

FLAVOR & THE MENU

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TOP 10 TRENDS



INFLUENCING FLAVOR & MENU DEVELOPMENT

worldly SANDWICHES

Banh mi was just the start of a global parade of sandwich styles and flavors hitting U.S. menus

WHETHER YOU THOUGHT THE SANDWICH WAS THE EPONYMOUS invention of an English aristocrat or an all-American phenomenon, think again: The whole world eats bread and what's between it.

"There are lots of different kinds of sandwiches in the world, and many of them are very adaptable to our culture," says Scott Robertson, executive chef of Grafton Street, a bar and grill in busy Harvard Square in Cambridge, Mass. In addition to the usual burger and French dip, Robertson's menu includes chicken pesto panini, a twice-pressed Cuban, a vegetarian toasted-chickpea burger and such specials as a chacarero, based on the traditional Chilean sandwich filled with such ingredients as green beans and avocado, plus or minus meat.

Speaking Spanish

"A chacarero is a person who owns a small plot of land and plants all kinds of things on it so he can feed himself and his family," says Robertson, who grew up in a Spanish neighborhood in Boston and has traveled extensively in Central and South America.

"It's a traditional street food in Chile, but you see it all over South America, made with whatever vegetables are in season and whatever kind of meat the vendor can get."

Robertson often makes his chacarero with chicken, flank steak or lamb, seasoned with spices like coriander, cumin, garlic, lime juice and olive oil, then roasted or grilled and served on a crusty round roll with green beans, avocado, tomato and house-made chimichurri mayo.

"We'll serve about 100 of these a day when we have it on the menu, lunch and dinner," says Robertson.

Another Latin classic is the Cuban, which he sometimes makes with carmitas rather than the traditional sliced pork.



In this naan-panini hybrid with Moroccan accents, chicken is wrapped in a chewy flatbread and slathered with nectarine chutney.



TIPS FOR MAKING SANDWICHES WORK FOR YOU

Sandwiches represent a very successful way to offer customers high-quality options that are lighter and more approachable than standard menu fare.

"We had always talked about a place that would be more affordable, especially at lunch," says Evandro Caregnato, culinary director of Texas de Brazil, the premiere Brazilian churrascaria steakhouse concept with 15 locations. So Dallas' Texas de Brazil Express opened in summer 2009 with a menu of sandwiches and salads showcasing TdB's most popular grilled meats, including picanya, the concept's signature top sirloin, plus pork loin, sausage and chicken breast wrapped in bacon.

"It's the same quality of meats, but between bread, or served on a salad or rice bowl," explains Caregnato.

The Express concept allows customers to build their own sandwich, salad or rice bowl as they walk a display line with a grill master station and an array of condiments and toppings, like roasted garlic aioli, crispy shallots, hearts of palm and blue cheese.

"It's set up like a sub shop, but this is much fancier than a sub shop," notes Caregnato.

"The meats are roasted fresh daily, in-house, and all the condiments are made from scratch. The focus is on flavor and specialty ingredients — arugula rather than Romaine or iceberg, tomatoes marinated in olive oil, balsamic vinegar and basil, rather than wan-looking sliced tomatoes. You can see — and smell — the quality."

The prototype includes 90 seats, but there is also a brisk business in takeout, and catering is planned. Sandwiches are priced under \$8, no matter what the condiments or toppings, and \$2 more gets you a double portion of meat.

"That's not a lot of money for a great sandwich, and we are getting a lot of obvious food lovers who know the difference between this and your average sandwich," says the chef, adding that long-range plans call for fine-tuning the Express concept and opening it up for franchising.

"We get people coming in off the street because there's that wonderful smell of roasted meat, and then they come back later in the day with someone else, to show it to them."

Such is the power of a well-made sandwich.

"I marinate the meat in orange juice, molasses, garlic and lots of onions, then roast it for hours until it's tender," he says.

The meat is pulled, layered on a torpedo roll with sliced ham and Gruyère and baked, open, until the cheese melts. The sandwich is then dressed with chipotle-spiked aioli, red onions, dill pickles and cilantro, closed up, pressed and griddled for two minutes.

The two-step cooking process is important: "If you just do it in the pan, the outside burns and the inside doesn't heat up," explains Robertson.

Also important is the right bread; traditional Cuban-style French bread has a light crust and is soft inside, ensuring proper response to the pressing.

