



FSR

HOW **FIVE**  
RESTAURANT  
GROUPS  
ARE SCALING SUCCESSFULLY

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LOTUS CONCEPTS / COVER JOSÉ ANDRÉS GROUP

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# 5 Restaurant Groups That Are Scaling with Soul

By balancing innovation with irreplaceable hospitality, the leaders of these restaurant groups are setting a new standard for what it means to find success in the full-service space.

SCALING A RESTAURANT GROUP IS NO SMALL FEAT, especially in today's complex dining landscape. For the visionary leaders behind five standout organizations—Casa Nela Hospitality, Hai Hospitality, Big Red F Restaurant Group, Lotus Concepts, and José Andrés Group—growth isn't just about adding locations. It's about expanding with intention, fostering community, and ensuring your team and culture grows alongside the business. These restaurant groups prove that it's possible to grow sustainably without losing the soul and core DNA that made them beloved by their communities in the first place.



# José Andrés Group

WASHINGTON, D.C.



**SAM BAKHSHANDEHPOUR**  
CEO OF JOSÉ ANDRÉS GROUP (JAG)



**FOR SAM BAKHSHANDEHPOUR**, who was named CEO of José Andrés Group (JAG) in May 2024, success in the restaurant world means having a strong ethos of uniting people through food, maintaining brand standards while thoughtfully growing, and delivering exceptional dining experiences while driving positive systemic change.

Bakhshandehpour's journey with JAG began in 2020 as president and board member before stepping into the CEO role last year. "Really, the move this past year was more symbolic than anything else. It was really to crystalize a role that I had already been playing, which is running the day-to-day of the business," he says. "José's primary focus is his humanitarian efforts. He is wonderful on camera and with storytelling, so he leans into JAM, which is José Andrés Media, producing content that brings really wonderful awareness to our restaurants."

Celebrity chef José Andrés was 21 years old and had just \$50 in his pocket when he moved from Spain to the U.S. Having already completed culinary school in Barcelona—which he enrolled in at the age of 15—he proceeded to make a name for himself over the past 30 years and became a world-renowned chef and restaurateur, and is often credited with introducing tapas to American eaters. He helped to open Jaleo in Washington, D.C. in 1993, which served paella and tapas and now has five locations. In 2002, he opened Zaytinya, which features eastern Mediterranean cuisine on small plates. His restaurants—from Jaleo to Zaytinya to Oyamel and beyond—were early drivers of the shared plates movement.

Now, JAG encompasses 40 restaurants in markets including Washington D.C., California, Las Vegas, Florida, New York, Chicago, and a few international spots like Fish by José Andrés in the Bahamas and Jaleo at Atlantis The Royal in Dubai. JAG's concepts range from food trucks to a multi-location vegetable-focused fast casual, Beefsteak, and world-class tasting menus like Michelin starred mini-bar by José Andrés. Each restaurant concept is a way for Andrés and his team to tell unique cultural and culinary stories through food, drink, and design.

Andrés famously founded World Central Kitchen (WCK) in 2010 after the devastating earthquake in Haiti. Formed with the goal of finding solutions to global hunger and poverty, WCK is an organization of food first responders, serving meals on the ground as a critical form of disaster





relief. Andrés and WCK served over 3.8 million meals in Puerto Rico following the devastation of Hurricane Maria in 2017, and they have continued to help food relief efforts in every natural disaster since, from Ukraine to Syria to here in the U.S. Named as one of Time Magazine's "100 Most Influential People" in both 2012 and 2018, and "Outstanding Chef" and "Humanitarian of the Year" by the James Beard Foundation, Andrés was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in January, the nation's highest civilian honor.

In 2021, Bakhshandehpour played a pivotal role in rebranding the company name from ThinkFoodGroup to José Andrés Group. "I wanted to showcase that we have the spirit of José, but you have a platform that can scale, that has been professionalized in terms of team members, systems, brand standards—really the blocking and tackling while preserving the soul," Bakhshandehpour says. "And in order to scale, you can't have ... a chef in a chef's coat, because once you have more than a handful of restaurants, there's only a limited amount of time that that chef can have. So José sets the North Star, but ultimately, our team is running the day-to-day."

That North Star mission is "to change the world through the power of food," and the balance between honoring Andrés' vision while streamlining operations has been key to JAG's success. By leaning on a mission-driven culture, the group has attracted top-tier talent, many of whom have stuck around for 15 to 30 years, who value working for a brand that not only positively impacts the world fighting for social justice issues, but also treats its hourly team members well. With a focus on career mobility, JAG enables employees to grow within the company, moving from city to city and concept to concept. For example, the group had a longtime chef who traded in their apron to become an IT specialist. "Career mobility is a huge selling point," he notes.

Despite the many headwinds operators face, the beauty of restaurants is the spirit of the people who work in this industry, says Bakhshandehpour. "José and I had an interesting discussion last week in L.A. He goes, 'You have to realize, many of the people who work in our industry and work for our company are passion-first.' And those two words really resonated with me," he says. "When you think about passion-first, the biggest challenge



this industry faces is labor right now, and it's both availability of labor and it's also the lens that they bring labor into their company. In credit to our HR team and our training team—they've done such a wonderful job of this—it's shifting the perspective where a job in the restaurant shouldn't just be a transition job."

"The way you solve for labor is you have an authentic mission," he continues. "You stand for excellence, and you have a beautiful culture that promotes the individuals, because it starts with our team ... Your guests can't have a wonderful experience unless your employees and partners feel like they're appreciated."

JAG's commitment to quality is also key, which manifests itself in the group's relentless drive for culinary innovation and investment in research and development. JAG sends dedicated chef partners out on global expeditions to bring back new ideas to their kitchens annually. "We lead with culinary innovation and excellence. That is the pillar that we build the rest of the experience around," Bakhshandehpour says. "What's interesting is all of the experiences are 'a luxury experience,' but luxury is not defined on price point. Luxury is defined by the quality of that experience, and it ranges from two Michelin star minibar experience in D.C. all the way to a food truck and everything in between."

