

INSPIRATION & INFORMATION FOR INDEPENDENTS

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25

MOST POWERFUL MULTICONCEPT RESTAURANT GROUPS



SEPTEMBER 2017
RESTAURANT-HOSPITALITY.COM

THE RH 25

MOST POWERFUL MULTICONCEPT RESTAURANT GROUPS

BY LISA JENNINGS

IN THE INDEPENDENT RESTAURANT WORLD, HAVING POWER IS ABOUT A LOT MORE THAN SIZE, SALES OR A CELEBRITY NAME. MANY OF THE MOST INTERESTING AND SUCCESSFUL RESTAURANTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE OPERATED BY MULTICONCEPT GROUPS — COMPANIES THAT HAVE BUILT A PORTFOLIO OF BRANDS THAT CAN BE WILDLY DIFFERENT, BUT ARE UNITED BY SHARED VALUES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

This year, Restaurant Hospitality collected the 25 most powerful multiconcept operators across the country, or what we call the RH25.

These companies are powerful for a number of reasons: They are operators everyone is watching because of their innovation. They are evolving with the changing consumer, although most have been around for decades. They are breaking old models and reinventing the way restaurants operate. And they are crossing segment lines, moving deftly from fine dining to quick service, while maintaining a reputation for excellence.

Looking more closely at these companies, common themes emerge. The Curators are building or curating food halls. The Culture Cultivators are rethinking employment models and putting their people first. The Icons are positioning for the future.

The Innovators are rolling out new hits. The Destination Drivers are demonstrating prowess in real estate partnerships. Some are Reformers, reimagining casual dining as we know it. And others are Media Masters, capitalizing on various media platforms to change the way we think about food and dining out.

With this list, there is no ranking. All 25 are powerful, and all 25 are companies to watch.

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THOMAS KELLER

THOMAS KELLER RESTAURANT GROUP

HQ: Yountville, Calif.

LEADERSHIP: Thomas Keller, founder

CONCEPTS: The French Laundry, Bouchon Bistro (3 units), Bouchon Bakery (5 units), Bar Bouchon, Per Se, Ad Hoc + Addendum

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: A new classic American concept coming to Hudson Yards in New York in 2018, as well as Bouchon Bakery.

Building a New Culinary Neighborhood

Thomas Keller's name has been a symbol for the top echelon of American fine dining for years. Next year, his restaurant group will enter a new phase of development.

Keller is co-curating food and beverage options for the 28-acre Hudson Yards development by Related Companies and Oxford Properties Group in New York.

Hudson Yards will be packed with culinary giants — José Andrés, David Chang and Ferran and Albert Adrià. But not least among them will be Keller, who is planning a new classic American restaurant, not yet named, which will be the group's first new concept in a decade.

In The New York Times, Keller described the 200-seat restaurant as one that would hearken back to the great restaurants of the "Mad Men" era, with someone like Bobby Short at the piano.

This year, Keller also completed a multi-million-dollar

renovation of his kitchen and the inn at The French Laundry, giving the signature brand a fresh new look.

In New York, Corey Chow was named chef de cuisine at Per Se, replacing Eli Kaimeh, who is taking a sabbatical. Chow joined Per Se in 2007, leaving for a time to work in the kitchen at The NoMad and Torrisi Italian Specialties, before returning in 2015.

Meanwhile, Keller is consumed with passing the baton, according to the Times.

With no obvious successor, the French Laundry has yet to establish an identity separate from the chef. As the group expands next year, it will be interesting to watch how the revered chef approaches his role with the company, and that of his team.

"The French Laundry is Thomas Keller," he said. "My job is to change that."

THE CURATORS

FRONT BURNER RESTAURANTS

HQ: Dallas

LEADERSHIP: Randy DeWitt, CEO; Jack Gibbons, president; John Franke, corporate chef

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: \$350 million in fiscal 2016

CONCEPTS: More than 90 restaurants, including 81-unit Twin Peaks, five-unit Velvet Taco and five-unit Whiskey Cake, along with Sixty Vines (2 units), Mexican Sugar, Ida Claire, Hot Joy and The Ranch at Las Colinas.

WHAT'S NEW: Legacy Hall food hall, The Keeper, Haywire and Detour.

A Future in Food Halls

Front Burner Restaurants straddles the sometimes disparate worlds of chain and independent restaurants with the 81-unit "breastaurant" concept Twin Peaks and one-offs like Mexican Sugar and Ida Claire.

But Front Burner has a plan that might help bridge the gap: Food halls.

In October, Legacy Hall — a 55,000-square-foot food hall with more than 20 artisan food stalls, full-service bars, an on-site brewery and beer garden — is scheduled to open.

Legacy Hall will not only be a Texas-sized addition to the growing food-hall scene, it will also be a model for the future.

The company has launched a subsidiary called The Food Hall Co., which aims to create and design food halls in other cities. The goal is for the food halls to become incubators for young entrepreneurs. But Front Burner is also developing food-hall-worthy brands.

Haywire serves home cooking with a fine-dining touch, and will debut in Legacy Hall in November. Detour, another concept opening there, will feature organic and natural wines, along with panini, cured meats and cheeses.

Legacy Hall will also have a tiki bar called Idol Time and Unlawful Assembly Brewing Co., a brewery and tap room promising a rotating selection of bold craft beers that will make up Legacy Hall's top floor.

In addition, the restaurant group this year is scheduled to open The Keeper, a Pacific Rim seafood concept with rum and tiki drinks.

A pan-Asian-inspired restaurant called Hot Joy also opened in July, as a two-year pop up, but hopes to find a permanent Dallas home.



JACK GIBBONS



RANDY DEWITT



LEGACY HALL

THINKFOODGROUP

HQ: Washington, D.C.

LEADERSHIP: José Andrés, chef and owner; Kimberly Grant, CEO

CONCEPTS: 28 restaurants, including minibar and barmini by José Andrés; Jaleo (4 units); China Chilcano; Oyamel; Zaytinya; Beefsteak (5 units); Bazaar (4 units); Fish by José Andrés; ThinkFoodLab; China Poblano; é; J by José Andrés; Mi Casa; Tres; Hyde Beach; America Eats Tavern; and Pepe Food Truck.

GROUP REVENUE: \$135 million in fiscal 2016

WHAT'S NEW: In late 2017, Somni in Los Angeles and a test kitchen called ThinkFoodLab in Washington, D.C. Coming in 2018 is Fish by José Andrés in the Bahamas; Jaleo at Disney Springs in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.; Zaytinya in Dallas; and a Spanish food hall in New York's Hudson Yards development.



