



## What's hot in 2014: The tastes you'll crave this year



As Fashion Week sets the standards for clothing every season, the food & beverage world also has its trendsetters. 2013 was all about organic and natural with a focus on Mediterranean flavors. **Nagi Morkos**, managing partner, **Hodema consulting services**, unveils 2014's latest trends in food and beverage

### Food halls

The concept of food halls has been spreading around the world for a couple of years and they are becoming increasingly popular. Food halls usually combine on-premises manufacturing, eating, takeaway and retail. In a closed area, people are offered a large choice of eateries, shops and snack bars. A butcher can stand alongside a cafe, a bakery and a small trattoria with outside seats. London's Harrods was a forerunner when it opened its food hall in the 1800s, closely followed by La Grande Epicerie in Paris. Both were launched within high-end department stores, and still exist today. The trend later reached the United States, with Todd English's Food Hall at The Plaza Hotel and more recently Eataly, the meeting point of New York's fashionistas and fine food lovers. The Italian-inspired food hall is composed of a grocery store with separate pastry, butcher, pasta, bread and cured meat stalls. Eataly is

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such a hit that it is now also in Chicago, Italy, Japan, Istanbul and Dubai. In Asia the trend is similar, with 'depachikas', as they call them, located in most cities. Tokyo's Takashimaya, in the basement of a department store, sells everything from fruits to whipped cream sandwiches. Food halls' hybrid restaurant-retail concept has been mainly attracting upscale food professionals, from artisans selling local signature products to chefs creating a new breed of restaurants with innovative take-away options. High prices are justified by the freshness of the ingredients and tailored service and dishes.

### Farm-to-fork

If food halls are a trendy twist to traditional covered markets, local markets are also making their way onto our plates. Far from the dusty and outmoded image of the street markets of our childhood, farmers now make fresh local food look good. The farm-to-fork trend, also called farm-to-table, encourages people to swap over-processed, modified foods for local, natural and unaltered products, dairy and meats. This has found an attentive ear as more and more consumers pay attention to what they eat and where it comes from. There is also a global trend in supporting local farming, which protects the economy, ensures the safety of food supply and decreases the environmental impact and carbon footprint of factory farms and

mass food production. Farmer's markets and produce co-ops are on the rise everywhere, and a growing number of farm-to-table restaurants are opting to only buy local food from small farmers who were once an almost extinct species but are now making a comeback. This use of fresh produces is a challenge for chefs, who have to invent new menus according to the season. And gourmet chefs aren't the only ones who are embracing farm-to-table cuisine. Chipotle, the fast-food Mexican chain, strives to buy many of its ingredients from local purveyors. So remember, sustainable food is a major hit in 2014.

### Healthy food

Eating local usually comes with eating healthy. The troubling rise of the global obesity rate has been pushing healthy food into the spotlight for a few years now - to the point that this market, once a niche, is fast becoming mainstream. Being vegetarian, or even vegan, is a way of life for an increasing number of people. This trend has brought organic products, once confined in specialized stores, to mass supermarkets. This democratization is associated with a growing awareness of food allergies such as gluten, dairy-rejecters and diabetics. All types of salads, wraps heavy on greens and grains with modest quantities of animal protein and cold-pressed juices can now be found relatively

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easily. The trend has even been picked up by restaurants, such as Sweetgreen, a 20-unit chain based in Washington, and Veggie Grill, with more than 20 outlets throughout the United States.

### Fresh casual

The trend of fresh food has been picked up by the lower end fast food chains, also known as 'healthy fast casual'. They started by introducing new produce in their meals, such as kale, and replacing fat and cream by spices. Vegetarians, vegans and people with allergies have long been asking for meals that suit their needs, without them having to pay more than others. Their calls have now been answered, with healthy joints emerging everywhere. Even vegans can now find what they crave for. The reference on the market is the Canadian Freshii, which since 2005 has expanded to 75 outlets in 8 countries. For sandwich lovers Au Bon Pain offers wholegrain breads, veggies, and hormone-free chicken. It even provides on-site nutritional information via computer kiosks, so that clients can know each option's calories, fat, and sodium. The healthy fast casual trend shows how you can change your cooking habits without changing the ingredients. That was the goal of Noodles and Company, which replaced fried grease with soybean oil. World-famous fast-food chains have also jumped on the bandwagon, slowly introducing healthy produce to their menus. McDonald's has started promoting some of its meals as part of the Weight Watchers points system, and Subway has hired the winner of TV hit program The Biggest Loser to represent the brand.

### Small plates/tapas style

This year is not only about what you'll eat, but how you'll eat it. The latest craze is to share the food with your friends, tapas style. Bar snacks, appetizers and starters, along with beer or wine have been popular for a while, but now the trend is evolving towards more refined dishes, such as local ham, fish and cooked vegetables. These plates offer options for creativity, both for the chefs and their clients, who can taste as many dishes as they fancy. On the financial side, it attracts a younger crowd with smaller wallets: many dishes can be hand-held with an average cost of USD 4 per plate. It also enables restaurants to increase their profit margins on food sales. All types of cuisines can be turned into tapas: casual chain T.G.I. Fridays has launched its 'Taste and Share' menu, The Cheesecake Factory offers 'Small Plates and Snacks' as well as California Pizza Kitchen and the Italian eatery Olive Garden.

