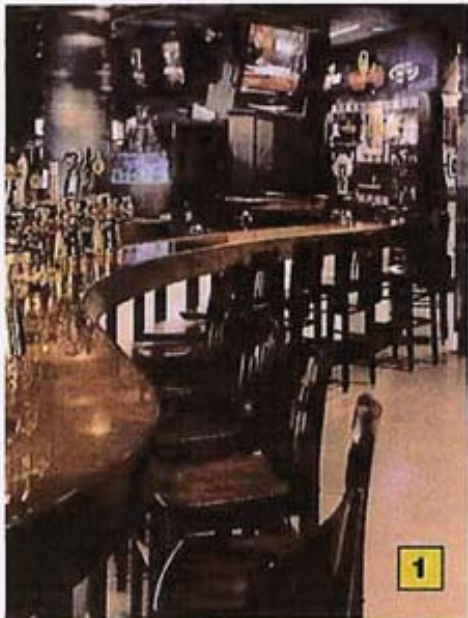




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hottest^{food} concepts to hit airports

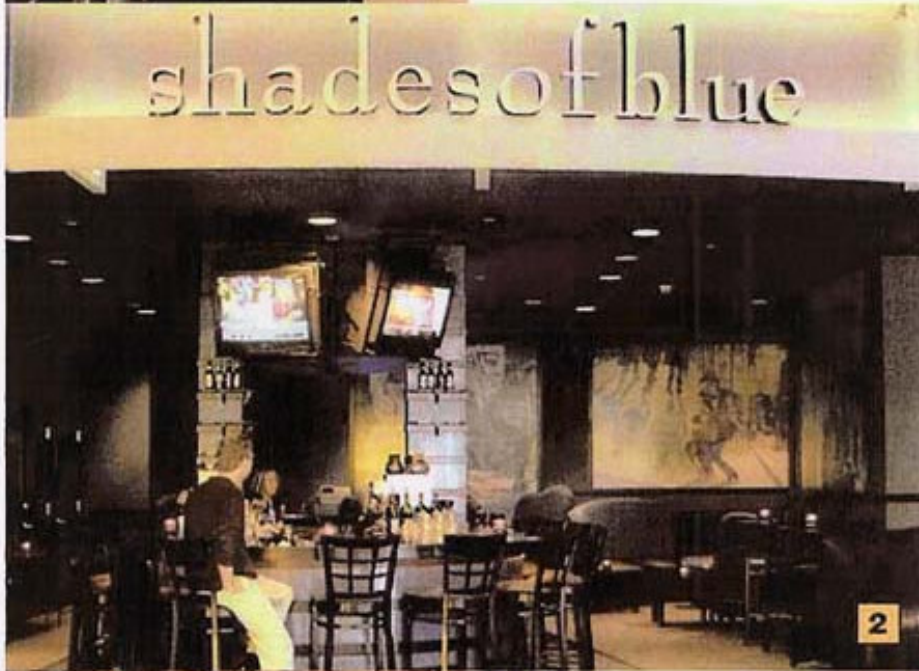
By Carol Ward

Tasting the fare of some of North America's most celebrated chefs or enjoying top-of-the-line steak and seafood aren't experiences most travelers are accustomed to. But that is slowly changing. Airports are now taking quality, variety and service to the next level, upping the bar in the never ending quest to increase customer satisfaction, and of course, the bottom line. Several of the high achievers in airports in the United States and Canada have captured the attention and allegiance of the traveling and local public.

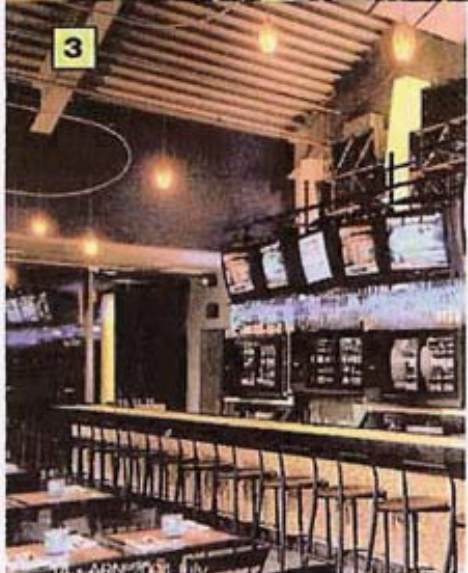
Most North American airports have either revamped their food and beverage offerings in recent years, or are in the process of doing so. One result of that has been a sunburst of awareness in food quality over the past decade. The challenge for airport officials now is to distinguish their food programs with unique menus, exceptional food quality, and a focus on customer service.

