



Conventional Wisdom

Taking You Behind the Scenes of America's Industry Confabs

The Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show
Nov. 3–5
Washington Convention Center

The Industry: dining and wining

The Attendees: 10,000 foodies grazing, gorging, and guzzling purely for research purposes

The Issues:

• **Social Lite:** No time to host dinners? Dina Cheney, author of the new book *Tasting Club*, demonstrated how to conduct a chocolate tasting. Steps: Pass out premium chocolate squares, then have guests appraise the aroma (“Strong or mild? Spicy or evergreen? Vanilla or berry? Rubber or tobacco?”). Then break off a bit, let it melt in your mouth, assess the texture and the flavor, and discuss. Cleanse the palate with table crackers and water.

• **EVOolution:** Al Fierro explained that the key to keeping his award-winning Olevano oil’s acidity level to a miniscule 0.22 percent is cold-pressing the olives immediately after hand-picking. To create “a true aphrodisiac... that captures the essence of romance,” don’t even think of infusing oils with chemical flavorings.

• **Holy Fruitcakes!** The holiday confection gets a bad rap because most makers use too little fruit and brandy, says Monastery Bakery manager Ernie Polanskas. His outfit’s superrich fruitcakes are made by Trappist monks in the Shenandoah Valley. Asked whether marketing such indulgences conflicts with holy vows, Polanskas, a former monk replied, “We preach, ‘Everything in moderation.’”

• **Flower Power:** “Flower Magic 101” presenter and DIY Network entertaining expert Karen Bussen urged attendees to “give long tables a chance”—they offer dramatic party potential. In place of one big centerpiece, make simple little ones, including stones on which you can write each guest’s name. If you must mix flowers, limit arrangements to three kinds and three colors. Recycle vases, decorations and other pretty things; store them in your “party pantry.”

• **Spore Scores:** The key ingredient of Gano Excel wellness coffee and hot chocolate is the tasteless, nutrient-packed Reishi mushroom (*Ganoderma lucidum*). Dubbed the “immortality mushroom” in the Far East, the red fungi’s potent alkaloids naturally remove most caffeine and acidity. Reputed benefits include boosting memory, fighting cancer, and improving golf games.

• **Red vs. Blue Cheese:** Former presidential chef Walter Scheib, stir-frying on the cooking demo stage, revealed that White House dining preferences were divided along gender, not political, lines. W and Bill shared the culinary philosophy that any dish can be improved by piling cheese on top.

• **Low-Carb Is So Over:** Amid a sea of cookies, cakes, crackers, hot cocoa, chips, dips, chocolate, jellies, wine smoothies, and high-fructose cocktail mixes, Alexa Corcoran, co-owner of local ready-to-assemble meal service Let’s Dish, acknowledged the waning of low-carb fervor. “There’s been a swing back to healthy low-fat foods,” she said, adding that her ready-to-assemble meal service can help customers “low-carb” when desired. CP

— Rob Tierney