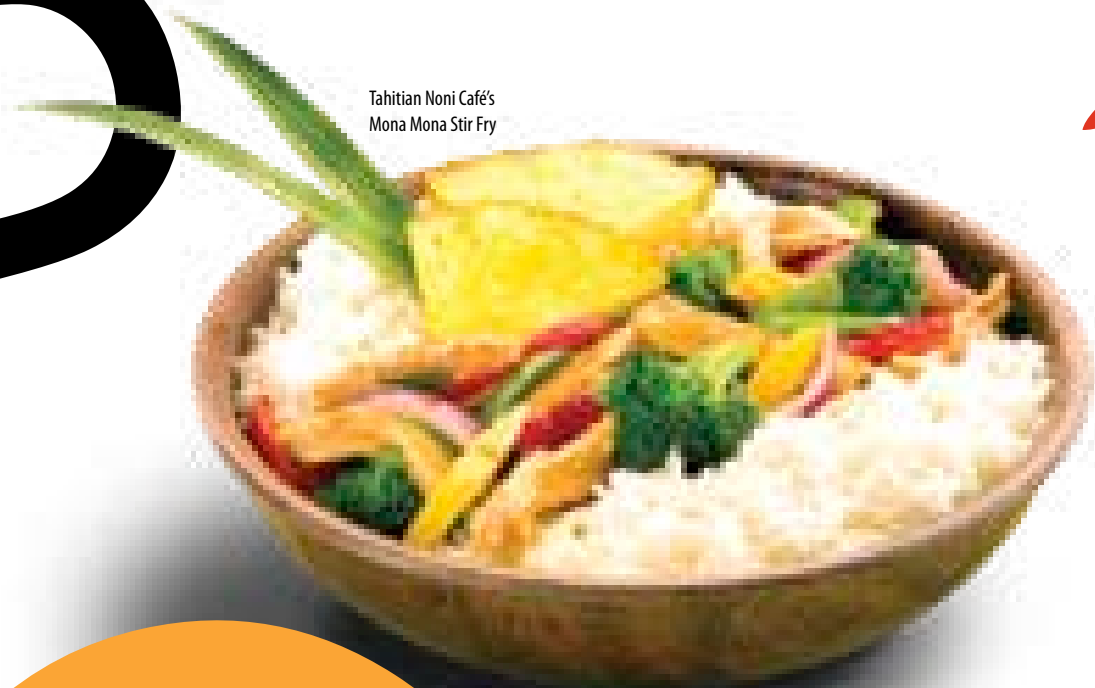


# TOP 100

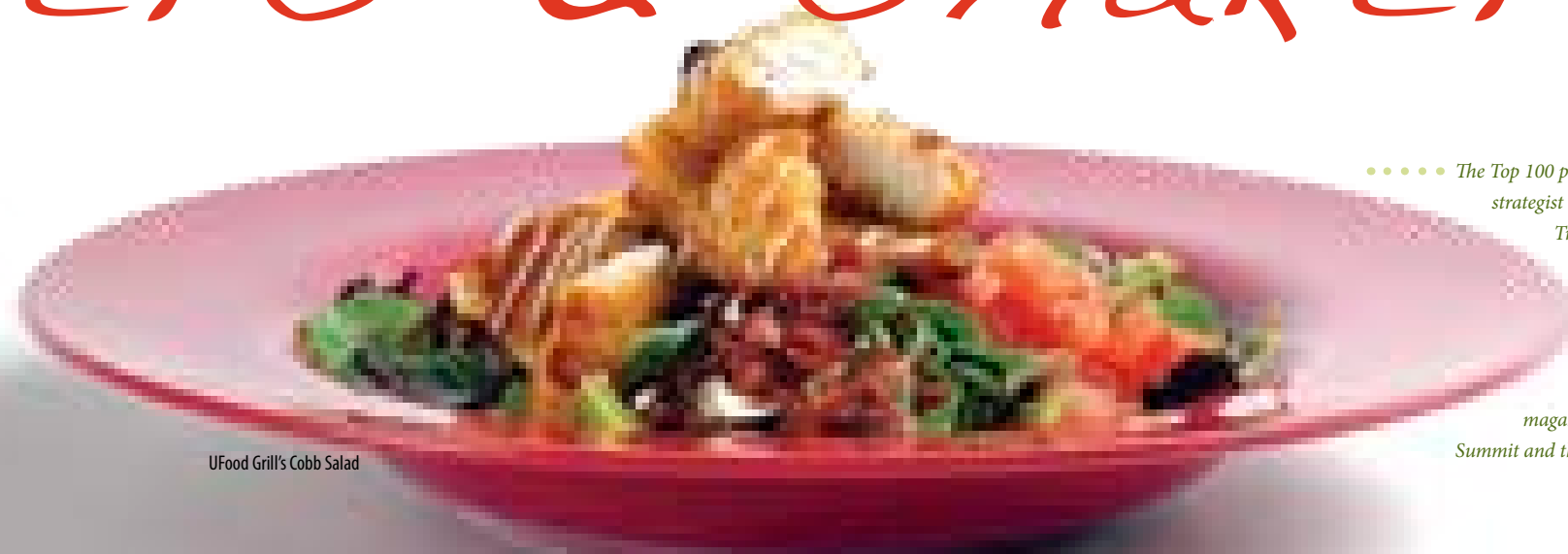
## movers & shakers



Tahitian Noni Café's  
Mona Mona Stir Fry



Qdoba's Queso Burrito



UFood Grill's Cobb Salad

**A**s for most magazines and industry watchers, culminating the very best of the breed in a fast-growing segment is often a difficult task. With more than 600 fast casual concepts in the half-trillion-dollar restaurant industry, paring the list down to just 100 is not for the faint of heart.

This year's top spot goes to Au Bon Pain. Our choice was a close one, with Café Express, Camille's, Qdoba and Panera rounding out the top five. Panera has held the top spot before, while Camille's and Qdoba have been in the top five for three years running. The choice boiled down to the creative portion tactics Au Bon Pain implemented this year, along with the brand's aggressive growth plan and stellar management team. This group of breadwinners easily deserves the top spot.

We are often asked how we compose the list each year and what it takes to get on it. What we look for are companies that have taken their concept to new places and redefined or excelled at a part of their business in a way that sets them apart, so that the consumer just says, "Wow!" We're not looking for the financially growth-oriented concepts or those with the most units in the ground. Instead, our list is of the "Movers & Shakers," concepts that truly make an impact in the space.

This year marked the first time we've excluded certain concepts that were on the fence of fast casual. We have also excluded dessert-only concepts, as well as beverage-only concepts. You also won't find individuals in our Top 100 this year, and our list of qualifications is getting more stringent as the number of concepts grows each year.

— Paul Barron

..... The Top 100 panel included Janelle Barlow, consumer strategist and author of "A Complaint is a Gift"; Darren Tristano, senior vice president of Technomic Information Services; Linda Duke, CEO of Duke Marketing; Valerie Killifer, senior editor of Fast Casual magazine and online; Christa Hoyland, editor of QSRWeb.com; and Paul Barron, founder of Fast Casual magazine and online, the Fast Casual Executive Summit and the Fast Casual Executive Alliance.



