



Creative healthy menu trends

GLOBAL CUISINE – LATEST CREATIVE MENU TRENDS: SEDUCTIVE MENUS

Unilever Food Solutions **Head Chef for Mexico, Lorena Naval**, UFS North America Executive Chef, Steve Jilleba, and Robin Ho, Executive Chef, the Marmalade Group, tell us what they think makes a good modern menu.

Often known as The Silent Salesman, a menu is the most familiar and also the most easily overlooked aspect of a restaurant's design. For many customers, the menu is their first point of contact with the restaurant. It's where the stage is set and appetites are tempted, but poor menu design can mislead or simply bore customers. "The menu introduces the meal and also the restaurant," says Chef Naval. "It communicates the restaurant's concept. It goes hand in hand with the ingredients, architecture, tables, plates – everything. They're all connected and the menu is the perfect place to sum them up."

SHORT AND SWEET A SEDUCTIVE FUTURE

"Too many menus lack creativity and imitate what is popular in other establishments. The menus are long and boring, with lots of dining options. But it comes across as old-fashioned. Today's menus are shorter and simpler, which is often reflective of a menu that is regularly updated and utilises fresher, more seasonal ingredients. Why make guests read a book when you know you have five really great dishes?" Chef Ho likes menus that are "catchy and, at the same time, straightforward and easy to understand." He says: "The most important thing is that they're true – although that doesn't mean they have to be dull. "Expanding descriptions so they tell customers more about their meal can make dishes sound more appealing. Giving information on sourcing and sustainability is interesting to the customer and part of a 'farm-to-fork' culture that I think we should be encouraging." Chef Jilleba agrees: "The products used are now being given much more focus on a menu and details such as the type and place of origin are now being included. "When it comes to menus, there is always room for improvement," he continues. "It's important they react to the times."

A SEDUCTIVE FUTURE

Another way to develop menus is online. "Linking website menus to videos on YouTube that show how the dishes are produced is a great way to add interest," says Chef Ho. One change Chef Naval wouldn't make is to add a 'light bites' or 'healthy eating' section. "I personally think all food offered on a menu should be healthy," she says. "Having a special 'healthy and light' menu encourages the belief that there are special diet foods and they're different to normal restaurant food. The idea is to make attractive and healthy food for everyone!" Chef Jilleba, too, agrees that the healthier options on a menu should not be singled out. For him, denoting these options through a healthy symbol or a heart symbol is like "the kiss of death". Instead, chefs should paint a picture of their food through using powerful, visual language to describe the dishes on their menu, leading guests more naturally to the healthier options. The Seductive Nutrition technique appeals to Chef Naval, who has discovered that traditional Mexican cooking methods often use less fat and produce vibrant, modern dishes with lots of plate appeal. "Sadly, Mexico leads the world in rates of obesity. So making small changes to popular dishes can have a big impact on customers choosing the dish," she says. "And showing customers that we can make changes without affecting taste, texture or aroma and still produce great food is key. Menu descriptions can help convey that message." Chef Ho agrees: "Whether it's replacing fattier cuts with leaner meats or swapping salt for herbs, it's a cultural change we should try to support. Get guests to understand and believe in what we're doing, and the changes will take off."



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