A fried egg sandwich with ham and a zesty harissa. A brioche-style bahn mi with foie gras and chicken liver pâté. Eggs scrambled with parmesan, then topped with fried oysters and pickled shallots. Lamb sausage. Chocolate chip waffles with peach nectar syrup.

What do all of these delectable items have in common?

They’re all brunch offerings.

There is no conjoined terminology that takes two meals, makes it one, and brings a smile to the face the way breakfast + lunch does. But further, there is an aspect to brunch, I believe, that tags it as the most decadent and luxurious of all meals.

New York chef and author Gabrielle Hamilton of Prune put her finger on the allure of the brunch in a recent Eater.com interview. She said, “Brunch is like an emblem of a relaxed day that I never get to live... It means you’re sleeping in. If you’re day-drinking, it means you definitely have time for a nap later. You probably went out the night before. So these are things that I don’t exactly get to participate in, but I love to provide the circumstances for someone else.”

“The emblem of a relaxed day” is what I keep focusing on. We don’t get full court press on the first two meals of the day often enough. For the daily worker, breakfast is skipped; breakfast is a container of yogurt and a cup of coffee; it’s a bagel eaten surreptitiously on the subway en route to work. Lunch is a cup of soup or a deli sandwich, chips from a machine, or left over pizza from a team lunch meeting two days prior. During the work week, breakfast and lunch are the redheaded stepchildren of the food industry. What we all crave is time, and brunch speaks to that luxury of time, no matter what hour it is served, or what day is occurs on. It brings a relaxed caché of cool to any catered event.

Brunch has been creeping into our collective consciousness—and our mouths—in recent forms such as chicken and waffles, donut pop desserts, eggs benedict-topped burgers, and over-the-top Bloody Mary bars (see page xx for more on that). Tune in to the Cooking Channel lately? Chef Bobby Flay asks you to join in his “greatest passion: cooking brunch. With a spatula in one hand and a cocktail in the other, Bobby goes from sweet to salty to savory...” He loves brunch so much he has a new book he’s promoting Brunch @ Bobby’s: 140 Recipes for the Best Part of the Weekend in a short tour that takes him from Minneapolis to Napa Valley.

Today’s brunch

A wide-ranging mix of a.m. and p.m. fare fans the flames of the brunch resurgence at catered events and restaurants alike. This is not your average mid-90s buffet with muffins and fruit at the beginning and a hunk of prime rib at the end. Oh, no—brunch is bangin’.

Need some ideas on how to set up your next brunch buffet? Want to know what’s happening across the US? Get by with a little help from your friends, and take a look at what is currently being served across the country.
California, at the Hotel Del Coronado

Of course, some venues, especially hotels and resorts, have always offered brunch. Take the Hotel del Coronado outside San Diego, which opened its doors in 1888. “The Del has been famous for its lavish feasts,” says hotel representative Sara Baumann, “though the modern day term ‘brunch’ as we know it started about 20 years ago.”

Brunch in the Crown Room is a destination from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. each Sunday, a $90 per person event covering everything from pâtés and terrines to leg of lamb, tamales, salads of all sorts, to an eye-popping candy and dessert bar. Executive Chef John Shelton says an average Sunday brunch is about 450 guests, although during peak season (spring break through summer), “we average 500 to 600 guests.” Dial it down to a holiday such as Thanksgiving or Christmas Eve and Day, however, and chef says “we serve an astonishing 2,700 adults plus children.” Set up takes about four hours for a stewarding team of four.
Chef Shelton

This year, the chef introduced the whole fish concept. “We bring in the freshest fish each week from the market and roast them whole,” chef says. “The fish range in size from 10 to 40 pounds, and they are paired with other regional foods. And of course we make a San Diego favorite: fish tacos.”

Seasonally, grilled items are added in the summer like skirt steaks and a grilled tomato bar with a huge variety of heirloom tomatoes paired with olive oils, salts, and artisan cheeses. In the winter, “we feature our braising items like short ribs and roasted winter squashes. We also do a popular fondue bar in early winter.”
The seasonal heirloom tomato station includes various drizzles and toppings
Desserts of all kinds command a large area of the Hotel Del Coronado’s brunch selection
The short ribs are a tasty and popular winter item at brunch

**Texas, at the International Foodservice Editorial Council Conference**

Want to impress a passel of food industry professionals? Dazzle them an over-the-top poutine brunch bar. Poutine has hit the big time and you can find this delicious potato, cheese curd, and gravy dish in iterations from classic to obscene (in reference to Minneapolis’ The Strip Club’s “The Poutine Obscene” containing pork belly and a port wine gravy atop gooey white cheddar cheese fries).

