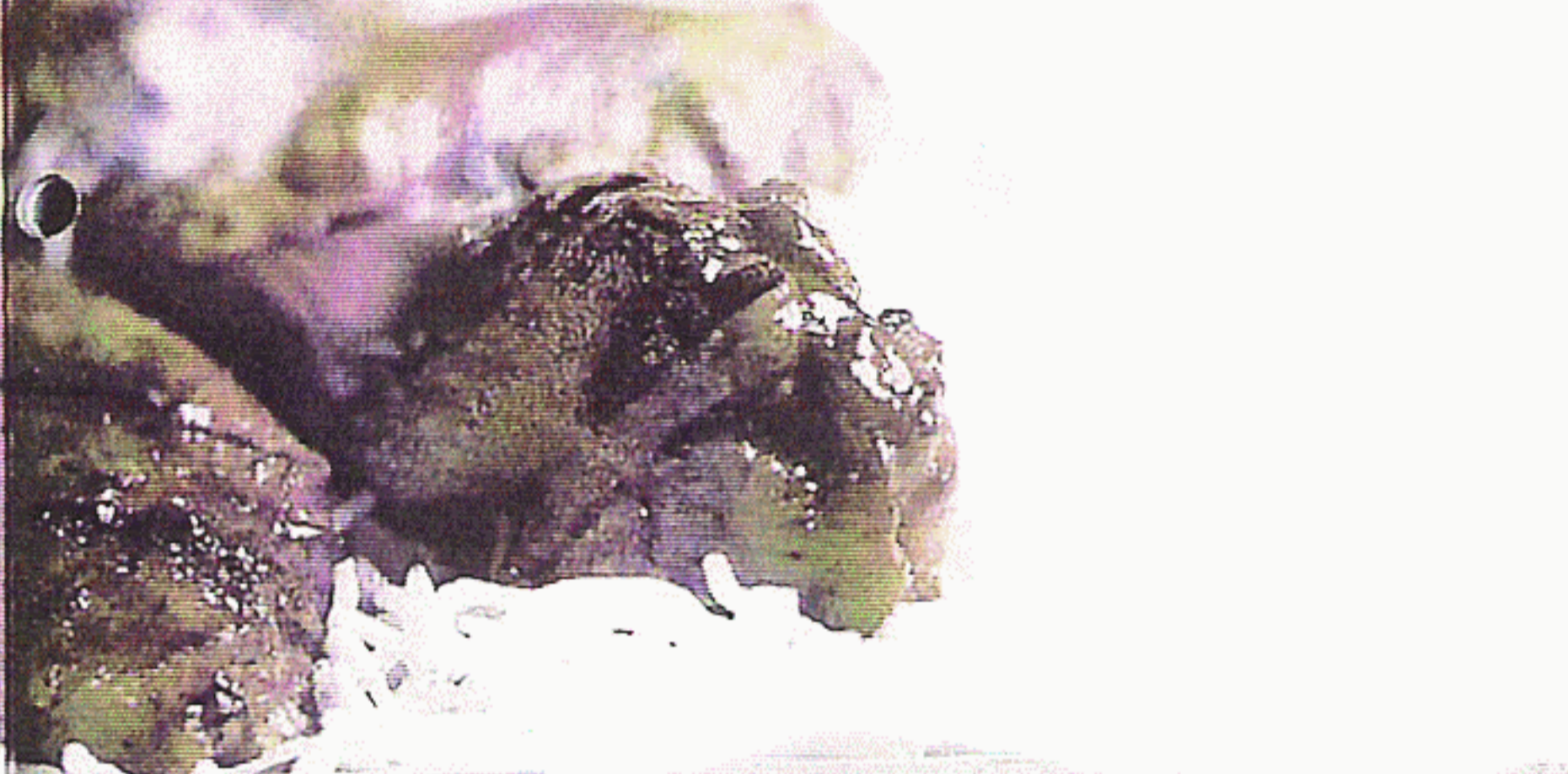
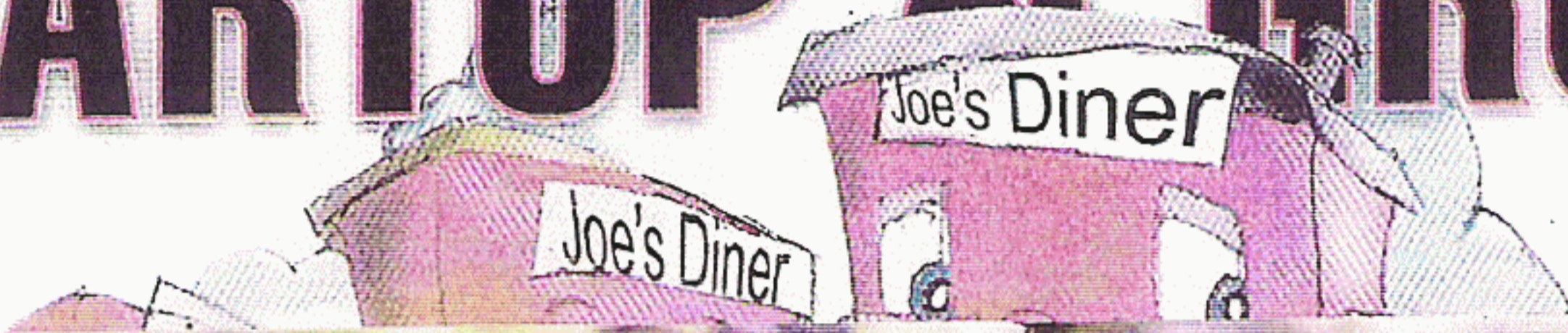


