

The Modern Global SANDWICH

The next generation of globally inspired handhelds will place more emphasis on form, filling and flavor

SANDWICHES ARE SHAPE SHIFTING again. To understand this emerging, rolling-like-thunder trend, pull back and look at the sandwich through a panoramic lens that encompasses all dynamic food cultures. We've certainly seen global sandwich innovation before. But as street food and a deeper delve into world cuisines seep into the picture, the sandwich morphs from a banh mi or a torta into a shao bing or a smørrebrød. This continued exploration of sandwich builds is leading us farther afield, but to more creative and culinary layers of handheld flavor.

"This trend speaks to the perpetual evolution of both the sandwich carrier and the filling," says consulting chef Rob Corliss of ATE/All Things Epicurean. "There is vast potential for operators to explore what will best connect with their target customers. It's all about how you make your offerings relevant and crave-worthy."

Sandwiches of all nationalities continue to proliferate across the food landscape, giving the American staple new guises to attract hungry diners. As we've become more sophisticated and knowledgeable about regional cuisines and authentic flavor profiles, we

want to find them in familiar and convenient places. And discovering them in something as recognizable as a sandwich makes sense.

"Now that we have gotten used to Vietnamese banh mi and Chinese bao sandwiches, curious food lovers are moving on to new territory," says Kara Nielsen, CCD Innovation trendologist. In recent years, globally inspired Cubanos, panini and tortas have reinforced the staying power of the sandwich. These concepts have also enabled American menu developers to embrace the sandwich in alternative carrier and filling adaptations, especially those that allow the flavors to shine.

FLAT AND FOLDED

One common theme among modern sandwich development is a greater use of flatter, thinner and open-faced breads and carriers, which shift the focus to the ingredients folded within or layered atop.

The open-faced sandwiches renowned in Scandinavia are a welcome addition to some U.S. menus because they combine less-familiar northern European rye breads with toppings that provide a new eating experience. "After hearing so much about

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Sandwiches are no longer defined as sliced meat and cheese between two pieces of bread.

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ANDREW HUNTER

Indian inspiration flavors up this open-faced sandwich, where naan flatbread serves as a base for grilled flat-iron steak marinated in tikka masala paste, layered with curry mayo, mango slices and mango chutney.



THE BEEF CHECKOFF

Why Now Sandwiches truly capture multiple opportunities – hitting all dayparts, snacking options, cuisines, hot/cold combinations, to-go, catering. There is inherent value in a sandwich. Creativity with unique breads and carriers will see the biggest ‘Aha!’ moments in 2013.

– ROB CORLISS



WISCONSIN MILK MARKETING BOARD

Yes, vegetarian sandwiches can be craveable, with flavor-packed fillings like Wisconsin feta, grilled eggplant and Kalamata olives, all tucked in a grilled flatbread.

Scandinavia in the past few years with the success of Noma [René Redzepi’s two-Michelin-star restaurant in Copenhagen], savvy diners are hungry to try these out,” Nielsen says. At Bar Tartine in San Francisco, smørrebrød are built on thin-sliced, sprouted rye bread, then topped with flavorful combinations of cured fish, smoked eggplant, pickled vegetables, creamy spreads, flavorful condiments and fresh herbs.

Au Bon Pain’s Executive Chef Stefano Cordova calls the Italian schiacciata “the mother of all open-faced sandwiches.” The focaccia-like bread that’s flattened by the baker’s fingers, leaving pock marks along the top of the dough that hold olive oil and salt, will find its way onto more menus as a sandwich base, he predicts. “Topped with cheese, extra-virgin olive oil and fresh roasted vegetables, it’s an explosion of colors and flavors,” he says.

Like tartines, other open-faced sandwiches allow toppings to take center stage. Chef Jose Garces, of “Iron

“The sky is the limit with creative and global favorites. Every global cuisine has a handheld that adds value and is potentially transferable to another cuisine. This is a great area for fusion cuisine.”

