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Issue 20

The Omaha Metro's Best Guide for Food, Dining, Spirits and Wine.

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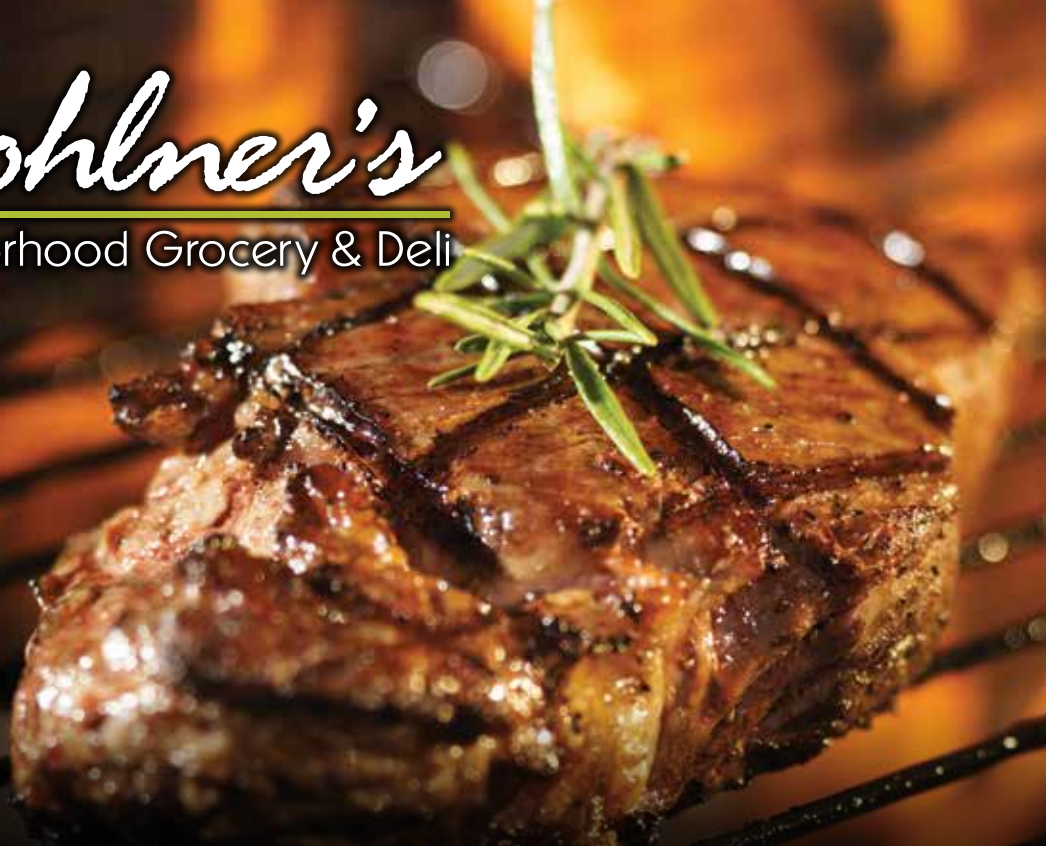
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**Dana Boyle**  
Dundee resident & longtime  
Wohlner's customer



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## On the Cover

The Reuben on the cover is for the recipe by Charles Schlusel that you'll find on page 12. The photo was taken by Jacob Herrman.

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# EXPERTS PANEL



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**Jessica Clem** Jessica Clem is a freelancer writer based in Omaha, Nebraska. A marathon runner and food writer, her favorite way to get motivated to finish a project is the promise of a craft beer. She has a B.A. in English and an M.S. in Urban Studies, and enjoys traveling, finding typos on billboards, and the smell of a real book. She currently works for National Media Brands as an account executive, and is married with two cats.

**Jesse Erickson** I’m the college dropout that ended up falling into a job that I love, which is Bartending. I was majoring in English Lit, which is why I love to write. And since I know booze, what better thing to write about? I also have the cutest puppy that has ever existed.

**John Finocchiaro** John Finocchiaro is a past owner of Finocchiaro Wine Company, Inc., a Nebraska wholesale wine, spirits, and beer distributorship dating back to 1935. He also formerly co-owned Johnson Brothers Finocchiaro, LLC. John is a former Certified Public Accountant and a Certified Specialist of Wine.

**Marq Manner** Marq Manner is a fan of Americana. He is interested in small town cafe’s, roadside BBQ, getting a hotdog from a stand made in the likeness of George Washington, and the grittier eating atmospheres found in out of the way places.

**Jason McLaughlin** Jason is a Certified Cicerone, a ranked ‘National’ as a BJCP judge (Beer Judge Certification Program), is a craft beer aficionado, a writer for the Nebraska Beer Blog, and award winning homebrewer living in Lincoln. Jason spends time traveling around the country judging beer competitions, and attending related events. Beer tasting and evaluation is his passion, and he can appreciate a great example of any style regardless of hype.

**Eddie Morin** I’m Eddie Morin. I’m from Omaha. I run B & G Tasty Foods, and I like eating food, playing video games, and dinking around with my wife and kids. I used to not be so fat. That’s all I really think there is to me.

**Charles Schlusell** Professional head shaver, Reckless adventurer, Erstwhile Semi-Pro skydiver (amateur lander), Fanatical tomato lover, All round awesome cook extraordinaire!

