6 Takeaways on the Future of Gastronomy
The Event

Turning The Tables brought together some of the sharpest minds in the restaurant industry, from chefs to professors, trend analysts to tech innovators. The series of digital discussions was a snapshot of the creativity, drive and resilience that has pushed the culinary community to evolve, pivot and reflect in the face of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Panelists

Ana Roš  Sasha Correa  Amanda Cohen  Vaughn Tan  Nick Kokonas
Jo Harris  Rodrigo Oliveira  Mitsuharu Tsumura  Nidal Barake  Mitch Lienhard
Mitchell Davis  Matteo Figura  Mark Moriarty  Grant Achatz  Massimo and Alexa Bottura
What We Learned

1. Supplementary Services
2. Chefs Must Learn Better Business
3. We Need to Redefine the Role of the Chef
4. The Customer is Not Always Right
5. Inclusive Excellence
6. Community is Key
The rise of supplementary services will be key to restaurants surviving and, in some cases, thriving in the next 12-18 months. There were numerous examples of restaurants that have launched new offerings in the wake of lockdowns: Grant Achatz from Alinea discussed how his team are serving more than 1,000 meals a night with their new takeout option, professor Vaughn Tan spoke about the need for food service businesses to adapt and evolve to the uncertainty of the pandemic, and Jo Harris, a landlady from the U.K., showed that even smaller community venues can and should look to evolve their services.

We heard numerous examples of how restaurants have answered the problem with unique, creative and profitable new models, and expect this trend to continue in the wake of social distancing.
Chefs Must Learn Better Business

One of the key take-homes of the discussions and presentations was that culinary students, chefs and cooks should all spend time on improving their business knowledge. There were many statements by young chefs Mark Moriarty and Mitch Lienhard about the need for culinary educators to offer more real-world business training. Nidal Barake from the Gluttonomy food agency said owners need to run restaurants as businesses and not as restaurants, and Amanda Cohen, owner of Dirt Candy in New York, echoed this sentiment.

It was Sasha Correa of the Basque Culinary Centre who said that culinary courses should offer this, but students and chefs should own this part of their education. She believes taking ownership of education and adding business knowledge is key to setting the industry on a stronger path.

Interestingly, Alinea, which is operated by Grant Achatz and Nick Kokonas, a former derivatives trader, is an example of a business that changed it’s entire operations in the wake of lockdowns, and with solid business decisions they have surpassed their own sales records.
In the wake of Covid-19, chefs have taken on many roles. They have cooked for charity, repurposed their restaurants, taken public contacts cooking for schools, and they have, time and time again, shown the transformative power of food within community. What it means to be a chef is something that was discussed throughout Turning The Tables.

Almost all participants agreed that we must question what it means to be a great chef. Is it the pursuit of stars and accolades? Or should it be to play an active role in your own community, and in society in general?

This sentiment was echoed by Mitchell Davis from the James Beard Foundation, but also by both of the young chefs on the panel, and by more established chefs like Rodrigo Oliveira. He said that there is not only one way to be a great chef, that we should realise there are many different ways to be a chef, many places to have impact. Cooking for a local audience should be as noble as cooking for the biggest awards in the world.
The Customer is Not Always Right

One overriding takeaway from the talks was that the onus and responsibility of rebuilding restaurants on a stronger path does not fall just on the chefs, educators and restaurant owners of the world.

Thanks to a thought-provoking presentation from Amanda Cohen, and from many follow up discussion threads, the consensus was that **diners should also be responsible in helping the industry reset and rebuild stronger.** Cohen talked about increased costs and the need to eliminate tipping in restaurants, something that is almost always offset by a fear that customers will stop dining if the cost of food is seen too high.

**Mitchell Davis** went further and spoke about an attitude that is expressed across the U.S dining scene, that the customer is always right. According to him, **this is not always the case.** If, after the lockdowns, restaurants are going to reopen with better business, better organisation, and more focus on education and stability, **some of the onus lies on the customer.**
With a focus on the fine dining sector, Rodrigo Oliveira, who runs the democratically modelled Mocoto restaurant in Brazil, spoke about the need for more chefs and restaurants owners to strive for “inclusive excellence”. The chef, who is famous for allowing a percentage of the diners at his award-winning restaurant to pay less than others, claims that exclusive excellence is good, even hard to do, but the real challenge for chefs across the world is to work out how to create excellence that is also inclusive. A call that many around the world are already answering.
Community is Key

The idea of community, how this feeds a restaurant with custom, and how a restaurant in turn can foster stronger community, ran throughout the talks. Mitsuhara Tsurma from the Maido restaurant in Peru spoke about his own efforts to democratise what he does with new services, delivery options and the use of Ghost Kitchens.

He spoke about how his own restaurant maintained a community link with different menus and why a strong local link is key for many restaurants that, perhaps in the past, have relied heavily on tourism.

The community angle and power of food was seconded by Massimo Bottura whose Food for Soul initiative served communities throughout the pandemic, and also by Rodrigo Oliveira who showed why purpose and profit can work together to shape a business model.
Thank You.

For more info
www.finedininglovers.com