



June 23, 2015

Movie Theaters Going Gourmet With New, More Upscale Food Offerings

The hardest food decision at a movie theater used to be whether or not to add extra butter to popcorn. Now, theaters across the country are adding more upscale offerings to the mix such as chicken quinoa bowls, lettuce wraps, flatbread and more.

Last week, **AMC** Theaters launched the first of a six-theater new dine-in menu test that will roll out to the remaining 12 dine-in locations by late fall, and Silverspot Cinema announced a restaurant partnership with David Burke Group for its three locations in Florida, North Carolina and Ohio.

AMC's overhauled menu focuses on the convenience of dining in the dark.

"We keep pushing ourselves to say, 'What is the most natural eating experience in the dark?' and obviously it's along the lines of holding a bag of popcorn and bringing it to your mouth," AMC's vice president of dine-in theatres operations Jennifer Douglass told ABC News. "So with that idea of product in your hand to your mouth, we added sushi, which we make fresh in house to order, because that's a great dining-in-the-dark sort of food."

Sushi? In a movie theater? Douglass said it's been a bit of a learning curve for guests, but that she is confident in the offering.

"From a culinary perspective, there are skill sets in the company we have that we didn't eight years ago when we [first] developed the menu," she said. "So I feel very comfortable saying, 'I'm going to hand roll sushi in my theaters,' but if you asked me that seven years ago, I may have had to think about that a little bit."

While AMC brought the culinary experience in-house, Silverspot partnered with David Burke Group to take care of that aspect. The restaurants will be run by the catering unit and within the theater complex that guests can sit in or order to go into the theater. The menus will be developed from a more local perspective – the Cleveland theater will get an **Italian** restaurant, while Coconut Creek and Chapel Hill's will be more Americanized, with local products at the snack bar.

“It’s so obvious that it should have happened long ago, and it just hasn’t. I think the movie theater business was just very focused on managing that aspect of it – getting the right movies, hopefully having a theater that’s clean, being on time,” David Burke Group CEO Stephen Goglia told ABC News. “Food and beverage, for a lot of people, it’s the hardest and least profitable thing. By them [SilverSpot] having a premium movie experience, they realized they need to have a premium food and beverage experience to go with it. We’re able to take the pressure off them [to do that] and provide a partnership and relationship that provides a benefit.”

Goglia said to expect gourmet burgers, flatbreads, pastas and more, all made at the restaurant. AMC also plans to up the ante with fresher ingredients, never-frozen burgers and housemade sauces and dressings.

Even with all the expanded options, though, popcorn and soda are still AMC’s top concession sellers.

“Having a coke and popcorn is a very nostalgic experience. I think that’s why those remain our most popular items, but we have pushed ourselves to evolve and have more options,” Douglass said. “It’s tough because what people want to eat and what they eat when they actually get to the theater ... it’s hard to resist the smell of that popcorn.”

So maybe, despite all the choices, extra butter or not will still be the biggest one.