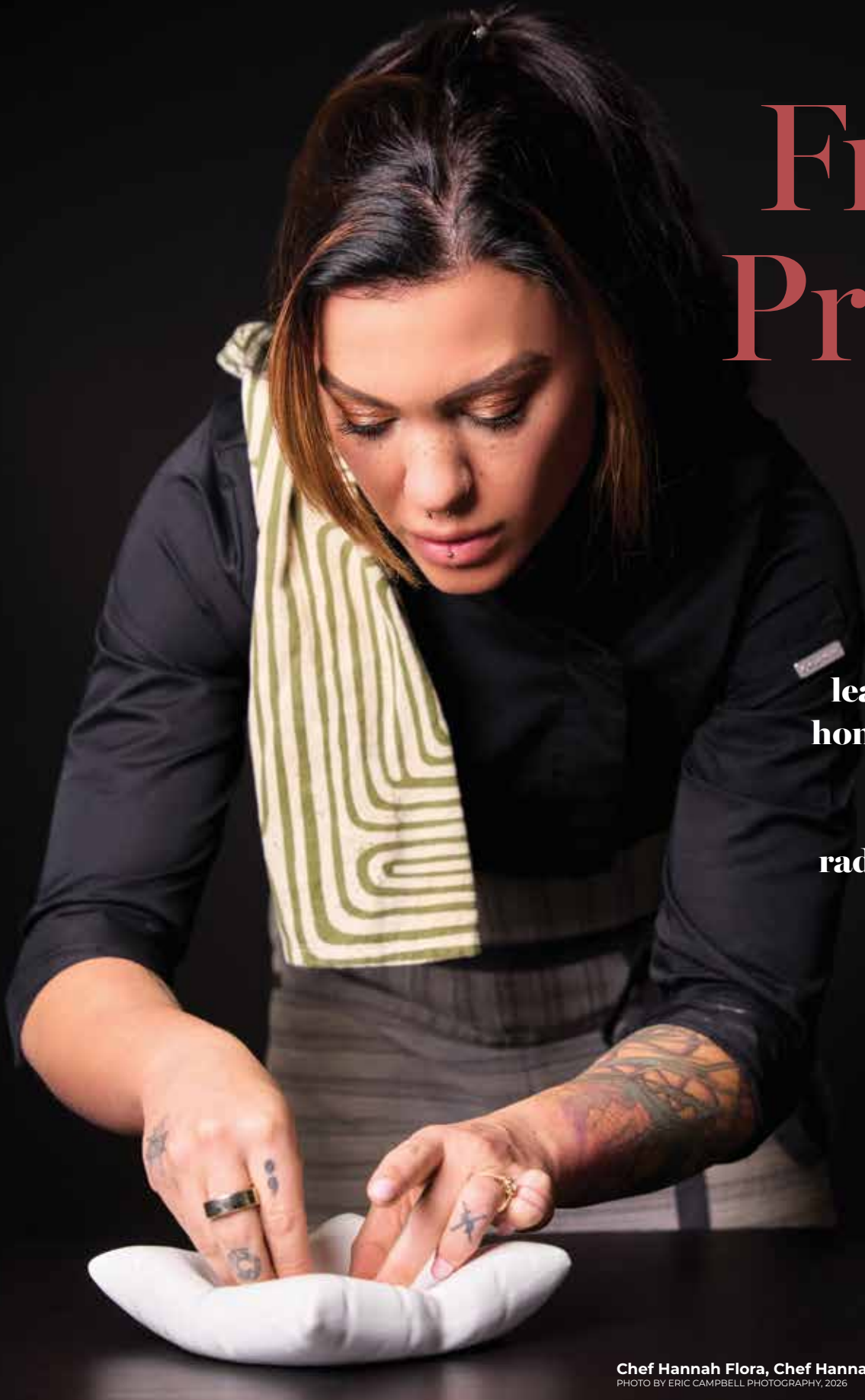




From Prime Rib

**“True culinary
leadership means
honoring tradition
with one hand
while driving
radical innovation
with the other.”**

—Chef Hannah Flora

Chef Hannah Flora, Chef Hannah Flora Enterprises
PHOTO BY ERIC CAMPBELL PHOTOGRAPHY, 2026



to Precision

The Evolution of Club Dining

BY CHEF HANNAH FLORA AND DIANA DELUCIA

FOR DECADES, club dining carried a predictable reputation. Prime rib on Fridays, lobster on Thursdays, overcooked salmon specials, iceberg wedge salads and menus designed more around tradition than innovation. Country clubs were once known for consistency and comfort, but rarely culinary excitement.

Today, however, a dramatic shift is taking place. Across the hospitality world, private clubs are evolving from conservative dining rooms into refined culinary destinations that rival upscale Michelin star restaurants, innovative pop-ups, and immersive wine dinners.

