

Toasts of the Town

Grab an indoor grill, some fabulous bread and whatever catches your fancy—you're onto the delicious trend of toasting sandwiches.

BY KATIE AYOUB

Toasted sandwiches seem to be on a roll. Once relegated to collegiate midnight snacks, they've gone mainstream. Look at Denver-based Quizno's Subs. It has grown from its original store in 1981 to nearly 3,500 shops in 12 countries. All of its sandwiches are toasted. McDonald's, based in Oakbrook, Ill., recently launched a toasted-sub menu called Deli Choices. In February, Milford, Conn.-based SUBWAY kicked off its menu of fresh toasted subs. Get it? Toasted is hot.

And chefs are adding their own beautiful signatures. Call them toasted or grilled. Panini, if you lean that way. Gourmet ingredients, artisanal breads, unique

condiments—those are what rev chefs' engines when it comes to the toasted sandwich. Indeed, Melt in Jersey City, N.J., does little else than crunch two pieces of bread, loaded with great combinations, into a panini maker. It serves more than 15 takes on the classic grilled-cheese sandwich, using at least 10 different cheeses to bring that desired goo-factor to the grilled sandwich.

At Chicago-based Morton's, the Steakhouse, 34 out of its 68 restaurants host "Mortini Nights," offering complimentary toasted filet-mignon sandwiches at the bar. Others make a meal out of it—all add individual flare to claim the toasted sandwich as their own.

GRILLED SIRLOIN STEAK AND POINT REYES ORIGINAL BLUE CHEESE SANDWICH WITH ROASTED PEPPERS, BALSAMIC-CURED ONIONS ON GRILLED ASIAGO BREAD

*Marlin Kaplan, Chef
One Walnut
Cleveland*

Yield: 8 sandwiches

- 4 oz. olive oil
- 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 lbs. sirloin steak
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 lb. Point Reyes Original Blue cheese
- 16 slices Asiago bread (or sourdough)
- 8 oz. roasted red peppers

1) In heavy-bottom skillet, heat





Melt serves the Adriatic—feta, fontina and olive tapenade.

olive oil; braise onion until soft. Add balsamic vinegar, reducing by half. **2)** Cut sirloin into 4-oz. servings; season with salt and pepper. Cook on well-oiled hot grill 3 to 4 minutes per side. Remove; slice into individual servings. **3)** Slice cheese with warm knife into 2-oz. portions. Grill slices of Asiago bread. **4)** On grilled bread, place 4 oz. sirloin steak, cheese, slice of roasted pepper and 1 oz. balsamic-cured onions. Place sandwich in preheated oven at 350°F for 2 to 3 minutes, or until cheese softens. Serve immediately.

THE ADRIATIC

*Jim Nowak, Chef
Melt, Jersey City, N.J.
Yield: 1 sandwich*

Green or black olive tapenade for spreading
2 thick slices Balthazar's Pullman bread (or multigrain)

TOASTED ALMOND AND PECORINO SANDWICH

*Elizabeth Pruitt, Chef/Owner
Tartine Bakery
San Francisco
Yield: 6 sandwiches*

3 cups whole unblanched almonds, toasted and cooled
1/2 cup plus 2 T. olive oil
3 T. fresh lemon juice
1 T. grated lemon peel

1/8 lb. fontina cheese
1/8 lb. feta cheese
Butter for spreading

Method: Preheat an indoor grill or panini maker. Spread tapenade on 1 slice of bread; add cheeses. Spread butter on each outer side of sandwich. Grill on panini machine for about 4 minutes at 475°F.

1 T. chopped fresh sage
1/2 t. salt
1/4 t. ground black pepper
12 thick slices country-style bread
12 oz. pecorino cheese, thinly sliced
Additional olive oil for brushing on bread

1) Coarsely chop nuts in processor. Add next 6 ingredients. Blend until mixture forms coarse paste. (Can be made 3 days ahead. Cover; chill. Let

stand at room temperature 1 hour before using.) **2)** Divide almond paste among half of bread slices; spread to cover. Top with cheese; sprinkle with more pepper. Cover

with remaining bread slices. Brush tops with olive oil. **3)** Heat 2 large nonstick skillets over medium-high heat. Add 3 sandwiches, oiled side down, to each skillet. Cook until

bread is crusty on bottom, about 6 minutes. Brush tops with oil. Turn sandwiches over. Cook until brown and crusty on bottom, pressing to compact, about 6 minutes.

HOT PRESSED SLOW-ROASTED PORK SANDWICH

*Jim Solomon, Chef/Owner
The Fireplace
Boston
Yield: 1 sandwich*

1 torpedo roll, split
3 thin slices roasted pork loin

2 slices ham
2 slices Gruyère
2 T. finely chopped dill pickles
2 T. finely chopped red onion
Spicy Mayonnaise (recipe follows)

1) Preheat panini maker to medium heat. On 1 side of torpedo roll, layer pork loin, ham and Gruyère. Add pickles and onions. Spread spicy mayonnaise on insides of both sides of

roll. **2)** Place roll in panini maker for 5 minutes, or until toasted to liking.

