

# FSR

Hacking  
Sustainability

Root Vegetables

FSR  
50  
EMERGING CHAINS  
FOR THE FUTURE

## The New Crew

Learn the secrets to growth from pros like bartaco and its peers on the FSR 50.



"We can design a good restaurant, but ultimately it's our team and the people that bring it to life."

***bartaco***



# FSR 50

This collection of 50 emerging chains with 50 or fewer locations offers plenty of insight into how a full-service restaurant concept can grow. We've got the numbers driving the most exciting chains—and tips that will help your growing brand chart its own world domination.

By [Laura Zolman Kirk](#)

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## Taco 'Bout Change

**ON THE EDGE OF ACQUISITION, BARTACO STICKS TO ITS SENSE OF SELF.**

Coastal, upscale taco brand bartaco knows what sort of experience it is looking to create for its guests. “I think we can all agree that life looks a little different when you have your toes in the sand,” says Sabato Sagaria, president. “It’s being able to create something that evokes that for us regardless of what city you’re in.”

Since 2010, the brand has been transporting guests to that beach mentality whether they’re landlocked in Boulder, Colorado, or on the harbor in Port Chester, New York. It is 17 locations strong today, serving travel- and food truck-inspired dishes like Baja Fish tacos, Glazed Pork Belly tacos, and lettuce cup Tuna Tatako tacos alongside fresh-squeezed margaritas in a laid back atmo-

TOM MCGOVERN



sphere that feels like a friend's beach house, Sagaria says. The sun comes in with ceiling fans going, while customers sit on the deck filling out the menu card with friends, coworkers, and family. "It becomes interactive," he says of the cards. "Instead of having four people sitting at a table looking at a piece of paper in silence, the conversation starts immediately."

As it's grown, bartaco has aimed to design each location with the community it serves in mind. "Each one is unique in its own sense," Sagaria says. Asheville, North Carolina, in the mountains is much different

**FAVORITE MENU ITEM RIGHT NOW**

Roasted maitake mushroom tacos with sweet corn puree, asparagus and corn relish.

SABATO SAGARIA, BARTACO

than Tampa, Florida. "We wanted to take inspiration from the surrounding communities, but do so through the lens of bartaco," he says.

And it seems there will be many more communities to consider in the future. Del Frisco's Restaurant Group Inc.—owner of Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse, Del Frisco's Grille, and Sullivan's Steakhouse—announced its plans to acquire

bartaco's parent company Barteca—including Barcelona Wine Bar—in May. Although the unit count was only 16 at the time of the announcement—with 30 approved sites over both Barteca brands—Del Frisco's estimates the total market potential for bartaco to be upward of 300 restaurants domestically.

It is anyone's guess how the acquisition will affect the brand's growth strategy. Del Frisco's has not released the number of total bartaco units planned for 2019. Up until the acquisition, however, Barteca had opened a couple of locations each year, exploring the East Coast and the Midwest, with a larger growth spurt in 2015 due to private equity investments.

People are the brand's top priority as the team looks to the future. "Ultimately it's our team and the people that bring it to life, day in and day out," Sagaria says. "That's something that you can't just churn out; that's something that we build every day. We're paying more and more attention to that as we move forward."

The brand would like to use the talent they have to fuel growth. "I really applaud the founders for being thoughtful about growth," Sagaria says. "That's something that we can continue to keep at the forefront of our minds as we start to look at opportunities for continued development."

**FSR 50**

**GROWTH BUSTERS**

- SMART TECH INTEGRATION
- ALL-DAY SERVICE
- TO-GO SERVICE
- ONLINE ORDERING
- LOYALTY PROGRAM

**RARE Steakhouse**

[3]

With locations in Madison, Milwaukee and Washington, D.C., RARE Steakhouse has quickly established itself as one of the **PREMIER DINING EXPERIENCES** in each market it operates in.

**Founding Farmers**

[7]

Providing **SCRATCH-MADE, RESPONSIBLY SOURCED** American food isn't new. Doing so under an ownership model that brings the farmers to the table—excuse the wordplay—is. The brand is poised to hit 10 units in 2019.

**The Ainsworth**

[7]

All of The Ainsworth's locations offer **CLASSIC AMERICAN FARE**, signature cocktails, and stimulating decor in a mixed space of restaurant, bar, lounge and events areas.

## Thirsty Lion Gastropub & Grill

[8] 🍷

Getting local is the Lion's specialty—each location caters to its market, with queso in Texas and charcuterie in the Northwest. Giving guests a **TRUE GASTROPUB EXPERIENCE** is leading the Lion to expand.

## b Restaurants—burgers.beer.bourbon

[9] 🍷 📱

It has taken b Restaurants the last decade to expand to nine locations, but the next couple of years are heating up for the brand that was founded in 2006 around the belief that **GREAT FOOD AND DRINK BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER**.

## Public School Restaurant + Bar

[9] 🍷 🕒 🍷 📱 👑

This chef-driven gastropub delivers an education in the art of food and beer. Is it the **BACON CHEDDAR TOTS**, known affectionately as “infamous” by the restaurant, that’s pushing the brand to expand?

## Babalu

[9] 🕒 🍷

After its founding in 2010, Babalu has taken the Southeast by storm using **HYPER-LOCAL PRODUCE** and products for its made-from-scratch dishes. Each Latin-inspired dish has unique Southern flair.

## Zea Rotisserie & Grill

[9] 🍷 🍷 📱

Started in 1997 by three **NEW ORLEANS CHEFS** inspired by rotisserie cooking in Europe, Zea has contin-

ued to turn out fresh menus that delight guests at an affordable price point.

## Piola

[10] 🍷 📱

The Italian brand landed in the U.S. with its headquarters in Miami and has locations in four states. Piola means “meeting point” in Piedmontese (a Venetian dialect) and is bringing Americans to the table for **AUTHENTIC, ARTISANAL PIZZA**.

## Pinstripes Bistro Bowling Bocce

[10] 🕒 🍷 📱

Pairing an upscale Italian-American menu with **BOWLING AND BOCCCE** has been a recipe for success at Pinstripes, which expects to expand to 15 units in 2019.

## The Matador

[11] 🍷 📱 👑

Scratch-made Mexican cuisine and an **ASSORTMENT OF TEQUILAS** are behind the Matador's drive to develop new markets in its five-state footprint.

## Stoney River Steakhouse

[12]

Beef accounts for 70 percent of sales at Stoney River Steakhouse, a J. Alexander brand that **TAKES ITS STEAKS VERY SERIOUSLY**.

## Redlands Grill

[12]

Another J. Alexander brand, Redlands Grill has been **SLOWLY TAKING OVER** J. Alexander locations, with at least two more on the way this year.

# Fall Favorites



## SERVING THE SEASON

This fall, there is no better way cater to your customers than offering Blount premium soups. Favorites like our Classic Broccoli Cheddar Soup are sure to be a hit as the weather starts to cool. With over 100 soup varieties, our easy to prepare and ready to heat bags mean less labor and more profit.

To learn more, contact  
Blount Fine Foods  
at 774-888-1300  
or visit us on  
[blountfinefoods.com](http://blountfinefoods.com)



## Words from the Wise

ADVICE ON EXPANDING CONCEPTS FROM THOSE IN THE THICK OF IT.

### Practice patience

What's worked for us is patience in the pace that we've gone. People are ambitious, but sometimes faster and bigger isn't always better. In today's world, consumers are much more dialed into the soul of the restaurant. They want to identify with it. They want uniqueness and owners that are really passionate about each store that they open, rather than just unit count.

**NICK HOGAN**

FLAGSHIP RESTAURANT GROUP CEO

### Listen and take it one step at a time

It's important to nail the first restaurant before you even think about the second one. If you don't, the second one is never going to happen. And you have to be a great listener, listening to what our guests are saying in the restaurant and on social media and listening to our employees. We're constantly evolving due to the feedback. That's what allows us to take a finer grain of sandpaper to the restaurant every day. It's not looking too far ahead, but one step at a time.

**SABATO SAGARIA**

BARTACO PRESIDENT

### Focus on people

People are the key to this business. You really have to focus on the people you have in the company and making sure that those people are, No. 1, properly picked—you've hired the right people—and, then on top of that, you've committed yourself to developing those people. I think when you've done that, it definitely makes expansion easier.

**CHRIS SIMMS**

LAZY DOG FOUNDER



"It's this balance of comfort and approachable classics that I think attract the older generation, and I think the bold innovation and the liveliness of the concept really attract the younger generation."

*Lazy Dog*



LAZY DOG

FOODNEWSFEED.COM

# FSR 50

## Blue Sushi Sake Grill

[13] 🍷 🍴 📱 👑

This sushi brand is on a roll as it climbs the ranks closer to the 20-unit mark. [READ MORE ON PAGE 48.](#)

## Sauce Pizza and Wine

[13] 🍴 📱

Sauce is putting the fine in fine casual with its focus on **QUALITY FOOD MADE FRESH DAILY** and looking to add six units in the next two years.

## Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House

[13] 🍷 🍴 👑

How a fine-dining brand made its offerings more accessible and affordable—a move that's been a **SUCCESS THAT KEEPS GROWING.**

## Ocean Prime

[14]

Known as the fine-dining jewel in the Cameron Mitchell Restaurants portfolio, Ocean Prime is an ideal place to socialize, talk business, celebrate, or indulge, with a **VIBRANT ENERGY** that is driving the brand forward.

## 110 Grill

[14] 🍷 🍴 📱 👑

The casual yet upscale atmosphere at 110 Grill is complete with open kitchens, large horseshoe-shaped bars, and outdoor patios with **FIRE PITS**. All this combined with dishes made from scratch on

seasonal menus is propelling the brand.

## Yolk

[14] 🍷 🍴 📱

What's brunch without a runny yolk? Yolk is a brunch brand that pushes the envelope with new ideas, **CREATIVE BREAKFASTS**, specialty juices, private label premium coffee, and new locations that are hot and ready.

## Tupelo Honey Café

[15] 🍷 🍴 📱 👑

The experience at Tupelo Honey Café embodies **SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY** in the Blue Ridge Mountains that keeps customers coming back for more chef-driven comfort food.

## STK

[15]

A blend of the modern steakhouse and **CHIC LOUNGE**, STK's fine dining experience brings superior quality and tradition to major cities.

## Cody's Original Roadhouse

[16] 🍴 📱 👑

The simplicity of the Cody's mantra—"Just Plain Good Food"—is just what the diner ordered, taking the **FONDNESS FOR THE FAMILIAR** to its finest.

## Oggi's Sports Brewhouse

[16] 🍴 📱

This 27-year-old, family-owned pizza concept has defined craft brewing, fresh pizza, and brewpub favorites in a **SPORTS-THEMED ATMOSPHERE**. The brews are award-winning; Oggi's brews have brought home more than 50 medals in beer competitions.

# Fall Favorites



## FALL IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER.

There is no better way to change up your menu than offering Blount premium soups. Favorites like our new Cauliflower Cheddar Soup are sure to be a hit with your customers. With over 100 soup varieties, our easy to prepare and ready to heat bags mean less labor and more profit.

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The FSR 50 is FSR's annual list of high-potential, performance-proven full-service brands. Each has fewer than 50 locations and is growing fast. Here's our collection of some of the hottest full-service brands under 50 units.

| RESTAURANT NAME   | UNITS       |                    |                      | FINANCIALS              |                         |                   | PROGRAMS              |                 |               |                 |                 |
|---|-------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | TOTAL UNITS | UNITS ADDED (2018) | PLANNED UNITS (2019) | TOTAL COMPANY SALES (M) | AVERAGE UNIT VOLUME (M) | AVERAGE CHECK     | SMARTTECH INTEGRATION | ALL-DAY SERVICE | TO-GO SERVICE | ONLINE ORDERING | LOYALTY PROGRAM |
| <b>RARE Steakhouse</b><br>MADISON, WI                         | 3           | 0                  | 2                    | \$20 <sup>e</sup>       | \$5.0                   | \$130             | ●                     |                 | ●             |                 |                 |
| <b>Founding Farmers</b><br>WASHINGTON, DC                     | 7           | 2                  | 1                    | \$60                    | \$12.5                  | \$57              |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>The Ainsworth</b><br>NEW YORK, NY                          | 7           | 4                  | 1                    | \$30                    | \$4.0                   | \$30              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Thirsty Lion Gastropub &amp; Grill</b><br>PORTLAND, OR     | 8           | 1                  | 3                    | \$35                    | \$5.1                   | \$24              | ●                     |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>b Restaurants—burgers.beer.bourbon</b><br>HARTFORD, CT     | 9           | 0                  | 2                    | \$35                    | \$3.5                   | \$27              |                       |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Public School Restaurant + Bar</b><br>WOODLAND HILLS, CA   | 9           | 0                  | 1                    | \$27                    | \$3.0                   | \$43              | ●                     | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Babalu</b><br>ROSWELL, GA                                  | 9           | 1                  | 3                    | \$30                    | \$3.2                   | \$21              |                       | ●               | ●             |                 |                 |
| <b>Zea Rotisserie &amp; Grill</b><br>NEW ORLEANS, LA          | 9           | 1                  | 1                    | \$30                    | \$5.5                   | \$25              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Piola</b><br>MIAMI, FL                                     | 10          | 0                  | 1                    | \$15                    | \$1.5                   | \$20              |                       |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Pinstripes Bistro Bowling Bocce</b><br>CHICAGO, IL         | 10          | 2                  | 3                    | \$60                    | \$8.5                   | \$45              |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>The Matador</b><br>SEATTLE, WA                             | 11          | 0                  | 2                    | \$30 <sup>e</sup>       | \$3.0                   | \$29 <sup>e</sup> |                       |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Stoney River Steakhouse</b><br>NASHVILLE, TN               | 12          | 1                  | 2*                   | \$46*                   | \$3.6*                  | \$43*             |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Redlands Grill</b><br>NASHVILLE, TN                        | 12          | 2*                 | 2*                   | \$68*                   | \$5.6*                  | \$30              |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Blue Sushi Sake Grill</b><br>OMAHA, NE                     | 13          | 1                  | 3                    | \$31                    | \$3.3                   | \$30 <sup>e</sup> |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Sauce Pizza and Wine</b><br>SCOTTSDALE, AZ                 | 13          | 2                  | 4                    | \$25                    | \$1.9                   | \$11              |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House</b><br>SOUTHLAKE, TX | 13          | 4                  | 2                    | \$177                   | \$14.1                  | \$116             | ●                     |                 | ●             |                 | ●               |
| <b>Ocean Prime</b><br>COLUMBUS, OH                            | 14          | 1                  | 1                    | \$109                   | \$7.8                   | \$110             |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Yolk</b><br>CHICAGO, IL                                    | 14          | 4                  | 6                    | \$28                    | \$2.4                   | \$25              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>110 Grill</b><br>WESTFORD, MA                              | 14          | 8                  | 10                   | \$30                    | \$4.0                   | \$25              | ●                     | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Tupelo Honey Cafe</b><br>ASHEVILLE, NC                     | 15          | 0                  | 0                    | \$52                    | \$3.4                   | \$22              |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>STK</b><br>NEW YORK, NY                                    | 15          | 1                  | 1*                   | \$165*                  | \$11*                   | \$115*            |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Cody's Original Roadhouse</b><br>TAMPA, FL                 | 16          | 0                  | 5                    | \$38                    | \$3.3                   | \$25 <sup>e</sup> |                       |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |

