

the**last**word



NICHE CONCEPTS

MARK BITHREY, DESIGN DIRECTOR AT B3 DESIGNERS, OFFERS UP HIS EXPERTISE ON THE 'NICHE CONCEPTS' MOVEMENT AND MERGING OF THE FOOD AND DESIGN WORLDS

THE 'NICHE CONCEPTS' MOVEMENT IS AN INTERESTING TREND AT THE MOMENT; IT SEES FOOD OFFERING AND DESIGN WORKING VERY CLOSE ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER TO CREATE THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE EXPERIENCE ON OFFER. THIS IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE PROMINENT IN TODAY'S EATING OUT CULTURE.

We are finding innovative restaurants are creating very interesting menus by focusing on one main food offer/ experience. Another interesting experience that 'niche concepts' offers us is the opportunity to revisit the provenance of food through revivalism. This is a notion that design can reinforce by forming the environment that embodies the food offer, suggesting a tone, atmosphere and ultimately a sense of experience for diners. Overall consumers have become less and less concerned about the brand when dining out and more with the overall experience and the emotional impact that this can deliver.

Sometimes this is strong conceptually and will go

the distance as it invites people to try the 'best' of particular ingredients. Menus change but the base ingredients remain the same. This gives the food offer a sense of authenticity and skillful execution that is reassuring. Pork-centric restaurant Blackfoot by ex-Leonite Tom Ward executes this very well.

Sometimes it relies on novelty and diners no doubt feel they are living a Nathan Barley sketch e.g. Cereal Killer Café, the UK's first speciality Cereal Café selling 120 different types of cereal from around the world and 30 different varieties of milk. Another good example of this is Tincan, a pop up restaurant project by Amanda Leveté, AL_A Architects serving the finest tinned seafood from around the world.

Alongside niche concepts trend, we have found niche 'food pairing' is still very popular. Being given a smaller selection of food and drink and executing that food offer very well. Good examples of these are Bubbledogs, Burger & Lobster, Dirty Burger + Chicken Shop and Tramshed to name a few. When we designed Bubbledogs, a key consideration was

the use of laid back furniture and materials like the reclaimed stools and shelf counters juxtaposed against more elegant, sophisticated materials like the polished copper bar and hand blown bubble pendants, originally from a grand chandelier. Creating this contrast was representative of the food and drink offer, the laid back hot dogs with champagne. In niche concepts, this is the value that design provides, adding layers on layers to the experience.

Another little trend we have noticed is 'Chef-on-residence' concept. We get quite excited when chefs are invited to our favourite restaurants for a few weeks or for a one-off event at established restaurants and pop-ups. Guest Series at Lyle's restaurant is a great example of this where we saw Head Chef, James Lowe, welcoming Leandro Carreira to his kitchen. Jones and Sons collaboration with Tripkitchen is another great example of this 'Chefs-on-residence' trend. Niche concepts – it's all in the experience.

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