Looking ahead, JAG's growth strategy will include openings in key cluster markets such as Los Angeles, South Florida, Las Vegas, and the group's debut of its first branded hotel, The Bazaar House in Washington D.C.'s Georgetown area, scheduled to open in 2027 as a six-story 67-room luxury hotel and membership club with a new signature restaurant from Andrés.

JAG will continue to focus on partnerships with hotels and airports and its collaborations with iconic brands like Marriott, Hilton, and Hyatt, which allow the group to integrate seamlessly into guest journeys and elevate the overall experience. "There is a mission here. And the more we scale, not only are we touching lives, guests, and our employees, not only are we making money for our shareholders, and our stakeholders who are our hotel owners and partners, but our voice can impact this industry," says Bakhshandehpour.



JOSE ANDRÉS GROUP/© J. BJORNWALLANDER





"We're innovating not just on food, but [on] sustainability. Can we put a dent into food waste? And through partnerships, not only impact the independent restaurant industry, but partner with our hotel partners? We're partners with the three largest hotel operators in the world," he continues. "So are there lessons learned in our four walls of restaurants that can apply to hotels? Are there lessons learned in our four walls of restaurants that can impact the airline industry and impact food waste and waste in general at airports?"

Sustainability has always been a part of Andrés' North Star. In 2023, he partnered with George Washington University to launch the Global Food Institute, an initiative backed by the Rockefeller Foundation that aims to change the way people view food's integral role in creating a better world, influencing global policymakers to deliver solutions for food system challenges, and inspiring future generations to develop systemic solutions.

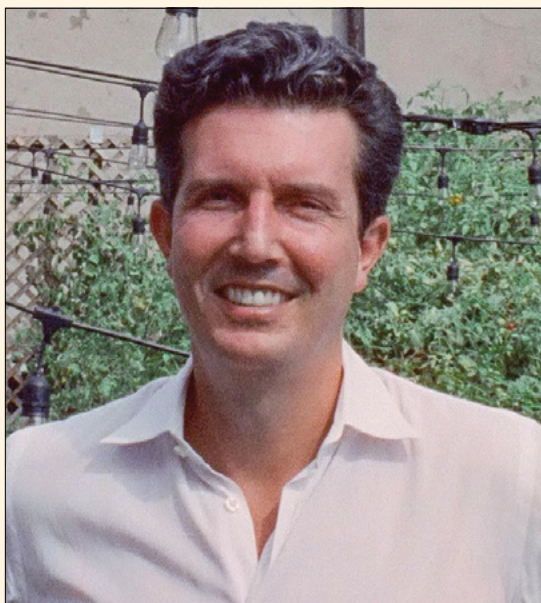
Bakhshandehpour says JAG will be announcing some initiatives soon around food waste and better utilizing ingredients, and ways to measure improvements. "There's a number of issues that the company and the name on the front of the jersey stands for, this North Star of purpose driven, being intentional with this company and this platform," he says. "That mission is authentic. It's been there from day one, it's about leading by doing good and running a profitable restaurant business."

"Rebranding to lean into that is what the brand José Andrés Group stands for—purpose and profit, that marriage of the two," he adds. "Why do so many Michelin starred restaurants not make it? Because they're all art; there's no science. They're bleeding cash ... On the other side, you look at fast casual or quick serve, it's very homogenized and it's a very sterile experience, but it's consistent. It has no soul, but they're the most valuable businesses on the planet. We're trying to be the best of both worlds. We're trying to deliver incredible culinary experiences while being good fiduciary stewards of capital."



# Casa Nela Hospitality

## NEW YORK CITY



**CARLOS SUAREZ**  
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER



When Carlos Suarez was 26 years old, he set out to open his first restaurant armed with a Wharton education, a brief stint in finance, and a deep passion for food. Inspired by his parent's Italian countryside garden and the transformative role of sharing food around the family table, he sought to recreate the intimate, communal atmosphere. From personally demoing his first restaurant to building Casa Nela, Suarez remains steadfast in his mission to create authentic and accessible dining experiences alongside a team of dedicated hospitality professionals.

### WHAT MAKES YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP STAND OUT FROM OTHERS IN THE FULL-SERVICE SPACE?

At Casa Nela, we aim to create restaurants that feel like home—a place where people gather to connect, celebrate, and share memorable meals. What sets us apart is our deep focus on hospitality. Each restaurant is designed to be warm, welcoming, and rooted in its neighborhood, blending timeless design with thoughtful food and service. We also prioritize fresh, seasonal ingredients, working closely with farmers and local producers to ensure the highest quality. For us, it's not just about a great meal but about cultivating a sense of belonging and community.

### CAN YOU DESCRIBE EACH CONCEPT UNDER YOUR UMBRELLA?

**Bobo (2007):** Bobo is where it all started. It's a cozy townhouse restaurant in the West Village, designed to feel like a dinner party in a casually elegant French country home. The space is intimate and layered with charm, from the dining room to the speakeasy-like bar.

**Rosemary's (2012, multiple locations):** Rosemary's is inspired by my parents' house in Luca, Italy. Our flagship in the West Village includes a rooftop garden, inspired by their garden, where we grow herbs and produce that we use in our dishes. The menu is approachable, with house-made pastas, seasonal plates, and a focus on simplicity and freshness. Over the years, Rosemary's has grown into a brand synonymous with warm hospitality and Italian comfort, now with three locations in New York, one in Miami, and even one in Tokyo.

**Claudette (2014):** Claudette draws its inspiration from the French Riviera, bringing the coastal elegance and



vibrant flavors of southern France to Greenwich Village. The reimagined menu highlights fresh, seasonal ingredients with a Mediterranean flair, offering dishes that are bright, refreshing, and effortlessly sophisticated. Think grilled seafood, vibrant vegetable-forward plates, and Provençal classics with a modern twist.

**Roey's (2018):** Roey's is our most casual and family-friendly concept, offering wood-fired pizzas, fresh salads, and simple, crave-worthy dishes. Located on Perry Street, it's a neighborhood hub designed to bring people together over great food without any fuss. It's accessible and perfect for a casual night out with friends, and due to its spectacular happy hour offering, tends to draw a younger crowd.