**Ann Summers** Ann Summers is not a 40-umthing-year-old rock climber who got shut down in Boulder Canyon and drowned her failure in a microbrewery. She is neither a mother of two, a fan of Latin plant names nor a lover of fine Italian Grappa. You’ll not catch her shooting guns for fun or hollering like a redneck. She hates Shakespeare, and doesn’t call a certain fast food chain “The Scottish Restaurant.” She turns her nose up at organic yellow beets, eschews fresh oysters, and loathes chubby guinea pigs with Violent Femmes hairdos. She is also a dreadful liar.



# LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



This issue of *Food & Spirits Magazine* marks a bit of a milestone for us. In your hands is the 20<sup>th</sup> issue of *FSM*. Perhaps it's needless to say, but I'll go ahead and say it anyway... it's been quite an eventful road to get to this point, and we're proud and humbled to still be producing one of Omaha's best publications; the only one dedicated to solely

covering the dynamic industry of food and spirits in our fine city.

So, perhaps it's appropriate for this anniversary-ish issue that we're covering Omaha's iconic, and perhaps only, native food creation – the **Reuben**. **Ann Summers** has a great article that gets into the origin and history of the Reuben and will certainly provide all the information you need to defend Omaha's sandwich legacy.

"It's been quite an eventful road to get to this point, and we're proud and humbled to still be producing one of Omaha's best publications."

Along with the history of the Reuben, you'll also find articles about where to find some of the best Reubens in town, recipes, and a vegan take on the classic Reuben. Additionally, if Reubens aren't your thing (blasphemy!), we've got an information-packed article by **Kent Cisar** on where to find some of the best sandwiches (of any sort) around Omaha.

**Nosh**, one of Omaha's mainstays when it comes to wine and great food, is featured by **Erica Viola**, while the **Supper Club** visits **Lot 2** and **Mouth of the South** to give you their take on two of Omaha's delicious dining establishments. In his humor column, *The Dumpster*, **Michael Campbell** gives you his take on farmers markets and 'local' food.

"Along with the history of the Reuben, you'll also find articles about where to find some of the best Reubens in town, recipes, and a vegan take on the classic Reuben."

Lavender, and its uses around the kitchen and bar, is profiled by **April Christensen**, and **Marq Manner** finds the food – this time in Malcolm, Nebraska. **Jess Clem** and **Jason McLaughlin** look at some of the great seasonal and local beers to be found around the Metro, while **John Finocchiaro** lays out a color-coded history of wine. You'll also find articles on infusions, syrups and dive bars by some of our other outstanding writers.

Finally, a little promo: *Food & Spirits Magazine* will be hosting our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Omaha's Largest Pizza Review June 16<sup>th</sup> at **The Waiting Room Lounge** in downtown Benson at 6:30 pm. Award-winning musicians **Kait Berreckman** and **Brad Hoshaw** will be performing. Doors open at 6:00. Admission is \$12, which includes pizza from 15 different Omaha-area restaurants. Those attending will vote for their top three pizzas and judging will also be conducted by *Food & Spirits Magazine's* panel of judges. Winners will be announced in the upcoming issue.

"Food & Spirits Magazine will be hosting our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Omaha's Largest Pizza Review June 16<sup>th</sup> at The Waiting Room Lounge in downtown Benson at 6:30 pm."

This year, a portion of the proceeds will help to provide scholarships for the culinary students at the **Institute for the Culinary Arts** at Metro Community College, some of whom will be on hand to help serve the pizza. The scholarships are provided through the Omaha Chapter of the American Culinary Federation. Tickets can be purchased at [www.etix.com](http://www.etix.com) in advance. I hope to see you all there!

I'm honored to have the opportunity to continue to put out *Food & Spirits Magazine* in Omaha. So, let us know how we're doing. Tell us what you like, and what you don't. We'll be listening.

*Erik Totten – Publisher  
Food & Spirits Magazine*



# 6 of Our Favorite Omaha Reubens



A Reuben at Spirit World

"Spirit World has been known for years for having some great food and their Reuben meets those expectations... not to be missed."

For those of us in Omaha, the Reuben sandwich is our fair city's iconic food item. Although its invention is still open for debate to many in the country, here in Omaha, we know it's ours (for more information on the Reuben origins, check out Ann Summers' fantastic article in this issue).

For obvious reasons, many, many places in Omaha offer the Reuben on their menus. Some of them adhere to the classic formula, while others reach outside the box a bit. Here are some of our favorites.

## Barrett's Barleycorn

Barrett's Barleycorn at 4322 Leavenworth is a cozy neighborhood pub and grill located in the heart of the city. They are proud of the pub fare they've been famous for since 1987, and boast some of Omaha's best bar food and Reubens.

In the city where the Reuben was created, Barrett's Barleycorn does it proud. They start with fresh corned beef sliced thin daily. One of Omaha's oldest bakeries, **Rotella's**, provides the perfect marble bread. Between two slices of this delicious bread are corned beef, Swiss cheese and a delicate balance of sauerkraut and Thousand Island dressing. Thank goodness for the endless supply of napkins on every table as they are needed for this massive sandwich.

At Barrett's Barleycorn, there are no strangers and every customer is a friend. Barrett's has a wide range of menu items perfected in

one of the busiest (and smallest) kitchens in Omaha. In addition to the Reuben, Barrett's Barleycorn makes mouth-watering burgers, pork tenderloins (on Thursdays and Fridays), and beef and chicken Phillies smothered in cream cheese and a specially-concocted sauce.

## M's Pub

M's Pub has been one of Omaha's best restaurants for nearly 40 years. They're well known for their gorgeous downtown location, great service and on-point food. As expected, their Reuben doesn't disappoint.

