

A DOZEN WAYS

Finishing WITH A Flourish

Light as air or thick as custard, special sauces can add body to any menu and every daypart



The endless varieties of sauces provide chefs exponentially greater flavor combinations.

Warmed Brie makes an instant fondue for sweet and savory applications.

Anyone worth his or her salt in the kitchen has a secret or signature sauce to pull out when other ingredients are scarce and inspiration fails to arrive. Whether browning off some butter or crushing together a killer tapenade, chefs learn early that sauces are among the most potent weapons in the kitchen arsenal. If need be, a good sauce can even cover up a few culinary ills — like a dried brisket or bland eggs. And, while the old adage says, “The proof is in the pudding,” we respectively submit that the real evidence of an accomplished kitchen in any segment — from barbecue joint to the finest French restaurant — lies in the sauce.

Americans have become more seasoned diners — we now pick our pizza parlors by the sauce on the pie, we’re far more selective about which brand of mustard to squeeze onto our hot dogs, and we can fall in love with a Mexican eatery based on the salsa alone.

Just when we thought we had heard it all when it comes to fantastic finishes, we found more saucy inspiration where serious restaurateurs, culinary wunderkinds and foodies go to recharge their batteries: Las Vegas. The city known for excess and indulgence has also become a dining mecca full of inspiration both low and high. Following are a dozen saucy ideas inspired by our recent gastro-tour — otherwise known as a restaurant research-and-development trip — of all the big-name chefs’ restaurants in town.

We dipped into as many sauces we could — from light reductions, foams and expensive airs to saffron beurre blanc and every emulsion in between. We know what happens in Vegas is supposed to stay in Vegas, but we’re here to share a dozen sauce inspirations based on our findings.

QUICK-TAKE

THIS STORY TAKES A LOOK AT:

- ▶ Drizzles, broths, foams and froths: the new forms of today’s sauces
- ▶ Some new twists to update classic sauces
- ▶ Dozens of flavorful ideas for matching the right sauce to the right menu application



THE AMERICAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION

BORDELAISE WITH A TWIST

Classically speaking, bordelaise is a French sauce made with red or white wine, brown stock, bone marrow, shallots and herbs and is usually served with broiled meats. Here are some interesting twists on the classic:

- Ancho-rubbed sirloin steak with wild mushroom bordelaise
- Surf and turf with lobster tail, filet mignon, leeks, shiitake mushrooms and lobster bordelaise
- Blackened chicken on a crisp crab cake with andouille bordelaise

FOND OF FONDUES

The French word fondue means “melt.” Strictly speaking, the melting is done in a central pot at the table, and bite-sized chunks of meats, sausages, bread, fruit or cake are dipped into the hot, sweet or savory mixture. The two classic types of fondue — cheese and chocolate — are equally indulgent. Today, fondue has become a catch-all term for any melted goodness that oozes on the flavor. Examples:

- Fire-seared sirloin steak sandwich on grilled ciabatta bread with Brie fondue
- Potato gnocchi in creamy tomato fondue with sweet butter and Parmesan
- Freshly baked chocolate chip cookie sandwich stuffed with Rocky Road ice cream and topped with chocolate fondue

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PRESTO, IT'S PESTO

This classic Italian sauce is as easy as crushing together basil, garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese and olive oil. While the original version of this Genoa-inspired sauce withstands the test of time, many variations have evolved, proving that a good herbal sauce knows no geographic boundaries. Examples:

- Grilled camarones with cilantro-pepitas pesto
- Shrimp and artichoke pizza with basil-pesto cream
- Grilled sirloin steak salad with chimichurri pesto

POM WONDERFUL



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FLAVOR-FORWARD FRUIT

Coulis, another French culinary term, describes the liquid puree used to enhance the flavor of a sauce or can be used by itself as a sauce. Fruit coulis are sauces made with raw or cooked fruit and seldom thickened. Likewise, fruit chutneys and jams can also be smooth or chunky. Here are some thought-provoking menu strategies to deliver intense fruit flavor without the arduous preparation that typically goes into making a sauce:

- Chile-rubbed pork chops with ancho drizzle and kirsch-spiked, dried-cherry jam
- Coconut-crusted mahimahi with mango coulis drizzle
- Maple mousse Napoleons with macadamia-nut brittle and passion-fruit coulis

Combining reduced pomegranate juice with the fresh fruit makes a simple, healthy sauce for hearty meats.

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ENTHUSED ABOUT INFUSIONS

The power of a good infusion also knows no bounds. An infusion extracts flavor from ingredients like tea leaves, peppery greens, herbs or fruit by steeping them in a liquid, such as syrup, spirits, water or tea. This simple idea is easy to execute and makes for some sexy menu copy. Examples:

- Banana-bread French toast with blueberry-infused maple syrup
- Grilled radicchio with honey-infused aged balsamic vinegar
- Panna cotta with pomegranate-infused molasses

6 TAKING A SHINE TO OILS

Drizzled as a flavor-enhancing finish, oils have always contributed great mouthfeel. Olive oil's color and flavor range — from nearly clear and clean to peppery and bright green — makes it a perennial favorite. Nut and seed oils are the slick, newer kids on the block and also offer an amazing array of flavors. Flavored and infused oils add new layers of flavor to foods, from herbal essences to the earthiness of mushrooms. Examples:

- Shrimp cocktail with lemon-cucumber-and-horseradish oil
- Grilled Artic char with braised bok choy, light soy sauce and sesame oil
- Sushi-grade bluefin tuna with warm extra-virgin olive oil