1. FISH Opening at The Cove, in the Bahamas
2. BELT A sandwich at the ThinkFoodLab test kitchen
3. PEPE Food Truck dishes out meals to go

A GROWING PORTFOLIO; A DIVERSE PLAYBOOK



JOSÉ ANDRÉS

José Andrés could be described as a force of nature.

He has only been in the U.S. since 1990, and he's won James Beard Awards and two Michelin stars. He has

been named one of Time magazine's Most Influential People. He has written books, taught college courses and appeared on TV many times.

Andrés has also made an effort to solve the nation's problems with hunger and poverty. He has been a vocal advocate for immigrants. And he has tussled in court and on Twitter with President Donald Trump.

For his ThinkFoodGroup, that energy has resulted in a growing portfolio with a diverse playbook.

There are signature restaurants like minibar by José Andrés, winner of two Michelin stars, exemplifying Andrés' playful choreography of art and science.

The group also includes the vegetable-forward, fast-casual chain Beefsteak, with five locations.

There are destination concepts within

hotels. The group has a partnership with Sbe, parent to the SLS, Mondrian and Delano properties, which has resulted in concepts like The Bazaar in Beverly Hills at the SLS.

Sister restaurant Saam at the SLS Beverly Hills closed in July for a redo. Later this year, it will re-open as Somni, a new concept yet to be described.

Next year, the seafood restaurant Fish by José Andrés is scheduled to open at The Cove at Atlantis Resort on Paradise Island in the Bahamas.

A sixth location of Jaleo will open at the Disney Springs complex in the Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., serving up tapas, wood-fired paellas and jamón ibérico de bellota, and chili and pollo croquetas. The restaurant will also have a grab-and-go component with Spanish sandwiches called bocatas.

And the group is bringing the Mediterranean concept Zaytinya to Dallas in partnership with Turkish company d.ream, or Dogus Restaurant Entertainment and Management, in The Star development there.

But perhaps most exciting is the Spanish food hall the group is planning in New York in partnership with Ferran and Albert Adrià,

known for their now-defunct restaurant elBulli. It will be a first U.S. effort for the Adrià brothers.

The food hall is coming to the 28-acre Hudson Yards complex in Manhattan and will include 35,000 square feet of indoor/outdoor space, including a market and dining outlets with everything from tapas, ham and olives, to paella.

Meanwhile, back in D.C., ThinkFoodGroup will look to the future with ThinkFoodLab, an outlet that will host a series of pop-ups to test concepts and dishes, with a focus on fast casual.

First up is a version of Pepe, the company's food truck, which serves menu items like Pan de Cristal sandwiches on traditional light-and-crispy bread; Spanish takes on grilled cheese; and desserts like leche merengada soft serve.

"I always have so many ideas for new concepts going through my head, and it has been a dream of my team and mine to have a space to try them all out in a way that the public can experience," Andrés said. "With Pepe, we will be looking at how we can push the experience beyond the boundaries of a truck, and from there, we will see what new concepts we can bring to life."

THE CURATORS



MAHI TACOS at Buena Onda

GARCES GROUP

HQ: Philadelphia

LEADERSHIP: Jose Garces, founder and CEO; Judy Moore, senior vice president; Melissa Scully, chief culture officer; Rob Esplen, vice president of operations; Gregg Ciprioni, vice president of culinary operations

CONCEPTS: 24 Italian Inspired Wood Fired restaurants, Amada (2 units), Buena Onda, Distrito (2 units), Garces Trading Company, JG Domestic Fine Food and Spirits, Okatshe, Olón, Orzi, Rural Society, The Olde Bar, Tinto, Village Whiskey, Volvér, and Bayamo and Pinchos Tapas Bar on Norwegian Cruise Lines

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: \$45 million in fiscal 2016

WHAT'S NEW: A second Buena Onda to open in Philadelphia, Village Whiskey coming to D.C., a new Latin marketplace

MINING THE RICHES OF LATIN CUISINE

Jose Garces is an Ecuadorian-American chef who once beat Bobby Flay on "Iron Chef."

He grew up in Chicago, but over the past decade he has opened restaurants that take a tour through Latin cuisine and culture, from the Spanish tapas and small plates of Spain at Amada, to the Argentinian steakhouse Rural Society.

But the group refuses to be one-note.

Added into the mix is the European bistro Garces Trading Company, a Japanese izakaya Okatshe, and the American burger joint Village Whiskey. At the high end, Garces goes beyond labels with a 12-course, \$125 tasting menu at 34-seat Volvér.

Perhaps most anticipated is the Latin marketplace Garces plans to bring to Washington, D.C., next year.

Details have not yet been revealed, but the group said it aims to create a dynamic culinary center with food stalls, shops and dining concepts.

And at a time when immigration issues are constantly in the headlines, Garces is positioning the group as a force for good.

In 2012, he launched a non-profit dedicated to serving Philadelphia's immigrant community, hosting events like health clinics and offering restaurant-English-as-a-second-language classes.



JOSE GARCES

MINA GROUP

HQ: San Francisco

LEADERSHIP: Michael Mina, chef and founder; Patric Yumul, president

CONCEPTS: About 32 restaurants, including the flagship restaurant Michael Mina in San Francisco, Bourbon Steak (5 units); and Stripsteak (3 units), as well as RN74, Clock Bar and Stonehill Tavern.

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: International Smoke San Francisco will replace RN74 there. The Street: A Michael Mina Social House opened in Hawaii. Mi Almita, a test kitchen pop-up, is scheduled to debut in August. Cal Mare is scheduled to open in Los Angeles. In 2018, Bourbon Steak will come to Nashville, Tenn., and The Street food hall will open in Los Angeles.

PLANTING SEEDS WITH PARTNERSHIPS

Born in Egypt and raised in the Pacific Northwest, Michael Mina is a Culinary Institute of America alum who spent his early years in the kitchen at Charlie Palmer's Aureole in New York.

Early on, he was offered a chance to develop a seafood concept in San Francisco with former Bel Air Hotel chef George Morrone. That became Aqua, which put Mina in the national spotlight.

With tennis champion Andre Agassi as a partner, Mina founded his own restaurant group in 2002, later converting a former Aqua location into the Michelin-starred Michael Mina restaurant.

Since then, the group has grown rapidly.