Perhaps the most popular globally inspired sandwich on Grafton Street's menu, however, is the Middle-Eastern-style toasted-chickpea burger, a house-made blend of cooked chickpeas, tahini and lots of caramelized onion, seasoned with salt, pepper, rosemary and cilantro. The mixture is stiffened with enough panko crumbs to give it structure, then formed into a patty and pan-fried to order. Served on grilled naan bread with cucumber-and-yogurt

TAKE-AWAY: *know your dough*

Bread is everything. You need certain characteristics for different sandwiches. Focus on ease of eating and durability; nobody wants a sandwich they can't chew or one that falls apart. Also, certain things set each type of sandwich apart, and it's important to stay true to those things. Examples are the olive salad of a muffuletta, the pâté and pickled vegetables of a banh mi and the soft bread of a Cuban that toasts crisp when pressed.

TODD DOWNS

tzatziki, "it's a great vegetarian option," says Robertson, "and we sell a ton of them."

Totally Tortas

At Gecko Grill, a family-owned, Mexican restaurant in San Jose, Calif., the sandwich of choice is the torta, a traditional sandwich category of Mexico. Here, it encompasses a wide variety of different hot and cold fillings and is "dressed up" with versions such as the Mexican Cheese Steak Torta, carne asada topped with shredded Jack cheese, onions, avocado slices, lettuce, tomato and jalapeños.

"We take the kinds of flavors and ingredients that are available in a traditional Mexican kitchen and tailor them to a non-Latin audience with upgrades to the presentation and combination," says chef/co-owner Sarah Jaramillo.

For instance, the classic, oblong telera roll is purchased daily from a local Mexican artisanal bakery and spread with fresh Mexican crema after toasting, which is customary. Fillings can be a little less traditional; consider the grilled mahimahi with garlic butter (Gecko Fish Torta), the fresh crabmeat (the special Torta Melt) or the version with sautéed peppers, zucchini and onions (Veggie Grill Torta).

Jaramillo also happily repurposes quesadilla fillings, such as tomato, basil and mozzarella with basil-avocado salsa or chicken mole, into sandwiches. "The torta is a very versatile sandwich, especially if you can find the right kind of bread," she notes. Even the Gecko Burger is served on it. "And our customers really enjoy them."

Asian Adaptations

Another area of the world with a wealth of sandwich traditions, from Indian masala dosa to Vietnamese banh mi, is Asia. Xie Xie (Mandarin for "thank you"), a New York City sandwich restaurant, is the brainchild of chef Angelo Sosa. He features a half-dozen flavorful sandwiches that he describes as "bridges" between Asian and American cuisine, including Sweet Glazed Pork in a Chinese bun with sweet-and-sour condiment and Shredded Braised Chicken with smoked egg salad and cilantro. The degree of Westernization varies from sandwich to sandwich. The top-selling Asian Lobster Roll has subtle Asian adaptations.

"Everyone here knows the lobster roll, just like everyone here knows the hamburger, but this one's done with Japanese Kewpie mayo, tarragon and crispy shallots packed into a



WOW BAO

Delightfully chewy and ready for a variety of savory or sweet fillings, steamed bao and mantao have plenty of potential for grab-and-go formats.

TAKE-AWAY: *creative customization*

Sandwiches offer the culinary team a platform to express their creativity and the opportunity to utilize high-quality trim from other parts of the menu. The flexibility and exchangeability of each component (bread/carrier, spread/sauce, fillings) satisfy today's customization-seeking diner. Give the customers a range of options in each category so they can build their own, but also be sure to provide proven combinations.

ROBERT DANHI

TAKE-AWAY: *bread as a vehicle*

Sandwiches represent a perfect vehicle for translating distinctive ingredients and flavors into a familiar format that American diners love.

Jason's Deli's Wrapini is a good example of tying in old favorites with newer cooking methods. Taking the ho hum and making it your own may mean just adding a simple spice or a new cooking method.

It is all about keeping it fresh for your customers.

RICK PEREZ

interpretation, tilapia is cooked in turmeric oil, topped with onion jam, sriracha mayonnaise and fresh dill on a baguette.

One sign that we'll be seeing more Asian-influenced sandwiches in mainstream dining is the multi-unit Charley's Grilled Subs, with 370 locations worldwide, where a spicy Asian-barbecue sandwich recently joined the lineup of mostly traditional American sandwiches. Marinated in pears, green onions and an assortment of authentic spices, the kogi-style beef is topped with provolone cheese and served on a warm "sub" roll.

traditional top-loading hot-dog bun," explains Sosa.

The burger has been recast as Vietnamese barbecue beef, made with braised short rib and served on a kaiser roll with basil mayonnaise and carrot kimchi.

Fish Chaca la Vong, on the other hand, is based on a freshwater Asian-catfish specialty that Sosa fell in love with in Hanoi seven years ago.

