

FEATURE // BEST NEW RESTAURANTS

THE 20 BEST NEW RESTAURANTS

FROM DECADENT FONDUE TO INNOVATIVE COMFORT FOOD (THAT PAIRS PERFECTLY WITH A BEER), IT WAS A DELICIOUS YEAR IN THE SOUTH FLORIDA FOOD SCENE. HERE, WE PRESENT THE BEST NEW RESTAURANTS FROM FORT LAUDERDALE TO BOCA RATON.

By Heather Carney, Lyssa Goldberg
and Alyssa Morlacci



APEIRO

When Apeiro opened in January 2015, it immediately caught the attention of local foodies, bloggers and restaurant reviewers. The *Sun Sentinel* gave it 4 stars. *Broward Palm Beach New Times* named it one of the "10 Best New Restaurants in Delray Beach." We also gave it a glowing review in our monthly "Taste" column. Well, a little more than a year later, the restaurant still lives up to the hype. It recently opened a Midtown Miami location, and is wowing diners with Mediterranean-inspired dishes like the Moroccan-spiced lamb ribs, "catch of the day" kebabs and the roasted branzino. Even a trip to the restaurant for a cocktail and dessert is worth it. We fell in love with the bombolini, sugar-dusted donuts served with Nutella, salted caramel and strawberry-basil sauces.

DISHES TO TRY: Moroccan spiced lamb ribs (\$16); Forest Mushroom flatbread (\$14)

Apeiro Delray Marketplace, 14917 Lyons Road, Ste. 100 / 561.501.4443 / delray.apeirorestaurants.com/

Apeiro's
caramelized
waffles

CHEZ MARIE FRENCH BISTRO

Chez Marie French Bistro left its first home in Ocala for a spot at the Polo Club Shoppes in Boca Raton, and we're glad it did. The authentic French eatery belongs to head chef Stephane Gattacieca, and his wife, Marie Gattacieca, who were both born and raised in the French Alps. The bistro offers classic dishes like onion soup, roasted duck and filet mignon, which pair with live music on Friday and Saturday nights. The restaurant also offers a three-course meal menu for \$35.90, or just \$21.90 between 5 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

DISHES TO TRY: The boeuf bourguignon is stewed in red wine with carrots and pearl onions served with mashed potatoes (\$24); the chocolate fondant is a chocolate cake served with crème anglaise and whipped cream coated with roasted almonds (\$9)

Chez Marie French Bistro, 5030 Champion Blvd., #D3, Boca Raton / 561.997.0027 / chezmariefrenchbistro.com

RAFINA GREEK TAVERNA

With seating that overlooks the water, the owners of Rafina Greek Taverna want to transport you to the Greek isles. If the view doesn't do it, the dishes will. Made with fresh ingredients, chef Janis Mucollari's menu fuses traditional entrees, such as lamb chops with fresh herbs, garlic and lemon-roasted potatoes, and the char-broiled octopus appetizer marinated in olive oil and red wine sauce, with more modern additions such as the baby back ribs and the lamb empanada. The drink list features select Greek wines plus imaginative craft cocktails. We loved the artistic "Rafina's Fire" made with Don Julio reposado tequila, St. Germain elderflower liqueur, grapefruit zest red pepper and a touch of lime infused with torched cinnamon smoke.

DISHES TO TRY: Shrimp and octopus ceviche (\$15); Avgolemono Greek soup with egg and lemon (\$5); spinach pie "spanakopita" (\$15)

Rafina Greek Taverna, Boardwalk at Boca Raton, 6877 SW 18th St., Boca Raton / 561.409.3673 / rafinaonline.com



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HYDE BEACH KITCHEN + COCKTAILS

There are few places where you can dine as close to the sand as at Hyde Beach Kitchen + Cocktails. This trendy new Hallandale Beach spot overlooks the Atlantic Ocean without a road separating your table from the water. The three-story beach club venue offers a separate dining experience on each level, with the second-floor restaurant. Dreamy beachfront view aside, we'd recommend a visit to Hyde Beach based on its menu alone. Its Italian and Mediterranean-inspired sharable plates are the main event. For two guests, consider ordering three plates, and once you've started munching, consider ordering more. With the word "cocktails" in the restaurant's name, it should come as no surprise that a drink or two would serve you well. Try the Kentucky Radler, a whiskey-based cocktail topped with Corona beer, or the Hibiscus Punch.