This year, Mina Group opened a food hall called The Street: A Michael Mina Social House in Honolulu, with a similar outlet planned for Los Angeles' Beverly Center in 2018.

From that collection came International Smoke, a concept created in partnership with cookbook author and media personality Ayesha Curry, which will replace RN74 in San Francisco later this year, as well as the fast-casual The Ramen Bar concept with Ken Tominaga, chef and owner of Hana Japanese Restaurant in San Francisco.

In August, the group was scheduled to open Mi Almita, a Mexican restaurant in partnership with Houston chef Hugo Ortega, in the group's 1,600-square-foot test kitchen.

And in November, even before the food hall, Mina Group plans to open Cal Mare at the Beverly Center in Los Angeles.

With both food halls and standalone locations, Mina Group is building opportunities for its own stable of chefs to grow, as well as bringing in fresh blood with such partnerships.



MICHAEL MINA

NOT RESTING ON THEIR LAURELS



DANNY MEYER

The restaurant world can't help but watch Danny Meyer.

Since opening Union Square Cafe in 1985, Meyer has built a restaurant and catering company that exemplifies his philosophy of hospitality, which puts employees first.

Meyer has been a longtime advocate of eliminating a service system that relies on tips, which he calls "antiquated." His restaurants are transitioning to a hospitality-included model designed to compensate workers more equitably as a team.

And that's only one thing the multiconcept operator

has been working on.

Last year, the group reinvented its founding concept Union Square Cafe, moving it down the street and reopening it in December, followed by a casual, adjacent outlet called Daily Provisions.

Next year, Meyer will bring Union Square Cafe to Washington, D.C., where it will be part of a massive, mixed-use development called Capitol Crossing. USHG will curate other food-and-drink outlets there.

This year, back in New York, the group opened Martina, a fast-casual pizzeria offering made-to-order pies, meatballs, salads and gelato at an accessible price.

Also scheduled in August in New York, was a new café and sandwich shop called Caffè Marchio. In September, the group is scheduled to open a wine bar called Vini e Fritti, with aperitivi and fried nibbles.

Coming is an as-yet-unnamed restaurant on the 65th floor of the 28 Liberty Street tower in New York.

USHG, of course, also gave birth to the Shake Shack chain, now a separate public company.

Meyer has continued to invest in other emerging brands, including Tender Greens, Joe Coffee and Salt & Straw, further expanding the restaurant group's impact and planting seeds for the future.

UNION SQUARE HOSPITALITY GROUP

HQ: New York

LEADERSHIP: Danny Meyer, founder and CEO; Ron Parker, chief operating officer; Richard Coraine, chief of staff

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed.

CONCEPTS: Union Square Cafe, Gramercy Tavern, Blue Smoke & Jazz Standard, The Modern, Café 2 and Terrace 5 at the Museum of Modern Art, Maialino, North End Grill, Marta, Porchlight, Untitled at the Whitney Museum, Studio Café, GreenRiver, Daily Provisions.

WHAT'S NEW: Roman-style pizzeria Martina, a Roman coffee bar called Caffè Marchio, and a wine bar called Vini e Fritti.

FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

Chef Daniel Patterson began building a restaurant group with the debut of Coi in 2006, described as a "small, quirky, fine-dining restaurant" that made a mark in Northern California.

ALTA GROUP

HQ: San Francisco

LEADERSHIP: Daniel Patterson, founder and principal; Joe White, director of operations; Gabriel Barba, director of learning and development

CONCEPTS: Alta at Mid-Market, Alta at Minnesota Street Project, Plum Bar, Alfred's

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: Alta at The Grant in the Yotel hotel, and The Grant, a rooftop bar. In 2018, Alta at Jack London will replace Haven, and Alta will open in Los Angeles.

Over a decade, Patterson opened six more restaurants in the San Francisco Bay Area under what was called the Daniel Patterson Group, including Alta, Plum Bar and Alfred's.

A few years ago, Patterson joined forces with Los Angeles chef and restaurateur Roy Choi to launch the quick-service concept LocoL, which is operated separately.

This year, however, Daniel Patterson Group morphed into Alta Group, and Patterson began growing the Alta brand by converting some existing restaurants and moving to new locations. With the move, Coi and Astor will be operated separately, although Patterson remains the owner.

But Alta won't be a chain. Patterson's goal is to recreate the restaurant to fit each community.



DANIEL PATTERSON

"I'm not a corporate guy," he said. "Even if I tried my hardest, I couldn't do the same thing over and over."

Meanwhile, Patterson continues to rethink the way restaurants operate.

The group has partnered with Restaurant Opportunities Center, or ROC United, to pilot a racial equity program, with the aim of creating more equitable systems

for hiring, training and advancement within the company.

Alta Group also moved to a hospitality-included model this year. The results have been positive.

"That's the magic," Patterson said. "When you get a group of people who love what they're doing, love the people they work with, and they feel comfortable and supported, then I really think anything's possible."



THE NEW ALTA AT THE MINNESOTA STREET PROJECT

THE WOLFGANG PUCK GROUP

HQ: Los Angeles

LEADERSHIP: Wolfgang Puck and Barbara Lazaroff, co-founders; Tom Kaplan, senior managing partner; Joe Essa, president of Wolfgang Puck Worldwide; Lee Hefter, managing partner and executive chef; Alex Resnik, senior operations partner; David Robins, operations and corporate chef; Carl Schuster, CEO of Wolfgang Puck Catering

CONCEPTS: More than 100 restaurants in the U.S., Singapore, London, Bahrain and Istanbul, including Spago (5 units), Cut (6 units), Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill (3 units), and WP24.

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: Test kitchen Rogue opened in April. A seventh unit of Cut is scheduled for the Mondrian Hotel in Doha. Various casual concepts are also planned in 2018, in airports around the world.



NO SIGN OF SLOWING DOWN

Wolfgang Puck is one of the best-known names in American fine dining.

He was one of the nation's first celebrity chefs, and he helped put California cuisine on the culinary map. This year, Puck was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

It has been 35 years since Puck opened Spago, first in West Hollywood, Calif., and later moving to Beverly Hills. Redesigned in 2012, Spago remains a cornerstone of the Los Angeles dining scene.

Since then, Puck has built a global empire. The group now includes three distinct companies: the Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group, Wolfgang Puck Catering and Wolfgang Puck Worldwide, which includes branded housewares and retail products.

Earlier this year, Puck opened Rogue, a test kitchen at the company's headquarters in West Hollywood, offering a tasting menu for only eight people each night. The concept is meant to be a collaboration with the group's chefs, with chef-in-residence David Beran at the helm.

