



THE  
**BAGEL**  
COMES  
FULL  
CIRCLE

The good ol' days of bagel baking are back—and better than ever.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS

FOOD STYLING: BRETT KURZWEIL



Lower East Side market stalls in New York City in the 1890s

STREET MARKET AND TING HYATT: GETTY IMAGES; BAGEL: CHLOE NOLAN; KLIEGMAN AND BERNAMOFF: SASHA MASLOV/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDX

If you visit the corner of Kenmare and Elizabeth streets in New York City on a Sunday morning, you'll likely see a line of people wrapped around the block. The same goes for the intersection of Stone Street and Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, MA, and Geary Boulevard and Fillmore Street in San Francisco. The people are all waiting for—believe it or not—bagels. Bagel making has become an art again, and the best of the best ones are as sought after as any croissant-doughnut or trendy food-truck taco. “We’ve gone back to producing bagels in a more thoughtful way,” says

Matt Kliegman, who boils his bagels in honey water before baking them in a wood-fired oven at New York City’s Black Seed Bagels. People are willing to wait a little longer and pay a little more for bagels made the old-fashioned way, he says. That old-school process of making bagels—when bakers proofed the dough, hand-rolled the rounds and boiled them before baking—all but disappeared 50 years ago with the advent of modern ingredients and machinery. But these days, bakers like Matt and his partner, Noah Bernamoff, and Melissa Weller, co-owner of Sadelle’s in New York City, are leading a bagel revival.

Before Melissa ever sold a single bagel at her now-famous shop, she made a name for herself in New York City kitchens like Babbo, Per Se (where she made bagels for staff dinners) and Roberta’s (where she created the bread program). She spent her off hours tasting bagels around the city and reading book after book about bagel history. Eventually, she opened a bagel stall at a Brooklyn food market, where she tested different types of flour, amounts of sugar, and starters. Her goal was to better the city’s most storied breakfast food without completely changing it. Her version



of the classic pumpernickel, for example, is boiled in water with malt syrup (a Big Apple technique) and tinted with brown barley flour (rather than with modern darkening hacks like cocoa powder or brewed coffee). She hasn’t completely stuck with the past, though: To make her onion bagels, she folds dehydrated onions into the dough rather than sprinkling them on top, where they tend to burn. “It’s not that I thought, ‘I want to do this differently,’” says Melissa. “I just thought, ‘I want to make the best bagel I can possibly make.’”

Mary Ting Hyatt, owner of Bagelsaurus in Cambridge, MA, takes a similar approach, and manages to attract both



MARY TING HYATT  
BAGELSAURUS,  
Cambridge, MA

“IT IS GREAT TO SEE BAGELS SWITCHING FROM FACTORIES BACK TO BAKERIES. I WANT MY EMPLOYEES TO FEEL LIKE BAKERS—NOT MACHINE OPERATORS.”

MATT KLIEGMAN AND NOAH BERNAMOFF  
BLACK SEED BAGELS, New York City



“A BAGEL SHOULDN’T BE MASSIVE,” MATT SAYS. “IT’S THE FOUNDATION FOR A SANDWICH; YOU DON’T WANT TO HAVE TO DISLOCATE YOUR JAW TO EAT ONE.”

traditionalists and the adventurous, who tend to love her black-olive bagels with honey-rosemary cream cheese. Her business model, meanwhile, was 100 percent modern: She started her Porter Square bagel café as a pop-up in the back of a sandwich shop before turning to Kickstarter for funding—which she earned in four days. That’s the real magic of this so-called bagel revolution: To customers, bagels are shiny and new—even worthy of crowd-sourced cash; to bakers, they’re a return to the golden age. “One hundred years ago, the process wasn’t considered artisanal,” Melissa says. “It was just what bakers had to do.”

**BAGELS BACK IN THE DAY**

America’s first bagel makers were mostly Eastern European immigrants who settled in New York City’s Lower East Side in the late

1800s. These working-class, predominantly Jewish bakers sold thousands of small, dense, hard-crustured rounds daily on the street. As bagels grew in popularity through the first half of the 1900s, so did efforts to mass-produce them: In 1954, Connecticut-based Polish baker Harry Lender revolutionized how America ate bagels by freezing his hand-rolled surplus during the week to sell on the weekend. By the next year, sleeves of Lender’s Bagels were in grocery-store freezers for the first time.

A cross-country bagel expansion followed in the 1960s, thanks in large part to California inventor Daniel Thompson’s bagel-making machine. These machines and others that followed made mass production possible, so bagels spread to every part of the country. Of course, the downside was that they weren’t exactly like the originals. They were bigger (because they were shaped by automated arms) and softer (some machines could only handle watery dough). By the 1980s, you could pick up a bagel pretty much

anywhere—gas station mini marts, food courts, even Burger King, which added a bagel breakfast sandwich in the late 1980s. These weren’t the bagels of 1920s New York, but no one knew any better... except New Yorkers.

**BAGEL PRIDE**

To this day, native New Yorkers are convinced “real” bagels can’t be found anywhere

else, and business owners far from the city have tried to take advantage of this by using “New York” or “Brooklyn” in their store names. The Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Co., based in Florida, even tries to replicate the composition of New York City tap water. There’s no proof that the bagel-boiling water has a huge effect on flavor, but the shtick seems to work: The chain has 24 outposts.

