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THE AMERICAN CULINARY FEDERATION QUARTERLY FOR STUDENTS OF COOKING



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on the menu

life as a
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on the cover: Café Patachou's Omelette of the Day is a popular brunch pick among guests at the Indianapolis restaurant. Photo courtesy of Café Patachou.

LET'S DO brunch

From tried-and-true to smorgasbord,
brunch is a growing all-day phenomenon.

By [Karen Weisberg](#)

Patachon
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Few of us describe the perfect brunch as being “three flat tires,” a “pair of headlights” and a “pair of running boards,” roughly translated as three pancakes, two eggs sunny side up and two slices of bacon. For some folks, that’s perfect, but most restaurant guests today are seeking something a bit more elegant when they go out for brunch, traditionally on a Saturday or Sunday.

In fact, some savvy operators, noting the increasing fondness for this hybrid breakfast/lunch meal, are offering it all day, every day. Jim Phillips, CEC, executive chef at Barona Resort & Casino, Lakeside, Calif., is one of them. Not only does Barona offer brunch seven days a week—Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.; and Sunday, 10 a.m. to midnight—they are thinking of expanding both the offering and hours because of its popularity with casino guests.

At Barona, the line between breakfast fare and brunch is sometimes blurred, as guests graze freely among nine distinct stations, plus a specific breakfast satellite station that’s set up until 1 p.m. in the common area in front of the other buffet stations. “Lately, we’ve

“Lately, we’ve noticed the breakfast thing is popular at all times of the day”

—Jim Phillips, CEC

noticed the breakfast thing is popular at all times of the day,” Phillips says.

When it comes to eggs, Phillips and his staff have switched to pasteurized shell eggs to avoid salmonella contamination. The pasteurization process involves creating a paraffin wax coating over the eggs to mitigate the transfer of bacteria. “You can’t do sunny side up or over-easy with liquid eggs,” Phillips says. “Once you go to all pasteurized eggs, it eliminates 80 percent of your foodborne illness risk; it’s a good thing for the health of your guests.”

all you can eat

Barona’s 850-seat Big Buffet, located on the casino level, is believed to be the largest in Southern California and boasts more than 200 items. The nine demo stations—seafood; rotisserie; Mexican; Mongolian; American barbecue; Chinese; salad; dessert, with its own authentic Parisian crêpe station; and dim sum, which is a mini-

kitchen on wheels that offers traditional items such as pot stickers—are all available for brunch. At the Mexican station, for example, huevos rancheros and beef tongue tacos are perfect fits for this crossover.

Each Saturday and Sunday, Barona also does a traditional buffet brunch for 3,600-4,000 people at \$20.99 per person. “We’re conscious of using sustainable produce, and many of our items change seasonally,” Phillips says. “Our sausage is from locally raised pigs, and we’ve continued to make our own pancetta in-house.”

sunday best

At Longwood at Oakmont in Verona, Pa., an upscale continuing care retirement community (CCRC) about 14 miles from Pittsburgh, executive chef Paul Bates knows his approximately 400 Sunday brunch customers (independent living residents and their guests) appreciate the rotation of standards he and his foodservice



staff provide. Selections are set out at various stations, mostly self-serve, within Commons Grille, a casual dining location.

Omelettes top the popularity list, with the standard portion prepared from liquid pasteurized eggs to the equivalent of three shell eggs, although some residents request a half-omelette. “We’ll go through about 15 dozen pasteurized liquid and shell eggs (also pasteurized), so we can offer over-easy and other eggs-to-order,” Bates says. “Pasteurized shell eggs cost about \$5 to \$6 more per case, but it’s in our best interest, and the state and local boards [of health] love us.”

Working on a five-week menu cycle at this Cura Hospitality, Orefield, Pa., account, the brunch always provides one or two

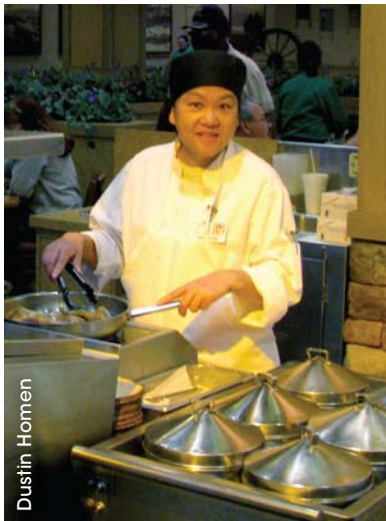
breakfast meats, perhaps bacon, Canadian bacon or sausage; one potato-based dish, such as hash browns or home fries; a huge platter of fresh berries; and sliced fruit (more than 50 pounds of fruit is served here daily); as well as a platter brimming with assorted pastries and baked breakfast breads—fresh raisin bread with icing being a favorite. The fruit, pastries and yogurt are set out on one side of a salad bar, with traditional salad fixings on the other.

