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RESTAURANT CONSULTANTS PREDICT TOP DINING TRENDS FOR 2007

NEW YORK, NY – Restaurant consultants Joseph Baum & Michael Whiteman Co. have forecast ten major dining trends that impact how Americans will eat in the year ahead.

Joseph Baum & Michael Whiteman Co. creates high-profile restaurants around the world for hotels, restaurant companies, major museums and other consumer destinations. Their projects include the late Windows on the World, the Rainbow Room and five three-star restaurants in New York.

They predict that: Tropical superfruits, chef-driven steakhouses, Peruvian cuisine, ethical eating, exotic salts, wildly flavored chocolates, and molecular gastronomy are on the menu for the year ahead.

Their ten trends (and buzzwords) for 2007:

#1. HEALTH AND WELLNESS TOP THE MENU: As baby boomers accept their collective aging, dietary issues gain momentum not just for themselves but for their children. Look for:

- Rain forest “superfruits” and their extracts – açai, cupuaçu, goji berries, coffee berry extracts, guava, guyabana, guarana, mangosteen, among others – that are loaded with antioxidants. These will appear in shakes, smoothies, ice creams and other desserts.

- Fruit- and vegetable-crammed chips will grab market share from typical fatty-salty potato chips as manufacturers try sidestepping attacks on their obesity-causing mass market snacks. You'll find these on platters next to your upscale hamburgers, too.
- Better-for-you ice creams spiked with immune-boosting green tea, extra vitamins and minerals.
- Next-generation yogurts enhanced with fiber and protein that fool you into feeling full; and yogurts that claim to improve your complexion.
- Sodas with green tea, ginger and caffeine that theoretically make you lose weight, and vitamin-enhanced beers.
- Even Disney is cutting the fat and calories of munch-food in its theme parks (and cutting portions, as well).
- Wal-Mart's muscling into organic food will force mass-market restaurant chains to follow.
- Increasingly extravagant health claims on food packages.

#2. THE 'NEXT' CUISINE: Most pundits point to India . But we say that Indian food is too complicated for home cooks and too obscure for most restaurant goers. So our vote goes to Peru. Why? Its government is promoting the cuisine, which is a fabulous fusion of Italian, Japanese, Indian, Spanish and indigenous cookery; it is part of the next wave of specific regional cookery; Nobu came from there; its hot, spicy, creative flavors resonate with Americans; it has a growing cadre of "new cuisine" chefs, some coming to the US, who are updating old fashioned dishes. Most importantly: There are big enough clusters of Peruvian immigrants to make their restaurants and ingredients more visible. You can now buy frozen guinea pig, an Andean delicacy, in Houston, and Inka Cola is sold on aptly named Amazon.com.

#3. CHOCOLATE – HEALTH AND EXOTICA: America's going nuts for chocolate. Manufacturers are touting health benefits of the cacao bean (not mentioning the calories) -- from lowering blood pressure to elevating your mood to pumping you full of anti-oxidants (Google 'chocolate and health' and you get more than seven million citations!). Luxury chocolates seasoned with oddities like paprika, saffron, curry powder, wasabi and even cheese are enlivening menus and retail shops. Bitter, rich *drinking* chocolates are the rage among people who years ago abandoned those packages of powdered cocoa. Look for restaurants to add shots of scotch, brandy or liqueurs to hot chocolate; for upscale food shops to feature high-priced nibs and chunks for easy melting; and for supermarkets to double their baking-chocolate selections as brands like

Hershey's, Nestlé, Ghirardelli's, Scharffen Berger increase the cacao content of baking bars and trumpet their contents on the label. Next: Chocolate sommeliers.

#4. SENSORY DECEPTION: Last year's chefs labored to bring out the pure flavors of top-notch ingredients. Next year's chefs are dismantling the molecular structure of these same ingredients --whirling them in laboratory equipment with frightening sounding chemicals, dipping them in liquid nitrogen, inflating them with vacuum cleaners, fabricating cantaloupe caviar, deep-frying mayonnaise, turning sauces into powders, and spraying the air with flavors to suggest that what you're looking at isn't what you're about to eat. It is equivalent to a gastronomic IQ test in which typical diners are all below average. Next time you eat a chocolate bonbon for dessert and find that it's a blob of olive oil, you'll know you've been ambushed by a Molecular Gastronomer.

