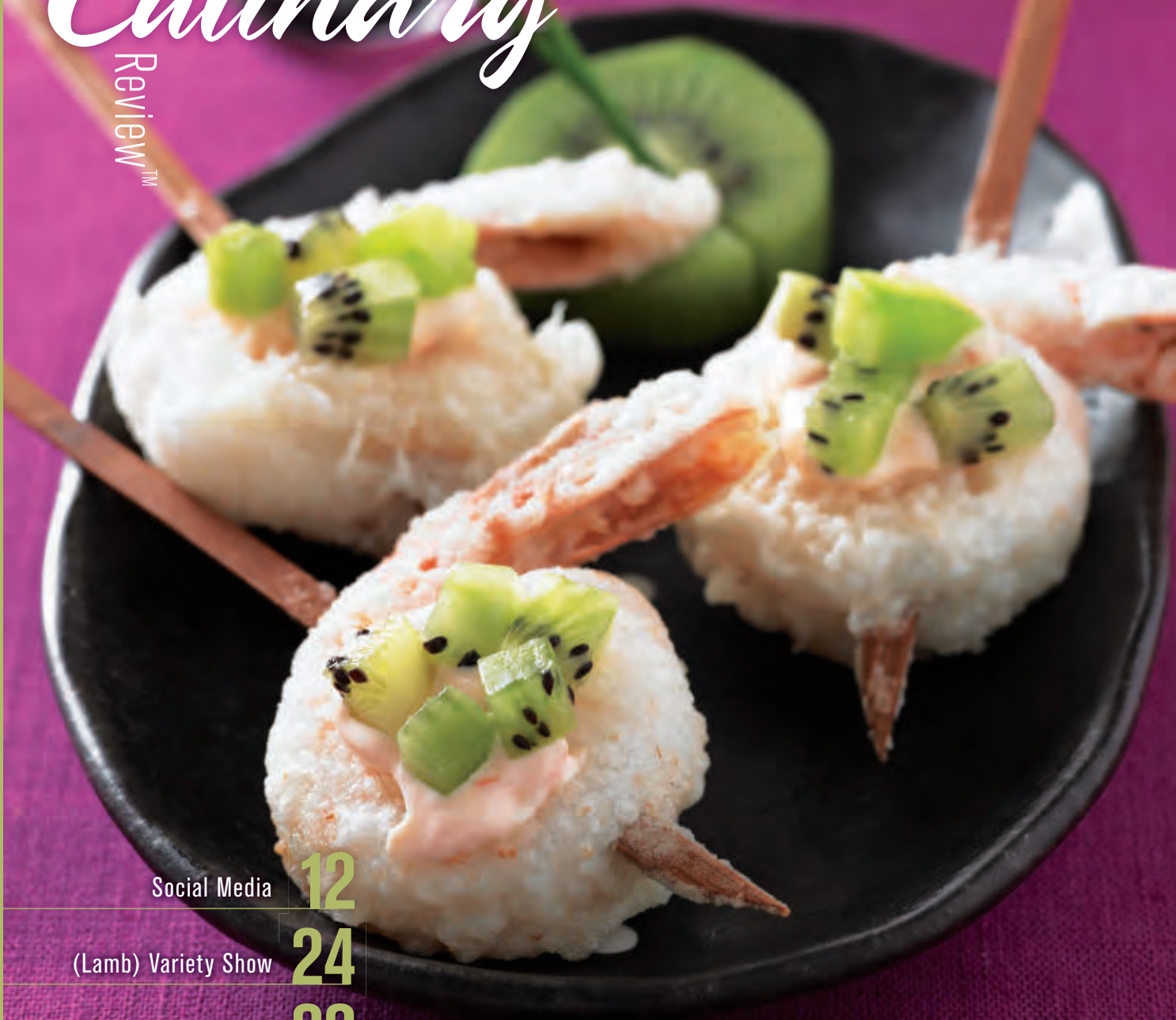


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Official Magazine of the American Culinary Federation

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FLAVORS



PUSHING *the* Appetizer ENVELOPE

ZESPRI® Kiwifruit

Just for fun—and profit—chefs create savory “lollipops,” foie gras corn dogs, cotton-candy spring rolls and more.

