

Culinary Trends and What Private Clubs Should Prepare For

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Private clubs have always occupied a special place in the culinary world. They are a place where tradition is honored and dining is often as much about the experience as the food itself. But members' expectations continue to evolve—shaped by global travel, social media, wellness priorities and the growing desire for customization and authenticity. For club leaders, chefs and house committees, the challenge is clear: protect the heritage that members value while staying ahead of emerging food trends that can elevate satisfaction, revenue and relevance. Clubs offer a variety of activities for members, and what brings all of them together is meeting back at the clubhouse and enjoying the offerings from the bar and dining room.

Here are the culinary trends every private club should be preparing for now.

Elevated Comfort Food

Members still love familiar classics (Taco Tuesday, Prime Rib Thursday, Seafood Sunday)—but they increasingly want them done exceptionally well. The trend is not about reinventing everything, but about refining it. The opportunity for private clubs is to take nostalgic dishes and turn them into signature dishes. I like to call it “Traditions.” The best executions are recognizable and consistent, while adding subtle touches that create a “you can only get this here” feeling.

Seasonal and Local Sourcing

Seasonality is no longer a marketing phrase—it's an expectation. Members want menus that feel connected to their region and reflect what's fresh *right now*. Chefs who build close relationships with local farms, fisheries and artisanal producers create immediate credibility and excitement.

For instance, where I live (in the Bay Area of northern California), if a club is not featuring the local specialties (oysters from Bodega Bay, sourdough bread, Dungeness Crab, etc.) then your chef is missing the boat. Every restaurant in the region features these items, and members expect them at their club. Private clubs should be preparing to rotate menus more frequently and tell better stories about sourcing. A simple line on a menu—“Sonoma mixed greens,” “Monterey rockfish” or “Acme Bread”—can become a point of pride, especially when servers are trained to speak confidently about ingredients. We do it on Wine Lists, why not food menus?

Wellness Dining Without Sacrifices

Wellness dining has matured. Members aren't asking for “diet food.” They want meals that feel lighter, cleaner and more functional without losing the indulgence and satisfaction they associate with club dining.

This means menus with more high-quality proteins, vibrant vegetables, whole grains, plant-forward dishes and smart alternatives such as olive oil-based dressings, low-sugar desserts and gluten-conscious options. It also means offering portion flexibility like full-size, half-portions or “taste” plates, so members can dine socially without overcommitting.

Wellness-forward menus succeed when they're seamlessly integrated into the dining experience, not separated into a "healthy corner" of the menu.

Plant-Forward Menus That Can Appeal to the Many

Plant-forward dining is one of the most important long-term shifts in club culinary programs. Even members who aren't vegetarian want more vegetable-driven options that feel intentional and satisfying. It has become more popular than ever. For clubs, plant-forward is also a strategic advantage. It often improves food cost stability, expands menu inclusivity and supports sustainability goals without feeling political or polarizing.

Experimental Dining and Chef-Driven Experiences

Today's members don't just want to eat, they want to *experience* dining. Clubs can create memorable moments through live-action stations, tasting menus, chef's tables, wine-pairing dinners, tableside preparations and interactive events like pasta-making nights or oyster tastings. Another fun and interesting event is "Chef's Table in the Kitchen." If you haven't tried it yet, make it a goal.

Experiential dining also translates well to member retention. It encourages guests to bring friends, post photos and associate the club with energy and exclusivity, of course, by sharing photos on the club's social media platforms.

Premium Casual...The New Standard

Many private clubs are seeing increasing demand for a "relaxed but refined" style of dining. Members want high-quality food without feeling overly formal. That means approachable menus, beautiful plating without intimidation and environments that support everything from family meals to casual business gatherings. The three-hour, seven-course dinners are a thing of the past.

Premium casual dining supports frequency, which is a major revenue driver. Clubs that over-index on formality can unintentionally reduce use. The modern club must master both: refined dining experiences for special occasions and elevated everyday options that members crave weekly.

Be proud to serve the very best hamburger in town. It is that simple.

Preparing for the Future, and Keeping Up with the Trends

The most successful private clubs will be the ones that embrace culinary evolution without abandoning their identity. Members still want the staples they love, but they also want menus that reflect the world they live in today: health-conscious, globally influenced, locally grounded and experience-driven.

Preparing for these trends isn't about chasing every fad. It's about building a flexible, member-focused culinary strategy—one that strengthens the club's culture, supports operational excellence and ensures the dining experience remains a major reason members choose to stay and bring others into your club.