A Sixteen-Year Lens on a Rapid Evolution

Perspective by Diana DeLucia

When I photographed my first private club kitchen 16 years ago, the landscape looked very different. Many clubs still lived in the era of “prime rib Fridays” and “lobster Thursdays”—menus built around predictability rather than possibility. Kitchens were hidden behind swinging doors, chefs were rarely visible to members and the idea of a club being a culinary destination was still in its infancy.

Even then, I could sense a quiet shift beginning. A handful of chefs were experimenting with sous vide, housemade charcuterie or farm partnerships long before these ideas became mainstream. As I traveled from club to club, documenting their stories, I watched that spark turn into a movement.

What was once a conservative dining model has transformed into what Hannah describes as “refined culinary destinations that rival upscale Michelin-star quality restaurants.” I have witnessed this evolution plate by plate, chef by chef, club by club — and it has been nothing short of extraordinary.



“The modern club member no longer wants ‘safe.’ They want experiences.”

—Chef Hannah Flora

Michael Mignano,
Weeburn Country Club
PHOTO BY DIANA DELUCIA, 2025

The Generational Balancing Act: Core vs. Carousel Menu Design

Perspective by Chef Hannah Flora

The classic “Club Grub” will always remain on the menu as a safe, familiar option for those not interested in something new.

Achieving a healthy balance between new and classic cuisine is the foundational hurdle of the modern club kitchen.

A younger generation of members has entered the club scene with elevated expectations shaped by travel, social media and exposure to worldclass dining. Members now crave chef-driven menus, seasonal ingredients, tasting experiences, craft cocktails, openfire cooking and presentation that tells a story.

To bridge this generational gap, clubs need to rethink menu engineering from the ground up. We cannot alienate the legacy members who built the club, but we cannot deprive the incoming generation of the culinary excitement they crave.

The Core and Carousel Framework

- ◆ **The Core:** A permanent, impeccably executed footprint of club classics.
- ◆ **The Carousel:** A rapidly changing, highly creative, seasonal à la carte menu that pushes boundaries.

Actionable Takeaways for Club Leaders

- ◆ Implement a 60/40 Menu Split.
- ◆ Audit and Elevate the Classics.
- ◆ Track Trial Rates Through POS Data.



Javier Burgos, Veggy Cocktails
PHOTO BY RICARDO MEJIA

Precision Operations: Leveraging the Private Club Advantage

Integrated Perspectives

Some of the most exciting culinary innovations in hospitality are happening behind the gates of private clubs. Unlike standalone restaurants battling turnover and razor-thin margins, clubs have a built-in clientele and financial stability that allow for creativity and experimentation.

From my vantage point as a photographer and storyteller, I’ve seen this stability empower chefs to take risks they couldn’t in a traditional restaurant setting. I’ve watched clubs invest in dry aging rooms, fermentation labs, microgreen programs, and hyperlocal sourcing pipelines — all because they have the data, the membership loyalty, and the operational predictability to support it.

Immersive Architecture: Designing the Interactive Dining Scene

Integrated Perspectives

Sixteen years ago, most club kitchens were hidden. Today, members want to see the artistry, the fire, the sweat, the craft. As Hannah writes, “If your kitchen is still hidden behind a set of swinging wooden doors, your club is living in the past.”

I've witnessed this architectural evolution firsthand:

- ◆ Open-concept display kitchens.
- ◆ Visible dry aging cabinets.
- ◆ Woodfired hearths.
- ◆ Chef's counters.
- ◆ Outdoor culinary pavilions.
- ◆ Food-truck style popups on the turn.

These spaces didn't exist when I started. Now they define the club dining experience.

Cultivating the Brigade: Attracting and Empowering NextGen Talent

Perspective by Chef Hannah Flora

The club world is no longer where culinary careers go to retire — it's where ambitious young chefs come to build their empires. But to attract and retain them, clubs must build antiburnout cultures, empower creativity, and abandon outdated brigade models.

"The club world is no longer where culinary careers go to retire — it's where the most ambitious young chefs are coming to build their empires."

— Chef Hannah Flora.

"I've met so many young chefs who found their voice in the club world. Stability gives them room to grow; mentorship gives them direction; creativity gives them purpose."

— Diana DeLucia.

The Strategic Leadership Round Table: Adapting to Survive

Integrated Perspectives

The clubs that succeed will be the ones willing to evolve, take risks, and treat dining not as an amenity but as a destination. This requires absolute alignment between the GM, COO, board, and executive chef.

Clubs that thrive are the ones where

leadership trusts the culinary vision — and participates in it. When boards taste the food, understand the strategy, and champion the chef, transformation accelerates.

"Complacency is the silent killer of private clubs."

— Chef Hannah Flora.

"The clubs that succeed are the ones where the GM, the board, and the chef speak the same language. When leadership aligns, the culinary program becomes unstoppable."

