

BREAKFAST

Breaks Out

Breakfast knows no boundaries — from improving its culinary pedigree to pushing into late-night and snack menus

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, breakfast represented the sunny side of an otherwise gloomy industry outlook, as analysts forecast growth in breakfast and brunch traffic at the same time other dayparts sustained big hits. As a result, some operators added breakfast, and those that already offered it in the morning experimented with serving it all day. Those excelling at all-day breakfast, seeing encroaching competition, sought innovation. “Even with all of the growth, breakfast remains an undervalued platform,” says Cari Price, director of culinary at Food IQ. “There is an opportunity to tap into the importance and ‘special’ nature of breakfast.”

That special nature is the hook that positions this trend squarely front and center. There’s something about breakfast fare that lets it zoom into all-day and even make clever appearances on snack and late-night menus. As evidence, look to Fried Egg I’m in Love, a Portland, Ore., food cart. It serves “blue-collar fried-egg sandwiches” such as Sriracha Mix-a-Lot, sporting a fried egg, seared ham, avocado, tomato, Havarti and sriracha on toasted local sourdough bread. Or look at late-night offerings from micro-chain Hash House A Go Go, like its

Sausage Gravy Pot Pie with scrambled eggs and mashed potatoes. And then there’s breakfast’s traditional home of hurried weekday mornings and lazy weekend brunches. Chefs are stepping up their game here, too. Consumers are rich with choice at breakfast time.

“

Breakfast isn’t just for breakfast anymore. And even when it is, it’s simply more savory.

”

ROBIN SCHEMP

BREAKFAST IS SERVED

Competition in this value-driven space coupled with a hunger for bolder flavor combinations has upped the ante from, say, routine quick-cooking oatmeal to craveable steel-cut oatmeal with raisins, cranberries, granola and pecans (at Shari’s restaurants in the Northwest), or perhaps even goji berries and Chinese red dates (at Wow Bao, Chicago’s Asian bun concept). Breakfast is now taking its cues from the bold mash-ups of street food and the relatively new cultural hankering for inspired-yet-craveable offerings, any time of day.

At Dirty Oscar’s Annex in Tacoma, Wash., diners can order Pulled Pork Hash for breakfast, with braised pork, home fries, onions, fried eggs and jalapeño ketchup. Or they can choose a more sophisticated take on the hash brown: thick-cut hickory bacon, shrimp and Boursin Gournay cream stuffed into

Savory breakfast elements are appealing any time of day, such as Poached Eggs Rio Grande with chipotle-tomato cheese sauce and a side of red onion-jicama-bell pepper slaw.



LACTALIS FOOD SERVICE

Why Now Breakfast and brunch menus are getting more experimental and benefiting from the trends and ingredients that popular p.m. menus are enjoying. People have much higher expectations these days for all of a restaurant's meal periods. Consumers want to try more adventurous dishes, and breakfast is a relatively unexplored arena in which to get creative.

– KATHY CASEY



GORDON FOOD SERVICE

Lunch and dinner menus can easily embrace sandwiches that showcase breakfast classics like bacon and eggs, but with a flavor upgrade.

“Look at breakfast items that push toward lunch; quiche is being reborn and individual savory pastries work well here, too. And using different meats and poultry to make bacon and pancetta such as Gertrude’s ‘lambcetta’ is an opportunity to differentiate all-day breakfast items.”

PRISCILLA MARTEL

hash browns and topped with two fried eggs. “Breakfast is the new frontier of culinary adventure,” says Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions.

The lines that separate lunch items from those served at dinner (including items offered in between and beyond) are decidedly gray, yet Americans call a meal “breakfast” only when it bears certain elements. Think about it: Who opts for French onion soup at 7 a.m.? Yet breakfast is the most flexible daypart of all.

All-day breakfast is an opportunity that continues to grow for operators, but breakfast favorites are now poised to stake their claim on the ever-increasing snack, bar and late-night menus. After all, the most craveable and on-trend bar bites share the pantry with a typical breakfast menu: potatoes, eggs, pork-everything, biscuits.