#5. BELLIES ARE BIG: Relentlessly searching for new things to serve, chefs are focusing on the nether regions of fish and animals. Pork belly, commonly called bacon, landed on menus all over the country last year, and savvy sushi chefs have long offered costly tuna belly, known as *toro*, to customers craving its prized fattiness. Next year menus will feature veal, salmon, swordfish and lamb bellies – all rich with fatty flavor, all (not coincidentally) cheap cuts that used to be trimmed away. They'll generally be braised, and sometimes braised and grilled. This definitely is restaurant food, so don't look for this stuff in your supermarket.

#6. ETHICAL EATING: “Fair trade” and “sustainable” are terms gaining traction with restaurant chefs and American consumers. People aspire to feel ethically comfortable about the food they buy: they want uncaged chickens and their eggs, humanely raised and slaughtered pork and beef, and environmentally friendly packaging. They're looking for locally grown products that reduce the global warming impact of moving food around the world. They don't want fisheries depleted for the sake of tuna steak on their plates. “Food miles” has entered the mainstream vocabulary. Starbucks' battle with Ethiopian coffee farmers has raised consumers' consciousness. There'll be more fair trade coffee and chocolate, more compassionately raised meats, more organic chickens and vegetables listed on menus and sold in food shops than probably exist in the world.

#7. THE IZAKAYAS ARE COMING: Move over tapas – make room for Japanese small plates. Venturesome restaurateurs are opening Japanese taverns, called *izakaya*, all over the world. These are homey places emphasizing modestly priced Japanese hors d’oeuvres washed down with oversized bottles of beer and overfilled glasses of sake. Some of the food may be unfamiliar but people are willing to risk \$5 or \$6 to experiment. You’ll find izakayas in London, Toronto, Vancouver, Seattle, LA (where, predictably, they’ve morphed into fusion menus), Omaha, Coral Gables and New York. The mavens behind P. F. Chang have opened a more Americanized version in Scottsdale, hoping to launch another chain.

#8. CHEF-DRIVEN STEAKHOUSES: Celebrity chefs are hanging their names on reinvented steakhouses. Wolfgang Puck, Bradley Ogden, Michael Mina, David Burke, among others, have launched newfangled beeferies that marry elements of serious cooking with simple but upscale grilling. More chefs are following this exercise in “brand extension.” When you get “sautéed snapper with edamame dumplings in a ragout of mussels” in a steakhouse, you know that the category is being redefined. Behind it: Hotels, casinos and shopping centers laying big money on these chefs because they’re competitively desperate to draw crowds.

#9. BURGERS WITH PEDIGREES: Rachel Ray is planning a hamburger restaurant. Laurent Tourandel has launched BLTBurger. Joe Bastianich, partner of Mario Batali, plans one serving sustainable beef. And several other famous chefs are toying with the notion. Perhaps they’re inspired by Hubert Keller’s Burger Bar in Las Vegas where, in addition to a standard hamburger, you blow your winnings on a \$60 Rossini Burger of Kobe beef, foie gras and truffles. Also watch for more Kobe or wagyu burgers (and hot dogs) than there are Kobe or wagyu cattle.

#10. SALT: Cardiologists aside, people are rediscovering what salt is all about. Not the powdery stuff in round cardboard boxes; we’re talking instead about crunchy, flakey, tinted crystals from out-of-the-way places that have migrated from restaurant kitchens to dinner tables at home. Pink salt mined in the Peruvian Andes, black lava salt from Cyprus, ruddy Alaea salt from Hawaii, gray sea salt, smoked salts (a big seller at Dean & DeLuca), herb-flavored salts, Tahitian vanilla sea salt, even

truffle-flavored salt. More restaurants will identify these on their menus – and upcharge accordingly. Salted caramel has become the rage among upscale pastry chefs.

BUZZWORDS: Marcona almonds, sweet potato vinegar, aji peppers, potatoes bravas, flavored salts, party-colored beets and other baby root vegetables, house-cured meats and fish, fresh curd cheese, slow-poached eggs, Spanish hams and sausages, humanely raised cattle, American caviar, pastel hued cauliflower, molecular gastronomy, yuzu, bahn mi Vietnamese sandwiches, gnudi, savory ice creams, wildly decorative cupcakes, slow cooking at home, matcha green tea powder.

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