

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

RESTAURANT

BUSINESS

November/December 2019

TOP 100

INDEPENDENTS

How the highest earners thrive in tough times. **P.25**



**+ MORE INSIGHTS
ON HOW TO GET
AHEAD IN 2020**

Shooters Waterfront
(No. 39) served
more than 400,000
meals last year.

RESTAURANTBUSINESSONLINE.COM



TOP 100

INDEPENDENTS

THE RANKING **P.27**
HOW THEY STAY ON TOP **P.34**

#91 | Girl & the Goat
Stephanie Izard's flagship
known for innovative small
plates is new to the Top 100.

The restaurants in this year's Top 100 Independents ranking are singing the same tune as years' past: It's an extremely tough operating environment, and it's getting harder by the year. Still, despite struggles with labor, competition, costs and more, these 100 concepts managed to bring in \$1.8 billion in 2018. In fact, many are thriving by adapting and innovating their approach to the business.

THE RANKING

The Top 100 Independents are nothing if not consistent. Despite a tough operating environment and the absence of some top earners that outgrew indie status, the Top 100 brought in roughly \$1.8 billion in food and beverage revenues for the fourth straight year. \ \ **COMPILED BY MEGAN ROWE**

5 LAVO New York City 2018 sales \$27.5M* Sq footage 9,000 Total seats 250 Avg check \$90* Meals sold 203,000*	6 SMITH & WOLLENSKY New York City 2018 sales \$25.5M Sq footage 20,000 Total seats 480 Avg check \$104.07 Meals sold 268,583	7 GIBSONS BAR & STEAKHOUSE Chicago 2018 sales \$25.2M Sq footage 8,725 Total seats 290 Avg check \$78.67 Meals sold 350,495	8 BALTHAZAR New York City 2018 sales \$25.1M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 205* Avg check \$87* Meals sold 530,280	9 BRYANT PARK GRILL & CAFE New York City 2018 sales \$24.7M Sq footage 16,500 Total seats 391 Avg check \$43.38 Meals sold 831,375	10 JUNIOR'S New York City (Times Square) 2018 sales \$23.7M Sq footage 8,000 Total seats 284 Avg check \$22.75 Meals sold 914,513	11 PRIME 112 Miami Beach, Fla. 2018 sales \$23.6M Sq footage 5,000 Total seats 200 Avg check \$130 Meals sold 204,100	12 MAPLE & ASH Chicago 2018 sales \$23.6M Sq footage 10,500 Total seats 215 Avg check \$85 Meals sold 241,756	13 VANDAL New York City 2018 sales \$23.5M* Sq footage 22,000 Total seats 215 Avg check \$84.50* Meals sold 209,480*	14 JOE'S SEAFOOD, PRIME STEAK & STONE CRAB Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$22.9M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 370 Avg check \$83* Meals sold 286,440*	15 ANGUS BARN Raleigh, N.C. 2018 sales \$23.7M Sq footage 8,000 Total seats 284 Avg check \$22.75 Meals sold 914,513	16 JOE'S SEAFOOD, PRIME STEAK & STONE CRAB Chicago 2018 sales \$22.6M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 335 Avg check \$89* Meals sold 253,760	17 KOMODO Miami 2018 sales \$22.5M* Sq footage 17,000 Total seats 320 Avg check \$97.50* Meals sold 245,000*	18 JOE'S SEAFOOD, PRIME STEAK & STONE CRAB Las Vegas 2018 sales \$22.3M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 384 Avg check \$77* Meals sold 260,000*	19 THE HAMILTON Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$21.9M Sq footage 39,000 Total seats 1,000 Avg check \$38.66 Meals sold 639,759	20 BUDDAKAN New York City 2018 sales \$21.2M Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 320 Avg check \$98 Meals sold 223,497	21 BAZAAR MEAT BY JOSE ANDRES Las Vegas 2018 sales \$20.8M* Sq footage 335 Total seats 470* Avg check \$114* Meals sold 189,500*	22 RPM STEAK Chicago 2018 sales \$20.7M* Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 470* Avg check \$104* Meals sold 204,000*	23 SW STEAKHOUSE Las Vegas 2018 sales \$20.6M* Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 466 Avg check \$142* Meals sold 148,350*	24 GIBSONS ITALIA Chicago 2018 sales \$20.4M Sq footage 15,735 Total seats 190 Avg check \$94.89 Meals sold 229,887	25 PADDLEFISH Orlando, Fla. 2018 sales \$20M* Sq footage 32,000 Total seats 525 Avg check \$46* Meals sold 420,025*	26 ST. ELMO STEAK HOUSE Indianapolis 2018 sales \$20M Sq footage 16,000 Total seats 455 Avg check \$93.90 Meals sold 220,000*	27 BOTTEGA LOUIE Los Angeles 2018 sales \$19.3M Sq footage 9,998 Total seats 255 Avg check \$37.39 Meals sold 384,843	28 QUALITY MEATS New York City 2018 sales \$19.2M Sq footage 12,000 Total seats 185 Avg check \$110.45 Meals sold 168,730*	29 DEL POSTO New York City 2018 sales \$18.8M Sq footage 175 Total seats 175 Avg check \$194 Meals sold 97,000	30 GIBSONS BAR & STEAKHOUSE Oak Brook, Ill. 2018 sales \$18.7M Sq footage 21,958 Total seats 719 Avg check \$78.86 Meals sold 269,345	31 TASTE OF TEXAS Houston 2018 sales \$18.7M Sq footage 20,000 Total seats 501 Avg check \$52.79 Meals sold 369,819*	32 GIBSONS BAR & STEAKHOUSE