Take Michael Chiarello’s Bottega in Napa Valley, whose Green Eggs and Ham appetizer features maple-braised pork belly, a crispy, soft-cooked egg, spinach and

pecorino budino, served with baby-spinach insalata and preserved Meyer lemon marmellata. Or Chef Holly Smith's five-minute egg with crushed pumpkinnickel, crème fraîche and white sturgeon caviar, offered on the starters menu at Café Juanita in Kirkland, Wash.

Meanwhile, other restaurants with breakfast-appreciative chefs at the helm are applying their culinary prowess to evening main courses. Dirty Oscar's Annex pays homage to the breakfast daypart on the dinner menu with Fried Smoked Pork Belly that's panko-fried, glazed with chipotle-maple syrup, served over Italian sausage cream and topped with a sunny-side-up egg.

THE LAWS OF BREAKFAST

An exploration of where breakfast can take operators in 2013 has to first embrace a handful of incontrovertible truths: (1) Nostalgic breakfast foods and dishes are familiar and, thus, comfortable, which empowers them; (2) costs of traditional ingredients are relatively low, with presumably lower risk; (3) eggs are formidable in terms of likeability, versatility (which is why they top virtually everything these days) and nutrition; (4) convenience and price point are huge drivers on weekday mornings, whereas the "experience" of breakfast reigns on weekends; and (5) health influences a large-enough percentage of breakfast diners, particularly in the morning.

Armed with these realities, the key to sales and profitability at breakfast — regardless the time of day or night it's offered — is differentiation.

"Breakfast of today is much different than it was 15 years ago," says Shamrock Foods' Chris Casson. "Diners don't go into this meal with a preconceived idea of what it needs to be, and they are excited when it ends up being better than average. Many of these 'trendy' breakfast

“ Consumers are looking for fresh breakfast ideas with a custom or homemade feel. This could be as simple as an old-style cream chipped with roasted poblanos and crispy shallots, served over a three-pepper potato hash. ”

RICK PEREZ

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Crowd-pleasing hash browns serve as a nostalgic base for creative toppings that give traditional breakfast components p.m. appeal.

establishments are now destination restaurants, and most often are at capacity even on the average workday.”

Breakfast constitutes a whopping 75 percent of daily sales at Hash House A Go Go, which serves all three dayparts at its four restaurants in Las Vegas and one each in Reno, San Diego and Chicago. The “twisted farm food” theme is evident in everything from the corned-beef hash (the top-selling breakfast item) made with Certified Angus Beef, red onion and Swiss cheese, to a chicken-and-waffle tower featuring two sage-fried chicken breasts served with hardwood-smoked bacon, hot maple reduction and fried leeks, to “Indiana favorite” O’Hare of the Dog — a 24-ounce Budweiser served in a brown paper bag with a side of bacon.

Eight to 10 breakfast favorites are served all day, and Hash House’s corporate executive chef and partner, Anthony Vidal, is seeing orders for waffles and pancakes increase. He’s also exploring gluten-free breakfast options to meet growing customer demand. And he’s cognizant of the greater interest in healthier breakfasts, evidenced by more requests for chicken and turkey sausages and hashes. Still, Hash House is Hash House, after all, and a top-selling special on Saturdays at the San Diego restaurant and the Vegas unit on Sahara is The Breakfast Burger — a mammoth sandwich sporting two half-pound Certified Angus Beef patties, three scrambled eggs, ham



LAMB WESTON

“ More restaurants offering the most important meal of the day will prove profitable. Eggs done really well still carry the same cost. Breakfast is a money maker, no questions asked. ”

T.J. DELLE DONNE

ON THE MENU

Breakfast Breaks Out

DECONSTRUCTED CORNED BEEF HASH ~ Fingerling potatoes, herbs, roasted onions, carrots, fennel, fried eggs
SKILLET DINER, SEATTLE

BRANDADE AND BELLY ‘BENEDICT’ ~ Brandade, pork belly, eggs, biscuit, kimchi
LITTLE GOAT DINER, CHICAGO

BOOMERS ~ Poached eggs in portobello caps with marinara
B.A.D, BROOKLYN

CHEDDAR BISCUIT SANDWICH ~ Thick-cut applewood-smoked bacon, melted cheddar, aioli, and arugula on a homemade cheddar biscuit
NICK’S WHEELY GOOD BREAKFAST, SAN FRANCISCO

WAFFLES: Sweet, Savory and Sandwiches

With chicken and waffles in all their permutations proliferating on menus, it's not surprising that the waffle is a key carrier in breaking breakfast boundaries.