By Karen Weisberg

WHEN customers come to your venue for a drink, whether beer, wine or spirits, you have the perfect opportunity to show off a bit with your out-of-the-ordinary hors d'oeuvre or appetizers, small plates or starters, or whatever is small, affordable and yummy. That way, you'll probably entice them to stay—or at least to order another drink. In this economy, that sounds like a plan.

At Elway's at Cherry Creek in Denver, executive chef Tyler Wiard aims for

“interactive appetizers” to liven up his menu beyond the traditional shrimp or lobster cocktails and crab cakes. “The idea,” he says, “is to get a glass of wine, a cold beer and great conversation and camaraderie going at your table.”

Lamb Chop Fondue (\$16.50) does just that. It includes three Colorado lamb chops, or lamb “lollipops,” cut individually from the lamb rack, seasoned with Elway's steak seasoning, then seared. “The runner brings

Dante Boccuzzi plays on the lollipop theme with this tempura shrimp with kiwifruit confetti.

out the lamb on a bed of brioche croutons and diced roasted sweet potatoes cut the same size as the croutons,” Wiard says. “We set a small crock of green chili sauce atop a little tea light to keep the sauce warm. We provide small bamboo skewers so the guest can dip the croutons and roasted sweet potatoes, as well as the chops, in the sauce.”

AWESOME TOWERS

Wiard's most over-the-top interactive appetizers are the Hot Appetizer Tower



Steve Crecellius

Conversation and camaraderie are on the menu at Elway's when Tyler Wiard serves his "interactive appetizers," such as this cold-seafood tower with lobster, shrimp and oysters.

(\$39) and Cold Shellfish Tower (\$49), each typically serving three guests. "For a group of seven the other night, I did one Hot Tower (featuring lamb fondue, calamari and coconut shrimp) and one Cold Tower (shrimp cocktail, lobster cocktail and oysters)," Wiard says. "The custom-made towers definitely keep the guests engaged with the food and with each other. It's certainly an out-of-the-ordinary presentation."

Playing on the lollipop theme, Dante Boccuzzi, executive chef/owner of Dante, Cleveland, offers his Tempura Shrimp Lollipop with Kiwi Fruit Confetti (\$6) as a passed appetizer for a festive gathering. To prepare, he first whips up a dipping sauce of mayonnaise, sambal and lime juice, plus salt and pepper, to taste. Next, he splits shrimp

tails, rolls them tight to form a pinwheel, then secures each with a 7- to 12-inch bamboo skewer to form a lollipop. "Then, we roll the skewered shrimp in 1 cup of tempura flour and shake off the excess. To a second cup of tempura flour, we add 1 cup of cornstarch and 1½ cups of ice water until the batter is slightly lumpy," Boccuzzi explains. "We dip the skewered shrimp in the batter, shake off the excess, and deep-fry in 350°F oil for a minute or two until it's crisp and golden. Finally, we top each shrimp with about a teaspoon of sambal mayo and peeled/diced kiwifruit."

APPETIZER—OR DESSERT?

Boccuzzi offers his take on an appetizer that tastes like dessert—his Foie Gras Donuts. "I do this for parties as a passed hors d'oeuvre or plated," he says. "You'd get three of them, each about two inches in diameter (\$6-\$8 for the plate)."

So, it's like a jelly donut, but the filling is foie gras mousse plus rhubarb compote (a spring variation), or perhaps fig jam or even Concord grape jam—both fillings to be used are kept at the ready in separate piping bags. Immediately after frying the donuts, Boccuzzi rolls each one in sugar and spices, usually coriander, cinnamon, cloves and a bit of cardamom.

Netsanet Alemayehu wows guests with these spicy drunken chicken drumettes, flavored with spices from her native Ethiopia, at Sheba Piano Lounge.

"I purchase the foie gras, marinate it with sweet wine (such as Muscado or brandy), sear it, purée the whole thing, then add whole butter to make it richer," he says. "The result is the foie gras mousse that goes into a piping bag. When it's needed for service, we'll fry the donut, roll in spices, fill with both fillings and serve it hot. You can't make them too big because it's just too rich," he warns.