#### HOW DO THEY DIFFER? WHAT IS THE THROUGH-LINE OR INVISIBLE THREAD THAT CONNECTS THEM ALL TOGETHER?

While each concept has its own distinct personality—Bobo with its Parisian charm, Rosemary's rooted in Italian tradition, Claudette bringing the glamour of the French Riviera, and Roey's as a neighborhood go-to—the common thread is the hospitality and community we foster. Each restaurant is built to reflect and enhance its neighborhood, creating spaces where people feel at home. We focus on fresh, seasonal ingredients, timeless design, and genuine service across all our concepts.

#### WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

The future for Casa Nela involves thoughtful growth. We're excited about expanding Rosemary's, particularly in new markets like Miami, where we see a great opportunity to bring the spirit of the Italian countryside to a vibrant and growing dining scene. We're committed to deepening our relationships with local producers, enhancing our sustainability practices, and continuing to elevate our guest experience. My ultimate goal is to stay true to what has always driven me: creating spaces that bring people together over great food and even better company.



DANIEL KRIEGER (2) / CASA NELA HOSPITALITY



# Lotus Concepts

DENVER, COLORADO



**SAVANNA HYDE**  
DIRECTOR OF GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT



Starting off as a front-of-house employee at a sushi grill and sake bar, Savanna Hyde has worked through many positions in the hospitality industry, from food and beverage operations manager at Marriott Hotels to being a bar director and a general manager. Hyde joined Lotus Concepts in July 2023, which was created by restaurateur Francois Safieddine who saw the opportunity to create an elevated neighborhood sports-bar dining experience, which led to the idea and opening of View-House Eatery Bar. Through the years, the restaurant group has continued to thoughtfully anticipate, create, and deliver innovative restaurant concepts to its portfolio, and currently operates nine locations.

## WHAT MAKES YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP STAND OUT FROM OTHERS IN THE FULL-SERVICE SPACE?

Our restaurant group stands out because of our unwavering commitment to creating unforgettable guest experiences. From the moment a guest walks through our doors, they can feel and see the creativity in every detail. We emphasize genuine hospitality and a personalized touch that goes beyond the standard. Each of our properties has a distinct identity and atmosphere, but they all share a core philosophy: to be a place where guests feel seen, valued and celebrated. We also prioritize innovation in every aspect of our business, whether it's curating unique menus that blend local and global flavors, stylish architecture and interior-design at all the spaces with custom-built details, or implementing cutting-edge technology to enhance service.

## OUR RESTAURANT GROUP HAS ALWAYS VALUED CAREFULLY CURATED EVENTS THAT HAVE SET THE STANDARD IN COLORADO FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS.

Beyond that, our team is deeply ingrained in the communities we serve. Through grassroots initiatives, local partnerships and hosting community events, we're more than restaurants—we're hubs for connection. Ultimately, it's our people – the passion, talent, and dedication of our team members—who make the difference. We believe in fostering a culture of care and excellence that reflects in every guest interaction, ensuring they leave with a sense of belonging and excitement to return. We use quality local ingredients and we are connected to the businesses and people we serve and partner with every step of the way.





LOTUS CONCEPTS

### CAN YOU DESCRIBE EACH CONCEPT UNDER YOUR UMBRELLA?

My Neighbor Felix celebrates the vibrant, fresh flavors of Mexico in a casual, fun environment. Open for dinner, brunch, happy hour, and lunch, My Neighbor Felix features time-honored recipes elevated with Colorado-proud, ethically sourced ingredients, as well as signature margaritas and craft cocktails. From familiar favorites like tacos, enchiladas and burritos to shareable “tablas fuertes” including mole de castilla organic chicken and crispy whole red snapper, culinary director Ricardo Villalobos’ menus take inspiration from all seven regions of Mexico. My Neighbor Felix supports local farms and producers, minimizing its environmental impact through sustainable practices and fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for community gatherings.

ViewHouse is an independently owned and locally rooted destination for great eats, drinks, views and endless fun. With four Colorado locations in Denver, Centennial, Littleton, and Colorado Springs, the chef-driven modern American menu spotlights 100-plus local products and the bar serves Colorado-centric brews from 35 taps, spirits from 15 local distilleries and hand-crafted cocktails. The vibrant atmosphere features indoor and outdoor flatscreens, a variety of bar activities and backyard games, plus live music and other events. ViewHouse is open for lunch, happy hour, dinner, and late night daily, as well as weekend brunch and private events.

Located in the heart of Denver’s Ballpark district, Wonderyard Garden + Table is a bar-forward restaurant that offers sharable favorites paired with an inventive cocktail and zero-proof program all in a lush secret garden-inspired venue. Open for lunch, brunch, dinner, and happy hour, Wonderyard’s dynamic indoor and outdoor spaces come to life in daylight and transition into a sophisticated, electric nightlife escape after sunset—making it the perfect all-day destination.



## HOW DO THEY DIFFER? WHAT IS THE THROUGHLINE OR INVISIBLE THREAD THAT CONNECTS THEM ALL TOGETHER?

Each of our concepts offers a distinct and unique experience, tailored to the community they serve and the vibe they embody. Across all three concepts, the invisible thread is our focus on bringing people together, whether it's to celebrate a milestone, unwind after work, or enjoy an everyday outing. Each concept reflects our attention to detail, passion for quality, and dedication to creating spaces where guests feel at home. It's about delivering an elevated yet approachable experience. That consistency in hospitality is what ties our diverse concepts together.

## HOW HAS YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

Our restaurant group has evolved significantly over the years, guided by our ability to adapt to trends while staying true to our core values. When we started, our focus was on creating spaces where guests could enjoy excellent food and a great atmosphere. Over time, we've grown not just in the number of concepts but also in our understanding of what makes each one unique and impactful. We've become more intentional about tailoring each concept to meet the needs and desires of the communities we serve. For instance, as people have sought more experiential dining, we've leaned into creating immersive environments like the vibrant energy of My Neighbor Felix or the relaxed sophistication of Wonderyard. With Viewhouse, we've embraced the dynamic social culture of Colorado, adding new touches to keep it fresh and exciting.

