

It's a Small World

The multi-billion dollar ethnic foods market is taking catering in profitable directions

Once considered a specialty, ethnic food choices are going mainstream with the public's ever-increasing interest in exotic tastes. In fact, the U.S. ethnic foods market is growing so rapidly, it's expected to increase by 50 percent over the next decade.

by Suzy Feine

Why such a dramatic increase?

The Ethnic Foods Market Report Plus 2007, conducted by Research and Markets, indicated that new product development continues to be one of the main drivers of sales in the ethnic foods market, influenced by healthy eating trends and by consumers asking for foods that contain lower levels of salt, fats and carbohydrates.

Another driver points to the fact that the ethnic makeup of the U.S. is changing rapidly. Currently, more than 30 percent of the people residing in the U.S. are considered ethnic, the largest ethnic group being Hispanics, followed by African Americans and Asian Americans. Plus, many non-ethnic consumers have acquired a taste for ethnic foods due to the influences of local ethnic communities and international travel, according to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Caterers interested in jumping on the ethnic foods bandwagon can learn from these caterers who have mastered the techniques required to make ethnic cuisine the norm.



Salsa Caterers & Special Events

Serving up Tradition

When Daniel Garcia started Salsa Caterers & Special Events in 1990, an advisor helped him build his marketing plan. "The advisor asked me, 'What are you selling to your customers?' I answered, 'Latino food, entertainment, decor,'" Garcia says. "The advisor replied, 'No, you're selling tradition. When someone comes to you, they're looking to buy Latino culture.'"

That simple statement helped Garcia build his niche market in Bronx, NY and the North Eastern corridor primarily around the Latino community, a niche that was virtually untapped when Garcia started. "I had a mentor who said I should go into the Latino catering business because no one was doing it professionally at that time," he says. "So our main



Salsa Caterers & Special Events

niche is Latino Caribbean, South and Central America, and Spain." As Salsa Caterers & Special Events grew, Garcia, along with executive chef Mercedes Castillo, added soul food and West Indian cuisine to the menu.

Adding a variety of ethnic foods to your menu is not as easy as simply following ethnic recipes, Garcia points out. "A lot of culinary schools don't train on ethnic foods. Even when chefs come to us with culinary degrees we still need to train them in ethnic cuisine," he says. "When we added soul food, we talked to our soul food client base and hired a soul food chef who taught the rest of the cooks. Then we talked to that community to make sure we had it right. We don't want to disrespect the food."

Garcia can testify firsthand that the ethnic foods market is growing rapidly. For the past two years, Salsa Caterers & Special Events has been a concessionaire at Yankee Stadium and has doubled their sales there from inception. "People are becoming more comfortable with ethnic foods," he says. "Many of our customers at Yankee Stadium are primarily non-Latino and they are not even familiar with the dishes we offer. But they taste it, they love it and they come back. Ten years from now, we anticipate an empanada will be as popular as a pizza." *➤



Celebrity Inspiration

When Max & Me Catering was asked to develop an African-inspired menu for the 2007 Liberty Medal Award Ceremony in Philadelphia, John D'Amelio, corporate chef for Max & Me, and his team went to war. "We hold what we call 'war board meetings,'" D'Amelio says. "We go to war on a party—we break it down, figure out who knows what and who will do the research. Our original plan was to find someone who could cook authentic African cuisine, but we couldn't find anyone so we had to do a lot of R&D in order to pull off something authentic."

The African menu was in recognition of singer/activist Bono, who was honored for his work in raising

awareness about Africa's HIV/AIDS epidemic. The team of chefs served an authentic meal that included Moroccan-Spiced Beef Tenderloin, Boharat-Braised Boneless Short Ribs, and an assortment of cheeses, fruits and breads from regions of Africa.

D'Amelio finds that catering to different ethnicities gives Max & Me an edge over other caterers who might not be able to offer the same. "We have chefs from different backgrounds and if we can't do it, we find other resources such as books, travel and the Internet, and we experiment so we can bring validity to our catering," he says. "Authenticity comes from having enough smarts to know that before we go to market, we need to make sure we are who we say we are."

The chefs at Max & Me are even planning on taking authenticity to the next level. "One thing we aspire to do is put together a faculty of chefs, names that people can relate to that have star power, that are masters in their own cuisine," says D'Amelio. "We are continuing to try to add people to our repertoire, such as Emeril Lagasse and David Burke; we're building relationships to work with them."

The Kosher Connection

The beauty of kosher products is that they lend well to many different ethnic foods, notes Noam Sokolow, president of Rave in New York. "There are many products that are kosher and as long as our chefs are using kosher products and abiding by the kosher laws, we can call the dish kosher," he says. "Many everyday products we all eat are already kosher."

Rave's primarily Jewish clientele request kosher, but after that, Sokolow's creativity comes into play when catering weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, and baby naming celebrations. "The food that we do is all kosher, but it could be Japanese, Mexican, Italian, etc.," he says.



Rave Catering - Güler Uger

One advantage to kosher catering is the pricing. "Pricing is much higher for kosher because we have more expenses going into it and we're limited on what we can and can't do," he says. "For example, meat and dairy never mix according to kosher rules, and there is no shellfish that is kosher. But all fruits and vegetables are kosher. We buy products that only have the kosher symbol."

Rarely will Sokolow find an ethnic ingredient that he cannot make kosher, but when he does, his chefs create it in house. "Certain sauces we have to make from scratch," he says. "And if an ingredient is only made in another country, sometimes it's difficult to find kosher versions."

