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Food trends of 2008: New concepts, fresh faces

By **Jeff Dufour**

Examiner Columnist 12/30/08

WASHINGTON – This year might not have equaled 2007 in terms of food news, when Wolfgang Puck and Eric Ripert arrived on the crest of a wave that brought us a panoply of impressive new restaurants. But 2008 was no slouch of a year, either, bringing with it some terrific new concepts and fresh talent. Here's a look at some of the trends that made the year in restaurants.

1. **Wine bars:** They're not quite at Starbucks levels yet, but wine bars have seemingly begun to divide and multiply around the region. There's a little something for everyone, too, from the romantic vibe of Veritas near Dupont Circle to the all-American wine list at Cleveland Park's Enology Bistro. At Evo Bistro in McLean and Ceviche in Glover Park, you can even pour your own tastes out of an automated machine, fed with a pre-loaded debit card. But no one does it better than newcomer Cork. The 14th Street destination justifies its nightly waits with cuisine prepared by a CityZen alumnus, and an all-Euro wine list stocked with hard-to-find gems.



Et Voila, a new restaurant in the Palisades, was able to take advantage of the city's hunger for more Flemish fare. -- Andrew Harnik / Examiner

2. **Flemish fare:** Who knew the low country would become so popular? After the trailblazing success of Belga Cafe and Brasserie Beck, this year has seen the addition of the sophisticated Et Voila in the Palisades and the well-worn look of Dr. Granville Moore's in the resurgent Atlas District. Take note, restaurateurs: There's something to be said for the simple formula of mussels, fries and the world's best beers.

3. **"Fast casual":** Just in time for a recession, we've suddenly got a glut of chef-driven fast-food establishments, from "Top Chef" alum Spike Mendelsohn's Good Stuff Eatery on Capitol Hill to the environmentally friendly Chix on U Street and Tackle Box in Georgetown. My favorite: the beach-inspired fare of Chef David Scribner at Surfside in Glover Park.

4. **Bargains:** Speaking of the recession, restaurants are responding, as they try to keep warm bodies in their seats. Mio downtown is offering a three-course lunch for \$15 at the bar. And last month, the online reservation site OpenTable.com held an "Appetite Stimulus" promotion, with \$24 prix-fixe lunches and \$35 dinners. Look for more of the same from restaurants in 2009.

5. **"Farm to table":** The green movement has caught on big-time among area chefs. More and more menus prominently trumpet the

kitchen's relationship to local farmers. The new Founding Farmers in Foggy Bottom is a veritable temple to the movement — it's owned by a farmers' cooperative, albeit one in North Dakota. Also on the rise: terms like sustainable, biodynamic and Certified Humane.

6. **Spanish wine:** Names like Rioja and Tempranillo have entered the lexicon of many diners and drinkers, as more and more bars are serving Iberian wines. Why? We asked John Wabeck, the sommelier at the forthcoming Inox in Tysons Corner. "The pricing still is reasonable, especially for the quality," he said. "They tend to be a little more full-bodied than a lot of pinot noirs, but not as tannic and full-bodied as cabernet would be. They're very good food wines."

7. **Charcuterie:** From Locanda on Capitol Hill to Blue Duck in the West End to nearly every one of our new wine bars, you can begin a meal with cheese, pate, sausage or cured meats just about

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anywhere these days. The maestro of salting, smoking and curing is Jamie Stachowski, the chef behind the new Thirsty Bernie sports bar in Arlington. From his garage, he turns out an array of charcuterie for his own restaurant, as well as other local haunts like Mendocino and Redwood.

8. "Upstairs/downstairs": In an effort to attract diners of all stripes (and income brackets) eateries are launching multiple concepts under one roof. The Source by Wolfgang Puck boasts a fine-dining temple of gastronomy upstairs, and a chic-casual spot for pizzas, dumplings and sliders on the ground level. The new Darlington House serves new American fare on the second floor, upscale bar food in the pub downstairs, and owners plan a coffee bar/reading room on the third floor. And Michael Babin, the owner of the dual concept Tallula/EatBar in Arlington, plans a similar venture on 14th Street in early '09: Birch & Barley, a beer- and wine-friendly restaurant on the ground floor, and ChurchKey, a beer-focused bar upstairs.

9. **Young chefs:** It no longer takes years of apprenticeships to land an executive chef position. Nowadays, talent can take you there, even if you're young. Take Daniel Giusi at 1789, who's but 24. Or Andrew Markert, the new exec at Tallula and EatBar, who is 26. Or Nicholas Stefanelli at Mio, who's only 28.

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