

Restaurant Business

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ISSUES & ANSWERS FOR THE GROWTH-MINDED RESTAURATEUR

Menu Strategies • 53

MENU SAMPLER

UPSCALE VERMILION

Chicago, IL

Five-Spice Scallops \$12
With spicy jalfrezi sauce.
Bajian Acaraje \$10
Brazilian bean croquettes
studded with cumin roasted
shrimp, served with spicy
pomegranate ginger chutney.

MIDPRICED

LIME

San Francisco, CA

Pork Quesadilla \$7
Braised pork in rich mole sauce
with mango salsa.
Ricotta Gnocchi \$7
Shiitake mushrooms, thyme,
parmesan cheese.

HARD ROCK CAFE

Orlando, FL-based

Bloody Mary Shrimp \$9
Basted with pesto sauce
and served with bloody
mary salsa.
Wings Around the World \$9
A dozen chicken wings tossed
with three sauces: classic,
Moroccan, and Asian-sesame.

MEET THE CHEF

Tapas' Passage to India

THE TWO-YEAR-OLD VERMILION fuses contemporary Indian and Latin cuisine, so it's not too surprising that tapas show up on the late-night lounge menu. What is surprising to executive chef Maneet Chauhan is the amazing response they've gotten. "I can't seem to make enough," she says of the four choices she offers everyday. They might include a passionfruit ceviche, Malabar crab cakes, a spinach empanada, and always the Mysore lamb chops. "These are so popular, they have to stay on the menu," Chauhan says of the chops, which are marinated and then tandoor-cooked.

During its recent Bollywood festival, Vermilion served Indian snacks and street food nightly until 3 a.m., including chickpea fritters with mango mint chutney and stuffed flatbread. Thirst quenchers on hand included cucumber-mint martinis, tamarind margaritas, and herbed white sangria. Hooray for Bollywood!

RECIPE ON PAGE 56.



MANEET CHAUHAN
Vermilion
Chicago, IL



COURTESY OF VERMILION.

lots of shareable items and finger foods.

"Composed, individual plates are not the way guests want to eat here after hours," points out Oliver Wharton, director of Restaurant Operations for the Light Group, which runs Fix. "It's a place people go to satisfy their cravings...to get their 'fix.'" Towards that end, the menu boasts such signatures as "perfect, one-bite" Buffalo Style Chicken Wings (\$14); Smoked Salmon & Osetra Caviar Poppers with warm scallion blinis (\$19); a three-some of Kobe Sliders with aged cheddar, grilled onions, and spiced fries (\$21); and a sampler of Crispy Rock Shrimp, Ipswich Clams, and Calamari to dip in creamy ponzu, Thai chili, and tartar sauces (\$14).

In true Vegas style, "wow" presentation is part of the package, too. Customers gape

as the poppers come to the table speared on cocktail forks that fit vertically into a custom-designed tray, or a unique tiered stand goes by holding a vast assortment of pristine raw shellfish and sashimi. Yet guests find the Fix dining experience very approachable and lots of fun, Wharton claims. Although the attention-getting presentation turns heads, the ingredients are familiar, and the menu user-friendly and unimposing.

The same effort and quality that goes into the food goes into Fix's drinks. Fresh juices and purees, hand-muddled fruits and herbs, and cocktails crafted to complement the menu make up the list, with selections such as the Pineapple Mojito and Cucumber Martini running \$10-\$11. "Both our food and our drinks are pret-

ty labor-intensive, so prices are on the high side," says Wharton, "but people come here for our signature items and are willing to pay for them." He adds that both locals and tourists have contributed to Fix's late-night coffers since the restaurant's opening a year ago.

The same holds true at the \$1-seat Della Femina in the ritzy enclave of Easthampton on Long Island, NY. Executive chef Michael Rozzi introduced his late-night menu during the height of the summer, when travelers flock to the area, but he intends to continue it through the fall and winter for resident diners. The selections are "in the spirit of finger food but way beyond mozzarella sticks," Rozzi says. Examples include Asparagus and Prosciutto Rolls with pecorino cheese (\$7),