



Associate Culinary Director, Culinary Innovation (Onsite)

Position Overview

As the activation arm of Kinetic12, the premier foodservice strategic consultancy, TwelvePlus+ is the leading culinary innovation and marketing innovation team in the industry. The Associate Culinary Director is a senior, hands-on culinary leader who drives concept strategy and development across key client engagements—from early-stage insight translation through bench-ready, operationally executable solutions. This role blends creative firepower with real-world practicality, ensuring every idea is both inspiring and buildable at scale (labor, equipment, spec, and supply-chain aware).

This is an **onsite role** based in our **Chicago test kitchen/studio**, with regular in-person collaboration, tastings, and build days. You'll lead culinary workstreams, elevate the quality bar across deliverables, and serve as a confident client-facing voice—building trust through thoughtful storytelling, disciplined execution, and strong follow-through.

Role Type: Onsite (Chicago)

Travel: Up to ~20% (client meetings, tastings, events)

Primary Responsibilities

1) Culinary Innovation & Concept Leadership (35%)

- Lead development of original, trend-forward concepts grounded in brand voice, consumer relevance, and operational feasibility.
- Translate insights into clear concept platforms (flavor, format, occasion, differentiation) with a strong “why it wins” story.
- Set the culinary direction for projects: guardrails, benchmarks, and what “great” looks like from concept through prototype.
- Own hands-on bench execution for priority concepts and/or direct others to ensure repeatable, documentation-ready outcomes.
- Pressure-test concepts for real-world execution: station impact, speed of service, batchability, holding quality, portioning, and training lift.

2) Client Leadership & Presentation Delivery (25%)

- Serve as a lead culinary voice in client meetings—guiding ideation sessions, tastings, and development touchpoints.



- Build and deliver compelling presentations that connect culinary thinking to business objectives (not just recipes).
- Lead tasting experiences end-to-end: prep plans, staging, pacing, talking points, and team coordination.
- Partner with account leads to strengthen relationships and surface follow-on opportunities rooted in real client needs.

3) Project Leadership, Process & Quality Control (20%)

- Collaborate with project leads to define culinary workplans, milestones, and timelines—and keep teams aligned to them.
- Review and refine concepts, recipes, and documentation for clarity, accuracy, repeatability, and readiness to share externally.
- Establish consistent internal tasting rhythms and feedback loops (what changed, why, and what's next).
- Proactively flag risks (scope creep, feasibility issues, timing constraints) and propose solutions early.

4) Research, Testing & Insight Translation (10%)

- Contribute to structured research: menu/market scanning, trend synthesis, and competitive pattern spotting.
- Support or lead iterative testing—capturing feedback and quickly improving flavor, texture, assembly, and operational steps.
- Maintain a commercialization mindset: what it takes to move from prototype to a plan a client can actually execute.

5) Team Leadership & Mentorship (10%)

- Mentor and develop junior culinary team members through clear coaching, high standards, and constructive feedback.
- Help strengthen internal best practices across kitchen organization, recipe writing, tasting execution, and client readiness.
- Collaborate across disciplines (strategy, design, account, PM) to ensure culinary output aligns with the full story and deliverable.



Qualifications

- **Experience:** 7+ years in culinary innovation, product/menu development, R&D, corporate chef roles, or operator-facing culinary positions (agency/consulting experience a plus).
- **Education:** Culinary degree or equivalent practical experience.
- Proven ability to create concepts that are both creative and operationally sound—built with scale and repeatability in mind.
- Strong comfort presenting to client stakeholders and leading tastings with a clear narrative.
- Food safety certification preferred.

Key Skills & Attributes

- Creative, solution-oriented thinker with strong operational awareness.
- Polished communicator—clear writing, confident speaking, and strong presence in the room.
- Organized and adaptable, able to manage multiple workstreams without sacrificing quality.
- Collaborative leader who raises the bar and makes teams better through expectations and support.
- Detail-driven execution: recipes, yields, methods, prep steps, and documentation that others can follow.

Work Environment & Physical Demands

- **Onsite presence required** in the Chicago test kitchen/studio for daily collaboration and hands-on development.
- Ability to work in a kitchen/studio environment and support client-facing tastings/events.
- Must be able to stand for extended periods and lift up to 50 lbs.



- Willingness to support occasional off-hours builds tied to client deadlines, tastings, or travel.