As a mainstay of their menu for over thirty years, the M's Reuben is a throwback to the Blackstone Hotel version in the 1920's. Simple, yet full of flavor from the combination of corned beef and pastrami, while being subtly balanced with a classic Thousand Island dressing, sauerkraut, Swiss cheese and thinly sliced pumpernickel bread. Finished on the griddle for a toasty crunch and adorned with a crisp pickle, this menu favorite is one of their original "classics"!

## Petrow's

Petrow's, an Omaha tradition since 1957, proudly serves Omaha's most famous sandwich. Starting with Rotella Bakery's fresh marble rye and their in-house prepared corned beef brisket, they create their sandwich to Reuben's specifications. They start with two slices of rye bread, buttered, grilled with melted Swiss cheese and

"I'd recommend enjoying Omaha's famous sandwich at Petrow's with a frozen schooner of beer on tap."



A Reuben at Petrow's





Barrett's Barleycorn boasts some of Omaha's best bar food and a great Reuben

slathered with Thousand Island dressing on one side. All that deliciousness is paired with fresh, lean corned beef steamed on their grill in a pile of fresh sauerkraut.

The sandwich is completed when the bread is golden brown, the cheese melts and the corned beef is steamed hot and tender. Assembled, cut on the diagonal and served with a dill spear, their Reuben also comes with a side of potato salad. They've mastered the Reuben – along with their other Omaha traditional favorites. I'd recommend enjoying Omaha's famous sandwich at Petrow's with a frozen schooner of beer on tap.

#### Spirit World

Spirit World is a locally owned spirits retailer and gourmet café with a passion for making everyday occasions memorable through exceptional food and spirits. They use real ingredients and original recipes, resulting in food that is fresh and unique. They offer dine-in, delivery and catering, with a whiskey and wine bar, and a private room.

Spirit World has been known for years for having some great food and their Reuben meets those expectations. Spirit World's **Chef Michael** outdid himself with his own personal take on the Reuben. The Pacific Street Reuben features his house-cured corned beef topped with homemade sauerkraut, Thousand Island dressing and Gruyere cheese, melted on thick-sliced Black Russian Bread. This is not to be missed.

"The Reuben at Anthony's follows the traditional recipe... For an alternate take, try their Reuben-style burger."

#### Anthony's Steakhouse

Anthony's Steakhouse at 7220 F Street has been proudly serving Omaha since 1967. Family owned and operated to this day, the Reuben at Anthony's follows the traditional recipe. Stacked high on grilled marble, freshly shaved corned beef, sauerkraut, Swiss cheese and their own Thousand Island dressing, it all comes together for an excellent rendition of their Omaha classic sandwich. For an alternate take, try their Reuben-style burger.



A Reuben at M's Pub

Anthony's ages and hand-cuts each and every one of its award-winning steaks daily. They also feature weekly hand-crafted, artisan burger specials made with in-house ground beef. Anthony's also carry a wide variety of foods from Alaskan halibut, walleye, pike and pork chops to pasta with fresh sautéed vegetables. All of their sauces are also made from scratch.

"Over Easy's Reuben hits all the right spots... a can't miss Reuben in Omaha."

#### Over Easy

Over Easy believes community is a verb and that local is an identity. The betterment of their neighborhood is the restaurant's daily mission, along with bringing a new standard to what you can expect from a local breakfast and lunch place in Omaha. The Interior is designed to welcome and surprise you, and that resonates in everything they do.

Over Easy's Reuben hits all the right spots. House blend spiced corned beef, sweet and savory sauerkraut, housemade Thousand Island dressing, and melted Swiss cheese on rye bread make this a can't miss Reuben in Omaha.

An advertisement for Metropolitan Community College's 'Everyday Extraordinaire' program. It features a chef in a white coat and black apron standing in a kitchen. The text includes the college's logo, name, website (mccneb.edu), phone number (402-457-2400), and details about the program: 'A series of classes for the everyday home cook looking for the next level of extraordinary.' It lists 'Foundation courses', 'Healthy foundations', and 'Specialty courses'. For more information, it directs to 'mccneb.edu/chh/everydayextraordinaire.asp'.