"I started thinking: What if I took these flavors but introduced them in sandwich form, to hit more of a Western palate?" In Sosa's

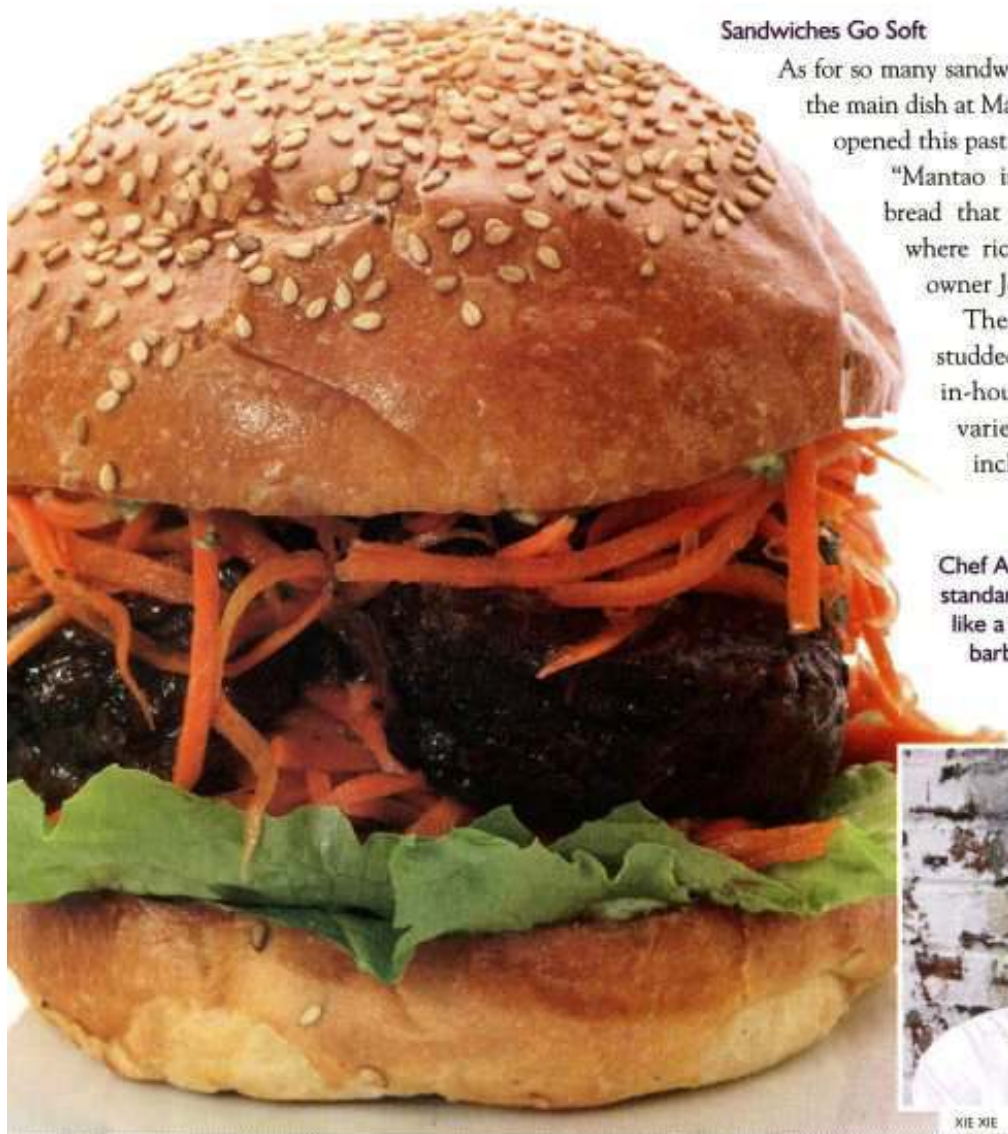
Sandwiches Go Soft

As for so many sandwiches, the bread is instrumental to the main dish at Mantao Chinese Sandwiches, which opened this past summer in New York City.

"Mantao is a simple, flour-based, steamed bread that is a staple of northern China, where rice is not so prevalent," says co-owner Joseph Tien.

The soft, bao-like, sesame-seed-studded little buns, which are made in-house from scratch daily, hold a variety of different nifty fillings, including spicy braised pork, short rib

Chef Angelo Sosa merges American standards with Asian flavors in offerings like a burger with a Vietnamese-barbecue spin.



XIE XIE



NATIONAL PEANUT BOARD

With crunchy-chewy bread, slowly simmered meats and flavorful extras, tortas are well-timed for more menus.

and kimchi, spicy mackerel, black-pepper chicken, shiitake and portobello mushrooms, Angus beef burger with spicy sambal sauce, and even fried egg with Chinese sausage and cheese.

Priced at \$2.50 to \$4.50 each, the sandwiches are also available in a combo box of any two with a side green salad and shrimp chips. The buns are aided and abetted on the menu by cold sesame noodles; wonton soup; steamed, spicy wontons; two kinds of fried dumplings; salads, such as beets with green-tea vinaigrette; and crepe-like Mantao Pancake Rolls with a choice of shredded beef or curry chicken.