"There's no depriving yourself once you walk into an airport," says Bart Goldberg, culinary consultant for **Well Done Restaurants**. The executive who makes his living advising restaurant owners around the country says the turnaround in airport offerings has been remarkable.

"The quality of food you can avail yourself of is unbelievable," Goldberg says. "It's a great cross-section of what is outside the walls of the airport, and it's very comforting to know that you can get a better-than-decent meal at most airports. There never used to be much,



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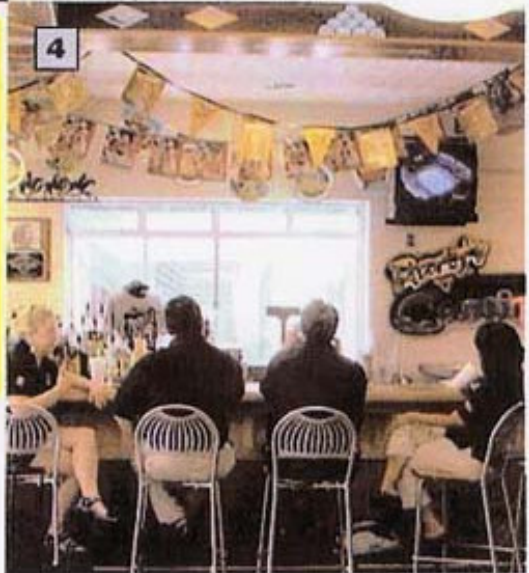
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1 In Philadelphia International (PHL), Jet Rock Bar & Grill is one of several OTG Management (OTG) concepts.

2 In PHL's Terminal A, Shades of Blue Lounge, an OTG concept, has garnered praise since opening in 2003.
— Photo by Barry Halkin

3 Cibo Bistro and Wine Bar in PHL's T-A has been well received.
— Photo by Barry Halkin

4 Marty's Cantina in El Paso International (ELP), has the appeal of being named after musician Marty Robbins.



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but now there is tons of variety."

Goldberg favors the restaurants featuring celebrity chefs, such as Wolfgang Puck Grill in Los Angeles International's (LAX) Tom Bradley terminal or Todd English's Figs restaurant at Terminal 2 in La Guardia (LGA). "I think you'll see a lot more people venturing into it," he says. Aside from the consumer appeal, Goldberg also notes the benefits to the chefs lending their names and expertise to the project. "Celebrity chefs are finding that airports are a new untapped resource and venue for them to pick up some pretty good money," he says.

Another consultant who works exclusively in the airport environment says one airport restaurant operator stands out above the others. OTG Management, which has restaurants such as the Jet Rock Bar & Grill, Cibo Bistro & Wine Bar, Deep Blue Sushi and



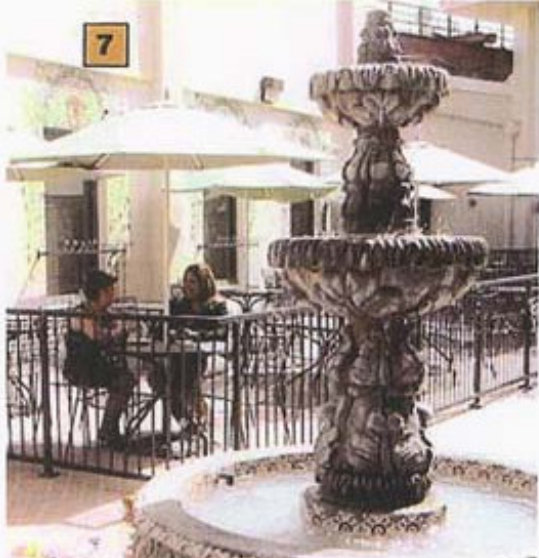
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several others, has garnered wide praise for its operations at Philadelphia International (PHL), John F. Kennedy International (JFK) and LaGuardia International (LGA).