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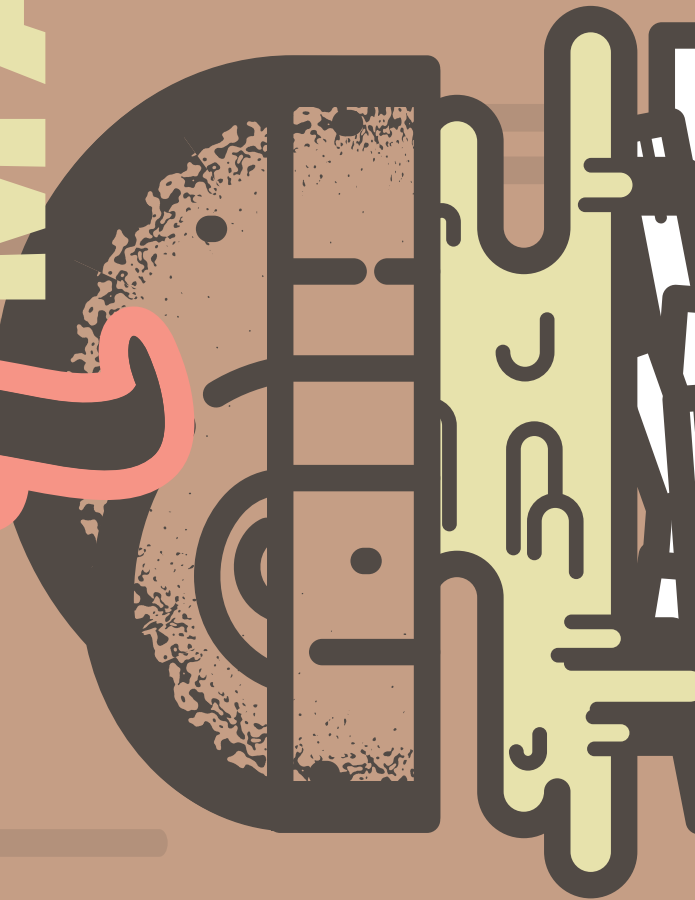
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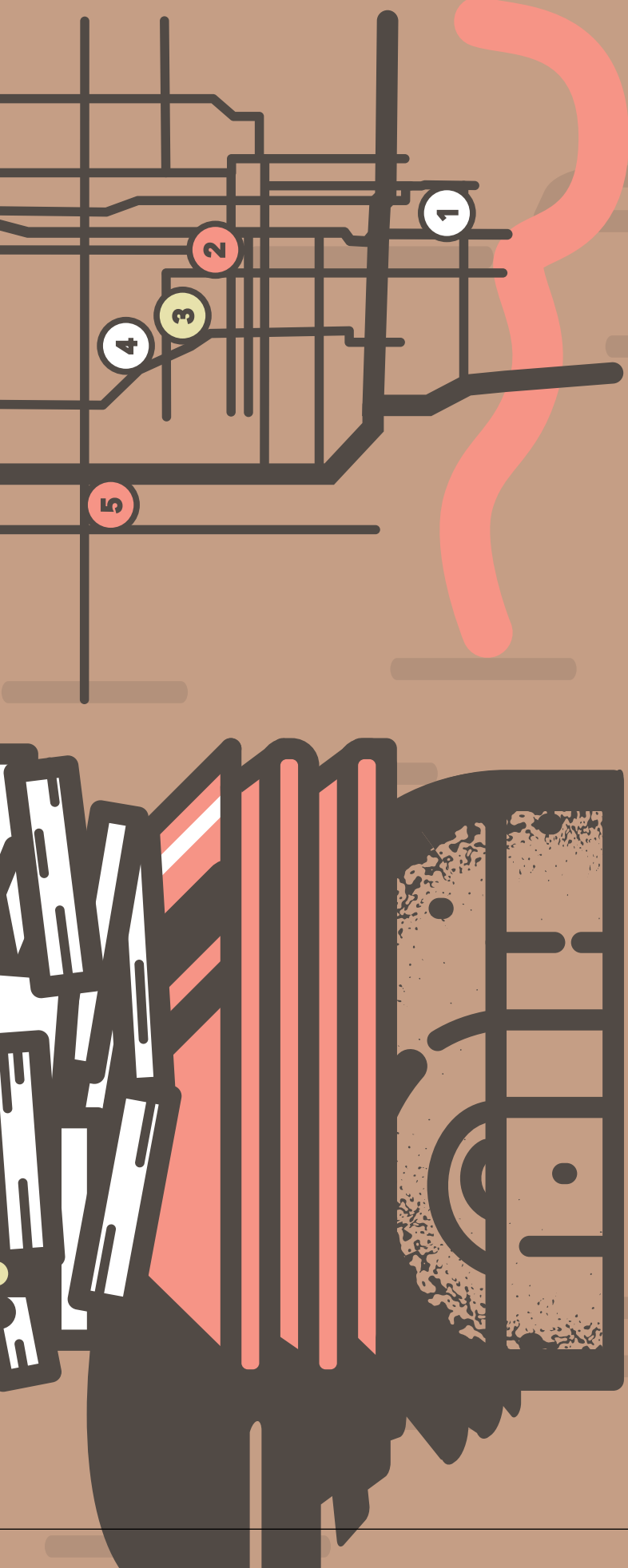
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# A Sandwich Called Reuben

story by Charles Schlusell, photos by Jacob Herrman

Is there anything as soul satisfying as a perfectly made Reuben? Encountering your first Reuben is a delicious rite of passage here in the city of its birth.

The Reuben newbie, finding themselves seated at the table facing the glorious largess of the sandwich called Reuben, immediately and intuitively realizes that a one-handed approach is not a possibility. Grasping the heftily encumbered sandwich firmly with both hands, you open wide for that first bite, encountering the crispy, crunchy, buttery rye, followed by the melty, gooey, sharp bite of Swiss, the tangy zip of sauerkraut melding perfectly with the creamy richness of thousand island dressing, and finally the melting tender corned beef hits your taste buds with a spicy knockout punch.

"Making corn beef is ridiculously easy, as is the construction of the Reuben itself."

Over the years I've had numerous friends nervous to invite me over to their homes for dinner. As I've told them, and now relay to you, there is a world of difference between a lover of great food and a food snob. Case in point: on a recent trip to New York I was able to have a culinary dream come true as I dined with friends at Eric Ripert's restaurant, Le Bernardin, one of the world's best seafood restaurants. The food and service were absolutely amazing and they are totally deserving of every one of their three Michelin stars. I can't wait to go back.

That being said, I can tell you that I also revel in a perfectly cooked cheeseburger and fries at a local dive. My eyes glaze over anticipating a late night snack at the **Localmotive** food truck and I can be completely and utterly enamored by a friend's home cooked meal. Great food is great food and there is a place and time for each style.

