

For Hotel, Resort, and Casino Food & Beverage Operations

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L - R: Royal Caribbean's Helga Finnsdottir, manager, F&B newbuild and design; Kennann von Raesfeld, chef de cuisine, 150 Central Park; Bob Minyette, director, fleet beverage operations; Josef Jungwirth, director, fleet culinary operations; Frank Weber, VP, F&B operations; Ken Taylor, director, fleet restaurant operations.

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Saturday brunch at Washington Duke Inn

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Sheraton vodka bar brings in locals

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La Quinta Resort's "wildly popular" iced coffee break

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Guest interaction skills *can* improve!

CRUISE CONTROL

Royal Caribbean's new outlets and menus satisfy all tastes. Page 28





Theory of Evolution

Royal Caribbean keeps food and beverage options fresh for a highly diverse guest portfolio. By MICHAEL COSTA

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TRADITIONAL F&B

"Cruising has become much more affordable in recent years," Weber says. "It's a family vacation now, unlike it used to be, when the joke was that cruising was for 'newlyweds and nearly deads.'"

That's not to say elements of what cruising "used to be" have disappeared. This is the area Weber addresses in the "traditional" category, and at its core is the main dining room.

For decades, onboard F&B centered around an enormous main dining room that served every passenger on the ship and had two scheduled seatings per evening. If a guest wanted dinner outside of those times, they were often out of luck. They also didn't have a choice as to who sat with them at their assigned table for the duration of the cruise.

It's this rigidity that turns off many younger passengers, but Royal Caribbean keeps it intact for guests seeking formal cruise ship dining because, "There are traditionalists who love it," Weber says.

In response to current casual trends, Royal Caribbean sets aside a portion of the main dining room each night for My Time Dining, a program

that reserves tables for guests who want to eat in private and outside of the scheduled seatings. It's been a huge hit since it launched fleet-wide in 2008.

"It's important that we don't turn our back on traditional dining," says Ken Taylor, director, restaurant operations, Royal Caribbean. "But a majority of new cruisers are interested in something different, so we really do want to continue with this flexible approach."

Other concepts in the traditional category are Royal Caribbean-branded outlets that appear on multiple vessels across the fleet. These include the Schooner Bar, Chops Grille steakhouse, and Windjammer Marketplace, which is a three-meal buffet that was recently updated to a "food island" concept, offering items in smaller batches at multiple stations, helping to reduce bottlenecks.

EVOLUTIONARY F&B

The Windjammer buffet is an example of a traditional outlet that straddles the "evolutionary" category, and nearly every successful F&B concept at Royal Caribbean follows a similar path. They start as a single idea, and, if

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Technology-Enabled Personalized Service on *Oasis of the Seas*

Royal Caribbean's *Oasis of the Seas* made its first voyage in December 2009 and holds an unprecedented number of passengers—around 6,000—making it the world's largest cruise ship. The ship also offers an unprecedented number of F&B options, with 24 food outlets and 37 bars. While it's good to have options, so many alternatives on such a large ship can be overwhelming to guests.

To help keep things straight, Royal Caribbean turned to technology; on every deck near each elevator bank, there are large touchscreens displaying every outlet's updated, real-time business levels. It's the first of its kind in the cruise industry.

"The digital signage is very important, especially in an environment that's basically its own little city. It informs guests what dining options are available and which ones are busy. They don't even need to use a phone," says Frank Weber, VP of F&B operations, Royal Caribbean.

