

N A T I O N ' S

WWW.NRN.COM

# Restaurant News®

AUGUST 6, 2012 • A PENTON MEDIA PUBLICATION



## CONSUMER PICKS

Diners rate their experiences in our annual survey.  
See what they really think of you and your competitors.

# Small plates let consumers tailor their meals

BY BRET THORN

Americans' appetite for snacks is growing, and restaurants are responding with expanded selections of between-meal nibbles designed to bolster weak dayparts and coax business from diners not hungry enough for a full meal.

Nearly half of all consumers have a snack at least twice a day, according to a recent study by Chicago-based research firm Technomic. That number has nearly doubled since 2010, the restaurant consulting firm said. Likewise, more than one-third of consumers told Technomic they generally skip one meal a day or replace it with a snack.



Although most of those snacks are eaten at home, often in front of the TV, about three in 10 are eaten elsewhere, giving restaurants plenty of opportunity to attract

guests with smaller items. Restaurants have apparently gotten a bit better at selling to snacking customers, who now buy more than 20 percent of their between-meal

**Pollo Campero is now offering three types of empanadas — small savory pastries — for \$1.49 each.**

foods in foodservice operations instead of retail, compared to 17 percent in 2010.

In recent years many of the large restaurant chains have added snacks, such as McDonald's Snack Wraps or Quiznos' Flatbread Sammies, and at the bar the humble dish of mixed nuts has given way to menus featuring gourmet bites and smaller versions of full meals.

Offering these small, savory bites can be great for the business, operators say, as they often have relatively low food costs

and can boost check averages, even when it's not a traditional meal time.

Guatemala-based chicken chain Pollo Campero recently joined the fray at its 50 locations in the United States, where in July it introduced a line of three empanadas.

"It has a lot of versatility, it's very portable, easy to eat on the run, and it has a lot of dayparts in which it can be relevant," Pollo Campero's marketing vice president Lisken Kastalanych said of the savory pastries.

Pollo Campero launched three flavors for \$1.49 each, or three plus a side dish for \$6.99.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

## Small plates, big deal

*Innovative snack items let consumers create their own dining experience*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The Spicy Chicken Empanada is filled with Pollo Campero's signature chicken along with green tomatillo salsa, Monterey-Jack cheese and cilantro. The Citrus Chicken combines chicken with grilled onions, tamarind sauce and shredded Monterey Jack.

The vegetarian version combines black beans with Monterey-Jack cheese, cilantro, diced onion and chipotle chiles.

At Kaleidoscope Bistro & Pub in Atlanta, there's an entire section of the menu, called "Tastes," devoted to snacks. It includes items such as Spicy Berkshire Pork Rinds with togarashi, lime, and pink Himalayan salt for \$3; house-roasted cashews and peanuts with Thai chile and scallions for \$4; classic Southern pimento cheese for \$4; and Pub Fries, cooked in duck fat and served with bacon mayonnaise, for \$5. Steak sauce and honey mustard are available on the side for 25 cents each.

"Our original idea of putting the snacks on the menu was to let the guests tailor the experience to whatever they want," owner Doug Gross said.

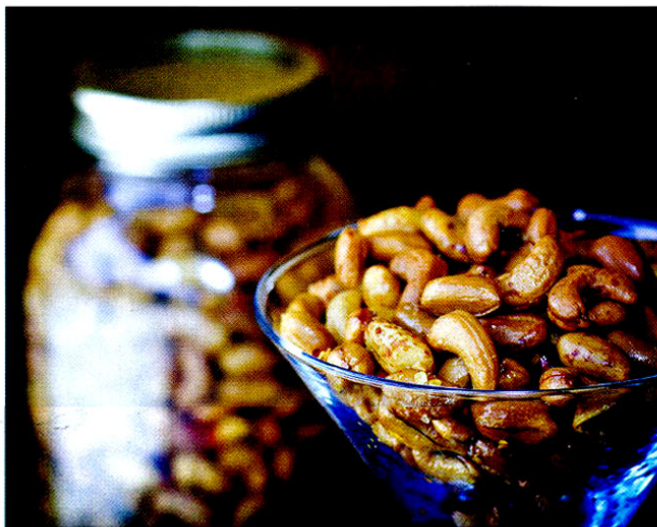
Since Kaleidoscope specializes in craft beer that can cost \$8, \$9 or \$10 apiece, Gross said his guests might not want to buy a whole meal on top of that.

On the other hand, "people who aren't sure they want a drink and then get something salty might decide they do want a drink," he added.