I can truly say that one of my most treasured food memories is that of eating a Reuben sandwich (well, actually, usually two at a single sitting). I have many wonderful memories of going home to Norfolk for the weekend to find that mom had a corned beef dinner in the crockpot for Friday evening. Now, as delectable as Friday dinner was, all I could think about was Saturday's lunch where the leftovers would be transformed into gloriously delicious Reubens; every bite a new revelation about how incredible great home cooking can be.

I challenge all of my *Food & Spirits* readers to cook up some wonderful home cooked memories for your family, friends

and loved ones. Making corn beef is ridiculously easy, as is the construction of the Reuben itself.



## *Reuben Sandwiches (makes 4)*

### INGREDIENTS

- 4-5 pounds cooked and sliced beef brisket
- 8 slices dark rye bread
- 16 slices Swiss cheese
- 1 bottle thousand island dressing
- 1 bag refrigerated sauerkraut drained

### FOR CORNED BEEF

- 1 (4-5 pound) flat cut beef brisket
- 2 Tbsp pickling spice
- 1 onion coarsely chopped
- 3 cloves peeled garlic (smash with the flat side of a chef knife)

Place brisket and rest of the ingredients in a crockpot and cover with water. Cover and cook on low for 10-11 hours, or until beef is tender. Take the brisket out and let it rest loosely covered with foil for ten minutes. Slice against the grain into approximately 1/8" slices.

Take a piece of dark rye bread, layer two slices of Swiss cheese, add a 1/4 cup of sauerkraut, and top with a generous dab of thousand island dressing. Follow that with a 1/2" of sliced corned beef, top with two more slices of Swiss, and finally the second slice of rye. Butter the bread and place in a nonstick skillet over medium heat, browning on both sides until cheese is starting to melt.



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8 Years In A Row





Making corned beef is ridiculously easy, as is the construction of the Reuben itself.





# Reuben, a Masque of Sandwich

by Ann Summers

A good sandwich can be an emotional thing. A good grilled sandwich, even more so. Sidle up to a Reuben sandwich and just look at it: lightly toasted rye bread, homemade sauerkraut, a hand's width slab of salty, thin-sliced corned beef, melted Swiss cheese and a bizarre schlop of Russian salad dressing (dare we call this sauce special?).

Unlikely, ungainly – and arguably unhealthy, this sandwich is either a freak of genius or devilry. One is tempted to call it destiny, or a delicious roll of the dice, but the true beginning of the Reuben sandwich is, I think, difficult to shed light on. Its history shrouded in dark nights, dark times and dark needs.

**"The true beginning of the Reuben sandwich is, I think, difficult to shed light on."**

Take yourself back to the depression – especially if you're on a low-salt diet, you might as well. On a dark and stormy night, or a rain soaked spring evening (you pick) in New York, a shivering

actress wrung out from takes in one of Charlie Chaplin's stunt-filled films, totters into Reuben's New York Deli on Park Avenue. The little lady is starving. Quite literally, she looks like she hasn't eaten in days.

**"Arguments have escalated to near fistfights over the Reuben's provenance... it became the most popular sandwich in the nation, some say the world."**

She says something to the chef, more exhausted than pleading, like, "Mr. Reuben, give me sandwich, I could eat an elephant." And someone (not Reuben, he was off tallying up tickets or something) grabs slices of roast turkey and Virginia ham (very possibly the dregs of a night's dinner service) and piles them onto some rye bread (cheaper than white) and Swiss cheese (imported but perhaps also left over) with a hay-forkful of coleslaw (ubiquitous in New York delis) and serves it up as a lumberjack's midnight snack that could choke a horse.

She tucks in and dusts the empty plate with her wrists. In a literal minute, this hollow-cheeked starlet has engulfed the entirety of something so monstrous, it might have been intended as a sort of gastronomic dare. “That was the best sandwich I’ve ever eaten,” she declares (hopefully, having dabbed her lips and re-applied the color) and thus one legend of the Rueben was born.

It makes for dramatic food history, but like the story of the Hope Diamond or how Uncle Bruce saw a Bigfoot, the versions differ in the telling. Let’s now pay a visit to the **Blackstone Hotel** in Omaha, Nebraska. It’s the late 1920s and The Blackstone is a well-heeled – but possibly morally corrupt – hotel down on Farnam Street. It was meant to impress, and was a magnet to anyone who wished to be known but not seen (comparisons with Dorothy Parker and the Algonquin Hotel in NY are strictly optional here).

**“Nebraska menus feature the same recipe under the same name, and everyone in Nebraska agreed that the Reuben began right here.”**

The chef de cuisine of the small restaurant is Lithuanian, or classically trained or else he is completely mad; the diners are late-night card players and their ilk. A poker game is in abeyance, pot money is collected, and the players herd towards the kitchen. Red-eyed and possibly lubricated with spirits, they ask for corned beef with sauerkraut. Someone named Reuben (or Reubin or Rubin) Kulakofsky (or Kulakowsky, or Kay), who is Lithuanian or Russian, is insistent about a sandwich and the ingredients, and voila! Corned beef, kraut, Swiss cheese and Russian dressing on rye: a Rueben is born. One original player named Schimmel, whose father later put the thing on the Blackstone menu, went on to publish a recipe in a local Omaha collection. Nebraska menus feature the same recipe under the same name, and everyone in Nebraska agreed that the Reuben began right here.

To me these stories feel surreal, like some hideously time-distorted John Galt encounter turned fable. It’s hard to know what to believe. Even now, *New York Times* writers, distant relatives, dictionary editors and food historians are at loggerheads. Sides have been picked and culinary knuckles cracked. Arguments have escalated to near fistfights over the Reuben’s provenance, and there is a good deal at stake. After all, it became the most popular sandwich in the nation, some say the world.

