

Food and Beverage

Future Trends - From Sinful Past

by John Nick and Barry Morgan

It would be fair to say that the 60's and 70's catered to that need to indulge. We would eat too much, drink too much, smoke too much, play hard and exercise only when absolutely required. Yes, they were the good old days.

Many of us can recall attending the weddings of baby boomers, including our own, at golf and country clubs some 25 years ago. The blue velvet suit worn by the groom, shirts with large collars secured with wide flamboyant ties under larger than life hairstyles. Travolta was strutting his stuff to the BeeGees 'Staying Alive' in Saturday Night Fever, and Archie Bunker was the armchair philosopher. We now reminisce over the tacky plaid clothes that are hauled out of storage by our children for their theme night activities and lie about our attendance at Woodstock. Who amongst us could deny the thrill of attempting at least once, to adorn these treasures of a bygone age, just to be ridiculed by our observers. Ah the joys of the past.... Oh yeah baby, who says Austin Powers and shag carpet were fictional?

In the 70's our parents were at the peak of their careers, planning an enviable retirement, while we struggled with the plans of owning our own home and raising children. Yet looking back, there was a certain naiveté to the expected sequence of life - get an education; find a good company; work hard; get promoted and retire. Is it any wonder that the 'silent generation' that experienced the depression as children and war as young adults would promote stability as a way of life? With the prospect of becoming grandparents the 'silent generation' that could afford to indulge in life, did. Their children, the 'baby boomers' who have rarely gone without came to expect the best from life.

The indulgence continued through to the early eighties. Fashionable restaurants thronged with patrons consuming endless high calorie, high cholesterol entrees. Naturally one would insist on washing it down with a glass or two of Chardonnay or Cabernet. City clubs were thriving havens for those, now infamous, two-hour martini luncheons. Meanwhile golf clubs that catered to corporate tournaments and weddings served heavy meals and abundant alcohol to those who insisted on supporting their indulgence. Rest assured, these patrons were not discussing their lipid profiles at the table.

By the mid-eighties personal computers had established the information age that called attention in the media to a number of unacceptable social issues. Poor eating and living habits; drinking and driving; smoking in food service establishments; intoxication in public; general and personal liability. We should have, but who could have predicted the impact that addressing these issues would impart on the food and beverage industry over the following decade.

By the end of the eighties a healthier lifestyle had become fashionable. Those who chose to live "high on the hog" over the past two decades began to challenge the principle that ignorance was bliss. It was high time to move out of the pen and into the garden. This was a revolution on indulgence and an evolution to a new appreciation that you are what you eat...and drink.

Yes indeed the years have taken their toll, and given half a chance gravity rears it's ugly head to remind us all, of the past culinary indiscretions. Baby boomers who have taken up the challenge to change for the better have significantly altered their shopping baskets throughout the nineties, which in turn has altered the eating habits of their children. Those of us who are now actively exercising and conscientiously pursuing a healthier lifestyle pay little credence to those who declare that there is nothing to eat if there isn't a great steak on the menu. To those we say..."au contraire mes amis!"

Well here we stand some 25 years later, staring at the mirror and lamenting the sins of the past. Our wives complain that our shadows have now become formidable. It's scary to think that our parents were our age when we were getting married and now here we are, soon to become the father of the bride. Recent life style and diet changes in the family removes any chance of the prime rib and Yorkshire pudding fare being duplicated from our wedding. Today's brides are more likely to select chicken, seafood, salads or pastas for their special day. Families in general are reducing their intake of red meats by substituting chicken and seafood items. It is common today for couples to share an entrée or substitute an entrée for two or more shared appetizers with dessert to follow when they dine out.

We are faced today with an explosion of specialty foods, exotic fruits and vegetables, a wide variety of herb breads, pastas, micro beers and soft drinks. We would never have dreamed of serving bottled water to our guests twenty-five years ago. To whet the palate prior to dinner, bottled water is now often preferred. Diet and health conscious individuals know the value of several glasses of water a day and judging by the selection available, the thirst for new product is not declining. Why give it away, when you can sell it at the tableside and increase your profits.

The beverage industry in soft drinks has exploded over the last two to three years offering multiple flavors in both carbonated and non-carbonated products. Cream sodas are popular with the kids as well as those old enough to recall the fifties. Micro-breweries across Canada are producing outstanding products for their local markets to enjoy. The saying that every cloud has a silver lining is no exception for the Canadian wine industry which has produced many exceptional wines over the past decade for Canadians to savor in their own backyard. With so many products to choose from, operators must be wary of overstocking. Remember the objective is to turn over your "whole" beverage inventory as quickly as possible, to maximize profits.

