

Celebrity backed restaurants sweep across North America

In a competitive market, having a famous face helps cut through the clutter.



Research

North America

May 2024


jll.com



Table of contents

This report is interactive!

Click on the topics to go straight to that section.

To come back to this page, use  located in the top right corner of each page.

01

Four key takeaways about celebrity restaurants

02

Celebrity restaurant openings aren't slowing down

03

Driven by passion, camaraderie and money

04

Celebrities are a marketing gold mine

05

Fame drives tourist traffic

06

Fame opens doors, but it doesn't close deals

07

Notable celebrity foodies

08

Owner or licensor?

09

A famous face in the burger crowd

10

Nashville delivers a string of Country star concepts

11

Lower Broad's Greatest Hits

12

For some unscripted series, the restaurant is the show

13

Las Vegas hotels bank on celebrity food draw

14

Local stars: the next generation

Four key takeaways about celebrity restaurants

1

361 celebrity restaurants opened in five years

We identified 361 restaurant openings in the U.S. and Canada by famous folks from 2019 through 2024. This includes celebrity chefs, actors and musicians.

2

Openings took off in 2021

Celebrity restaurant openings doubled from 2020 to 2021, at a time where overall U.S. restaurant openings only increased by 13 percent.*

3

Celebrity restaurants are tourist attractions

Celebrity restaurants are often driven to popular tourist corridors like Las Vegas Boulevard and Nashville's Lower Broadway.

4

Chefs and actors opened 69% of celebrity restaurants

37% of the restaurant openings in our study were made by celebrity chefs. 32% were backed by actors.

*JLL analysis of Yelp trend data.





Celebrity restaurant openings aren't slowing down

The restaurant industry is hot. There were 1,832 new U.S. planned restaurant openings announced in the first quarter of 2024 alone. *In this competitive atmosphere, attracting investors, appealing to landlords and connecting with customers is a big challenge. Celebrities have the advantage of name recognition and legions of loyal fans.

This may be one reason why celebrity restaurant openings took a big leap in 2021 and have not significantly subsided.

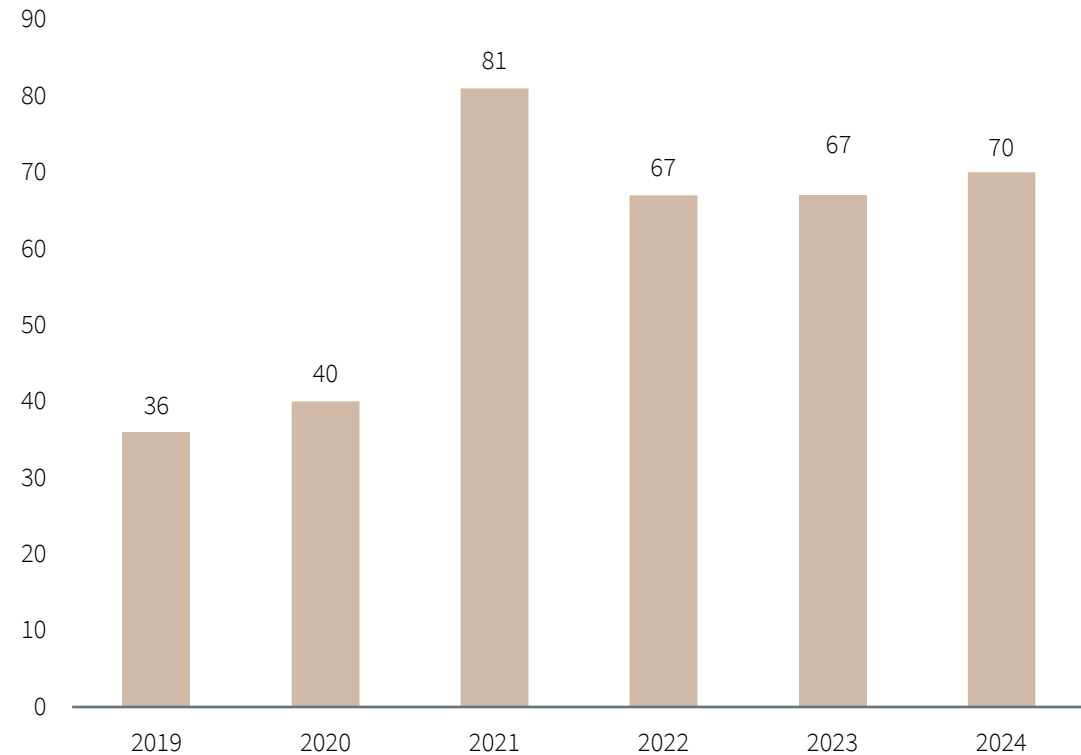
- 2021 saw more than twice the number of celebrity-backed restaurant openings than 2020.
- The total number of U.S. restaurant openings increased by only 13 percent in the same period.**

*JLL analysis of chain restaurant opening announcements

**JLL analysis of Yelp trend data.

Celebrity-backed restaurant openings in the U.S. and Canada

New stores added



Source: JLL analysis of new openings of quick service, fast casual and full-service restaurants backed by celebrity chefs, actors, musicians, influencers, athletes and others.