Among the poutine buffet selections at this Dallas conference was the food-coma inducing Umami Poutine with crispy Idaho home fries topped with tahini-braised kale and spinach, a Wisconsin three-cheese sauce, cinnamon apples, roasted mushroom gravy, and finally, a poached egg. Additionally, a tried-and-true favorite was offered in Chicken & Waffle Poutine with Idaho waffle fries, a choice of a slice of country ham or buttermilk fried chicken, cheddar cheese curds, maple syrup, buttermilk sausage gravy ladled with a little red eye gravy for good measure, and topped with a scrambled egg. Finally, all the right classic notes were hit with thinly sliced pomme frites coupled with Idaho tater tots, short ribs, Wisconsin white cheese curds, bacon, hot beef gravy, and a fried egg.

**Oh, Canada!**

Buttermilk sausage gravy is ladled atop waffle fries | Photo: J. Kindig
Short ribs and bacon crumbles await hungry food editors | Photo: J. Kindig
Buttermilk fried chicken and cheddar cheese curds top waffle fries | Photo: J. Kindig

The poutine buffet line | Photo: J. Kindig

**Florida, at Arthur’s Catering**

Talking to Executive Chef Julie Noggle of the Altamonte Springs, FL Arthur’s Catering, the chef points to her Mini Chocolate Chip Waffle as a great crossover item in that, “we have done this for both a passed dessert at evening parties, and at brunches” but notes that chicken and waffles “anytime of the day and as many varieties as possible” are still golden. Their Southern fried chicken with maple syrup, creamy gravy, homemade waffles and biscuits were paired with individual ricotta and egg casseroles at a “Breakfast Fun!” event for 65 people.
Arthur’s Catering offers a Mini Chocolate Chip Waffle with strawberry pearls, cinnamon whip, micro basil, and peach nectar syrup in a pipette as both a dessert and brunch offering.
Chicken & Waffles are still a standout at Arthur’s Catering

**Illinois, at Blue Plate**

What could be better than a late night breakfast station for hungry after party revelers? For their ACE Awards 2015 submission, Chicago’s Blue Plate offered a short menu for brunching late night, including Sweet Corn Waffle with whiskey braised pulled brisket; Mini Short Stack Pancakes; Lemon Thyme Savory Doughnut; and House Made Hash Browns with basil ketchup, served in paper cones. Yes, the brunch is not just for daylight hours anymore when sweet and savory breakfast goodness is placed within arms’ reach.
Buttermilk mini pancakes layered with maple-flavored buttercream, skewered with fresh blueberry and mint | Photo: Artisan Events

Lemon Thyme Savory Donut with sliced turkey breast, herb aioli, sweet red onion jam, smoked gouda, and baby arugula | Photo: Artisan Events
Mini pop tarts iced and sprinkled are the ultimate breakfast finger food or late night dessert | Photo: Amanda Sudimack

Steal this recipe

For a plated brunch item, consider that mashed potatoes are no longer relegated to the dinner table.
Smoked Mashed Potatoes with poached egg & watercress purée

Yield: 24

Ingredients

- 9 lbs Russet potatoes
- 3 c half-and-half
- 16 c watercress leaves
- 24 eggs
- 24 slices sourdough bread
- Salt & pepper as needed

Method

1. Bake potatoes in 350°F oven about 30 minutes or until tender. Cool; cut in half lengthwise. Smoke potatoes in a stovetop smoker with soaked hickory chips about 20 minutes or until flesh turns golden brown. Scoop out flesh and pass through food mill into large saucepan. Stir in half-and-half, season with salt and pepper. Keep warm or reheat to order.* Yields 12 cups. (*As a shortcut alternative, simply add liquid smoke to taste once potatoes have been mashed.)

2. In boiling water, blanch watercress about one minute or until wilted but still bright green. Drain, reserving some of the blanching water. In a blender, purée watercress with enough reserved water to make a thick purée. Keep warm or reheat to order. Yields six cups.

3. For each serving, poach one egg and toast one slice of sourdough bread. Place 1.2 cup potatoes
and ¼ cup watercress purée in plate; arrange toast and egg on top.

Recipe courtesy of the US Potato Board