Meanwhile, the high-end steakhouse Cut continues as a growth vehicle within the fine-dining group, with a seventh location scheduled to open at the Mondrian Hotel in Doha later this year.

The group is also planning new casual concepts for airports.

Expect more from Puck, who remains actively involved, but who has also built a deep bench of managing partners and chefs to take the company into the future.



COMMANDER'S FAMILY OF RESTAURANTS

HQ: New Orleans

LEADERSHIP: Lally Brennan and Ti Adelaide Martin, co-proprietors; Tory McPhail, executive chef

CONCEPTS: Commander's Palace, Brennan's Houston, Café Adelaide & The Swizzle Stick Bar, SoBou.

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

LOOKING BACK BUT REACHING FORWARD

Not many multiconcept groups today can say they have roots in the 1800s. But the Commander's Family of Restaurants' namesake concept first opened in 1893.

In a town of great restaurants, Commander's Palace is an icon.

For the Brennan family behind the group, it began with Brennan's, which opened in the 1940s. It was the first venue for Ella Brennan, now the family matriarch, who took on leadership of the restaurant after the death of her brother.

The young restaurateur, one of few women in the industry, helped put New Orleans on the map as a town that should be taken seriously for its cuisine.

After a reorganization, some family members moved away from Brennan's and bought Commander's Palace in 1969, which at the time needed a lot of work.

In 1974, Ella, her sister Dottie, and brothers Dick and John Brennan reworked the restaurant. It gave rise to some of the region's top chefs over the years, redefining "haute Creole" cuisine, including Paul Prudhomme, Emeril Lagasse, Jamie Shannon and now Tory McPhail.



TI ADELAIDE MARTIN AND LALLY BRENNAN

The group opened a Brennan's in Houston, in 1967, and was not affiliated with the original Brennan's in New Orleans, adding the French Quarter tavern SoBou.

Most recently, Café Adelaide joined the family, offering a more playful take on Cajun/Creole cooking. The restaurant is named after "auntie" Adelaide Brennan, whose nieces Ti Adelaide Martin and Lally Brennan and nephew Alex Brennan created the concept.

For the family, 2017 has been a year of telling Ella's story.

Last year, Ella, now 91, released a memoir and this year a documentary on Netflix called "Ella Brennan: Commanding the Table" also tells the family history.

Meanwhile, the next generation of Brennans is carrying the family legacy into the future.

UNDERSTANDING THE THEATRICS OF THE RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE



Many restaurant companies are working hard to create better experiences for their guests. But restaurateur Stephen Starr nailed that years ago.

In his early days, he opened restaurants with comedy acts and live music, and later launched a concert company that brought hit-makers like Eurythmics, Cyndi Lauper and Bruce Springsteen to Philadelphia.

He sold that business and returned to restaurants and nightclubs. But he maintained his attention to theatrical details, like music, lighting and backdrops — the details that please the senses and shape the overall experience.

Now Starr is the hit-maker. Founded in 1995, Starr Restaurants has grown into one of

the largest multiconcept operators in the country, with restaurants up and down the Eastern Seaboard, from New York to Miami.

Starr was named the Richard Melman Innovator of the Year by Restaurant Hospitality in 2013.

But 2017 was a breakthrough year for Starr.

After years of being nominated, Starr finally won the James Beard Awards as Outstanding Restaurateur of the Year.

The group's Le Coucou in New York, helmed by chef Daniel Rose, was also named best new restaurant.

Starr Restaurants declined to reveal what might be next. However, earlier this year, Starr told Charlie Rose that "things have gotten a little boring" in the restaurant world, and that it's time to shake things up.



STEPHEN STARR

STARR RESTAURANTS

HQ: Philadelphia

LEADERSHIP: Stephen Starr, founder and CEO

CONCEPTS: Alma de Cuba; Buddakan (3 units); Continental Martini Bar; Elvez Restaurant (2 units); Jones; Morimoto (2 units); Pod; Butcher and Singer; Barclay Prime; Continental Mid-town; Parc; Pizzeria Stella; El Ray; The Dandelion; Talula's Garden; Talula's Daily; Frankford Hall; Fette Sau; Serpico; Upland (2); The Clock Tower; Le Coucou; Continental Atlantic City; Makoto; Steak 954; Le Zoo; Le Diplomate.

"I'm hungry, and I'd like to do something different," he said.

In the interview, Starr also said he has long wanted to get into the movie or TV business.

Will a food-related film be next?

FINDING THE SWEET SPOT

A key player in the Los Angeles restaurant world is The Lucques Group.

Where would an American president dine when visiting Los Angeles? Lucques, of course. The group's signature concept was a favorite of former President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

Chef and owner Suzanne Goin opened Lucques in 1998 with Caroline Styne. Lucques is an unpretentious, fine-dining concept with a lovely outdoor patio, laudable wine list and seasonal Sunday suppers. It was followed by the wine-driven a.o.c. a few years later.

Tavern debuted in 2009, with essentially three concepts in one: a full-service dining room, a marketplace with breakfast sandwiches and pastries, and a bar serving craft cocktails.

The success of Tavern's more casual outlet led to the launch of The Larder, which offers a counter-order take on Goin's cuisine with multiple locations, including one at Los Angeles International Airport. The wholesale Larder Baking Company debuted in 2013.

For a.o.c.'s 10th anniversary in 2014, the group moved the restaurant to a spot with an outdoor garden and an upstairs wine room. Last year, Goin and Styne took on food and beverage for the beloved outdoor venue The Hollywood Bowl.

Goin was named Outstanding Chef of the Year by the James Beard Foundation in 2016. She was inducted into the organization's Who's Who of Food & Beverage in America in 2017.

At a restaurant industry conference earlier this year, Goin bemoaned the number of restau-

THE LUCQUES GROUP

HQ: Los Angeles

LEADERSHIP: Suzanne Goin, chef and owner; Caroline Styne, wine director and owner; Cynthia Longley, director of operations; Javier Espinoza, corporate chef

CONCEPTS: Lucques; a.o.c.; Tavern; The Larder (4 units); Larder Baking Company; Hollywood Bowl Food + Wine

WHAT'S NEW: Started a 10-year contract in 2016 to serve food and beverages at The Hollywood Bowl

CAROLINE STYNE AND SUZANNE GOIN



rants closing as newcomers crowd the market.

Los Angeles will soon be home to a flood of celebrity chefs, from Dominique Ansel to Daniel Humm.