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| <b>Oggi's Sports Brewhouse</b><br>SAN CLEMENTE, CA          | 16          | 0                  | 3                    | \$38                    | \$2.4                   | \$20              |                       |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>The Flying Biscuit</b><br>ATLANTA, GA                    | 16          | 5                  | 8                    | \$22                    | \$1.5                   | \$18 <sup>e</sup> |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Bartaco</b><br>NORWALK, CT                               | 17          | 4                  | 4 <sup>e</sup>       | \$95*                   | \$5.6*                  | \$22              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Arooga's</b><br>HARRISBURG, PA                           | 17          | 5                  | 8                    | \$38                    | \$2.5                   | \$18              | ●                     | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>The Lost Cajun</b><br>COVINGTON, LA                      | 17          | 15                 | 25                   | \$10                    | \$1.1                   | \$40              |                       | ●               | ●             |                 |                 |
| <b>J. Alexander's</b><br>NASHVILLE, TN                      | 19          | 1                  | 2*                   | \$108*                  | \$5.7*                  | \$31              |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Walk-On's</b><br>BATON ROUGE, LA                         | 19          | 14                 | 30                   | \$70                    | \$5.4                   | \$16              |                       |                 | ●             |                 | ●               |
| <b>Zinburger Wine &amp; Burger Bar</b><br>LIVINGSTON, NJ    | 20          | 0                  | 5                    | \$60 <sup>e</sup>       | \$4 <sup>e</sup>        | \$20 <sup>e</sup> |                       |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Bubba's 33</b><br>FISHERS, IA                            | 21          | 1                  | 7*                   | \$80*                   | \$4*                    | \$18*             |                       |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Eddie V's</b><br>ORLANDO, FL                             | 21          | 2                  | 3*                   | \$102                   | \$6.4                   | \$90              |                       |                 |               |                 | ●               |
| <b>Umami Burger</b><br>LOS ANGELES, CA                      | 22          | 4                  | 40                   | \$37 <sup>e</sup>       | \$1.6 <sup>e</sup>      | \$15 <sup>e</sup> |                       | ●               | ●             |                 |                 |
| <b>Rock &amp; Brews</b><br>MANHATTAN BEACH, CA              | 22          | 5                  | 6                    | \$83                    | \$4.8                   | \$52              |                       | ●               | ●             |                 |                 |
| <b>Rusty Bucket Restaurant &amp; Tavern</b><br>COLUMBUS, OH | 23          | 0                  | 0                    | \$60                    | \$2.6                   | \$24              |                       | ●               | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>JINYA Ramen Bar</b><br>LOS ANGELES, CA                   | 23          | 12                 | 25                   | \$30                    | \$1.3                   | \$15              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Boston's</b><br>DALLAS, TX                               | 24          | 3                  | 5                    | \$61                    | \$2.3                   | \$19              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Lazy Dog</b><br>HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA                     | 26          | 4                  |                      | \$150                   | \$6.4                   | \$20              |                       |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Carolina Ale House</b><br>RALEIGH, NC                    | 30          | 1                  | 0                    | \$56                    | \$3.5                   | \$25              |                       | ●               |               | ●               |                 |
| <b>Cooper's Hawk Winery &amp; Restaurant</b><br>CHICAGO, IL | 31          | 4                  | 5                    | \$242                   | \$8.3                   | \$33 <sup>e</sup> | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Snooze</b><br>DENVER, CO                                 | 31          | 8                  | 12                   | \$60                    | \$3.1                   | \$14              |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Famous Toastery</b><br>CHARLOTTE, NC                     | 32          | 10                 | 15                   | \$30                    | \$1.5                   | \$13              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Native Grill &amp; Wings</b><br>CHANDLER, AZ             | 33          | 3                  | 8                    | \$63                    | \$1.6                   | \$12              |                       |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Bad Daddy's Burger Bar</b><br>LAKEWOOD, CO               | 33          | 9                  | 10                   | \$75                    | \$2.6                   | \$18              | ●                     |                 | ●             | ●               |                 |
| <b>Duffy's</b><br>LAKE WORTH, FL                            | 34          | 1                  | 3                    | \$135                   | \$4.1                   | \$21              | ●                     | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Cantina Laredo</b><br>DALLAS, TX                         | 37          | 6                  | 9                    | \$90                    | \$3.0                   | \$23              |                       |                 |               |                 |                 |
| <b>Abuelo's</b><br>LUBBOCK, TX                              | 38          | 2                  | 2                    | \$118                   | \$3.2                   | \$18              |                       |                 | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Seasons 52</b><br>ORLANDO, FL                            | 41          | 1                  | 1*                   | \$250                   | \$5.8                   | \$45              |                       |                 |               | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Firebirds</b><br>CHARLOTTE, NC                           | 45          | 4                  | 6                    | \$161                   | \$3.8                   | \$27              | ●                     | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |
| <b>Bareburger</b><br>NEW YORK, NY                           | 47          | 3                  | 10                   | \$88                    | \$2.3                   | \$35              | ●                     | ●               | ●             | ●               | ●               |

SOURCES FOR DATA INCLUDE COMPANY REPORTS, SEC FILINGS, AND INDUSTRY RESEARCH. NUMBERS WITH AN ASTERISK\* WERE GATHERED OR ESTIMATED FROM THE MOST RECENT ANNUAL REPORT OR SEC FILING. ESTIMATES (e) ARE ASSOCIATED WITH PRIVATELY HELD COMPANIES THAT DO NOT RELEASE SALES FIGURES AND ARE COMPILED FROM INDUSTRY RESEARCH.



LAZY DOG

## Casual Dining 2.0

LAZY DOG LOOKS TO ATTRACT ALL GENERATIONS BY COMBINING COMFORT WITH INNOVATION.

Aiming to run the next generation of casual dining with scratch cooking and a brand that takes responsibility for not only its guests but also the products it serves and the people it employs, Chris Simms opened the first Lazy Dog in Huntington Beach, California, in 2003.

“Every time I come home, my dog is the most excited individual in the house,” Simms says of the name choice. “We wanted people to be able to feel that welcome when they walk in, and we wanted them to just be able to kick back and relax and let us take care of everything.”

His goal beyond that was to appeal to a wide audience, the next generation of consumers—millennials and Generation Z—as well as the baby boomers.

So far, he’s succeeded. Walking through one of Lazy Dog’s 26 locations primarily on the West Coast, one could encounter a table of 5-year-olds and their parents celebrating a birthday party, an elderly couple on a date, and a group of young people pregameing for a night out with drinks and appetizers at the bar.

“It’s this balance of comfort and

approachable classics that I think attract the older generation, and I think the bold innovation and the liveliness of the concept really attract the younger generation,” Simms says. Some of that balance coexists within the same item on the menu, like with the guest-favorite BBQ Bison Meatloaf, for example. It’s a comfort food, but it uses an innovative protein.

Other dishes that have proven popular are the Togarashi Edamame Beans small plate and the Burrata + Heirloom Tomato Crisp. Both were developed from trend-watching at other concepts that appeal to Lazy Dog’s customers and then doing the brand’s take on it. The edamame, instead of served just sprinkled with salt like at sushi restaurants, is tossed in a wok with soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, orange peel, and the Japanese red chili spice mix togarashi. The burrata crisp is served almost like a pizza with chili oil and pomodoro sauce. “One of our goals has been to introduce people to new foods,” Simms says.

Jackson Hole, Wyoming—where

Simms spent a lot of his childhood—is the inspiration behind the brand’s natural decor choice. And, when looking for new locations, the team gravitates toward places with a lot of energy and traffic.

Another key to the brand’s success as it has continued to appeal to more people in more markets is its people-focused culture, Simms says. “In all of our decision making, we’re always thinking about our teammates, guests, and vendors: all of the stakeholders in our business. And I find that that creates an environment where people really love coming

### FAVORITE MENU ITEMS RIGHT NOW

BBQ Veggie Burger, lemon gluten sensitive cake, and Thai peanut wings.

CHRIS SIMMS, LAZY DOG

to work. They then, in turn, bestow that upon the guests,” he says. As long as the Lazy Dog team can maintain guest experience at this caliber, it will continue to grow, Simms says. There will be 30 Lazy Dog restaurants by the end of the year, and the brand hopes to open at a 20 percent pace as it enters markets moving forward.

# FSR 50

## The Flying Biscuit

[16] ☹️ 🍷 📱 👑

After 20 years and 16 locations, The Flying Biscuit still maintains its quintessential **NEIGHBORHOOD FEEL** with its Southern-inspired comfort food menu.

## bartaco

[17] 🍷 🍷 📱

On the edge of acquisition, bartaco still knows what sort of experience its looking to create for its guests and is sticking to it. [READ MORE ON PAGE 37.](#)

## Arooga's

[17] 🍷 ☹️ 🍷 📱 👑

It's been 10 years since Arooga's opened its first location in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The passion to offer guests more is still driving the brand as Arooga's begins to offer the latest technology such as **TABLE PAYMENT** and an app-based jukebox.

## The Lost Cajun

[17] ☹️ 🍷

This family-friendly concept with **AUTHENTIC CAJUN FOOD** strives for a true hole-in-the-wall vibe despite its 17-location success that's still growing.

## J. Alexander's

[19]

A low **TABLE-TO-SERVER** ratio is the trademark of concepts in the J. Alexander's Holdings group, and nowhere is that more evident than in the signature brand.

## Walk-On's

[19] 🍷 👑

It's game day every day at Walk On's where **LOUISIANA FARE** meets sports bar flair by a brand that aims to more than double its foot-print in two years.

## Zinburger Wine & Burger Bar

[20] 🍷 📱 👑

This upscale boutique burger concept offers **GOURMET BURGERS** and perfectly paired wine selections.

## Bubba's 33

[21] 🍷 📱

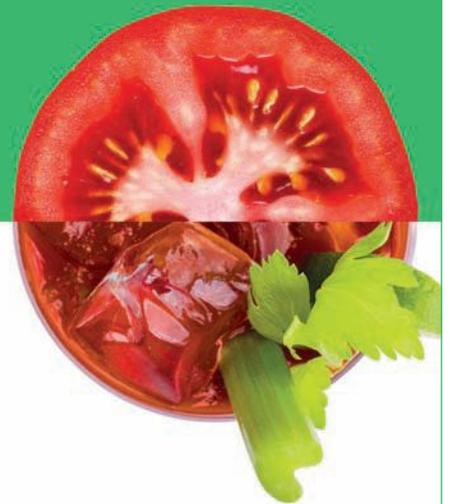
**PIZZA, BURGERS, BEER, AND SPORTS** rule at Bubba's, named for the founder's nickname. Kent Taylor, founder of Texas Roadhouse restaurants, created Bubba's in 2013 and has been expanding rapidly.

## Eddie V's

[21] 👑

Darden proves a corporate group can deliver fine-dining excellence with this **UPSCALE SEAFOOD** concept that continues to expand.

You  
get out  
what you  
put in



**BETTER INGREDIENTS  
MAKE BETTER DRINKS**

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"When we started 16 years ago, the vast majority of people were California-roll-eating people. As time has gone on, their palates have matured."

*Blue Sushi  
Sake Grill*

# FSR 50

## Umami Burger

[22] 🕒 🍷 📱

This over-the-top burger shop has a **CULT FOLLOWING AND BIG PLANS** to spread that cult around the globe. Along with international expansion, the brand plans to add 40 units in 2019.

