

FOOD

## FOOD; SLICES OF LIFE

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DEFINING A SANDWICH IS ALMOST impossible. Two slices of bread surrounding a filling doesn't do it, since a sandwich can be open-faced, or triple-faced. A sandwich can be humble, as in a slice of meat loaf on toasted white bread; grand, such as a sliver of velvety smoked salmon with cucumbers and beluga caviar, or grandiose, as in a listing tower of meat, cheese, lettuce and vegetables.

In the United States, sandwiches span the hamburger and hot dog, the elaborate heroes and submarines, corned beef and pastrami on rye, the BLT and the club. The latter two are personal favorites, particularly when the luscious sweet tomatoes are ripe on the vine. A 1950's-style diner in Beverly Hills, Calif., called Ed Debevic's Short Orders Deluxe, is practically an ode to American sandwiches. Among the offerings are meat loaf, chicken BLT and what they call sloppy Jose. A burnt meat-loaf sandwich, made with pork sausage, smothered in tomato sauce and cooked over high heat until the outside is crunchy, is served as a special.

At Eli Zabar's E.A.T. in New York, sandwiches are a good deal more refined. Zabar has a number of strict rules for sandwich making. The bread must be very thin. He cuts it on a meat slicer so that each sheet is almost transparent. If the sandwich is smoked salmon with cream cheese, Zabar slices the bagel into four neat slivers. Butter goes on nearly every sandwich. "We put only a schmear of sweet butter on the bread, but it changes the sandwich from the prosaic to the extraordinary," he says.

He calls Hellmann's mayonnaise "the greatest culinary invention. I think homemade mayonnaise tastes terrible on sandwiches," he says. Up until a few months ago, E.A.T. offered thick sandwiches, such as an \$8 egg salad that weighed in at three-quarters of a pound.

Now, Zabar fills his sandwiches with thin things, such as delicate sheets of prosciutto or whitefish. "My \$10 whoppers are now reduced to \$3 sandwiches," he says.

Scandinavia is known for its almost unlimited variety of sandwiches. Denmark, in particular, counts among its elaborate open-faced offerings - called smorrebrod - such favorites as sliced egg with anchovy fillets and dill; her-ring salad; cold potato with caviar; miniature prawns (known as "left-handed peeled shrimp") with mayonnaise; raw minced beef with capers, onion and raw egg yolk, and doll-sized hamburgers with pickled cucumber and fried onion rings. The Scandinavian restaurant Aquavit in New York has seven artful smorrebrods on its menu.

Given the broadest definition, a wedge of pizza might be called a sandwich. That other great Italian specialty, the pizzalike bread known as focaccia, is now the rage in metropolitan centers in America. It is a yeast dough, more often than not rectangular in shape, that is topped with olive oil and baked until crisp. You can cover it with almost any pizzalike ingredient, from cheese to sausage with herbs such as sage, rosemary and oregano.

One of the most sumptuous sandwiches in all the world is of French origin - Provence and Nice, to be precise. It is called pan-bagnat (pronounced pan-banya). To be enjoyed to the fullest, it should be consumed by someone in swim wear under a broiling hot sun. This sandwich is made from a small crusty loaf of french bread (a ham-burger bun will not do, but what is known as a french roll will suffice), the split surfaces of which are brushed or dribbled with vinegar and olive oil. These are then filled with an elaborate salade nicoise. To be really authentic, authorities say that the sandwich must be made at least one hour in advance and left to stand so that the bread absorbs all the oil and vinegar juices. This explains the sandwich's name, which derives from the French pain baigne, meaning bathed bread. Serve it with lots of napkins. If it doesn't drip, it isn't provençal.

### **BRIE SANDWICHES ON CROISSANTS**

4 croissants 1/4 pound wedge Brie 12 sun-dried tomatoes 8 sprigs arugula, rinsed and patted dry.

1. Split the croissants in half, sandwich fashion
2. Cut the wedge of cheese into four slices of equal size. Top four of the croissant halves with one slice of cheese. Top each portion of cheese with three sun-dried tomatoes. (You can, of course, use more cheese and sun-dried tomatoes depending on taste and appetite).
3. Cover each serving with two sprigs of arugula and cover with the second croissant half. Press lightly and serve.

### **PAN-BAGNAT (A Mediterranean sandwich with salade nicoise)**

Yield: Four servings.

4 round, crusty sandwich rolls 8 teaspoons red-wine vinegar 4 teaspoons, plus 10 tablespoons, olive oil 1 cup peeled, seeded, diced red, ripe tomatoes 1 cup cored, seeded, julienned green pepper 1 cup shredded, unpeeled hothouse (so-called burpless) cucumber 1/2 cup trimmed, thinly sliced radishes 1 cup red onion, finely chopped 16 small, pitted green olives 16 small, pitted black olives, preferably imported from Greece or Italy (do not use the tasteless California variety) 4 teaspoons drained capers 2 teaspoons finely minced garlic 1/2 cup crumbled, drained tuna packed in oil 1/4 cup coarsely chopped fresh basil leaves Salt to taste, if desired Freshly ground pepper to taste 2 hard-cooked eggs, thinly sliced.

1. Cut the rolls in half, sandwich fashion. Pull out a small amount of the soft inner portion. Crumble and set aside.
2. Brush each of the eight cut portions with a half teaspoon of vinegar and with a half teaspoon of oil.
3. Put the reserved crumbled bread pieces into a bowl and add the tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, radishes, onion, green and black olives, capers, garlic, tuna, basil, remaining four teaspoons of vinegar, remaining 10 tablespoons of olive oil, salt, pepper and the hard-cooked eggs. Toss gently to blend thoroughly.
4. Heap one-fourth of the salad onto four sandwich roll halves. Top each with a second half and press. Wrap each sandwich tightly in clear plastic wrap and leave at room temperature until ready to serve.