DISHES TO TRY: Pumpkin butter rolls (\$17), Lobster pasta (\$18), Wasabi tuna tartare (\$14), Mushroom gnocchi (\$14)

Hyde Beach Kitchen + Cocktails, 111 S. Surf Road, Hallandale Beach / 954.699.0901 / sbe.com/restaurants/locations/hyde-beach-kitchen-cocktails/



THE LITTLE CHALET

Imagine dipping freshly baked artisanal bread into a four-cheese blend of Swiss, Parmesan and blue cheeses. Now imagine biting into a filet mignon stuffed with prosciutto and catupiry cheese. No, this isn't a meal from your dreams—it's a dinner at The Little Chalet in Boca where the decadence doesn't stop at creamy fondues, such as the Quattro Formaggio. The restaurant offers a full menu with steak and seafood entrées that are as rich and memorable as the cheesy starters. The Boca location is the restaurant's first foray outside of Brazil, where it got its start by introducing Swiss fondues to South American diners.

DISHES TO TRY: Wild mushroom cheese fondue (\$22/petite); Welsh filet with blue cheese (\$49); Chocolate s'mores dessert fondue (\$25/petite)

The Little Chalet, 485 S. Federal Highway, Boca Raton / 561.325.8000 / thelittlechalet.com

BOATYARD

So we're cheating a bit. Boatyard isn't brand new—it's technically remodeled and rebranded from its former days as Bimini Boatyard—but the change was so drastic that it more than deserves a spot on our Best New Restaurants list. Located along SE 17th Street in Fort Lauderdale, the restaurant offers one of the city's best waterfront dining options. Its dockside patio spans the Intracoastal under twinkle lights with outdoor dining tables and lounge stations. Inside, a continued nautical theme includes porthole windows and a chandelier made from 70 spiraling oars fixed above the bar. During lunch, dinner and

Sunday brunch, experience the raw bar and menu that boasts daily catches from local fishermen. On Thursdays, the restaurant hosts its Boats & Bubbles event from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. During the happy hour, guests take a cruise down the Intracoastal, and ladies drink free.

DISHES TO TRY: The Bimini Bread accompanied by honey butter (\$4); and the grouper piccata with wilted spinach, cured tomato, caper berries and lemon chardonnay butter (\$34)

Boatyard, 1555 SE 17th St., Fort Lauderdale / 954.525.7400 / boatyard.restaurant

Scottish salmon at Boatyard



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From the Editors:

Alyssa Morlacci, Associate Editor



Craziest thing you ate this past year:

For a not-so adventurous eater, bone marrow was a courageous texture for me to try. It left the kitchen at Adena Grill still attached to the bone. We scraped it off and spread it on bruschetta toast like jelly.

Most memorable dish: This year I was introduced to the Nauti Dawg Marina Cafe in Lighthouse Point. The low-key spot makes an earth-shattering coconut French toast for brunch.

Food trend you're most excited for:

I love the push for health-conscious menus. Less preservatives, additives and hormones is awesome because it means I can eat out more and cook less.

Trend you're over: No more pork belly, please!

Favorite food trend of this past year:

It isn't a stroke of genius or anything, but I enjoyed seeing watermelon as a salad topping. Talk about refreshing!

GARY RACK'S FAT ROOSTER

The Fat Rooster gained national fame when its dish, the Hen Loving Waffle, was named the best chicken sandwich of 2015 by industry website Restaurant Hospitality. The latest addition to the Gary Rack Restaurant Management Group, which owns restaurants in Boca and Delray Beach, it's become a local favorite for its take on American-Southern classics such as Lucy's Chicken Biscuit Oh My! and the chicken fried steak with black pepper mushroom gravy. For breakfast, don't leave without trying a Fat Rooster sticky cinnamon bun or an oversized buttermilk biscuit.

DISHES TO TRY: Rooster mac with panko Parmesan frito crumbs (\$11); pecan-crusted trout with corn succotash and crab remoulade (\$22); shrimp 'n grits with smoked ham, mushrooms, scallions and beer gravy (\$24)

Fat Rooster, 204 E. Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach / 561.266.3642 / thefatrooster.com

BOCA'S BEST BBQ & SMOKEHOUSE

Take two powerhouse barbecue restaurants, combine them into one concept, and you've got Boca's Best BBQ & Smokehouse. The restaurant, which opened in January, features Carolina favorites such as pulled pork, pulled BBQ chicken, fried catfish and more using the restaurant's custom indoor smoker. The barbecue joint also serves homemade pickles and beef jerky. At the helm are brothers Nathan and Scott Gibson—Scott serves as the pit master while Nathan serves as chef and general manager. Best of all, the restaurant is open for breakfast with Southern comfort classics such as biscuits and gravy, and the overflowing BBQ Benedict that features your choice of meat on cornbread with two poached eggs and Hollandaise sauce.

