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A touch of glass

Foodservice businesses are using glassware to present food in increasingly innovative ways, but its fragility can be a double-edged sword. While it lends dishes a refined and elegant appearance, it also makes it challenging to work with. *Open House* asks the experts which types of dishes are best presented in glassware and how to minimise breakages.

Bruno Malzacher, director of culinary operations for Melbourne's Crown Casino complex, home to 26 fine-dining and casual restaurants, is a big fan of using glassware to serve food, describing it as "versatile, stylish and capable of adding value to the presentation of a dish".

Most Crown restaurants – which include Bistro Guillaume and Giuseppe, Arnaldo & Sons – use glassware to present some dishes, he says, primarily cold entrées and desserts.

"Many of our restaurants present appetizers, such as fresh seafood, in glassware. We also use it a lot for desserts, particularly fruity and layered varieties."

When selecting glassware, Malzacher says quality and fit with the restaurants' décor and style of cuisine, are key. Crown designs much of its own glassware, he says, tailoring it to individual restaurants' requirements.

"We try to think outside the box and present food in new ways by, for example, selecting different shapes and types of glass. Using an unusual glass with striking layers can create great visual appeal and impact."

While Malzacher acknowledges glassware's fragility presents a challenge to kitchen and wait staff – "particularly during busy service periods when you're less likely to spot chips" – he says he always opts for quality, elegant-looking brands over cheaper alternatives, even if they are tougher.

The key to minimising breakages, he says, is to use glassware only for appropriate dishes and to train staff to treat it with due care.

For Hidetoshi Tsuboi, head chef and general manager of new Japanese restaurant Monkey Magic in Sydney's Surry Hills, using glassware to present certain dishes helps to create a more memorable and modern dining experience.

"Customers have come to expect

you will present food in interesting ways," he says.

Meeting these expectations is Tsuboi's chief concern – a disappointed customer, he points out, is a far greater loss to a restaurant than a broken glass.

It is this desire to meet – and preferably exceed – customer expectations that prompts Tsuboi to buy the best-quality glassware he can afford.

He uses glassware to present cold dishes only, saying it's particularly well-suited to colourful and delicate raw seafood dishes, such as sashimi, and desserts. Two examples are a seafood ceviche salad served in a traditional martini glass and a white sesame-infused tiramisu served in a latte glass.

In Japan, Tsuboi says, many restaurants use glassware with subtle colours or patterns to present seafood dishes. A standout for him was an entrée of blowfish carpaccio presented on an intricately-patterned glass platter. "The fish was translucent so you could see the glass patterns through it, which was a cool effect."

Food stylist and former chef, Kai Ellman, regularly uses glassware to show off the dishes he photographs for books, magazines and promotional material, saying it can make them "more classy, stylish and premium-looking".

Like Tsuboi, he believes glassware lends itself especially well to delicate seafood dishes and desserts as well as platters and salads.

To minimise breakages, Ellman advocates using glassware to present only cold dishes prepared in quieter areas of the kitchen. "Glassware certainly has a lot of potential in terms of presentation – you just have to be very careful." **OH**

Monkey Magic's Hidetoshi Tsuboi uses glassware to present entrées and desserts in interesting new ways.