On the operational side, we've prioritized innovation, sustainability and efficiency—from incorporating advanced technologies to streamline guest experiences to supporting local vendors and eco-friendly practices. Our commitment to our teams has also deepened, investing in training and creating opportunities for growth.

Ultimately, our evolution has been about listening—to our guests, our communities and our teams—and using that feedback to continuously refine and elevate what we offer. While the journey has been one of growth and change, our mission of delivering exceptional hospitality and creating memorable experiences has remained at the heart of everything we do.



LOTUS CONCEPTS (3)





LOTUS CONCEPTS

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES?

Operating a variety of unique restaurant concepts is both an exciting opportunity and a complex challenge. Each concept has its own identity, target audience, and operational needs, which means we have to tailor our approach to everything from menu development to marketing strategies. Balancing these distinct personalities while maintaining a consistent standard of excellence across the board requires thoughtful planning and strong leadership.

One challenge is ensuring that each concept has a clear and authentic voice while still aligning with the overall vision of our restaurant group. For instance, what resonates with guests at My Neighbor Felix might not be the same as what works for Wonderyard or Viewhouse, so we have to deeply understand the DNA of each brand and remain true to it. Another challenge is managing the operational complexities that come with varied menus, staffing needs, and service styles. Each restaurant has different rhythms, from the energetic nightlife vibe at Viewhouse to the communal, garden-inspired atmosphere at Wonderyard. Keeping the right team in place and ensuring they are supported and trained for the unique demands of their concept is critical.

Lastly, marketing multiple concepts means creating campaigns that are as distinct as the restaurants themselves, while still representing our group's overall dedication to quality and hospitality. It's a fine line, but one we navigate by staying creative, adaptable, and focused on what makes each concept special. The key to overcoming these challenges is communication and collaboration. By fostering a culture of teamwork and shared purpose across all our concepts, we ensure that each restaurant thrives in its own way while contributing to the bigger picture.



## WHAT IS YOUR BRAND'S PHILOSOPHY OR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

Our brand's philosophy is rooted in the belief that dining is about more than just food—it's about connection, community, and creating moments that matter. Whether it's a casual lunch, a celebratory dinner, or a night out with friends, we aim to make every visit unforgettable by blending exceptional hospitality, thoughtfully crafted menus and inviting atmospheres.

At the heart of everything we do is a commitment to people first. From our guests to our team members, we focus on fostering genuine relationships built on trust, respect, and care. We believe that when our teams feel empowered and inspired, it reflects in the guest experience. Another core principle is innovation without losing authenticity. We're constantly looking for new ways to elevate our concepts, whether through creative menus, engaging events, or unique design elements, but we always stay true to the spirit and identity of each brand.

Lastly, we're driven by a deep sense of community. We strive to give back through local partnerships, meaningful connections, and spaces where everyone feels welcome. Our guiding principle is simple: Every guest, every time. No matter which concept they visit, we want our guests to leave with a sense of joy, connection, and excitement to return.

## WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

We're excited to continue building on the success of our current brands—Wonderyard Garden + Table, My Neighbor Felix, and Viewhouse—by further enhancing the experiences they offer and expanding their presence to reach even more guests. Each concept a loyal following, and we're committed to refining and evolving them to keep them fresh, relevant, and exciting.

At the same time, we're also focused on developing new concepts that bring something truly unique and fun to the market. We're always inspired by the communities we serve and the ever-changing trends in the industry, and we want to create experiences that surprise and delight our guests in new ways. These future concepts will stay true to our philosophy of delivering exceptional hospitality while offering something completely distinct and innovative.

The future is about staying true to who we are while pushing the boundaries of what's possible in hospitality.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY METRICS TO SHOWCASE YOUR SUCCESS?

Our success and growth are best reflected in our continued expansion and our commitment to bringing exciting concepts to the market. Each new opening is a testament to our ability to innovate and adapt.

Our success isn't just about numbers; it's about the connections we've built, the memories we've helped create, and our ongoing mission to elevate hospitality in every way. We're proud of what we've accomplished so far, and we're even more excited for what's to come.





# Hai Hospitality

AUSTIN, TEXAS



**TONY MONTERO**  
CEO



In 2003, James Beard Award-winning chef Tyson Cole launched his first restaurant, Uchi, in a modest red house in Austin, Texas. Today, with four unique concepts, the award-winning restaurant group remains dedicated to learning, evolving, and delivering outstanding culinary and hospitality experiences. Tony Montero came on board in June 2017 as CEO, bringing with him 30 years of restaurant and hospitality industry experience, from working as a dishwasher at age 12 to working as a Cheesecake Factory vice president. Hai Hospitality operates 12 Uchi restaurants with a location in Uchiko Miami Beach opening this year. Hai also owns and operates six Loro Asian Smokehouse and Bars.

## WHAT MAKES YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP STAND OUT FROM OTHERS IN THE FULL-SERVICE SPACE?

We hire people who are passionate, provide them with a long roadmap of training, emphasize food innovation and exceptional hospitality, and then set them free to deliver unique experiences for our guests in their own authentic way. Uchi was founded on the principle of extending the personal connection you get at the sushi bar to every seat in the restaurant. Every member of our front-of-house team is extensively trained to understand our food and beverages and engage with guests as a sushi chef would—sharing insights and collaborating to create a warm, personalized dining experience.

## CAN YOU DESCRIBE EACH CONCEPT UNDER YOUR UMBRELLA?

Uchi ("house" in Japanese) is the original concept in our portfolio, founded in 2003 by award-winning chef Tyson Cole. Inspired by the intimacy of the sushi bar, Cole sought to create a dining experience that pairs a modern, non-traditional take on Japanese cuisine with a welcoming atmosphere. Uchi's menu highlights light clean flavors with a strong emphasis on sushi, while the environment blends an elevated dining experience with a warm, homelike feel.

Uchiko, meaning child of Uchi, came along seven years later as an extension of the brand. Uchiko is the fiery counterpart to its parent, bringing smoke and char to the fore alongside the fresh and clean flavors that define Uchi. Uchiko showcases an array of exquisite beef and fish from Japan and worldwide with various seasonal ingredients



and imaginative combinations. Uchiko is perfect for both small and large parties offering an entire section “from the hearth” with options serving the whole table.