Driven by passion, camaraderie and money

For celebrity chefs, new restaurant openings are a natural progression of their careers. Albeit for other types of celebrities there are a variety of motivations.

They have a passion for food.

- Houston rapper Bun B turned his passion for making smash burgers at home into **Trill Burgers**.

They want to diversify their income.

- Former NFL quarterback Drew Brees is a **Jimmy John's** franchise owner and invests in **Walk-On's Sports Bistreaux** and **Smalls Sliders**.

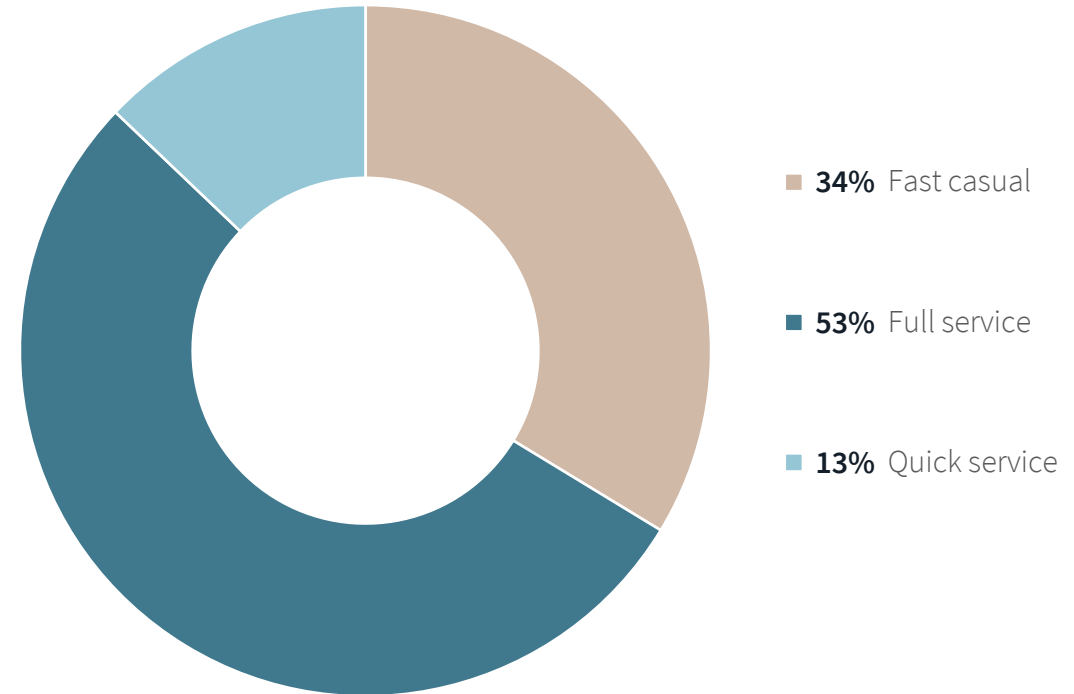
They want a place to hang out and call their own.

- Comedians Pete Davidson and Jason Sudeikis; musician Mark Ronson; and actors Nicholas Braun and Justin Theroux are all investors in New York's **Pebble Bar**, located steps away from the 30 Rockefeller Plaza studio where Saturday Night Live films.

They want to support a brand they love.

- After years of eating salads and drinks from **Health Nut**, Kris Jenner signed on as an investor to help the chain expand beyond Southern California.

New restaurant openings by service level, 2019-2024



Source: JLL analysis of new openings of quick service, fast casual and full-service restaurants backed by celebrity chefs, actors, musicians, influencers, athletes and others.



Celebrities are a marketing gold mine

Savvy celebrities are social media machines. They can use their large followings to drive diners to restaurants, giving them a leg up on their big competition.

- The celebrities who opened restaurants between 2019 and 2024 had an average of 15.1 million Instagram followers.

For example, comedian Kevin Hart can use his 179 million Instagram followers to publicize his fast casual vegan burger **Hart House** and compete with the likes of Mcdonald’s (5 million followers), Wendy’s (1.1 million followers) and Burger King (1.9 million followers.)

