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Artisan Spirits, Culinary Cocktails and Organic Wine Among Hottest Menu Trends for 2009, National Restaurant Association Research Finds

Survey of more than 1,600 American Culinary Federation member chefs reveals alcohol is taking on a starring role in restaurants

Washington, D.C., December 9, 2008—Alcohol is an important part of the culinary arts and experience, and new research from the National Restaurant Association reveals which alcohol trends will be the hottest on restaurant menus in 2009. A survey of more than 1,600 professional chefs – American Culinary Federation members – ranks micro-distilled/artisan liquor, culinary cocktails and organic wine in the top 20 culinary trends. Also high on the list of trends for the coming year are food-alcohol pairings, craft beer, specialty beer, organic cocktails, muddled cocktails and wine or beer flights.

“As Americans are growing more and more interested in the culinary arts and the ‘foodie’ movement, that interest and sophistication is also extending to alcohol and cocktails,” said Dawn Sweeney, President and CEO of the Association. “According to our chef survey, mixologists will be taking on leading roles in the coming year and, much like chefs in the kitchen, showcase their creativity behind the bar. In addition, chefs will continue to highlight various types of alcohol in their recipes and to complement their culinary creations through pairings and samplers.

“Culinarians, mixologists and other restaurant and hospitality industry professionals will be able to explore these trends, learn from noted experts and browse hundreds of beverage alcohol brands and labels at the 2009 International Wine, Spirits & Beer Event next spring,” Sweeney added.

“Pairing cocktails and wines is all about complementing your food, and as chefs, we need to know what will work best with the dishes we serve,” said ACF National President, John Kinsella, CMC, CCE, WGMC, AAC. “In 2009, we are also looking at pairings with specialty beers, organic cocktails and signature drinks. In addition, American diners have become wine smart and are always looking for great, inexpensive wines to complement their dining experience. During this economic downswing, the restaurateur will have to find innovative ways to keep costs in line by purchasing great wines at the right price point.”

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In October 2008, the Association surveyed 1,609 American Culinary Federation member chefs, asking them to rate 208 individual food/beverage items, preparation methods and culinary themes as a "hot trend," "yesterday's news," or "perennial favorite" on restaurant menus in 2009.

The culinary cocktail is an emerging concept that will become more visible on restaurant menus in 2009, with professional bartenders approaching drink-making as a chef does a food recipe. These cocktails, which are often signature drinks, are made using a wider variety of ingredients and more precise techniques than simpler concoctions. They often contain savory ingredients and items previously only used in kitchens, and tailor flavors to complement specific food items or dishes.

The chefs surveyed were also asked what the hottest beverage alcohol trend in restaurants will be in 2009. Thirty-three percent said mixologists and signature cocktails will be the number-one trend. Twenty-six percent believe functional cocktails will be the most popular, (e.g., cocktails created with health and nutrition aspects in mind, such as using superfruits, full servings of vegetables, etc.). Another 23 percent said food-alcohol pairings will rule the alcohol scene next year.

The National Restaurant Association's 2009 International Wine, Spirits & Beer Event – the industry's only professional event focused exclusively on beverage alcohol – will highlight vintners, distillers and brewers in exhibits, food-alcohol pairing demonstrations and education programming focused on trends in alcohol. It will be held May 17-18, 2009, in conjunction with the 2009 National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Motel-Motel Show® at McCormick Place in Chicago. For more information, visit www.winespiritsbeer.org.

NRA Show 2009 will offer the best opportunity of the year to experience and explore the hottest food and beverage trends in the culinary world. The event provides a window to the future of the restaurant industry, including food and beverage items, innovative equipment and technology. In addition, the Show will feature unparalleled culinary-focused events and educational opportunities. NRA Show 2009 will be held May 16-19 at McCormick Place in Chicago (see www.restaurant.org/show for details).

For full results from the "Chef Survey: What's Hot in 2009," visit the Association's Web site at www.restaurant.org/foodtrends.

The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With more than 22,000 members spanning 230 chapters nationwide, ACF is the culinary leader in offering educational resources, training, apprenticeship and accreditation. In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive certification program for chefs in the United States. ACF is home to ACF Culinary Team USA, the official representative for the United States in major international culinary competitions. For more information, visit www.acfchefs.org.

The National Restaurant Association, founded in 1919, is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which is comprised of 945,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a work force of 13.1 million employees - making it the cornerstone of the economy, career opportunities and community involvement. Along with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, the Association works to represent, educate and promote the rapidly growing industry. For more information, visit our Web site at www.restaurant.org.

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