



Casual Dining 2015 ticks all the right boxes

The second edition of Casual Dining – the award winning trade event for the UK's pub, restaurant and bar sector – has been hailed a big success.

Brilliant, lively, informative, refreshing, and relevant – is just some of the feedback received from visitors so far; with Paul Pavli, operations director at Punch Taverns calling it "a must attend event".

The show, which took place at the Business Design Centre in London last week, on 25-26 February, featured over 150 exhibitors and welcomed 3,608 attendees (from nearly 2,000 companies). Notably, over 30% of visitors cited a corporate spend of over £500k (a further 21% of survey respondents quoted over £5 million).

Alongside the show's bustling exhibition, the Casual Dining Keynote Theatre was a hive of activity throughout. Powerful Keynotes – led by a stellar line-up of industry big hitters, including Karen Forrester (TGI Friday's), Stephen Holmes (ASK Italian and Zizzi), and Alasdair Murdoch (GBK), enjoyed standing room only crowds. Whilst panel sessions hosted by CGA Peach, Propel Info and David Coffer Lyons sparked plenty of insightful debate from entrepreneurial operators like Martin Morales (Ceviche), Harald Samuelsson (Côte), Brandon Stephens (Tortilla), Simon King (Burger and Lobster restaurant group), Alex Reilley (Loungers), Kevin Charity (Bulldog Hotel Company), and Tim Foster (Yummy Pub Company).

"Innovation is the life blood of the casual dining market. It doesn't just have to be for the casual diners, we can all benefit from the huge advances in innovation, product development and technology. Casual Dining 2015 had a great number of these suppliers on offer and was definitely worth the journey," says Tim Foster, head of being awesome at The Yummy Pub Co.

Big name buyers and exhibitors

The show's aisles were buzzing with a 'who's who' of the sector, with many of the UK's biggest pub and restaurant groups in attendance – including The Restaurant Group (owner of restaurant chains Frankie & Benny's, Chiquito and Garfunkel's); Mitchells and Butlers; Marston's; Prezzo; wagamama; Giraffe; Strada; Byron; Fuller, Smith & Turner; Greene King, Stonegate Pub Co; Whitbread; Spirit Pub Company; Young's; Carluccio's; Pizza Hut Restaurants, and Casual Dining Group (the new name for Tragus, owner of the Bella Italia and Café Rouge brands).

More than 1,200 independents (including restaurants, bars, pubs and hotels) were also represented, as were big contract caterers like BaxterStorey, Bidvest 3663, Elior UK, Compass Group, and Sodexo.

"It's great to finally have a trade show dedicated to our industry. It's a really worthwhile visit," says Steve Holmes, CEO of ASK Italian and Zizzi.

"A clear winner from my perspective, in terms of focus, attention to detail, accessibility and organisation. Well done to the Casual Dining team," says David George, head of food development at Greene King.

"It's a great show, with a superb feature programme and an excellent mix of visitors and exhibitors alike. It's one of the best shows out there in the hospitality industry," says Lorraine Wood, director of hospitality networking association Arena.

"Two exhibitors that I spoke to said that it was the best trade show that they had ever done!" comments visitor Andy Walsh, catering controller at Booker Wholesale (and former chef for the Hilton and Marriott Groups).

Exhibitor feedback from across the show floor certainly echoed the sentiment.

"The quality of buyers at this show is like no other! It's a fantastic show, and we booked our stand for next year as soon as we could," says Mike Clarke, sales director at It's a Wrap.

Wow, great vibe and good people, plus customers that want to buy, the perfect ingredients for a great show – which it was!" agrees Nigel Phillips, UK & Ireland National Sales Manager at Lamb Weston.

"Casual Dining is ahead of the zeitgeist once again – attendance is mandatory for all those who care about good food and drink," adds Luke Fenton, export and UK sales exec at Thistly Cross Cider.

A thriving market

Casual Dining is big business in the UK – and with growing consumer confidence and spending, it's set to get even bigger. According to Peter Backman, managing director of the insights firm Horizons (and host of the show's opening Keynote), "the casual dining market is thriving" and now worth over £7bn.

"This is certainly the most intense and ferocious period in licensed hospitality I can remember, with sophisticated operators expanding and evolving to meet the demands of increasingly savvy customers," says Kate Nicholls, chief Executive of the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR), during her session at the show.

"They say that talent thrives during periods of adversity and, as we emerge from a recession, the very best and brightest in the sector are making a name for themselves," she says. Discussing the ALMR's 2014 Benchmarking Report, she said that licensed hospitality was "outgrowing the wider economy", with "food-led and town centre venues seeing 9.8% growth". Nicholls also revealed that 1,000 new restaurants opened in 2014, with a further 1,000 predicted for this year.

Casual dining formats predicted to thrive in 2015 included all day/flexible, premium fast food, premium casual dining, and street food/pop-ups.

Casual Dining Innovation Challenge Awards 2015

Designed to promote and celebrate genuinely new ideas in the market, including new innovations and new twists on established concepts – the Innovation Challenge Live saw 12 finalists pitch their ideas to a panel of industry judges on the second day of the show.

The panel included leading pub and restaurant entrepreneur Peter Borg-Neal, chief executive at Oakman Inns & Restaurants; Brian Whiting, owner of award winning pub group Whiting & Hammond; and Keith Bird, commercial director at Gourmet Burger Kitchen. Entries included food, drink, packaging, equipment and technology.

Casual Dining Innovation Challenge Gold Award recipients were Aryzta Food Solutions UK for Bun Appetit – a new Pretzel Burger Bun made using traditional pretzel baking methods; and Gram UK for Superior Plus 72 – claimed to offer operators the most energy efficient refrigeration available on the market.