Celebrity restaurateurs with the most Instagram followers

Celebrity	Celebrity Type	Instagram followers (millions)	Restaurant
Kevin Hart	Comedian	179.0	Hart House
LeBron James	Athlete	159.9	Blaze Pizza (franchisee)
Drake	Musician	146.0	Dave’s Hot Chicken (franchisee)
Priyanka Chopra	Actor	91.0	SONA
Justin Timberlake	Musician	72.6	The Twelve Thirty Club
Salt Bae	Chef	53.8	Nusr Et

Source: JLL Analysis of Instagram accounts of celebrities with restaurant openings in the U.S. and Canada from 2019 through 2024.

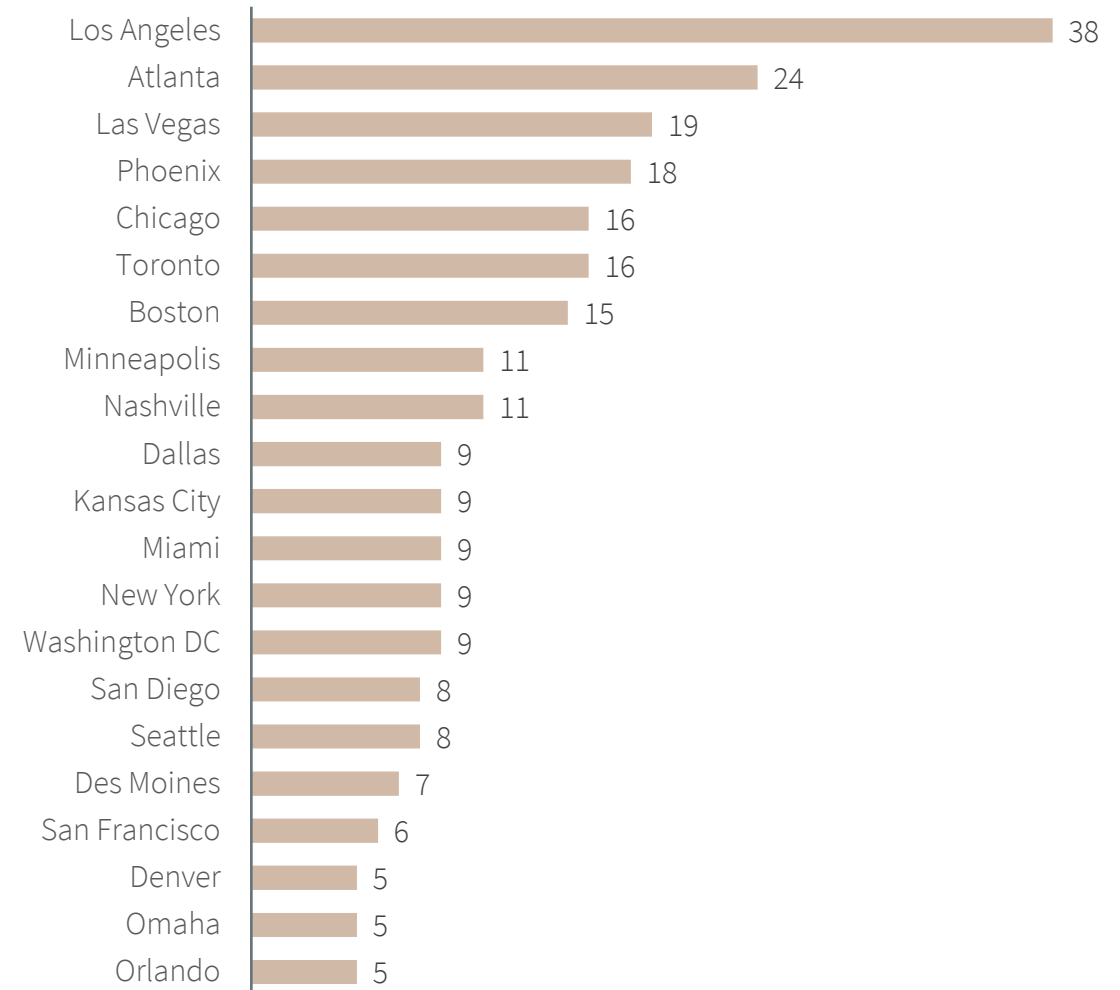
Fame drives tourist traffic

Signing a buzzy celebrity-backed project can be a boon to a property developer. It drives public interest and generates an outsized share of earned media and social engagement. This media attention in turn drives foot traffic.

- A 2023 study* by Amex Global travel found that 40 percent of respondents have been inspired by a celebrity influencer to visit a specific destination.

