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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

FOOD & DRINK | July 26, 2012, 5:35 p.m. ET

For Well-Heeled Pooches, Fine Dining Al Fresco

By ALINA DIZIK

At a recent lunch at his favorite restaurant, David Fountain ordered the chicken sandwich with a glass of Chardonnay. His companion, Hannah, got the restaurant's Gravy Train, a chicken with demi-glace and rice dish, and a bowl of water.



Some restaurants are taking advantage of underutilized outdoor patio space allowing animal-obsessed customers to dine al fresco with their pups while creating a source of extra revenue in a competitive industry. Alina Dizik has details on Lunch Break. Photo: Bear Guerra for the Wall Street Journal.

Hannah, a champagne-colored poodle, was one of the four-legged diners having lunch on the patio at Citron, a restaurant in the Viceroy Hotel in Palm Springs, Calif. Mr. Fountain spends four afternoons a week at the restaurant because it is quiet enough to conduct business—and dogs are welcomed. "She'll have one of her meals of the day there. She enjoys the whole atmosphere," says Mr. Fountain, a 63-year-old attorney mediator.

Fine Dining Goes to the Dogs



Bear Guerra for The Wall Street Journal

Wilbur, a Boston terrier belonging to Olivia Prescott, devoured a meal of eggs and smoked bacon on the patio of the Viceroy Hotel's Citron restaurant in Palm Springs, Calif.

A smattering of upscale restaurants like Citron are expanding to let dog owners dine al fresco with their pooches while creating a source of extra revenue in a

competitive industry. Restaurants generally take underutilized outdoor patio space where owners can dine with their dogs. Some have separate menus with special entrees for dogs: anything from lamb stir fry to meat loaf to scrambled eggs with bacon bits. When the pooch needs to take a bathroom break, space is provided at the side or behind the restaurant, complete with waste pickup bags.

Art and Soul, a restaurant in Washington, D.C.'s, Capitol Hill neighborhood, started offering a "pooch patio menu" in 2009 with items like the bowser beer (a nonalcoholic beer) and a frozen raw bone sprinkled with dill. The restaurant's pastry chef bakes fresh dog biscuits as well. Savory items are cooked on a separate burner. "We treat it as a kind of kosher item," says Patrick Chiappetta, director of operations at the restaurant, part of the Liaison Hotel.

The restaurant "needed to come up with a way to make the patio more appealing to people in the neighborhood," says Mr. Chiappetta. Customers who don't want to eat amid dogs and their owners can sit inside, he adds.

The raw bone (\$5) and "hungry dawg" steak (\$8) are the biggest sellers, with the dog food menu making up 20% of the revenue for all side dishes sold on the patio, he says. About 20 dogs a week come to the restaurant with their owners.



Bear Guerra for The Wall Street Journal

Sharon and David Fountain dine with their dog Hannah at Citron, a restaurant in the Viceroy Hotel in Palm Springs, Calif.

Leigh Terry occasionally visits Art and Soul for brunch along with her roommate Sharon Sotsky, and their two dogs, Annabelle, a terrier mix, and CJ, a dachshund poodle mix. As Ms. Terry sips on a cocktail of Champagne and strawberries, she is able to reward Annabelle with beef tips in gravy. "They will lie under the table, eat and then they get to chill back out," says the 27-year-old special education teacher from Alexandria, Va.

Serving dogs allows restaurants to expand their clientele to people who typically opt for takeout or simply stop in for a quick bite, say restaurateurs.

"It's not trying to profit off the pets. It's to draw in the customers," says Dominic Mercurio, owner of Cafe Fina, a Monterey, Calif., restaurant that offers a "doggy" menu.

Mr. Mercurio started offering a specialized menu in 2005. In the past few years, nearby restaurants have developed their own, he says. While he doesn't track numbers, Mr. Mercurio says he gets about 25 dogs a week. He has noticed that guests with dogs tend to stay longer and visit more often, which translates into higher food sales. "We've built some loyal customers," he says.

At Cafe Fina, the menu offerings for humans and dogs are the same. But to attract dog owners, Mr. Mercurio says he often charges dogs less for the same dish. The 14-ounce grilled and sliced New York steak costs \$15.95



Bear Guerra for The Wall Street Journal

Warren Cordoba, above, executive chef at the Viceroy, created a special menu for dogs.

for dogs, compared with \$29.95 off the regular menu. Dogs entrees cost less because they require less preparation and don't include side dishes, Mr. Mercurio notes.

Before restaurants open their patios to animals, they must comply with building and health codes, which vary across the country. Some cities, including Atlanta, don't allow dogs on restaurant patios. And Chicago, for example, doesn't allow restaurants to offer food to pets.

D'Agnese's at White Pond, a restaurant in Akron, Ohio, spent three years getting its menu off the ground. The

restaurant's first application to allow animals on the patio was denied three years ago because it didn't comply with health codes. Recently, a separate entrance for dogs was added in a new location because animals are forbidden from walking through the restaurant.

Owner Joe Gallagher got the permit to serve dog fare in June and lists ingredients like locally grown corn, organic chicken, wild rice and stone-ground oats on a biscuit-shaped dog-food menu. Already he estimates a 25% increase in revenue and sees about 40 dogs a week. This summer, diners "are hanging out more and having a few more cocktails," says Mr. Gallagher.



Bear Guerra for The Wall Street Journal

Jeremy Davies-Barbala's puppy Edwin yawns before digging into his scrambled eggs and smoked bacon.

Researching the menu also takes time, since many foods that are OK for humans can be harmful to dogs—onions, chocolate and some dairy products, for example. Warren Cordoba, executive chef at the Viceroy in Palm Springs, revamped its pooch menu after consulting with several veterinarians. He stopped using jelly on his peanut-butter biscuits to decrease sugar content and started making a blander veal stock for some dishes, including Rover Easy, which has scrambled eggs with applewood smoked bacon bits. "Dogs are people's babies. You've got to make sure you're taking care of them as you were somebody's child," he says.

Still, some dog owners are wary, says Mr. Cordoba. "A lot of people ask us if we are just serving them old food. We are like, 'No, it's of the same quality.'" Generally, food is served bland, lukewarm and in bite-size pieces.

But not all canines prefer the limited selections on specialty menus. When Kimberly Coffaro, 24, walks into Cafe Fina with her Labrador-and-chow mix Zeus, she asks for an order of fried calamari and a separate plate. As Zeus nibbles on his share, Ms. Coffaro eats hers. In the past, she's ordered Chicken a la Pooch (grilled and sliced chicken) but finds Zeus prefers to split the seafood. Her dog is treated like royalty, she says. Since Zeus is a regular, servers greet him by name and bring his special place setting right away. As for the food? "He's pretty picky. He loves

[his calamari] dipped in tartar sauce."

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