

Year in Review: Top 5 Cool Plates

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In January, NRN.com introduced Cool Plates, a weekly feature that showcases menu items from restaurants across the country that initiated new trends, took fresh looks at standard menu items, or offered clever ideas to other chefs and restaurateurs.

Below are senior food editor Bret Thorn's five favorite Cool Plates of the year.



Chicken and Jack cheese dumplings, Buffalo style
9 restaurant, New York City

The buffalo wing went upscale and got an international twist in this dish. Chicken meat, cheese, butter, cream and spices formed the filling for this dumpling, which was served boiled or fried with a sauce made of equal parts hot sauce, butter and a house-made Moroccan glaze.



Kale Caesar Salad
Co-op Food & Drink, New York City

Kale was perhaps the hottest vegetable at independent restaurants in 2011, and this salad by chef John Keller is an example of many kale Caesars served across the country. This version uses both red and Tuscan kale. For an extra twist, Keller added slices of Asian pear.



Shrimp Tikka Masala
Uno Chicago Grill

Trend watchers have been waiting for years for Indian food to go mainstream. They're still waiting, but this 145-unit casual-dining chain, best known for its deep-dish pizza, has gained some traction with a number of Indian items, most recently this summer limited-time offer.



Fomami breakfast sandwich
Fomami Asian Sandwich Bar, Boston

Owner Michael Wang sandwiched an omelet topped with bacon and cheese between Chinese scallion pancakes to give a simple ethnic twist to a hand-held American breakfast.



Magnolia roasted sea bass
Maison Blanche, Longboat Key, Fla.

Fish steamed in the leaves of banana trees or grape vines is common in some parts of the world. Chef José Martinez gave it a local twist by using a local leaf.