*American Express Travel's 2023 Global Travel Trends Report

Metros with 5 or more celebrity restaurant openings, 2019-2024



Source: JLL analysis of new openings of quick service, fast casual and full-service restaurants backed by celebrity chefs, actors, musicians, influencers, athletes and others.

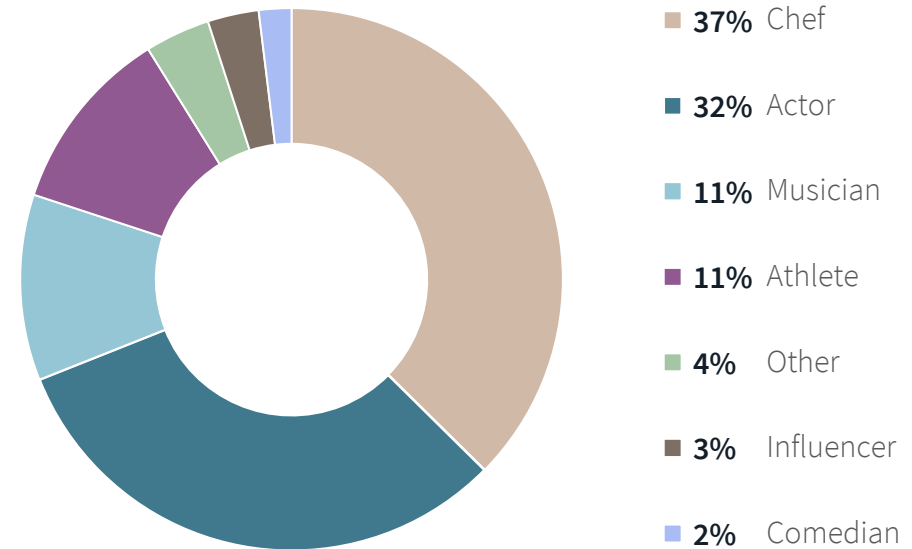
Fame opens doors, but it doesn't close deals

With the U.S. retail vacancy rate at 4.1 percent,* the competition for restaurant space is high and availability is low. Landlords receive many inquiries for each vacant space. One way to increase the likelihood of a landlord returning a call is to have a famous name behind the food. But as discussions proceed, landlords will generally vet celebrity restaurants like any other.

- Financials: Landlords want to know that the restaurant has the money to support the build-out and obligations of the lease.
- History of success: They want to see an executive team with a track record of success with this or other concepts.
- The right concept for this location: Landlords are looking for a concept that fits in with their vision of the neighborhood or development.

* JLL United States Retail Market Dynamics, Q1 2024

New restaurant openings by celebrity type, 2019-2024



Average size of celebrity restaurant openings, 2019-2024

Average size	
Fast casual	3,441 square feet
Quick Service	7,631 square feet
Full service	8,689 square feet

Source: JLL analysis of new openings of quick service, fast casual and full-service restaurants backed by celebrity chefs, actors, musicians, influencers, athletes and others.



Notable celebrity foodies

While chefs and actors together account for 69 percent of the openings, there are notable restaurateurs in every category of celebrity.

Most active celebrity restaurateurs	
Celebrity chef	Gordon Ramsay, Guy Fieri, Jose Andres
Actor	Mark Wahlberg, Robert De Niro, Norman Reedus
Musician	Drake, Ne-Yo, Jimmy Buffet
Athlete	Shaquille O'Neal, Carlos Dunlap, LeBron James
Influencer	Lisa Vanderpump, Tue Nguyen
Comedian	Kevin Hart, George Lopez



Owner or licensor?

