

My Compliments to the Chef, Er, Robot

Automated machines take over New York kitchens

By Charles Passy – July 20, 2019



Robots are making their way into New York City's restaurants. A growing number of dining spots throughout town are using machines to prepare all manner of food and drink, in many cases replacing the employees who would normally handle the task. Think gizmos that can do everything from slice a sushi roll into eight uniform pieces to mix the perfect happy-hour cocktail.

And when no machine is available for the job, some restaurateurs find an automated solution of their own design. Nat Loganathan, owner of the newly opened Dalup Modern Indian, a fast-casual restaurant in Chelsea, used his engineering and computer background to build a device that makes dosa, the crepe-style item popular in Indian cuisine.

While automation offers a restaurant many benefits, the main one is about keeping labor costs down,

said Arlene Spiegel, a New York-based hospitality consultant. And that is especially critical at a time when dining spots in the city are feeling financial pressure because of increases in the mandated minimum wage.

Ms. Spiegel also noted that a younger, tech-savvy generation of customers has no issue with robots preparing their food. "They're used to having machines take the place of real live experiences," she said.

Still, restaurateurs are quick to note that they have hardly replaced all their staff with machines. Only certain orders are currently prepared by machine. Some chefs remain wary of automation, saying machines might work in some settings, but they have their limitations. A robot is not going to recognize a regular customer. ●