

## Trend Tracker | Deli dallying

Restaurants now have in-house delis, selling cold cuts, sauces and breads, to push their brands directly into diners' homes

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The grab-and-go counter at Otto Infinito in the Bandra Kurla Complex. Photo: Abhijit Bhatlekar/Mint

From restaurants run by *MasterChef* demigods to global fast-food giant McDonald's, any memorable food and drink establishment is recognized by its unique "signature dish". Cracking that original creation is sometimes also the quickest route to fame and fortune for its maker.

At American-style, fine-dining restaurant Ellipsis in Colaba, Mumbai, chef Kelvin Cheung's menu has several contenders for the title of top dish, including an indulgent heirloom tomato salad, a faultless plate of pork belly steamed buns and the Willy Wonka-style dessert Rocky Road. Still, if I had to pick just one signature, it would be Cheung's complimentary pretzel bread served with goat cheese butter, smoked paprika dip and miso honey dip. Soft as a dinner roll on the inside but with a shiny glazed crust topped with salt crystals.

So when Ellipsis rolls out its deli menu on Tuesday, on the shelves will be the restaurant's baked goodies (from ₹100 for five pretzel rolls) and spreads (from ₹100 for 100g).

Ellipsis is only the latest in a long list of fine-dining restaurants, casual diners and all-day cafés producing, packaging and selling signature food items, often out of in-house deli or retail counters and shelves. The reason, says owner Rohan Talwar, is that, "The new deli menu will help build exposure for the brand."

In the restaurant business, the term deli is used loosely. We're still far from getting an authentic European delicatessen or New York-style deli that butchers and cures its own meat or churns its own cheese. But retail products—ranging from in-house breads, pastries, dips, salad dressings and sauces to imported cold cuts and meats used by the kitchen—not only contribute to the establishment's revenue, depending on the scale of production, but also function as an extension of it with direct access to the diner's home.

Bandra's new Eat-Deli.Cafe. Photo: Abhijit Bhatlekar/Mint

At both of Mumbai's newest all-day cafés, Eat-Deli.Cafe on the Dr Ambedkar Road stretch in Bandra (already home to Café Basilico—Bistro & Deli and Indigo Deli) and Two One Two All Day in Santacruz, retail display counters are at the heart of the business.

"Eat is a deli, a café, a patisserie, a bakery and a takeaway joint," says owner Vardhaman Choksi, who also owns Linking Road tapas bar Escobar. "Retail may not contribute significantly to the business, but it's a value-add that cushions all my diner's requirements, including shopping for bread for the next day. It's a step towards creating brand loyalty."

Ketan Kadam of Two One Two All Day, a casual diner-style version of the upscale Italian eatery Two One Two—Bar And Grill in Worli, says their deli will only stock fresh everyday ingredients. "You could buy our bread, sauce, cold cuts and our cheese and get creative with these products when you go back home," says Kadam.

Two One Two All Day's chef, Mikhail Shahani, says diners will even be able to take home and cook dishes straight off the café's menu—marinated cuts of fresh lamb, chicken and fish that only need to be baked or grilled, as well as burger and slider patties (Angus beef, Panko Crusted Cajun Chicken, Habanero Spiced Lamb Mince and Barbecue Spiced Pulled Pork) that Kadam's other venture, Café Sundance in Churchgate, is best known for, will be available for takeaway.

Danish pastries by Le Pain Quotidien

The concept is not unique to Mumbai. Delhi-based Ritu Dalmia says even though she worked as a chef in London, UK, for many years, she never cooked at home, shopping instead for prepped and packed veggies, fish and chicken at London's Bluebird Epicerie. That's why, at

Dalmia's DIVA—The Italian Restaurant and Café DIVA, most mise en place is on display and available for purchase.

"Most people aspire to cook at home but they don't have the time to do all the long tedious work that goes into, let's say, making a ravioli from scratch," explains Dalmia. "So they can pick up readymade ravioli and gnocchi from us along with a basic tomato and pesto sauce."

Also in Delhi, Shelly Sahay, of Elma's Bakery, Cakes and Tearoom, Elma's Brasserie and Edward's Sandwich Bar Deli and Artisanal Shop, retails her line of preservative-free breads, cakes, jams and preserves as well as locally sourced products by Ms Chhotee's, Foodaholics and Erna's Gourmet. In Pune, Tertulia sells its entire patisserie range and Mezzuna stocks pasta, quinoa, and coffee from premium international brands alongside its own breads and desserts. At the UB City mall in Bangalore, Fava and Café Noir have deli counters stocked with freshly baked baguettes, pastries and macaroons, a range of canapés, mezze, mustards, mayonnaise and pâtés.