SPICY MAYONNAISE

2 T. mayonnaise
1/2 t. puréed chipotle chile pepper
Pinch salt and pepper, to taste
Juice of 1 lime

Method: Mix all ingredients together well.



A slow-roasted pork/ham pressed sandwich, akin to a Cuban, but with spicy mayo instead of mustard, is on the menu at The Fireplace.

OVEN-TOASTED BLACK FOREST PANINI

*Andrea Curto-Randazzo,
Chef/Co-owner
Talula Restaurant
Miami Beach, Fla.
Yield: 1 sandwich*

2 T. violet mustard
1 10-inch French baguette, split
1/4 lb. thinly sliced Black Forest ham
3.5 oz. Campo D'Maltaban cheese (or any sharp cheese)
3 oz. Bosc pear, thinly sliced
2 oz. arugula leaves
1 lemon
1 T. extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper, to taste

1) Spread violet mustard on bottom half of bread. Place ham over mustard, then cheese over ham. On baking sheet, place sandwich in 375°F oven until cheese is melted and bread is slightly toasted, about 3 minutes. Remove sandwich from oven. 2) In small mixing bowl, combine pears and arugula; add squeezed lemon juice, olive oil, salt and black pepper. Place in sandwich; close sandwich. Cut in half; serve.

WOLFGANG PUCK'S GRILLED STEAK PANINI

*David Robins, Executive Chef
Spago Las Vegas
Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group
Yield: 4 sandwiches*

1/2 cup mayonnaise
1 T. grainy Meaux mustard
8 slices thick country bread
1/2 lb. beef fillets, cut crosswise into 3/4-in.-thick steaks
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 handful baby spinach leaves or arugula

1) Preheat an indoor grill or panini

maker. Mix together 1/3 cup mayonnaise and mustard. Spread each slice of bread generously on 1 side with mixture. 2) Spread thin layer of remaining mayonnaise on other side of bread slice; set aside. 3) Season both sides of fillet with salt and pepper. Grill for about 2 minutes, or until nicely grilled on outside and rare inside. Remove from grill; place fillet on mustard/mayonnaise side of bread slice. Top with another slice of bread, mustard/mayonnaise side down. Repeat with remaining bread. 4) Grill sandwiches on indoor grill, being careful not to crowd grill, until bread is nicely browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove sandwiches from grill; remove top slices of bread. Insert handful of greens. Return top slice of bread; slice sandwiches in half diagonally; serve.

BARTENDER STEAK SANDWICH

*Julio Quisbert, Chef
JLX Bistro
Sag Harbor, N.Y.
Yield: 4 sandwiches*

Vegetable oil for frying
1 red onion, julienned
1 red bell pepper, julienned
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 T. olive oil
1 lb. boneless rib-eye steak, sliced 1/4-in. thick
8 slices Gruyère cheese
4 hoagie sandwich buns, split
1/2 t. Parmesan cheese
Horseradish Dipping Sauce (recipe follows)

1) Heat vegetable oil in large skillet. Add onion and bell pepper; season with salt and pepper. Sauté vegeta-

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bles 2 to 3 minutes. **2)** Heat olive oil on griddle. Season steak with salt and pepper. Cook steak on griddle 2 to 3 minutes a side; add to vegetables. Sauté 2 more minutes.

3) Using a spatula, divide sautéed mixture into fourths. Place 2 slices Gruyère cheese on top of each fourth sautéed mixture. Sprinkle both halves of bread with Parmesan cheese. Using a spatula, remove each fourth; place on each bun. Serve with horseradish dipping sauce.

HORSERADISH DIPPING SAUCE

1 cup mayonnaise
1 cup sour cream
1 piece lemon zest and juice from 1 lemon wedge

1 T. Worcestershire sauce
1/2 cup fresh horseradish
Salt and pepper, to taste
1 T. Siracha chili sauce

Method: Combine all ingredients; serve with sandwich.

ONE WALNUT HERBED GOAT CHEESE SANDWICH

*Martin Kaplan, Chef
One Walnut
Cleveland*

Yield: 4 sandwiches

4 oz. goat cheese
1 T. chopped fresh chives
1 T. chopped basil
1 T. heavy cream
8 slices brioche

2 oz. smoked salmon
4 thin slices red onion

1) Blend first 4 ingredients in food processor. **2)** Toast brioche on both sides. Spread cheese mixture on 1 side of bread; top with salmon and slice of onion. Place remaining slice of bread on top. Slice; serve with tomato soup.

Katie Ayoub is based in Keswick, Ontario, Canada.



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