Uchibā, which loosely translates to Uchi bar, is a more casual izakaya-inspired cocktail bar and restaurant. With two locations now in Dallas and Austin, Uchibā is a great entry to point to our concepts and delivers a vast selection of Japanese whiskies, yakitori grill items, and Uchi classics.

### HOW DO THEY DIFFER? WHAT IS THE THROUGHLINE OR INVISIBLE THREAD THAT CONNECTS THEM ALL TOGETHER?

The Uchi restaurants represent three similar but distinct concepts. Rooted in Japan and inspired by the world, all brands are committed to delivering extraordinary experiences through thoughtful design, genuine hospitality, and remarkable food.

### HOW HAS YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

With Uchi as the core brand we have evolved our concepts Uchiko and Uchibā, to allow exploration of new ingredients, techniques, and influences with an eye to creating different ways of interpreting the “perfect bite”.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES INVOLVED WITH OPERATING A VARIETY OF UNIQUE RESTAURANT CONCEPTS?

With every market we enter we create a connection to each community through the design of the exterior and interior as well the menu and programming. Having each location be specifically tied to its market while maintaining the highest standard of quality and service does present ongoing challenges but also opportunities and learnings that we can bring back to the group.

### WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

We are continuing to grow all of our concepts. We seek markets where there is current and potential demand for our restaurants and in 2025 our plans include opening an Uchiko in Miami Beach and Uchi in Charlotte, North Carolina. Hai sales have tripled since 2019, and we are looking to continue to grow at 20-25 percent each year.





# Big Red F Restaurant Group

BOULDER, COLORADO



**DAVE QUERY**  
CHIEF POT STIRRER (FOUNDER AND CHEF)



Known by friends as “DQ” (completely unrelated to Dairy Queen), Dave Query is described as “a hometown guy” who grew up in Boulder, Colorado. He graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, cooked his way through France, and worked in multiple restaurants throughout the U.S. before returning home to become a part-owner of his first restaurant in 1989. Now, he owns and operates 15 locations under Big Red F Restaurant Group.

## WHAT MAKES YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP STAND OUT FROM OTHERS IN THE FULL-SERVICE SPACE?

First and foremost, our dedication to our communities. We recently tallied our charitable contributions, and over our 30 years in business, Big Red F has managed to raise several million for various charitable causes. Also, our dedication to fun. It sounds silly, but making sure our team members are happy and having fun translates to the guest experience.

We also pride ourselves on being a Colorado-centric group. With our focus on Colorado’s Front Range, we are able to support so many local vendors here and really integrate into our communities.

## CAN YOU DESCRIBE EACH CONCEPT UNDER YOUR UMBRELLA?

**The Post Chicken & Beer** serves modern takes on traditional American dishes, with a special emphasis on the art of fried chicken. Founded in 2013, The Post’s crispy, all-natural, gluten-free, pressure-fried bird has legions of loyal devotees across Colorado’s Front Range. The menu, which also includes vegetarian and seafood dishes, fresh salads and innovative and classic side dishes, pairs perfectly with The Post’s own award-winning craft beers.

Founded in 1994, **Jax Fish House & Oyster Bar** has been Colorado’s go-to destination for the freshest sustainable seafood for three decades. The first restaurant in Colorado to be certified by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch for its responsible sourcing, Jax Fish House flies seafood in daily to stock its renowned raw bar and create chef-driven, seasonal plates. Whether guests are visiting for daily happy hour or a celebratory dinner, they will find exemplary service, a curated list of cocktails, wine and beer and a high-energy dining experience at each of Jax Fish House’s five Front Range locations.





Located in the heart of downtown Boulder, **Centro** serves soulful and imaginative Mexican cuisine, blending the culinary traditions of Mexico with modern Colorado influences. The bustling bar focuses on agave spirits, crafting fresh-squeezed margaritas and other refreshing cocktails to pair with the vibrant cuisine. The year-round patio offers the Pearl Street Mall's best people watching.

Pearl Street's historic watering hole, **West End Tavern's** menu revolves around classic neighborhood tavern favorites. The bar houses a massive whiskey selection plus a constantly rotating selection of craft beers on tap, perfect for pairing with the remarkable views of the Flatirons from the Tavern's rooftop patio. From wings and burgers to seasonal salads and barbecue sandwiches, West End's home-style eats hit the spot for lunch, dinner, and happy hour.

**The Velvet Elk** Lounge is an intimate live music venue and cocktail bar in downtown Boulder. Featuring local and nationally acclaimed performers, the Velvet Elk is also a destination for craft cocktails, cold beer, and a curated menu of seasonal snacks and light bites.

**ButterPunk Cookies** specializes in fresh-baked, warm cookies. ButterPunk delivers indulgent treats with a punk rock attitude. The menu features a selection of signature cookies, along with monthly flavor specials.



## HOW DO THEY DIFFER? WHAT IS THE THROUGHLINE OR INVISIBLE THREAD THAT CONNECTS THEM ALL TOGETHER?

In some ways, our concepts are wildly different in terms of experience. For example, while we do have an approachable happy hour, many guests visit Jax Fish House to celebrate special occasions over a raw bar platter and bottle of Champagne. Meanwhile, West End Tavern is a cozy, time-worn tavern experience. But the throughline of all is that we want to offer something that guests can't find elsewhere. While there are a million (wonderful) Italian restaurants, in the '90s in Colorado, you couldn't get fresh seafood, so we opened an oyster bar and made folks realize that we could fly in top-notch, sustainable fresh product from both coasts.

West End Tavern offers carefully crafted barbecue—a rarity in Boulder—and a slightly elevated bar experience. Centro's year-round covered patio right in the action on Boulder's Pearl Street makes it a year-round hub. And when we couldn't find the fried chicken we wanted in Colorado, we created it for The Post, developing our own Colorado-style fried chicken that just happens to be gluten free. Other threads that tie everything together are the fact that we are always chef-driven, welcoming, and community minded.

