

## Executive Summary

- ▶ Salad-dressing basics and new flavor combinations.
- ▶ New salad dressings, including Mexican Caesar, Tex-Mex ranch, fig tahini and more.
- ▶ Healthier dressing, including lowfat and oil-free options.
- ▶ Insight into how dressings can be marketed as multipurpose products.



# Salad Dressings—

## Textural Sensations, Flavor Explosions

BY WALTER ZUROMSKI, CEC, CCE

Contributing Editor

In culinary terms, salad dressings are considered “cold sauces,” and the variety of cold sauces is as broad as hot sauces—and, in some cases, they offer more diversity of application than their hot counterparts. With a virtually endless repertoire of flavor components and variations, dressings—whether acidic, tangy, savory or bold—play an important accenting role via flavor and texture on appetizer, side or entrée salads.

But dressings also accompany or accent hot or cold items like hors d’oeuvres and sandwiches, and serve as

marinades. In addition to their contributions of flavor, dressings take the sensory experience further, providing the delivery of sheen and cling with varying degrees of mouth-coating, extending flavors to aid to the overall experience.

### Roots and modernization

Salad dressings and similar sauces have been with us for centuries. Nearly 3,000 years ago, people in Asia used soy sauce, mixed with sesame oil and aromatic herbs, as a



topping on vegetables. The Babylonians, 2,000 years ago, accented their salad greens with oil and vinegar. Mixtures of spices, oil and vinegar were popular on greens in ancient Egypt.

But then mayonnaise debuted on French and Spanish tables 200 to 300 years ago, changing the way people flavor and dress their salads and ushering in the 20th century's love for stabilized, emulsified dressings like Caesar, ranch, etc. (Today, the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* outlines the standard of identity for "salad dressing," as well as specific pourable salad dressings like French.)

During the early 20th century, before the mass production of retail dressings began, prepared dressings were generally only available through restaurants that had become famous for their salads. For instance, Ken's Steak House, in Framingham, MA, since 1941, started an offshoot dressing business run out of the owners' house in 1958 and now boasts a portfolio of well over 400 dressing and sauce combinations. The T. Marzetti Company likewise got its start by selling bottles of dressing out of Teresa Marzetti's Italian restaurant in Columbus,

OH, around 1920. By the mid 1950s, the second floor of the building had become a veritable manufacturing facility for its salad dressings.

Kraft Foods (then known as the Kraft Cheese Company) entered into the dressings business in the 1920s with the purchase of several mayonnaise manufacturers, and also launched a French dressing, a vinaigrette with tomato and paprika. Ranch dressing (a dry mix of spices mixed with buttermilk and mayonnaise) hit the masses after it became famous during the 1950s and '60s at Steve and Gayle Hanson's Hidden Valley Guest Ranch near Santa Barbara, CA.

The U.S. food industry evolved the dressing business to a new level with its use of stabilizers like hydrocolloids, flavor technology, unique spice combinations, flavored vinegars, and citrus juices, among other ingredients. Now salad bars, restaurant menus and retail outlets offer myriad dressings like ranch, Italian, creamy Italian, Thousand Island, balsamic vinaigrette, French, Russian, Catalina, blue cheese, honey Dijon, red wine vinaigrette, poppy seed, Caesar and more.

## The classic pairs

Some dressings are specific to different traditional salads. Caesar salad, which started out as a tableside preparation in restaurants, is made with garlic, fresh egg yolk, mustard powder, anchovies or Worcestershire sauce, and Parmesan cheese, mixed in a wooden bowl tableside and tossed with romaine hearts and garlic croutons. The star in this salad, the dressing, is emulsified and clings to the romaine lettuce.

Another traditional pairing is red-wine vinaigrette with Cobb salad, which consists of greens, tomato, bacon, chicken, hard-boiled egg, avocado and blue cheese. Vinaigrette is also the traditional dressing for Niçoise salad, comprised of lettuce, tomato, red peppers, hard-boiled egg, Cailletier olives, shallots, artichoke hearts, tuna and anchovies. Spinach salad often gets topped with a warm bacon and red-wine vinaigrette.

