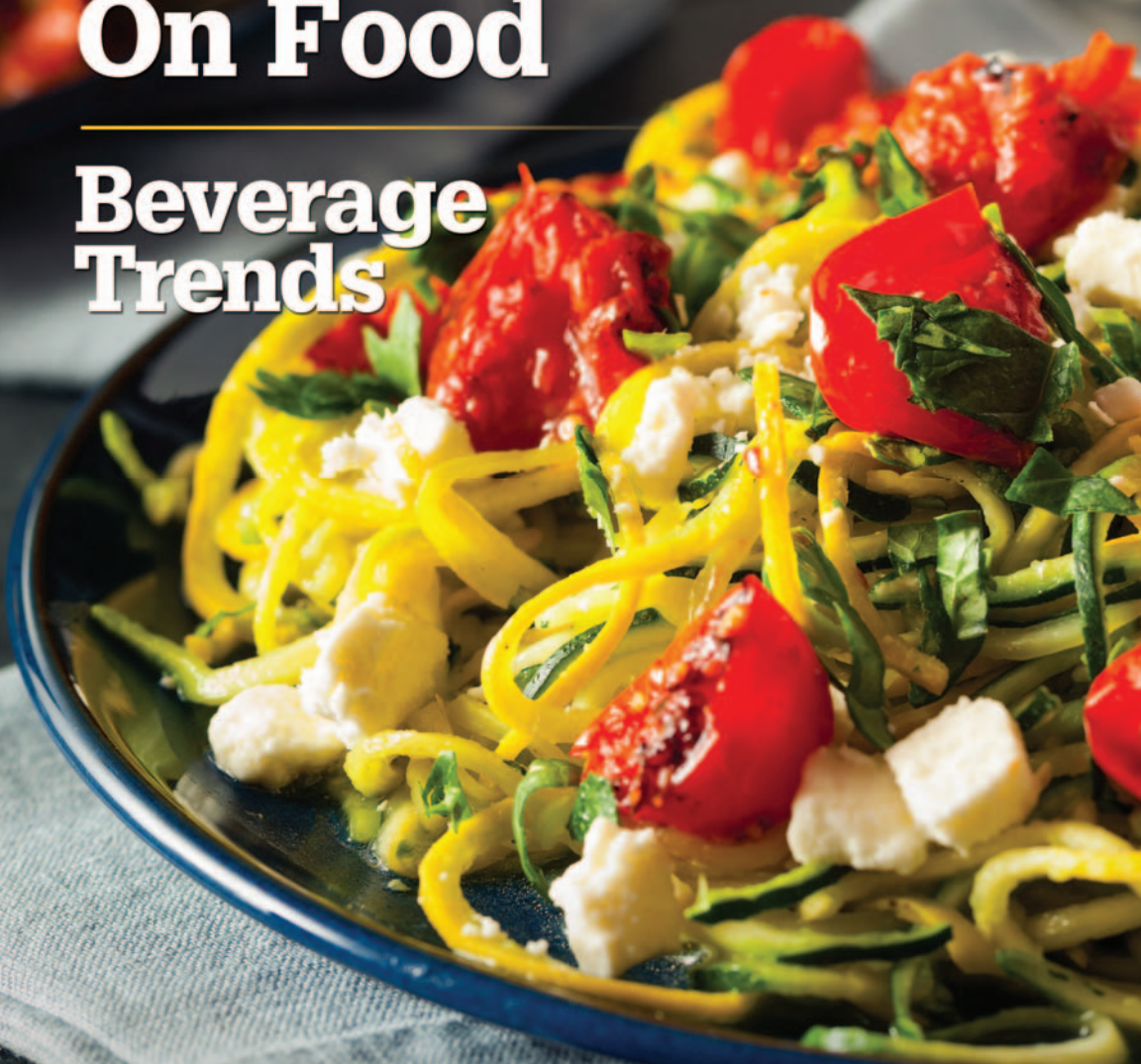


EAT DRINK

The foodies guide to the best local eating
in Sarasota, Manatee and Venice

The Mood On Food

Beverage Trends





PLANT-BASED CUISINE IS MORE THAN A TREND; IT'S A MOVEMENT. AREA RESTAURANTS ARE GOING BEYOND ZOODLES TO OFFER FRESH AND INVENTIVE MENU OPTIONS.

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FRESH, LOCAL, SUSTAINABLE AND TASTY TOO

What will we be eating when dining out this year? If national trend forecasts are right, think alternative proteins, ethnic-inspired breakfasts and veggie-carb-substitutes. Those are the top three predictions from the National Restaurant Assn.'s 2019 What's Hot Culinary survey.