"Every time OTG springs something up its definitely a well-run operation in all regards," says the consultant. "[The concepts] are very creative with beautiful buildout, a wonderful menu, great execution and good customer service attributes."

According to OTG president Rick Blatstein, many of the company's concepts have garnered wide consumer appeal. As to which has had the most success, he says, "That's like asking which one of my children I like best."

Growing in popularity in the airport environment are restaurants that invoke "a sense of place." Airports around the country have tried to capture the essence of a city, knowing that it will be the



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5 At Vancouver International (YVR), Hanami appeals to local residents and travelers.

6 Figs, is a popular "celebrity chef" restaurant adapted to La Guardia (LGA).

7 CA One adapted the successful Forti's Mexican Elder Restaurant to El Paso International. It's landside and has an outdoor patio.

8 Celebrity chef concept, such as Wolfgang Puck's Grill in Los Angeles International, have been a boon to airport food and beverage.



8

traveler's first and last impression of the area (see related story on page 18). That was the motivation behind the Red Rocket restaurant at Toronto's **Lester B. Pearson International (YYZ)**. "The menu is fairly standard for airports because it seems that...people going through airports, despite the fact that they're asking for everything in the world, only buy certain things. But the facilities themselves are quite unique," says a YYZ concessions executive. The Red Rocket, affectionately named after Toronto's downtown streetcars, is modeled after the streetcars, complete with wire overhead cables and windows depicting downtown scenes.

El Paso International (ELP) also found itself lacking in quality regional cuisine, which prompted a **CA One** search for authentic Mexican food. "We had no (full service) and relatively generic Mexican food in a city that probably has the best Mexican food in the country," says aviation director Patrick Abeln. Just over a year ago, Forti's, a well-known El Paso destination, opened at the airport. The restaurant, which has indoor and outdoor patio seating, has had broad appeal among local travelers and tourists, Abeln says. "We're even starting to see people come eat at the restaurant who have no business at the airport," he adds.

Another distinct trend among airports is an emphasis on Asian cuisine. Some, like the Hanami Japanese restaurant at **Vancouver International (YVR)**, appeal to the locals as well as the hordes of international passengers traveling through and to Vancouver. Others, like Deep Blue Sushi in JFK's JetBlue Terminal 6, have made waves with a domestic crowd. Hanami, a full-



service restaurant, features a kaiten (revolving) sushi bar, tatami rooms and a lounge. Deep Blue, is also full-service, features fresh sushi and sashimi against the backdrop of a cozy deep blue atmosphere.

For a truly upscale experience, The Globe @ YVR, part of **The Fairmont Hotel**, fits the bill. The fine dining restaurant features floor to ceiling windows, with a view of mountains, the city, and YVR's U.S. departures terminal. On each table are binoculars and an aircraft guidebook, so customers can watch departing planes and identify what they're seeing.

The Globe, featuring a West Coast menu highlighting the use of local products, doesn't have a standard airport food and beverage contract; instead it's part of YVR's hotel concession contract with The Fairmont. But Chris Gilliland, manager, retail sales and service programs, says the airport promotes the restaurant as part of its range of available food and beverage options. "From a reputation point of view, it's excellent for us to be able to communicate that we have an upscale restaurant like this," he notes. "It's spectacular."

Apparently travelers have responded with enormous enthusiasm to the more ambitious food concepts launched by airport concessionaires. Their success is likely to boost competition by inspiring more innovation and dedication to excellence among peers who want to carve their own unique niches out of airports in North America.

We'd like to hear your opinion about this article. Please direct all correspondence to Carol Ward at carol@airportrevenue.com

9 The Fairmont Hotel's proprietary restaurant, *Globe* is a destination for locals as well as travelers passing through YVR.

10 Customized hamburgers and nostalgia are featured at *Red Rockets Gourmet Deli* in Lester B. Pearson International (YYZ). "Red Rockets" was Toronto's famous streetcar.

11 On Stage Casey's Toronto, adapted from a street restaurant with regional fare, is decorated with memorabilia of the city's artistic past and present.