"I wonder how many restaurants LA can handle and at what point the city will be saturated," she said. "I wish them all the best of luck, but it's not as easy as it looks."

FOX RESTAURANT CONCEPTS

HQ: Phoenix

LEADERSHIP: Sam Fox, founder

CONCEPTS: True Food Kitchen (20 units), Blanco Tacos + Tequila (4 units), North Italia (11 units), Zinburger Wine & Burger Bar (5 units), Culinary Dropout (5 units), The Arrogant Butcher, Wildflower American Cuisine, Olive & Ivy + Marketplace (2 units), The Greene House, Little Cleo's Seafood Legend, Jubly True (2 units), The Henry, Flower Child (7 units), Doughbird Pizza & Rotisserie, and a pizza truck called The Rocket

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: Doughbird Pizza & Rotisserie opened in March. North Italia is coming to Las Vegas this year, and to Dallas and Austin, Texas, in 2018. A sixth location of Culinary Dropout and a version of the sprawling restaurant/entertainment concept called The Yard is scheduled to open in Tucson, Ariz. A Blanco Tacos unit is coming to Houston this fall, and True Food Kitchen will open in San Diego.

Next year, Flower Child will come to Las Vegas and Austin, Texas. Locations of The Henry are planned for West Hollywood, Calif., and Dallas in 2018, and True Food Kitchen will open in Nashville, Tenn., and Boca Raton, Fla.

A PROLIFIC HIT MAKER

Fox Restaurant Concepts has the development of new restaurant concepts down to a science.

The Phoenix-based restaurant group, founded in 1998 by Sam Fox, has more than 53 restaurants across 15 brands in a dozen states, along with an event space.

Powerful strategic investors are watching what the group does.

True Food Kitchen won an early \$10 million investment from P.F. Chang's China Bistro Inc. in 2012. Last year, the fast-casual Flower Child brand and the casual-dining concept North Italia drew a minority investment from The Cheesecake Factory Inc.

In 2014, Fox was honored with the Richard Melman Award by Restaurant Hospitality, as well as a MenuMasters Award from Nation's Restaurant News for True Food Kitchen.

Many Fox restaurants have multiplied as chains, but the group also operates a handful of one-off concepts, including The Arrogant Butcher and Little Cleo's.



SAM FOX

Now all eyes are on Doughbird Pizza & Rotisserie, which debuted earlier this year in Phoenix, offering pizzas cooked in a wood-burning oven, rotisserie chickens and prime rib.

New units are in the works for True Food Kitchen, North Italia and Flower Child, and now The Henry is multiplying, with locations planned in Los Angeles and Dallas.

Fox's concepts are not gimmicky or based on shallow trends. He has an eye for what consumers want, and he knows how to meet them where they are.



FLOWER CHILD'S BOWLS

THE GO-TO GROUP FOR TOP HOTELS

If there is a chef sought after for opening in splashy hotels, it is Jean-Georges Vongerichten, whose group operates concepts in top properties around the world.

Earlier this year, Jean-Georges at the Waldorf Astoria opened in Beverly Hills, Calif., the chef's first West Coast venue.

He also opened Jean-Georges at The Connaught, the iconic hotel in London's Mayfair area.

And in June, the new Public Hotel by Ian Schrager also debuted in New York, with Vongerichten's Public Kitchen as the primary dining destination.

The original Jean-Georges is located in the Trump Hotel in New York, and frequented by the president.

Jean-Georges Management also has Prime Steakhouse at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, with Jean-Georges Steakhouse at the

Aria Resort & Casino just down the Strip. In Dubai, Jean-Georges Kitchen is in the Four Seasons.

But the group doesn't just do hotels.

This year, Vongerichten opened his first all-vegetarian concept, ABCV, with chef de cuisine Neal Harden.

On the menu are trendy dishes like avocado toast and congee. But the restaurant skips fake-meat alternatives meant to simulate things like burgers or chicken tenders, instead letting the vegetables shine on their own merit.

Next year, Vongerichten is reportedly planning to open a 7,300-square-foot casual restaurant and a 50,000-square-foot seafood market in the Tin Building next to Pier 17, former home of the old Fulton Fish Market in South Street Seaport in Manhattan.

JEAN-GEORGES MANAGEMENT

HQ: New York

LEADERSHIP: Jean-Georges Vongerichten, chef and proprietor; Phil Suarez, partner and founder; Lois Freedman, president

U.S. CONCEPTS: ABC Cocina, ABC Kitchen, ABCV, Jean-Georges, Nougatine at Jean-Georges, Terrace at Jean-Georges, Jojo, Louis, Perry St., Public Kitchen, Simply Chicken, The Mark, The Mercer Kitchen, Prime Steakhouse, Jean-Georges Steakhouse, Matador Room, Market at Edition, Tropicale, Jean-Georges at Topping, Rose House, Le Dock, The Inn at Pound Ridge, Jean-Georges Beverly Hills, The Rooftop by JG

INTERNATIONAL CONCEPTS: Dune, Café Martinique, Tangara Jean-Georges, Mercato, Jean-Georges at The Connaught, Market, Sand Bar, On the Rocks, JG Tokyo, Seared, Suviche, The Dempsey Cookhouse and Bar, Jean-Georges Kitchen

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: Jean-Georges at the Waldorf Astoria in Beverly Hills, Calif.; Jean-Georges at The Connaught in London; Public Kitchen in the Public Hotel in New York



LETTUCE ENTERTAIN YOU ENTERPRISES

HQ: Chicago

LEADERSHIP: Richard Melman, founder; Kevin Brown, president and CEO

NEXT GENERATION: RJ Melman, Jerrod Melman and Molly Melman — Richard Melman's children — oversee a division of 13 restaurants and nightclubs within the group.

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: \$580 million in fiscal 2016

CONCEPTS: More than 120 restaurants and more than 60 concepts in 13 states, including the original R.J. Grunts, RPM Steak and RPM Italian, and the newer Beatrix.

WHAT'S NEW: Open in 2017 is a third location of Beatrix, Lucky Dumpling, ASAP Poke, Stratford on the Park and Seaside's

CHICAGOLAND RESTAURANT EMPIRE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

With the debut of R.J. Grunts in 1971, Richard Melman launched what has become a multiconcept restaurant empire with brands as diverse as the fine-dining, art-filled concept Tru to the noodle den Ramen-san.

With the next generation of Melmans stepping up, Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, or LEYE, is executing forward-thinking ideas.

