

Creative juices flowing

Sweeten profits and satisfy appetites by adding drinkable desserts to menus

By Lori Lohmeyer

While traditional desserts, such as Key lime pie and strawberry shortcake, continue to be customer favorites, chefs are finding that dessert beverages that mimic popular sweet treats add a unique flair to menus.

Although dessert coffees and wines have been an after-dinner treat at high-end restaurants for a long time, most dessert beverages traditionally are served by fast feeders. Today McDonald's serves three different flavors of milk shakes, and Jamba Juice touts its wide variety of smoothie options. Starbucks' line of coffee alternatives, such as toffee nut crème and caramel apple cider, continues to be a big seller for the retail giant. But as dessert tastes become more eclectic and sophisticated, chefs at upscale restaurants are turning to creative liquid offerings to satisfy their customers' sugary cravings.

Michael Waterhouse, beverage director and co-owner of Dylan Prime restaurant in New York, said he saw an opportunity to expand the traditional dessert beverage menu by creating unique alcoholic offerings. By combining cream, vanilla liqueur and alcohol, Waterhouse developed a new line of "pie-tinis," designed to taste just like their dessert counterparts. His current pie-tini menu includes apple pie à la mode, peach cobbler, Mississippi mud and Key lime pie, \$10.

"We sell more pie-tinis than we sell actual desserts," Waterhouse says. "It's so close to the actual pie that it's amazing."

Waterhouse, to make his peach cobbler pie-tini, showed his bartenders how to mix

peach schnapps, fresh peach puree and simple syrup. The mix is poured into a martini glass rimmed with cinnamon sugar and layered with vanilla liquor and heavy cream.

Dessert beverages have been a boon to Dylan Prime's check average, because customers typically accent their \$10 pie-tini with a regular dessert offering.

For customers in search of nonalcoholic drinkable desserts, chef Todd Annis of Rainwater restaurant in Alpharetta, Ga., serves a vanilla cola float at his 200-seat fine-dining establishment. During colder months Annis put a rich hot chocolate topped with marshmallow fluff on his dessert menu along with apple cider. To highlight springtime, Annis is serving a snow cone topped with a black-raspberry-flavored liqueur in a martini glass.

Annis attributes the popularity of his dessert beverages to the comfort-food trend. According to him, customers view his desserts as appealing, "classic old-fashioned drinks" that they remember from their childhood.

In an effort not to discount the importance of coffee to any dessert beverage, executive pastry chef Marcos Gonzalez of the 1200 Restaurant & Courtyard in the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, Fla., added an afogatto di cafe to his dessert menu. The traditional Northern Italian beverage combines a warm cafe latte with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. The dish is served in a tall glass and topped with whipped cream, dark chocolate shavings and powdered sugar.

To give customers a taste of coffee with a twist, Nancy Kirschner, pastry chef at Tuscan in New York, added a frozen caramel macchiato to her dessert menu.

