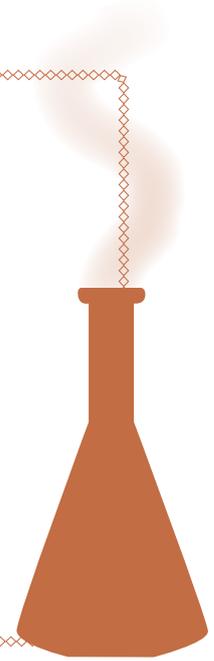


GRAND EXPERIMENTS

Inventive action stations dazzle groups at Wyndham Grand Orlando. BY MICHAEL COSTA



A 40% REBOOKING RATE FOR GROUPS IS A DREAM NUMBER FOR ANY PROPERTY,

but at the Wyndham Grand Orlando Resort Bonnet Creek, that dream is a reality.

Executive Chef Andrew Edwards says there are many reasons why 40% of their clients come back, but one key driver is the experiential, wow-inducing action stations that he and his team create for breaks and events.

“Our stations are always evolving, and the ideas come from all the different places I’ve worked around the world, plus observations around town, and bringing them together here at Bonnet Creek,” says Edwards, who has been at the resort since it opened in 2011.

Even repeat clients who request the same stations from a previous

visit don’t receive an exact copy.

“We’ll give them the same concept, but not the identical choices or the same presentation or execution of that concept,” explains Miggy Urena, director of catering and conference services. “We go out of our way to transform traditional client requests into an untraditional experience for them, because they always remember the food and the memories associated with it.”

Edwards says a key component to any successful action station is knowing exactly who your client demographic is and maximizing their budget, which “determines the level of creativity and uniqueness of each station and how long a client’s function will last.”

Portion size, presentation, props, and the timing of menu items served to customers are also crucial. “Guests today prefer to walk up, interact with the chef, and take an individual plate that was made just for them. They’re a lot happier than going up old-school style, scooping food themselves onto a dish and walking away,” says Edwards.

Here, Edwards details four of his most successful stations and the stories behind each that brought them to life.

Michael Costa is industry relations editor at *Hotel F&B* magazine.

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BANANA BREAK

“My wife made some really great banana bread at home with crumbled brown sugar streusel on top, and that was the inspiration for this station,” explains Edwards. “We can make ice cream at the resort using crême anglaise and liquid nitrogen, so I thought about putting those two ideas together, and boom, we had an afternoon break that blew the minds of our clients. It’s a warm piece of banana bread grilled with some butter, topped with caramel ice cream that we make in front of the guest, and a bit of sea salt.

“This station came from combining two of my environments, home and work. Being a chef is a lifestyle, so it doesn’t end when I leave the resort. I could be out shopping with my wife but I’m always thinking about how I can incorporate what I see into an action station or a menu.”

FULL BANANA BREAK MENU:

Warm banana bread with nitrogen caramel ice-cream, demitasse cups.



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Action Stations

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HONG KONG STATION

"This came from my experience working around that region (Edwards was the executive chef at Pacific Islands Club Resort & Spa in Guam from 2003 to 2007). One of our chefs there made this phenomenal Peking duck, so I translated his recipe into English, and it's the recipe we use for this station," explains Edwards. "We also have bao, siu mai, and dumplings in the steamer baskets and some chicken satay skewers. Our duck meat is put in moo shu wrappers, and we have a pretty large knife to carve the duck, just like you'd see in Asia. It's fun to bring that part of the world over to Orlando. This station has some unique around-the-world flavors, which can be difficult to cook authentically unless you've actually visited or lived there."

FULL HONG KONG STATION MENU:

- Peking duck moo shu wrappers with leeks, black bean sauce.
- Tsingtao drunken chicken satays with sweet chili sauce.
- Mongolian beef with garlic ginger jus.
- Char siu bao BBQ pork buns, chicken siu mai, edamame dumpling.





MOLECULAR MEDITERRANEAN CHEESE STATION

"This is like a pan-Mediterranean tapas menu, with a foundation in Spanish cuisine, which is where the molecular component comes from too," Edwards says. "Fernando Salazar (former VP of F&B at Wyndham) took several of us chefs to Spain for ten days so we could be immersed in Spanish cuisine. We went to a farm that produces ibérico ham, where the pigs are fed acorns, which gives the meat a unique taste that's representative of its region. That trip was the inspiration for this station. The menu has ibérico ham and raclette cheese, which we soften on a little heater and put onto a little crostada and finish off with some onion marmalade, pickles, and whole-grain mustard. We also have Manchego cheese lollipops, which we freeze with liquid nitrogen."

FULL MOLECULAR MEDITERRANEAN CHEESE STATION:

Bleu cheese lollipops, nitrogen anti-griddle.

Chorizo and Manchego arepas.

Arancini with mushroom and Taleggio cheese.

Raclette cheese action, sliced Ibérico jamón, country olives, Burgundy onion marmalade, gherkins, whole-grain mustard, and roasted garlic croustades.

Apricot white Stilton, sage Derby, Tintern cheddar, Manchego, fig cake, and local honeycomb.



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Action Stations

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SOUS VIDE EGGS BENEDICT BAR

"This is a really neat station," says Edwards. "It's a deconstructed Benedict, and we sous vide the eggs inside their shells until they're perfectly poached. It's a pretty difficult technique to pull off to make sure the eggs are perfectly poached. The guest will build the base of their Benedict, and when they get to the end of the line, the chef will crack open the eggshell over their plate, and out comes a perfectly poached egg. Then they have three different kinds of hollandaise they can put on top: orange Maltese, tomato Choron, and tarragon Béarnaise."

Urena adds that "when a client requests eggs Benedict for breakfast, never in their dreams do they think this is what they're going to have, especially in a banquet environment."

FULL SOUS VIDE EGGS BENEDICT BAR MENU:

Foundations: toasted brioche or English muffins.

Proteins: candied pork belly, Canadian bacon, smoked salmon.

From the garden: asparagus, overnight tomatoes, avocado, portobello mushrooms, young spinach.

Choice of hollandaise: orange Maltese ~ tomato Choron ~ tarragon béarnaise.

Fresh Florida orange juice, ruby red grapefruit juice, freshly brewed Starbucks coffees, and Tazo tea.

Ancho sugar-cured Nueske's bacon with chocolate fondue.

Lobster egg strudel, white truffle, goat cheese, puff pastry, Maltese Hollandaise.

Fresh made Cronuts with Meyer lemon Icing.