Ask yourself, what other sort of food is so culturally stoked, so dardingly faddish that it has not one but two origin fables that evoke

Edward Hopper’s famous painting, *Nighthawks*, with its lit diner and dark streets? How to make sense out of such mythology? Like *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, these evoke primal fear, lust and envy, but where’s the kernel of truth?

**“A Reuben sandwich appears early on in many places around Omaha in its current conception, while the New York version only appears later, and after it had gained some renown.”**

For our analysis, we can borrow a tool from language studies (just like the Grimm brothers, who did fascinating work that established basic precepts such as consonant shifts). There is a saying among linguists: earliest spread is oldest bred. And for me, this tilts things strongly towards Omaha and the Blackstone Hotel, merely from the Reuben’s early Midwestern popularity and the spread of its name as a household word. A Rueben sandwich appears early on in many places around Omaha in its current conception, while the New York version only appears later, and after it had gained some renown.

But consider the draw of the first story. A sultry actress and Charlie Chaplain (who at the time was more famous than the Beatles), it’s late at night, she’s knackered and in a kind of Jewish-grandmother-crazed frenzy. A New York Deli chef makes a pile of sliced turkey and ham with slaw, cheese, and Russian dressing.



The Blackstone Hotel

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However, Russian dressing is in the proper realm of the Reuben, and the Reuben Kulakofsky mentioned in the Omaha story was ... remember ... Russian.

There's just one problem: Russian dressing isn't really Russian. It was developed in freaking New Hampshire by a grocer named Colburn who was also, um, not Russian. But whatever! It did offer a spicy alternative to the popular French dressing (also a tomato, mayo, pickle sauce) with some horseradish thrown in. So both the Blackstone and Reuben's Deli would both easily have had Russian dressing in their larders (or in their unused table caddies). So the dressing itself isn't indicative of who has dibs. We'll come back to that in a sec.

"I am not going to make a case that coleslaw is worse or better than sauerkraut... the history of those two cabbages to me hammers the conclusive nail into the New York claim."

Rye bread was common fare in both delis and restaurants, especially with Eastern European crowds. As for corned beef... in my musty 1887 version of *The White House Cook Book* (which contains one whole chapter on pickling meats) the method of "corning" beef, deriving from the word *corn* which meant *a little grain of something* (in this case, salt) was to use good lean beef, in a "clean barrel with a tight-fitting lid" layered with a peck of salt (you've got to love a recipe that uses pecks).

Serving suggestions did not involve sandwiches; they invaded the food service industry after 1928 in the U.S. after the invention of sliced bread. But people still made and ate sandwiches prior to 1900 (and no, we don't care about the stupid Earl of Sandwich or the Duke of Grilled Cheese for that matter). So everyone had rye, and sandwiches. However, a turkey and ham sandwich is *not* a Reuben (maybe Reuben's Deli sandwich was invented by the Count of Monte Cristo). So that brings us to the key ingredient—the sauerkraut, and in the New York case—the coleslaw.

Now, I am not here to say that immigrants didn't bring coleslaw here – they did. And I am not going to make a case that coleslaw is worse or better than sauerkraut, or that both weren't well-established on the American diner menu. They were. In *TWHC (The White House Cookbook)* there is both a traditional sauerkraut recipe (which rightly involved fermentation in a barrel previously used for vinegar or wine) and several recipes for what Mrs. Gillette (she was Scots Irish, not German) called "cold slaw." Neither recipe is more authentic than the other. They do, however, offer a clue. And the history of those two cabbages to me hammers the conclusive nail into the New York claim.

Cabbage numbers one of the botanical family *Brassicaceae* (don't try to say it, it hurts) which includes broccoli, mustards and turnips. All are well-known for their sulfurous, mustardy goodness and their tendency to deliquesce (turn to mush) when salted. Sauerkraut – or fermented cabbage – is older than Rome. To say it spread all over Eurasia like Putin would love to, is putting it mildly. Kraut came to this country with Eastern Europeans and Slavs who lived on it, and claimed it cured everything from headaches to hangovers. It was fried, stewed, seasoned, grilled and basically used as raw ingredient might be. Cabbage soup often contained both cabbage and kraut, which is redundant to us, but not to the Eastern Europeans.

"Take a look at the Blackstone Reuben on the Crescent Moon's menu and you can see how true to the original it is."

Now take slaw. Coleslaw is old as well, but it is not one thing, nor was it as ubiquitous as kraut in European migrations. The word and the food came from the Dutch, meaning "cabbage salad" (bonus quiz: who founded New York? Answer: The Dutch). It was shredded cabbage covered with some sort of dressing; either vinegar, egg and oil (very southern Europe), or some dairy product such as cream, sour cream, or even a mayonnaise (which is a kind of vinaigrette). I'll say that first bit again in case you missed it: coleslaw is cabbage with *a dressing*. Now, why in the world would you put dressing on a sandwich with coleslaw on it? You wouldn't! It doesn't need one, it already *has* a dressing.

Let's not get too excited about whether either sandwich was or was not kosher—they both had meat and cheese, which is clearly not kosher. So whether the slaw was a vinegar base or a dairy base is moot. But, sauerkraut was used as a raw ingredient, remember? And it shouldn't stretch anyone's imagination who knows Eastern European dishes to see kraut go on a pickled/salt cured meat with some dressing or mustard on bread. Perhaps you've heard of hot dogs?

