

## TOP 10 TRENDS FOR 2016

### Citrus On Fire

*Transformational flavor and culinary aesthetic make this a menu-ready trend*

By Katie Ayoub

“Citrus” is one of those beautiful food words that evokes menu positives for the diner: fresh, zingy, refreshing, tart, bright, healthy, light. Apart from delivering premium menu cues, it’s also a fantastic flavor component, truly bringing all of those words to life. Chefs are now taking citrus to the next level, transforming it with the flavor of fire, giving it depth, nuance and flair while lending it even more menu language power.

As evidence, look to the lyrical descriptions that both intrigue and entice: Torched grapefruit brings a smoky brightness to a salad of arugula, endive, feta and pecans at Sweet Basil in Vail, Colo.; The Kitchen in Denver has a blistered lemon wedge served with oysters; and Ox in Portland, Ore., serves Things Done Changed, a cocktail composed of pisco, jalapeño and egg white combined with smoked lemon.

*“People are drawn to the aroma and flavor of citrus, as it conveys freshness plus a natural, satisfying taste. The combination of sweet, acid and a touch of bitterness provides a genuine impact without dominating the entire flavor profile.”* - Mike Buononato

“Unexpected, intentionally charred ingredients are showing up on menus, and citrus is a brilliant ingredient to char, as the natural sugars in the fruit caramelize and create a unique flavor profile, yet still taste familiar,” says Daniel Campbell, R&D chef with Food IQ.

Citrus’ familiarity is one of the main drivers that propels this trend forward. Aggressive cooking-technique cues like burnt, torched, embered and blistered might pose a bit of adventure for some, but partnering with the well-known citrus family offers the glow of recognition.



Roasting grapefruit transforms the bitter fruit into an intensely flavored, caramelized accent that is particularly welcome in veg-centric dishes.

“Whether chefs are turning to varieties of citrus that Americans are aware of, like blood oranges and Meyer lemons, or emerging types from around the world, like yuzu, bergamot and calamansi, citrus is a safe experiment for most consumers,” says Maeve Webster, president of Menu Matters. “Preparation techniques that are impacting so much of the rest of the menu are now impacting the flavor pulled from citrus—grilling, smoking, charring. These can be used across the menu,” she says.

Applying heat does magical things to citrus fruits. It caramelizes. It balances sour. It adds a savory note. Chef Kathy Casey of Kathy Casey Food Studios and Liquid Kitchen, describes the transformation as “adding a layer of flavor that’s smoky and almost umami.” Robert Danhi of Chef Danhi & Co. says that the caramelizing of the natural sugars creates a “deep, rich, bitter edge that balances flavor.” These cooking techniques also signal culinary artistry, a value held close by today’s diners, who look for evidence of artisanship at every turn.

“This is a chef-driven trend, screaming technique and culinary creativity,” says chef Rob Corliss of All Things Epicurean. “Fire can bring charred bitterness or sweetness coupled with smokiness.” With those flavors, the technique elevates the dish, giving it premium menu status.

## Plays Well With Food



Desserts invite playful use of citrus. The Torched Citrus Peel Cake at Sugarmill in Denver gets a colorful and unique twist from the charred peel garnish and the blood orange-mezcal icing.

Cliff Pleau, vice president of R&D for 212-unit Bonefish Grill, relies on citrus when looking to inject clean, bright flavors into his dishes. “Of course, citrus is a nice complement to seafood, but I like to give it a little extra with my blend called LOL.” He mixes together the zest and juice of the “LOL”—lemons, oranges and limes—then adds tamari and proprietary spices. He uses it as a marinade and finishing sauce for grilled fish. “When the protein is hot off the grill, it soaks up the tasty juice,” says Pleau. One of his ideas in the test kitchen for grilled citrus takes brûléed grapefruit sections topped with agave and chipotle powder, then adds them to grilled chicken or maybe a salad. “You’d get the yin and yang with tangy, tart and sweet,” he says.

Apart from elevating garnishes—like with Swift’s Attic in Austin, Texas, where the squid fries are served with roasted garlic aioli and charred lemon—this trend also plays well with the veg-centric movement. At Bridge Club in Raleigh, N.C., charred orange marmalade vinaigrette enhances roasted beets with toasted pistachio, ensuring that every element in this dish gets served with a culinary edge. Publican Quality Meats in Chicago offers another example with its recently menued Perks of Being a

Cauliflower Sandwich, featuring a cauliflower steak with a charred lemon aioli.