## HOW HAS YOUR RESTAURANT GROUP EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?

We've been a place where folks can really find their home, and we really value their perspectives and talent. When we were just starting out, we aimed to hire the best people we could and trust them to do amazing things. That hasn't changed. But over the years, many of those same folks who started with us as bartenders or servers have made their way into various leadership roles in the company, shaping our restaurant group's culture as a whole. That's been an amazing thing to see. We also like to nod to the past and we certainly have OG dishes that never leave the menu, but we always want to stay relevant with current appetites and trends so that our restaurants continue to appeal.



BIG RED F (3)





LUCY BEAUGARD

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES INVOLVED WITH OPERATING A VARIETY OF UNIQUE RESTAURANT CONCEPTS?

It's a blessing and a curse. During the pandemic, our more casual concepts, The Post Chicken & Beer and West End Tavern, were our lifeblood, as people were looking for comfort food and takeout. We're also able to streamline sourcing at various restaurants—for example, Centro Mexican Kitchen is bringing in the same top-tier sustainable seafood that we're so known for at Jax Fish House. Those longstanding relationships with suppliers benefit the entire group.

Our challenges are probably the same as everyone else's—staying consistent across locations and allowing our local teams to be community minded and creative without going too far off the brand map.

### WHAT IS YOUR BRAND'S PHILOSOPHY OR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

"Make it right." We have this hanging in all of our kitchens.

### WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

We're scouting a stand-alone brick-and-mortar location for our new cookie brand, ButterPunk Cookies, in Denver. It's been operating as a take-out cookie window at a location of The Post since it opened earlier this year and it's been a huge success, so we look forward to growing that. We are also in the bidding process for a Jax Fish House at Denver Airport. ●



BIG RED F



**CHICKEN BACON  
SANDWICH**

# The Key to Building a Craveworthy Menu

**Satisfying diners with a single ingredient.**

## **DINERS JUDGE WHETHER A RESTAURANT**

is worth revisiting based on their satisfaction with the experience. A low-priced meal can still leave a negative impression if it falls short on taste or expectations, while pricier options are justified if customers enjoy the food and service.

To impress diners, operators should elevate their menus with ingredients that feel premium and indulgent. Consumers don't want a meal they can easily get at home or better executed by compet-

ing restaurants. Bacon, a customer favorite, facilitates this approach by adding indulgence, versatility, and craveability, helping chefs craft dishes that exceed expectations.

"When used thoughtfully, bacon can transform a good dish into a great one, making it memorable for customers and enhancing overall satisfaction," says Clay Mohr, senior product manager for Tyson Foods. "Signature bacon-based dishes meet consumer demand for indulgence but also help restau-

*"When used thoughtfully, bacon can transform a good dish into a great one, making it memorable for customers and enhancing overall satisfaction."*

rants differentiate themselves in a competitive market. By offering unique and premium bacon creations, operators can help build customer loyalty, drive repeat business, and give diners a compelling reason to choose their establishment over competitors."

Today's consumers are looking for more variety with 48 percent saying they are interested in trying new bacon items, according to a 2023 Mintel report. One impactful way to tap into this trend is by reimagining bacon beyond its traditional breakfast role. "Bacon is now celebrated as a premium, versatile ingredient across every daypart," Mohr says. "From appetizers to desserts, chefs are leveraging bacon's bold flavor and crave-able texture to enhance and elevate their menus."

T. Hasegawa released its 2024 Salty Snack report, which examined consumer preferences regarding snack choices, flavors, and their willingness to try new innovations. Sweet and savory combinations topped the rankings, with 52 percent of consumers favoring them. Quick-service restaurants are capitalizing on this movement by offering desserts featuring bacon.

"We've done a lot of brown sugar bacon, which works well with sweet dishes," says Brooks Cameron, corporate executive



chef at Tyson Foods. “When I see something really sweet, I think, ‘That’s a perfect opportunity for some salty bacon to balance it out.’ I look for places where bacon can make a dish better, or where it’s underused. For example, we recently did a crispy bacon chicken churro sandwich. The inspiration came from chicken and waffles, and the bacon cinnamon flavor worked well together. I try to combine familiar flavors with new twists, finding where bacon can add that extra something.”

Bacon adds a great sense of balance to a dish. Even if it is just a sprinkle on top of a soup or salad, it provides a needed layer of texture and flavor. “Bacon has become a sought-after premium ingredient because it delivers on every level: bold flavor, craveable texture, and universal appeal,” Mohr says. “Its smoky aroma, salty-sweet balance, and rich umami flavor enhance virtually any dish, making it a versatile addition that resonates with diners across all demographics.”

When selecting bacon for non-breakfast dishes, consumers prioritize several key qualities. The flavor is a top consideration, with bold, rich tastes being favored, such as hickory smoked, maple glazed, or globally inspired seasonings that elevate indulgence and depth. The texture is equally important, with the ideal balance between crispiness and a slight chew, ensuring the bacon provides both flavor and a satisfying bite. Additionally, attributes like “thick-cut” or “center cut” are highly appealing, signaling premium quality and justifying a higher price point.

When considering flavor, texture, cut, and source, **Wright** Brand is a trusted choice for food-



**CHICKEN  
FRIED BACON**



**BACON &  
EGG BURGER**

service operators. “Every slice of Wright Brand bacon begins with hand-selected pork belly, ensuring consistency and precision,” Mohr says. “Our authentic slow-smoking process, perfected since 1922, uses real hickory or applewood chips to infuse rich, robust flavors unmatched in depth and authenticity.”

With three distinct cuts—Premier, Preferred, and Popular—**Wright** Brand bacon is designed to meet a variety of menu needs. The bacon is offered in three signature flavor profiles: Hickory Smoked, naturally wood-smoked for hours to deliver a bold, classic flavor; Applewood Smoked, a light, fruity, and slightly sweet option that adds a unique twist; and

Peppered, finished with coarse-ground pepper for a perfect balance of spice and smoky richness.

**Wright** Brand’s versatility shines across menu applications, performing beautifully in everything from center-of-plate entrees to garnishes and ingredients. The thick-cut slices maintain their texture and flavor, delivering consistent results in sandwiches, salads, soups, and more.