But here in the Manatee and Sarasota area diners are more likely to tell their waiter, chef or restaurant owner that they want dishes made with fresh, locally-sourced ingredients, or that they require a specialized diet, like gluten-free or vegan.

It's not that you can't find alt. proteins, zoodle noodles and cauliflower everything in some local eateries. It's that those foods take a back burner to what patrons really want, and that is great tasting, healthy and sophisticated cuisine.

"It's not a trend: it's a movement," says Chef Paul Mattison, about the local and national push to eat fresh, local and sustainable. "It's getting back to how farming used to and should be done and how cattle can be raised humanly," he adds.

Mattison says he has been "completely immersed" in this world for more than two years in order to provide locally sourced and sustainable menu choices for his three restaurants and

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catering division. The effort hasn't gone unnoticed. Mattison's (mattisons.com) was recently recognized for promoting good food and sustainable food systems by the Good Food Media Network (goodfood100restaurants.org).

"From the Farm" is a whole menu category at Mattison's 41. Items range from house-made pasta to

'freebird' brick seared half chicken. It also reflects Mattison's commitment to sourcing all natural, humanely raised meats from Niman Ranch with dishes like Niman Ranch Tomahawk pork chop, a "Bertha Palmer" which is a surf-and-turf style dish with filet mignon, and more.



ENJOY HUMANLY RAISED, CHEMICAL FREE MEATS FROM NIMAN RANCH AT ALL THREE MATTISSON'S RESTAURANTS.

Culinary Commitment

Mattison's restaurants are just one example of the many restaurants here that believe in the whole foods movement. For example, the three beachside restaurants of the Chiles Restaurant Group – The Sandbar, The Beachhouse and the Mar Vista Dockside (groupersandwich.com)– are also in our community's forefront of the charge towards locally sourced, seasonally

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a scratch kitchen; we're not your traditional cookie-cutter chain restaurant and since we're independent we're allowed more leeway to be inventive in the way that we approach sustainability," says Austin Harlow, Grove's general manager.

For example, Grove tries to use every bit of its ingredients in its inventive dishes. "Our grouper dip,

tuna poke and traditional beef tartare are prepared using those portions of the fish or steak that maybe weren't show-worthy as an entree, but they taste just as delicious when formed into one of these dishes," Harlow adds.

Pier 22 also ascribes to the use it all, or shall we say 'no waste' bandwagon. "In terms of food preparation, we're focused on reducing waste, for example using every usable part of the fish. It's not just good for the environment it also makes perfect economic sense in terms of our bottom line," says Pier 22's general manager, Nicole Johnson.



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THE SOCIAL BREAKFAST BURRITO AT FIRST WATCH.

Seasonal is the New Yummy

Embracing fresh and local as a culinary philosophy is something First Watch has done from the word 'go.' "First Watch (firstwatch.com) has been around for 35 years and from the very beginning set out to do things differently," says corporate chef Shane Schaibly.

"We don't call ourselves a health food restaurant or a diner – we play both sides of the field. You

can come here and get whole, healthy choices and you can get chocolate chip pancakes," he says. The first First Watch was located in Monterey Bay, CA. "The story goes the founders started breakfast place because they wanted to golf every day in afternoon. When they moved to Florida they wanted to golf all day long," he jokes.

An important aspect of Schaibly's job is to dream up new dishes for First Watch's seasonal menus. "We offer five seasonal menus per year, one for each season and one for the holidays, he says. He has fun doing it: "I get to spend my days developing new menu items, visiting our restaurants across the country, checking out lots of cool new recipes and restaurants, and collaborating with lots of awesome people," he explains.



The selections prepared by Chef Charles seek to excite the palate, inspire the epicurean adventurer, and transport first-time guests to becoming regular diners. Carefully chosen ingredients combined with a refined technique are the basis for the seasonally inspired menus for lunch and dinner.



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Seasonal menu items do become regular menu items, if the demand is high. "I've been here for almost five years and in that time we have kept the quinoa bowl, avocado toast and the breakfast tacos," he says. Also some come back 'in season.' For example Schaibly is looking forward to having the acai bowl back. It's on the January/February 2019 seasonal menu.



THE ACAI BOWL AT FIRST WATCH IS BACK!

Where's the Beef?

Whether you call it a trend or a movement, providing a menu of whole food dishes doesn't yet make sense for all places, as Michael Bacon, owner of BrewBurgers in Venice (brewburgers.com), will tell you. "I think the higher end dining you go, there is a greater demand for the farm to table sourcing. There are different expectations when you go and get a burger," he says.