— Diana DeLucia.

The New Standard of Private Club Excellence

The private club industry stands at a historical crossroads. Shifting from predictable tradition to modern culinary artistry requires structural, cultural and philosophical change — but the clubs that embrace this evolution will define the next era of hospitality.

"We have the financial stability, the member loyalty, and the talent pool necessary to rewrite the rules of hospitality."

— Chef Hannah Flora.

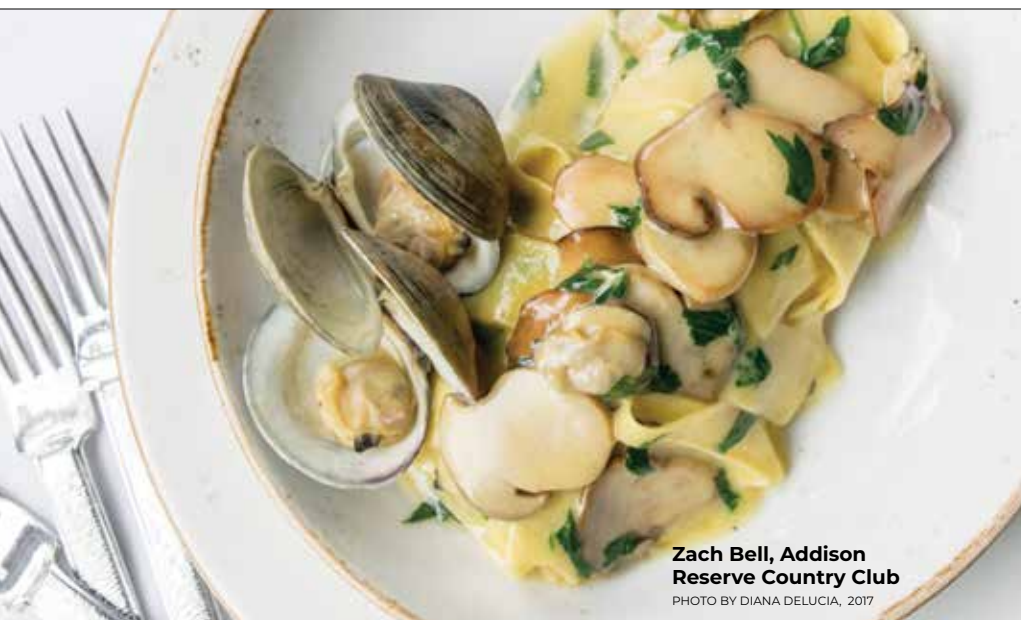
"Sixteen years ago, I photographed mostly closed kitchens.

Today, the most exciting clubs are the ones that put the culinary team on stage — literally. Transparency has become part of the experience."

—Diana DeLucia



Matthew Gilbert, Medinah Country Club
PHOTO BY NICK NOVELLI, 2026.



Zach Bell, Addison Reserve Country Club
PHOTO BY DIANA DELUCIA, 2017

“I’ve witnessed this evolution for sixteen years, and I can say with certainty: the clubs that embrace this moment will define the next era of private dining.”

— Diana DeLucia.

Call to Action for Clubs: Lead the Culinary Evolution

The evolution of club dining will not happen by accident — it requires bold, intentional leadership from every seat at the table. The clubs that thrive in the next decade will be the ones that recognize dining not as an amenity, but as a strategic engine for culture, recruitment, retention and longterm relevance.

For General Managers and COOs

Empower your chefs. Treat your food and beverage program as a strategic investment, not a cost center. Champion innovation, protect creative bandwidth, and ensure your culinary leaders have the tools, trust, and resources to elevate the member experience.

For Executive Chefs and Culinary Leaders

Stop playing it safe. Push boundaries, mentor your brigade, and bring restaurant level execution to the club world every day.



Javier Burgos, Veggy Cocktails
PHOTO BY RICARDO MEJIA

Your creativity is now a primary driver of member loyalty — own that influence.

For Boards and F&B Committees

Be advocates, not gatekeepers. Taste the vision before you judge it. Support calculated risks. Help guide your membership toward a more dynamic, experience-driven future.

“I’ve watched clubs evolve from playing it safe to embracing boldness. When leadership trusts the chef, the food becomes extraordinary — and the membership responds in kind.”

—Diana DeLucia

For the Entire Leadership Round Table

Align, communicate, and evolve together.

The most successful clubs are those where the GM, the board, and the executive chef operate as a unified force — protecting the budget, defending the vision, and championing the club’s culinary identity.

The Moment Is Now

Private clubs have financial stability, the member loyalty, and the talent pool to redefine what hospitality looks like in the modern era. The tools are already in your kitchens — the courage must come from your leadership.

Take action. Take risks. Take your culinary program from predictable to unforgettable.

Your members are ready. Your chefs are ready. The future of club dining is already here — make sure your club leads it. 

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