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THE British Breads are coming!

Move over English muffins... crumpets, scones and tea sandwiches

are on the rise by Seánan Forbes

The British love their "stodge," that is, food that is comforting, starchy and familiar. It's the stuff that sticks to the ribs and warms the soul on a cold and rainy morning—and nothing has the comfort factor of good bread.

Regional specialties include Welsh griddle cakes (small raisin-studded rounds cooked on a griddle), Scottish oatcakes (thick crackers made of coarse oats), the Irish farl (a skillet-cooked potato bread), not to mention Britain's most expensive loaf: Hobbs House Bakery's Shepherds Loaf, for which customers pay \$21 (about \$33). The UK is famous for its frilly tea sandwiches and moist brown Irish soda breads, and they're sold everywhere, even drug stores. British bread delivers comfort and brings in easy cash—and not just on its native ground.

As Chef de Cuisine Ron Oliver of The Marine Room in La Jolla, Calif., observes, British bread is a natural vehicle. Scones



have cream, tea sandwiches bear butter and cucumber, and whole-meal bread is piled with ham and cheese. Look back far enough, and bread serves as a plate.

On menus in new countries, British and Irish

breads have been given fresh flavors and textures, and they have customers queuing through the door. Across America, chefs are taking traditional British breads and using them to tempt their customers, while putting their own spin on classic crumbs, "We kidnap it and turn it into something else," says Wendy Pashman, president of Chicago's Entertaining Company. You may not find plain Scottish baps (soft, flat white-flour rolls) or chip butties (sandwiches made of French fries on white bread) everywhere, but you can find scones and soda breads, Yorkshire puddings and potato bread—even tea sandwiches—given new character and fresh roles in all kinds of cuisines.

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Bacon-Cheddar scones, \$4, Chef-Owner Celina Tio, Julian, Kansas City, Mo. RECIPE, p. 89.

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Crumpets, \$1, Chef de Cuisine Ron Oliver, The Marine Room, San Diego, Calif. RECIPE, p. 90.

BREAD AS A BASE

Oliver, co-author with Chef Bernard Guillas of *Flying Pans: Two Chefs One World* (Sunbelt Publications, 2009) sees British breads as naked canvases, ready to be adapted to any season or cuisine. "It's not really the bread itself, it's what you put on it that makes it interesting," he says. "The bread is a vehicle to carry the other flavors to your mouth. You can use bread as a base, for toppings or to bake things right into it."

Guillas, executive chef of La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club, in La Jolla, Calif., sees the crumpet, a pancake-like bread, as a good medium. "If you start with it plain, you can do anything with it. You

can change the flavors, making them sweet or savory."

Oliver concurs, noting that any kind of herb or spice will work: "I even used lemon balm before. I've done curry crumpets, *garam masala* crumpets, even saffron." He's gone sweet, too, with vanilla and cardamom or agave nectar and rum. There is one caveat: "With crumpets, you don't want to add anything too heavy, because it will prevent the bread from rising," he explains. Guillas and Oliver keep things light with horseradish and chive crumpets topped

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with *gravlax* (\$1, recipe, p. 90).

Their version of British soda bread (recipe, plateonline.com) gets the same experimental treatment. As Oliver notes, it will take heavier ingredients, "because it has the body to hold stiff like dried fruit; nothing is off-limits. You can substitute one-third of the flour with cornmeal—to make golden soda bread. You can add cocoa powder or oats." But Guillas doesn't substitute anything in his grandmother's *pain d'epices* (recipe, plateonline.com) "she baked the honey-spice bread in an old cast-iron mold. As soon as it came out of the oven, it would take over the whole house," says Guillas.

SCONE ON THE RANGE

Some chefs test their boundaries with crumpets and soda bread, while others play with scones. Celina Tio, chef-owner of Julian, in Kansas City, Mo., hot-smokes bacon with salt, sugar, juniper berries and peppercorns for her bacon-Cheddar scones (\$4, recipe, p. 89). "It's just typical that a chef who's predominantly savory makes a savory scone," Tio says. "I love breakfast food and scones, so we came up with these for Sunday brunch. I offer them as a starter that people can share. They're inexpensive, it tides [guests] over while they wait for breakfast, and it increases the check," she says.

Mindy Segal, chef-owner of HotChocolate in Chicago, makes many kinds of scones, like chocolate chip and cinnamon (recipe, plateonline.com). "We have a base recipe and we change it. We have a basket of breakfast pastries: a scone, a croissant and a coffee cake. Everything's seasonal, and it has to be cohesive."

Segal likes scones that aren't too dry, that have the right amount of butter. "You have to taste a little salt," she says, "it's



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Yorkshire pudding

Chef Kris Morningstar, District, Los Angeles

Yield: 58 servings

Menu price: N/A; food cost/serving: N/A

Eggs 8 each

Milk 4 C

Flour 640 g

Salt 25 g

Chives, chopped 12 g

Thyme, fresh, chopped 8 g

Freshly ground black pepper as needed

Duck fat, melted as needed

1. Combine eggs and milk and reserve.

2. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, salt, chives, thyme and 10 grinds pepper.