This year, LEYE opened three digital-only concepts, with food available for pick-up or delivery, but no dine-in service.

Lucky Dumpling serves dishes like crab Rangoon dumplings, salt-and-pepper shrimp, duck pot stickers and cashew chicken. ASAP Poke offers poke bowls and sushi rolls, and Seaside's features fried chicken, slow-cooked ribs and grilled lobster.

But the group's dine-in brands are still growing.

The all-day neighborhood restaurant and coffeehouse Beatrix opened a third location this year. Tucked inside two locations is Beatrix Market, with grab-and-go and self-serve food options. A standalone Beatrix Market is also coming soon to Chicago's Loop.

LEYE has enjoyed a steady stream of accolades over the years. Crain's Chicago Business dubbed Richard Melman "the Meryl Streep of hospitality."

But the patriarch said: "I don't want to be the biggest. I don't want to be the richest. I don't want to be the most well known. I just want to be good at what I do. It keeps my life in balance. If you have all you need, what more could you want?"



MOMOFUKU GROUP

HQ: New York

LEADERSHIP: David Chang, founder; Alex Munoz-Suarez, president

CONCEPTS: Momofuku (3 units), Ssam Bar, Ko, Ma Peche, Fuku, Fuku +, Nishi, Milk Bar (4 units), CCDC, Seiobo, Nikai, Dasiho, Shoto

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: North Spring is coming to LA, along with a location of Milk Bar. Momofuku will open in Hudson Yards in New York next year

RETHINKING THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS

Chef David Chang opened Momofuku in 2004 and ushered in a new era of Asian-fusion cuisine.

The New York-based group now includes restaurants in Washington, D.C., Las Vegas, Toronto and soon Los Angeles, including multiple locations of Momofuku and the dessert-focused Milk Bar, led by Christina Tosi. The group is reportedly scheduled to bring the fast-casual chicken concept Fuku to Hard Rock Stadium in Miami this fall.

Momofuku Group is known for rethinking the restaurant business.

This year, Chang grew the delivery-only concept Ando, expanding the delivery reach in New York and adding a new kitchen. But the business also evolved into more of a hybrid, with only takeout available from the pilot kitchen in Midtown.

But Maple, another delivery company Chang had invested in, failed, and the group folded the magazine Lucky Peach earlier this year.

Meanwhile, the group has been building its infrastructure with the addition of Alex Munoz-Suarez, formerly of The One Group, as president.

Chang is coming to the West Coast for the first time later this year with a new concept in Los Angeles called North Spring, as well as a location of Milk Bar.

And, not surprisingly, Momofuku Group is among the multi-concept players planning a restaurant in New York's Hudson Yards project. It is described as another location for Momofuku, although Chang hints that it will have a more "experiential" aspect.

"I think we need to do things a little bit differently and have bolder, bigger visions," Chang said in a statement. "This is exactly what Hudson Yards is to me. I think it's going to have a world-class food program, and I'm really honored to be a part of that."

SAGE RESTAURANT GROUP

HQ: Denver

LEADERSHIP: Peter Karpinski, co-founder and chief operating officer

CONCEPTS: 12 restaurants, all adjacent to Sage Hospitality hotel properties, including Mercat a la Planxa, Hello Betty Fish House, Braddock's, The Corner Office, Second Home Kitchen + Bar, Kachina, The Original Dinerant, Departure and Urban Farmer

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: \$118.4 million in fiscal 2016; \$125.5 million projected in fiscal 2017

WHAT'S NEW: Torali Italian-Steak opened in July. The fourth Urban Farmer opened in Denver in August. Emporium Kitchen & Wine Market and the adjacent Bowerbird Coffee will open in Fort Collins, Colo., this year, and in Savannah, Ga., in 2018.

CREATING A DESTINATION IN HOTELS

Sage Restaurant Group has worked hard to stay at the forefront of hotel dining with innovative concepts, all adjacent to properties owned or operated by Sage Hospitality, a management company for hotel chains.

Sage restaurants handle all hotel food and beverage needs, but they are also designed to stand alone as destinations.

Most are independent concepts,

but some brands are multiplying.

The fourth Urban Farmer opened in Denver in August, near The Oxford Hotel.

Each "rural chic" Urban Farmer steakhouse has its own personality based on the neighborhood, with menus that tap local ingredients, farms and fisheries.

Later this year, Emporium Kitchen & Wine Market will debut in Fort Collins, Colo.,

near The Elizabeth Hotel. The restaurant will serve housemade charcuterie; Blue Hill Bay mussels in white wine, herbs, shallots and butter; and wood-grilled spring trout with roasted fennel, clams and saffron broth.

The concept includes a market with wine, artisanal cheese, sandwiches, pizza and deli items.

And a side operation is the whimsical Bowerbird Coffee.

Emporium Kitchen & Market and Bowerbird will also open next year in Savannah, Ga.

In July, Torali Italian-Steak opened at the Ritz-Carlton in Chicago, with housemade pastas and big cuts of meat.

There's also an adjacent Torali Bar and an outdoor Rooftop at Torali. An all-day concept called The Café serves specialty coffees, sandwiches and desserts.



REACHING THE FINAL FRONTIER

Patina Restaurant Group is known for its attention-grabbing restaurants in landmark locations. So it makes sense that its next concept will be in space.

PRG's restaurant for Disney's upcoming Epcot exhibit called "Mission: Space" will give the appearance of dining high above the earth.

PRG has deep roots with Disney. The out-of-this-world restaurant will be one of several venues the group operates at Walt Disney World, including Tutto Italia, Via Napoli and Morimoto Asia.

The group grew out of food-

service contractor Restaurant Associates. In 1989, chef Joachim Splichal opened the restaurant Patina later expanding with more concepts and a catering empire that fed Hollywood stars at glamorous events.

In 1993, Nick Valenti was named CEO of Restaurant Associates, striking a deal with Compass Group USA, and in 1999 merging with Patina Group on the West Coast, forming the bi-coastal Patina Restaurant Group.

In 2014, Delaware North took a majority stake in the company, adding to the list of venues served.