To be successful today you must recognize that the tastes of the indulgent "silent generation," the aging "baby boomer," the self-reliant "generation x," and now the "baby buster" generation are all in a state of flux.

The bride and her mother today have an enviable but more difficult job when selecting the style of reception and subsequent menu items. A good meal will be separated from a memorable one if the regular dinner roll is replaced with a variety of warm fresh baked herb breads, and served with spiced and flavored low fat spreads, or an oil and balsamic vinegar mix. Pitas and wraps have sparked a total revision of the sandwich sections of menus and are a welcome alternative for hot and cold hors d'oeuvres. The bride who likely has her eye on a CEO position somewhere, may welcome less traditional suggestions: a chilled strawberry soup ideal for her summer wedding, or seared tuna on a bed of wild greens topped with a tropical fruit salsa dressing. As our customers become exposed to new tastes and customs of other parts of the globe and our competitors try new things to capture the interest of an increasingly discerning marketplace we are challenged to keep pace. But keep pace we must.

The traditional wedding buffet for example must now show depth and imagination and is likely to reflect a theme or topical motif in its presentation and decoration. Even at a golf tournament nowadays, formerly standard fare such as potato and macaroni salads, are no longer mainstays on any but the most basic offerings. Far more likely will be platters of grilled vegetables and fresh tropical fruit salads, all attractively presented in colorful china. Garden vegetables are likely to be fresh and tossed in herbed oil. Creams and mayonnaise have given way to yogurt dill dips and other flavorful low fat dressings.

Plated meals have undergone a revolution over the past few years with fusion cooking arising from the marriage of traditional North American fare to the less familiar foods and ingredients from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Now we expect to find flavors and textures from all over the globe presented artistically in a vertical presentation on a wide plate, with only a hint of the traditional meat and potatoe combination.

For all those party animals who have committed to a lifetime of culinary pleasure, we have news for you. All this does not necessarily mean that the simple dishes of yesterday are gone completely and we have banished the excesses of the past forever. In fact, the gate to the garden has been left open, just in case you change your mind.

The current trends have affected more than just what we serve. All those exotic foods require some pretty sophisticated equipment and if you think the kitchen is not high tech, drop by your nearest fast food restaurant and take a peek at what the teenagers behind the line are jockeying around. Thermal air pots have replaced the often-burned glass coffee silex at many establishments . Alto Sham

ovens allow meats to be slowly cooked for the highest possible yield and held for several hours. Smokers, woks, combi-ovens, and steamers are becoming common place in the kitchens of today. Point of sale equipment has come a long way too. It is rare to find an operation today which does not have a computerized system and some are even carried by the service staff directly to the table. Inventories are being done on palm sized computers and weekly orders are key punched by the chef over the Internet to their suppliers' offices. Make sure all your equipment is Y2K compliant!

Food service staff in the nineties are technically savvy. They have been raised on a steady diet of YTV and video games and are uncertain about their future. They, like their generation X managers, demand involvement in your business and expect leadership rather than control from those above them. Their grandparents had an employment contract that exchanged loyalty, hard work and dedication for job security and a comfortable retirement. Today, no employer can guarantee security beyond a few years hence. But hard work and dedication are still expected and in fact an essential requirement of an empowered workplace. Therefore, to hold up their end of the contract a company must now be willing to create an environment where their employees can grow and develop personal interests and skills. Skills that will provide them with a future, in all likelihood, somewhere else.

In a little more than three years many baby boomers will begin retiring at the age of 60. It seems such a short journey from entering the work force, to leaving it. The challenge for boomers in management will be to service other boomers in retirement. The level of tolerance for a "faux pas" in the clubhouse will seriously diminish when boomers retire. They will be more demanding, so get ready baby; Austin is about to disembark!

Although memorable, our experiences from the 60's and 70's seem to be of little consequence in the 90's. Similarly, today's ring bearers and flower girls will likely look back on the 90's with equal qualification for, "The Times They Are a Changing." With this in mind, it is imperative that you as operators must keep up with the trends or perish. Competition is merciless and today's customers have become sophisticated in their tastes. "Good enough," isn't enough anymore.

Who knows what the ring bearer and flower girls might expect at their wedding twenty years hence? However, one thing is sure. If prospective brides continue to select golf and country clubs for their receptions, the venues they choose will most likely be the ones that kept up. The others sadly, will be for the most part merely memories of their former owners. A forgotten legacy to a stability of the past, which lost relevance as the generations advanced.