Rosemont, Ill. 2018 sales \$18.7M Sq footage 10,500 Total seats 410 Avg check \$77.60 Meals sold 258,323	33 BOB CHINN'S CRAB HOUSE Wheeling, Ill. 2018 sales \$18.5M Sq footage N/A Total seats 736 Avg check \$68* Meals sold 587,078	34 PARC Philadelphia 2018 sales \$18.4M Sq footage N/A Total seats 302 Avg check \$59 Meals sold 446,080	35 ABE & LOUIE'S Boston 2018 sales \$18.3M Sq footage 10,300 Total seats 271 Avg check \$118.19 Meals sold 174,130	36 SPARKS STEAKHOUSE New York City 2018 sales \$18.2M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 684 Avg check \$96* Meals sold 206,220*	37 FOUNDING FARMERS Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$18.2M* Sq footage 8,530 Total seats 385 Avg check \$36.45 Meals sold 596,348	38 MON AMI GABI Las Vegas 2018 sales \$18.1M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 400 Avg check \$72.50* Meals sold 307,440*	39 SHOOTERS WATERFRONT Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 2018 sales \$18M Sq footage 20,000 Total seats 600 Avg check \$56.40 Meals sold 407,925	40 QUALITY ITALIAN New York City 2018 sales \$17.8M Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 210 Avg check \$97.44 Meals sold 172,366*	41 CHICAGO CUT STEAKHOUSE Chicago 2018 sales \$17.8M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 270 Avg check \$92* Meals sold 206,000*	42 SHAW'S CRAB HOUSE Chicago 2018 sales \$17.7M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 270 Avg check \$70* Meals sold 266,700*	43 TAVERN ON THE GREEN New York City 2018 sales \$17.6M* Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 345 Avg check \$76* Meals sold 255,700*	44 LE DIPLOMATE Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$17.4M Sq footage 6,960 Total seats 311 Avg check \$51 Meals sold 339,601	45 HARRIS RANCH INN & RESTAURANT Coalinda, Calif. 2018 sales \$17.3M Sq footage N/A Total seats 480 Avg check \$28.47 Meals sold 530,000*	46 CHOPS LOBSTER BAR Atlanta 2018 sales \$17.3M Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 250 Avg check \$104 Meals sold 166,000	47 PRIME STEAKHOUSE Las Vegas 2018 sales \$17.1M* Sq footage 7,500 Total seats 210 Avg check \$168* Meals sold 110,300*	48 FRANKENMUTH BAVARIAN INN Frankenmuth, Mich. 2018 sales \$17M Sq footage 90,000 Total seats 1,200 Avg check \$18.47 Meals sold 919,390	49 RUSTY PELICAN Miami 2018 sales \$16.9M Sq footage 28,864 Total seats 413 Avg check \$64.51 Meals sold 152,351	50 SWIFT & SONS Chicago 2018 sales \$16.8M Sq footage 15,000 Total seats 466 Avg check \$115 Meals sold 189,654	51 BEAUTY & ESSEX New York City 2018 sales \$16.7M* Sq footage 10,000 Total seats 550 Avg check \$90* Meals sold 192,200*	52 GRAND CENTRAL OYSTER BAR New York City 2018 sales \$16.7M* Sq footage 23,000 Total seats 450 Avg check \$62* Meals sold 302,500*	53 JUNIOR'S New York City (49th St.) 2018 sales \$16.6M Sq footage 14,500 Total seats 247 Avg check \$22.02 Meals sold 745,041	54 LAVO ITALIAN RESTAURANT & LOUNGE Las Vegas 2018 sales \$16.6M* Sq footage 25,000 Total seats 382 Avg check \$92.50* Meals sold 135,664*	55 ORIGINAL JOE'S WESTLAKE Daly City, Calif. 2018 sales \$16.6M Sq footage 9,942 Total seats 264 Avg check \$37.03 Meals sold 457,341	56 PORTLAND CITY GRILL Portland, Ore. 2018 sales \$16.5M Sq footage 18,000 Total seats 559 Avg check \$79.46* Meals sold 373,327*	57 MORIMOTO ASIA Orlando, Fla. (Disney Springs) 2018 sales \$16.5M* Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 474 Avg check \$68* Meals sold 511,475	58 DELMONICO STEAKHOUSE Las Vegas 2018 sales \$16.4M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 260* Avg check \$100* Meals sold 144,448	59 KEENS STEAKHOUSE New York City 2018 sales \$16.3M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 300 Avg check \$95* Meals sold 175,680*	60 ACME FEED & SEED Nashville 2018 sales \$16.1M Sq footage 22,000 Total seats 300 Avg check \$38 Meals sold 678,664	61 MAKOTO Bal Harbour, Fla. 2018 sales \$16.1M Sq footage 5,235 Total seats 204 Avg check \$65 Meals sold 247,450	62 THE RUSTIC INN Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 2018 sales \$16M Sq footage N/A Total seats 450 Avg check \$70 Meals sold 370,000	63 ZEHNDER'S OF FRANKENMUTH Frankenmuth, Mich. 2018 sales \$15.8M Sq footage 80,000 Total seats 1,500 Avg check \$16.80 Meals sold 940,513	64 PRIME & PROVISIONS Chicago 2018 sales \$15.8M Sq footage 12,000 Total seats 279 Avg check \$110 Meals sold 140,000	65 THE LOBSTER HOUSE Cape May, N.J. 2018 sales \$15.3M* Sq footage 49,445 Total seats 550 Avg check \$42* Meals sold 320,000*	66 HARRY CARAY'S ITALIAN STEAKHOUSE Chicago 2018 sales \$15.2M* Sq footage 24,000 Total seats 450 Avg check \$57.50* Meals sold 287,900*	67 JEAN-GEORGES STEAKHOUSE Las Vegas 2018 sales \$15M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 220 Avg check \$118* Meals sold 124,000*	68 15TH STREET FISHERIES Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 2018 sales \$15M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 530 Avg check \$67* Meals sold 341,500*	69 TIMBERLINE STEAKS AND GRILLE Denver 2018 sales \$14.7M Sq footage 4,558 Total seats 158* Avg check \$22.83* Meals sold 642,836*	70 THE BAZAAR BY JOSE ANDRES Beverly Hills, Calif. 