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How NYCWFF Is Reinventing Itself For A New Generation Of Food Lovers

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Mon, August 10, 2026 at 12:15 PM EDT
6 min read

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Food Network New York City Wine & Food Festival presented by Invesco QQQ on October 16, 2025 in New York CityGetty Images for NYCWFF...

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The Food Network New York City Wine & Food Festival has never been just about celebrity chefs.

Sure, this year's lineup includes everyone from Nobu Matsuhisa and Kwame Onwuachi to Rachael Ray, the Voltaggio brothers, and Questlove. There are Michelin-starred dinners, burger competitions, cocktail tastings, and rooftop celebrations all overlooking the Manhattan skyline. But according to founder Lee Brian Schrager, the festival's continued success comes from something much simpler: making sure there's truly something for everyone.

Returning October 15 through 18 for its 19th year, NYCWFF will once again transform the Seaport into one of the country's largest celebrations of food and drink, bringing together more than 300 chefs, restaurateurs, beverage experts, creators and culinary personalities across nearly 50 events.

"Our sales are tracking better than they ever have this time of year," Schrager shared during a phone interview. "We're ahead of everything."

For a festival approaching its twentieth anniversary, that's no small accomplishment. Over the past several years, NYCWFF has navigated venue changes, shifting consumer habits, and an increasingly crowded food festival landscape. Schrager admits one of the biggest learning moments came when the festival temporarily relocated to Brooklyn.

"I thought people would be thrilled with it," he said. "It was a mistake." While Manhattan attendees were reluctant to travel across the river, Brooklyn

residents didn't embrace the festival in the way organizers expected. The experience reinforced just how important location is in a city where convenience often dictates attendance.

Today, the festival has found renewed momentum at the Seaport, which Schrager believes better reflects the energy of modern New York while providing room to continue expanding.



Rachael Ray and Brooklyn Peltz Beckham at the Blue Moon Burger Bash 2.0 presented by Pat LaFrieda Meats in 2025.

This year, guests will notice the addition of The Rooftop at Pier 17, which will become home to several marquee events. With gorgeous waterfront views, the rooftop will kick off the weekend Thursday, October 15th with the return of the Blue Moon Burger Bash presented by Pat LaFrieda Meats hosted by Rachael Ray and Bert Kreischer. The longtime festival favorite pits chefs against one another for both Judges' Choice and People's Choice honors. Friday, October 16th brings Steak & Whiskey with Bryan and Michael Voltaggio stepping into hosting duties for an evening of premium cuts and whiskey.

Saturday, October 17th night turns the space over to one of the festival's biggest new additions with New York After Dark hosted by Kwame Onwuachi is envisioned as a love letter to the city, pairing dishes from some of Onwuachi's favorite New York chefs and restaurants with a DJ set by Questlove. Inspired by Onwuachi's forthcoming cookbook, *All Hours*, the event represents a bigger NYCWFF role for a chef whose Caribbean event at the South Beach Wine & Food Festival proved enormously popular.

Schrager said the response to Onwuachi's New York event has been equally strong, "maybe even more so."



Guests attend the Asian Night Market hosted by Padma Lakshmi and Jean-Georges Vongerichten during the Food Network New York City Wine & Food Festival presented by Invesco QQQ on Oct...More

It's hardly the only new addition resonating with festivalgoers. Morning Buzz with MGK & 27 Club Coffee turns Sunday morning into a celebration of the city's coffee, matcha, tea and breakfast scene. The concept follows a similar non-alcoholic event at the South Beach festival, but Schrager says the New York edition has taken off in a way even he didn't necessarily anticipate. "The coffee event is killing it," he said. "It's a best selling event so far."

The enthusiasm speaks to how dramatically food and beverage culture has changed. While wine dinners and traditional tasting events remain cornerstones of NYCWFF, today's audiences are just as excited by specialty coffee, food creators, and experiences built around specific cuisines and communities.

That evolution can be seen across the rest of the weekend. A Culinary Journey Through Peru marks Nobu Matsuhisa's first-ever NYCWFF appearance and brings together some of New York's top Peruvian restaurants. Flavors of Bollywood hosted by Maneet Chauhan and Vijay Kumar celebrates Indian cuisine alongside the energy and spectacle of India's film industry.

Best of the Best will be hosted by Jonathan Waxman and Keith Hernandez bringing together more than 15 James Beard Award winners, nominees and semifinalists, while Oyster Bash returns with Andrew Zimmern and Tacos & Tequila with Aarón Sánchez. Sunday closes out the festival's signature programming with The Cookout hosted by JJ Johnson and Angela Yee celebrating Black food, culture, and community with Method Man and an appearance from Whoopi Goldberg.



A view of pasta served at the Sunday Supper presented by Peroni hosted by "The Pasta Queen" Nadia Caterina Munno and Lil Mo Mozzarella during Food Network New York City Wine & Food Fe...More

For guests looking for something more intimate, the festival's dinner series offers another side of NYCWFF. This year's collaborations include Alex Guarnaschelli and Mario Vitolo of Emilio's Ballato, José Andrés, Maneet Chauhan and Stephanie Izard, Rocco DiSpirito and Nadia Caterina Munno, Andrew Carmellini and Hillary Sterling, Angie Mar and Charlie Palmer, Alain Ducasse, Marc Forgione, Antonia Lofaso and Michael Symon, Masaharu Morimoto and more.

FoodieCon also returns Sunday, reflecting another significant change in the culinary world since NYCWFF began nearly two decades ago. The creator-focused event puts digital food personalities alongside the chefs and restaurateurs who have traditionally defined food festivals, with panels, tastings, demonstrations and opportunities for fans to meet the people they increasingly turn to for restaurant recommendations and cooking inspiration.

Rather than choosing between those different corners of the culinary world, Schrager sees bringing them together as one of NYCWFF's strengths. "Not everyone wants a Michelin meal," he said. "We're fortunate that we can have those food influencers, the white-tablecloth chefs, and the everyday working chef."

That philosophy has become increasingly important as the lines between traditional restaurant culture, digital creators, and everyday dining continue to blur. Someone who comes for an Alain Ducasse dinner isn't necessarily the same person buying a ticket to Burger Bash or showing up Sunday morning for matcha and coffee—and that's exactly the point.

For Schrager, figuring out how all those pieces fit together remains one of the most enjoyable parts of the job. "It's putting the program together," he said when asked what still excites him after more than two decades producing food festivals. "Curating the talent, working with new people and giving some people a break."

In many ways, that curation has become the festival's greatest strength. Instead of chasing a single definition of what food culture should look like, NYCWFF has expanded alongside it—embracing creators without abandoning chefs, celebrating burgers and coffee alongside fine dining, and giving neighborhood restaurants space beside some of the world's most recognizable culinary names.

This article was originally published on Forbes.com