## Rock & Brews

[22] 🕒 🍷 📱

**ROCK LEGENDS** and local brewery rockstars meet at Rock & Brews, a growing Southern California brand with a family friendly atmosphere serving American food.

## Rusty Bucket Restaurant & Tavern

[23] 🕒 🍷 📱

Founded in 2002, the sister company within the Cameron Mitchell Restaurants group calls itself a casual-dining experience, but each location features an executive chef guiding **FROM-SCRATCH MENUS**.

## JINYA Ramen Bar

[23] 🕒 🍷 📱

Realizing the need for **AUTHENTIC RAMEN** in the U.S., Tokyo restaurateur Tomonori Takahashi opened JINYA's first location in Los Angeles in 2010. Despite fast growth—12 new units this year and 25 planned for next—JINYA is known for a slow-cooked approach to ramen.

## Boston's

[24] 🕒 🍷 📱 👑

Family-friendly casual dining and the high-energy sports bar vibe coincide at Boston's, which has specialized in relaxing atmospheres and **SCRATCH FOOD** for over 50 years and is still growing.

## Lazy Dog

[26] 🍷 📱

While the name lends itself to the casual atmosphere, the growth strategy at Lazy Dog is anything but lazy. **READ MORE ON PAGE 44.**

## Carolina Ale House

[30] 🕒 📱

The parent company of Carolina Ale House—LM Restaurants, owned by Lou and Joy Moshakos—is truly a **FAMILY-OPERATED** business. The Moshakos' three daughters help to run the growing restaurant empire.

## Cooper's Hawk Winery & Restaurant

[31] 🕒 🍷 📱 👑

Chef-driven cuisine isn't the only thing driving success at Cooper's Hawk. The **WINERY** produces 5 million bottles annually and has won more than 300 local, national, and international awards.

## Snooze

[31]

Up from 20 units in last year's *FSR 50*, Snooze is **GROWING SUSTAINABLY** with the goal of being an asset to each of the communities it operates in.

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BLUE SUSHI SAKE GRILL

## Slow and Steady

**BLUE HAS BEEN PACING ITSELF IN THE MID-AMERICA SUSHI RACE FOR 16 YEARS NOW, AND SO FAR, SO GOOD.**

Over 16 years Blue Sushi Sake Grill has gradually grown to 13 locations across the U.S. The brand is owned by Flagship Restaurant Group, which was founded by a group of investors including CEO Nick Hogan. Blue, the group's first concept, began in Omaha, Nebraska. Hogan had spent time enjoying the sushi scene in Tucson, Arizona and San Diego, and then moved to Omaha and noticed a hole

### FAVORITE MENU ITEMS RIGHT NOW

Poke, nigiri, and the Spanish Fly roll.

NICK HOGAN, BLUE SUSHI SAKE GRILL

in the market. So, he and his partners—all in their late 20s and having never opened a restaurant before—opened the first Blue in 2002.

“We didn’t know what we didn’t know,” Hogan says in hindsight. But, by learning and evolving the brand on the go, they have managed to develop a successful sushi brand, among others.

In the beginning, Hogan says, Blue was more of a specialty restaurant, but, as the brand has grown, Blue has changed to be more approachable. “Now, I think we operate in that space between maybe the mom-and-pop sushi restaurant and fine dining,” he says. “You get very close to the fine dining experience but with a more affordable ticket.”

One of the things that Hogan believes has been a significant component of Blue’s growth and brand revolution has been evolving the menu and decor of the locations continuously. “When we started 16 years ago, the vast majority of people were California-roll-eating people. As time has gone on, their palates have matured and they look for stuff that’s a little more out there. People are eating uni, or things that would have scared them away years ago. They’re eating more sashimi, climbing that sushi sophistication ladder,” Hogan says. “I think we’ve done a great job over the years of evolving our menu to keep pace with that.”

On the menu, one can still find the ever-comforting Cali Roll, but also a

light and refreshing sockeye salmon Poke bowl, a range of thoughtfully developed vegetarian and vegan sushi options like the Cowgirl roll with pickled vegan tempura, Sriracha-fried onion rings, and vegan mayo, and more exotic and sophisticated options like sashimi as well.

The look and feel of the locations, which are typically around 5,000 square feet, have gone through a similar evolution. In the early 2000s when the brand began, the decor included glowing acrylic and fish tanks. Now, the look involves more natural materials, traditional sake kegs, and Japanese beer ads.

The future for the brand includes more evolution, Hogan foresees, and steady growth in urban entertainment and midtown development settings. “Our growth has been very organic, fueled by cash flow and some community bank financing,” Hogan says.

The team has discussed private equity, but Hogan believes what has worked for the brand has been its easeful pace. “If you’re gearing up and taking a bunch of private money to grow faster, then maybe you don’t have quite as much time [to evolve the menu and decor as thoughtfully],” he says. With the plan of opening three to four stores a year for the next couple of years, Hogan says the brand’s intention is to grow indefinitely.

# FSR 50

## Famous Toastery

[32] 📱 🍷 📺

Best friends turned business partners Brian Burchill and Robert Maynard opened the first Famous Toastery in 2005 and quickly grew to three locations. Up 10 units from last year, the duo is crushing their goal to break through the otherwise boring **CASUAL BREAKFAST** segment.

## Native Grill & Wings

[33] 🍷 📱 👑

This family-friendly wing spot has been around since 1979 but is anything but old news. Coupling America's longtime love of **CHICKEN WINGS** with new strategies—a mobile app, loyalty program, online ordering, and third-party delivery—has proved to be the key to growth.

## Bad Daddy's Burger Bar

[33] 📱 🍷 📺

They're **BAD AND THEY KNOW IT**, up 10 units since last year with plans to add 9 more in 2018 and 10 in 2019.

## Duffy's

[34] 📱 🕒 🍷 📱 👑

This Florida sports bar has become a regional leader in top-quality casual dining with an emphasis on fresh ingredients and **MORE THAN 80 TVS** broadcasting endless sports entertainment.

## Cantina Laredo

[37]

This **MODERN MEXICAN** spot has replicated its sophisticated atmosphere in 16 states, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

## Abuelo's

[38] 🍷 📱 👑

The Abuelo's story is simple—extraordinary flavor, impeccable service, and memorable experiences, all coupled with **EVERYDAY VALUE**. The chain is fast approaching the 50 mark with two more units added each year for the next two years.

## Seasons 52

[41] 📱 👑

Darden's **CHIC GREEN BRAND** with a focus on seasonal and local is steadily growing.

## Firebirds Wood Fired Grill

[45] 📱 🕒 🍷 📱 👑

Soon to be a graduate of the **FSR 50**, this contemporary-polished chain offering an energetic twist on the **TRADITIONAL GRILL** is firing up each community it lands in.

## Bareburger

[47] 📱 🕒 🍷 📱 👑

Due to grow beyond 50 this year, Bareburger has been banking on its **NO-FUNNY-BUSINESS** attitude and reaping the rewards. The chain proudly serves its communities with the goal to make the whole world smile.

You  
get out  
what you  
put in



**BETTER INGREDIENTS  
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# FSR

**FSR  
50**  
EMERGING CHAINS  
FOR THE FUTURE

Secret Sauces  
for Cocktails

Fermentation  
Arts

## Breakfast Wakes Up

Snooze CEO David Birzon talks about the sustainable practices that earned this chef-driven breakfast concept a spot in the *FSR 50*.



**FSR**  
**50**

**FIFTY FOR THE FUTURE**

*FSR* names the 50 high-potential, performance-proven full-service brands to keep on your radar—each with fewer than 50 locations.

BY ALEX DIXON & CONNIE GENTRY

**Performance and potential** earned restaurants a spot among this year's *FSR 50*—that, and the fact that each has a portfolio of fewer than 50 units. We're talking emergent chains, those that have a growing presence and a penchant for progress, be it defined as menu innovation, sales growth, brand expansion, or community support. You'll discover regional brands that have been around for decades, like Elmer's, which opened in 1960 in Portland, Oregon, and has given birth to a new concept that it plans to develop in the Southwest. Along with brands like Snooze, which got its start just 11 years ago but has already awakened the Denver region to a heightened appreciation for polished breakfast service and exceptionally sustainable processes. For performance metrics, look to the chart on Pages 48 to 49, which details total company sales, average unit volume, number of units, and areas of operation for each of the *FSR 50* brands.

JESSICA GIESEY

Denver's progressive breakfast concept, Snooze, diverts 90 percent of its waste from landfills; by the end of next year plans call for 100 percent to be diverted.



# SNOOZE WAKES UP THE BREAKFAST SCENE

This chef-driven brand brings sustainable practices and community support to the start of each day.

**THERE'S A NEW MEANING** for “green eggs and ham” in Denver, Colorado, thanks to the commitment one breakfast-centric concept has made to sustainable practices.

**20 UNITS** Founded in 2006 by brothers Jon and Adam Schlegel, Snooze, an A.M. Eatery, has grown to 20 units through a brand built on three pillars: community, sustainability, and responsible sourcing through a decidedly chef-driven menu.

