

Forward Thinking: Bring Home the Bacon

From cocktails to candy to candles, bacon flavor and aroma offers opportunities for innovation

Amy Marks-McGee, Trendincite LLC; trendincite@aol.com; tel: 1-888-561-1229

Q: What do the following items have in common: restaurant menus, cookbooks, confections, ready-to-drink products, personal care products, fashion and design, and technology?

A: One ingredient: bacon.

Bacon is not a new savory item; however, a renewed interest in bacon and new uses for bacon are emerging—it's crossing markets and industries. According to Mark Pastore, vice president of New York's Pat LaFrieda Wholesale Meats, "bacon sales have gone up 25% nationwide in the last three years. Sales of artisanal bacon, small-batch and smoked, have risen 42% since 2007."

Bon appétit: Bacon is experiencing a culinary renaissance with cookbooks such as James Villas' *The Bacon Cookbook* dedicated to this delectable delight. Pushing the envelope further is *Bacon: A Love Story, A Salty Survey of Everybody's Favorite Meat* by Bacon Unwrapped (www.baconunwrapped.com) blogger Heather Lauer, featuring not only recipes, but also "fun facts and the ins and outs of how bacon finds its way to your skillet and what to do with it when it gets there." Besides the expected breakfast and lunch items on menus, bacon is now appearing in high-end desserts. New York's Dovetail started the craze with its signature dessert, brioche bread pudding with bananas, bacon brittle and vanilla-rum ice cream. A more recent example is Tailor's cornbread ice cream, blueberry compote and bacon dessert by Sam Mason.

Cheers: Shifting from eating to drinking, bacon is making its way into the ready-to-drink market and distilled spirits. Maple Bacon Coffee by Boca Java is described as "sweet, savory coffee," which seems like a logical transition since bacon is a breakfast food often accompanied by pancakes drenched in maple syrup, followed by hot coffee. On the other side of the spectrum, bacon martinis and Bloody Marys are gaining popularity. Bakon Vodka is new to the market; meanwhile, trendy mixologists are house-infusing vodka and bourbon with bacon. Brent Jones, a molecular mixologist at Hotel Jerome in Aspen, Colorado, made his claim to fame with his BLT cocktail. Benton's Smoky Mountain country bacon is making its way into cocktails and beer. PDT in New York features a Benton's old-fashioned cocktail—bacon-infused bourbon and maple syrup—and the Brooklyn Brewery has introduced Reinschweinsgebot, a limited-edition bacon beer.

Sweet tooth: In addition to food and drink, bacon is inspiring candy launches. Mo's Bacon Bar by Vosges



Chocolate received a lot of press upon its launch; due to its popularity, the company recently released Bacon Caramel Toffee. Lollyphile and Roni-Sue both offer maple-bacon lollipops. The list goes on and on, including, bacon gumballs and mints and Uncle Oinker's Gummy Bacon, which looks like bacon, but tastes like strawberry.

Scentsations: Thus far, bacon has played primarily on the taste buds. Now, the growing fascination with bacon has unfolded into sensory products based on scent. In the oral care category there is bacon floss; in personal care there is bacon soap; and in air care there is the Funky Fresh Bacon Air Freshener and BLT candles.

Fashionista: This iconic food doesn't just stop at flavor and fragrance; it spills over into fashion and design. Archie McPhee's Web site (www.mcphee.com/shop/) has a variety of novelty kitsch items in a Bacon & Meat section that features odd bacon-inspired designs such as a belt, watch, wallet, lunch box and adhesive bandages. For those seeking authenticity, bacon enthusiasts online are creating bizarre homemade fashions made of real bacon such as a bacon dress and a bacon bra. While on the subject of real bacon, British photographer Carl Warner uses bread, bread sticks, cured ham, salami and bacon to create one of his many foodscapes.

Technology like-mindedness: There is an entire subculture of bacon lovers; www.blogs.com highlights the top 10 list of bacon blogs such as Bacon Today, Bacon Unwrapped, and It's All About Bacon. For further evidence, one only need search Facebook using the keyword "bacon" and see how many different groups surface. Just like any other interest group, like-minded bacon devotees create blogs and forums to share a passion for bacon.

Trickle down: What's next? Bacon—an everyday breakfast food, a household commodity, a mundane item, a single ingredient—is appearing in unexpected places and crossing industries. Where will it trickle down to? It is still niche, but watch as large manufacturers capitalize on this trend. Is Absolut Vodka's next variant going to be bacon? How about a maple bacon Yankee Candle? Will the next fine fragrance blockbuster feature salty, smoked bacon nuances with a hint of sweet maple?

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