move towards unprocessed, locally procured, sustainable foods and restaurants that give back

Umami

Suddenly significant to chefs worldwide, umami (the Japanese word for flavor or deliciousness) is the so-called fifth taste. It's the rich savoriness that accentuates cooked mushrooms, tomato sauces, beef broth, and sharp cheeses.

- Add shaved Parmesan and anchovies to romaine salads
- Deglaze sautéed vegetables with veal stock or soy sauce
- Stir sautéed mushrooms into tomato and cream sauces

Street Food

Portable, creative, and easy-to-eat, street food is the hottest trend among today's adventure-seeking foodies.

- Korean-Mexican fusion is just one example of the no-rules attitude inherent in the genre
- Develop your own version of street food classics like satay, shawarmas, gyros, paani puri, arepas, and tacos
- Top chefs such as Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Susan Feniger, and Rick Bayless now have restaurants based on street food

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Eat Well, Be Well

As obesity and diabetes rates climb and industry laws tighten (e.g., trans fat bans and nutritional labeling requirements), the foodservice industry has an opportunity to attract more customers by including a variety of healthy options.

- Using fresh fruits and vegetables instead of processed carbohydrates and calorie-dense meats can lower a dish's fat content as well as boost flavor and nutrients
- Gluten-free is a fast growing category; list any recipes that qualify as such
- Offer more vegetarian entrée options; even carnivores like to skip meat on occasion
- If possible, list calorie and fat content on Web sites, in brochures, or even on your menu
- Give patrons a choice: offer half-portions or "family style" shared sides
- Don't miss the chance to highlight ingredients when they are organic, free-range, high in anti-oxidants, or made in-house (little-to-no processing)

The Hot List:

- Greens
- Organ Meats
- Cardamom
- Gluten-Free Foods
- Sweet Potatoes
- Hibiscus
- Mole Sauce
- Fancy Fried Chicken
- Pho
- Sriracha Sauce
- Caramel
- Sardines
- Whoopie Pies
- Confit Cooking
- Kimchi
- High Tea
- Banh Mi Sandwiches
- No Reservation Dining
- Cupuacu
- Nutritious Kids' Meals
- Sea Salt
- Habanero Chile Peppers
- Meatless Meals
- Lemongrass
- Harissa
- Sous Vide
- Rose Water
- Hazelnuts
- Order Customization
- Kaffir Lime

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Regional Ethnic

In today's world of sophisticated palates, it's not enough to serve Mexican, Italian, Japanese, or Chinese food. People increasingly want to know the regional specifics of what they are eating.

- Highlight dishes from their place of origin: spicy stir-fries from Szechuan, China; rich mole sauces from Oaxaca, Mexico; hearty bean soups from Tuscany, Italy; and paella from Valencia, Spain
- Barbecue fans want to know which type you specialize in: the sweet, tomato-based Kansas City kind, the peppery-vinegar Carolina type, the smoky Texan style, or any of the other myriad methods
- Indian foods are divided into Northern Punjabi dishes like samosas, yogurt-based sauces, and tandoori; Southern recipes with rice, pickled vegetables, and curry; Western Goa cuisine that is primarily vegetarian; and Eastern Bengali foods that include fresh seafood and many sweets
- List tamales served in banana leaf as Yucatan-style or those steamed in corn husks as the Michoacan method
- Most people picture sushi when they think of Japanese food; what about serving soba noodles from Honshu, ramen from Sapporo, or udon from Shikoku?
- Barcelona brought us Spanish tapas...now comes bacalao from the Basque country, gazpacho from Andalucia, and sweet pepper empanadas from Galicia
- Don't forget to label Chinese dishes from their distinct areas: Cantonese dim sum, Beijing (a.k.a. Peking) duck, and Szechuan's fiery kung pao chicken
- French favorites like ratatouille, coq au vin, and tarte tatin can be labeled from their respective regions: Provence, Burgundy, and Normandy

Resources:

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Saveur Magazine, January/February 2010
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The Packer Online
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The Food Channel
The Chicago Tribune
Top Trends: Now and Next
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The Los Angeles Times
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Environmental Leader
Chow Hound
Fruitnet.com
Horizon Watching
The Food Examiner
Grubstreet.com

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