2018 sales \$14.6M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 417 Avg check \$100* Meals sold 145,312*	71 ATLANTA FISH MARKET Atlanta 2018 sales \$14.5M Sq footage 12,000 Total seats 425 Avg check \$55 Meals sold 273,000*	72 QUARTINO RISTORANTE & WINE BAR Chicago 2018 sales \$14.5M Sq footage 12,100 Total seats 528 Avg check \$31.19 Meals sold 426,274	73 HUGO'S FROG BAR & FISH HOUSE Chicago 2018 sales \$14.4M Sq footage 14,050 Total seats 398 Avg check \$72.81 Meals sold 189,491	74 CARMINE'S Atlantic City, N.J. 2018 sales \$14.4M Sq footage N/A Total seats 552 Avg check \$36.46 Meals sold 137,331	75 CLIFF HOUSE San Francisco 2018 sales \$14.3M Sq footage 25,000 Total seats 295 Avg check \$63.67 Meals sold 274,809	76 JUNIOR'S New York City (Brooklyn) 2018 sales \$14.2M Sq footage 14,000 Total seats 288 Avg check \$22.78 Meals sold 365,990	77 VIRGIL'S REAL BARBECUE New York City 2018 sales \$13.9M Sq footage N/A Total seats 340 Avg check \$31.22 Meals sold 210,113	78 TAVERN ON RUSH Chicago 2018 sales \$13.8M Sq footage 8,800 Total seats 380* Avg check \$75* Meals sold 364,000	79 FRANCISCAN CRAB RESTAURANT San Francisco 2018 sales \$13.7M Sq footage 12,000 Total seats 326 Avg check \$59 Meals sold 260,000	80 CASTAWAY BURBANK Burbank, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.7M Sq footage N/A Total seats 323 Avg check \$50.78 Meals sold 175,170	81 ROCK CENTER CAFE New York City 2018 sales \$13.6M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 220 Avg check \$61.50* Meals sold 314,000*	82 PARADISE COVE BEACH CAFE Malibu, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.5M Sq footage 7,000 Total seats 290 Avg check \$37.91 Meals sold 357,122*	83 FOUNDING FARMERS McLean, Va. 2018 sales \$13.3M Sq footage 11,525 Total seats 262 Avg check \$38.90 Meals sold 392,353	84 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	85 MATT'S EL RANCHO Austin, Texas 2018 sales \$13.1M Sq footage 10,308 Total seats 410 Avg check \$25 Meals sold 524,588	86 GEORGE'S AT THE COVE La Jolla, Calif. 2018 sales \$13M* Sq footage N/A Total seats 397 Avg check \$87.50* Meals sold 258,000*	87 FARMERS FISHERS BAKERS Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$12.9M Sq footage 9,662 Total seats 273 Avg check \$37.13 Meals sold 378,342	88 THE SOUTHERN STEAK & OYSTER Nashville 2018 sales \$12.8M Sq footage 7,000 Total seats 298 Avg check \$42 Meals sold 361,756	89 BEAUTY & ESSEX Las Vegas 2018 sales \$12.8M* Sq footage 10,000 Total seats 346 Avg check \$92* Meals sold 139,100*	90 LE COUCOU New York City 2018 sales \$12.7M Sq footage 3,800 Total seats 80 Avg check \$126 Meals sold 96,606	91 GIRL & THE GOAT Chicago 2018 sales \$12.7M Sq footage N/A Total seats 156 Avg check \$80 Meals sold 182,500	92 CARMINE'S Las Vegas 2018 sales \$12.7M Sq footage 26,000 Total seats 800 Avg check \$41.58 Meals sold 128,385	93 SCOMA'S San Francisco 2018 sales \$12.5M* Sq footage 15,000 Total seats 300 Avg check \$60* Meals sold 292,000*	94 CARMINE'S Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$12.2M Sq footage 26,000 Total seats 685 Avg check \$36.60 Meals sold 147,748	95 FARMERS & DISTILLERS Washington, D.C. 2018 sales \$11.9M Sq footage 13,190 Total seats 321 Avg check \$38.33 Meals sold 359,605	96 HARRY & IZZY'S CIRCLE CENTRE Indianapolis 2018 sales \$11.8M Sq footage 8,500 Total seats 300* Avg check \$65.38 Meals sold 110,000*	97 ORIGINAL JOE'S San Francisco 2018 sales \$11.8M Sq footage 7,815 Total seats 281 Avg check \$47.40 Meals sold 252,180*	98 WHISKEY JOE'S TAMPA Tampa, Fla. 2018 sales \$11.8M Sq footage 11,000 Total seats 419 Avg check \$40.87 Meals sold 270,766	99 FOUNDING FARMERS King of Prussia, Pa. 2018 sales \$11.6M Sq footage 14,046 Total seats 321 Avg check \$35.78 Meals sold 394,297	100 URBAN FARMER Portland, Ore. 2018 sales \$11.6M Sq footage 2,341 Total seats 139 Avg check \$79.70 Meals sold 146,282	METHODOLOGY RB's Top 100 Independents ranking is a measure of the highest-grossing independent restaurants. Restaurant concepts with no more than five locations are considered "independents" for this list (although it's possible a restaurant that shares a name with a chain but is owned and operated separately would qualify, such as Smith & Wollensky in New York City). Rankings are based on gross 2018 food and beverage sales. Information was gathered through surveys. When data wasn't provided, sales were estimated based on public information, similar concepts and other factors.	