### Fun dining

Some restaurants are also experimenting with the dining experience. The new trend of 'eatertainment', which plays with the clients' senses, is emerging with new smells, temperature, sound and light changes. Ultraviolet in Shanghai takes its high-spending guests to a secret room that radically shifts moods with each course, by means of lights in the floor, 360-degree high-definition projectors, swings in air temperature, smell diffusers, 22 speakers, LEDs, etc. The Casino de Madrid in Spain diffusers control temperature and humidity, occasionally drifting aromas of mushrooms or grass. In New York, The Pass contains a giant screen and guests can chat in 'real' time with produce suppliers. In Spain the owners of Can Roca project images onto their dishes. They have created 'Il Somni', a 12-course banquet-opera. >



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IF HOTDOG, PIZZA & ICE-CREAM TRUCKS ARE THE MOST COMMON VERSIONS OF THE PHENOMENON, NEW INNOVATIVE AND NICHE ONES ARE APPEARING ON THE STREETS, WITH LOBSTER ROLLS, FALAFELS OR CRÈME BRÛLÉES

### Food trucks

For the busiest amongst us, the trend of food trucks is again in fashion this year. They can sell all types of meals, from pizza, to hamburger, ice cream and even prepackaged meals. Some even resemble restaurants on wheels. The United States is a food trucks' paradise, with nearly three million of them on the streets of large cities, such as New York, Los Angeles or Boston. Food trucks are associated in people's minds with fast-casual menus, and many low and mid-end restaurants add a truck to their activity. This popularity, and practical aspect, didn't go unnoticed by gourmet chefs, who found there was an alternative way out of the financial crisis striking high-end restaurants. If hotdog, pizza and ice-cream trucks are the most common versions of the phenomenon, new innovative and niche ones are appearing on the streets, with lobster rolls, falafels or crème brûlées.

In Birmingham, UK, the chef Michael Brandon created Spoonfed, an entire kitchen on wheels. The project's success kick started the trend of food trucks in the area. The Kogi Korean BBQ food truck, which sells fusion Korean and Mexican cuisine, is a pioneer in the gourmet food truck movement. It created a buzz by announcing its location via social media, which started the heavy use of social media marketing among food trucks. Popular restaurant chains such as Wendy's, Chick-fil-A, Taco Bell, and Applebee's have also started experimenting with trucks as marketing platforms. Food trucks can also cater to events and park in specific areas such as college campuses, office complexes, movie sets and military bases.

### Peruvian food

This season also takes us to Latin America, its sunny recipes and spicy flavors, which have for a while been overshadowed by the boom of Asian and European cuisines. Peru in particular is in the spotlight, with Lima's world-famous Mistura food festival, an event that draws chefs from all over the globe. This season, professionals gave away the sought-after Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants Awards, rewarding the region's best tables. Latin American cuisine encompasses a large choice of dishes, from sea food, to Amazon specialties and mountain recipes. Peru symbolizes this diversity, with its contrasting climates and countless plant species. It has thousands of different sorts of potatoes, corn and quinoa. Peruvian cuisine is the result of more than 400 years of Spanish, African, Japanese and Chinese immigration mixed with local Quechua culture. This variety inspires chefs who experience and revisit local traditions, from ceviche to grilling techniques.

## BEVERAGE TRENDS

### Culinary savory cocktails

Food never goes without drinks - and vice versa as a matter of fact! The latest fashion in bars and high-end restaurants is the 'culinary savory cocktail', which includes herbs, spices and even food products in its mix. Bacon, mustard, mushrooms and horseradish are the new ingredients used by bartenders in clubbing hotspots, such as the London Cocktail Club or New York's Neta.

### Tea

This year, tea is officially starting a crusade against coffee. Old, traditional dull tea is officially dead: hipster tea places, such as Teavana in New York, are now experimenting with exotic flavors and trendy decors, and this beverage makes it to nightclubs, with bartenders using it as a base for cocktails.

### Homemade sodas

Homemade soda is also the latest fad. Rather than buying them readymade, syrups and infusions are now mixed with carbonated water or soda. The Perlini system and Twist-n-Sparkle are the new craze in the bartending world, enabling the barman to add a bubbly touch to drinks. Starbucks has the Fizio soda machine on test in stores, to offer carbonated teas, sodas, coffee and lemonades to its clients.

### Fresh juices/juiceterias

A regular in coffee shops is the pressed fresh juice. In the last few years, it has gained in popularity with the launch of 'juiceterias', rejuvenating a drink that used to be associated with health-obsessed people. Chains such as Jamba Juice offer large menus of fruit and vegetable combinations, with a young and glamorous twist.