CHARLIE BAGGS

Chef” fame, celebrates his Latin heritage at Distrito in Philadelphia and Scottsdale with sandwiches born in Mexico and updated for adventurous tastes. His oblong, fried-masa huaraches still bear elements of their Mexico City roots, but instead of toppings limited to traditional green or red salsa, onion, potato, cilantro, ground beef or tongue and queso fresco, Distrito’s “Pato” features duck confit, smoked potato purée, Oaxaca cheese and pickled jalapeños. The “Costillas” is crowned with short rib, three-chile barbecue sauce, queso mixto, poblano, crema and radish.

For more inspirations, many operators are looking to the Middle East, with the falafel arguably the best-known sandwich from that region of the world. “This sandwich is going viral in New York City, with two concepts opening 20 units in the last two years,” says Au Bon Pain’s Cordova. He likewise points to koftas — ground-lamb or beef patties

Fóumami in Boston features northern Chinese shao bing bread sandwiched around Japanese chicken katsu with cabbage and tomato.



FOUMAMI

“With fillings, realize that sometimes the messier, the better. There is a lot of opportunity to bring out the knife and fork in this category as we get back to flavorful applications.”

CARI PRICE

ON THE MENU

Modern Global Sandwiches

CEMITAS ~ Sesame-topped Mexican bread filled with chicken simmered in mole Coloradito sauce and avocado
NIDO KITCHEN & BAR, OAKLAND, CALIF.

SLOPPY CHO ~ Pulled roast pork, pickled carrots and daikon, Asian coleslaw, cilantro, side of Asian barbecue sauce; on Hiro sub or Mantou bun
HIRO SANDWICH BISTRO, GAINESVILLE, FLA.

COCA DE JAMON Y QUESO ~ Serrano ham, manchego cheese, date-almond butter, arugula, piquillo pepper agridulce on Spanish focaccia
SUPER PAN LATINO SANDWICH SHOP, ATLANTA

SMØRREBRØD ~ Kale “tartare” with endives, apples and walnuts in a creamy vinaigrette
AAMANN'S COPENHAGEN, NEW YORK CITY

or balls grilled or cooked on skewers and served in pita and topped with yogurt — and lamb and chicken shawarmas, seasoned and molded around a vertical spit. As the meat rotates on the spit and cooks, chunks are sliced off and served in warmed pita bread or lavash. Cordova credits the “theater and aroma” of these items for enhanced appeal.

NEW GLOBAL BUILDS

Global carriers transcending the focaccia, ciabatta and tortilla are thick or thin, crispy or chewy. Some speak to ancient cultures, while others are innovative and proprietary to their creators. But all are new to the vast majority of U.S. diners.

Portland Penny Diner opened recently at the Hotel Lucia in downtown Portland, Ore., with chef/owner Vitaly Paley’s vision for sandwiches made with Native American fry bread to reflect the region’s heritage cookery. “I thought it would be kind of cool to marry something that’s been here for centuries with ingredients and techniques we as immigrants brought here with us,” says Paley. To prepare the leavened flatbread, he stretches the dough, then drops it in the fryer for a couple of minutes for a crispy but pliable finish. Paley compares the flavor to that of olive-oil-rich focaccia — “pleasantly greasy,” he says. He folds the fry bread over fillings like falafel, harissa, raita, grilled tomatoes and lettuce for one build, as well as Middle Eastern braised lamb neck — “lamb carnitas” — along with harissa, grilled tomatoes, lettuce and preserved lemon for another.

“Keep in mind that North America has global sandwich power, too! For every globally inspired sandwich, there is an American classic to be admired or re-tooled.”

ROBIN SCHEMPP

For his “Bun Me,” a creative riff on a banh mi, Paley uses a lighter, focaccia-style bread which is layered with braised beef belly, chicken liver mousse, quick-pickled coleslaw, basil, cilantro, chiles and spicy mayo.

When considering the carrier of his sandwiches, Paley points to bread’s dual purpose: functionality and flavor delivery. “You have to have both. You’ve got to have the right bread to hold it all together — that’s the function of the bread, after all — but you also want it to soak up the flavors,” he notes. “As far as the filling goes, it’s liberating to know we’re no longer relegated to traditional ‘lunch meats’ like ham, turkey and pastrami.”

