

WHY HOTELS ARE TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT F&B OFFERINGS

By **kostuch** - September 11, 2017



Canada's foodservice sector is a challenging one in which to thrive, so why would a hotel want to pour resources into its F&B options when there are so many other less-saturated areas of the guest experience to focus on? As it turns out, when done right, F&B offerings can significantly elevate a hotel's profitability and long-term success. The partnership between Bar George and Montreal's two-month-old luxury boutique hotel, Le Mount Stephen — a 90-guestroom property built in Montreal's historic George Stephen House — is one example. Bar George, perhaps Toronto-based Oliver & Bonacini's most ambitious endeavor to date, aims to please both the ultra food-savvy locals of Montreal as well as tourists from across the globe. This is by no means an easy undertaking in a province where hotel restaurants have historically been taboo. "The Montreal market, in terms of hotel restaurants, is pretty grim," Marco Gucciardi, GM of Bar George, explains. "They don't do very well with Montreal locals. For me, being a Montreal local and knowing what restaurant diners want, under no circumstances did I ever want to be part of a hotel restaurant. For us it's taboo. Generally speaking, locals here don't go out for dinner in a hotel restaurant. So that was another challenge for us, to create something special and bring down that misconception."

Gucciardi cites uniqueness and quality as the determining factors behind Bar George's success so far. O&B's corporate executive chef, Anthony Walsh, and the restaurant's chef de cuisine, Kevin Ramasawmy, have taken classic English fare and added a distinct French-Canadian flare, which Walsh describes as being "unapologetically Québécois."

In Toronto, The Drake Hotel is continuing to innovate its F&B offerings by adding a new 8,000-sq.-ft culinary space to its arsenal. Drake Commissary is designed as a destination for food enthusiasts and a space where the company tests out new menu items that eventually make it to its numerous properties, including the Drake Devonshire.

“We’ve always had a centralized commissary kitchen that has provided our properties with a lot of the basics but, about a year ago, we found a space where we could really expand this,” says Sarah Lyons, director of F&B at The Drake. “It was an opportunity for us to remain handcrafted and really close to our culinary offerings at all our properties.” The Drake Commissary, Lyons explains, acts as a springboard from which The Drake can evolve its food-and-beverage items for all of its properties.

ROOM-SERVICE REVIVAL

According to CBRE, room-service revenues have dropped by more than 25 per cent since the last recession, propelled mainly by the misconception that the option is fraught with extravagance that’s outside a guest’s spending budget — especially when compared to other options in the city. That’s why hotels are now partnering with cities’ most popular dining spots to bring a restaurant’s gastronomic experience to the guest who would rather dine in. In August, the Chicago Tribune reported on the trend by looking at three recent room-service partnerships between a hotel and a restaurant: the Kinzie Hotel in Chicago’s Near North neighbourhood has joined forces with next-door eatery, Public House, which is now the sole provider of room-service meals for the hotel; upon opening a new location on the ground floor of the Chicago Athletic Association Hotel, Shake Shack inked a deal with the hotel to bring its burgers and shakes to guestrooms, marking the restaurant chain’s first foray into the hotel sector; and Hotel Chicago on the Near West Side, which opened this April, commissioned health-focused Eat Purely, to bring a handful of its organic options to guests, available within 30 minutes of ordering.

Beyond Hotel Chicago, general consumer demand for healthier food options continues to shape F&B trends in hotels across North America. In April, the Hilton Garden Inn announced a revamping of its food-and-beverage options to meet guests’ evolving dining standards. New offerings will be healthier, more organic and will feature bold new flavours and all-day availability in a more social setting. More specifically, the brand announced new retail spaces with enhanced grab-and-go items; a refreshed breakfast buffet, featuring an open-display kitchen for cooked-to-order food alongside daily specials; and in-room dining options that will consist of grab-and-go items.

Just as “healthy” and “organic” continue to define consumers’ values when it comes to food, coffee maintains its reputation as the catchword in beverages. According to a recent study

conducted by Forbes, caffeinated drinks still reign as the most popular beverage choice for guests, thanks in no small part to millennials who are rapidly surpassing baby boomers as the largest consumer demographic. Today, the focus rests heavily on nitro-brew, cold brew and unique milk substitutes, but the unwavering demand for caffeinated beverages leaves lots of space for further innovations to take off in the future within hotels' F&B teams.

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