“Responsible food started up through dinner, and then quick-casual was a branch of that ... but why does it only have to be during lunch?” Snooze CEO David Birzon notes. “No one had done anything different with breakfast in 30 years, and we’re taking the chef-driven model to it with Snooze.”

Birzon says that Snooze wants to be more than a restaurant; it wants to be an asset to each of the communities in which it operates.

The company does this by giving back to the local community through donations of goods and services, whether it’s employees passing out pancakes, maintaining school gardens, or volunteering at food banks or other organizations. There’s even a full-time community director at Snooze who assists in determining the best ways to make monetary donations, typi-

cally 1 percent of sales from each location, and to get employees involved. Employees also volunteer for local boards and other leadership positions within communities, Birzon says.

That sense of creating community encourages Snooze to be an example and a leader for other establishments when it comes to sustainability. The company diverts 90 percent of all of its waste from landfills, with plans to divert 100 percent by the end of 2018.

Snooze recycles and composts, while working with neighboring businesses and landlords to make the process easier for all and to encourage collaboration in reducing waste. The brand has a full-time director of sustainability who ensures that it meets its sustainability objectives and that it is using resources and sourcing wisely.

When deciding what ingredients come through the door, Snooze has strict principles: Meat must not contain any sub-



GEORGE LANGE PHOTOGRAPHY



GEORGE LANGE PHOTOGRAPHY



JESSICA GRIESEY



therapeutic antibiotics; eggs must be cage-free; and products should be purchased from organic purveyors whenever possible. Because of the costliness associated with organic certification, Snooze also guides small vendors that it works with through the process. Employees visit partner farms and manufacturers, and each location has a “green captain” to organize events like the farm field trips and to keep employees informed of sustainability efforts.

Snooze’s commitment to ethical and environmental practices not only leads to quality food and an impact in the community, but it also resonates with customers and attracts employees who are passionate about the brand. “It benefits the employee base because they can say, ‘Snooze believes what I believe and I believe what Snooze believes,’” Birzon says.

And the fact that an early shift means employees are usually out of the restaurant by mid-afternoon doesn’t hurt the company’s ability to attract prospects, either. Even with operating hours from 6:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. daily, sales ring in comparable to many restaurants serving through dinner and late night. Birzon says Snooze locations on average bring in sales of more than \$3 million per unit.



ASHLEY DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Snooze has plans for adding seven new units throughout 2017, and will open 10 or 11 in 2018. All of the locations are company-owned, and Birzon says that while the growth is focused around existing and recent markets like Texas, the brand is looking at new markets going into 2019, such as Kansas City, Missouri, and select markets in North Carolina.



## ABUELO'S

LUBBOCK, TEXAS

**40** Family-friendly and focused on authentic Tex-Mex cuisine and ambiance, this popular brand, which boasts it has been ranked the No. 1 Mexican Restaurant by Consumer Reports every year since 2006, is adding three or more units a year, primarily in its existing markets. Two leases are already signed for 2018.

## AROOGA'S GRILLE HOUSE & SPORTS BAR

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

**14** A tech-savvy brand, Arooga's offers a cardless loyalty program (guests simply sign up online); it also has online ordering capabilities and catering services. Ten of the 14 locations are company-owned and four are franchised; five additional franchise units will open through the end of this year and into the first quarter of 2018.

## B RESTAURANTS—BURGERS.BEER.BOURBON.

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

**9** Part of the Locals 8 Restaurant Group, B Restaurants raised the bar on premium burger and brew venues when it added bourbon to its mission statement. This month hails the conclusion of the brand's Tour d'Pappy promotion,

which started in January at the flagship West Hartford location and ran across seven locations where prix fixe five-course dinners were paired with the legendary Pappy Van Winkle bourbons.

## BAD DADDY'S BURGER BAR

LAKEWOOD, COLORADO

**23** In 2015, Good Times Restaurants spent \$21 million to acquire Bad Daddy's, a brand in which it already had a 48 percent stake. Good Times has its sights set on growth, with a total of eight new units planned for this year, which would bring the portfolio to a total of 28 locations by year-end. Performance numbers remain healthy, with average per-person checks coming in at \$17, alcoholic beverage sales running 14 to 24 percent of total sales, and traffic balanced between 40 percent lunch and 60 percent dinner.

## BARCELONA WINE BAR & RESTAURANT

NORWALK, CONNECTICUT

**13** The consummate wine bar for adventuresome foodies, this concept is known for its tapas from Spain and the Mediterranean region—and even more so for its robust collection of Spanish-focused wines. *Wine Enthusiast* sings the praises of its list of some 400 wines, with 40 available by the glass. And the experience is unique to each setting,



RESTAURANT

|   | NUMBER OF LOCATIONS | TOTAL COMPANY SALES (MILLIONS) | AVERAGE UNIT VOLUME (MILLIONS) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Abuelo's</b><br>13 STATES  | 40                  | \$119                          | \$3.1                          |
| <b>Arooga's Grille House &amp; Sports Bar</b><br>CONNECTICUT, FLORIDA, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, RHODE ISLAND, TEXAS  | 14                  | \$40                           | \$2.85                         |
| <b>b Restaurants (burgers / beer / bourbon)</b><br>CONNECTICUT, MASSACHUSETTS, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA   | 9                   | \$26 e                         | \$3.2 e                        |
| <b>Bad Daddy's Burger Bar</b><br>COLORADO, NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE  | 23                  | \$60 e                         | \$2.7 e                        |
| <b>Barcelona Wine Bar &amp; Restaurant</b><br>CONNECTICUT, GEORGIA, MASSACHUSETTS, TENNESSEE, VIRGINIA, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  | 13                  | \$48 e                         | \$3.75 e                       |
| <b>Bareburger</b><br>SEVEN STATES, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, CANADA, GERMANY, JAPAN, AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES   | 42                  | \$98 e                         | \$2.38                         |
| <b>Black Angus Steakhouse</b><br>ALASKA, ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, HAWAII, NEW MEXICO, WASHINGTON  | 44                  | \$160 e                        | \$3.63                         |
| <b>Blue Sushi Sake Grill</b><br>COLORADO, ILLINOIS, KANSAS, KENTUCKY, NEBRASKA, TEXAS   | 11                  | \$33                           | \$3.25                         |
| <b>Cantina Laredo</b><br>ALABAMA, COLORADO, OHIO, MISSOURI, MINNESOTA, ILLINOIS, TEXAS, LONDON, AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  | 40                  | \$100                          | \$3                            |
| <b>Carolina Ale House</b><br>FLORIDA, GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, VIRGINIA  | 30                  | \$100 e                        | \$3.8 e                        |
| <b>Cooper's Hawk</b><br>FLORIDA, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, MARYLAND, MISSOURI, OHIO, VIRGINIA, WISCONSIN   | 28                  | \$200                          | \$8.3                          |
| <b>Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House</b><br>COLORADO, FLORIDA, ILLINOIS, MASSACHUSETTS, NEVADA, NEW YORK, NORTH CAROLINA, PENNSYLVANIA, TEXAS, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA | 13                  | \$167*                         | \$14.4*                        |
| <b>Del Frisco's Grille</b><br>12 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  | 24                  | \$107*                         | \$5.1*                         |
| <b>Dinosaur Bar-B-Que</b><br>CONNECTICUT, MARYLAND, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK  | 9                   | \$31 e                         | \$3.5 e                        |
| <b>Eddie V's</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, FLORIDA, ILLINOIS, MICHIGAN, MISSOURI, PENNSYLVANIA, TEXAS, VIRGINIA   | 17                  | \$120 e                        | \$7 e                          |
| <b>Elmer's Restaurants</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, IDAHO, OREGON, WASHINGTON  | 26                  | \$50 e                         | \$2.07                         |
| <b>Eureka! Restaurants</b><br>CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, IDAHO, TEXAS, AND WASHINGTON  | 22                  | \$70                           | \$3.2                          |
| <b>Famous Toastery</b><br>COLORADO, FLORIDA, NORTH CAROLINA, PENNSYLVANIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, VIRGINIA   | 22                  | \$30                           | \$1.5                          |
| <b>Firebirds Wood Fired Grill</b><br>18 STATES  | 45                  | \$144                          | \$3.7                          |
| <b>Flying Biscuit Café</b><br>FLORIDA, GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA  | 14                  | \$20.7                         | \$1.48                         |
| <b>Fogo de Chão</b><br>MAJOR CITIES IN U.S., BRAZIL, AND MEXICO   | 48                  | \$288.3                        | \$7.8                          |
| <b>Granite City Food &amp; Brewery</b><br>14 STATES   | 36                  | \$140 e                        | \$3.9 e                        |
| <b>Hickory Tavern</b><br>ALABAMA, NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE   | 27                  | \$75 e                         | \$3 e                          |
| <b>Houston's</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, LOUISIANA, NEW JERSEY, TENNESSEE, TEXAS  | 16                  | \$124 e                        | \$7.5 e                        |

