

Mintel Serves Up Restaurant Menu Trends for the New Year

When dining out, be sure not to fill up on bread and butter. Mintel Menu Insights has identified eight exciting trends sure to transform the American menu in 2008. Shaking and stirring everything from fine dining to fast food, these menu changes are sure to satisfy appetites, taste buds and health concerns alike.

“Everyone’s looking for the next breakthrough item, the next mini burger appetizer, mojito or pomegranate flavor,” says Maria Caranfa, director of Mintel Menu Insights. “This year, we expect to see new twists on already popular items, giving people more flavors and options for the foods they love. Restaurants will get more creative with foods and preparation techniques as they attempt to cater to American’s evolving tastes.”

1 Superspices are the New Superfruits

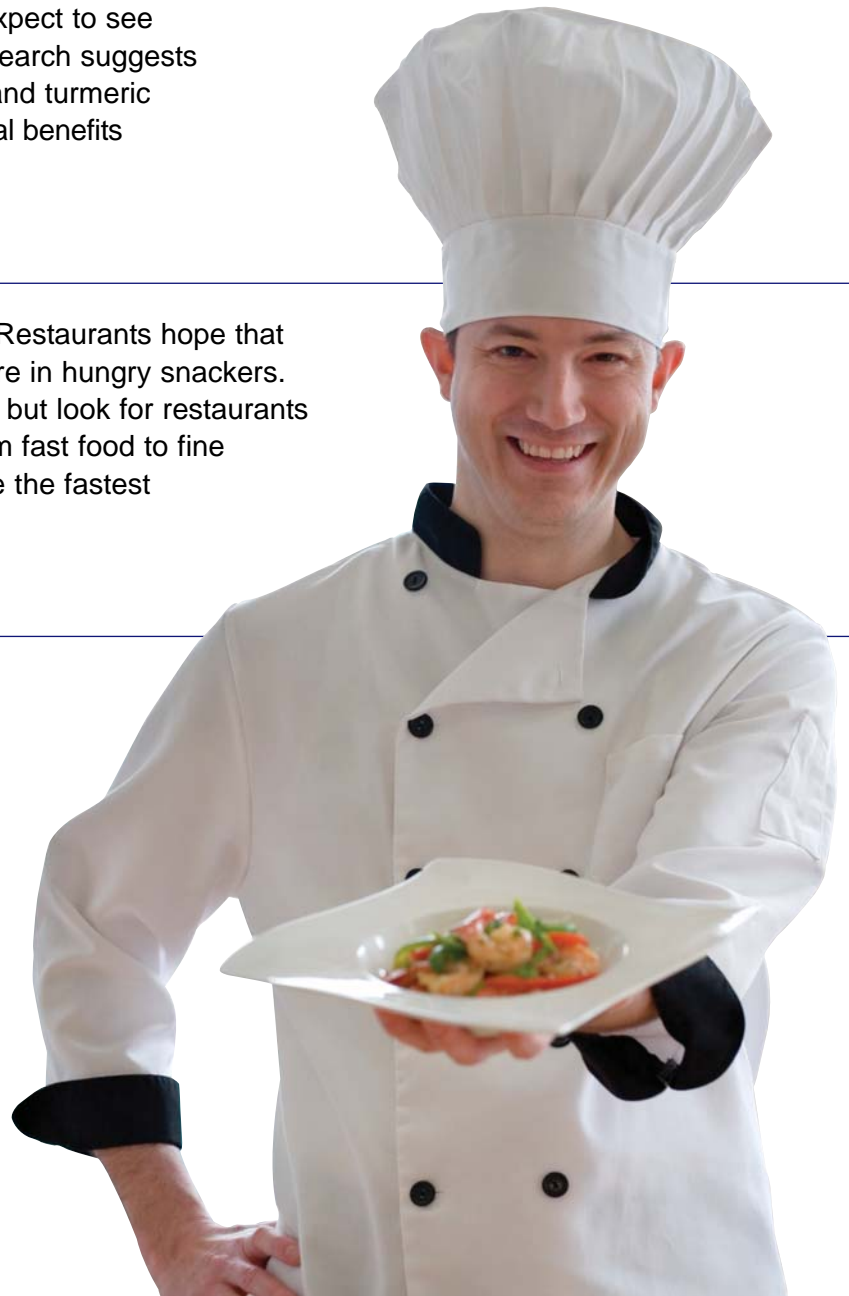
2007 created a superfruit frenzy. With such high antioxidant content, superfruits such as pomegranates, blueberries and açai berries flourished on the restaurant menu. This year, expect to see “superspices” seasoning American menus. Research suggests that superspices like cumin, ginger, cinnamon and turmeric may boast more antioxidant power and medicinal benefits than their superfruit cousins.

