From Thai Chiles to Tiki-Inspired Drinks: Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants Unveils Its First Culinary & Cocktails Trend Report

San Francisco-Based Operator of 70+ Restaurants and Bars Surveys Chefs and Bartenders for Their Take on Today's Hottest Drinking and Dining Trends, along with “Off-the-Clock” Favorites

SAN FRANCISCO (January 7, 2014) – Pickled, fermented and smoked dishes, exotic chilies, craft vinegars and savory desserts continue to rise in popularity among diners, while at the bar, house-made bitters, barrel-aged “brown” spirits, unoaked Chardonnay and Tiki-themed drinks will be the cocktails of choice in 2015. These are just a few of the highlights from the first-ever Kimpton Culinary & Cocktails Trend Report, which was released today.

The inaugural report by the boutique hotel and restaurant company summarizes results from an extensive survey of kitchen and bar staff from its 70+ popular restaurants, bars and lounges across the country. Kimpton polled more than 100 chefs, sommeliers and bartenders on which ingredient, dining, cocktail and cooking technique trends were currently “hot” and/or growing in popularity, along with which foods and spirits folks could expect to see more of in the year ahead. The survey also sought to uncover some of the “off-the-clock” personal favorites – and pet peeves – of these hospitality professionals for an inside look at what they really think, eat and drink when in their own home or out on the town.

“When trying to determine the pulse of what’s hot and what’s not, and what the future holds for diners and bar patrons in the year ahead, we thought, ‘who better to talk to than those on the front lines every day in our restaurants and bars?’” explains James Lin, Senior Vice President of Restaurants and Bars for Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants. “As you might expect with such a diverse group across the country in 28 cities that range from
coastal beach resorts to urban downtown lounges, the survey turned up quite a bit of variety and interesting opinions. But there were some strong themes across the board as well."

What’s Hot at Kimpton Restaurants & Bars

When it came to naming the trendiest cooking ingredients right now, Kimpton chefs served up a huge variety of responses, from sorghum and salsify to kefir lime, sour cherries and Thai ghost chiles. Some of the common themes, however, centered on aged, pickled and fermented foods, gluten-free grains, smoked foods, house-made vinegars, sustainable seafood and even beets and baby kale. In addition to brining, curing and smoking, Kimpton chefs are doing more juicing, poaching, dehydrating and sous vide, in a nod toward increasing diner concerns about health and wellness. This same wellness theme is driving a greater demand for more vegetable-focused dishes and gluten-free grains such as farro and amaranth. For dessert, the savory-sweet trend continues to be a mainstay, along with high-end, soft serve ice cream with unusual flavors such as manchego pineapple gelato, creative pies and reinvented kid classics like s’mores.

On the bar side, whiskey and other barrel-aged spirits continue to be all the rage, along with sherry cocktails, kegged and bottled cocktails, house-made bitters and added carbonation. In addition, Italian Amaro liqueur, along with Tiki-inspired drinks made with rum, made Kimpton’s “hot” list. In terms of wine, Chardonnay, Malbec and Cabernet are still popular, though sweeter wines, South American reds and “unoaked” Chardonnay are on the rise. And fine wines by the glass via the Coravin wine access system are also growing in popularity.

Behind the Curtain – Chef, Bartender Picks & Peeves

If Kimpton chefs had their way, everyone in their restaurants would be eating more sweetbreads, pork liver sausage, wild boar, sardines and black cod. These are the foods the chefs said they personally enjoy but are not necessarily favorites among the general public. Not that the chefs are so high-brow all the time. Off-the-clock favorites for Kimpton chefs include gummy bears, Vienna sausage, Taco Bell and Doritos, and for the bartenders, the drink of choice is more likely to be a shot of whiskey and a beer or a simple glass of red wine.

What else do Kimpton cooks and bartenders do at home? Not surprisingly, many admit to tuning in to quite a few of the top cooking competition shows (e.g., “Top Chef,” “Chopped,” “Iron Chef”) as well as any of Anthony Bourdain’s shows and “America’s Test Kitchen.” They also cook a bit for friends and family – albeit on the simple side, from grilled meats to roast chicken, pasta and one-pot meals. Many chefs also favor Indian, Latin and Asian dishes that do not fit the profile of the restaurants where they work.
Finally, the report captures what Kimpton pros think about service when dining out at other people’s restaurants. For the most part, pet peeves centered on slow and/or inattentive service, as well as servers who lack knowledge about the menu and/or ingredients.

For more detailed results, quotes and specific examples from Kimpton’s culinary team, please download the full report.

ABOUT KIMPTON RESTAURANTS
When Bill Kimpton introduced the boutique hotel concept to America in 1981 he pioneered the revolutionary relationship between one-of-a-kind hotels and restaurants led by acclaimed chefs. Today, Kimpton has nearly 70 unique restaurants, bars and lounges across the country helmed by renowned chefs and bartenders that offer guests a chance to dine like a local. Common cornerstones of each restaurant and bar include heartfelt care; chef-crafted, seasonal menus that celebrate local farms and purveyors; and striking interiors with vibrant style and design. Wines are chosen with a nod toward artisanal and sustainable selections by Master Sommelier Emily Wines and signature cocktails are created by individual restaurant bartenders and Lead Bartender Jacques Bezuidenhout. Guided by company-wide EarthCare practices, Kimpton restaurants demonstrate a dedication to preserving the environment through the use of local and sustainable ingredients, including adhering to the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch guidelines; the use of compostable “to go” packaging; and recycling and composting practices. With concepts ranging from rustic Italian cuisine in the Pacific Northwest to oceanic fare on the Florida coast and alluring rooftop lounges and bars tucked away in the nation’s capital, each Kimpton restaurant is as distinct and expressive as its location. For more information, visit www.KimptonHotels.com.

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