"This is ideal food for a quality-oriented, fast-casual concept that appeals to someone who wants something a little different, and we were careful to design the whole package with a wide audience in mind, not just Asians," says Tien, who envisions replicating Mantao Chinese Sandwiches in such urban markets as Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

"Everyone understands what a sandwich is, and using a mix of Asian and non-Asian ingredients makes them more familiar, but with more interesting flavors than an American-style sandwich.

"Once the general population becomes more familiar with Asian sandwiches, like what's happening to the banh mi now, they really have the potential to catch on."

Betting on the Banh Mi

Anthony Paone, chef of the popular Sea Salt in Berkeley, Calif., (part of K2 Restaurants, including T-Rex, Fonda, Jimmy Deans and Lalime's and owned by Haig and Cindy Krikorian), has had a banh mi in some form or other on the menu for years.

TAKE-AWAY: *domestic affairs*

It's important to remember that there is more to pressed sandwiches than panini and more to cold ones than wraps. Also, don't forget regional American sandwiches, like New Orleans' po-boy, for sources of inspiration.

ROBIN SCHEMPP

"The banh mi is an interesting sandwich left over from the French colonial period in Vietnam," says Paone.

The classic banh mi contains a liverwurst-like pâté and ham or roasted or grilled pork, daikon, onions, cucumbers, cilantro, plus thinly sliced pickled carrots and jalapeños on a baguette. Like so many sandwiches, this one is wide open to interpretation.



Koftas and other meatball variations become portable when wedged inside a pita.

With its menu heavily focused on sustainable seafood, Sea Salt's banh mi originally was filled with Japanese-style barbecued eel. When Paone's local importer had trouble sourcing the product, he changed it over to a house-made pâté of pork shoulder and neck fat, dressed with jalapeño and a quick pickle of onion and carrots and served on ciabatta from K2 Restaurants' new Artisan Bakery. It shares menu space with such snacky foods as toasted fresh chickpeas, oyster and clam shooters, fried smelts and grilled sardines.

"There's not a large audience for it, but we like it, and it says a lot about what Sea Salt is all about," says Paone.

Still, the sandwich category in general is becoming more significant for the restaurant, and the menu contains a number of popular signatures that contemporize American classics, such as hand-chopped ahi tuna sliders, mini lobster rolls and the popular Bacon, Lettuce and Trout Sandwich.

"That's a sandwich that really hits everyone in a happy place," says Paone.

Real Italians

Sandwiches are a very important menu category for BiNA Osteria in Boston, owned by sister-and-brother restaurateurs Azita Bina-Seibel and Babak Bina. Originally from Iran, the two had operated several Northern Italian restaurants in Boston and Providence, R.I., before opening the award-winning gourmet Persian restaurant Lala Rokh, which made their name.

Since then, they have transitioned back to Italian food with the 3-year-old Bin 26 Enoteca and now their newest, BiNa, which was established primarily as a foothold for importing high-quality

Italian and French food products. Adjoining the restaurant is BiNA Alimentari, a shop offering European specialty foods and wines.

"Having the café gives us an outlet for many of the imported products and an opportunity to introduce new things to our customers," says Babak Bina. "There are many wonderful products out there that we would love to be able to bring in."

Sandwiches are served in the store and its adjacent outdoor café, as well as in the full-service osteria. Selections range from traditional options like turkey and roast beef (albeit organic and grass-fed, sourced from local farmers) to imported, cured meats and cheeses including speck, jamon serrano, salame Toscano and caciocavallo.

Specialty sandwiches and pressed panini include braesaola with arugula, Parmesan and roasted peppers, and lemon-zest-marinated salmon with cream of eggplant and mascarpone. These are presented in the simple, traditional Italian style, with just a drizzling of olive oil and salt and pepper, to play up the quality of the meat, cheese and bread.

"Sandwiches are very popular at lunch, of course, but they also sell very well on the late-night menu," notes Bina. "And they are something that is very easy for the staff to put together, using all these beautiful ingredients." ☞

TAKE-AWAY: *add jazz*

Whether it's banh-mi-inspired touches like sweet chile-ginger drizzle, fresh cilantro and ginger-pickled carrots, or muffuletta ingredients like peppercom salami, roasted-garlic provolone and house-made olive-and-pickled-veggie salad, these all can be incorporated into a multi-unit menu with innovative development and custom ingredients created with key suppliers. Jazzing up the everyday sandwich is a must these days; think custom cheeses, sauces, spreads and toppers.

KATHY CASEY

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for more on the Worldly Sandwiches trend