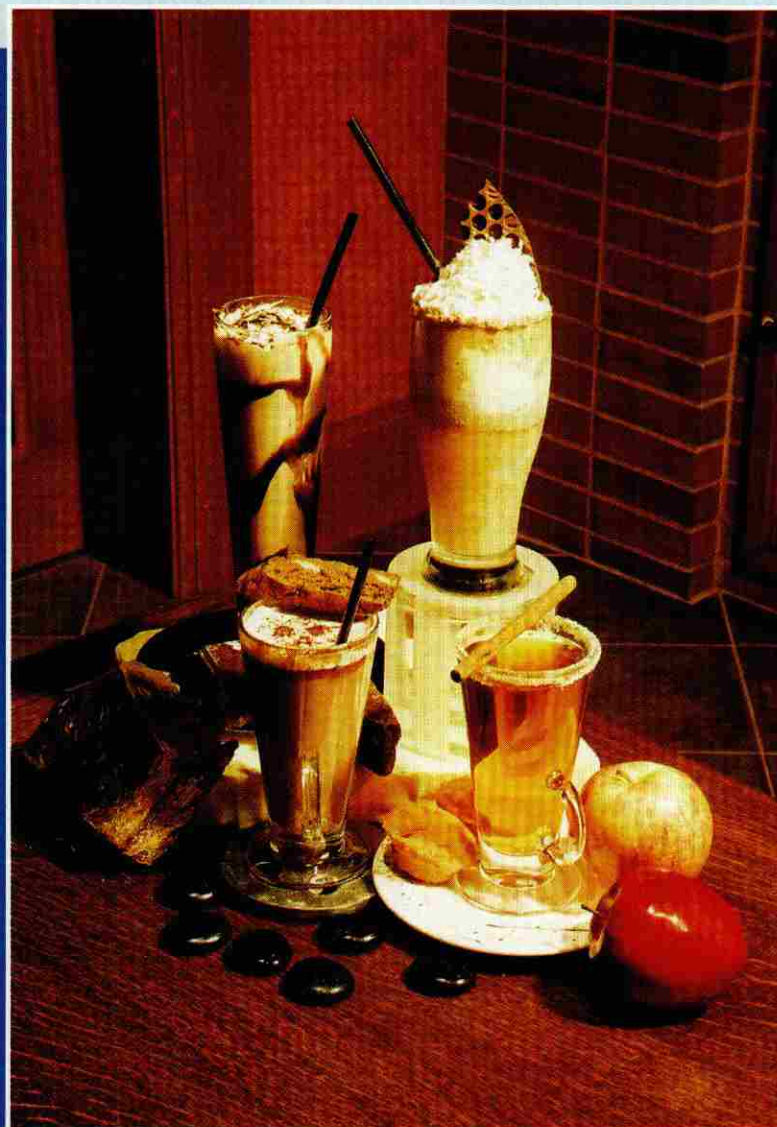
To make her Starbucks-inspired beverage, Kirschner says she pairs house-made caramel

and espresso ice creams with caramelized cream. She pours the mix into a tall, frozen glass topped with espresso foam. To add a touch of chocolate to the dish, Kirschner says she accents the beverage with a chocolate straw.

Although Kirschner concludes that people enjoy drinkable desserts as a lighter-tasting alternative to rich chocolate cakes and pies, she always includes a garnish to "round out all the components," of the dessert. She serves her frozen caramel macchiato with several cookies.

Annis also says serving an accompaniment with the dessert beverage is a key to its success. During the winter, he says, he served miniature spiced muffins on the side of his house-made apple cider.

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Chefs and bartenders are turning to creative liquid offerings to satisfy their customers' sugary cravings. Rainwater restaurant's chef, Todd Annis, has served a variety of drinkable desserts, including, clockwise from top left, a chocolate malt, vanilla cola float, hot apple cider and hot cocoa with marshmallow fluff.

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QSR chains convene to discuss franchise issues

By Lori Lohmeyer

WASHINGTON — As the U.S. economy and customer perception of fast food remain on the downturn, a host of quick-service chains converged on the annual International Franchise Expo here recently to tackle problems currently affecting the franchise community as well as to attract prospective partners.

The event, which was held April 11-13 and hosted by the International Franchise Association, grappled with several franchisee concerns, such as dispelling the myths associated with becoming a franchise owner,

choosing the right franchise and financing the venture. Franchisors learned about national and international expansion, understanding earnings claims and attracting new franchisees. Panelists at the event included such industry experts as consultants Steve Hockett, president of FranChoice Inc., and Terry Powell, chief executive of The Entrepreneur's Source, as well as John P. Hayes, Ph.D., author of the "Franchise Pre-Investment Checklist" and other franchise-related resources.

The Expo, which drew in

about 9,500 attendees this year, gave companies the opportunity to provide information to potential franchisees. Restaurant companies in the mix included Golden Krust Bakery, a Bronx, N.Y.-based Jamaican-style quick-serve chain, and franchise behemoths Dunkin' Donuts, Sbarro and Cold Stone Creamery.