GOOD RESTAURATEURS ARE ALWAYS LEARNING™

Restaurant

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STARTUP & GROWTH™



Steal the Show

How to Create a Profitable Appetizer Menu

Photos Courtesy of Tyson Foods, Inc.

Devout concert-goers often stand in line for hours to buy a ticket for a big-name act, without consideration for whoever else will be on stage that night. Yet it is often the quality of the opening band that sets the tone and creates the energy that flows into the rest of the show. In some cases, the "opening act" is so good, it provides an unexpected treat. A number of great bands have gotten their start by stealing the show as warm-up bands for the headliners. Serious music fans are always looking for the little-known talent that will be next year's buzz.

In the daily show that takes place in your restaurant, appetizers are tantamount to the warm-up band. They can bring the crowd to its feet, or be chased off the stage. You want to avoid the latter, since more than ever before, patrons are discussing them, sharing them, often ordering nothing but them — and chefs are making their reputations off of them.

By Howard Stahl

...So why have appetizers moved so clearly into the spotlight? "Because people get their first impressions from the appetizer section," says foodservice consultant Arlene Spiegel. Nor should operators treat appetizers as "second-class citizens," she says. "The plate presentation, condiments and everything that goes with it should be treated as just as important as an entrée."...

To Thine Own Concept be True

..."People today, when they go out, very often use the appetizer section of the menu to mix and match, and actually that's sometimes all they eat from," Spiegel says. "So No. 1, the appetizer menu should have enough variety that if people want to use it as their main meal there is enough substance to it."

Next, Spiegel says, the menu should "really reflect the culinary point of view of the cuisine, of the chef, of the concept. They should be in sync. You wouldn't, for example, just to make some people happy, put fried chicken or those cheese mozzarella sticks on. It should definitely be congruent with the overall menu."...

How Many is Enough?

The number of appetizers to offer is another strategic decision. Spiegel says the appetizer portion should be large enough that people can share. In fact, she says, "Very often when people go out with a group, or even two or three people, what they'll do is get one or two appetizers for the table to share. A very, very important item on all appetizer menus should be what I call a sampler. It should have a choice of anywhere from three to five of your appetizers able to be put into a large platter."

Manhattan's Havana Central does this, she says. "They actually bring a tall tower with several plates of their appetizers. I think that's really important, and in fact it's one of the most popular appetizer courses. People really want to have a variety and they love to share, and that's really the trend. It takes from the old (Chinese) pupu platter. Everything old is new again."...

Pricing

..."Pricing should not be "so intimidating that people won't order it," Spiegel says, "Unless you're dealing with caviar or truffles, or other items that are very dear and precious." As a rule of thumb, the appetizers should be no more than one-third of the cost of an entrée....