DISHES TO TRY: Brisket eggrolls with pulled pork, coleslaw and BBQ ranch dressing on the side (\$10.99); Fried catfish plate (\$16.99); ask for the Blueberry BBQ Sauce

Boca's Best BBQ & Smokehouse, 9181 Glades Road, Boca Raton / 561.488.9688 / bocasbestbbq.com



Beef brisket, mac and cheese, potato salad and Texas toast at Boca's Best BBQ & Smokehouse

QBAR BURGERS & BLUES

Ourmet burgers plus live music and craft beer make for a great Friday night. Add to that your furry friend (it's a dog-friendly restaurant) and you've got your go-to spot. Inspired by the French Quarter in New Orleans, the restaurant blends good music and food with burgers named after jazz icons, such as The King (1/2 pound burger with duck bacon and cheddar cheese). Patrons can saddle up to the 78-foot copper and wooden bar to enjoy live music while sipping on a craft cocktail, like the QBar Smash made with Gentleman Jack, lemon, arugula and peach.

DISHES TO TRY: Filet mignon chili with beans and cheddar cheese (\$8); Fried baked brie and mixed nuts with apple chutney and raspberry sauce (\$10)

QBar Burgers & Blues, 2362 N. Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale / 954.565.2299 / qbarfl.com



CIBO WINE BAR

This rustic Italian restaurant takes a traditional approach to both the classics and modern dishes. The Fort Lauderdale restaurant opened as a response to requests from guests traveling from Broward to dine at the two Miami-area locations. Cibo's wine selection is 2,500 bottles deep. They're stored in an award-winning wine room, from which harnessed "wine angels" descend to retrieve your bottle. The industrial chic restaurant offers an outdoor patio and lively bar area. The new Fort Lauderdale location has Cibo Wine Bar's first in-house salumeria, where the restaurant cures its own selection of meats. Cibo is also beloved for its Sunday Italian Bubbles and Brunch, which includes a buffet-style selection of made-to-order pizzas, pastas and eggs, as well as salads, cured meat, cheeses, fruit and more.

DISHES TO TRY: Polenta fries (\$9), Porcini mushroom risotto (\$18), Gorgonzola and pear pizza (\$14)

Cibo Wine Bar, 4100 N. Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale / 754.900.2426 / cibowinebar.com/cibo_fl/index_fl.html

BURLOCK COAST

Burlock Coast is a lot of things. It's an artisanal food market. It's a grab-and-go counter perfect for takeaway lunches on the beach. It's a sit-down restaurant focused on seafood and locally sourced products. What Burlock Coast is not, however, is a stuffy, overpriced hotel restaurant, despite the fact that it's located inside a 5-star resort on Fort Lauderdale Beach. That's because at this Prohibition-era themed restaurant, executive chef Gavin Pera has crafted a menu that embraces the work of local artisans, from Miami Smokers to Zak the Baker, and serves it up in a spacious environment with outdoor seating welcoming in beachgoers. Fittingly, you'll find an indoor-outdoor bar with a cocktail selection heavy on the rum.

DISHES TO TRY: Tuna tartare with tostones (\$16), Artisanal cheese and charcuterie (\$29), Niman NY Steak (\$46), BC Donuts with white chocolate banana rum sauce (\$8), Key Lime Pie For Many (\$14)

Burlock Coast, 1 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd., Fort Lauderdale / 954.302.6460 / burlockcoast.com

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Black grouper at Burlock Coast

From the Editors:

Heather Carney, Managing Editor

Craziest thing you ate this past year:

Squid ink pasta at Corsair in Aventura. I also tried frog legs at Pistache in West Palm Beach.



Most memorable dish:

The Kobe Beef dinner at NYY Steak at the Seminole Casino Coconut Creek. I've never had steak prepared so many different ways and with so much flavor. Its even marbling was mesmerizing.

Food trend you're most excited for:

Simple yet sophisticated food, like the dishes from chef Philip Darmon at Hardy Park Bistro and chef Matthew Byrne at Kitchen in Palm Beach.

Trend you're over: The Southern, farmhouse-style restaurants. I love Southern comfort food, but I'm ready for something new.