"The show was a terrific success for Cold Stone Creamery," said Kevin Donnellan, communications manager for the 366-unit ice-cream chain. "We were at the show to aid our expansion into the Northeast. Being in Washington, D.C., really gave us the opportunity to speak with potential partners and franchisees."

In addition to networking, the Expo also served as an opportunity for small-business owners who are considering franchising to learn the ins and outs of the business, such as understanding earnings claims.

Jan Gilbert, a shareholder of Jenkins & Gilchrist PC, offered insight into earnings claims at one of the conference's seminars.

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public, including the media. As a result, Gilbert added, many franchisors allude to earnings in order to help sell franchises. "It's a tough line to find," he said.

To help confront this age-old franchising dilemma, Gilbert advised providing "well-thought-out business plans," such as a detailed list of expenses broken down by the percentage of business. He also suggested turning to the media, such as trade journals, to provide detailed earnings information without breaking strict FTC guidelines.

At a seminar on "Choosing the Right Franchise," Hockett advised participants to find a business that they are able to manage, market and promote, rather than one they love. He said most franchisees fail because new business owners "haven't taken the time to figure out what they're getting into."

Hockett also advised participants to determine financial parameters, consult family members, make numerous visits to existing units and talk to current franchisees.

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CULINARY CURRENTS

Creative juices flowing: Satisfy sweet teeth by adding drinkable desserts to menus

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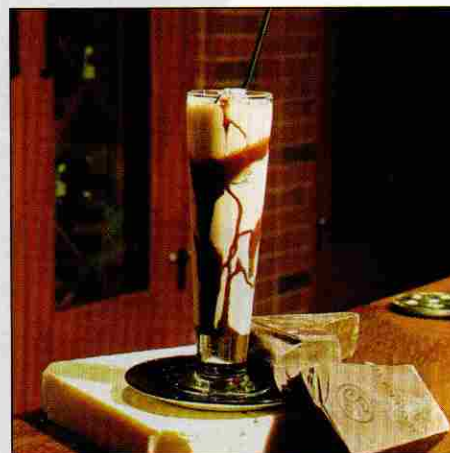
The drugstore chain Walgreens credits itself with the invention of one of the most popular liquid desserts — the milk shake. The company said it started offering its "double-rich chocolate malted milk" to soda fountain customers in the early 1920s.

In New York the Waldorf=Astoria hotel's pastry chef Jean-Claude Perennou often includes a malted milk shake on the menu of the hotel's Oscar's restaurant. This summer the hotel will include a malted milk shake offering as part of a dessert plate. In addition to several small chocolate desserts, Perennou includes a milk shake served in a shot glass.

Waldorf=Astoria executive chef John Doherty says the surprise of encountering the unexpected on the dessert menu adds to a dish's popularity. He says customers are surprised to see a "comfort food" like a milk shake at the Waldorf.

Casual-dining players, such as Dallas-based T.G.I. Friday's and 11-unit Bubba Gump Shrimp Co., also are turning to creative

Todd Annis of Rainwater restaurant in Alpharetta, Ga., serves a chocolate malt at his 200-seat fine-dining eatery.



dessert beverages to boost alcohol sales. Currently T.G.I. Friday's serves a strawberry shortcake, an ice-cream sandwich and a banana split on its beverage menu. The banana split combines a trio of liqueurs with bananas, strawberries and vanilla ice cream. According to beverage marketing manager David Robinson, offering beverage desserts helps separate T.G.I. Friday's from the slate of casual-dining players. "[Dessert beverages] have been part of Friday's heritage from the beginning, even though they're more time-consuming and labor-intensive."

Robinson says that to make certain that customers do not forget about the chain's host of beverage desserts, he trains servers to

mention the company's wide range of after-dinner drinks as they hand out dessert menus.

Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. serves a drink dubbed "Mama's Favorite," advertised as "better than any box of chocolates." The drink combines coffee liqueur, nonfat vanilla yogurt, chocolate and amaretto. Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. also serves a wide variety of dessert smoothies, such as an Oreo cookie smoothie and an Alabama sweet smoothie, which includes peanut butter, chocolate and nonfat vanilla frozen yogurt.

