

Food Management

MENU Trendwatch

Menu Expert Arlene Spiegel Offers tips on How to Build a More Effective Dessert Menu

BY TARA FITZPATRICK

Dessert is a unique signature. "It's where you make your last and best impression — everyone remembers the dessert," says Arlene Spiegel, AS, FCSI.

A restaurant foods and retail consultant based in New York City, Spiegel is the founder of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, a full-service hospitality consulting firm that develops differentiated branded restaurant experiences for corporate foodservice, hotels, restaurants, cultural venues and a host of other client types, including many in the international arena. (For example, she recently completed restaurant projects for The Cherokee Nation; Isle of Capri; and is now working on a seafood concept in Tribeca.)

We asked Spiegel to share her thoughts on dessert menu trends for this year and beyond. To find out more about Spiegel's firm, visit www.arlenespiegel.com.



This 27 Spiced Apple Pie is an example of two big menu trends this year: it's a "classic comfort food with a twist," and it's also served in something other than a plate or bowl.

a unique signature with a special berry sauce or a mint leaf.

> **I'm seeing a resurgence** of comfort foods in the dessert world: custards, puddings and feel-good items. Chef's special versions of the store-bought snack cakes we all grew up with made with a twist are big right now.

> **People want to feel good** and enjoy dessert again.

> **We're now seeing flights of chocolate** served as in a cheese tasting. You could have milk chocolate followed by 60%, then 75% and then 80% cocoa content. A server could guide you through this experience, or it could be made simple for onsite operators to offer 1 or 2 oz. bars with the same cocoa contents in packaged form.

> **On your menu, describe** where chocolate comes from. Just like cheese. Is it French? Is it American?

> **You can charge** a hefty sum for chocolate fountains at catered events. People love the spectacle.

> **Toppings are now schizophrenic** for frozen desserts. You can have whole-grain granola, or you can have candy. No one is left out.

> **Cupcakes are still** going strong. A great idea is a very Southern cupcake: the peanut butter and jelly cupcake.

> **There's a cycle where** desserts are in, then they're out, and then they're associated with a specific era, just like classic cocktails. And they do come back (see sidebar, next page).

> **If you have yogurt on the menu**, you can say 'probiotic' to describe it. Words that imply health benefits are part of the mainstream conversation now.

> **For Greek yogurt**, mention on the menu that it's served with special honey from the Mediterranean, for example.

> **The biggest trend** is small, two-bite desserts. People can sample several different desserts without the commitment of one big dessert. We're seeing desserts served in shot glasses, demitasse cups...unusual ways to present a small dessert in a creative way.

> **The way the economy is**, smaller desserts allow people to spend just a little and still have a variety of options.

> **When you design a dessert menu**, you have to have an amazing cheesecake. Don't just call it 'New York Style.' Co-brand it and elevate the product; let them know you have the best.

> **You need a signature item** on your menu. It's big right now to make your own doughnuts. Serve doughnuts or churros with a caramel or chocolate dipping sauce.

> **List points of origin** on your menu. If something is local, it adds value to customers to know you are reducing your carbon footprint. When you have an ingredient you can source to the farm, you put that right on the menu.

> **On the other hand**, you don't want a menu that's like a book to read.

> **From the operational standpoint**, using premade items like mini cakes saves labor and equipment costs. They're uniform and pre-portioned. If they start out plain, any chef can add her own signature.

> **A cheesecake or a mini bundt cake** can get



Arlene Spiegel, shown here with Eric Dziwanowski, Executive Chef of Flint Creek Steakhouse, Cherokee Casino in West Siloam, OK, during a pre-opening menu testing.