7 DOWN TO THE BARE ESSENTIALS

Jus is the French word for “juice” and can refer to both fruit and vegetable juices as well as natural juices exuded from roasting meats. Great left alone, or reduced and thickened to a silky finish, these lighter sauces contribute intense flavor without added calories from cream, butter or starch. Similarly, clear broths can go beyond soups to add moisture and flavors to a range of dishes. Examples:

- Hibachi-grilled teriyaki chicken with Japanese udon noodles and miso broth
- Steamed mussels and clams with red curry, kaffir lime and lemon-grass broth
- Pan-roasted chicken, morel mushrooms and natural jus

9 HOT ON HONEY

This humble stuff of bees has suddenly become the simple sauce of the moment, with good reason: Varietals come with layered flavors built in. The honey's golden sheen glimmers like gold; it drizzles exceedingly well, and the infused versions really spiff up menu copy. Examples:

- Grilled pork tenderloin with Asian vegetables and chile-spiked honey-hoisin sauce
- Grilled salmon salad with honey-chipotle vinaigrette
- Beignets drizzled with orange-blossom honey and served with honey-laced vanilla ice cream

Varietal honey adds gleam and layers of flavor in any sauce or can be used alone as a finish.



NATIONAL HONEY BOARD

8 SAY SABAYON OR ZABAGLIONE

This is one of Italy's greatest culinary gifts to the world. Bordering on the hedonistic, the sauce gets its richness from warmed whipped egg yolks, sugar and liqueur; it can be served hot or cold and works equally well enhancing sweets or savorys, which ties in well with the trend toward blending these two menu segments. This custard-style sauce is no more difficult to prepare than a hollandaise. One of the tricks to holding it for service is to put it into a pre-heated thermal container with a wide opening so that it maintains temperature without breaking. Examples:

- Oven-baked sea bass with crabmeat gratin and vanilla-bean sabayon
- Chocolate tiramisu with espresso zabaglione
- Caramelized apples and pears with Calvados sabayon

10 GO YOGURT

Yogurt-based sauces are typically associated with Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Indian cuisines, but their benefits travel well. Besides being healthful and a cooling companion to spicy food, yogurt is easy; it comes prepared and is an easy mix away from being a finished sauce with no-heat techniques. Examples:

- Grilled tandoori-spiced chicken over green papaya salad with charred-lemon-and-cilantro yogurt
- Garam masala-rubbed chicken with mint-raita yogurt sauce
- Seafood pasta salad with lemon-saffron yogurt

11 VINAIGRETTES LEAVE THE NEST

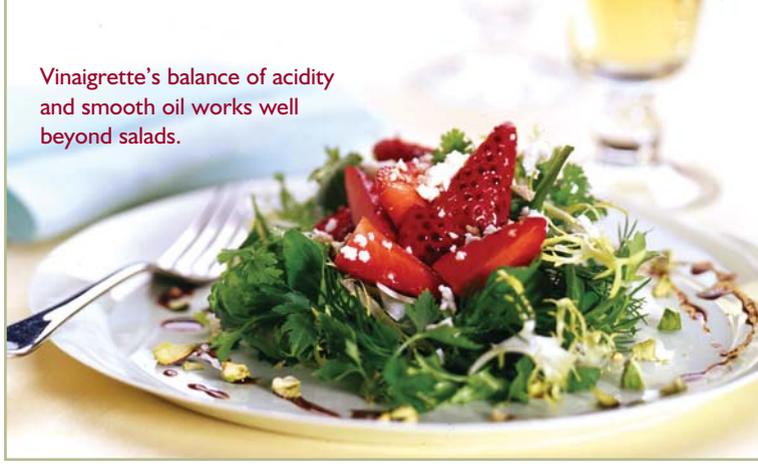
Vinaigrettes have broken free from their primary duty of dressing green salads. Creative chefs are proving that the perfect balance between the acidity of good-quality vinegar and the smoothness of flavorful oil has plenty of other applications, from moistening grains and beans to topping grilled proteins and softening sandwich bread. Examples:

- Warm organic chicken salad with asparagus, fingerling potatoes and morel vinaigrette
- Baby spinach salad with hard-cooked eggs, applewood-smoked bacon, roasted mushrooms and warm bacon-vinaigrette dressing
- Muffaletta sandwich with olive vinaigrette

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

- ▶ **PUTTING ON AIRS:** Foams, froths and emulsions lend an air of sophistication to any menu
- ▶ **DAZZLE WITH DRIZZLES:** Add some gleam with a splash of oil or a drizzle of honey

Vinaigrette's balance of acidity and smooth oil works well beyond salads.



CALIFORNIA STRAWBERRY COMMISSION

12 FOAMS AND FROTHS

Some of the newest finishes in the vault, these ultra-lights make the most of immersion blenders, atomizers and cappuccino-style steamers to create flavor-enhancing concoctions almost out of thin air. This sauce strategy certainly plays well in high-end dining but could also apply to casual-dining concepts. While these sometimes fussy and frothy sauces sound difficult to execute, with the right equipment, they are actually easy to prepare and make a tremendous tableside presentation. Examples:

- Creamy Parmesan risotto with porcini mushroom foam
- Fire-roasted tomato soup with basil foam
- Steel-cut oatmeal with fresh berries and maple foam

In a world that demands flavor — more flavor, intense flavor, layered flavor and multiple flavors — there's never a bad time to pour on the sauce. Or, in these advanced culinary times, you can also drizzle it on, paint it on the plate, infuse it in grains, whip it full of air and spritz it about. Getting your menu sauced has never been more fun! ☺

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