Paul Fehribach, chef of Big Jones, a restaurant in Chicago featuring Southern cuisine, said flavorful, popular snacks can be great for the bottom line, especially since many of them are made from low-food-cost items.

He prepares classic Southern snacks such as boiled peanuts, which are made from fresh peanuts harvested at this time of year.

Fehribach boils them in heavily salted water with cayenne pepper for about four hours.



**Kaleidoscope Bistro & Pub offers a selection of snack foods on its menu, including house-roasted peanuts and cashews, above. Meanwhile, the entire menu at The Hawthorne is composed of bar snacks, an assortment of which is pictured right.**

"They're like edamame," he said. "At this time of year people line up to buy that stuff," he added.

He charges \$5 for a 1-pound serving, which costs him about 80 cents.

He also offers cheese straws, for which he adds Cheddar cheese and a little blue cheese to a fairly classic cracker recipe. He pipes the dough through a cookie press, then bakes the straws.

"It's one of the most labor-intensive things that we do, but for a 12 percent food cost I'll do that extra work," he said.

He sells 4- to 5-ounce portions for \$5.

Fehribach makes charcuterie from whole hogs and also makes the skin into pork rinds. He parboils the skin, completely scrapes off the fat, and then boils the skin in salty water for about six hours. Then he dehydrates it.

At service he drops the skins in "smoking hot" 425-degree oil, and they puff up like shrimp crackers. They're \$5 per order.

Like many chefs these days, Fehribach also serves house-made pickles, made from such

produce as wax beans, green tomatoes and purple okra, he said.

Pickled eggs are a hit at Cole's, the Los Angeles eatery that claims to have originated the French-dip sandwich.

For that item, hard-boiled eggs are soaked for a week in the same pickling brine that's used to make the restaurant's spicy pickles — made of water, vinegar, jalapeño and habaño chiles, mustard seed and pickling spice.

They're garnished with a blend of paprika and cayenne pepper and sold for 91 cents apiece.

"The eggs are in jars at the bar," said Jeff Marino, director of restaurant operations for 213 Nightlife, which owns Cole's. "People are a little hesitant to try them, but then you see them having two, three or four more," he said.

Deviled eggs are a hit at The Hawthorne, a Boston cocktail bar where the whole menu is comprised of bar snacks.

"It's a comfortable but elegant

setting, and we wanted to follow suit with food that had an element of sophistication, but also [was] pretty shareable, pretty snackable, pretty craveable," chef Jeremy Sewall said.

That includes items like baked pretzel knots — made in the hotel's bake shop — sprinkled with sea salt and served with bourbon mustard. A five-

tropub in New York, has an entire 19-item toast menu ranging in price from \$7 for selections such as crumpets with lemon curd or butter, marmite, or pears with blue cheese and a port reduction, to \$13 for potted crab with tomato powder, steak tartare, or chicken liver and foie gras.

At Jasper's Corner Tap & Kitchen, a Kimpton restaurant in San Francisco, chef Adam Carpenter serves up salt-cod corn dogs made with a paste of

roughly equal parts salt cod and potato. To that Carpenter adds smoked paprika and roasted garlic purée. He dusts it in cornmeal and deep-fries it. He serves two 2-ounce pieces with a house-made tomato jam for \$4.

"We try to make our snack menu approachable and fun," Carpenter said.

He also makes a spicy beer sausage, starting with Kurobuta pork butt that he brines overnight in local beer with house-made togarashi spice, Malaysian sambal, chile flakes, black pepper, salt, brown sugar and pink curing salt.

He grinds the pork piece order is \$8.

His classic deviled eggs are spruced up with a variety of embellishments, including crispy prosciutto, a Parmesan and black-pepper tuile, or toasted grains such as faro and bulgur, which provide a little crunch. Sewall sells them for \$3.

The Hawthorne also offers an assortment of toasts, a trendy new category of hip canapés that can be anything from mini-Reuben sandwiches to bruschetta-like bites topped with tomatoes, organic peas and radishes. They range in price from \$6 to \$9 for three to five pieces.

Jones Wood Foundry, a gas-



with some of the brine, then whips in more beer and pipes it into sausage casings. He vacuum-packs it with bacon fat and cooks it sous vide for three hours.

He then grills it and serves it whole as a hot dog or cuts it into five pieces and serves it with spicy mustard for \$5.

"We sell enough sausage the whole night that we can keep some of them grilled [in advance]. It's kind of nice that we can offer something that takes a long time to prepare at a really fast pace," he said. ■

bret.thorn@penton.com