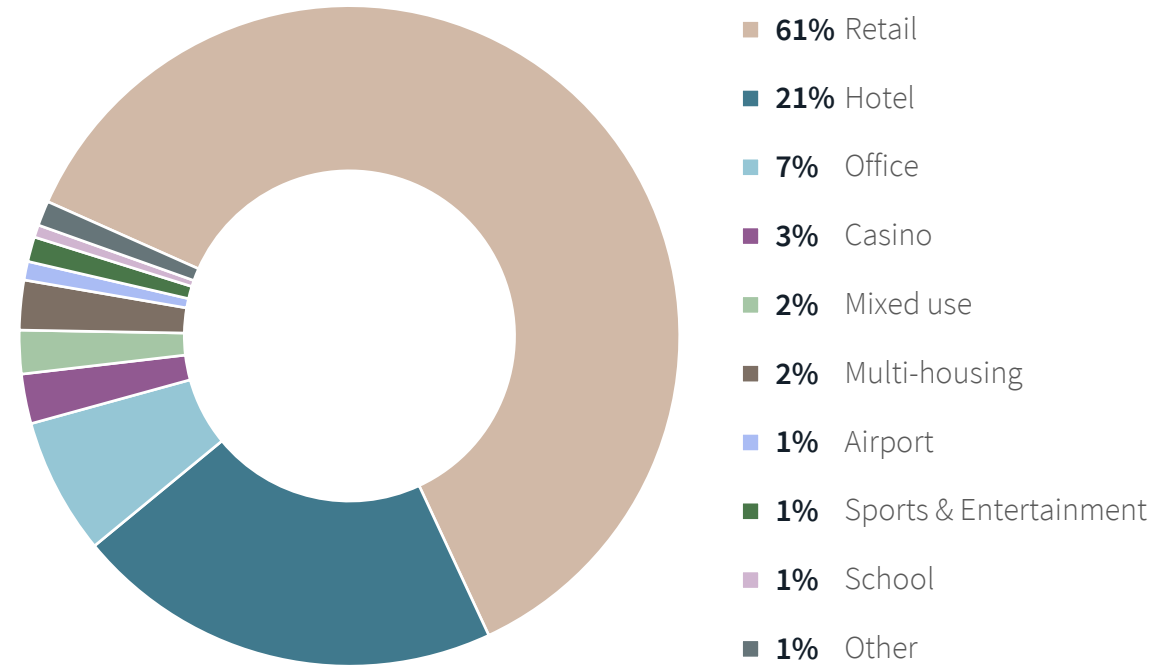
Celebrities can own all or part of a business that bears their name. Or they may have signed a licensing or management agreement.

Full or partial ownership: Celebrities invest their own money in the restaurant concept, taking on some or all an ownership stake.

Licensing, management and branding agreements: A celebrity chef might sign an agreement to create the menu and design the concept and then be closely involved with the restaurant for a given period of time. The chef may be paid a fee, a percentage of sales or some combination of the two.

It's unlikely that a diner at a celebrity restaurant would distinguish between these different structures. Whether a star has been paid a fee or is an owner, in the diner's eyes it's still the star's restaurant.

Celebrity restaurant openings by commercial property type, 2019-2024



Source: JLL analysis of new openings of quick service, fast casual and full-service restaurants backed by celebrity chefs, actors, musicians, influencers, athletes and others.



A famous face in the burger crowd

The world of burgers and chicken sandwiches is ultra competitive. A celebrity face can cut through a lot of noise.

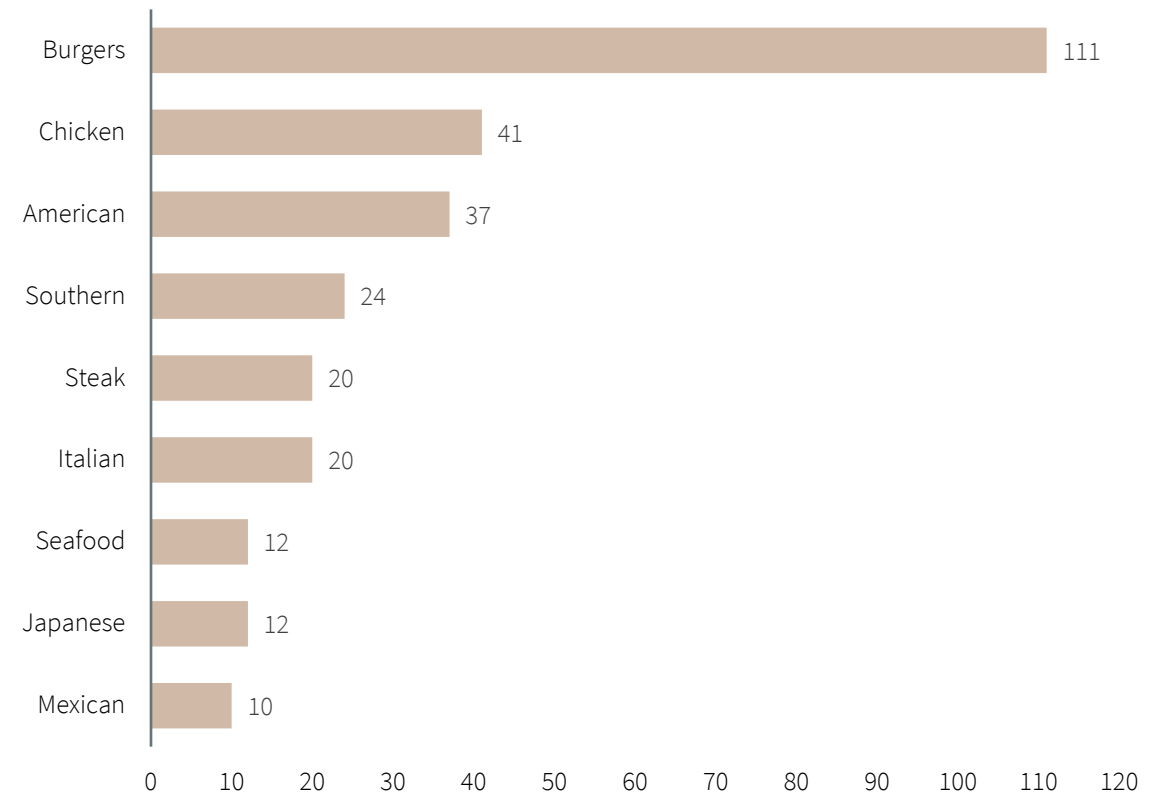
Wahlburgers, from executive Chef Paul Wahlberg and his brothers Donnie and Mark, opened the most locations in the period of our study. Many of these new locations were inside Hy-Vee supermarkets. In 2018 Hy-Vee announced that it would become the chain’s largest franchisee. Today there are 89 existing and announced locations inside Hy-Vees.