| RESTAURANT  | NUMBER OF LOCATIONS | TOTAL COMPANY SALES (MILLIONS) | AVERAGE UNIT VOLUME (MILLIONS) |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Il Fornaio</b><br>CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, NEVADA, VIRGINIA, WASHINGTON   | 21                  | \$116 e                        | \$5.5 e                        |
| <b>J. Alexander's</b><br>11 STATES  | 19                  | \$108 e                        | \$5.7*                         |
| <b>Jonathan's Grille</b><br>TENNESSEE   | 7                   | \$21                           | \$3.5                          |
| <b>Legal Sea Foods</b><br>GEORGIA, MASSACHUSETTS, NEW JERSEY, PENNSYLVANIA, RHODE ISLAND, VIRGINIA, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA          | 36                  | \$216 e                        | \$6                            |
| <b>matchbox American Kitchen + Spirits</b><br>FLORIDA, MARYLAND, TEXAS, VIRGINIA, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA                            | 11                  | \$29 e                         | \$3.1 e                        |
| <b>Native Grill &amp; Wings</b><br>ARIZONA, IDAHO, MASSACHUSETTS, MONTANA, TEXAS, SOUTH DAKOTA  | 34                  | \$62                           | \$2.1                          |
| <b>North Italia</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, KANSAS, TEXAS   | 9                   | \$36 e                         | \$4.5 e                        |
| <b>Ocean Prime</b><br>11 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  | 14                  | \$110                          | \$8.1                          |
| <b>Paul Martin's American Grill</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, TEXAS   | 11                  | \$50 e                         | \$5                            |
| <b>Pinstripes Bistro Bowling Bocce</b><br>CHICAGO, KANSAS CITY, MINNEAPOLIS, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA                                 | 7                   | \$60                           | \$8.5                          |
| <b>RAM Restaurant &amp; Brewery</b><br>IDAHO, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, OHIO, OREGON, WASHINGTON   | 24                  | \$55 e                         | \$2.5 e                        |
| <b>Redlands Grill</b><br>ALABAMA, COLORADO, GEORGIA, ILLINOIS, KENTUCKY, OHIO, TENNESSEE  | 12                  | \$68 e                         | \$5.7*                         |
| <b>Rusty Bucket Restaurant &amp; Tavern</b><br>COLORADO, FLORIDA, INDIANA, MICHIGAN, NORTH CAROLINA, OHIO                                 | 24                  | \$63                           | \$2.6                          |
| <b>Seasons 52</b><br>19 STATES  | 41                  | \$254*                         | \$6.3 e                        |
| <b>Snooze</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, TEXAS   | 20                  | \$52 e                         | \$3                            |
| <b>STK (ONE Group)</b><br>MAJOR CITIES IN SEVEN STATES, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, CANADA, AND EUROPE                                      | 15                  | \$150 e                        | \$11.4*                        |
| <b>Stoney River Steakhouse and Grill</b><br>GEORGIA, ILLINOIS, KENTUCKY, MARYLAND, MISSOURI, NORTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE                    | 12                  | \$43 e                         | \$3.6 e                        |
| <b>Sullivan's Steakhouse</b><br>13 STATES   | 18                  | \$78*                          | \$4.4*                         |
| <b>The Greene Turtle</b><br>DELAWARE, MARYLAND, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, VIRGINIA, WEST VIRGINIA, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA | 46                  | \$125                          | \$2.74                         |
| <b>The Matador</b><br>COLORADO, IDAHO, NEVADA, OREGON, WASHINGTON   | 14                  | \$35                           | \$3                            |
| <b>Thirsty Lion Gastropub &amp; Grill</b><br>ARIZONA, COLORADO, OREGON, TEXAS   | 8                   | \$46                           | \$5.8                          |
| <b>True Food Kitchen</b><br>ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, ILLINOIS, MARYLAND, PENNSYLVANIA, TEXAS, VIRGINIA            | 20                  | \$135 e                        | \$7 e                          |
| <b>Tupelo Honey Cafe</b><br>COLORADO, GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, TEXAS, VIRGINIA                                 | 15                  | \$55 e                         | \$4 e                          |
| <b>Wild Wing Cafe</b><br>ALABAMA, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, NORTH CAROLINA, NEW JERSEY, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, TEXAS, VIRGINIA                | 42                  | \$125 e                        | \$2.8 e                        |
| <b>Zea Rotisserie &amp; Grill</b><br>GREATER NEW ORLEANS  | 8                   | \$30                           | \$4.3                          |
| <b>Zinburger Wine &amp; Burger Bar</b><br>ARIZONA, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, NORTH CAROLINA, VIRGINIA                       | 18                  | \$70 e                         | \$3.9 e                        |

FOOTNOTE: SOURCES FOR THE DATA INCLUDE COMPANY REPORTS, SEC FILINGS, AND INDUSTRY RESEARCH. NUMBERS WITH AN ASTERISK\* ARE TAKEN FROM THE MOST RECENT ANNUAL REPORT OR SEC FILING. ESTIMATES (e) ARE ASSOCIATED WITH PRIVATELY HELD COMPANIES THAT DON'T RELEASE SALES FIGURES AND ARE COMPILED FROM INDUSTRY RESEARCH.



THIRSTY LION GASTROPUB & GRILL



with design elements that capture the identity and culture of local surroundings. No wonder the AUV tops \$3.7 million.

**BAREBURGER**  
NEW YORK CITY

**42 UNITS** Winner of the 2016 James Beard Foundation “Blended Burger Project,” Bareburger remains an odds-on favorite to be in the running again this year. (Winners will be announced this month.) Meanwhile, the brand merits praise for its sustainable practices and commitment to fresh, clean food and doing right by its people, processes, and product.

**BLACK ANGUS STEAKHOUSE**  
LOS ANGELES

**44 UNITS** The only company among our FSR 50 to own units in Alaska and Hawaii as well as the continental U.S., Black Angus is a true beefeater’s steakhouse—with average sales at each unit topping \$3.6 million. And the brand’s tagline says it best: “Here’s to the nights you can’t remember and the steaks you won’t forget.”

# THIRSTY LION HAS 20/20 VISION

For this Portland, Oregon–based gastropub, that would be 20 locations by the year 2020.



THIRSTY LION GASTROPUB & GRILL

**LAUNCHED IN 2006**, the Thirsty Lion Gastropub & Grill takes its name to heart, offering guests made-from-scratch fare in a lively environment and serving cocktails with a thick, solid ice block that melts slowly and prevents your next Old Fashioned from being watered down. “Our definition of a gastropub is high-quality food in a public house environment without pretension,” says CEO John Plew.

With a core menu of about 65 items, the restaurant prepares everything fresh and offers some regional items as well as a seasonal menu that changes four times per year. That approach extends to its beverage lineup as well, so the gastropub fills its draft lines with local and regional beer. Thirsty Lion averages \$5.8 million in annual revenue at each location and brings in 35 percent of sales through its beverage and bar program, while food sales account for the remaining 65 percent.

The company now has eight units in Oregon, Arizona, and Colorado, with plans for aggressive expansion over the next several years. Plew says Thirsty Lion will have nine units by the end of 2017—including its first Texas location, and will then grow its unit count each year to reach 21 units by the end of 2020. This growth will include new markets, such as Florida, Texas, and the East Coast, and some backfilling of existing markets in Oregon, Colorado, and Arizona.

## BLUE SUSHI SAKE GRILL

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

**11** Blink your eyes and that unit count will be up: This sushi brand's on a roll. Two additional locations are opening this year, in Dallas and Indianapolis. Who'd have guessed there would be such demand (AUV comes in at \$3.25 million) for sushi and sake in landlocked states across America's Heartland?

## CANTINA LAREDO

DALLAS, TEXAS

**40** With a mix of company-owned and franchised locations, parent company Consolidated Restaurant Operations has taken its Tex-Mex brand to 12 states, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. The menu gives traditional Mexican fare a modern interpretation, and everything is prepared fresh daily.

## CAROLINA ALE HOUSE

RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

**30** Owned by Lou and Joy Moshakos, LM Restaurants—the parent company of Carolina Ale House—is truly a family-operated business with their three daughters helping run the burgeoning restaurant empire, which now extends from the Carolinas across neighboring states Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia.

## COOPER'S HAWK WINERY & RESTAURANT

CHICAGO

**28** In addition to the chef-driven cuisine in its restaurants, the brand is known for its award-winning wines. Cooper's Hawk has won more than 300 local, national, and international wine awards, and its winery produces 5 million bottles annually. Its signature wine club has 250,000 members who are invited to signature wine dinners in the restaurants as well as to other special events and perks. Founder and CEO Tim McEnery was honored earlier this year with the 2017 LEAD Award for Corporate Leadership, presented by HR.com, the largest social networking and resource site for HR professionals. For locations open three years or more, the average annual sales volume is \$9.4 million, and the company is moving its winery and headquarters to a 125,000-square-foot facility in Woodridge, Illinois.