*“Using citrus flavor profiles is an overarching trend across all segments right now. In upscale operations we’re seeing use of lesser-known citrus such as yuzu and calamansi, while QSRs are expanding to blood orange. Adding the burnt element to citrus increases flavor complexity and interest.”* - Cristi Shipley, Food IQ

Steve Schimoler, chef/owner of Crop Restaurant Group in Cleveland, says his favorite technique with citrus is charring grapefruit for his Charred Grapefruit and Brown Butter Sauce, served with toasted brioche and seared scallops. He zests the rind and grills the grapefruit, using apple-wood chips for smoke. Once charred, he removes the meat and uses half in a reduction with shallots and white balsamic vinegar. He then caramelizes sugar with the remaining grapefruit, purées it until smooth, using it as the base of the brown butter sauce. He finishes the sauce with the grapefruit zest. “The result sees a great blend of the grapefruit’s bitter and acid that marries with the nuttiness of the brown butter and the charred notes,” says Schimoler. “By charring the fruit, it develops the sugars and concentrates its flavor. There is something unique about how the citrus naturally accepts the charring—its high moisture content can stand up to the grill for an extended period, allowing the fruit to not burn, yet pick up all of the flavor.”

Desserts today are seeing innovation around citrus, too. Chef Troy Guard at Sugarmill in Denver serves a Torched Citrus Peel Cake, a yellow cake with caramelized citrus rinds and topped with blood orange-mezcal icing. At Del Campo in Washington, D.C., the Grilled Lemon Cheesecake with a Pavlova of Burnt Blueberries features a garnish of grilled lemons. Howells & Hood in Chicago menus a Chocolate Puff Pastry with charred blood orange curd. Kathy Casey suggests a citrus-centric upgrade perfect for garnishes or as inclusions: “For desserts, slice citrus fruits like lemon or orange, lay on a sheet pan, sprinkle with sugar and roast in a convection oven or brûlée with a torch,” she says.

*“Layer the citrus with other trends that marry well, whether incorporating it into grilling, live-fire cooking, seasonal menus or in regionally specific dishes, using citrus that complements the location. The only missed opportunity with citrus right now is to not enter the trend.”* - Suzy Badaracco

## **Citrus Infusion**

by Robert Danhi

The caramelizing of the natural sugars creates a deep and rich bitter edge that is welcome, balancing the taste. Lemons are most popular, but don’t neglect the opportunity to use orange wedges to drench a roasted chicken, for example. Grilled wedges and halves of lemons are great; remember to grill the segments, wedges or slices so the diner can eat the entire thing.

Consider grilling the citrus then using it as a base for flavoring other items as they come to the table. For grilled salmon, try topping the lemon with salmon and bake for a few minutes. The lemon almost melts, creating a sauce unto itself—and it has great plate appeal.

## **Beverages Get a Boost**

Of course, citrus finds a natural home in both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. With diners looking for craftsmanship here, too, elevating drinks with citrus set alight is a welcome innovation. At Eastern Standard in Boston, lemon ash garnishes the Phoenix, a mixture of aged Bols Genever, burnt sugar syrup and egg white. At Restaurant Latour in the Crystal Springs Resort, Hardyston Township, N.J., the “New” Fashioned sees a mix of sweet vermouth and burnt orange zest-infused Tuthilltown white corn whiskey, garnished with pickled



Citrusy and fire meet in this Old Fashioned with Slow & Low Rock and Rye Whiskey, Angostura bitters and flamed orange peel, on tap at Plan Check Kitchen + Bar in Los Angeles.

Concord grapes, a dried orange segment and a burnt orange twist. Even something as simple as a grilled lemon wedge affixed to a glass of lemonade can upgrade the experience beautifully.

The Promontory Paloma, served at The Promontory, Jared Wentworth's hearth-based concept in Chicago, uses a house grapefruit soda made with grapefruit that has been charred in the hearth. The cocktail is garnished with a wheel of charred grapefruit. "We char the citrus fruit to represent our kitchen centerpiece: the hearth," says Dustin Drankiewicz, The Promontory's bar director. "We wanted the smoke, char and a layer of depth introduced. Charring or grilling citrus fruits caramelizes the sugars and intensifies the very alluring natural bitterness."

Adding culinary technique to citrus fruits offers a powerful triumvirate: premium status, developed flavor and menu distinction.

## On the Menu: Fired-Up Citrus

- Green salad with toasted pecans, apples, feta and a smoked orange-cider dressing - *Oyster Club, Mystic, Conn.*
- Bone Marrow Croquette with torched grapefruit mostarda, sage, whipped almond milk - *Alden & Harlow, Cambridge, Mass.*
- Fried Calamari with Mama Lil's peppers, grilled lemon aioli, chimichurri - *Boka, Seattle*
- Sonoma duck breast, muhammara, charred mandarin and Flamingo peppers - *Octavia, San Francisco*
- Grilled broccoli and cauliflower "Caesar" with charred lemon - *August, New Orleans*
- Barn Burner: Copper City Bourbon, Cynar, chile, crème de menthe, peach bitters, flamed citrus - *Blue Hound Kitchen & Cocktails, Phoenix*
- Oak-fired Paloma: Maestro dobel, oak-fired grapefruit juice, jalapeño, G&G spice - *Guard and Grace, Denver*