PATINA RESTAURANT GROUP

HQ: Los Angeles/New York

LEADERSHIP: Joachim Splichal, chef and founder; Nick Valenti, CEO; Matt King, president

CONCEPTS: Nearly 60 restaurants across the U.S. and in Japan, including the flagship Patina in Los Angeles, and New York venues Lincoln Ristorante, The Grand Tier Restaurant at the Metropolitan Opera House and Nick & Stef's Steakhouse on both coasts

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: The Edison at Disney Springs in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., and the space-themed restaurant adjacent to the upcoming Mission: Space at Epcot

Over the years, PRG has proven its flexibility, creating high-end concepts like Leatherby's Café Rouge at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, Calif., and Lincoln Ristorante at New York's Lincoln Center.

In addition to the space-themed concept, PRG will open a version of The Edison at Disney Springs in Florida, a steampunk "industrial gothic" concept inspired by a venue of the same name in Los Angeles. Both are designed by Andrew Meieran of

design firm Kinetescape.

Back on the West Coast, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art will break ground in 2018 on a \$600 million rebuild that will reshape its neighborhood.

PRG currently handles food-service at LACMA, including the casual-dining Ray's and Stark Bar, LACMA Café, and the quick-service Coffee and Milk, or C+M. Whether the partnership will continue remains to be seen, but PRG is likely brewing potential ideas for LA's future.



PLANNING FOR THE NEXT PHASE

Originally from Lyon, France, chef Daniel Boulud arrived in New York in 1982 and began building an empire around soulful, seasonal French cooking.

In New York, he first worked in the kitchen at the Polo Lounge with another young chef, Thomas Keller. In 1986, he was named executive chef of Le Cirque, where he later won his first James Beard Award for Outstanding Chef.

Boulud won the award again at Daniel, his first restaurant, opened in 1993. Daniel became the foundation on which he built The Dinex Group, now a family of concepts across the U.S., London, Toronto, Montreal and Singapore.

This year, Dinex Group closed the restaurant DBGB Kitchen & Bar after eight years in downtown New York, in part because Boulud has a new project in the works.

Dinex Group has signed on to develop a new concept in the One Vanderbilt Avenue project next to Grand Central Station in New York, which will include a 1,400-foot skyscraper.

The restaurant will reportedly be on the second floor, and isn't expected to open until 2020. The project will also include a fourth location of Épicerie Boulud.

With Hudson Yards across town and the World Trade Center Oculus also attracting big-name restaurateurs, the fine-dining battle in New York is about to get more interesting.

THE DINEX GROUP

HQ: New York

LEADERSHIP: Daniel Boulud, chef and owner; Brett Traussi, chief operating officer

CONCEPTS: Daniel; The Bar at Daniel; Bar Boulud (3 units); Boulud Sud; Café Boulud (3 units); Bar Pleiades; d|bar; db Bistro Moderne (2 units); DBGB Kitchen & Bar (2 units); Épicerie Boulud (3 units); Maison Boulud; DB Bistro & Oyster Bar

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: DBGB Kitchen & Bar in New York closed in August after eight years. But the group is working on an unnamed new concept in One Vanderbilt in New York, a project that will also include a new location of Épicerie Boulud.



DANIEL BOULUD



THE GRILL

MAJOR FOOD GROUP

HQ: New York

LEADERSHIP: Rich Torrisi, Jeff Zalaznick and Mario Carbone; co-founders

CONCEPTS: Carbone (3 units); ZZ's Clam Bar; Dirty French; Parm (4 units); Santina; Sadelle's; The Grill; The Pool

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: The Grill and The Pool, replaced The Four Seasons at the Seagram building in New York. Coming in October: The Lobster Club.

REINVENTING A HISTORIC SPACE

This year, Major Food Group brought to fruition a massive project that made headlines.

The space that once housed the beloved Four Seasons, which closed last year, has been completely reworked into what is essentially two restaurants in the historic Seagram building: The Grill and The Pool, with adjacent bars.

Both restaurants attempt to recapture the stylish glory days of Manhattan's midcentury chophouses.

The menu at The Grill includes dishes like filet mignon topped with smoked oysters, a prime rib trolley, and ice cream Charlottes for dessert.

Chef and partner Mario Carbone led menu creation for The Grill, and said it was meant to be more fun than formal. But the setting is dress-up-worthy, with original art by Joan Miro, Alexander Calder and Cy Twombly. Service captains wear Tom Ford-designed tuxedos, and tableware was inspired by the John F. Kennedy White House.

Sharing a kitchen is The Pool, which debuted a few months later, with a seafood-focused menu by chef and partner Rich Torrisi. The menu includes French turbot and surf-and-turf combinations like lamb with scallops and duck with crab. The Pool boasts a large collection of Chateau d'Yquem wine, with bottles dating back to the 1800s.

Coming next is The Lobster Club, a Japanese restaurant to open in October, which Eater New York reported will also be in the Seagram building, on the lower level of the former Four Seasons space.

The restaurants so far are extravagant and shockingly expensive, but early reviews have been positive, in part because the concepts evoke a fantasy of the past that most diners today don't know or remember.

Major Food Group is not new to the old school. The group also operates Carbone, with locations in New York, Las Vegas and Hong Kong, a revival of traditional red-sauce Italian restaurants.

Torrisi Italian Specialties, once the group's crown jewel, closed in 2015 and is now a test kitchen — indicating there is more to come.

CRAMMING IT ALL IN

Troy Guard likes to use the phrase “continental social food” to describe what he does at his TAG Restaurant Group.

By that he means food unconstrained by national boundaries. “Social food” comes from TAG’s open kitchens and sharable dishes.

Guard also likes to give people something to talk about.

A signature dish at the restaurant TAG, for example, includes a simple presentation of fresh, flash-seared Hamachi tuna in yuzu white soy. But Guard garnishes the dish with Pop Rocks to give it

a sweet kick.

As a group, TAG is growing.

In March, a second location of fast-casual Bubu opened in the Denver area with build-your-own and signature bowls.

In June, a third location of the “badass” Mexican concept Los Chingones opened in Denver’s Stapleton neighborhood.

The original Los Chingones in Denver’s arts district will also grow this fall with the addition of Los Lounge, replacing the adjacent SugarMill that closed in May.

In July, Guard opened a casual

breakfast concept called HashTAG with dishes like lamb necks Benedict, creative hashes, pastries and boozy breakfast cocktails.

In August, HashTAG planned to launch a rotisserie-to-go program on weekdays, offering whole chickens and two sides.

Next up this fall is FNG, which is short for “F’in Good,” in Denver’s Highlands neighborhood, which is described as a social gathering destination and local hangout with elevated interpretations of comfort food favorites, largely informed by the wood-fired grill.

In a twist, FNG will include a market selling a selection of housemade prepared foods.