## Diversifying dressing uses

Chefs and food scientists continue to stretch the boundaries and uses of dressings. One of the key trend swings is now a dressing portfolio destined to be marketed

as not only a salad dressing, but also as a finishing sauce or condiment. This allows for more diverse applications and uses of dressings, allowing dressing manufacturers to target their dressings for not only salads, but also appetizers, sandwiches and main courses.

For instance, ranch dressing has long been a staple condiment with cut vegetables, and blue cheese dressing with chicken wings and its accompanying celery. Likewise, Thousand Island or Russian is the go-to accenting sauce for a Reuben. In some circles, “mayonnaise” is practically synonymous with “salad dressing,” but is de rigueur on sandwiches. Menu developers and chefs are simply extending this concept in response to consumers who are seeking more flavor and textural experiences that can take a simple sandwich, taco or burger and fries to a new level, and marketing campaigns for retail dressings can similarly diversify that market.

For example, in our work with Richelieu Foods, Elk Grove Village, IL and one of its national chain accounts, the goal was to transform a breaded fish sandwich. The way it was designed was to make the flavor bolder

“Sugar should be regulated like alcohol and tobacco.”



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through the sauce, made using mayonnaise as the foundation. Our twist on traditional tartar sauce was to go with a Roasted Red Pepper Remoulade sauce, incorporating roasted red pepper, lemon, capers and *cornichon* (gherkin) pickles with mayonnaise as the base. We then took the fish sandwich to several new flavor perspectives by changing the flavor, or theme, of the sauce:

- Crispy Fish Sandwich with Lemon Pepper Remoulade
- Cajun Fish Sandwich with Creole Remoulade
- Italian Fish Sandwich with a Roasted Red Pepper, Tomato and Basil Remoulade

Chefs are creating dressings to deliver the explosive expansion of global flavors, relying on the dressing to carry the theme throughout the concept. Chop't Creative Salad Company in New York offers over 80 salad toppings, along with 20 dressing choices categorized as: classic, which includes some twists like Smoky Bacon Russian and White Balsamic Vinaigrette; exotic, described as “fresh and bright and inspired by our travels,” like Lemon Tahini, Mexican Caesar with cotija and chipotle, and 5 Flavor Asian; spa, with lowfat and oil-free classics, and new wrinkles like Tzatziki Yogurt, and Tex-Mex Ranch with chipotle, ancho, paprika and cayenne; and bold, called “extreme in deliciousness, flavor and heat but never too spicy,” with Chile-Lime, Tex-Mex Ranch (the full-fat version) and Sweet & Smoky Chipotle Vinaigrette. This clearly illustrates the concept of ultimate patron customization.

Recently I was challenged to work with Lean Works Restaurant Group, West Roxbury, MA a healthier, light, quick-service restaurant (QSR) concept with 500 calories per menu offering, but one that relied on delivering rich, bold flavors with dressings. We created items like a Carolina Dressing, a Chipotle Scallion Spread, and a Sweet & Spicy Bangkok dressing to provide flavor vehicles to support a build-your-own-menu strategy across all menu items offered, accenting their burgers, steak sandwiches and salad wraps across the flavor map. The dressings were applied in a slaw mix or sandwich spread, and others, such as sesame vinaigrette, chipotle-ranch dressing, raspberry-Cabernet vinaigrette, and poppy seed dressing all transformed the basic salad mix into an Asian, Mediterranean or Southwestern salad sensations.

### Formulation finer points

Dressings really pop and stand out when distinctive vinegars are used. Balsamic of Modena is widely used and starts with a sweet wine. Traditional balsamic, made from reduced, aged Trebbiano grape juice, has much more complexity. Balsamic, like many other vinegars, contributes not only acidity, but also sweetness and smoothness to dressings.