On the other side of the country, shao bings have put Fómami (a contraction that loosely translates to “what Buddha finds to be most delicious”) on the map in Boston. The inventive Asian sandwich bar draws its inspiration from the food of China’s Shandong province, but doesn’t drop culinary anchor strictly in that region — or country. Shao bings are unleavened bread falling somewhere between pita and focaccia, in which two separate sets of dough are combined and rolled out again to create a consistency that, when baked at a high temperature, is crisp and flaky on the outside and soft and chewy on the inside. Korean grilled soy-garlic-marinated rib-eye with sautéed onions and romaine lettuce is one shao bing variety at Fómami; panko-breaded chicken breast, cabbage, tomato and katsu sauce, inspired by Japan, is another. For the less-adventurous diner, one shao bing sports traditional tuna salad, and to accommodate vegetarians, another features flash-fried tofu, sautéed onion and carrot.

Bäco Mercat in Los Angeles is home of the “bäco,” the signature flatbread sandwich developed by chef Josef Centeno. With inspiration taken from coca, the Spanish version of pizza, the original bäco featured crispy pork belly and beef carnitas with caraway pepper. Since then, bäco bread has taken center stage and works as a vessel for pork, beef, poultry, seafood, vegetables and more.

And who says a sandwich has to feature bread at all to catch fire? Juan “Peter” Figueroa chose a different carrier when he introduced the jibarito — made with flattened, fried green plantains, garlic-flavored mayonnaise and a filling that typically includes steak, chicken or pork, cheese, lettuce and tomato. Figueroa began serving these at Borinquen, a Puerto Rican restaurant in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood, in 1996, after reading about a Puerto Rican sandwich substituting plantains for bread. The jibarito’s popularity has since spread to other Latin-American restaurants around Chicago, including Mexican, Cuban and Argentinean establishments.

“This trend will continue to evolve for the simple reason that sandwiches are a perfect fit for our mobile and time-stressed lives. But we want interesting builds along with portability, so this is a natural on the continuum of sandwich evolution. There’s great potential with Greek, Middle Eastern and Mexican meat-on-a-stick as a hot, on-the-go sandwich. This has great visual appeal and suggests a particular wholesomeness to the sandwich.”

CHRISTOPHER KOETKE

How to Work It There has been a resurrection, making the sandwich our best-selling American food in all its forms and dayparts. Signaturize and customize – offer classic and innovatively reconstructed signatures, but also allow guests to mix and match interesting, high-quality ingredients in a choice of formats (classic, grilled/pressed, open-faced, etc.).

– ROBIN SCHEMPP

BUILDING VALUE

Sandwiches, no matter how jacked up, offer a familiar platform for diners. And aside from bringing menu distinction and craveability, adding global inspirations to your sandwich menu may just move them up a notch in value perception.

“Based on where we are in our economy, consumers are looking at sandwiches for value, generally under a \$10 price point,” says Technomic’s Darren Tristano. “How do you go higher? Through creative, globally inspired sandwiches.” Indeed, authentic expressions on quality breads and other forms express premium values. “If done well — if you have credibility with the preparation and execution — this gives you an opportunity to raise the price on your sandwich.”

And as we look at the proliferation of better burger chains and even better chicken chains, perhaps “better” for sandwiches is linked to a bona fide exploration of the globe. ☺

Creatively layered smørrebrød at Bar Tartine in San Francisco offer variations on a Danish theme, from open-faced to stacked veggies.



BAR TARTINE

“One area to focus on more, and where there are great differentiation opportunities, is healthy, vegetarian sandwiches. The problem is that most vegetarian sandwiches have been lackluster, so there is great potential in this category. The sweet spot here is for internationally inspired veggie sandwiches — especially leveraging new and popular flatbreads and wraps. Also, there will be a continued and indeed growing presence of spicy sandwich spreads that will leverage items like aji of South America and Korean chile pastes.”

CHRISTOPHER KOETKE