Signature Ethnic Recipes Revealed

Salsa Caterers & Special Events' Signature Roast Pork with Rice and Pigeon Peas

ROAST PORK

Serves 20

- 10 lb. fresh ham
- 1 tbsp. Adobo Criollo seasoning per pound of pork
- 6 oz. vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp. salt

Massage the pork with the Adobo, oil and salt. Marinate, covered in the refrigerator for 5 hours or overnight. Roast the pork, skin side up, at 325 degrees for 3 hours; raise the temperature to 350 degrees for 1 hour more for crispy skin. Allow the roast pork to set for 20 minutes before carving.

Note: When roasting the pork it will reduce to half of the weight, because of the fat, water and bone content.

RICE AND PIGEON PEAS

Makes 6 to 8 servings

- 1 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp. Adobo Criollo seasoning
- 1 tbsp. Sofrito seasoning
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 cups long grain rice
- 6 oz. can pigeon peas
- 3 drops egg shade salt and pepper to taste

In a heavy bottom pot, heat the oil and sauté the Sofrito, Adobo and tomato paste. Add the pigeon peas to the liquid. Once the mixture simmers, stir it. Add the chicken stock, salt and pepper to taste. Once the liquid boils, add the rice. Reduce the heat when the rice and pigeon peas have absorbed the liquid and cover with a lid. Cook for 25 minutes. Remove the lid and stir the rice and pigeon peas. Serve hot.

ADOBO CRIOLLO SEASONING

- 3 oz. garlic, peeled
- 1 tsp. Caribbean oregano
- 1 tsp. black ground pepper
- 3 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 3 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 tbsp. salt

In a food processor, combine all ingredients until a puree forms. Keep refrigerated until you are ready to use it.

FRESH SOFRITO SEASONING

- 8 oz. cilantro, cleaned and chopped
- 4 oz. culantro, cleaned and chopped
- 4 oz. red peppers
- 4 oz. green peppers
- 4 oz. onions
- 4oz. sweet peppers (they look like avaneros, but sweet)
- 8 oz. vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp. salt

Combine all ingredients in a food processor for 30 seconds. Place in a clean container and save in the refrigerator until you are ready to use it. The Sofrito will last 2 weeks at 35-40 degrees, or frozen below zero degrees for up to a month.



Salsa Caterers & Special Events



**Max & Me's Signature
Boharat-Braised Boneless
Short Ribs**

Serves 16

- 1 cup boharat spice rub
- 10 lbs. boneless beef short ribs (preferably block-cut "chuck" type)
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 2 large onions, peeled and diced into 1-inch pieces
- 2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 bottle dry red wine
- 2 cups dried apricots
- 2 cups dried dates
- 16 cloves garlic, peeled and root removed
- 1 cup molasses
- 2 quarts veal stock, beef broth or beef bouillon
- salt and pepper

Combine 1 cup of the Boharat Spice Rub with a few tablespoons of water to make a thick paste. Smear over the short ribs, covering all surfaces. Wrap tightly in plastic and let marinate in the refrigerator for 24-48 hours.

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees. Season the marinated short ribs liberally with salt and pepper. Select a heavy-bottomed pan or Dutch oven just large enough to accommodate the short ribs in a single layer. Heat the oil in the pan over medium heat and sear the short ribs, turning with tongs or a fork, until all sides are nicely browned. Work in batches if necessary. (If the spices begin to burn, reduce the heat a little.) Transfer the seared short ribs to a separate platter. Add the diced onions and carrots to the pan and sauté, stirring often, until the onions are softened and beginning to brown. Pour the red wine into the hot pan and use a wooden spoon or spatula to scrape up any browned bits that have stuck to the bottom. Continue cooking over medium heat until about half the wine has evaporated. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the dried apricots, dates, garlic cloves and molasses and stir to distribute evenly. Return the short ribs to the pan and arrange in a single layer, overlapping a little if necessary. Add enough veal stock to come about half to three-quarters the

way up the sides of the meat. Cover the pan with a tight-fitting lid.

Place the pan in the preheated 300-degree oven and cook for about 2 1/2 to 3 hours, until the meat is easily pierced with a fork. Avoid opening the lid during this time.

Allow the short ribs to cool to room temperature in the cooking liquid, then carefully remove and slice into individual portions. Strain the braising liquid and reserve.

To serve, heat the portioned short ribs gently in the oven or on the stovetop along with a little of the reserved cooking liquid.

BOHARAT SPICE RUB

Makes 1 cup

- 1/2 cup allspice
- 2 tbsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp. ground cinnamon
- 2 tbsp. ground nutmeg
- 2 tsp. ground cardamom
- 2 tsp. ground cloves
- 2 tsp. ground ginger
- 2 tbsp. lemon zest or dried lemon peel
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt

Combine all ingredients. Store in a tightly sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Recipe developed by chefs Louis Chabot and Derek Steel of Max & Me Catering at the National Constitution Center.




Rave Catering - Günter Uger

**Rave's Signature
Japanese-Style Tuna
Tartar on Cucumber
Gunkan**

Serves 8

- 4 oz. Sashimi-grade tuna
- 1 tbsp. soy sauce (Kikkoman)
- 1 tbsp. sesame oil
- 1 tsp. rice wine vinegar
- Pinch kosher salt (Diamond)
- Pinch freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. black sesame
- 1/2 tsp. white sesame
- 1 hot house cucumber
- 2 tbsp. rice wine vinegar (to marinate the cucumber)

Brunoise the tuna. Halve the cucumber lengthwise and seed it using a spoon. Run a knife on the outside edge to make a flat surface. Rub cucumber with rice wine vinegar. Mix the soy sauce, sesame oil, rice wine vinegar, salt, pepper and sesame seeds with the tuna. Place the tuna onto the hollowed out cucumber. Slice cucumber 3/8" thick. Garnish with 1" julienned cucumber skin. 



Rave Catering - Günter Uger



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Max & Me Catering - Carol H. Feeley