Brunch at Longwood is “absolutely cost-effective,” Bates says, since he is able to cross-utilize various items. If, for example, he has an extra eight- or nine-pound piece of filet from the previous day, he can prepare 50-60 orders of filet mignon medallion with poached egg on top, plus



top left: Café Patachou’s Omelette of the Day, \$9.50, comes with a cup of fresh fruit and choice of toast.

top right: Paul Bates, executive chef at Longwood at Oakmont, serves Sunday brunch to 400 customers each week.



top: Many chefs use pasteurized shell eggs to avoid salmonella contamination.

bottom: Francisco De La Toba works at the dim sum station at Barona Resort & Casino, which serves brunch seven days a week.

béarnaise sauce, allowing him to bring his restaurant creativity to this retirement community venue. The challenge, but one Bates handles with aplomb, is the attendance factor, with its irregular peaks and valleys.

“This is a fee account, with each resident on a meal plan. We work off a budget, with so much to spend per resident, per plate. So into weeks three and four, some residents haven’t used up their plan,” he says. “Some may have 15 or 20 meals left, so they’ll bring in family and guests to dine, which means that, especially in week four, we’re very busy. But we do have history to look at as an indicator.”

all day, every day

In 1989, when Martha Hoover, a criminal trial attorney and mother of two, decided to

become a restaurateur, she had no formal front- or back-of-the-house training. She knew it would be hard work, but with passion and dedication, she figured she could succeed. Now, with eight Indianapolis locations in operation—and a slew of satisfied repeat customers—she knows she’s been consistently hitting the mark. Hoover’s empire—five Café Patachou restaurants; two Petit Chou by Patachou venues; and Napolese, an Artisanal Pizzeria by Patachou—all serve what she deems “brunch.” Actually, they all serve “breakfast all day until 10 p.m. closing time, seven days a week,” Hoover says.

Eggs are a prominent feature of her menus, even at Napolese, which only serves pizzas. “Some pizzas are topped with eggs, even quail eggs, and all are Indiana produced,” she says. “We get them within 24-48 hours from the time they’re laid. We’ve bought our chickens and all our eggs from the same family farm since 1991.”

farm-fresh eggs

Not only does Hoover make it her business to know what the chickens who lay her restaurants’ eggs are fed, but she and her team periodically inspect the farmer’s operation,



which, in turn, inspect hers to make sure refrigeration and product rotation are more than acceptable.

“We don’t use raw eggs. All are cooked because they’re not pasteurized, but when we say we’re using ‘farm-fresh eggs,’ we mean they’re farm fresh,” Hoover says. “During a nationwide salmonella scare about two years ago, our sales of egg-based dishes actually increased, because people had remarkable faith in the level of quality we’re committed to—that [commitment] creates the culture of the restaurants.”

Three signature omelettes (\$11.25 each) offered at all Café Patachou locations rank as the top sellers overall: The Hippie with a Benz (think Mercedes) is a combo of spinach, fresh tomatoes, mushrooms and imported feta cheese; The Overachiever features bacon, cheddar cheese, sour cream, plus a pop of freshly grated horseradish; while The Omelette You Can’t Refuse boasts bacon, cheddar, sour cream and sautéed potatoes. Each omelette order is served with a cup of fresh fruit.

mess of goodness

There’s also a fried egg sandwich, as made by Hoover’s mom years

ago. “It was novel here 15 years ago when we started featuring it for brunch,” she says. “It takes buttered toast—all our breads are made from my recipes by one bakery we’ve used since 1989, and made exclusively for me each morning—plus perfect fried eggs. Then, there’s a choice of ingredients, perhaps avocados, phenomenal baked salmon, Indiana bacon or cheddar cheese. It’s a fork and knife sandwich ‘cause that yolk is runny; it becomes a soupy mess of goodness.”

The Café Patachou brunch lineup also includes, among other items, bacon, crispy salads with made-in-house vinaigrettes, corned beef hash, freshly baked gluten-free breads (a recent addition) and waffles, such as a ricotta cheese waffle with lemon-scented crème anglaise. There’s also an array of French toast creations, including a unique Pear French Toast (\$8.75) featuring homemade brioche as a base. “We poach fresh pears in vanilla-scented sugar water, then top the brioche French toast with warm pears, warm maple syrup, plus fresh sugared pecans.” Definitely, light years away from “flat tires.” ■

New York-based award-winning journalist Karen Weisberg has covered the issues and luminaries of the food-and-beverage world for more than 25 years.

brunch numbers

Industry research and experts point to brunch’s profitability:

- According to NPD Group, which continually tracks consumer use of commercial and noncommercial foodservice outlets, brunch amounted to 924 million visits out of the 59 billion visits made to U.S. restaurants for the year ending in December 2010. Total restaurant visits were down 1 percent last year, as were brunch visits.
- Looking at profit margins, the National Restaurant Association (NRA) doesn’t have specific brunch data. “It’s tricky to research, because it’s in between two dayparts,” notes NRA spokesperson Annika Stensson. “Restaurants typically have slim profit margins at 3-5 percent.”
- Martha Hoover, owner of Café Patachou, Indianapolis, suggests, “Higher-end restaurants, such as ours, can figure on 10-12 percent profitability from brunch.”