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A Bagel And Coffee — There's Nothing Better

An interview with Juda Engelmayer of Kossar's Bialys.



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Posted by Arthur Bovino, Editor

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The essay "Real New Yorkers Don't Toast Their Bagels" tackles the question of bagel-toasting with eight prominent bagelers and critics. Read the full interviews for more on bagels, cream cheese, and who has better bagels, New York or Montreal.

Kossar's Bialys has been an institution on New York City's Lower East Side since it was founded by Isadore Mirsky and Morris Kossar in 1936. In 1998, Kossar's custodianship was assumed by owners Juda and Debra Engelmayer, and Daniel and Malki Cohen. What does Juda Engelmayer think about toasting, and what is it about bagels that make them so popular bread? Read on.

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New York or Montreal?

New York, of course. The bagel started here, and it is where it can really be called home. I know they do it well up there, but we still have the edge in New York - the water.

What's your favorite kind of bagel:

everything, sesame, pumpernickel, poppy, plain, etc.? Salt is my favorite, but I always have a soft spot for a pumpernickel/plain mix we call marble. It has a great look, texture and a blend of really nice flavors that go so well with the spreads or alone.

Bialy or Flagle?

How about just peeling the inside of the bagel out and have the best of both worlds?

Nova or lox?

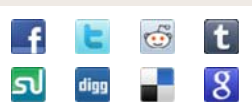
It depends on the mood. Nova is smoked and has a richer flavor and you can't always get it when traveling. When in New York I go for Nova, when traveling I just say "lox" and assume I will get just plain lox anyway.

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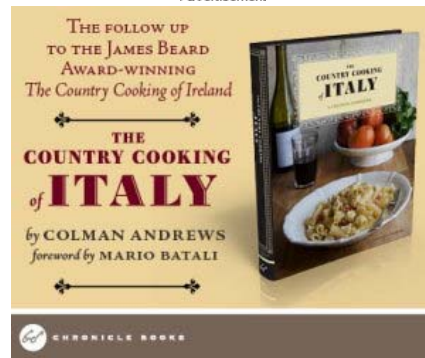
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Sable or whitefish?

I like them both, but whitefish wins with me more often.

Favorite place for a bagel other than your own?

What a question! I should just steer someone to a place out of the city... If I couldn't find my own I'd be able to survive with one from [Murray's](#), [Ess-a-Bagel](#) or [Pick a Bagel](#).

Who is your biggest competitor?

As primarily a bialy purveyor, we make the best hand-rolled, real malt bagels in New York. That said, there are so many bagel shops, it is hard to make it your living in a competitive market. We mostly retail our bagels to our thousands of loyalists, but we have limited wholesale on it. In the bialy market, where we sit atop all others, we have very little competition.

Some people swear by toasting. Others claim it destroys the integrity of the bagel. To toast or not to toast? Why?

Integrity? It's preference. A fresh hot bagel needs no toasting, but a bagel stored in your freezer and thawed could use a toasting to get it going. Nothing I like more on a cold morning if I am on the road than a toasted onion bagel with cream cheese melting all over, wrapped in a cheap piece of foil. That and a fresh cup of coffee.

Favorite type of cream cheese?

Scallion.

What should never be a cream cheese flavor?

Honey walnut.

Anything different you notice about bagels now from those of your youth?

Many are larger, fluffier, and not quite crispy outside. When you don't use malt and you don't boil them first, they are cheaper and easier to make, but the texture is not as it should be.

If there's one question you wish you were asked more about bagels, what would it be?

What is it about the bagel that has made it one of the most popular breads in the country, if not the world? The answer would be in its sheer simplicity and goodness. Many artisan breads and rolls (not the Kaiser) that people say are so good are often so complicated to make with many odd ingredients and rise-time requirements. The bagel, in all its glory, is a five-ingredient bread, water, flour, yeast, salt, and malt, no oil, no spices, etc., that becomes a crunchy, yet soft; sweet, yet easy-going piece of bread that can be eaten with almost anything, anytime or anywhere, and even just by itself.

Are you:

- A fan of [the L.E.O.](#)?
- Leo who?

I eat L.E.O.'s all the time. My 12-year old son makes them with red onions. But the lox, eggs, and onions which I've eaten all my life I've never heard of as a L.E.O.

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