## DEL FRISCO'S DOUBLE EAGLE STEAK HOUSE

SOUTHLAKE, TEXAS

**13** The big city crown jewel in the DFRG portfolio, Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House boasts an average check of \$115 and a loyal following in the cities it serves. A bump in first-quarter sales (up 3.7 percent from last year) was attributed to increased weekly revenues at relocated units in Dallas and

Orlando. Clearly this is a brand that knows all the right moves.

## DEL FRISCO'S GRILLE

SOUTHLAKE, TEXAS

**24** This is Del Frisco Restaurant Group's answer to making its fine-dining brands, Double Eagle Steak House and Sullivan's, more accessible and affordable. The \$48 average Grille check plants this brand squarely in the polished-casual segment—that plus its varied and inventive menu that speaks millennial on every level. In its financial statements, the group says the Grille will be the "primary driver of new unit growth in the near term." Smart move, since sales for the quarter that ended March 21 were up 10 percent from the same period last year.

## DINOSAUR BAR-B-QUE

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

**9** Barbecue may not come to mind when thinking of New York, but Dinosaur Bar-B-Que is squashing preconceived notions. With nine locations throughout the Northeast, the casual brand offers guests slow-smoked meats, homemade sides, live music, and, of course, local and seasonal beer.

## EDDIE V'S

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

**17** Darden Restaurants proves a corporate group can absolutely deliver on fine-din-

ing excellence. The company reported that Eddie V's set new sales records during key holidays in the previous year, and in the third quarter of this fiscal year (December through February), Eddie V's saw same-restaurant sales spike an impressive 11 percent.

## ELMER'S RESTAURANTS

PORTLAND, OREGON

**26** This brand got its start back in 1960 when it operated under the name Elmer's Colonial Pancake House and was owned by Walt and Dorothy Elmer. It was all about home cooking then, as it still is now, and Walt's original pancake recipe remains a menu foundation. Eight locations are company-owned and 18 are franchised units. Like all prolific families, Elmer's recently spun off another concept, Egg N'Joe, which is open for breakfast and lunch only. There are two Egg N'Joe units open in Arizona, with a third under construction. The company plans to build out the Phoenix market and begin franchising this brand by the end of the year.

## EUREKA! RESTAURANTS

HAWTHORNE, CALIFORNIA

**22** Within its inviting rustic industrial settings, this brand has coined the "eatertainment" experience—one that is filled with exceptional food, beer, spirits, and music. Expansion



FIREBIRDS WOOD FIRED GRILL

## POLISHED DINING WITHOUT A PREMIUM PRICE

When Firebirds Wood Fired Grill opened its first location 17 years ago, it emerged somewhere on the spectrum between casual dining and fine dining.



FIREBIRDS WOOD FIRED GRILL

**FOUNDER DENNIS THOMPSON**, who also launched Lone Star Steakhouse and Saloon, envisioned the concept as “polished-casual dining”—a white tablecloth experience without the price tag and a step up from casual-dining competitors. Menu items include classic beef cuts like prime rib and filet mignon, as well as the brand’s signature Chile Rubbed Delmonico and Wood Grilled Salmon basted with key lime butter.

**45** UNITS

Since the brand began in Charlotte, North Carolina, it has grown to 45 units across the country with annual sales averaging \$3.7 million per location. Success is due in part to assertive strategizing; the company is constantly thinking of ways to innovate and stay relevant in an increasingly competitive segment, says vice president of marketing Stephen Loftis. Case in point: Firebirds is launching a new restaurant prototype later this year as it looks to backfill existing markets before entering new ones. Now located in several states including Arizona, Ohio, and Florida, the restaurant is evaluating locations in Texas.

Firebirds describes itself as a “conscious organization,” meaning that it approaches each business decision with consideration toward both its communities and the environment. The company uses sustainably harvested wood, serves sustainably raised salmon and trout, and recycles fryer oil. The brand also intends to stay on the forefront of adopting practices to reduce kitchen waste.

The company has raised more than \$90,000 annually for pediatric cancer research and the Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation, selling freshly squeezed lemonade year-round, with proceeds going to the foundation. The support is highlighted by an annual fundraiser when lemonade sales are augmented by sales from its LTO Big Daddy Lemon Cake, plus guests rounding up checks.



plans call for new locations in Southern and Northern California, along with an opening in Las Vegas. All units are company-owned, with an average sales volume of \$3.2 million and total company sales ringing in at \$70 million.

### FAMOUS TOASTERY

HUNTERSVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

**22** A popular breakfast, brunch, lunch concept since it launched in 2005, the company hit a true millennial nerve when it decided to focus on boozy brunches. Last summer the brand added a signature pairings selection to its menu, and sales jumped 35 percent. With annual sales approaching \$30 million, the company expects to open 10 locations in the coming year. Of the existing 22 units, six are company-owned and 16 are franchised.

### FIREBIRDS WOOD FIRED GRILL

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

**45** This restaurant company has perfected polished dining at affordable prices, and it has done so not only with wood-fired signature menu items but also with impressive commitments to support Alex’s Lemonade Stand and sustainable practices across its portfolio. **SEE ADJACENT PROFILE ON THIS PAGE.**

## FLYING BISCUIT CAFÉ

ATLANTA

**14** When the doors of Flying Biscuit Café first opened in 1993 at 7 A.M., the restaurant sold out of biscuits by 11. Twenty-four years and 13 more locations later, the Southern-inspired breakfast brand has retained that initial popularity and brings in more than \$20 million per year. Flying Biscuit Café will open its first Texas location in Richardson this fall, with another restaurant planning to open in Dallas.

## FOGO DE CHÃO

DALLAS, TEXAS

**48** Fogo de Chão's development strategy emphasizes market penetration, balanced with new entries into key metropolitan areas in North America. The remaining domestic openings anticipated for 2017 will be in Jacksonville, Florida, and Troy, Michigan. From an international perspective, Fogo anticipates opening joint-venture restaurants in the Middle East. Overall, Fogo has plans to increase the company-owned restaurant count by at least 10 percent annually over the next five years. All U.S. and Brazil locations are company-owned; the locations in Mexico City are joint-venture partnerships.

## GRANITE CITY FOOD & BREWERY

ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA

**36** This polished-casual venue has an on-site brewery and an open kitchen where chef-driven dishes are made from scratch. The goal is freshly brewed beer and freshly made food. Its signature brews include Broad Axe, an oatmeal stout, and Prairie Vixen, a hefeweizen, plus a bock, a pale ale, an American lager, and a double IPA. The restaurant takes its name from the nickname of its hometown, which was known in the 1880s for family breweries that cropped up to quench the thirst of miners working in the granite quarries. Now the brand has locations from Iowa to Tennessee.

## HICKORY TAVERN

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

**27** It's so much more than a sports bar that even ESPN named this brand runner-up in its Best Sports Bar in North America ranking; but menu diversity and innovation is where this restaurant ranks highest. A kids' menu with nine entrées and nine sides speaks to the family-friendly focus; a B.Y.O. Salad option that lets guests choose everything from leaf bases to veggies, toppings, and proteins sends a shout-out to health-conscious diners; and traditional pub grub like wings and burgers share the spotlight with Seared Ahi Tuna, Cedar Salmon, Shrimp and Grits, and the list could go on.

## HOUSTON'S

BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

**16** Part of the Hillstone Restaurant Group, Houston's name is a nod to the home state of founders George and Carol Biel. HRG has a number of brands including its eponymous restaurant, which was one of the first polished-casual concepts when it debuted in 1977. There are nine Hillstone restaurants operating around the country, but Houston's has become the group's leader, with 16 locations in major cities across the country.

## IL FORNAIO

CORTE MADERA, CALIFORNIA

**21** The brand got its start as a baking school in Barlassina, Italy, in 1972, and opened its first U.S. bakery in 1981, followed by the first full-service restaurant in 1987. The company was acquired in 2011 by Roark Capital Group. In addition to the 21 signature locations, it also owns and operates two locations under the Canaletto Ristorante Veneto brand and a catering business that hosts on-site and off-premises events throughout California.

## J. ALEXANDER'S

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

**19** A low table-to-server ratio is the trademark of concepts in the J. Alexander's Holdings group, and nowhere is that more evident than in the signa-



FOGO DE CHÃO

KELLY ARCHITECTS

ture brand, where average checks come in at \$30.41 per person. Dinner service is 68 percent of the business, with lunch at 32 percent.

## JONATHAN'S GRILLE

FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE

**7** Since it started in 1999, Jonathan's **UNITS** Grille has given guests two settings within one restaurant. Part upscale restaurant and part casual sports bar with TVs, Jonathan's has grown throughout its home market of Tennessee and is looking to expand its footprint even more.

## LEGAL SEA FOODS

BOSTON

**36** Launched in 1950, this brand is in its **UNITS** second generation of management by the Berkowitz family. With eight locations in major airport terminals, the concept has played a key role in the elevation of upscale dining options for travelers.

## MATCHBOX AMERICAN KITCHEN + SPIRIT

WASHINGTON, D.C.

