

# FLAVOR

## & THE MENU

ABOUT THE BUSINESS OF FLAVOR

### The FLAVOR PAYOFF

**Asian ingredients and American dessert forms  
can add up to new interest in sweet endings**

Core savory Asian flavors like soy sauce, wasabi, chile sauces and sesame have thoroughly infiltrated mainstream American dining, but the region's influence on dessert menus lags behind. This discrepancy was the subject of a recent study conducted by Olson Communications, a Chicago-based marketing-communications firm, which used its Culinary Visions Panel to poll a nationwide cross-section of 314 consumers over the Internet.

Participants were presented with descriptions of different Asian dessert concepts created for the survey by dessert specialist and cookbook author Jill Van Cleave. Her concepts included mango-rice pudding layered with sponge cake; coconut-milk cream cake with meringue frosting; chai-tea cheesecake with caramelized bananas; an upside-down kumquat cake; milk-tea ice cream with passion fruit; carrot-ginger cake with yogurt-cheese frosting; Vietnamese-style rice crêpes with lime-curd and fresh-strawberry filling; and cardamom-scented buttermilk monkey bread with blueberries and brown-sugar glaze.

Survey participants were most enticed by the chai-tea cheesecake: 45 percent of respondents said they would be "very likely" or "likely" to try it. Another 41 percent reported that they would be very likely or likely to try the coconut-milk ice cream cake or the cardamom-scented buttermilk monkey bread. Forty percent indicated that they would order milk-tea ice cream with passion fruit or carrot-ginger cake with yogurt-cheese frosting.

The mango-rice pudding, Vietnamese-style crêpe and upside-down kumquat cake received the fewest votes, but even here, at least a third of respondents reported a willingness to taste these desserts.

"These results clearly show an audience for Asian-inspired desserts," says Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications. "Asian cuisines have become so ingrained in our eating habits that diners today know the difference between chai tea and green tea; they know how a mango can enrich a pudding; they know what cardamom is, and they like its flavor," she notes.

Operators looking to branch into new flavors for familiar desserts like ice cream, cookies and cakes can be confident that diners are ready for a taste of the East.

— Kathy Hayden