Favorite food trend of this past year:

I saw burrata and tomato salad on so many menus and loved it. You can't go wrong with a cheese made from mozzarella and cream.

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Funky Buddha's Brewer's Plate with meat, cheese and pickled produce

FUNKY BUDDHA BREWERY'S CRAFT FOOD COUNTER & KITCHEN

When Craft Food Counter & Kitchen opened in the back of the house at Funky Buddha Brewery in November, it was a game changer. Since saying so long to the usual food trucks parked outside, the brewery has hosted hungry patrons in its redesigned back room where it serves good eats made with Funky Buddha beers in mind. Guests can also play giant Jenga, corn hole and coin-operated arcade machines. Chef Jeff Vincent, formerly of Beauty and the Feast at the Atlantic Hotel in Fort Lauderdale, works at the helm of Craft Food Counter & Kitchen and has created a seriously mouthwatering menu of gourmet bar grub. So next time you stop by Funky Buddha for a cold brew, head to the back, walk up to the fast-casual food counter, place your order and enjoy the craft goodness that awaits.

DISHES TO TRY: Tap room pretzel with dipping sauces, like Doc Brown Mustard or Sriracha Honey (\$5.95); Yucca tots with spicy ketchup (\$5.95); Craft brat sandwich (\$9.95)

Craft Food Counter & Kitchen, 1201 NE 38th St., Oakland Park / 954.440.0046 / funkybuddhabrewery.com/brewery/craft-food-counter-kitchen



Jumbo lump crab cake at Hudson at Waterway East

HUDSON AT WATERWAY EAST

Next time you find yourself on Atlantic Avenue, a walk across the drawbridge to Hudson at Waterway East is a must. The Delray Beach eatery has gone through a number of chef changes since it opened at the end of 2014, but its contemporary seafood-centric menu consistently impresses. And complementing Hudson's creative, quality fare and extensive beverage program are incredible waterfront views—the restaurant employs an open plan that allows patrons seated indoors to take in the sights of the Intracoastal. Guests can enjoy drinks at the indoor bar or outdoor Pier Bar, where shots are half-off any time the Atlantic Avenue drawbridge goes up. Other specials include a daily "Social Hour" deal offering 2-for-1 drinks from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., "Uncorked Mondays" for half-off wine bottles all day, and ladies night every Thursday.

DISHES TO TRY: Crab mac and cheese (\$8), Warm kale and bacon salad (\$13), Jumbo lump crab cake (\$18)

Hudson at Waterway East, 900 E. Atlantic Ave., Ste. 22, Delray Beach / 561.303.1343 / hudsondelray.com

KURO

Famished from cranking slot machines, gamblers at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino can pop into Kuro for shareable Japanese fare. With the success of its dinner menu, the restaurant recently tacked on lunch hours. The midday menu was created by executive chef Alex Becker, whose focus is to fuse traditional dishes with progressive concepts. A visit to Kuro isn't complete without a cocktail (or two). Mixologist Jared Boller divides the menu into five flavor profiles: sweet, savory, bitter, salty and umami. Our call: Order the KYU from the sweet section. It's the mix of rum, lemongrass chartreuse, falernum, pineapple and lime juice you'll need to perfect your poker face.

DISHES TO TRY: The Kuro Ramen, with char siu pork belly, scallions, egg and nori swimming in pork broth (\$16); for dessert, the Hazelnut Bar, which looks so much like art that it's hard to dig in (\$12)

Kuro, Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, 1 Seminole Way, Hollywood / 954.327.7625 / seminolehardrockhollywood.com

Louie Bossi's "The Boss" panini with porchetta, pesto, provolone, arugula and cherry peppers



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LOUIE BOSSI'S RISTORANTE BAR PIZZERIA

This Italian eatery took Las Olas Boulevard by storm over the summer. After what seemed like a stealth opening, Louie Bossi's Ristorante quickly became a go-to spot. It joins other The Big Time Restaurant Group successes like Rocco's Tacos and Big City Tavern, where Louie Bossi was executive chef before he was offered his own restaurant concept. At Louie Bossi's, Bossi himself crafts homemade neo-Neopolitan pizzas, pasta dishes, salumi, dry-aged steaks, gelato and breads. Every day happy hour is from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. with \$2 off drinks and half-priced pizzas; and Sunday brunch includes \$12 bottomless drink specials.