Shaq’s Big Chicken takes on the competitive chicken sandwich space with the help of Shaquille O’Neal. It has 36 existing and announced locations.

Chicken Guy! is the chicken tender concept from Guy Fieri and Robert Earl with 18 locations. Chandi Hospitality Group announced in March a franchise agreement to open 10 units in Northern California.

Hart House, co-founded by comedian Kevin Hart, sells plant-based “burg’rs” and “chick’n” sandwiches at four CA locations.

Top 10 celebrity restaurant cuisines



Source: JLL analysis of new openings of quick service, fast casual and full-service restaurants backed by celebrity chefs, actors, musicians, influencers, athletes and others.

Nashville delivers a string of Country star concepts

Nashville has long been the home of country music, but only in recent years has its Lower Broadway district transformed into a collection of bars and restaurants branded with some of the biggest names in the genre. These concepts, which often feature multiple stories and music stages, are especially appealing to the many tourists that descend on the city each week.



Lower Broad's Greatest Hits

Alan Jackson's **AJ's Good Time Bar** opened in 2016.

Florida Georgia Line opened **FGL House** in 2017, with four levels of bars and a restaurant.

Jason Aldean's Kitchen + Rooftop Bar opened in 2018. Its main bar features a 1961 4020 John Deer tractor.

Luke Bryan's **Luke's 32 Bridge Food + Drink** has six floors and opened in 2018.

Blake Shelton's **Ole Red** has 26,000-square-foot space and opened in 2018.

In 2021, Miranda Lambert opened **Casa Rosa**.

Eric Church opened **Chief's** in 2024 with six stories and a rooftop bar.

Jon Bon Jovi will open **JBj's Nashville** in a 37,000-square-foot space in 2024

Morgan Wallen will open **This Bar and Tennessee Kitchen** later this year in 30,000 square feet.



For some unscripted series, the restaurant is the show

61 percent of tourists* said they'd been inspired to visit a restaurant or store after seeing it on a show or movie. So imagine the marketing potential when an entire series is centered around a restaurant.

Vanderpump Rules (BRAVO, 2013-present, 11 seasons)

Perhaps the most expansive example is the collection of restaurants featured in the 11 seasons of Vanderpump Rules. restaurateur Lisa Vanderpump leads this Real Housewives of Beverly Hills spin-off, which launched with a focus on the staff at **SUR** in West Hollywood. Other featured restaurants include **TomTom** in West Hollywood, as well as **Vanderpump Cocktail Garden** and **Vanderpump à Paris** in Las Vegas.

Hell's Kitchen (Fox, 2005-present, 21 seasons)

This cooking competition series, hosted by chef Gordon Ramsay, is mostly filmed on a sound stage dressed to look like a restaurant. But with the success of the show, seven Hell's Kitchen restaurants have opened, based on the show. Recent seasons have featured segments filmed at the **Hells Kitchen** at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. In 2023 this location was the most photographed of any restaurant in the U.S. on Yelp.**

*American Express Travel's 2023 Global Travel Trends Report

**Yelp, Most Photographed Restaurants of 2023



Wahlburgers (A&E, 2014-2019, 10 seasons)

This unscripted series follows chef Paul Walberg as he expands his burger chain with the help of his much more famous brothers Mark and Donnie. Starting with a single location in Hingham, MA, the series follows the chain's domestic and international expansion.