**Wright** Brand offers valuable resources to help operators effectively use the product and drive menu innovation. On-trend recipe inspiration offers creative ideas for crafting bacon-forward dishes that appeal to customers and keep menus ahead of the curve. Trend insights deliver actionable knowledge about consumer preferences and industry movements, helping position bacon as a must-have ingredient. Since 1922—for more than 100 years—**Wright** Brand has led the industry with premium bacon and continuously evolved with operators needs in mind.

**By Olivia Schuster**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [TYSONFOODSERVICE.COM/PRODUCTS/BRANDS/WRIGHT-BRAND-BACON](https://tysonfoodservice.com/products/brands/wright-brand-bacon).**





**SELL  
MORE  
SANDWICHES  
ACROSS  
ANY  
DAY PART**

**DO IT  
WRIGHT™**



FOODSERVICE







# Tricks for Balancing Quality and Cost

BACON &  
FIG TOAST

## Smart sourcing superior ingredients.

**CONSUMERS TODAY PRIORITIZE** high-quality menu items and often avoid processed or "unnatural" options when dining out. According to the Toast 2023 Restaurant Success Report, 72 percent of diners ranked high-quality food as the top factor influencing their choice of restaurant. For operators, this means sourcing ingredients consumers can taste and see the difference in—ingredients that are fresh, visually appealing, and transparently sourced to feel confident about the quality of their meals.

Offering authentic and high-quality products doesn't just satisfy customers—it also strengthens a restaurant's brand identity. Diners associate quality with trust, and when they encounter dishes made with premium ingredients, they're more likely to explore additional menu items. This curi-

osity to try more of what the restaurant offers enhances the overall dining experience and positions the menu as versatile and reliable.

Operators must strike a careful balance between offering high-quality products and maintaining profitability. This requires strategic portion control to reduce waste, efficient storage solutions to preserve ingredient freshness, and thoughtful menu pricing that reflects the value of the dish without alienating cost-conscious customers. By managing these factors effectively, restaurants can incorporate premium offerings without compromising their bottom line.

According to Datassential 2024, The World of Bacon Report 69 percent of menus include bacon, and 56 percent of diners believe that bacon is a key ingredient in dishes. The overwhelming presence of bacon means consumers have higher expectations for bacon due to its permeance across menus and dishes. If oper-

ators plan to stand out sourcing high-quality, and versatile bacon cuts and flavors is key.

When upgrading a menu, high-quality bacon is key to making a significant impact. Bacon is often chosen by diners to elevate the flavor and satisfaction of their meal, making its quality crucial. Poor-quality bacon can leave guests disappointed and harm their dining experience.

"Operators often face challenges in balancing quality with cost," says Clay Mohr, senior product manager for Tyson Foods. "Sourcing bacon that meets high flavor and authenticity standards, such as those derived from real-wood smoke, can be expensive. Additionally, finding consistent product quality and ensuring the bacon aligns with their target flavor profiles can be difficult. Managing inventory to ensure freshness without overstocking, which can lead to waste, is another challenge."

**Wright** Brand helps opera-



**BREAKFAST  
PLATTER**

tors achieve the perfect balance between quality and cost with a premium product that delivers consistent flavor at a competitive price. “Wright Brand uses a time-honored method of smoking bacon over real hardwood, such as hickory or applewood, which imparts a rich, authentic flavor that is hard to replicate with artificial flavoring methods,” Mohr says. “This process is longer and more labor-intensive, but it results in a superior product with a deep, smoky flavor that many operators and consumers find more desirable.”

**Wright** Brand bacon is a consistent thickness that ensures uniform cooking results and a top-tier guest experience every time. Consistency helps portion control, reduce waste, and maximize yields. Prepping bacon for peak service hours is easy for operators due to the four hour hold times **Wright** Brand bacon offers. Additionally, operators can select bacon sliced by the pound or inch, providing the flexibility to find the perfect fit for their menu and operational needs.

Bacon is a special ingredient because some dishes only need a

*“Using bacon as a topping or ingredient in signature dishes can help portion control and help reduce waste.”*

light crumble or the underlying flavor of bacon to increase their value. Its rich, savory profile enhances dishes in subtle yet impactful ways. “Operators should consider menu engineering to incorporate premium bacon in ways that boost flavor without requiring large quantities,” Mohr says. “Using bacon as a topping or ingredient in signature dishes can help portion control and help reduce waste.”

Bacon is also a dual-purpose ingredient. Its rendered grease can be repurposed to enhance the flavor of other dishes. From sautéing vegetables and frying eggs to adding depth to sauces and soups, bacon grease is a cost-effective way to infuse rich, smoky notes into menu items. By using the grease, operators can help reduce waste, save on additional

cooking oils, and maximize the value of every slice.

When it comes to incorporating bacon into dishes, finding the right balance is essential. “Food should be dynamic, like music,” says Chef Brooks Cameron, corporate executive chef for Tyson Foods. “Think of it as creating a balance of flavors. Bacon is salty and fatty, so you need something that balances it out. It could be as simple as adding a fresh, lightly marinated cucumber for acidity or using a bun that complements the fat. The goal is to create a dynamic, balanced dish.”

Incorporating bacon into LTOs is another unique opportunity to create memorable, elevated dishes. “Premium bacon is perfect for LTOs because it adds a special touch that makes the dish feel indulgent and unique,” Cameron says. “It’s a way to create excitement and attract customers looking for something new or different. The versatility of premium bacon allows for creativity in both savory and sweet LTOs.”

Incorporating high-quality bacon—from appetizers and soups to beverages and desserts—provides a dynamic way to elevate dishes, enhance flavors, and attract a broad range of diners. According to Datassential’s MenuTrends 2023 Report, 80 percent of consumers say they like or love bacon, solidifying its status as a timeless favorite. **Wright** Brand offers a consistent, premium option that helps enhance the overall dining experience and keeps customers returning for more, making it an essential ingredient for operators looking to satisfy cravings and create memorable meals.