- At The Iron Press “beer and waffles” concept in Costa Mesa, Calif, the menu showcases waffle sandwiches like thinly sliced prosciutto, Gruyère, frisée and stone-ground mustard.
- Chicago’s Waffles concept has grown to two units and includes treatments like Albondigas: pork and lamb meatballs in spicy tomato stew served over a Chihuahua cheese waffle and topped with mint.
- The four Southern California locations of Bruxië offer such Belgian-waffle-sandwich varieties as buttermilk fried chicken, chile honey and cider slaw, and cold-smoked salmon with herb cream cheese, cucumber and chive.
- In San Francisco, Blue Fig’s namesake waffle features organic blue commeal topped with fig reduction, whipped cream, banana and syrup.

and cheddar on a housemade bun, garnished with fried pasta, a barbecue-sauce drizzle and a fresh rosemary sprig. “The Breakfast Burger is like Vegas aspirin,” Vidal says. “A perfect hangover cure.”

WAKE UP TO NEW FLAVORS

“Consumers want to try more adventurous dishes, and breakfast is a relatively unexplored arena in which to get creative,” says chef Kathy Casey, whose Dish D’Lish cafés at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport realize more than 40 percent of sales from their all-day offerings of signature hot-pressed breakfast sandwiches, such as the Florentine egg sandwich crafted on organic bread with fresh spinach and artichoke-Parmesan spread.

In recent years, arguably the most noticeable innovations at breakfast have been brought to Americans by global influences. In the realm of creativity, pan-cultural influences on traditional breakfast dishes maintain their shelf life. To some degree, there’s a greater demand for authentic global breakfast foods, like congee and miso soup, but more often, diners desire a mere tweaking of the familiar — something that doesn’t force them to bet their tastebuds and wallets on a “foreign” (and sometimes difficult-to-pronounce) breakfast.

“Chefs are seeing the opportunity to nudge traditional offerings into unexpected territories,” says consulting chef Rob Corliss, of ATE/All Things Epicurean, adding that new items are still rooted in classics like oatmeal, but “are getting a culinary blast of style.”

“This is a trend that has been in the shadows just waiting to take center stage. For a long time, the data was pretty clear that people were unwilling to experiment with breakfast. But with the increased global food interest and the blurring of traditional breakfast meal times, I think that we are just seeing the beginning of a trend here. The field is wide open for experimentation and innovation.”

CHRISTOPHER KOETKE

How to Work It The opportunities here are to develop international and innovative breakfast items while still offering some of the traditional fare. Thus you can keep traditional clientele (who may well migrate from the tried and true) while appealing to a whole new market segment. On the international side, look at the wide range of atypical breakfasts from Japan, Korea, Bahamas, Mexico, etc.

– CHRISTOPHER KOETKE

Wild Eggs, with a unit in Denver and three in Louisville, Ky., recently added a chicken enchilada with eggs to the menu, and sales of the dish took off, says co-owner J.D. Rothberg. Other top sellers include nontraditional Benedicts, particularly the Kalamity Katie's Border Benedict — corn cakes with green chile and cheddar, crowned with chorizo, two poached eggs, queso fundido, sour cream, green onion and avocado.

“People are craving more unique, flavorful dishes,” Rothberg says. “There’s always the demand for eggs and bacon, but the consumer wants some interesting options.” ☺

“Breakfast has vast flexibility (way more than static lunch or dinner), as it can apply to 24/7 eating occasions. Traditional morning hours can be driven by consumer convenience, portability and routine, whereas lunch/dinner/late night can be driven by flavor and originality. A breakfast-type offering — at any time of day — can tap into all of these.”

ROB CORLISS

Kicking it up several notches is Wild Eggs' Kalamity Katie's Border Benedict, featuring green chile-cheddar corn cakes topped with chorizo, poached eggs and queso fundido.



WILD EGGS