Friends in Low Places (Amazon Prime Video, 2024, 1 season)

Garth Brooks and wife Trisha Yearwood design, build and open a 54,715-square-foot honky-tonk along Lower Broadway in Nashville, along with sibling restaurateurs Benjamin and Max Goldberg.

Big Chicken Shaq (Facebook Watch, 2018, 1 season)

Basketball star Shaquille O'Neal opens the first **Shaq's Big Chicken** location in Las Vegas, in partnership with JRS Hospitality and Authentic Brands Group. Today, the chain has 26 locations with 9 more announced.

Guy's Chance of a Lifetime (Food Network, 2022, 1 season)

Guy Fieri leads contestants through a series of challenges. One winner receives their very own **Chicken Guy!** franchise



Las Vegas hotels bank on celebrity food draw

In a city with 172,830 hotel rooms and 40.8 million annual visitors*, casino hotels must compete to stand out. Celebrity restaurants have emerged as a big part of that strategy.

Prolific Food Network personality Guy Fieri is known for Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives and many other series.

- Guy Fieri's Vegas Kitchen & Bar – The Linq Hotel and Casino
- Chicken Guy! – Caesars Palace
- Guy Fieri's El Burro Borracho – Rio Las Vegas Hotel & Casino
- Guy Fieri's Flavortown Sports Kitchen – Horseshoe Las Vegas Hotel

Bobby Flay is known for many shows, including Beat Bobby Flay and Iron Chef America.

- Amalfi – Caesars Palace
- Brasserie B – Caesars Palace
- Bobby's Burgers – 3 Vegas locations: Caesars Palace, Harrah's Las Vegas and Paris Las Vegas

JLL Global Hotels Research, 2024



Rio Hotel & Casino

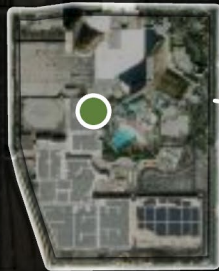


Caesar's Palace

Bellagio

Cosmopolitan

Flamingo



Mandalay Bay

Venetian/Palazzo

Harrah's

The Linq

The Cromwell

Horseshoe Hotel

Paris

Virgin Hotel

Planet Hollywood

MGM Grand

- Bobby Flay
- Buddy Valastro
- Gordon Ramsay
- Guy Fieri
- José Andrés
- Lisa Vanderpump
- Nobu Matsuhisa
- Wolfgang Puck

Bellagio
Spago

Caesar's Palace
Brasserie B, Amalfi,
Bobby's Burgers
Chicken Guy!
Hell's Kitchen, G.R.
Pug & Grill
Cocktail Garden
Nobu

Cosmopolitan
Jaleo, é, China
Poblano

Flamingo Hotel & Casino
Gordon Ramsay -
Burger & Grill,
Ramsay's Kitchen

Harrah's Hotel & Casino
Ramsay's Kitchen
PizzaCake
Bobby's Burgers

Horseshoe Hotel & Casino
Flavortown Sports
Kitchen

MGM Grand
Wolfgang Puck Bar &
Grill

Mandalay Bay
CARAMÁ

Paris
Bobby's Burgers
Gordon Ramsay
Steak
Vanderpump a Paris
Nobu Paris

Planet Hollywood
Gordon Ramsay
Burger

Rio Hotel & Casino
El Burro Borracho

The Cromwell
Buddy Valastro

The Linq
The Boss Cafe
Gordon Ramsay Fish
& Chips
Guy Fieri Vegas
Kitchen & Bar

Venetian/Palazzo
Carlo's Bakery,
Buddy's Ristorante
Cut by Wolfgang Puck

Virgin Hotel
Nobu



British chef Gordon Ramsay is known worldwide for his cooking chops and strong demand for teamwork and performance.

- Gordon Ramsay Burger – 2 locations: Planet Hollywood & Flamingo (Opens Summer 2024)
- Gordon Ramsay Fish & Chips – The Linq Las Vegas
- Gordon Ramsay Pub & Grill – Caesars Palace
- Gordon Ramsay Steak - Paris Las Vegas
- Hell's Kitchen - Caesars Palace
- Ramsay's Kitchen – Harrah's Las Vegas

BRAVO star Lisa Vanderpump opened her first Vegas location in 2019.

- Vanderpump Cocktail Garden – Caesars Palace
- Vanderpump à Paris – Paris Las Vegas
- Pinky's by Vanderpump – Flamingo Las Vegas (Opens summer 2024)

Nobu Matsuhisa is known for the Japanese restaurants that bear his name.

- Nobu Las Vegas
 - Caesars Palace
 - Paris Las Vegas
 - Virgin Hotel



Celebrity Restaurants –2024

TLC's “Cake Boss” star Buddy Valastro has four Vegas locations and many more cake vending machines.