101 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	102 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	103 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	104 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	105 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	106 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	107 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	108 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	109 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	110 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	111 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	112 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	113 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	114 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	115 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	116 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	117 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	118 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	119 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	120 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	121 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	122 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	123 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	124 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	125 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	126 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	127 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	128 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	129 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	130 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	131 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	132 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	133 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	134 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	135 BOA STEAKHOUSE West Hollywood, Calif. 2018 sales \$13.2M Sq footage 12,500 Total seats 349 Avg check \$105 Meals sold 159,544*	136 BOA STEAKHOUSE
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RESTAURANT	CITY	RANK	2018 SALES
15th Street Fisheries	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	68	\$15M*
Abe & Louie's	Boston	35	\$18.3M
Acme Feed & Seed	Nashville	60	\$16.1M
Angus Barn	Raleigh, N.C.	15	\$22.8M*
Atlanta Fish Market	Atlanta	71	\$14.5M
Balthazar	New York City	8	\$25.1M*
Bazaar Meat by Jose Andres	Las Vegas	21	\$20.8M*
Beauty & Essex	Las Vegas	89	\$12.8M*
Beauty & Essex	New York City	51	\$16.7M*
BOA Steakhouse	West Hollywood, Calif.	84	\$13.2M
Bob Chinn's Crab House	Wheeling, Ill.	33	\$18.5M
Bottega Louie	Los Angeles	27	\$19.3M
Bryant Park Grill & Cafe	New York City	9	\$24.7M
Buddakan	New York City	20	\$21.2M
Carmine's	Atlantic City, N.J.	74	\$14.4M
Carmine's	Las Vegas	92	\$12.7M
Carmine's	Washington, D.C.	94	\$12.2M
Carmine's (Times Square)	New York City	2	\$36.9M
Castaway Burbank	Burbank, Calif.	80	\$13.7M
Chicago Cut Steakhouse	Chicago	41	\$17.8M*
Chops Lobster Bar	Atlanta	46	\$17.3M
Cliff House	San Francisco	75	\$14.3M
Del Posto	New York City	29	\$18.8M
Delmonico Steakhouse	Las Vegas	58	\$16.4M*
Farmers & Distillers	Washington, D.C.	95	\$11.9M
Farmers Fishers Bakers	Washington, D.C.	87	\$12.9M
Founding Farmers	Washington, D.C.	37	\$18.2M
Founding Farmers	King of Prussia, Pa.	99	\$11.6M
Founding Farmers	McLean, Va.	83	\$13.3M
Franciscan Crab Restaurant	San Francisco	79	\$13.7M
Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn	Frankenmuth, Mich.	48	\$17M
George's at the Cove	La Jolla, Calif.	86	\$13M*
Gibsons Bar & Steakhouse	Chicago	7	\$25.2M
Gibsons Bar & Steakhouse	Oak Brook, Ill.	30	\$18.7M
Gibsons Bar & Steakhouse	Rosemont, Ill.	32	\$18.7M
Gibsons Italia	Chicago	24	\$20.4M
Girl & the Goat	Chicago	91	\$12.7M
Grand Central Oyster Bar	New York City	52	\$16.7M*
Harris Ranch Inn & Restaurant	Coalinga, Calif.	45	\$17.3M
Harry & Izzy's Circle Centre	Indianapolis	96	\$11.8M
Harry Caray's Italian Steakhouse	Chicago	66	\$15.2M*
Hugo's Frog Bar & Fish House	Chicago	73	\$14.4M
Jean-Georges Steakhouse	Las Vegas	67	\$15M*
Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab	Washington, D.C.	14	\$22.9M*
Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab	Chicago	16	\$22.6M*
Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab	Las Vegas	18	\$22.3M*
Joe's Stone Crab	Miami Beach, Fla.	1	\$38.4M
Junior's (49th Street)	New York City	53	\$16.6M
Junior's (Times Square)	New York City	10	\$23.7M
Junior's (Brooklyn)	New York City	76	\$14.2M

