

Function Favours

The Brave

Leading into the busy Christmas period, **Annette Shailer** talks to two chefs to find out how they are preparing for the **FUNCTION FOOD** flourish ahead.



Just one of the mouth-watering function dishes available at the Lion Hotel.

Function food has come a long way from the days of party pies, cocktail frankfurts and mini gherkins. Today, bloody mary oyster shooters sit alongside Peking duck pancakes and lamb cutlets - challenging the 'finger' element of finger food. Function food has the ability to produce great returns if executed correctly through many ways, including good preparation, low-wastage and smart ordering.

Most venues have a function element to the business but few have an entire off-premise function business. Enter Adelaide's **Lion Hotel**. This multi-award winning venue has six private spaces for hire within the hotel, as well as an off-premise catering division. Lion Hotel event chef, Chris Militz, said there were a few key components that go into designing a function food menu. "Quality and seasonability are always the factors at the forefront of our minds," Militz said. "It is also increasingly necessary to use products that are going to appeal to a diverse range of clientele." The events menu at the Lion Hotel is a simplified version of their award-winning restaurant food. "We use high-end products in a simplified manner," Militz said.



Port Melbourne's Exchange Hotel has a diverse function menu catering for various demographics and dietary requirements.



The function room at the Lion Hotel is a versatile spot, popular for various events including weddings and work conferences.

“The vast majority of food is made here at the Lion. We only buy products that are too good not to, for instance Perrymans Pies and Pasties from their famous North Adelaide Bakery.”

Another venue with a diverse range of contemporary function food on the menu is The **Exchange Hotel** in Port Melbourne. Head chef, Ryan Thompson, said functions were an important element of the busy venue. “There are generally good margins to be had when providing finger food,” Thompson said. “We make a lot of the food on-site, which definitely helps when it come to cost-efficiency.” Capitalising on this coming into the Christmas party period, it is important to know your patrons and provide food to suit them. “We offer a range of finger food to appeal to the diverse clientele,” Thompson said. “The younger crowd tends to like the skewered meats and fried foods, while the older customers prefer the chicken liver parfaits, and duck and wild mushroom pithiviers.”

Diversity, quality and efficiency are three key ingredients behind operations at the Lion Hotel. “Our menus are structured to be ‘fast in

“Our menus are structured to be ‘fast in the finish.’ Our aim is to send out 10 plates a minute and in order to do this we need to be realistic.” - **Chris Miltz, Lion Hotel, Adelaide.**

the finish’. Our aim is to send out 10 plates a minute and in order to do this we need to be realistic,” Miltz explained. “All our base products are always cooked to order, including the scotch fillet, fish and chicken, while our accompaniments are quick and easy to plate-up, without sacrificing quality.” Having a structure in place like the 10 plates a minute ensures all the staff are aware of what they are aiming towards and what is expected during functions. The Lion Hotel has six private spaces within the hotel to cater for a range of events, from boardroom conferences to weddings and birthdays.

The Lion Hotel is a multi-purpose business in that it has a restaurant, casual eating and event facilities, which are used to the hotel’s advantage. “We work hard to structure menus between each of these spaces to minimise

Always a function favourite, sushi has taken the finger food world by storm due to its cost efficiency and bite size pieces.





“The menus we do for the degustations are a great way to experiment and create new dishes. More often than not our new season menus derive from these.” – **Chris Militz, Lion Hotel, Adelaide.**

The Lion Hotel's off-premise catering division adds yet another dimension to this multi-faceted venue.

wastage and maximise our products,” Militz said. “Also, menus are written to minimise the impact of price fluctuations.” To add another element of diversity to the venue, degustation style dinners and regular wine matching dinners are also held at the Lion Hotel. “The menus we do for the degustations are a great way to experiment and create new dishes. More often than not our new season menus derive from these,” Militz said.

A menu change at The Exchange Hotel also occurs with the new season. “I like to add something new and different, but I don’t go overboard because we are catering for the mass market with finger food, rather than specialised meals,” Thompson said. The venue provides finger food for around 50 to 120 people, with a diverse range of customers

booking the function rooms. “Our main demographic is about 25 to 35 but we also have functions booked for 50 and 60 year-olds,” Thompson said.

Allowing the customer to be a part of the planning process of an event is also an important element. “When we do set menus for a function I will come out and sit down with the customer and make a menu according to what they want for the occasion,” Thompson said. “It works better this way as they feel like they’re involved and it’s a great way to give them a bit of personalised care.”

Catering for functions from five people to 500, the Lion Hotel still maintains a strong personal touch through a well-structured events team and excellent customer service. “The foundation of our business is utilising

the best possible product with service that is knowledgeable and caring,” Militz said. “We always try to remember that for our client, be it a wedding, 21st birthday or corporate dinner. There is a huge amount of trust that goes into selecting us to cater.”

The off-premise catering division of the Lion Hotel has been running for four years and is a versatile extension to a venue already recognised for its food. Catering for everything from very intimate functions to large corporate dinners for several hundreds, the functions team is used to diversity. “No two ‘off prems’ are ever the same. There are always challenges that pop-up and there are more variables to control,” Militz said. Despite the unpredictability of working at a different venue, there are definitely some benefits. “All

HEAD CHEF



"I like to add something new and different, but I don't go overboard because we are catering for the mass market with finger food, rather than specialised meals." – **Ryan Thompson, The Exchange Hotel, Port Melbourne**

INNOVATIVE FUNCTION FOOD IDEAS:

- Plastic spoons have allowed for foods like risotto
- Shot glasses for oysters and soup
- Individual cones for squid and fish and chips
- Mini burgers
- Individual gelato cones

the staff really enjoy working off-premise because not only do we get to 'leave the office for the day,' but more often than not we are in some fantastic location as well," Miltz said.

Different function styles require varying staff levels but Miltz suggests about one chef for a dinner of 20 and three chefs for around 100 dinner guests. "There are three core function chefs and then several chefs who will float between sections depending on what is occurring on any given week," Miltz said. Having won numerous AHA awards for the restaurant and taking out Best Overall Hotel at the 2007 National AHA Awards, the Lion Hotel has gained an impressive reputation. "I think it comes back to quality product and trust," Miltz said. "Our clients know we have been around for a long time and will be around longer. They know that we always strive to put great food on the plate and they know our staff care about their event." ■

CAMBRO®

TRAYS • TABLE SERVICE • FOOD PRESENTATION • SHELVING
FOOD STORAGE & PREPARATION • MOBILE VENDING
HOLDING & TRANSPORTATION • WAREWASHING & STORAGE SYSTEMS



Do you comply with current food safety requirements?



Did you know that over 10% of illnesses are estimated to be caused by the incorrect storage of fresh produce?

All Cambro products are designed to minimise handling and save time, reducing the risk of food borne illness.

Cambro continues to lead the foodservice industry in helping operators serve safe food.



From the world of Comcater!

For your nearest dealer, phone:
1300 662 532
www.comcater.com.au