- Carlo's Bakery
- Buddy V's Ristorante – The Venetian
- PizzaCake – Harrah's Hotel & Casino
- The Boss Café – The Linq Las Vegas
- Carlo's Bakery Express ATM – Cake vending machine with 15 Las Vegas locations

Spanish chef José Andrés is known both for his cooking and humanitarian work.

- Bazaar Meat– Sahara Las Vegas
- China Poblano - The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas
- é by José Andrés - The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas
- Jaleo - The Cosmopolitan Las Vegas

Since opening the first Spago in LA in 1982, Wolfgang Puck has been internationally renowned.

- Caramá – Mandalay Bay
- Cut - The Palazzo
- Spago - The Bellagio
- Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill - MGM Grand Hotel & Casino



Local stars: the next generation

Across North America there is a category of chefs that rise to the level of local celebrities. Though we haven't attempted to track these local heroes in the data we analyzed for this report, we do recognize their importance.

Many of these local celebrities have appeared on individual episodes of one or more food shows, may have a strong social media presence and aspire to make the jump to national stardom.

For example, Shane Roberts-Thomas, opened **Southern Kitchen** in Richmond, VA in 2014. The restaurant gained early acclaim for its southern take on the egg roll. In 2020 Southern Kitchen was featured on Gordon Ramsay's 24 Hours to Hell and Back. Roberts-Thomas was a contestant on Food Network's Chopped later that same year. She's also been on Bravo's Real Housewives of Potomac and appears regularly on local television.

Roberts-Thomas recently leased a new larger space so she can seat more customers. Her goal is to continue to grow her platform with a food show of her own, more locations of Southern Kitchen and a digital multimedia platform.

Roberts-Thomas told us, "Once you get on television, it's up to you to take the ball and keep rolling it. Television only gives you the jump off and it's your deal to make it make something for you."



About this report

The data

The JLL research team assembled a database of celebrity restaurants with openings from 2019 through 2024, including those with planned openings in 2024. Our database includes both owned and licensed celebrity concepts.

The experts

The following subject matter experts kindly lent their knowledge to this report: Emily Durham, Brian Adams, Zach Demuth, Gary Woodward, Blake Kaplan, Travis Robertson, Phil Colicchio, Kyle Inserra, Shane Roberts-Thomas, Ken Higman, Kipper Worthington and William Shell.

Special thanks to Joshua Moreno for creating our Las Vegas map.





Research authors

James Cook

Americas Director of Research
Retail JLL
jamesd.cook@jll.com

Saul Lua

Analyst of Research
Retail JLL
saul.lua@jll.com

Keisha Virtue

Senior Analyst of Research
Retail JLL
keisha.virtue@jll.com

Heli Brecailo

Manager of Research
Retail JLL
heli.brecailo@jll.com

Research at JLL

JLL's research team delivers intelligence, analysis and insight through market leading reports and services that illuminate today's commercial real estate dynamics and identify tomorrow's challenges and opportunities. Our more than 550 global research professionals track and analyse economic and property trends and forecast future conditions in over 60 countries, producing unrivalled local and global perspectives. Our research and expertise, fuelled by real-time information and innovative thinking around the world, creates a competitive advantage for our clients and drives successful strategies and optimal real estate decisions.

About JLL

For over 200 years, JLL (NYSE: JLL), a leading global commercial real estate and investment management company, has helped clients buy, build, occupy, manage and invest in a variety of commercial, industrial, hotel, residential and retail properties. A Fortune 500® company with annual revenue of \$20.8 billion and operations in over 80 countries around the world, our more than 106,000 employees bring the power of a global platform combined with local expertise. Driven by our purpose to shape the future of real estate for a better world, we help our clients, people and communities SEE A BRIGHTER WAYSM. JLL is the brand name, and a registered trademark, of Jones Lang LaSalle Incorporated. For further information, visit [jll.com](https://www.jll.com).

COPYRIGHT © JONES LANG LASALLE IP, INC. 2024

This report has been prepared solely for information purposes and does not necessarily purport to be a complete analysis of the topics discussed, which are inherently unpredictable. It has been based on sources we believe to be reliable, but we have not independently verified those sources and we do not guarantee that the information in the report is accurate or complete. Any views expressed in the report reflect our judgment at this date and are subject to change without notice. Statements that are forward-looking involve known and unknown risks and uncertainties that may cause future realities to be materially different from those implied by such forward-looking statements. Advice we give to clients in particular situations may differ from the views expressed in this report. No investment or other business decisions should be made based solely on the views expressed in this report.