

# BEYOND

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# Bottomless

What makes our love affair with brunch so compelling?

What was once reserved for Mother's Day, Easter and a few other special occasions has now turned into a weekend tradition for bleary-eyed night owls. Consumers no longer disregard brunch. Its uptick has been perpetuated by a shift in syrup and hollandaise addicts who are looking for an all-encompassing experience. Between mid-morning shoptalk, a lower check average and an inextricable tie to the drinking culture—think bellinis, mimosas and the almighty Bloody Mary—brunch is more than just a



Chef Joshua Murray's bacon with blueberry glaze from the 2014 Blueberry Immersion Program.

meal. Combine that with consumer interest in bold flavors and sophisticated dishes, brunch has been catapulted into a weekend must-do. Read on to find our picks for brunch menu inclusions.

## Blueberries

Consumers are reaping the health benefits of blueberries. Beyond their incredible source of Vitamin C, they're high in manganese, which helps us process nutrients, and an excellent source of dietary fiber. For brunch-goers on a healthy path, blueberries continue to thrive. According to the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council's Technomic Berry Trends on U.S. Menus study, blueberry mentions have increased

100 percent in the past eight years, including a 560-percent growth in adult beverages. From bellinis and blueberry mimosas to berry-infused teas, fruit-flavored beverages make a brilliant brunch companion. The superfood has a consistent presence among top flavor trends each year, a benefit S&D Coffee and Tea has used to its advantage. Last year, the company's Teafinity Blueberry Thyme Green Tea won a blue ribbon award at the North American Tea Championship. "[Our] Teafinity Blueberry Thyme product is an all-in-one green tea concentrate," says Grant Cates, R&D beverage technologist for tea products with S&D Coffee & Tea. "This was developed to offer both an iced tea

and a hot tea application."

But blueberry bellinis and teas aren't the end of the road for the mighty fruit. In 2014, the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, an agricultural promotion group representing blueberry growers in North and South America, initiated the Little Changes campaign to engage consumers in healthy living. The Little Changes Kitchen Challenges invited 16 executive chefs to a Blueberry Immersion Program held at the Culinary Institute of America and challenged each to develop innovative blueberry dishes.

It was here that Executive Chef Joshua Murray of the Sonoma Renaissance Resort and Spa in Sonoma, Calif. created a signature

dish, Blueberry Glazed Bacon. Armed with pork as his mystery ingredient and a mental repertoire of recent glazed and candied bacon experiments, Chef Murray rendered a sweet-meets-savory combination for his dish. "Blueberries today are seen in a different light," he says. "Because of the desire to be healthy and trendy, the sky is the limit. With brunch as a platform, this grows exponentially." And grown it has. Technomic's MenuMonitor database has noticed a 2.3-percent yearly increase, most of which was in never-before-thought-of applications

like Executive Chef Graham Bartlett's Blueberry Pork Sausage. The Regional Executive Chef at Richard Sandoval Restaurants developed his dish at the 2015 Blueberry Immersion Program. "As we all know, fruits often go well with charcuterie," he says. "I had a hunch that the dried blueberries might puff up with the internal steam from the sausage as it cooked—almost like a breadcrumb—and it paid off." Chef Bartlett is under the impression that blueberry menu items will continue to increase in the near future, as his team plans to use them with breads and meats in the coming months. "In the autumn, it's a great opportunity to

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match fruits with the season and take the sweetness to prepare with savory dishes.”

But fresh blueberries aren't as season-specific as you might expect. Domestic blueberries are available April through October with the peak season lasting from mid-June to mid-August. Once fall hits in the States, it's a quick trip to South America where the harvesting season takes place from November until March. We have Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Peru and even New Zealand to thank for these winter fresh blueberries.

## Ethnic-inspired dishes

Last fall, The National Restaurant Association (NRA) developed a 2015 culinary forecast that utilized results from a 1,276-member survey regarding foods, cuisines, beverages and culinary themes that would be popular this year. The top two results for breakfast and brunch trends were ethnic-inspired breakfast items and traditional ethnic breakfast items.

Well into the year, that study couldn't be any more accurate. Ethnic foods have found a voice on modern American brunch menus. Variety is the spice of life after all—the NRA's Global Palates study found that 66 per-

cent of consumers eat a wider variety of ethnic cuisines now than five years ago. The Global Palates study was conducted to explore the familiarity of worldwide cuisines among American diners. Another reason is that the NRA feels that ancestry is a strong influencer when it comes to culinary decision making. Its study found that 43 percent of consumers enjoy eating the foods tied to their own heritage. “Many Americans trace their family history—whether established for generations or more recently rooted—beyond U.S. borders,” says Annika Stensson, director of research communications for the NRA in a recently published article by the association. Additionally, it found that 65 percent of Millennials who indulge in ethnic cuisine prefer to eat in relation to their family's roots. As Millennials outpace Baby Boomers, the consumer landscape is beginning to shift. The Hispanic population is quickly becoming the largest ethnic group in the United States and is perhaps the root of the influx of Latin American-inspired cuisine.

With a lineup of more than 35 concepts, Richard Sandoval Restaurants is more than your average budding operation. All of the

restaurant group's establishments tout a Latin or Asian menu, and Chef Bartlett, regional executive chef for the greater Washington D.C. area locations, is reaping all the benefits of the popularized food region. “Each has its own niche based on the demographic,” says Chef Bartlett. “We have several trips to Mexico each year where we focus on different regions, take the inspiration and apply it based on the community to create something you won't find in any other area Latin restaurants.”

When it comes to a Latin-incorporated brunch, Chef Bartlett's group writes the book. “We have some variations on classics like benedicts and French toast, but we also throw in something that you can't get elsewhere like bacon and egg steamed buns with house cured bacon and salsa verde, or curried potato gratin under a poached egg and chipotle hollandaise.” What makes his dishes so successful is that the ubiquitous D.C. brunch-goers are adventurous in their eating. Latin-inspired hashes, benedicts and Chilaquile dishes are something to look forward to for the restaurant's patrons.

## Eggs

Still one of the most beneficial natural foods, eggs are used in nearly every aspect of a restaurant's kitchen. Not only are egg white omelets in the top three trends for the aforementioned NRA forecast, but one can't turn a corner without running into a restaurant with hundreds of eggs on hand for cooking. Some embrace the humble bacon and eggs, while others are recreating traditional recipes and cooking techniques. Whether it's sticking to classics or drawing inspiration from around the world, adding eggs to a dish creates an avant-garde and brunch worthy meal. For Executive



Latin-inspired cuisine like this Smoked Chicken Hash is plated at Masa 14.

Chef Chad Mace of Chicago-based Pomp & Circumstance, adding a modern twist to brunch menus is something of an enjoyable feat. “Keeping the original integrity of the dish is the challenge while finding more modern ways to plate [them]” he says. A classic Eggs Benedict is topped with lobster rather than Canadian bacon, and Chef Mace's kitchen procedures keep the newly opened establishment busy during brunch hours.

Establishments that have joined the brunch movement are able to optimize their space by maintaining longer hours, have a higher—and lucrative—turnaround, and give their chefs an opportunity for whole-animal cooking; chefs who are able to test their skills utilizing all parts of an animal that may not be appropriate for dinnertime dishes. This is their chance to really push the envelope with a myriad of mix-and-match ingredients.

Food experiences are deeply ingrained in our culture, and today's adventurous patrons are looking for something to wet their sophisticated whistle when it comes to different flavors. Brunch is quite simply an early-to-mid-morning period where prolific chefs have the ability to come up with whatever comes to mind. 