Evan Bloom, co-owner of San Francisco’s Jewish deli Wise Sons, took the opposite approach: “We purposefully do not call our product a New York bagel, because everyone has an opinion about those,” he says. He and business partner Leo Beckerman had to futz with the recipe dozens of times until it met their exacting standards: chewy on the outside, softer in the middle, with a slightly malty taste.

The biggest difference between bagels made in New York and ones produced elsewhere might just be pride. “New York City had a really dominant bagel culture in the early 1900s,” explains Melissa, “but you can find good bagels in other places.”

The return to artisanal bagel baking has led to an increased interest in bagels of every form—even ones that aren’t old-fashioned. The Bagel Store in Brooklyn, for example, can barely keep up with demand for its rainbow bagels, dyed with food coloring. When a behind-the-scenes video was published earlier this year showing how the over-saturated bagel was made, demand got so huge that the shop had to shut down for a week to streamline



**EVAN BLOOM AND LEO BECKERMAN**

**WISE SONS JEWISH DELICATESSEN, San Francisco**

“THERE IS NOSTALGIA AND RITUAL THAT’S OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH BAGELS,” EVAN SAYS. “FOR ME, IT WAS SUNDAYS WITH MY GRANDMA, EATING BAGELS AND LOX. I EVEN REMEMBER THE PLATES SHE SERVED THEM ON.”

its production process. And four-year-old Tompkins Square Bagels in Manhattan, which is opening a second location soon, has had similar cult success with its over-the-top cream cheese menu (42 options, including birthday cake and wasabi). Whether folks actually crave these crazy flavors or just the thrill of tasting the Next Big Thing is up for debate. The bottom line is that people want more bagels. “We’re choosier about carbs these days,” Mary says, laughing. “No one is going to eat a bagel that’s not worth it.”



**MELISSA WELLER**

**SADELLE'S, New York City**

“THERE IS A PHENOMENON OF FORMING LINES TO SEE WHAT THE NEW THING IS ALL ABOUT, AND NOW WE HAVE A SPOTLIGHT ON BAGELS. IT’S CHANGING WHAT BAGELS ARE AND HOW PEOPLE WANT THEM.”



WISE SONS BAGELS: MOLLY DECOUDREAU; BLOOM AND BECKERMAN: ALANNA HALE; SADELLE'S BAGELS: EVAN SUNG; WELLER: MELISSA HORN



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Oscar Mayer Premium Beef Hot Dogs are now made with 100% Angus beef for a taste the whole family will enjoy.



## MAKING THE ROUNDS

We asked readers how they like their bagels.



WHICH CLASSIC COMBO IS BETTER?



**56%**  
Bacon, egg and cheese



**44%**  
Lox, tomatoes and onions

*Best*  
TIME TO EAT A BAGEL?

**62%**  
breakfast

**18%** snack  
**13%** lunch  
**7%** dinner

DO YOU OWN A BAGEL SLICER?

**92% No**  
**8% Yes**

### THE STARS SAY...

DUFF GOLDMAN



DUFF SAYS THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS TOO MUCH CREAM CHEESE.

BAGEL OF CHOICE: Everything

JEFF MAURO



JEFF EATS A BAGEL SANDWICH-STYLE (makes sense for the Sandwich King).

BAGEL OF CHOICE: Sesame

ALEX GUARNASCHELLI



ALEX PREFERS BUTTER TO CREAM CHEESE.

BAGEL OF CHOICE: Everything

HOW OFTEN DO YOU EAT A BAGEL?

**43%**  
eat at least one bagel a week!

**4%**  
eat one daily!

SCOOPING OUT THE INSIDE OF A BAGEL IS:

**92%**  
Nonsense

**8%**  
Common sense

HOW DO YOU EAT YOUR BAGEL?



**85%**  
Open-faced



**15%**  
Like a sandwich

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS TOO MUCH CREAM CHEESE?

**54% Yes!**

**46%** No way, pile it on!

YOU CALL THIS



**69%**  
Cream cheese

**31%**  
A schmear

Favorite Spread?



**47%**  
Cream Cheese

**29%** Flavored cream cheese

**18%** Butter

**6%** Peanut butter

FAVORITE BAGEL FLAVOR?



**36%** EVERYTHING

**15%** Cinnamon raisin

**14%** Plain

**9%** Sesame

TOASTED AND UNTOASTED BAGEL: JON PATERSON/STUDIO D. EVERYTHING BAGEL: MELISSA PUNCH/STUDIO D. BUTTERED BAGEL, CREAM CHEESE BAGEL, AND CREAM CHEESE BAGEL AND EGG SANDWICH: GETTY IMAGES. LOX BAGEL: SHUTTERSTOCK.



**NEW YEAR'S EVE**  
THE BAGEL STORE  
thebagelstoreonline.com



**VALENTINE'S DAY**  
MR. J'S BAGELS AND DELI  
mrjsbagels.com



**ST. PATRICK'S DAY**  
THE CAFE AT WYNN  
wynnlasvegas.com

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BRUEGGER'S BAGELS  
brueggers.com



**HALLOWEEN**  
THE BAGEL NOOK  
thebagelnook.com



**CHRISTMAS**  
BLAZING BAGELS  
blazingbagels.com

JON PATERSON/STUDIO D. HALLOWEEN BAGEL: JEFF HARRIS/STUDIO D.