"Casual Dining was a roaring success for Gram UK. It was an ideal opportunity to showcase our developing portfolio of products to a targeted, very enthusiastic and engaged audience from this rapidly growing sector of the marketplace. Winning the Innovation Challenge Gold award was a fabulous ending to a very successful two days in London," says Glenn Roberts, managing director at Gram UK.

"Casual Dining was the perfect platform for us to connect with the industry and we were busy throughout, with a great quality of visitor and some promising leads. The Innovation Challenge proved a fantastic success – we're delighted to have been recognised with a gold by such an esteemed panel," says Paul Whitely, brand & communications manager UK at Coup de Pates/Aryzta Food Solutions UK.

Commended entries include It's A Wrap's Printed Grease Proof Paper, L'Aquila's Roasted Tomatoes Au Natural, Manitowoc Foodservice UK's Convotherm 4, Millenium Foodservice UK's Individual Gluten-Free Pastry Cases, and Purbeck Ice Cream's Dorset Wasabi Ice Cream.

King of Craft

Innovation is also key to the success of the growing craft beer and cider markets – currently enjoying their biggest renaissance in years. Attendees were able to enjoy tasting sessions from all eight of the Craft Beer & Cider Showcase exhibitors in the new Drinks Innovation Theatre. Bru Ri, an Indian Pale Ale (IPA) brewed by Bru Brewery in Ireland, was the lucky recipient of Casual Dining's first ever 'King of Craft' Award (voted for by visitors to the show).

Casual Dining Design Awards 2015

Other show highlights included the announcement of the winners of Casual Dining's prestigious Design Awards. Under the chairmanship of designer David Worthington, the three judges (Theo Williams, Afroditi Krassa, and Tina Norden) described the entries as producing great and exciting work, and discussed the role of design and branding in helping to create differentiation and enhancing visitor experience within the hospitality industry.

"Design plays a key role in any restaurant environment today – whether you pay £10 or £100 a head. The casual dining scene, in particular, is incredibly creative and over the last years has led the restaurant design world with its energy and new ideas," says Tina Norden, project director at Conran and Partners.

This year's shortlist included selected interior design projects from over 40 finalists from across the UK; including high street brands like ASK, Carluccio's, GBK, Nando's, Pizza Hut, Red's, and Tortilla.

Faced with an extremely high standard of entries, The Perfectionists' Café in Heathrow Terminal 2 (operated by The Fat Duck Ltd, designed by AfroditiKrassa) won over the judges^[1] in the Best Designed Independent Restaurant category. Praising the design's attention to detail, the judges said they loved the way the space had been laid out and constructed.

"I am absolutely delighted that we have won this Casual Dining Design Award for our recent restaurant design for Heston Blumenthal," says Afrodita Krassa, founder of AfroditiKrassa.

"A decade ago, it would have been hard to imagine an airport restaurant becoming a destination and winning design awards, yet the Perfectionists' Café has achieved exactly this. This is exemplary of how much the industry has moved on, the casual dining

world is booming with creative energy, quality and bold thinking; we are proud to be part of it,” she says.

Alston Bar & Beef in Glasgow Central Station (operated by Glendola, designed by Jestico + Whiles), and Smack Lobster Roll Deli in London (operated by Goodmans, designed by DesignLSM) were both also highly commended.

Hare & Tortoise in Chiswick (operated by Bronzemarch Trading Ltd, designed by SAY Architects) took away the winning trophy for Best Designed Multiple Restaurant. Summing up their decision, the judges said the design was “beautiful, simple, and elegant”.

Wagamama Uxbridge (designed by Blacksheep) was highly commended in the same category.

The Fable in London (operated by Drake & Morgan Collection, designed by Fusion Design and Architecture) was awarded highly commended in the Best Designed Casual Dining Pub category. After much debate by the judges, no overall winner was selected this year.

Save the date for 2016

Looking ahead to 2016, around 80% of Casual Dining’s exhibition space has already been reserved, with many exhibiting companies having already requested to increase the size of their stands. To accommodate growing demand, organiser Diversified Communications UK has also revealed that exhibition space will be expanded to include more of the Upper Feature Level at the Business Design Centre in London next year.

The expansion will grow the show from 151 to around 190 exhibiting companies for its third edition. They’ll be in great company, as 87% have survey visitors already indicated that they intend to revisit when the show returns on 24-25 February 2016.

“We’re delighted with the show,” comments group event director Chris Brazier, speaking on behalf of the Casual Dining team. “We saw record numbers of innovative exhibitors doing business with a quality of decision maker that you rarely see at any trade show – let alone one in only its second year. No wonder so many of our exhibitors have already signed up for Casual Dining 2016! Big thanks must go to the senior buyers from across the casual dining sector for embracing the show – we’re already looking forward to making it even bigger and better for them next year!”

Next year’s Casual Dining will also feature the launch of the recently announced Casual Dining Restaurant & Pub Awards, which will take place on the evening of the show’s opening day – Wednesday 24 February.

For more information, please visit www.casualdiningshow.co.uk.

Booking for new exhibitors opens at 10am on 23 March 2015.

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Notes:

[1] Afrodita Krassa was excused from judging this category

Casual Dining was the first launch show (UK and international) in over five years to win ‘Best Tradeshow Exhibition under 2,000sq.m’ at the Association of Event Organisers’ Excellence Awards 2014.

High res images available upon request:

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http://www.casualdiningshow.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/KEYNOTE_low-res.jpg

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