



PANACHE

Trend Spotting at The Winter Fancy Food Show

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by Sharon Olson

The Fancy Food Show attracts specialty retailers, caterers, chefs, and a wide range of professional food enthusiasts. Here are some perspectives from the show floor.

Passion for the Craft

Cheesemakers continue to focus on the craft and unique *terroir* of their cheeses. American cheeses have gained stature and credibility – building a world-class reputation for quality and craftsmanship. Passion for the craft extended to fair trade and sustainability initiatives in every category, from ranchers to chocolatiers.

Slow Food in the Fast Lane

The global slow food phenomenon continues to build momentum, but time-starved consumers can be just as happy finding a resource to take over some of the slow part of the process, so they can enjoy the food at home. Authentic ethnic foods made easy have appeal to consumers who enjoy the flavors and the speed-scratch convenience of sauces, rubs, and seasonings made by experts.



Photo courtesy of PDR Productions

Foods with A Conscience

Fair Trade and sustainable were the attention-grabbers at this show. These products may or may not be organic; the big interest was in supporting local producers, small family farms and a healthier lifestyle that's not only good for the consumer, but also good for the global community.

Savor the Salt

When it comes to prepared convenience foods, salt is clearly the next ingredient to eliminate as consumers become tuned in to checking ingredient statements for sodium. But when it comes to gourmet preparations, salt is the latest seasoning to explore and savor. There were more than 25 different varieties of gourmet salt to experience at this show – ranging from classics like fleur de sel to exotics, including Bolivian Rose, Cyprus Black Lava, and Aguni from an obscure Japanese island.

Chocolate, Chocolate, Chocolate

Chocolate was the single largest exhibit category at the show. Edible, drinkable, deep, rich, and dark chocolates were available from all over the world. Exhibitors featured the romance and drama of chocolate with stories about product, producers and unique ways in which their confections were created.

Zen and the Art of the Infusion Experience

Tea continues to be an aggressive, successful competitor to coffee in the fight over hot-beverage share. Silk bags, pyramid-shaped containers, flower teas and heirloom quality selection boxes are now the norm. For those concerned about over-packaging, there were biodegradable pyramid tea bags.

The Next Superfruit

Acai is making a run at becoming the new pomegranate, as are a wide range of other exotic fruits. Taste is a challenge with many of the new fruits, and they are often mixed

with traditional juices to mask the flavor. Perhaps the next drink will come from a flower, rather than a fruit. Rose nectar was making quite a stir with its delicate flavor, soft color and colorful history.

Food as Fashion

Packaging for high-end gift foods now rivals the products of any ultra-chic fashion boutique. Packaging makes the statement, from youthful and contemporary with lots of attitude to classic high-end retail that is almost as much fun to unwrap as it is to eat.

Exquisite Bites

"Indulgence is worth the splurge," continues to drive innovation in bite-sized appetizers and sweets. One company aptly named The Perfect Bite proudly proclaimed that chefs say their delectable appetizers look and taste like a chef's own. Difficult, time-consuming preparations were done perfectly for the consumer or the foodservice professional, and were too delicious to resist.

Asia's Rising Star – India

Asian was a well-represented category, driven by the noodle dishes characteristic of Thai, Chinese, and Vietnamese cuisines that are rapidly heading toward mainstream status. Several years ago, we began looking at chutney as both the next salsa and an excellent introduction to the flavors of India. This year, foods characteristic of this culture were more widely represented – we saw gourmet curries, biryanis, samosas, vegetarian kebabs, Indian breads used for wraps and rolls, and mango custards. One caveat holds true. The more difficult the cuisine is to create, the greater the interest in creating convenience-food versions of authentic dishes. Since a wok is a lot easier to come by than a tandoori oven in today's kitchens, ready-to-eat Indian dishes are a growing category.

Everyday Mediterranean

Flavors and ingredients like olive oils, Italian-style cheeses, desserts, and pastries with Mediterranean flavors have become part of the everyday meal as Americans have embraced these flavors and cooking styles as their own.

In the end, it was all about great taste, imagination and the joy of little luxuries.



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