RESTAURANT	CITY	RANK	2018 SALES
Keens Steakhouse	New York City	59	\$16.3M*
Komodo	Miami	17	\$22.5M
Lavo Italian Restaurant & Lounge	Las Vegas	54	\$16.6M*
Lavo Italian Restaurant & Nightclub	New York City	5	\$27.5M*
Le Coucou	New York City	90	\$12.7M
Le Diplomate	Washington, D.C.	44	\$17.4M
Makoto	Bal Harbour, Fla.	61	\$16.1M
Maple & Ash	Chicago	12	\$23.6M
Matt's El Rancho	Austin, Texas	85	\$13.1M
Mon Ami Gabi	Las Vegas	38	\$18.1M*
Morimoto Asia	Orlando, Fla.	57	\$16.5M*
Old Ebbitt Grill	Washington, D.C.	4	\$33.3M
Original Joe's	San Francisco	97	\$11.8M
Original Joe's Westlake	Daly City, Calif.	55	\$16.6M
Paddlefish	Orlando, Fla.	25	\$20M*
Paradise Cove Beach Cafe	Malibu, Calif.	82	\$13.5M
Parc	Philadelphia	34	\$18.4M
Portland City Grill	Portland, Ore.	56	\$16.5M
Prime & Provisions	Chicago	64	\$15.3M
Prime 112	Miami Beach, Fla.	11	\$23.6M
Prime Steakhouse	Las Vegas	47	\$17.1M*
Quality Italian	New York City	40	\$17.8M
Quality Meats	New York City	28	\$19.2M
Quartino Ristorante & Wine Bar	Chicago	72	\$14.5M
Rock Center Cafe	New York City	81	\$13.6M*
RPM Steak	Chicago	22	\$20.7M*
Rusty Pelican	Miami	49	\$16.9M
Scoma's	San Francisco	93	\$12.5M*
Shaw's Crab House	Chicago	42	\$17.7M*
Shooters Waterfront	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	39	\$18M
Smith & Wollensky	New York City	6	\$25.5M
Sparks Steak House	New York City	36	\$18.2M*
St. Elmo Steak House	Indianapolis	26	\$20M
SW Steakhouse	Las Vegas	23	\$20.6M*
Swift & Sons	Chicago	50	\$16.8M
Taste of Texas	Houston	31	\$18.7M
Tavern on Rush	Chicago	78	\$13.8M
Tavern on the Green	New York City	43	\$17.6M*
The Bazaar by Jose Andres	Beverly Hills, Calif.	70	\$14.6M*
The Boathouse	Orlando, Fla.	3	\$35.5M
The Hamilton	Washington, D.C.	19	\$21.9M
The Lobster House	Cape May, N.J.	65	\$15.3M*
The Rustic Inn	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	62	\$16M
The Southern Steak & Oyster	Nashville	88	\$12.8M
Timberline Steaks and Grille	Denver	69	\$14.7M
Urban Farmer	Portland, Ore.	100	\$11.6M
Vandal	New York City	13	\$23.5M*
Virgil's Real Barbecue	New York City	77	\$13.9M
Whiskey Joe's Tampa	Tampa, Fla.	98	\$11.8M
Zehnder's of Frankenmuth	Frankenmuth, Mich.	63	\$15.8M