DISHES TO TRY: Arancini Con Tartufo, a crispy rice filled with fior di latte and truffle aioli (\$12.50); the radiatori short pasta dish mixed with eggplant, San Marzano sauce and ricotta salata (\$17); and for dessert, the Italian Ice Cream Sundae comes with three scoops of gelato accompanied by pizzelle, chocolate, fruit and whipped cream (\$9)

Louie Bossi's Ristorante Bar Pizzeria,
1032 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale /
954.356.6699 / louiebossi.com

PIZZACRAFT

It's not your run-of-the-mill pizza joint. The newest concept from JEY Hospitality Group serves crispy, light-crusted pizzas. Pies are cooked in a Neapolitan wood-burning oven and are served alongside original pasta dishes, salads and appetizers. Through a sliding door toward the back, diners may also access the restaurant's counterpart, Apothecary 330, a secret cocktail bar serving more than 300 types of whiskey. And what's new—the pizzeria now offers Sunday brunch with menu features like the spaghetti omelette, Nutella bruschetta and avocado toast to accompany \$15 bottomless mimosas and bellinis, the \$8 build-your-own bloody mary bar and \$5 Aperol Spritz.

DISHES TO TRY: The Bianca, a white pizza topped with scallion cream, homemade mozzarella, taleggio DOP, ricotta, pecorino, garlic confit and fried sage (\$18)

PizzaCraft, 330 Himmarshee St., #101,
Fort Lauderdale / 954.616.8028 /
pizzacraftpizzeria.com

From the Editors:
Lyssa Goldberg, Web Editor

Craziest thing you ate this past year:

Grasshoppers. I tried them at Dos Caminos on Fort Lauderdale Beach, where they serve guac topped with chapulines (grasshoppers), which is a popular pairing in Mexico.



Most memorable dish: Pasta carbonara at Taverna Trilussa in Rome during my trip to Italy. More than six months later, I'm still daydreaming about that bowl of pasta. Luckily, Louie Bossi's on Las Olas makes a mean carbonara as well.

Food trend you're most excited for: More clean-eating experiences you don't have to feel guilty about, like DIRT in Miami Beach.

Trend you're over: Prohibition-themed everything. It's a cool aesthetic, but every new restaurant and bar that opens nowadays is doing it, and it's starting to look unoriginal and overdone.

Favorite food trend of this past year? "Middleterranean" cuisine (a blend of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern food options). I fell in love with Mediterranean/Middle Eastern food during a trip to Israel and have been obsessed ever since. I was so happy to see so many Middleterranean restaurants open last year and am excited about others that are still coming.

TOP HAT DELICATESSEN

Top Hat's location—across from an empty parking lot on the nearly abandoned Northeast Third Street west of Federal Highway in Fort Lauderdale—might seem odd. But don't be fooled. With an impressive repertoire of restaurants, think The Foxy Brown and Coconuts, the "be nice" restaurant group can now add Top Hat to that list. The New York-style deli, which opens for breakfast and lunch, serves hearty, down-home comfort dishes with a twist like a fried bologna with egg sandwich, or sweet pleasers like the challah French toast.

DISHES TO TRY: Top Hat Burger made with pastrami and Swiss cheese (\$14); Chocolate cake made with nine layers, meant for sharing (\$12)

Top Hat, 415 NE Third St., Fort Lauderdale / 954.900.3896 / tophatfl.com

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From the Editors:

Ileana Llorens, Senior Web Editor

Craziest thing you ate this past year:

I'd love to say I branched out and tried something completely out of the ordinary, but for me, this year was all about broadening my horizons with new vegetables and more fish. Hey, baby steps!



Most memorable dish: Hands down the warm lemon madeleines at Cafe Boulud in Palm Beach. They were so light and delicate. I'm not a dessert person, and I couldn't help but sneak an extra two or three when I was left alone at the table. They were life-changing and definitely worth the drive—even if they're the only thing you order.

Food trend you're most excited for:

I really love all the restaurants opening up in hotels along the beach. Going out to dinner suddenly becomes a mini escape.

Trend you're over: If we could all agree that kale is overrated and has no place in a smoothie that'd be great. I also don't understand the culinary world's current obsession with cauliflower. A friend recently told me she saw someone on Instagram call a cauliflower steak a cheat-day meal.

Favorite food trend of this past year:

I loved the focus on craft cocktails. There's nothing I like more than trying new concoctions. The Kentucky Radler at Hyde Beach Kitchen + Cocktails, for example, mixes whiskey and beer, and the result is delicious. Who knew?!