### **TOWER OF BAGEL SANDWICHES**

Yield: Four servings.

4 freshly baked bagels 8 ounces cream cheese at room temperature 1/2 cup finely chopped scallions 3/4 pound smoked salmon, preferably Norwegian.

1. Place one bagel at a time on a flat surface. Hold a slicing knife parallel to the cutting surface. Cut through the bagel to make four slices of more or less equal thickness.
2. Blend the cream cheese with the scallions.
3. For each sandwich, smear two ounces of cream cheese on a cut surface of four bagel slices. Repeat until all the slices are smeared. Top each smeared surface with an equal number of salmon slices. Reassemble the bagel slices, sandwich fashion.

### **HAM AND CHUTNEY SANDWICHES**

Yield: Four sandwiches.

4 crusty french rolls (small baguettes) about 7-inches long, or use 4 7-inch lengths of baguettes 6 tablespoons sweet mustard (preferably sweetened with honey) 4 tablespoons mayonnaise 1/2 pound cooked, wafer-thin slices of ham 4 tablespoons chutney, preferably homemade.

1. Split the french rolls or bread slices in half, sandwich fashion.
2. Spread each of four bread slices with one-and-a-half tablespoons of mustard and spread each of the remaining slices with one tablespoon of mayonnaise.
3. Cover half of the mustard-smeared bread slices with a quarter of the ham slices and top each serving with one tablespoon of chutney. Cover with the mayonnaise bread slices and press to seal.

### **CHICKEN AND SUN-DRIED TOMATO SANDWICHES**

Yield: Four servings.

4 crusty french rolls (small baguettes) about 7-inches long, or use 4 7-inch lengths of baguettes 1/2 cup mayonnaise 1/2 pound thinly sliced cooked chicken meat 24 sun-dried tomatoes 8 small hearts of romaine lettuce or Boston lettuce leaves.

1. Split the french rolls or bread slices in half, sandwich fashion.
2. Spread the cut side of each piece of bread with equal amounts of mayonnaise. Divide the chicken slices into four equal-size portions. Cover half the mayonnaise-smear bread slices with one portion of chicken slices neatly arranged. Cover each serving with six sun-dried tomatoes. Cover each with two lettuce leaves. Top with the remaining bread slices. Press to make the sandwiches more compact.

Yield: Four sandwiches. CROQUE-MONSIEUR 2 square slices firm-textured white bread 4 thin slices Swiss cheese (preferably Emmenthal) 2 thin slices baked ham 1 or 2 tablespoons butter.

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
2. For one sandwich, place a slice of bread on a flat surface. Top it neatly with two thin slices of cheese trimmed to fit. Cover with the ham, also trimmed to fit. Cover with the remaining bread slice.
3. Melt the butter and generously brush the top of the sandwich with it. Brush the bottom of a heavy skillet just large enough to hold the sandwich. Add the sandwich, brushed side down. Generously brush the unbuttered side with butter.
4. Cook the sandwich on top of the stove until the bottom is nicely browned. Turn the sandwich over and immediately put it in the oven. Bake it just until the filling is piping hot and the cheese has melted. If desired, trim the sides. Cut in half and serve piping hot.

## **BAGEL AND SMOKED SALMON SANDWICHES**

Yield: One sandwich.

4 bagels 8 tablespoons cream cheese 4 tablespoons drained capers 1/4 cup finely chopped dill 1/2 pound thin smoked salmon slices 4 slices red or Vidalia onions.

1. Slice the bagels through the center, sandwich fashion.
2. Toast the cut side of each bagel until golden brown.
3. Smear each bagel half with one tablespoon of cream cheese. Scatter equal amounts of capers and dill over four bagel halves. Press down lightly with a fork to make the capers and dill adhere.
4. Cover each smeared bagel half with equal portions of salmon slices. Cover each with one onion slice. Top each sandwich with a second bagel half and press.

## **FOCACCIA (A pizzalike bread)**

Yield: Four sandwiches.

2 packages dry yeast 1 cup, plus 2 tablespoons, lukewarm water 2 cups all-purpose flour 1 1/2 cups whole-wheat flour 1/4 teaspoon salt, if desired 1 teaspoon sugar 6 tablespoons olive oil, plus oil for greasing the baking sheet and mixing bowl 1/2 cup freshly grated pecorino or romano cheese 1 teaspoon finely minced garlic 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary, or half the amount dried 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper.

1. Put the yeast into the container of a food processor and add the water, all-purpose and whole-wheat flours, salt and sugar.

2. Start blending while adding two tablespoons of the oil. Blend until the dough comes away from the sides of the bowl of the container. Empty the dough onto a lightly floured board and knead briefly. Shape the dough into a ball. Lightly oil a mixing bowl and add the ball of dough. Cover with clear plastic wrap and let stand half an hour or longer in a warm place.

3. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

4. Lightly oil a baking sheet. Roll out the dough into a rectangle measuring about 11 by 13 inches. Place the rectangle of dough onto the baking sheet. Using two fingers, make indentations all over the surface of the dough, leaving a half-inch border all around. Combine the cheese, garlic, rosemary and black pepper. Sprinkle the top of the dough all over with this mixture. Press down once more all over the top of the dough with two fingers. Dribble the remaining four tablespoons of olive oil all over the dough.

5. Place the dough in the oven and bake 30 minutes. Cut into six to 10 wedges and serve hot.

### **FOCACCIA WITH MOZZARELLA AND SUN-DRIED TOMATOES**

Yield: Six to 10 servings.

Scatter one cup of grated mozzarella cheese over the top of the focaccia five minutes before it is removed from the oven. Arrange 20 more sun-dried tomatoes in spoke-fashion on top of the cheese and bake another five minutes.