The Table, a few blocks away from Ellipsis in Colaba, also recently started stocking dinner kits of the restaurant's signatures such as the Beet Risotto (₹ 575) and Roast Chicken (₹ 700) along with viennoiseries (from ₹ 250 for three-six pieces) and readymade dips, dressings and tomato ketchup (from ₹ 250 for 200g) on Foodesto.com.

For chef Gresham Fernandes of Salt Water Café and Smoke House Deli, refrigerated display counters also help save space in cramped city kitchens and expand the café's offerings beyond the menu. "Let's say, on the menu we have 100 items, but with a deli, we can do at least 150-200 permutations and combinations with just different kinds of cold cuts and cheese," explains Fernandes.

Ready-to-eat mains by Pico Express

Shahani adds that the Two One Two All Day deli counter, with a "Make Your Own Sandwich", will shoulder the load while the kitchen preps between the lunch and dinner services, and even tend to working professionals in a rush at lunchtime.

Naturally, quick-service delis work best in business districts, and at Mumbai's Bandra Kurla Complex there are already half-a-dozen eateries that boast of especially designed grab-and-go menus. For lunch breaks, chef Azad Arif of Otto Infinito dishes out at least two types of pizza by the slice, eight kinds of packed sandwiches and salads in plastic bowls with mini containers to hold the dressing, all priced at ₹ 65-250.

At Le Pain Quotidien in Mumbai's business compound Maker Maxity, you'll find a more extensive range of sweet and savoury pastries along with prepacked shakes and smoothies. Even its neighbour California Pizza Kitchen (CPK) couldn't resist—its deli line with the pizzeria's signature pizza sauces and salad dressings, presently available only at the High Street Phoenix outlet, was initially created for the busybees in the business complex. In fact, the Indian outlets of CPK are the first in the world to house delis that will upsell their signature recipes in such a way.

Inspired by UK-based fast-food chain Pret a Manger, entrepreneurs Arjun Gadkari and Abhay Jaiswal have launched, along with chef Nicole Gonsalves Pereira, six outlets of Pico Express in commercial locations in just over a year, and plan to expand to another six before the year is up. Each outpost stocks an extensive range of sandwiches, wraps, desserts and hot mains in microwavable packaging (₹ 110-200). The company has also begun to manufacture its jams and preserves to target the consumer goods space and by Diwali, will have a range of 10 different hot sauces—from the mild mango and lemon to one made from Naga Bhut Jolokia chillies.

Other all-day establishments are plotting expansion plans too—chef Viraf Patel of Café Zoe in Todi Mills in Mumbai recently acquired more space in the same compound to produce for deli items, Moshe's cafés and Juhu's Freeman & Baker Deli will launch in Pune, and Indigo Deli will open in Delhi by the end of the year.

Still, even industry veterans like Indigo's Rahul Akerkar say business from retail and deli counters is negligible. "Retail and restaurants are separate operations, you can dabble in both, but for retail to add to the revenue, one really needs to focus, invest and scale up," Akerkar explains.

Even at the Freeman & Baker Deli, director Vishal Mehra says the only reason he can offer his customers attractive prices on imported meats is because his company, Meatrix Foods Pvt. Ltd, has been supplying fancy meat and seafood to five-star hotels and premium restaurants in the city for over a decade. "We would like for Freeman & Baker to stand on its own legs, but the only reason we're not bottom-line obsessed is because the bulk customers are paying our bills," says Mehra, and then jokes, "We're not looking to buy the next Ferrari out of Freeman & Baker revenue."

Others are still hopeful—restaurateur and chef Dharmesh Karmokar, who helped set up retail counters at Mocha during its launch in 1999, is enamoured by the success of South African quick-service brand Nando's range of PERi-PERi sauces, now so popular that they are stocked at supermarkets across the globe.

At his South-East Asian chain Nom Nom, launched in April 2012, Karmokar didn't want to service the tables at the restaurants with the stale condiment trio of green chilli vinegar, soy and Schezwan sauce. Instead, he came up with a basil and coriander vinaigrette, a red chilli and star anise sauce and a sesame oil emulsion with crunchy sesame seeds. All three will be bottled and available for purchase soon at the restaurant's outlets in Bandra and Versova.

At Karmokar's other eatery, the Silver Beach Café in Juhu, a retail counter was fitted into an empty alcove under the staircase with enough room to stock in-house relishes (blue cheese, champagne and spiced apple), some wine, Tea of Life's range of premium teas and Finnish premium water brand VEEN Waters.

"Unlike other delis, we don't waste our space on items easily accessible to our diners, everything's got to be exclusive," says Karmokar. "It may just be a value-add to my customers now, but you never know, I might get lucky like the Nando's chain and you'll find my brand at

supermarkets too.”