

# Innovation Begins with Observation!

*Have you noticed how we really eat today?  
How are you responding?*

Americans have become quite unorthodox about how, where, and when they eat. According to the Culinary Institute of America, a full 19% of all meals and snacks are eaten in the car. We don't live in Mayberry anymore; we really eat while watching television, "shopping" the refrigerator, refueling with ready-to-eat dishes (often eaten in the supermarket), dropping in at Starbucks for taste bud entertainment, and refueling as we drive our cars from one appointment to the next.

Food is often more about staving off boredom or facilitating social activities than simple nourishment. Another key observation is that people are increasingly cocooning in public, i.e. listening to iPods, playing computer games, or working on their computers, often done in the company of friends in cafes and restaurants. How we communicate and socialize continues to evolve and impacts our industry. We eat with great fluidity today, yet food & beverage operations present a fairly stagnant design, service, and product offering built around what is convenient for the operator. This is your opportunity to innovate and it all starts by being a keen observer!



For just a moment we took our blinders off and dreamt up a few concept ideas that keep up with today's consumer.



**The Living Space** – This moves beyond the hotel’s compartmentalized thinking where guests are commandeered to eat here, check in there, drink over in the corner, and play or watch TV in their rooms. The Living Space is designed to leverage the popularity of the Great Room (combined kitchen, dining, and living area) in residential design. This room meets the needs of socialization, activity area, and of course casual dining. This is a place to congregate in a comfortable multi-energy zone that enables social interactions and cocooning at the same time. The layout would include an open kitchen, diverse activity areas for individuals, groups, and new friends to interact in a home-like setting. Envision a TV lounge with surround sound, pool table, iPod docking stations, Wii play stations, common tables, tables that can be adjoined, cocooning iPod chairs, and even a massage chair, you know the one we have all vicariously sampled at Sharper Image but never had the \$3,000 to buy. The interior design would be a little imperfect (like most of our homes) creating an ambiance that is more relaxing and invites guests to feel at home. This home-like space would offer a number of food options from a grab-and-go refrigerator, all-day bar that evolves with the day-part (coffee, wine, liquor), roving hosts would deliver guests food wherever, whenever they wanted, facilitating their activity and interaction.



**The Refrigerant** – Designed to satisfy today’s social TV-centric diner. This concept replicates the experience of your home TV lounge. The service involves a refrigerator that is rolled up to the couch so guests can shop with their eyes, grab a beer and pop their selection into their personal microwave. Where this may seem absurd at first hearing, a modified version of this might be great for a hotel or residential housing that is seeking to create a truly residential experience.



**The Tailgaterant** – Our drive-in diner for 2010. Envision a parking lot full of pickup trucks to SUVs decked out with TVs, sound systems, and their own Webber grills. Servers deliver the meat and fixings and then guests tend the grill and serve themselves out of endless beer on tap. Again, seems far flung, but isn’t this truly what many people long to experience.



**Injectables** – pureed foods served in hands-free syringes so drivers can neatly slurp down their meal as they speed down the interstate. Now that cell phones are required to be hands-free, what about the hands-free Big Mac? Yes, you are correct; the fast food lobby would never let this happen, not to mention the challenge to make it viscerally appealing. Have you noticed the rise in popularity of vitamin rich “healthy” meal replacement snack bars? This is one solution addressing this need?

OK, so we went a little overboard, but that is how we open our minds and generate possibilities. Great marketers observe how people behave every day, inside and outside of their establishment. They experiment with offerings that facilitate the way people are really behaving so patrons don't have to adapt to our systems. Evolutions like the drive-thru window, curb side pickup, communal tables in hip fine dining, electric plugs under tables for guest to recharge their gadgets, and cooking with healthier ingredient are all examples of intelligent responses to keen observations. We still have extraordinary opportunities to experiment and establish the next great solution. I encourage you to really observe yourself today and understand how you relate to food throughout the day. Restaurants are in need of revolution! Let me know if you come up with anymore observations and solutions. I look forward to hearing from you!

For more free help with this process go to [www.cultivationcorps.com](http://www.cultivationcorps.com) and download 8 simple steps to define your brand and those looking to redo their existing restaurants you can download and read about Hermit Crab concepts.

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