STAYING AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME

Putting up big numbers year after year is a challenge, but operators of these 100 restaurants have cracked the code.

BY MEGAN ROWE

#35 \ Abe & Louie's
Midwestern steaks and fresh seafood are the stars at this Boston restaurant and its Boca Raton, Fla., sibling.

Steak sizzles

About a quarter of the restaurants in the Top 100 are known primarily as steakhouses. This is one category where indies have a definite edge, especially in the fine-dining niche. High-end chain steak concepts registered 3% sales gains last year, while their independent counterparts saw nearly 5.5% growth, according to Technomic.



Sky-high success

The almost overnight success of the highest-debating concept on the Top 100, No. 24 Gibsons Italia (pictured), surprised even the owners. Gibsons Restaurant Group took a chance opening Gibsons Italia in the fall of 2017. The four-story, 190-seat complex (plus 105 bar and 92 private dining seats) sits in an office/residential tower in a transitional neighborhood on the Chicago River that was once an industrial area—not exactly prime territory for a restaurant. But the skyline view is considered among the best in town. The Lombardo family reckoned the site would do well at weekday lunch, happy hour and early dinners. But weekends? Not so much. Surprise: Saturday night reservations are nearly impossible to get. The result was a \$20 million-plus first full year—well beyond projections. “Does the food taste a little better because of that view? Maybe,” says partner Steve Lombardo III.

At tight labor market, mandated wage increases and markets flooded with new competitors have wreaked havoc on many restaurants’ bottom lines. Despite all that, operators ranked among this year’s Top 100 Independents generally figured out how to beat last year’s numbers, fill staffing gaps and even branch out and grow.

For Alicart Restaurant Group, which has five restaurants in the Top 100 (four Carmine’s and one Virgil’s Real Barbecue), rising wages and rent are always nipping at the heels of profit. “We’re fighting a battle, trying not to raise menu prices to cover our rent,” says COO Randy Talbot. The two New York City Carmine’s are considered icons, and that has helped in lease negotiations because property owners like to have a traffic magnet. Alicart’s approach to covering rent increases is to squeeze more out of every seat; more efficient seating practices and slightly extended hours have helped. “We use a lot of technology, and we’re very focused on getting the staff to be better salespeople,” Talbot says. “We’re also relying on delivery and off-site orders to get more business.”

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ABE & LOUIE'S AND GIBSONS ITALIA

Loyalty in the workforce

In Nashville, new restaurant and hotel openings are outpacing the area's population growth, says Lauren Morales, COO of TomKats Hospitality Group, which operates Acme Feed & Seed (No. 60) and The Southern Steak & Oyster (No. 88). All those new projects are dipping into the same well of talent, so established operators do what they can to hold onto their best players.

TomKats focuses on staff recognition through perks such as half-off dining discounts, family meals, shoutouts, birthday celebrations and gift cards for good reviews. But health insurance for the entire staff, from busers up to managers, creates the most loyalty. "A lot of employees have said they stick around because of that," Morales says. TomKats also offers a 401(k).

Gibsons Restaurant Group, with seven Top 100 concepts (three Gibsons Bar & Steakhouse locations, Gibsons Italia, Quartino and Hugo's Frog Bar, all in the Chicago area; and The Boathouse in Orlando, Fla., which it manages) boasts a team turnover rate of 45.6%, about half the industry average. Partner Stephen Lombardo III points

to careful vetting of potential hires, above-average pay, generous benefits and a stable company reputation—Gibsons has never closed a restaurant—as factors in staff loyalty. "When we find people whose values line up with our values and who have a service mentality, they tend to stay longer," he says.

Chris Cuomo, director of operations for Groot Hospitality (No. 17 Komodo), agrees that careful vetting of potential employees is essential. At Groot, that means checking references and not hiring in a hurry—no easy task when hundreds of candidates are being vetted for a new restaurant. Competitive salaries, weekly paychecks and the ability to offer a career path—Groot just opened a new restaurant in Miami Beach and is developing four additional restaurants—also encourage loyalty. "We sat down with some of our line cooks and explained, 'If this is what you want to do, in the next 12 months we will have up to 16 new sous chef openings,'" Cuomo says.

"Pay will get employees 65%-70% of the way happy; another 30% is scheduling and knowing they can get 40 hours a week, and 10% is about the culture that you build. People want to be happy where they work," he says.

"Five years ago, if we advertised for a hostess, there would be 10 wonderful

Finding staffers

The labor shortage remains a top challenge, even for the most well-trafficked restaurant operations. Here's how some of these winning independents are addressing hiring and retention.