But maybe you've heard of a Rachel Sandwich? No, of course not. No one has. A Rachael is also called a California Reuben and is considered a *variant* of the Reuben, made with pastrami or even *turkey* and *coleslaw*. Whatever – turkey and ham aren't the



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A Reuben at the Crescent Moon

original and that sandwich isn't what came out of Omaha, that's for dang sure. Things become even clearer when you consider that Omaha was always a beef town and corned beef was a common way of preserving beef. All of the Kulakofsky households listed in the 1900 census in Omaha, Nebraska (Rubin was head of one of 13 households) put Russia as their birthplace and Russians ate sauerkraut, not coleslaw. Case closed!

I don't know if you buy this angle or not, but **Bill Baburek**, owner and operator of **The Crescent Moon Beer Bar and Restaurant**, Omaha's original alehouse, definitely agrees. "I'm kind of an Omaha history buff, and since the Blackstone Hotel is right across the street, when we first opened in 1996, we decided to pay homage to its most famous dish. We developed a Reuben recipe as a kind of tribute, and the recipe has remained unchanged since then." Take a look at the Blackstone Reuben on the Crescent Moon's menu and you can see how true to the original it is. Even better, take a look at this sandwich close up, and then take a bite.

Its delectability must be universal because the Crescent Moon sells 25,000 of them a year. "It's our #1 selling item on the menu. People come in just for that sandwich," remarks Baburek. In fact, as we were speaking, a film crew was featuring Omaha's tastiest sandwich in a commercial promoting the Convention Center. Thanks to the Crescent Moon, two years ago March 14th was declared official **Reuben Sandwich Day** here in the Big O. Maybe the city's new slogan should be "Never mind the wind, just eat the Reuben."

Perhaps you are still not convinced of Omaha's claim, but what else have we got? Rueben is gone, along with The Little Tramp and the button shoe. The Blackstone is still there, but the old diner is no more. So as we draw back from the fluorescent lights into the wet, dark alleyways, and turn away from the tired faces round the counter of nighthawks, card players and actors seeking company and nourishment, we may feel a little too full, and perhaps a bit remorseful. But no matter which city we find ourselves on a corner of, we most certainly feel satisfied from having indulged in the spicy, sweet, salty, sour, toasty, melty goodness that is the Reuben Sandwich.



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# A Meatless Wonder

Where to find vegan Reubens in Omaha by Rachel Mulder

Though I'm no longer a vegetarian and have never been vegan, I still enjoy the style of food. I think it takes a lot of skill and creativity to make something vegan that traditionally relies on meat for most of its flavor taste as good – if not better – than the original. It takes a certain amount of ingenuity to make the Nebraska staple, the celebrated Reuben sandwich, palatable without corned beef.

"It takes a certain amount of ingenuity to make the Nebraska staple, the celebrated Reuben sandwich, palatable without corned beef."

I was introduced to the vegan Reuben in 2009 when I moved to Nebraska and started a job at **Jane's Health Market** in **Benson**. One of my main duties was to keep the deli case stocked with the popular sandwich, so naturally I had to eat a couple to make sure I could do them justice. Jane's replaced their corned beef with a marinated tempeh, made their own version of a vegan thousand island, used vegan cheese and butter, and surprisingly, I preferred them to the real thing.



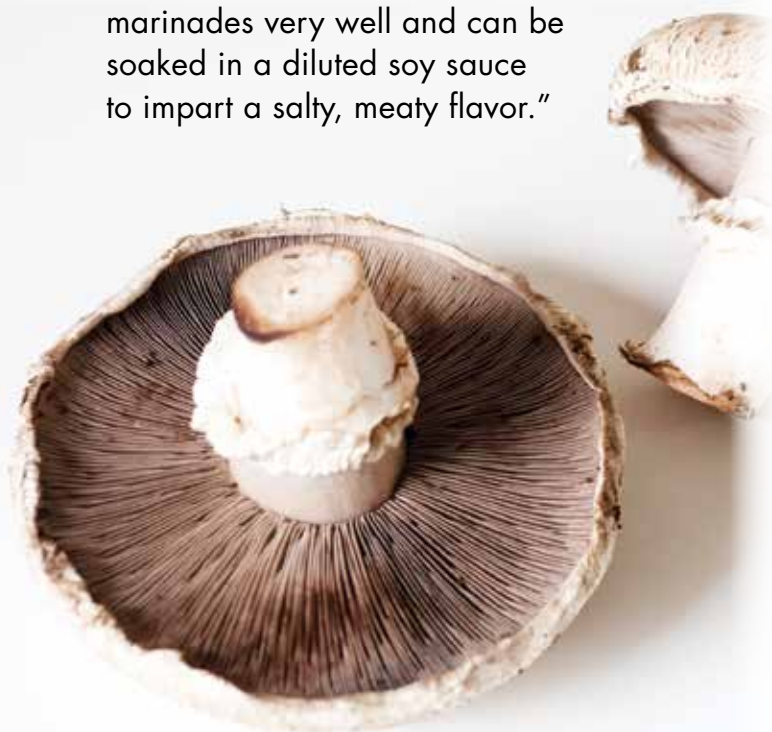
A vegan Reuben at Wilson & Washburn

There are many versions of the vegan/vegetarian tempeh Reuben, even in Omaha. **Block 16** has a vegan version of their traditional Reuben available, which I believe uses seitan to replace the meat, but adds a twist with homemade chocrute (sauerkraut), pickled beets and a very special “kajillion island” sauce. I make a point to head to Block 16 every Saturday and suggest you do the same, whether you’re a meat-eater or a vegan.

