

CLARK WOLF COMPANY

FOOD, RESTAURANT AND HOSPITALITY CONSULTING

A BAKER'S DOZEN TRENDS (PLUS ONE) FOR 2010

The 'Aughts are over! So let's move firmly and confidently into the real meat of the 21st Century. Here's a baker's dozen of trends for the New Year.

Mobile Foods. Street food with a parking space. If you can put wheels on it, you're off and running. Immigrant or Celeb-bratty Chef, it's a great way to try things out, go right to your customers and expand your horizons. Have stove will travel.

Gardens and more gardens. Just because things seem to be getting better it doesn't dampen last year's explosion of personal plots. In large part thanks to the back yard produce program of Michelle Obama, we're all gonna continue to dig it! And get delicious foods for our messy efforts.

Seasonal, regional and fresh! Families and restaurant chains, high end eateries and local diners, we're all going to see a lot more of what's ripe and ready from just down the road. We'll figure out what and how and if we'll mention it or just expect it but what we chow down will be from a lot closer by.

Pizza, pizza everywhere and not a drop to waste. Fresh, handmade and local mozzarella on top, we'll keep digging into what Mediterraneans have known about for millennia. Few but perfectly handled ingredients just prove that machines can never replace what nice folks and hot ovens can cook.

The Great American Hamburger lives on. There's a reason that a good burger feels like an America birthright - and it's not far flung beef parts from unknown quarters. Hand ground from beef cattle raised on personal pastures. Gussie it up or leave it be, it's a simple pleasure that's worth the extra trouble to do right.

Speaking of chopped and cooked, sausages are great food if the right cook puts together good ingredients. It fits a lot of bills - that need to stay lower these days.

Which marries well with our need for Comforting Foods - Part Deux. Italian food has become the new normal. Managing to be special without being strange, people seem happy to 'go Italian' for almost any meal at almost any level. Thirty years ago it was classified as "ethnic food". Now it's just lunch.

One easy/tasty standout that seems on the verge of going national is some and all versions of what the Vietnamese call Bahn Mi - and we call them good, zippy sandwiches.

I know I have a conflict of devotion with this one but boy, am I glad to see really good mac and cheese just about everywhere. I had it as a middle course - covered with shaved black truffle - on Christmas Eve, and then again served from Corning ware on a Brooklyn counter top to bring in the New Year. It's just good eat'n, and a cure for whatever ails us. And no, I don't mean Kraft Dinner. I mean aged cheddar and good noodles and...whatever else seems like a good idea, especial if some form of bacon is involved.

Freshly butchered meats. Now that it's become a foodie fetish, and we've had a few e-coli scares, we realize yet again, the value of knowledge and craft, hard work and the wisdom of learning and preserving cultural foodways. And the taste!

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Calling crap and busting the bogus. Even with a frontman (woman) huckster Nutrition dean they had to pull the hilarious Smart Choice label program when the New York Times Business Section called into question the basic business sense of suggesting Fruit Loops were a Smart Choice. Yeah, for a hangover.

American Maple. I mean, they call their tree farms their Sugarbush!! How great is that? And it's a natural sweetener that can please us and teach us a lot about managing wooded areas in thoughtful ways.

And finally, a coming together of Land Preservation and Farm Preservation folks that acknowledges the need for sustainable balance, not just so that people can go for a lovely walk but so that we can grow and raise foods without bespoiling the earth. It's just, well, right.

Ok, one more cultural glacier that's slowly moving to cut through mountains. The Trusted Byline. As publishing institutions crumble and bloggers blather and yelp we begin to realize that professional training and traditional hard work are as important in journalism as they are for cheese making. We trust people we've come to trust (can you imagine being a Julie Powel wanna be? So sad). For The New York Times or Politico, if Marian Burros writes it, it's solid. Francis Lam moves from Gourmet to Salon.com and we go too. Scott Hocker rocks it now from Tastingtables.com, leaving SF Mag to its own devices. Maureen Clancy and Scott Joseph have left the San Diego Union Tribune and the Orlando Sentinel respectively but they now have their own delightful and useful sites. The Atlantic has Corby Kummer and the thinner and thinner SF Chronicle has Michael Bauer - both of whom we count on and trust. For solid American cookery we have Scott Peacock at Better Homes and Gardens, and there always Cooks Illustrated as long as Chris Kimball has his bow tie firmly in place.