The Shanghai cocktail at The Rusty Hook Tavern



THE RUSTY HOOK TAVERN

You likely won't find this restaurant unless you go looking for it. The Rusty Hook Tavern opened last spring under the direction of chef Nader Jaouhar, who was previously chef de cuisine at Gordon Ramsay's restaurant, Cielo, in Boca Raton. In addition to the Rusty Hook's menu teeming with seafood options to be enjoyed on the deck lining the Intracoastal, the cocktails are also worth note. Mixologist Kareem Lakchira takes credit for the dangerously well-blended drinks with names like Troublemaker, Guilty Plea and Bamboozled. And the good news? Thursday nights ladies enjoy 50 percent off all drinks.

DISHES TO TRY: Crispy Cheetos fish tacos with mango salsa, green papaya slaw and smoky chipotle crema (\$17); the Thai Basil cocktail with orange vodka, Thai basil and grapefruit (\$9)

The Rusty Hook Tavern, 125 N. Riverside Drive, Pompano Beach / 954.941.2499 / therustyhooktavern.com



Blackened shrimp tacos at The Rusty Hook Tavern



"Green Eggs & Ham" Benedict at Tap 42

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TAP 42 CRAFT BEER BAR & KITCHEN

Like clockwork, every Saturday and Sunday before 11 a.m., a line forms outside of Tap 42, snaking around the side of the building along Andrews Avenue in Fort Lauderdale. There are two reasons people wait hours to be seated for brunch: the menu includes dishes like white chocolate strawberry pancakes, and mimosas and bloody marys are bottomless till 3 p.m. Sure, other restaurants offer similar specials, but there's just something about Tap 42 that works—the laid-back vibe, the original twists on traditional foods and a plethora of booze. While the Fort Lauderdale location isn't new, the gastropub recently expanded to Boca Raton, joining Town Center Circle during the summer.

DISHES TO TRY: The Prohibition Burger white cheddar, applewood bacon, "secret sauce," dijonnaise and lettuce, tomato and onion (\$13.50)

Tap 42, 5050 Town Center Circle, Boca Raton / 561.235.5819 / tap42.com

SVICHE

We're glad this Miami-based Japanese-Peruvian fusion restaurant made its way up to Broward County in 2015. Ever since SuViche, aptly named for the various sushi and ceviche dishes that are staples on the menu, opened up shop on a side street off Las Olas Boulevard, it has won our hearts with refreshing seafood fare and comforting Peruvian plates. What's more, the restaurant's indoor-outdoor bar pours Pisco sours and other cocktails made with the South American brandy. SuViche also offers online delivery, daily happy hour specials from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., and buy one, get one half-off sushi rolls on Tuesdays.

DISHES TO TRY: SuVama ceviche (\$11.95/bowl), Arroz Chaufa with chicken (\$8.95), Perfection roll (\$11.50)

SuViche, 401 E. Las Olas Blvd., Ste. 150, Fort Lauderdale / 954.656.3663 / suviche.com

WHY THE O-B HOUSE IN FORT LAUDERDALE IMPLEMENTED A NO-TIP POLICY

Restaurant co-owner Rodney Ely dishes on this controversial decision.

While listening to the drums pound in Washington, D.C., I have asked myself what I would do given the inevitability of minimum wage increases. I have always loved the restaurant business, first becoming passionate about it in my 20s working in a successful fish house on the New River in Fort Lauderdale and quickly earning my way into the proprietorship of my own establishments.

To most, the business seems glamorous and fun. But for those of us in it, we know it is hard work with thin margins. In order to survive, I knew I needed to adjust my business model. How can small restaurants stand minimum wage increases? Would consumers pay an elevated cost and adapt to a new system?

The no-tip concept was a strategy I was willing to try. I had read about the idea, and I designed a model that I believed would work for my establishment. Though prices were increased to affect the new model, the majority of customers were not fazed by it. The general consensus is that customers love not having to figure out a tip and they feel supportive of an establishment that takes responsibility for its employees.

Under the no-tip system, our traditional servers garner the same yearly earnings. However, they are now more able to budget themselves, receiving all of their income on bi-weekly checks rather than having a spendable daily cash income. The no-tip system has allowed us to give raises to the back-of-the house staff well in advance of any mandated minimum wage increase. Those staff members work long, hard hours to ensure the success of an independent community establishment such as mine.

Having a superior food product has been the key to my success, and having a happy staff is imperative to the customer experience. To those restaurateurs who can ensure good service through strong leadership, I encourage them to give the no-tip strategy a try. From my perspective, it's the way of the future.