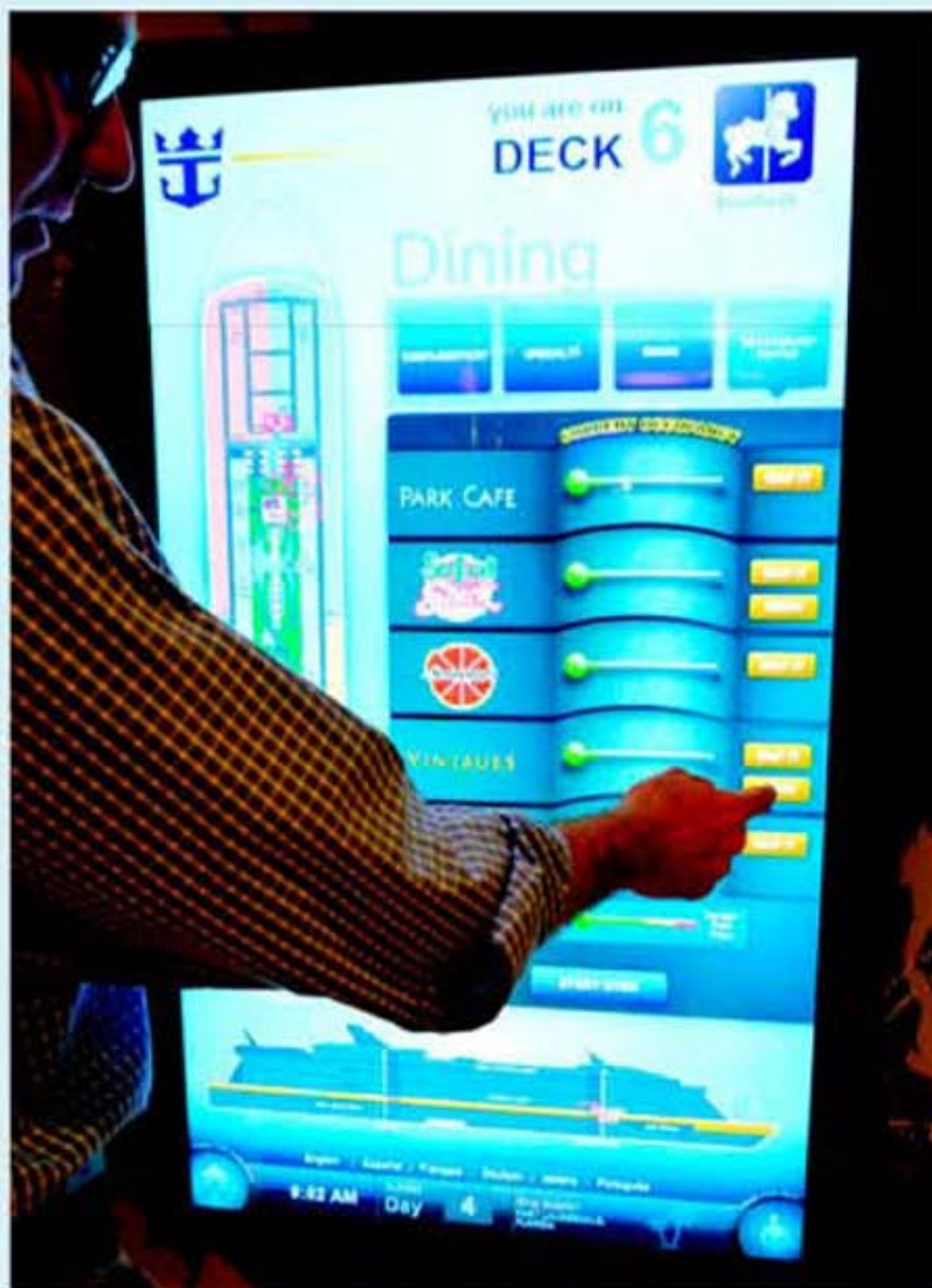
In addition to real-time updates, the touchscreen displays a description and photo of each outlet, and a "map it" function that will give the guest directions from where he or she stands to the location of the desired restaurant.

Another technological touch is applied to the most traditional part of the F&B operation, the main dining room. Because customers potentially eat there several times during their voyage, Weber says Royal Caribbean "needed technology to capture guest preferences" so it could be applied to the dining experience by the waitstaff during each subsequent meal.

Today, when a passenger eats in the main dining room, a waiter or waitress records what he or she ordered, and that information is later entered into a computer database. When the guest returns, his or her SeaPass card (which is also their room key) is swiped by an attendant, and a "cheat sheet" of guest preferences is printed out for the waitstaff to use during service.

"We can pull the customer's information and say, for example, 'We know you like your coffee black,' and we'll deliver it without their even asking for it," says Weber.

This attention to detail has a positive effect on the passenger, Weber says. Because service is personalized, the overall experience is memorable for the guest, who is more likely to re-book with Royal Caribbean when cruising in the future.



On *Oasis of the Seas*, large touchscreens display every outlet's updated, real-time business levels. It's the first of its kind in the cruise industry and even gives passengers walking directions from their current location to each restaurant.

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successful, graduate to a place on every ship. Over time, they evolve based on customer feedback and changing dining habits.

"A few years ago, I sailed on a ship and asked guests, 'Where do you go out for dinner at home?' All these restaurant chains were mentioned, like Outback Steakhouse, T.G.I. Friday's, and Applebee's. Meanwhile, we were still trying to entice our guests with traditional French dishes such as duck a l'orange. The reality is, they're looking for something more casual," says Weber.

In response, Royal Caribbean focused more attention on evolving casual concepts. For example, they launched the Royal Caribbean-branded Sorrento's Pizza on *Majesty of the Seas* in 2004, and since then, it has been added to five ships in the fleet.

