

Announcing the Demise of Diets - Top Five Dining Trends for 2006

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Benchmark Hospitality International has announced Five Top Dining Trends for 2006, as observed by its properties.

Trend #1 - Announcing the Demise of Diets

Today it's about balanced alternatives instead of dieting. Low trans fat, smaller plates for reduced portions, wise choices versus opting for no or low carbohydrates, selections of natural unprocessed food planned to help the body burn properly ... and that reward with rich flavor. This is where healthy dining is headed.

And today's menus are about the total experience -- fresh ingredients, taste, proper digestion -- just the way nature intended it to be. Chefs are increasingly looking at cuisine from a dietician's point of view. Balanced health is as important as flavor and artistry.

Trend #2 - Not Your Grandmother's Comfort Foods!

Hand tossed, pulled, kneaded and milled ... preparation techniques that 'say' home-prepared, homemade. Couple these with the freshest organic ingredients right out of the kitchen garden and an elegant presentation and you have what is ultra current in healthy home-style dining.

As cookery continues to move away from the sautéing and frying, it's rushing toward grilling, smoking, poaching and plancha seared techniques that require herbs and healthy oils for robust flavor - not fat!

Oh and meatloaf and mashed potatoes lovers, take heart, ... these comfort foods will never go out of style!

Trend #3 - Breakfast is Back And Way Over The Top!

Eggs Benedict with lump crab and Smithfield Ham from the Virginias, Sweet Roll French toast, breakfast phyllo made like spanakopita with eggs, feta and gyro lamb, fresh berry Crostini and berry bread pudding with real maple syrup. Hungry yet?

Breakfast is back and breakfast dining is huge! Everybody loves breakfast - now, with the demise of low & no carb diets, people are zealously returning to the meal and going for the classics. Flavors are fresh, preparations are creative, and the pay off is in the togetherness that breakfast promotes. Families, travelers and groups come together to enjoy a dining experience while launching their day, whether they're headed to the beach, the museums, the office, or the meeting room.

Trend #4 - Courses Within A Course

Confusing? Here's what we mean. Menus are moving toward total prix fixe dining that is rich in choice. A three-course meal will have several appetizers, entrees and desserts for you to 'build.'

When guests order a course, a tasting is provided of the particular seasonal item ordered. If sea scallops are selected, guests will enjoy them three ways -- perhaps with Osetra Caviar and lemon confit, Thai seared with ginger slaw, and grilled with creamed Smithfield Ham. Exciting, isn't it!

Great chefs are continually striving to accommodate the moving target of consumer likes and dislikes, forever reinventing flavor, texture and culinary drama -- and trying not to worry about the added kitchen stress. Whoever said the culinary arts were for the faint of heart?

Trend #5 - Lite Fare Loaded With Vegetables

Rotisserie chicken with creamy white beans, spinach and fresh basil; fresh bay scallops with English peas, prosciutto and farfalle; pulled pork shoulder with grilled vegetables, black beans and fresh tomatoes ... the trend is for lighter fare loaded with flavor and the freshest vegetables.

And classic salads as Panzanella, Salad Nicoise and the Brown Derby Chop Salad are now being transformed with fresh picked fruit and fresh baked, crusty breads.

A Word about Wine

Rieslings are the comeback kid this year in the wine world. Wine lovers are discovering there is nothing more refreshing on a warm evening than these delicate wines properly chilled. They're refreshing, delicious, pleasantly sweet and have a relatively low alcohol content.

And Rieslings are terrific at all levels of sweetness -- from dry to dessert sweet. They pair superbly with dinner and dessert. Oh, and look in the German section of your favorite wine merchant. The best Rieslings are, as they have always been, from Germany. Go ahead, try them again.

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