

Keep it moving: Occasions Caterers uses a conveyor belt to deliver delightful bites.



Fork it over: Rows of forks offer teeny salad morsels from Occasions.

Edgy and New vs. Tried-and-True

Clients say they want edgy menus, but then call for the classics. Here, caterers explore the yin and yang of catering, sharing the very best of both.

By Susan Cuadrado

PRETTY PEBBLES

OCCASIONS CATERERS,
WASHINGTON
WWW.OCCASIONSCATERERS.COM

EDGY: Compressed, dehydrated, powdered, foamed, rehydrated—by definition, molecular gastronomy is about as edgy as it gets. Occasions puts science into play with its compressed melon on prosciutto dust, and a molecular caprese salad of mascarpone gel pearls, tomato gel and basil foam. But the hands-down winner of way-out: pizza pebbles, wherein powdered pizza compo-

nents—tomato powder, Parmesan powder, pepperoni powder and shiitake powder—are rolled with an emulsified garlic-infused oil.

Boozed-up ice pops in flavors such as lime daiquiri, white Russian, tequila sunrise and piña colada prove that popsicles aren't just for kids. And for those cool to frozen cocktails, there's always the beer sorbet with pretzel bits.

TRIED-AND-TRUE: "We like to present traditional dishes in new and creative ways," says president Mark Michael. A favorite: Turning

big steakhouse flavors into one-bite hors d'oeuvre, such as tiny strip steak bites topped with blue cheese butter on a bed of crispy fried cipollini onions, and super-petite filets mignon wrapped in bacon and served with fondue forks.

OSCAR WINNER

WOLFGANG PUCK CATERING,
LOS ANGELES
WWW.WOLFGANGPUCK.COM

EDGY: When it comes to edgy and you're Wolfgang Puck, it's a challenge to pick a best representative dish. For starters, there's the compressed watermelon sangria sphere with micro shiso. Follow that with a white asparagus salad with pickled watermelon rind, crispy pig skin, fried egg and spring blossoms. And for dessert, could you choose



Taking classics out for a spin: Strawberry shortcake push pops from Wolfgang Puck Catering (left) and a glorious grits station from Epicurean Catering (above). Photo at left courtesy Wolfgang Puck Catering, above by Chad Chisom.

between a strawberry shortcake push pop and a brown-sugar lemon meringue cone? We didn't think so.

TRIED-AND-TRUE: The hands-down favorite—smoked salmon pizza, a fixture at the Oscar Ball. “When I opened the original Spago in 1982, this quickly became its signature pizza,” Puck says.

GO FOR GRITS

EPICUREAN CATERING,
CENTENNIAL, COLO.
WWW.EPICUREANCATERING.COM

EDGY: Smoked food—from hors d'oeuvre to desserts—is as ubiquitous as it is delicious. Case in point: A bourbon smoked scallop with a vanilla beurre blanc served in a miniature bell jar. “The coolest thing about this dish is its presentation,” says Epicurean communications director Stephanie Blackford. “A puff of smoke escapes when the jar is opened.”

And speaking of “smoking,” Epicurean’s “Moveable Feast” menu certainly qualifies: shirtless male models carrying ice blocks piled high with hand-crafted sushi!

TRIED-AND-TRUE: “Everyone still loves a great meatball,” Blackford says. Epicurean pays homage to the meaty morsel with its deconstructed

spaghetti and meatballs—a plain meatball drizzled with pesto oil served atop fried spaghetti in a crisp parmesan herb cup.

Comfort food to some, exotic fare to others, grits and eggs at Epicurean’s “Kiss My Grits” action station combines aged cheddar cheese and creamy grits mixed with a choice of smoked salmon, duck confit or wild mushrooms and spinach, topped with a fresh fried egg.

HAIL, CAESAR SALAD

FEASTIVITIES EVENTS,
PHILADELPHIA
WWW.FEASTIVITIESCATERING.COM

EDGY: Mozzarella balloon salad pops on the palate—literally. To create it, roasted garlic oil is added to an empty whipped cream canister.

A piece of mozzarella, worked into a rubbery consistency, is then placed on the mouth of the canister and inflated into a garlic-infused bubble. The bubble is served atop vine-ripened tomatoes and fresh basil, with a drizzle with pesto vinaigrette, for guests to pop and enjoy.