Other outlets in the evolutionary category include the Champagne Bar, which received a stylish upgrade on the new *Oasis of the Seas*, and Vintages wine bar, which started as a wine-only concept aboard *Navigator of the Seas* in 2003 and has grown into a wine and tapas menu on *Oasis of the Seas* and is currently on six Royal Caribbean ships.

"We're not making tremendous profit in our specialty restaurants, but we're covering our costs," says Taylor. "From a business standpoint, it makes perfect sense to have guests dining in other areas, because then we don't have to produce as much in the main dining room."

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REVOLUTIONARY F&B

The final category in Weber's one-third paradigm is "revolutionary," covering concepts that are new to Royal Caribbean and aimed primarily at younger and first-time cruisers looking for a Las Vegas-style experience.

"We need options for those guests, whether it's a steakhouse, a pizzeria, or maybe just a place for great snacks. They want what they're used to seeing at an upscale resort or hotel," Taylor says.

Royal Caribbean's newest ideas are well timed with the launch of *Oasis of the Seas*, the world's largest cruise ship, holding about 6,000 passengers. Taylor says the math is simple: Several thousand people spanning a broad range of ages and interests means even the most niche-driven concepts will still appeal to a few hundred guests at any given time. One example is Club 20 on *Oasis of the Seas*.

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The tightly scheduled, multi-tiered main dining room has been a tradition in the cruise industry for decades, but Royal Caribbean has updated it to satisfy current trends with its MyTime Dining program, allowing customers to eat dinner whenever they want. "We develop a product without any of the cruise barriers around us," says Royal Caribbean's Ken Taylor.



Fine-dining restaurant 150 Central Park is a "revolutionary" concept being launched on *Oasis of the Seas*. If it does well, the concept could move up the ladder and be added to several Royal Caribbean ships.



Oasis of the Seas — By the numbers

- More than 5,400 guests
- More than 2,300 crew
- 18 decks
- 25 unique food outlets
- 24-hour room service
- More than 90 Alto-Shaam Combitherms, Cook & Holds, and Holding Cabinets

With numbers like these, there's no room to compromise on quality. "Every meal is critical. It's all about quality and serving our guests the finest products made with the freshest ingredients" states Frank Weber, Vice President of Food & Beverage.

"Alto-Shaam has been a reliable, long-term partner with Royal Caribbean Cruise lines. Alto-Shaam provides the tools that are necessary for us to give our guests a truly memorable culinary experience on all of our ships."

Alto-Shaam is proud to serve on the "crew" of the largest cruise ship in the world, the Oasis of the Seas.

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Director of Culinary Operations Josef Jungwirth and VP of F&B Operations Frank Weber note that a main ingredient in Royal Caribbean's success is the quality of the food. They insist on from-scratch cooking for all menus—including soups, stocks, breads, pastries, and desserts.

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"It has a Miami Beach focus, and it's extremely cool. But, let's face it," Taylor says, "probably only 10 percent of our guests are interested in it. However, that's still about 500 people."

Other revolutionary concepts being launched for the first time on *Oasis of the Seas* include:

- 150 Central Park, a contemporary fine dining restaurant
- The Cupcake Cupboard, featuring cupcakes baked in-house and frosted by hand
- The Seafood Shack, a casual family-friendly venue in the ship's Boardwalk neighborhood

If these outlets are successful, they could move up Weber's ladder to potentially become part of the traditional category and be installed on several ships. "We try a new concept for a few weeks on one of the ships so we can get direct customer feedback. Based on that feedback, we say, 'It's great; we did it,' 'It's nice, but we need to make some adjustments,' or, 'This was the craziest idea ever; forget about it,'" Weber says.

FLOATING HOTELS

Royal Caribbean may be a cruise company, but its F&B ideas often come from shoreside hotels. "We develop a product without any of the cruise barriers around us," says Taylor. "That's been a main ingredient in our success over the past five years. We're bringing together our experience from shoreside hotel operations and transferring it to the ships."

Weber and Jungwirth note that another main ingredient in Royal Caribbean's success is the quality of the food. They know even the most dynamic F&B concept won't bring customers back if the caliber of what they're consuming isn't high. Both men insist on from-scratch cooking for all menus—including soups, stocks, breads, pastries, and desserts.

"I've been in the cruise industry for almost 15 years, and our product is much closer to what's served in some of the really trendy restaurants now," says Jungwirth. "We've definitely narrowed that gap and tried to fulfill the expectations of our guests." ■

Michael Costa is industry relations editor for *Hotel F&B*. He worked for several years in the kitchen and in F&B purchasing at a large convention hotel in Chicago, as well as having attended culinary school.



Royal Caribbean's F&B ideas often come from land-based hotels. "We're bringing together our experience from shoreside hotel operations and transferring it to the ships," says Director of Restaurant Operations Ken Taylor.