When it comes to capturing the essence of global cuisines, authentic flavors are key. For an Asian or Japanese dressing, ingredients like rice wine vinegar, soy sauce and

## ▶ MARKET SNAPSHOT

## Going Greek and Asian

According to Chicago-based Technomic's 2012 Consumer Trend Report, "The Left Side of the Menu: Soup & Salad," away-from-home salad consumption has increased, with 81% of consumers now occasionally purchasing salad away from home compared to 77% of those polled in 2009. Nearly half (47%) of consumers now say they order salad on all or most of their restaurant occasions, up from 34% in 2009. The report notes that as ethnic-style salads (particularly Greek and Asian) continue to grow on limited-service restaurant menus, watch for Greek dressings, as well as ginger and peanut dressings for Asian salads, to appear more frequently. And although traditional dressings like vinaigrette, ranch and Caesar lead all other varieties, vinaigrette and ranch present opportunities to innovate with flavor accents. To highlight craveable new tastes—and underscore menu differentiation—the authors of the report suggest that more operators to begin experimenting with unique global flavors and ingredients for salad dressings.

—The Editors

touches of sesame oil or fermented fish sauce are options. To add a touch of the exotic, mangosteen vinegar, from Southeast Asia, has a silky, citrus, sweet-peach flavor.

Fig vinegar is rather similar in appearance and flavor to balsamic vinegar, rich in color and with a sweet-and-sour taste and raisin notes. An application with fig vinegar, orange juice and honey or agave nectar would work well in salads featuring salmon, as well as with crème brûlée or vanilla bean ice cream. Other distinctive options include pomegranate, blueberry, raspberry and strawberry vinegars.

When it comes to oils, soybean, corn and canola are not used to deliver flavor, but to carry it and remain bland so the other flavor components can shine—and also for economic reasons. Olive oil adds a touch of distinction, and sometimes flavor. Other options include grape seed, flax seed and hemp seed oil, as well as nut oils like walnut and hazelnut oil, which can add notable flavor contributions.

In retail, a great line of unique and creative refrigerated dressings is produced by a company in Brockton, MA, Cindy's Kitchen. All of their dressings are cross-functional and allow consumers to use them on more than lettuce

greens. These dressings are cooked up in a kettle to 180°F, and stabilized or emulsified with xanthan gum or carrageenan. Both gums provide a specific function for the dressing, such as building viscosity, emulsification and suspension of particulate, slight gelling, and coating and cling characteristics for both the food and the palate. They also act as a fat mimetic to replace the sensation of oil in an oil-free dressing. Some of the company's unique dressings include Oil-Free Pomegranate Vinaigrette, Oil Free Tomato Basil, Fig Tahini, Lemon and Shallot Vinaigrette, Vidalia Onion Cilantro, Coconut Lime, Ginger Lime, and Korean Kim Chi. These not only work wonders with salads, but they also let consumers and restaurants use these unique flavors in all menu categories, including cooked dishes such as fish, meat, poultry and vegetables.

In dressings made with dairy products, such as buttermilk, yogurt or sour cream—for example, blue cheese

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dressing—stabilizers protect the milk protein from precipitating. Formulators typically turn to hydrocolloids first to manipulate texture and deliver the results with innovative gum blends. A blend of xanthan gum and carrageen improves particulate suspension and imparts a creamy texture to dairy-based dressings such as blue-cheese types.

A blend of guar gum, xanthan gum and propylene glycol alginate stabilizes both reduced-fat and full-fat dressings. Every ingredient added to a dressing formula affects its stability, so in many cases a tailor-made stabilizing system is developed to create the ideal matrix of stability, texture, cling, sheen and mouthfeel for a finished dressing. It is important to be clear on the processing practices, whether hot-fill or cold-process, as well as other production and equipment details, so your supplier can fine-tune the stabilizer's effectiveness and usage level.

The dressing industry will continue to grow while it adds more global flavor sensations to not only salads, but other foods as well via dipping sauces, spreads, etc. Once you start exploring, the possibilities are endless. 

Walter Zuromski, CEC, CCE, is chief Culinary® officer for TIC Gums, Inc., White Marsh, MD, and owner/operator of the Chef Services Group, Inc., Lincoln, RI, a culinary R&D consultancy that provides menu development for restaurants and chains, product development for plants, and food manufacturing in various venues. Zuromski is a certified executive chef and culinary educator through the American Culinary Federation. He was also a member of the Research Chefs Association. For more information, visit [chefservicesgroup.com](http://chefservicesgroup.com).



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