Still, as a foodie, a chef and a restaurateur, Bacon avidly follows all that is happening in this arena and does what he can, within reason. "We try to source our vegetables as close to local as possible. When we can get the ingredients we need from Florida we do," he says.

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A CHEESEBURGER WITH BACON IS JUST ONE OF A DOZEN WAYS THEY SERVE BURGERS AT BREWBURGERS.

sourced from 3 Sons Ranch in Punta Gorda. "Its price point will be higher than a regular burger. We think we have a market for it. As we grow our business (local sourcing) will happen more and more," he adds.

Now, if you are talking to Bacon about the BREW part of BrewBurgers, local is totally the way he goes. "When we started our taps were mostly commercial beer. Over the past six or seven years, craft breweries have hit locally, and now they are a huge deal here at BrewBurgers," he says. Today, 80 percent of the beers at the two BrewBurgers locations are from Florida.

Bacon is most concerned about the quality of the beef used in the burgers and the expert way they are cooked. "We go out of our way to make sure to use the best possible ingredients to start with," he says. For the burgers that is pure, ground Angus chuck. "I would love to offer Florida beef, but it doesn't come close, price-wise and quality-wise compared to what I get from Angus in Ohio," he explains.

That said, he has just put a free-range bison burger on the menu,

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Having it Your Way

Local restaurants have embraced seeing to guests' special dietary needs, ensuring there will be no loss of flavor or taste.

Chef Schaibly says that since the food at First Watch is cooked to order, it's easy to respond to requests for substitutions for special diets or preferences. "We are seeing Keto and Paleo, gluten-free and vegan – all sorts of diets," he says. "Our menu can be manipulated pretty easily to fit them all," he says. In Schaibly's experience, "most often the customer knows what they can and can't eat and can take a look at the menu and know how to accommodate preferences," he adds.

"There's really a lot that we can do to accommodate a guest



TWO POPULAR FAVORITES AT PIER 22 ARE (TOP) WASABI CRUSTED AHI TUNA AND (BELOW) NEW ZEALAND RACK OF LAMB.



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THE HOUSEMADE PASTA AT MATTISON'S 41.

with a gluten-free or a vegetarian dietary restriction with just simple modification," says Juan Sarmiento Pier 22's executive sous chef. "We want to let guests know that they shouldn't be afraid to ask," he adds.

"We've gone to great lengths to expand our gluten-free and vegetarian offerings. We make all of our bread and many of our own sauces, so we really control what goes into the mix. Even the pizzas on our small plates menu can be made gluten-free," says Sarmiento.

The same is true for Grove. "Being that we're a scratch-made kitchen we're able to take someone's dietary restrictions and design a dish that meets that guests' needs with only small modifications to what you see displayed on the menu."

Plus, if you really are looking for cauliflower, Grove is the place to go. "Some of our gluten-friendly items like the cauliflower crust flatbreads are quite popular with all types of crowds. The same with our cashew chili made with simple time-tested ingredients: red kidney beans, crushed tomatoes, onion, celery and spices. You don't have to be a vegan or vegetarian to enjoy the dish," he says.

Planet Watch Is On!

Taking care of the only planet we have is something that local culinary experts embrace whole-heartedly. Here are a few ways they are contributing to the greater good.

PEOPLE FIRST: First Watch completely changed how it sources its coffee by partnering with Mujeres en Café (Women in Coffee) – an organization of female coffee growers in the Huila department of Colombia. The group's mission is to create sustainable businesses that elevate the lives of their families and improve conditions in their rural communities. The partnership program is called Project Sunrise.

HUMANE TASTES BETTER: Mattison's has made a serious commitment to get away from sourcing its meat from the "commodity market." "It is important that there are no hormones or

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antibiotics, but more important is how the animal was fed, treated and harvested – that it was treated humanely,” says Chef Paul Mattison.

THERE'S NO FUTURE IN PLASTICS: Pier 22 pays close attention to the packaging and especially the plastics that it uses in everyday restaurant operations. The restaurant has taken the 'Skip The Straw pledge' and now only offers cardboard straws for customers that request one.

PAPER INSTEAD OF STRYO: BrewBurgers is looking to lose the takeout containers for its burgers and go old school by wrapping them in paper. In the meantime it uses packaging that is made from recycled material and is biodegradable.

HELPING NEXT GENERATIONS: The future is our children. That's why Chef Paul Mattison serves on the board of directors of a scholarship program to help teens go to agriculture school and stay on family farms. Plus the Chiles group is participating in a foreign exchange program so budding chefs from Central and South America can come to the US and learn culinary skills.



SHRIMP RANGOON IS A FAVORITE AT MATTISON'S CITY GRILLE.



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