

## Nation's Restaurant News names 2001 Hot Concepts! winners

CHICAGO – Celebrating the food-service industry's seemingly endless wellspring of creativity, Nation's Restaurant News has named six innovative restaurant chains and one Hot Again organization as its 2001 Hot Concepts! honorees.

Now in its seventh year, the Hot Concepts! program honors organizations for developing cutting-edge operations with strong consumer appeal. This year's winners are ESPN Zone, Figs Restaurant, FiRE + iCE, Noodles & Co., Samba Room and Nick & Stef's Steakhouse. The Hot Again winner is A&W Restaurants.

Those companies will be honored on Sunday, May 20, as Tyson Foods Inc. presents the Nation's Restaurant News' Hot Concepts! Awards in Chicago during the Hot Concepts! Celebration at the John G. Shedd Aquarium.

"As these concepts so aptly demonstrate, the entrepreneurial spirit continues to thrive in food-service," NRN publisher Alan Gould said. "Congratulations to the people behind these imaginative restaurants for providing us with unique dining venues."

John Tyson, chairman, chief executive and president of Tyson Foods Inc., added: "We are proud to be associated with forward-thinking organizations that have an abiding passion for excellence in foodservice, a passion we share



Boulder, Colo.-based Noodles & Co., a specialty concept that serves pasta, is a 2001 Hot Concepts! winner.

at Tyson Foods. We salute these deserving companies and their visionary leaders."

Here's a look at the 2001 Hot Concepts! winners.

ESPN Zone is a slice of heaven for hungry sports fans. Owned by the Walt Disney Co., the concept was launched in Baltimore in 1998 and now has locations in Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Anaheim, Calif., with Las Vegas and Denver coming soon.

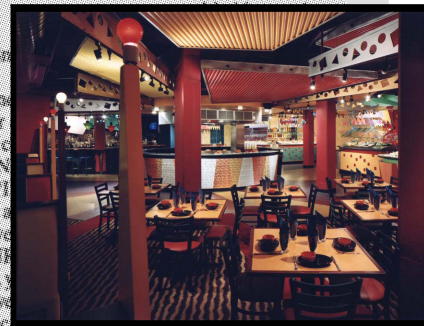


smack a hockey puck or swing a bat.

Figs Restaurant made big news last October when the 2-year-old Boston-based concept from Todd English opened in New York's LaGuardia Airport. "I've been through a lot of airports, and there's nothing like what we're trying to do," English told NRN. "Most of the time in airports, you tend to eat a lot of junk, but we're doing a little bit more upscale."

As one reviewer put it, if you don't like the food at FiRE + iCE, you have only yourself to blame. That's because this three-unit, Cambridge, Mass.-based operation lets you select your food and watch it prepared to your liking by chefs at a circular grill. Table service also is available. Called an improvisational grill, FiRE + iCE is all about casual fun in its three Boston area locations: Back Bay, Harvard Square and Providence Place. A favorite with office workers, students, families and picky eaters, the concept was founded in 1997 by chief executive Jim Miller.

Convinced that noodles and



features a comfortable dining atmosphere featuring quick counter ordering with table delivery.

Samba Room, a concept from E. Brands, a division of Carlson Restaurants Worldwide, is an upscale Latin cafe that evokes memories of a 1960s Rio de Janeiro jet set, drumbeat getaway.

(See NATION'S, page 97)

**Location:**  
Providence Place, Rhode Island;  
Cambridge, MA;  
Boston, MA

**Program:**  
New 8,000-10,000 s.f. restaurants  
with "Improvisational Grill" theme

**Designer:**  
Connor Architecture  
**Client:**  
Jim Miller  
Boston, MA