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## Jet Blue Banks on Travelers' Worldly Appetites

By FLORENCE FABRICANT  
Published: July 30, 2008

ARRIVING at the airport an hour or two before departure has become routine; so have long delays before boarding.

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Ezra Stoller/Esto

**WHITE GLOVE ERA** T.W.A.'s terminal at what was then Idlewild Airport, in 1962. A new Jet Blue terminal nearby will offer several restaurants.

What can the traveler do to pass the time? Jet Blue is hoping passengers in its Terminal 5 at Kennedy Airport will want to eat. And not just nachos, pretzels or hot dogs.

When the new terminal, built behind the swooping, landmarked terminal designed by [Eero Saarinen](#) for T.W.A., opens late in September, travelers will have their pick of a number of serious restaurants with respected New York chefs, though not the usual marquee names, as consultants.

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Mark Ladner of Del Posto will be responsible for AeroNuova, a rustic Italian trattoria. Michael Schulson, who left Buddakan for Izakaya in Atlantic City, is in charge of the menu for Deep Blue, a sushi and Asian restaurant. Riad Nasr and Lee Hanson, the longtime executive chefs for Balthazar and Pastis, are responsible for a brasserie called La Vie. Alexandra Raji, who was at Tia Pol until May, is creating a tapas menu for Piquillo. And Roberto Santibañez, formerly of Rosa Mexicano restaurants, will oversee the food for Revolución.

The restaurants will offer a break from the sports-bar atmosphere of many airport venues, but that is not to say they will be formal. Much of the seating will be at counters or communal tables, without fancy linens. Some will have open kitchens and reservations will not be taken. The style will be similar to that of many of Manhattan's more popular restaurants.

Rick Blatstein, the chairman of OTG Management, a Philadelphia-based company that will own and operate the restaurants in Terminal 5, called the chef-driven restaurants "a gamble, a calculated risk." But it is a risk that a growing number of airlines are willing to take when they renovate and upgrade their terminals.

"Passengers have the time," said Stephen Freibrun, a principal with SH&E, an airport and aviation consulting company. "The airlines are interested in having them go from an average of \$4.50 for fast food to \$12.50 or more. They have to supplement their loss of revenues due to higher costs by growing non-travel revenues. The more money that's generated in the terminal, the less fees the airlines have to pay."

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Mr. Freibrun said that well-known chefs can imbue airport dining with "a sense of theater." As examples, he cited Todd English and [Wolfgang Puck](#) restaurants in the United States, and the new [Gordon Ramsay](#) restaurant, Plane Food, at Heathrow's Terminal 5 near London. Dinner for two there can cost about \$140 (although local critics have been underwhelmed).

[American Airlines](#), at its new Terminal 8 at Kennedy Airport, is hoping to make a positive impression on what Ned Reynolds, a spokesman, called "the premium passenger," namely the international and transcontinental flyer. "We are doing a lot at J.F.K. to serve them and cater to their diverse tastes," he said. A martini bar and a clone of the O'Neals' near [Lincoln Center](#) have already opened there, and Bobby Van's Steakhouse is coming this fall, white tablecloths and all.

Jet Blue estimates that 20 million travelers will pass through Terminal 5 annually, and expects around 65 percent of them to buy something to eat or drink. Besides the chef-driven restaurants, their choices will include a steakhouse, a French bakery-cafe, a sports grill and a food hall with burgers, Asian food, pizza and kosher choices. Dining areas at the gates will be equipped with computer terminals so travelers can order food to be delivered to tables and check e-mail while waiting for flights.

Mr. Blatstein said that people who walk into an airport expect the worst. "We want to blow your mind," he said.

It's not a new idea. Back in 1953, Joseph Baum was hired by Restaurant Associates to create a restaurant at the newly opened Newark Airport. The Newarker set tables with fine china and linen. By 1955 it was turning a profit. But those were the days when flying was a special occasion: women wore stockings and heels and men put on jackets. The Newarker became a destination restaurant where 90 percent of the customers were nontravelers.

The Terminal 5 restaurants will be located behind the security checkpoints, making it impossible for anyone who is not taking a Jet Blue flight to dine there. Mr. Blatstein said that most travelers have 60 to 90 minutes to spare once they have cleared security. "We'd like to see dining at the terminal become part of a traveler's plans, especially if your plane is delayed," he said.

Mr. Freibrun said that, in the past, travelers had a fear of flying. Then, after Sept. 11, they had fears about security. "Now," he said, "they have a fear of being left hungry on a plane that doesn't serve food or is delayed somehow."

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