If it's foie gras customers crave, then Peter Rudolph, executive chef at Madera at Rosewood Sand Hill, Menlo Park, Calif., has an equally out-of-the-ordinary offering: Foie Gras Corn Dogs. "It's one of the most fun things now," he says. "We're taking foie gras, cutting it into ½-inch rectangles, then marinating it 1-2 hours prior to putting sticks in and freezing it overnight."

Just before service, Rudolph and his staff dip the frozen-on-the-stick foie gras in a light cornmeal batter, fry, and top with a daub of *fruitsa di mostarda*. "It's so sweet and so tangy and a play on 'culture.' We just made it up," he says.

Rudolph notes his fondness for juxtaposing various clear-cut textures, and particularly enjoys working with avocado. "Avocado has a texture unto itself and a fatty/smooth mouthfeel, so it fits well with fluke and other seafood," he says.

His Tempura of Rock Shrimp with Shichimi, plus avocado, works well as a passed hors d'oeuvre, he points out. To prepare, Rudolph stacks small pieces of tempura rock shrimp with a cube of avocado, with three repeats per bamboo skewer. "It's comfortable, with its familiar ingredients, but instead of mayo, we've got avocado to provide that creamy texture," he says.



National Honey Board

FLAVORS



Hass Avocado Board

Seared fluke with avocado on the menu at Madera takes advantage of the fatty/smooth mouthfeel of avocado that Peter Rudolph says goes well with seafood.

a drizzle of truffle honey. Now, topped with a sprinkle of crushed nuts, they're ready to serve on rectangular plates with toasted brioche triangles, garnished with a brûléed poached pear or other fruit.

"The fruit is torched and the cheese is hot out of the oven," Gin explains. "As long as the cheese is kept cold beforehand, then heated to golden on the outside, it will be soft and pliable for spreading."

ETHIOPIAN SPICES

Since Netsanet Alemayehu, chef/owner of Sheba Piano Lounge opened her restaurant in San Francisco some four years ago, the locals have discovered they can easily become addicted to her native Ethiopian spices. "Guests love our Drunken Chicken Drumettes (five or six pieces for \$8.50)," she says. "We make them with a marinade of bourbon, honey, teriyaki glaze, tomato paste, Ranch dressing, olive oil, berbere, mitmita, flour, salt, black pepper and cardamom powder."

After the drumettes marinate overnight, Alemayehu bakes them at 350°F for an hour, basting with additional honey for a richer color. "A lot of people make chicken drumettes, but guests like the spiciness as well as the bourbon in our recipe—and spicy appetizers encourage them to order more beverages."

Vegetarian, meat or crab sambusas are currently her most popular appetizers or hors d'oeuvre. The vegetarian sambusas boast a filling of lentils, garlic, green onion and jalapeño, all sautéed and wrapped in a pastry shell shaped in a triangle, then deep-fried. She grinds the meat herself for the

meat sambusas, adding red onion, green onion, habañero pepper, garlic, cardamom and Marsala wine prior to rolling the mixture in a pastry shell and deep-frying.

ESPRIT DE BRIE

Faced with the challenge of creating items to serve about 100 guests, buffet-style, and with a wheel of Brie on hand, Kevin Gin, executive chef/partner at Bridges Restaurant & Bar in Danville, Calif., cut out the center and wrapped the remaining whole donut-shaped wheel in phyllo, leaving the center open. He froze it for 15-20 minutes, baked it off in the oven, then placed it on a platter, filling the center with dried fruit and assorted nuts.

"I drizzled the phyllo with truffle honey—that is, an orange honey infused with truffle oil and truffle shavings—then set out plates along with baskets of fresh bread, crackers and toasted crostini to serve yourself," Gin says.

The center-of-the-wheel-of-Brie concept has become a plated appetizer and is regularly featured on the Bridges menu. Gin slices 2-ounce wedges from the center and wraps them in phyllo, bakes them off for about four minutes, to order, then adds

Using Brie as a passed hors d'oeuvre is a third iteration on the Brie theme. Gin cuts ½-ounce squares of Brie, then wraps each in phyllo that's been sprinkled with crushed nuts. (It's definitely labor-intensive, but worth it, he says.) Each morsel includes a layer of cheese out of the oven set on a round of brioche, with a drizzle of truffle honey on the Brie and a tiny sliver of brûlée poached pear on top, with the honey serving as the tasty glue to keep the pear in place.