3. Pour egg mixture into flour mixture and mix until smooth.

4. Fill mini-muffin tins 1/4 full with melted duck fat and warm in a 425-degree F for 2 minutes. Fill tins 2/3 with batter and immediately place back in oven. Bake for 12 minutes or until golden brown and serve immediately.

almost like a really good biscuit." Timing is also important. "They have to be made fresh that day. End of discussion."

TEA SANDWICHES FOR TWO

At Alice's Tea Cup in New York City, scones are always on the menu, and sisters and co-owners Haley and Lauren Fox put no limits on flavors. Guests may be offered anything from cinnamon-chocolate to pumpkin or ham-and-cheese scones. But Alice's is also known for its tea sandwiches, one of the most popular of which is filled with a curry chicken (\$11, recipe, plateonline.com). "We grew up going to a lot of high teas in hotels,

where we had bland and basic sandwiches. We wanted to do the sandwiches people are used to, but kick them up," says Fox. "For example, we put apricot jam in our chicken curry for sweetness."

At Chicago's Entertaining Company, Executive Chef Shawn Doolin says the tea sandwich selection is always growing, from a "linear" version with watercress, cucumber, red pepper and pesto crème on thinly sliced white bread (recipe, p. 90), to quail breast, quail eggs, baby arugula and roasted tomatoes on wheat (recipe, plateonline.com). "We play off the classics and give our tea sandwiches different shapes so they're organized on

the tray with different heights and colors," says Doolin. "But we do everything small, two bites or less."

Creativity earns loyalty; around 80 percent of their clients are repeat business, and Pashman links the sandwiches with her success. "It says something about our brand, that we are willing to do something by hand, from scratch," she says. Or maybe it's because clients appreciate the tradition of tea sandwiches—old-school British elegance, with delicate fin-



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Cucumber, red pepper and pesto tea sandwich, Executive Chef Shawn Doolin, Entertaining Company, Chicago. RECIPE, p. 90.

and honey, a far cry from the traditional. Kris Morningstar, chef of District in Hollywood, Calif., remembers his

mother's roast beef; and the Yorkshire pudding was one of his favorite parts of the meal. For the bread program, he gave Yorkshire pudding (recipe, p. 44) a spin.

Traditional Yorkshire pudding catches the drippings from roasting meat. At District, "We do duck confit; we render [the fat] out." As to herbs, "Thyme's something my mom did—I think she used dried thyme."

The duck fat and thyme Yorkshire pudding functions as a side dish or a pre-meal starter. It isn't a quick bread, but guests are willing to wait for it.

But that's OK. By taking British breads and giving them multicultural twists, American chefs are making history—and more than a little profit—of their own. While he's happy to play with flavors, Morningstar says, "There should be a lot of freedom, but respect for where something comes from is an important part." You have to know your food's roots.

Seánan Forbes has at least five different sacks of grain on hand (in New York City and London) at any given time. ✪ For recipes from this article and more, visit, plateonline.com.

BAKING BRITISH

British bakers have experience making bread; The Worshipful Company of Bakers (www.bakers.co.uk) was established eight centuries ago. The second oldest guild in London, it was giving gold to the crown as long ago as 1155.

Britain's bakers had to be adaptable. Consider Ireland; the wheat was too soft to work with yeast, so local bakers started leavening flour with soda. Bakers and customers thrived, and the bread is a staple to this day. Even the smallest British village supports a bakery or two.

ger foods and precise presentation—enough to come back for more. Pashman isn't shy about testing flavor-boundaries. "It would be interesting to think of an Asian tea sandwich in the context of English tea," she says, contemplating their 30 varieties of bread.

HOT POTATO

Potato bread is an Irish staple, rolled out, quartered and baked or fried, sometimes with green onions in the mix. In the hands of Marc Forgione, chef-owner of Marc Forgione in New York City, and his original pastry chef, Jenny McCoy (who's now at Craft), potato bread has become something fine and marketable.

Here, too, the chefs started with something simple. "It's a basic recipe," says Forgione. "There's nothing fancy about them; they're really well-made. A potato roll is neutral in flavor; you really

need to hit it on the head with technique. The clincher—the reason that they are memorable—is that we reheat them to order, then we brush them with clarified butter and season them with sea salt."

This neutrality gives space for other tastes to shine. Forgione's potato rolls are served with caramelized onion butter (recipe, plateonline.com). "It's the first thing that hits the table," Forgione says. "Your hands get a little greasy; it's supposed to make you feel like a kid again."

PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

Forgione recalls working at BLT when they had popovers—another spin on Yorkshire pudding. In England, the dough is flattened by drippings, and it's a savory dish. In New England, popovers were allowed to rise into crisp shells around eggy hollows. Americans enjoy popovers with jams, fruit butters

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