GIRL & THE GOAT

We are addressing this through a combination of recruiting initiatives—how employment ads read, how benefits are messaged outside of the organization, presence at job and recruitment fairs, referral bonuses, etc.

FRANKENMUTH BAVARIAN INN

Increasing wages, established premium pay on weekends, established tuition reimbursement program.

PORTLAND CITY GRILL

We focus on the culture to ensure that we are a very positive and professional workplace.

TAVERN ON RUSH

Using different online platforms and social media for recruitment.

FARMERS FISHERS BAKERS

Working on bettering recruiting strategy, and offering best benefits possible to recruit and retain top talent.

WHISKEY JOE'S TAMPA

Promoting from within with an emphasis on improved training and retention. ... Emphasis on quality of life, yearly reviews, benefits and advancement opportunities.

SHOOTERS WATERFRONT

We have a very structured system of continuous development for our team in every position.



people lined up,” says Lee Maen, founder and partner of Innovative Dining Group (IDG), operator of BOA Steakhouse (No. 84). Those days are gone. Finding new help has gotten harder and pricier, “and you can’t raise prices enough to equate to the increased labor costs,” he says. To prevent staff from straying but keep a lid on wages, he says IDG restaurants work on operating more efficiently and pay the top performers more. “The best person can do 125% of what someone else does, so you can have fewer people,” Maen reasons. Service charges, where legal, have helped defray some of the additional labor costs, as have strategic menu price hikes.

Menu moves

For IDG, survival often translates to innovation. In the case of BOA Steakhouse, the most successful menu update in 2018 was the addition of a vegan menu section. “More and more people are going vegan or thinking about it, and LA is a hot spot for that,” says Maen. “We saw the demand from both vegans and people who just want to try it out, and we said, ‘Why not offer them the BOA experience?’”

Vegan menu choices include plant-based Impossible chili burgers, chiles rellenos and lasagna made with a dehydrated olive oil standing in for Parmesan. The additions have been so well-received that IDG is working on ways to expand the choices and incorporate more plant-based fare at other concepts. The company’s Japanese-themed Sushi Roku, Katana and Roku, for instance, now offer a vegan omakase option, which started as a special but worked its way into the regular rotation. And the innovation doesn’t stop there: IDG has been testing a mocktail menu that will be rolled out at all of its restaurants.

“Certain things will never change,” Maen acknowledges. “But people want to try new things, and new generations eat differently.”

Cuomo of Groot says opening three new concepts in the Miami area, where it already operates seven restaurants and nightclubs, means considering new directions

Most successful menu additions



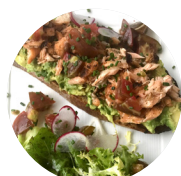
TASTE OF TEXAS

Crab stick appetizer

Chilled fresh Hass avocado tossed in habanero herb vinaigrette with fresh mango, topped with jumbo lump crab meat



GIRL & THE GOAT
Wood-fired lamb skewer



CLIFF HOUSE
Avocado toast with mesquite-charred salmon belly



RUSTY PELICAN
Negroni Week



WHISKEY JOE'S TAMPA
Fire-grilled oysters



SOUTHERN STEAK & OYSTER
Seared sea scallops with corn maque choux, cherry tomatoes, mole verde and candied bacon



KOMODO
Truffled honey salmon (with shiso, shaved truffle)



ACME FEED & SEED
Smoked brisket quesadilla with jalapeno gouda and sauteed onions and peppers



PRIME 112
Kobe beef dumplings (with sweet chile aioli, soy vinaigrette)

Managing costs

Given rising overhead and increased competition from both restaurants and retail operations, these top operators share how they are keeping costs under control.

CARMINE'S TIMES SQUARE

Had to cut back internal delivery service and use third-party delivery services; delivery is up 18%.

JUNIOR'S BROADWAY

Tighter scheduling, cross-training.

VIRGIL'S REAL BBQ

Using third-party delivery services has had big returns. Delivery is up 36%.

FRANCISCAN CRAB RESTAURANT

Managing staff schedules.

TAVERN ON RUSH

Minimum wage continues to rise in Chicago with the fight for \$15. We're constantly looking for ways to cut costs, whether it's regarding labor, food costs, marketing, etc.

PARADISE COVE BEACH CAFE

Keeping up with rising labor costs while trying to stay affordable to our middle market guest base.

KOMODO

We try to manage our costs by monitoring through daily labor productivity reports, food and beverage cost tracking, an internal maintenance team, P&L recap meetings, etc., to ensure the management team is aware of the revenue, costs and profitability of the business they are managing.

for menus and overall themes. “We study the market and look for areas where there are gaps,” he says. Groot’s current portfolio includes nightclubs, a modern European restaurant, an Asian concept and a coffee shop, among other spots. A New York-style steakhouse, Papi Steak, recently opened in Miami Beach. In the works are sushi/fried chicken, diner and dessert cafe concepts, along with a Dallas location of Komodo.