Guard said he didn’t mean to cram so much in this year, but some projects were pushed back from last year.

That doesn’t mean he plans to stop.

Another one or two concepts will open in 2018, and another two to four in 2019.



TROY GUARD

TAG RESTAURANT GROUP

HQ: Denver

LEADERSHIP: Troy Guard, chef and owner; Nikki Guard, beverage director and owner; Jason Borders, director of operations and partner; Chris Lotterer, executive vice president and partner

CONCEPTS: TAG; Bubu (2 units); TAG Burger Bar; Guard and Grace; Los Chingones (3 units); Mister Tuna; HashTAG

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: \$21.5 million in fiscal 2016; \$31 million projected for fiscal 2017

WHAT’S NEW: FNG opening in fall 2017



GUARD AND GRACE

COOKNSOLO RESTAURANT PARTNERS

HQ: Philadelphia

LEADERSHIP: Michael Solomonov and Steven Cook, co-founders

CONCEPTS: Zahav; Federal Donuts (5 units, plus two seasonal locations); Dizengoff (4 units); Abe Fisher; Rooster Soup Co.; Goldie

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT’S NEW: Rooster Soup Co. opened in January and Goldie opened in April. Federal Donuts locations opened in Miami, with Dizengoff next door. In 2018, Federal Donuts will open in Nashville, Tenn.

FROM SOUP TO DOUGHNUTS

CookNSolo is building a diverse portfolio of restaurants on the East Coast. The group is led by chef Michael Solomonov and restaurateur Steven Cook, who left his job as an investment banker in New York to pursue his passion.

Solomonov was named this year’s Outstanding Chef by the James Beard Foundation. He was born in Israel and raised in Philadelphia, and has helped educate American diners about the joys of Israeli cuisine with his restaurant Zahav.

While Zahav leans high end, CookNSolo is also demonstrating the casual appeal of Israeli food.

Fast-casual Dizengoff debuted in Philadelphia, in 2014, offering a contemporary take on the hummus stalls found on nearly

every street corner in Israel.

The group also added limited-service Goldie, a vegan falafel shop serving the balls fried to order and topped with amba, schug or harissa sauces, with shawarma-spiced fries and tehina shakes.

And it’s growing Federal

Donuts, which debuted in 2011 and has a cult following for its fried chicken and doughnuts.

Earlier this year, the group launched Rooster Soup Co. Proceeds support a hunger-relief and social-services program in Philadelphia that serves those in need.



A PARTNERSHIP THAT WORKS

The story of Batali & Bastianich Hospitality Group, or B&B, began in 1981, when Lidia Bastianich opened Felidia in New York.

She and her son, Joe Bastianich, followed it a few years later with Becco. Then Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich debuted Babbo Ristorante e Enoteca in 1998, and Batali and Joe Bastianich formed what is now B&B.

Over the years, the hits kept coming: Del Posto, Pizzeria Mozza in Los Angeles and CarneVino Italian Steakhouse in Las Vegas.

The group is also growing the Italian food market and restaurant hub Eataly in the U.S., where it is multiplying with locations in

New York, Chicago, Boston and soon Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Batali, of course, has become one of the most recognizable celebrity chefs, appearing on shows like "The Chew." He is reportedly working on a new

show with Zero Point Zero Production, of "No Reservations," "Parts Unknown" and "Mind of a Chef" fame.

The group is staying mum on what's coming next, but B&B has an eye for what works.



MARIO BATALI, LIDIA AND JOE BASTIANICH

BATALI & BASTIANICH HOSPITALITY GROUP

HQ: New York

LEADERSHIP: Mario Batali, Joe Bastianich and Lidia Bastianich, co-founders

CONCEPTS: 28 restaurants in seven states, Singapore and Italy, including Babbo Ristorante e Enoteca, Pizzeria Mozza, Del Posto, Felidia, Lupa and Tarry Lodge

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed

WHAT'S NEW: B&B Burger & Beer will close in September as the group prepares to open Eataly at the Park MGM in late 2018. B&B Ristorante in Las Vegas, which celebrated its 10th anniversary this year, will be renovated. Eataly is scheduled to open in Los Angeles this fall.

SPREADING THE LOVE OF MEXICO

Rick Bayless was one of the first chefs in the U.S. to get national attention for elevating Mexican cooking with his restaurants Frontera Grill, which debuted in 1987, and Topolobampo, which opened two years later.

What grew from those

acclaimed concepts was not one restaurant group, but two.

Frontera Grill, Topolobampo and quick-service Xoco operate under Frontera Grill Inc., which is owned by Bayless and his wife Deann, with Rick as chef.

As the company expanded, a separate Frontera Hospitality Group was formed, with Rick Bayless at the helm. That group operates newer concepts, like Leña Brava in Chicago, which opened in 2016. Next door, Cervceria Cruz Blanca serves tacos and craft beers.

Last year, the Hospitality Group opened Frontera Cocina at Disney Springs in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

Tortas Frontera has units in Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, and Frontera Fresco has two units in Macy's stores and one at Northwestern University.

The two groups are represented by one website, with Rick Bayless



TOPOLOBAMPO

at the culinary heart of the operations. He is also a consultant to the Red O concept, with four locations in Southern California, but those are operated separately.

Over the years, Bayless has become a passionate advocate for Mexican cooking. His television series, "Mexico: One Plate at a Time," is filming its 12th season. In 2014, he created a dinner-theater show called "Cascabel," featuring the flavors of Mexico, song, dance and a contortionist.

In 2016, Bayless earned the Julia Child Foundation Award, given to a person who has had a profound impact on the way America eats, cooks and drinks.

After three decades of promoting a richer understanding of Mexican cuisine, Bayless proves his continued relevance.

This year, the 28-year-old restaurant Topolobampo, which was also recently renovated, won the James Beard Award for Outstanding Restaurant.

FRONTERA GRILL INC./FRONTERA HOSPITALITY GROUP

HQ: Chicago

LEADERSHIP: Rick and Deann Bayless, owners, Frontera Grill Inc.; Rick Bayless, Manny Valdes and Dom Hospitality Group, co-owners, Frontera Hospitality Group

CONCEPTS: Under Frontera Grill Inc.: Frontera Grill, Topolobampo, Xoco. Under Frontera Hospitality Group: Tortas Frontera, Frontera Fresco (3 units), Fonda Frontera, Leña Brava, Cervceria Cruz Blanca, Frontera Cocina

GROUP SYSTEMWIDE SALES: Not disclosed