COTTON-CANDY COOL

Before taking his current position as executive chef at José Andrés Catering with Ridgewells, Bethesda, Md., Katsuya Fukushima was instrumental in opening the critically acclaimed minibar by José Andrés in Washington, D.C., as well as The Bazaar by José Andrés in Los Angeles (named *Esquire's* 2009 Best New Restaurant of the Year). In both venues, Fukushima played around with cotton candy as an hors d'oeuvre component, as in foie gras cotton candy.

Giving full credit for inspiration to Andrés and to Ferrán Adrià, head chef at El Bulli in Roses, Spain, Okinawa-born Fukushima has now created a Vietnamese Spring Roll with

Peanut Cotton Candy. "I took everything I love about fresh Vietnamese spring rolls, including the sweet/vinegary dipping sauce, and made it into an ode to a spring roll," he says.

Well aware that cotton candy melts with moisture, Fukushima cryovaced his fresh cucumber and carrots, cut to matchstick size, and marinated in pickling liquid. "Air pockets are removed in the cryovac machine, forcing the pickling liquid into the vegetables, so they don't sit in the liquid and become mushy," he explains.

Before service, he layers numerous stacks side-by-side, each stack comprised of shrimp chips, carrot and cucumber sticks, fresh basil and cilantro leaves, plus dry bean sprouts and dry radish sprouts, topped with crushed peanuts. At service, several assistants step in to help with spinning cotton candy and laying out handfuls of it (about 8½ x 11 inches) over each stack of ingredients.

"You carefully roll each stack, cocooned in cotton candy, into a rectangular shape, but keep it nice and light and ethereal," Fukushima says. "After wrapping, sprinkle roasted ground peanuts on top of the cotton

candy—whatever sticks, sticks. In the mouth, it's a nice, light sweetness, then you bite down to the crunch of veggies, the shrimp chip, the basil, etc. It all comes together. It's a play on a spring roll—creative, tasty and it's fun."

The pickling liquid (used to marinate the carrots and cucumbers) incorporates fish sauce, lime juice, chilies, salt, etc., but not sugar, because the cotton candy provides the sweetness.

EGGS-TRAORDINARILY DEVILED

At The Saint Andrew's Golf Club in Hastings-On-Hudson, N.Y., members and guests—about 100 per day midweek, 200-300 each Thursday through Saturday—know they can count on executive chef/club manager Patrick Wilson, CEC, CCA, not to stuff them too full on oversized hors d'oeuvre during special receptions.

While his philosophy in preparing an array of mini morsels is "one bite, one swallow," it's hard to stop nibbling. Take, for example, his Deviled Egg with Barsac Jelly, Smoked Bay Scallop and Chili Threads. "We slice brioche bread about the size of a quarter, use a small pastry tip to pipe around the edge with deviled egg

yolk (a mixture of mayo and Coleman's mustard), then pipe on Barsac jelly," Wilson says. "We set a small, smoked-in-house baby scallop on top of the jelly within the center of the egg yolk, adding a garnish of a few chili threads."

With the sweetness of the jelly, the saltiness of the brined-and-smoked scallop, plus some heat from the chili, it's perfect for a champagne reception, he says.

To add a bit of Indian spice to his hors d'oeuvre offering, Wilson purchases wafer-thin (about 1¼ inches in diameter) black pepper pappadams from a New York-based specialty store. "We fry them, then I make a rosette from smoked salmon," he says. "I pipe horseradish sour cream sauce into the center to hold the smoked salmon rosette to the pappadam."

Served cold, they can be assembled 20-30 minutes before service (to hold at room temperature) so the pappadam doesn't get soft.

"Again, it's 'one bite, one swallow,'" Wilson says. "But go ahead—take two. They're small."

New York-based award-winning journalist Karen Weisberg has covered the issues and luminaries of the food-and-beverage world—both commercial and noncommercial—for more than 25 years.

Here, Patrick Wilson's deviled eggs with Barsac jelly, smoked bay scallop and chili threads lives up to his appetizer philosophy of "one bite, one swallow," guaranteed to keep guests at The Saint Andrews Golf Club satisfied.



Tracy Donaldson