2 Snack Attack

This year, plan on satisfying that snack attack. Restaurants hope that small portions, big flavors and low prices will lure in hungry snackers. Mini burgers and wraps caught on late in 2007, but look for restaurants to add more “mini” favorite foods this year. From fast food to fine dining, restaurants may soon compete to create the fastest and most filling snacks.

3 Fine Fast Food

Fast food is going gourmet. Popular celebrity chefs are branching out with convenient, fast casual restaurants that promise high quality food, fine cooking and bold flavors ... all on a 30-minute lunch break. Bobby Flay, Rick Bayless and Wolfgang Puck have invested in fast casual operations, bringing their unique culinary flairs to the masses. Expect more celebrity chefs to get in the mix this year.



4 Grain Goodness

With the health benefits of whole grains becoming more widely known, certain nutritious grains will grow on the American restaurant menu. Kamut, quinoa, barley and millet pack a worldly punch along with healthy, essential nutrients. These grains are the ideal backdrop for tomorrow's innovative ethnic flavor and health trends.

5 Ingredient Provenance

Food safety and ecological issues have made headlines recently, causing many Americans to rethink where their food comes from. As concerns over ingredient origins rise, restaurants have responded with more local ingredients, more natural and organic menu items and more sourcing information on the menu. Expect all types of restaurants to take some of the "science" out of dining out this year.

6 Bulking up the Bar

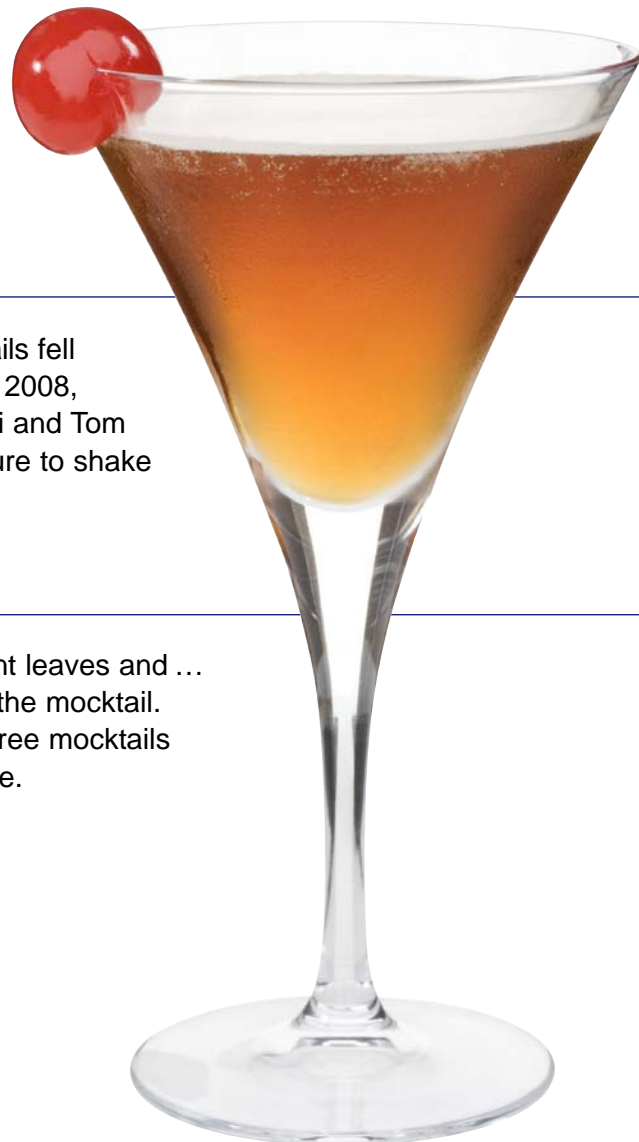
Watch closely as restaurants flex their bar muscles. Enhancing menus with more flavorful cocktails and savory appetizers than ever before, restaurants want diners to linger, lounge and just have fun in the bar. Look for beverage lists to grow longer than entrée lists, while appetizers occupy more of the menu in coming months.

7 The Return of the Classic Cocktail

Once the preferred choice of Hollywood sophisticates, classic cocktails fell behind flashy, froufy new favorites in recent years. But no more. In 2008, expect a rebirth of cocktails such as the Sidecar, Manhattan, Bellini and Tom Collins. Classic and glamorous, these old-fashioned choices are sure to shake things up.

8 Mocktails Rock

Ice-cold lemonade with strawberry puree, fresh ginger, crushed mint leaves and ... no alcohol? Rising demand for better non-alcoholic drinks created the mocktail. Boasting the same premium flavors as the cocktail menu, alcohol-free mocktails are a sophisticated alternative for "non-drinkers" and "drinkers" alike.



To learn more about emerging trends and Mintel Menu Insights, call 312.932.0600 or email menuinsights@mintel.com.

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