

# Chefs Revive Tableside Service with Smoke, Knives, 'Clouds' and Personal Attention

Tableside techniques add value and make costly dishes easier to sell, chefs say. At **Urban Farmer**, a Portland, Ore., steak house, a best-selling entree is the 14-inch-long Tomahawk rib-eye, offered for about \$80. Rolling out the 40-ounce cut of meat and carving it tableside results in less waste, says the executive chef, Matt Christianson, who discusses the marbling of the fat with the guests while slicing. And by selling lesser-known, individually-priced cuts this way, the restaurant moves through an entire cow in less time. "We can get an 800-pound animal in and sell through it in...two weeks tops," says Mr. Christianson, who started the offering last year.

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FOOD & DRINK

## Chefs Revive Tableside Service With Smoke, Knives, 'Clouds' and Personal Attention

Porter House, Desnuda, Marc Forgione, Urban Farmer Put a Twist on Flambé Tradition

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By ALINA DIZIK  
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When Christopher Uriarte, 36, sits down to a dinner at Eleven Madison Park in New York, it isn't only the food he's excited about—it's the show. The restaurant serves several dishes prepared or finished by the chef at tableside. A carbonated egg cream is prepared on a cart. A raw carrot put through a meat grinder clamped to the table is carrot tartare. "The spectacle adds to the experience," says Mr. Uriarte, a financial-services executive who visits the restaurant, with its \$225 prix fixe menu, about twice a year.



View Graphics

Tableside service, popular at high-end restaurants of the "Mad Men" era, is making a comeback.

Chefs looking to surprise their customers find tableside presentations create dining room buzz. Many dishes somehow become more attractive after a spin on the food cart. Diners find the theatrical effects, educational chitchat and personal attention from a chef make a meal more memorable.

This month, Michael Lomonaco, chef and partner at steakhouse Porter House New York, began offering a \$110 roast duck dish for two, in which the bones are crushed in a traditional French duck press at the table. The entire duck is wheeled out on a traditional guéridon cart and disassembled at the table. The duck's legs and thighs are served in a salad for the first course while the breast with the juice from the crushed bones is offered second.

"It takes two people to do this—one to work the duck press, the other to assist in capturing all the juices," says Mr. Lomonaco, who occasionally does the show himself. The required time commitment is a big reason the duck isn't a permanent menu fixture.

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Tableside service is making a comeback as many chefs are finding ways to surprise diners with recipes that benefit from a spin on the restaurant's food cart. Laura Bird and chef Michael Lomonaco discuss. Photo: Stuart Mullenberg for The Wall Street Journal.

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Entertaining a client with a restaurant meal and a chef's participation makes for a more memorable meeting, says Mason Walker, 32, a partner in a medical management company in Camas, Wash., who dines at Urban Farmer monthly. The bone-in steak "looks

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