TRIED-AND-TRUE: “Say what you will about Caesar salad, but its broad appeal at large events makes it a menu mainstay,” says senior event producer Dan Hoch, who suggests front-of-the-house preparation, whether tableside or at stations, and serving the greens in a crisp cup made from asiago cheese.

ROCKIN' STARTER

PUFF 'N STUFF EVENTS &
CATERING, ORLANDO, FLA.
WWW.PUFFNSTUFF.COM

Show 'em how it's done:

Feastivities prepares Caesar salad in front of guests, adding drama to a menu mainstay.





Climbing the walls: The spoon wall from Puff 'n Stuff serves as both decor and, well, spoons.

EDGY: For the aptly named “Purple Haze,” Peruvian purple potato soup is served with a syringe filled with red pepper coulis and finished with a spoonful of pop rocks—all presented on a mirrored tray.

“We find that edgy events are best complemented by menus that feature a mix of exciting, nouveau cuisine and comfortable, familiar foods,” says president and owner Warren Dietel. The “Study in Heirlooms” salad finds that balance, featuring heirloom tomatoes and a “virtual egg” crafted from mozzarella and yellow heirlooms, sprinkled with flake salt and drizzled with unfiltered olive oil and aged white balsamic vinegar with basil foam.

TRIED-AND-TRUE: Warm and comforting, risotto with sweet corn and rock shrimp is a marriage made in comfort food heaven. Puff 'n Stuff

serves this rich, creamy, oft-requested dish from a copper pot with a garnish of diced chives and poached lemon ribbons.

PHEASANT DREAMS

CULINARY CAPERS,
VANCOUVER, BRITISH
COLUMBIA

WWW.CULINARYCAPERS.COM

EDGY: It’s a good thing they’re small, because who could choose between a spoonful of white soy caramel sablefish with miso aioli atop cucumber and Asian pear salad with yuzu-mirin vinaigrette, and a Victoria gin-infused, cucumber-wrapped scallop dusted in chile and celery powder? Not us.

For an edgy main course, “Pheasant Two-Ways” features pheasant breast cooked sous vide and also prepared as an herbed confit with Champagne apple gastrique, potato tarte tatin and braised baby fennel. “Pheasant is a great poultry alternative,” says president and owner Debra Lykkemark. “It’s elegant and mild in flavor.”

TRIED-AND-TRUE: For a classic surf-and-turf combo, Culinary Capers pairs a red wine-braised short rib with seared sablefish, chanterelle mushrooms, potato pavé, Jerusalem artichokes and chives. ●

It takes two: ‘Pheasant Two Ways’ from Culinary Capers.



CATERING EQUIPMENT ON THE EDGE

The Sushi Conveyor Belt:

Occasions uses sushi conveyor belts as moving buffets for sushi as well as bar snacks (fried plantains, cheese straws, spiced nuts), small plates (salads, crudites, mini burgers) and mini desserts (cheesecake bites, tiny sorbet scoops, brownies).

The Chill Grill: Also, known as an anti-griddle, and looking much like a traditional flat-top, Occasions uses the Chill Grill to freeze foods on contact. “When sauces, purées, crèmes and foams hit the minus-30 degree top, they set up and freeze almost immediately,” says Mark Michael, who uses it for the company’s signature cocktail ice pops.

The Big Bento Box and Spoon Wall:

Drawing inspiration from the popular Japanese boxed meal, Puff 'n Stuff’s giant, vertical bento box creates an artful display for small plates and hors d’oeuvre, such as king crab with pink grapefruit with a tangerine gastrique and lemon foam and beet-cured salmon ceviche with chopped pistachios. Another variation: The Spoon Wall, where tasting spoons featuring one-bites, such as seared peppered tuna ribbons with daikon and cucumber slaw, and crispy wild rice pancakes with apple-chipotle chutney, are inserted into a customized metal wall (available through www.linenswithpanache.com).

The Food Truck: Epicurean invested in a food truck for its “Coffee and Donut Brake” as a clever, trendy way to deliver hot coffee and home-made Sicilian doughnuts to corporate clients.