**11** Artisanal pizzas cooked in authentic **UNITS** brick ovens in a rustic industrial setting—sure it's been done before. But these guys are doing it really, really well. And the "Spirit" tag



OCEAN PRIME / CAMERON MITCHELL RESTAURANTS

in the name? That speaks to a prolific bar scene—complete with local brews, signature wine blends, and truly crafty cocktails—plus a community spirit that has embedded sustainable practices throughout the operations and connects restaurants with local opportunities to make a difference.

## NATIVE GRILL & WINGS

CHANDLER, ARIZONA

**34** The name changed in 2014 to Native **UNITS** Grill & Wings, but the company actually dates to 1978 when Buffalo, New York, city slickers Floyd and Judy Anderson took their dream of owning a restaurant westward and opened Native New Yorker in Arizona. Current expansion plans call for adding a Tulsa, Oklahoma, location along with a Northern Arizona location. The current portfolio includes three company-owned locations and 31 franchised units.

## NORTH ITALIA

PHOENIX

**9** Courtesy of Fox Restaurant Concepts, this polished-casual brand dishes up homemade pasta and scratch-made pizzas to the tune of per-person checks that average \$25 to \$30. New restaurants are slated to open soon in Las Vegas and Austin, the Texas capital's second location.

## OCEAN PRIME

COLUMBUS, OHIO

**14** The fine-dining jewel in the Cameron Mitchell Restaurants portfolio, Ocean Prime restaurants present nothing like a chain. From food to beverage to service to setting, each restaurant conveys the image of a premium independent operation. The 14 locations are in major markets around the country, and each is designed to reflect the energy and inspiration of its city. Beginning in 2008, and every year since, Ocean Prime has been

recognized with the Wine Spectator "Award of Excellence."

## PAUL MARTIN'S AMERICAN GRILL

ROSEVILLE, CALIFORNIA

**11** The culmination of restaurateur Paul **UNITS** Fleming's and Chef Brian Bennett's vision for serving fresh, contemporary California cuisine, the polished-dining experience suggests a per-person food check higher than the \$30 average it tallies. The concept is also known for its expansive wine collection, including more than 70 selections offered by the glass.

## PINSTRIPES BISTRO BOWLING BOCCO

CHICAGO

**7** At Pinstripes, guests don't have to come **UNITS** just for the bowling or bocce. The entertainment-focused restaurant offers an upscale Italian-American menu alongside rotating craft beers

and handcrafted cocktails. An eighth location is scheduled to open this month in Bethesda, Maryland; four locations are slated to open next year; and deals are inked for 2019 and 2020.

## RAM RESTAURANT & BREWERY

LAKESIDE, WASHINGTON

**24** With roots going back to 1971, the **UNITS** RAM transitioned from family ownership to being an employee-owned company in 2014. Another milestone transition occurred in 1995, when the company began brewing its own beer. It has since won more than 100 medals from national and regional competitions including seven medals at the 20th Annual North American Beer Awards and two gold awards at the 2016 Great American Beer Festival.

## REDLANDS GRILL

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

**12** A fine-dining staple in the J. Alexander's **UNITS** Holdings portfolio, Redlands Grill is the natural evolution to which existing J. Alexander's restaurants have transitioned. The company expects another two to four Redlands Grill units to open by the end of this year.

## RUSTY BUCKET RESTAURANT & TAVERN

COLUMBUS, OHIO

**24** A sister company within the Cameron **UNITS** Mitchell Restaurants group, Rusty Bucket calls itself a casual-dining experience, but there's an executive chef leading made-from-scratch menus in every location. And true to its tavern vibe, there's a stellar beverage program with craft cocktails and signature spirits and beer. Within five years the company anticipates growing to 40 locations.

## SEASONS 52

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

**41** One of the brands that corporate parent **UNITS** Darden Restaurants has identified as a growth vehicle, Seasons 52 succeeds in presenting a fresh, handcrafted, and upscale dining experience that is easily perceived by guests to be analogous to a chef-owned independent concept. Same-restaurant sales increased 4.7 percent in the fiscal year that ended May 29, 2016.

## SNOOZE

DENVER

**20** There's a whole new meaning for "green **UNITS** eggs and ham," thanks to the commitment this breakfast-centric concept has made to sustainable practices. Not only is Snooze focused on operating in the greenest fashion possible, it also brings a

decidedly chef-driven focus to the menu. **SEE STORY ON PAGE 46.**

## STK

NEW YORK CITY

**15** Located in major cities around the **UNITS** world, the concept originates from the ONE Group, which owns eight of the units and manages or is a licensee for the remainder. The average check at this upscale restaurant and lounge concept is \$111, and beverage sales represent 39 percent of revenues. Additional units are slated to open soon in Austin, Boston, Dallas, and San Diego, with plans to open two to three locations per year across 50 major metropolitan areas around the world.

## STONE RIVER STEAKHOUSE

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

**12** Beef accounts for 70 percent of sales at **UNITS** Stone River, which is perhaps why the average check hits \$44 per person, significantly higher than its sister concepts in the J. Alexander's Holding group, where the average check hovers at \$30.

## SULLIVAN'S STEAKHOUSE

SOUTHLAKE, TEXAS

**18** The mid-market concept within the **UNITS** Del Frisco's Restaurant Group, Sullivan's is the brand that's dotted the map from Raleigh,

North Carolina, to Anchorage, Alaska. Its average check of \$64 seems modest alongside that of sister concept Double Eagle Steak House, especially given Sullivan's posh white tablecloth setting and progressive menu offerings. A tepid start to the year—one unit closed and first-quarter sales came in about 6 percent lower than in 2016—caused little concern, as the slump was a reflection of temporary closings that resulted in the loss of eight operating weeks.

## THE GREENE TURTLE

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

**46** For this brand, winning the restaurant **UNITS** race is all about steady (but you can forget any mention of slow). Since investment firm Stone-Goff Partners laid claim to The Greene Turtle in October 2015, annual company sales have grown to \$125 million. The brand, which is roughly 25 percent company-owned and 75 percent franchised units, plans to open two additional units this year. In April, The Greene Turtle announced its partnership with the Sea Turtle Conservancy, cementing its commitment to help protect different species of sea turtles and donating proceeds from its signature cocktail, Hell in the Shell, made with Naked Turtle White Rum.

## THE MATADOR

SEATTLE

**14** With a menu of scratch-made Mexican cuisine and an assortment of tequilas, the Matador rakes in an average of \$3 million per unit and is continuing the development of new markets across the five states in which it operates.

doesn't skimp on beverages and prepares craft cocktails alongside an extensive menu of beer and wine. **SEE PROFILE ON PAGE 50.**

## TRUE FOOD KITCHEN

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

**20** Long before the restaurant industry had embraced all things raw and healthy, Sam Fox opened the first True Food Kitchen in 2008. Even today, it remains a progressive concept

## TUPELO HONEY CAFE

ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

**15** Scratch-made Southern comfort food with chef-driven flair is the basis for the menu, but the whole experience conveys the culture and hospitality of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The brand's commitment to local farmers travels with it to each new location and the company exercises due diligence to source from the best regional farms and suppliers.

2012. By year-end, the company plans to open another five locations and add 30 more within the next three to five years. Currently, 17 locations are company-owned and 25 are franchised.

## ZEA ROTISSERIE & GRILL

NEW ORLEANS

**8** Started in 1997 by three New Orleans chefs inspired by rotisserie cooking in European food markets, Zea has shown no signs of getting stuck in its ways. The restaurant is undergoing a redesign with new units showcasing updated looks and a focus on bar service.

## ZINBURGER WINE & BURGER BAR

LIVINGSTON, NEW JERSEY

**18** Fox Restaurant Concepts of Phoenix introduced the Zinburger concept and has five locations in Arizona. The Briad Group (Livingston, New Jersey) saw the success of the brand, and Sam Fox sold Briad a license to develop the restaurants east of the Mississippi. About a year ago, Fox sold the brand to The Briad Group, but kept the locations in Arizona in his portfolio. The Briad Group is now the owner and will be expanding to the tune of about five new stores a year. Three additional units are slated to open this year in Maryland, New Jersey, and New York.



THE MATADOR

THE MATADOR

## THIRSTY LION GASTROPUB & GRILL

PORTLAND, OREGON

**8** With a knack for catering toward new markets in which it opens—whether it's queso in Texas or charcuterie in the Northwest—Thirsty Lion has focused on giving guests a true gastropub experience. Food sales account for 65 percent of all revenue, but the brand

(albeit in an increasingly growing niche of health-conscious chef-driven cuisine) and the menu is rooted in the principles of Dr. Andrew Weil's anti-inflammatory diet with an emphasis on wholesome, simple ingredients. The brand now has a presence in 10 states, from California to Florida to New Jersey. **SEE STORY ON PAGE 26.**

## WILD WING CAFE

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

**42** Food and beverage rock at this casual-dining enclave, where music holds center stage and entertainment plays nightly. Band competitions are as locally and regionally sourced as the craft beer list, and it all adds up to strong growth for Axum Capital Partners, which purchased the company in