“We want people to be able to go to all of our venues and not get tired of them,” Cuomo says.

Knowing—and growing—their niche

Having a well-developed identity has helped some of the highest-grossing operators thrive. Alicart is known for its consistency (No. 2 Carmine’s has had the same menu for 27 years) and good value, and its dining areas are purposely

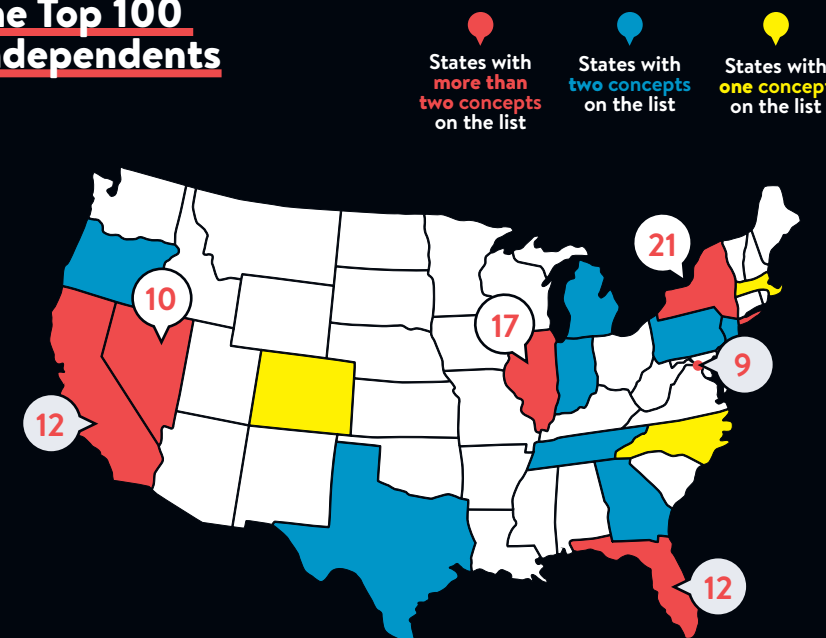
designed to accommodate groups.

“At a lot of restaurants, you get the sense that you’re meant to just eat, and you get rushed out in 50 or 55 minutes. That’s called eating to survive,” COO Talbot says. “If you come to one of our restaurants, you’ll see large tables. You rarely see deuces or four tops. People are eating to celebrate.”

A local experience drives some of high-volume restaurants’ success. “Ten years ago, everyone wanted to see a celebrity chef,” Cuomo says. “Now people want locally driven spots that they can’t go to in other markets.” In Nashville, where a rash of new restaurants “can make it tough to shine amid the clutter,” Morales agrees that authentic food, music and cocktails help TomKats’ concepts stay competitive. “We have the flexibility to make it hospitality first and make it real Nashville,” she says.

Lombardo says Gibsons management debates whether it’s smarter to follow trends or stick with the tried and true—and tried and true usually wins. “Our real philosophy: We have one job, to make every customer leave happy,” he says. An empowered staff bends over backwards to

Mapping the Top 100 Independents





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TOP 100 INDEPENDENTS



**#61 \ Makoto ** Playful, innovative takes on Japanese classics draw fans to this Bal Harbour, Fla., spot.

accommodate requests, even if it means sending out for something that's not on the menu to placate a picky eater, and they are rewarded for their efforts.

Despite the fact that the original Gibsons opened 30 years ago, the group doesn't rest on its reputation. In Chicago, which has an estimated 60 steakhouses alone, the competition is fierce, so the company reinvests in facilities to make sure restaurants stay fresh, neat and clean. That includes changes as small as upgrading steak knives.

Going forward, expect to see the Gibsons brands pivot beyond its home base of Chicago. A Quartino is poised to open in the Grandscape lifestyle center north of Dallas. The group is also considering Dallas proper, Nashville, Washington, D.C., and Florida. These markets, Lombardo says, tend to have lower taxes, fewer regulations and a more welcoming attitude toward business. "They all happen to be booming markets, and I don't think the two are unrelated," he says.

The sheer capacity of Alicart's typical facility—at least 400 seats—limits where it can expand, but Talbot says the company is scouting possible locations in Boston and Philadelphia. Regardless of where the company opens, success boils down to a simple formula, he says: "Keep it simple, offer value, provide great service and keep it food-centric, because people are going out to have great food."

By the numbers

\$194

Highest average check
#29 \ DEL POSTO

\$16.80

Lowest average check
#63 \ ZEHNDER'S OF FRANKENMUTH

13

Number of concepts new to the ranking

8

Number of restaurants in the Miami/Fort Lauderdale area

1,013,433

Most meals served

#4 \ OLD EBBITT GRILL

27

Number of multiconcept operators with restaurants on the ranking

No. 1

Top 100 Independent operators named wages as their top worry for 2020. Workforce quality is also a large concern for them, as is competition from retail.