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Hotel F&BTM

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Greater Wolf

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The fruity, bubbly mini-mimosas are ripe for sharing, though many guests want the whole paddle all to themselves. EATS sells around 50 flights per brunch.

Fizz Is What It Is

Mimosa flights are a simple, enticing upsell at EATS Kitchen & Bar's Sunday brunch. BY DENNY LEWIS

Orange County's Hotel Irvine brands itself as a lifestyle hotel, and few things are more about lifestyle than Sunday brunch. The brunch setting for the modern 536-room Irvine Company property, EATS Kitchen & Bar, avoids the formulaic offerings

of a big buffet with long tables of chafers and omelet and waffle stations and instead features the vibrant à la carte menu of Chef Jason Montelibano's "evolved brunch favorites" and "comfort food turned on its head."

No matter how distinct and unique their fare might be, however, no brunch would be complete without the traditional brunch libations of Bloody Marys and mimosas, and the mimosa flights at EATS deliver

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sparkling servings of Southern California sunshine in four glasses.

Hotel Irvine GM Jeroen Quint defines the lifestyle hotel concept as a sort of hospitality reverse engineering; they aim to learn about the guests who are coming to the hotel and do everything they can to cater to their way of life and anticipate their expectations. In a way, Quint extends that idea of service to the property's neighborhood.

"We are located in a residential neighborhood, and nearby there are five towers of offices where 6,000 people, who typically live within a five-mile radius, go to work every day," says Quint.

"Hosting a great Sunday brunch was a chance to accommodate our regular guests and to serve our local community," he says. Quint also believes that people usually "find their brunch spot"—the one restaurant that will be their go-to brunch venue on a regular basis—

where they can find "good food and drink at an affordable price point" and "where they take care of me."

At EATS, that means a personable, highly trained staff and elements that have good bang-for-your-buck value, such as the mimosa flight.

Flight Patterns

The flight features four six-ounce pil-sner glasses of sparkling wine married with fruit juices and purées, presented at the table in a specially made wooden paddle. EATS Manager Jessica Eller created the mimosa flights with the help of Chef Montelibano's kitchen. Eller devised the recipes, which change

seasonally, and the EATS back-of-the-house staff preps the purées and fresh ingredients. At this writ-

ing, the choices for the flight included sparkling wine with lemon-strawberry purée, peach purée, mango purée, or blood orange juice, or a traditional mimosa of sparkling wine and fresh orange juice.

"We already had the 'bottomless mimosa' on the menu," says Eller, "but we wanted something even more exciting and eye-catching." Eller adds that there is a noticeable "ripple effect" for flight orders as a server carries

one through the busy dining room and out onto the patio. "People see it, and everybody wants one." That first impression is key to the upsell. "We wanted to make it feel like a deal so people don't feel guilty about it," says Eller.

The EATS menu prices a glass of the house sparkling wine at \$8 ("You're probably going to have a couple anyway," says Eller). Being "bottomless," the regular mimosa seems a bargain at \$8, but four exotic mimosas for \$15 seems even more so. While a flight is perfect for sharing, Eller observes that "most people order one just for themselves." She estimates that a minimum of one person at every table orders a flight, totaling about 50 flights per brunch. Even with the moderate price and the expensive ingredients, Eller keeps costs at 25%. And she's had to order more serving paddles.

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The mimosa flights are exciting and eye-catching when carried through the room by servers, making the upsell easy, says EATS manager Jessica Eller (left). GM Jeroen Quint (right) believes the \$15 mimosa flights align with guests' desire to "find their brunch spot," the place they can find good but affordable F&B and feel taken care of.



Thriving in a Micro-Economy

The creative beverage program, which also includes a build-your-own Bloody Mary bar, craft beers, innovative signature cocktails, and an affordable slate of wines, has become a successful accompaniment to Chef Montelibano's popular, eclectic, globally inspired, locally sourced, OC-healthy, maybe-some-Filipino-vibe-thrown-in "gastropub" food. Quint, who foresees that "the big price tag hotel brunch buffets are going away," reports a \$40 average cover for brunch, \$15 of which is produced by beverage sales.

With its dining room and patio, EATS seats 170 guests, and, six

months after the inaugural brunch, it is serving around 200 covers every Sunday. Quint says the diversity of the community and mix of residential and business properties in their immediate market has created a "micro-economy" that thrives and has them surrounded by other restaurants that serve brunch. Being able to grow market share in such tight proximity to established competition is a testament to food, beverage, and service. "I only expect it to get more popular," says Eller.

As it gets more popular, Quint has his eye on a two-brunch weekend, but

not until the time is right. "We are focused on slowly improving everything. We want everything to be consistent," he says. "We

don't want to change a winning formula." Meanwhile, Eller is hinting at cucumbers and blueberries in the mimosas for the warm days of summer and is already experimenting with exotic flavors for the mimosas of the days beyond. 🍷

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