**By Olivia Schuster**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT [TYSONFOODSERVICE.COM/PRODUCTS/BRANDS/WRIGHT-BRAND-BACON](https://tysonfoodservice.com/products/brands/wright-brand-bacon).**



# The Ingredient That Sells Itself

**Profit potential in customizable meals.**

**CONSUMERS LOVE THE FREEDOM** to customize their meals when dining out. The ability to add ingredients to a dish makes the experience more personalized and memorable. For operators, this presents a valuable opportunity to upsell and increase check averages.

Bacon is the ultimate add on, enhancing nearly any meal with its rich flavor and universal appeal. According to Datassential's 2024 The World of Bacon Report, almost 69 percent of menus serve bacon. Offering bacon as an add on to a meal, such as a sandwich or breakfast plate, can be a powerful way to entice guests, as many are likely to indulge in the upgrade. The word "bacon" alone sparks cravings, with its irresistible scent and savory flavor evoking a sense of enjoyment and indulgence.

"From the consumer's side, it's about delivering a dish with more flavor, texture, and overall satisfaction at the end of the day," says Chef Brooks Cameron, corporate executive chef at Tyson Foods. "From an operator's perspective, bacon drives traffic and adds a higher perceived value to a dish—even something as simple as a chicken sandwich can feel elevated with a couple of slices. We've seen that bacon can also help improve margins. Operators can charge more for a bacon-

enhanced item and see a meaningful return."

Bacon's familiar flavor and versatile texture make it a universally appealing choice for diners across all demographics. Unlike niche or unfamiliar ingredients that might deter customers, bacon evokes comfort and nostalgia. According to 2024 research by Statista, 268.04 million Americans consumed bacon in 2020, with projections estimating an increase to 275.72 million by 2024, highlighting its strong influence on menu choices.

Its smoky flavor also pairs well with a wide range of cuisines, making it a perfect addition to



**BLTA SANDWICH**



**HICKORY SMOKED BACON**

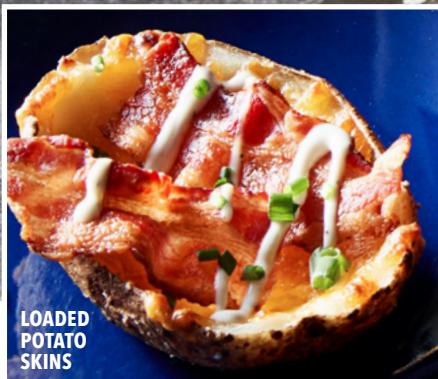


**BIG-BIG BACON BURGER**

various dishes. A 2023 report by Bake Magazine indicates that over the past year, bacon has generated \$6.3 billion in sales in the United States, further emphasizing its popularity and versatility.

"Bacon is great because it's a familiar flavor, so it's easy to play with," Cameron says. "I could do a Thai peanut butter and bacon pizza or even a Hawaiian pizza with bacon. I've also done Korean egg Benedicts with bacon. Bacon's salty, umami flavor is great for adding depth, and it's a comfort



**BACON BAO****LOADED  
POTATO  
SKINS****BACON SANDWICH  
WITH PIMENTO  
CHEESE**

food that pairs well with just about anything, even global flavors.”

Not all bacon is created equal, and for operators, choosing the right type can be overwhelming. From smoky sweet applewood to the bold, robust flavor of hickory, bacon comes in a variety of profiles, each bringing its own unique taste and texture to a dish. For instance, hickory-smoked

*“Operators can charge more for a bacon-enhanced item and see a meaningful return.”*

bacon delivers a classic, rich smokiness that pairs perfectly with hearty breakfast platters, while applewood-smoked bacon offers a lighter, subtly sweet note that complements salads and sandwiches.

This is where **Wright** Brand can help simplify the decision-making process. Hand trimmed, naturally smoked, and available in various cuts and flavors, **Wright** Brand bacon has provided chefs with a reliable, balanced option since 1922. With its consistent quality and flavor, **Wright** Brand bacon works across a range of culinary applications, from traditional comfort foods to modern, globally inspired dishes.

**Wright** Brand offers three

expertly crafted flavors, ensuring a perfect option to complement any meal. The Hickory Smoked variety is a timeless classic, naturally smoked for hours over hickory chips to impart a bold, savory flavor that has become a staple in countless kitchens. For a lighter, subtly sweet alternative, the Applewood Smoked bacon delivers a fruity aroma and taste, making it ideal for salads, sandwiches, and brunch offerings. For those seeking a bold twist, the Peppered bacon brings a satisfying balance of spice and smokiness, finished with a coating of fresh, coarse ground pepper.

No matter the flavor, three high-quality cuts are designed



**BLOODY MARY**

plates. The further you go down, the less defined the slices will be, and it's usually less expensive. If you're working in a hospital, hotel, or school, you might not need that perfect lean-and-fat ratio, but a chef at a sit-down restaurant would want that precision."

By combining expertly crafted flavors with versatile cuts, **Wright** Brand ensures operators can confidently create dishes that exceed guest expectations, no matter the setting or menu focus.

"Choosing the right bacon starts with understanding your menu's unique needs," Cameron says. "Whether you need thick slices for a hearty brunch dish

to suit various operational needs. The Premier Cut represents the peak of craftsmanship, graded with the strictest criteria for muscle-to-lean ratio, slice uniformity, and cut quality. This tier ensures extended shelf life through gas-flushed packaging and is ideal for premium applications requiring consistency and excellence. However, some flavors, such as Peppered, are only available in the Preferred Cut.

The Preferred Cut offers a balance of variety and quality. It is an ideal choice for operators who need flexible options to meet diverse menu demands. This cut also comes in gas-flushed or frozen packaging, providing convenience alongside exceptional flavor.

For high-volume operations, the Popular Cut delivers great value while maintaining the consistent quality **Wright** Brand Bacon is known for. Crafted to meet standard grading criteria, it offers

*"Choosing the right bacon starts with understanding your menu's unique needs."*

**BACON RAMEN**

reliable performance for a wide range of applications.

"The three tiers of bacon exist for specific reasons," Cameron says. "The Premier Cut is the center-cut bacon, which is great for dishes like buffets or brunch

plates. **Wright** Brand, will guide you through every step of the process helping you choose the ideal bacon for your menu, cook method, and customer preferences."

**By Olivia Schuster**

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