Au Bon Pain Copley Place, Boston

**A**u Bon Pain founder Louis Kane was strolling through Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace in 1978 when he came across a display of French bakery ovens. The aroma and quality of fresh-baked bread inspired him to create the restaurant, whose name translates roughly as "the place of good bread."

Thirty years later, the company has expanded to more than 225 locations. Earlier this year, private-equity firm LNK Partners acquired a majority ownership interest, putting more than \$100 million into the transaction. The investment will support the company's expansion in the United States and across the globe.

"The rest of the world really lives in urban, dense markets," said Au Bon pain CEO Sue Morelli. "And Au Bon Pain translates beautifully to these other countries."

Lately, Au Bon Pain has developed a reputation for food that's not only good, but also good for you. The company was one of the first chains to begin removing artificial trans fats from its products in 2003, and now all its products have zero grams artificial trans fat.

Au Bon Pain also uses only all-natural chicken in its sandwiches, salads and wraps. Earlier this year, it was recognized

## Au Bon Pain

Boston  
Bakery/café  
Last year: 13

by the editors of Health magazine as one of "America's Healthiest Restaurants." The editors praised Au Bon Pain's Nutrition Kiosks, which allow guests to plan a nutritious meal and sort the menu by a specific nutritional requirement — high fiber or protein; or low carb, fat, cholesterol, sodium or calories.

Au Bon Pain also offers a "Smart Menu" application via the company's Web site, where customers can view the nutrition information for a specific combination of food choices and search for combinations that best meet their individual dietary needs.

Au Bon Pain introduced a new product line in 2008 called Portions, a menu of 14 dishes made fresh daily, packaged individually and containing 200 or fewer calories apiece. They are designed to tap into the tapas/small-plates trend. The company recently expanded Portions with five dessert choices, each with 200 calories or fewer per serving.

— Richard Slawsky