“Block 16 has a vegan version of their traditional Reuben available.”

**Wilson & Washburn** also has weekly vegan specials, including a vegan Reuben. If you’re in the mood for a beer and a nice chat with the head waitress, Marina, head down there any time. The restaurant is worth a trip for the atmosphere and the conversation alone.

“Portobellos and tempeh both take marinades very well and can be soaked in a diluted soy sauce to impart a salty, meaty flavor.”



Another option is to just make your own. There are many different meat substitutions you can try, like portobello mushrooms, beets, making your own vegan corned beef and tempeh. Portobellos and tempeh both take marinades very well and can be soaked in a diluted soy sauce to impart a salty, meaty flavor. I’ve seen beets marinated and roasted with traditional corned beef seasoning.

My least favorite option is making the vegan corned beef, which is essentially all gluten (and acts as a fantastic intestinal glue), but has the most similar consistency to real meat. You also have a lot of choice to suit your own dietary needs. Veganise, Tofutti cheese, and Earth Balance make great dairy substitutes. Any gluten-free bread can be used to replace the wheat. Bragg’s Liquid Amino Acids can replace the soy sauce for a gluten-free marinade.

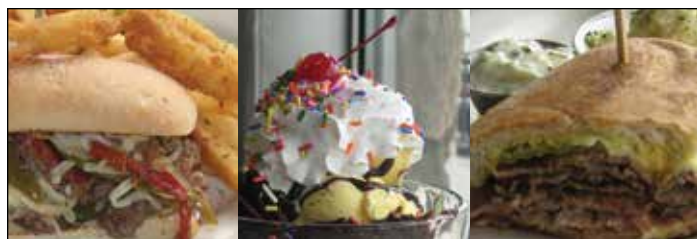
### *Vegan Reuben Recipe*

#### INGREDIENTS

1 8 oz. package of tempeh, sliced to preferred thickness  
 ¼ cup Soy sauce or Bragg’s Aminos, diluted to taste  
 Any other seasoning (garlic, bay leaves, onion, etc...)  
 Thousand island dressing  
 ¼ cup vegan or regular mayonnaise  
 3 tbs. relish  
 2 tbs. ketchup  
 6 slices of bread (rye or gluten-free)  
 3 slices cheese (vegan or dairy)  
 1 cup sauerkraut  
 Earth Balance or butter

#### DIRECTIONS

Marinate the tempeh in diluted soy sauce or Bragg’s and seasonings for at least 30 minutes. Toast bread, butter one side, and put Thousand Island on the other. Layer “meat”, cheese and sauerkraut on sandwich. Pan-grill both sides of sandwiches.



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# Slices of the City

A look at Omaha's spectacular sandwich scene

by Kent Cisar



Razzo's Some-a

"The Omaha sandwich scene is expanding rapidly to meet the taste buds of both the diners and the dashers."

A sandwich is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "two or more slices of bread or a split roll having a filling in between or one slice of bread covered in food". For some, a sandwich is a quick grab and go snack or meal. For others, it's a sit down; take your time, indulgent dining experience. The Omaha sandwich scene is expanding rapidly to meet the taste buds of both the diners and the dashers.

I live an active lifestyle, often working long days and quickly transitioning into evening endeavors. I search for flavorful, healthier meals at a reasonable price. I've lived within a mile of the Westroads my entire life, and the sandwich selection within a two mile drive has never been better.

An aroma or a taste can instantly return our minds to times gone by. The consistency of two Omaha deli institutions combines current great taste with pleasant family memories. Little King has several locations throughout the city, and my frequent stop is the 114th and Davenport location. I enjoy walking in and seeing the meats and cheeses sliced right before my eyes. Fresh cuts matter

here. The Royal Treat done the **Little King** way has been a part of my family picnics for a generation.

Another Omaha staple resides on 90th street between Blondo and Maple Streets. **Razzo's** has a wide selection of not only sandwiches, but of breads to put them on and garnishes to create your flavor. For those who are indecisive, the Some-a is hard to beat. It's some of everything they have. The Some-a is a double decker sandwich with a mouthful of meats, cheeses, and toppings. I prefer it hot and on marble rye. Bring your appetite, and a little extra time to take this sandwich down.

My area has also benefitted from the infusion of new sandwich talent. A **Potbelly** sandwich shop resides near 120th and Blondo. Potbelly specializes in toasted subs made fresh. They cater to appetites of all sizes. You can go with an original, big (with 30% more of the ingredients), or thin (easy on the bread and lighter ingredients). Potbelly's service is fast and friendly.

"Omaha's local bar scene also showcases some excellent sandwiches... One of my personal favorites is the Sicilian muffaletta from Jimi D's near Aksarben."



Sicilian muffaletta at Jimi D's

Which Wich opened a location at 114th and Davenport last year and made an immediate splash in the area. I'd never eaten a sandwich from Which Wich until last Spring. It's now in my regular rotation. A first walk into Which Wich can be overwhelming, as the choices and combinations are vast. Dashers choose their genre, then their sandwich, then their toppings all on a brown bag. **Brittany Sundberg**, manager of this store offers advice to new patrons "First timers tend to overload their sandwich, simpler is better". By selecting fewer toppings, simple sandwiches such as a roast beef on white or sliced turkey on wheat can be taken in drastically different directions with toppings such as caramelized onions, dried cranberries, and pesto. I asked how Which Wich maintains consistency with such a range of choices and a larger workforce, "We put a heavy emphasis on training. With our selection, precise amounts of the contents are important" Sundberg said.

"Sandwich lovers in downtown Omaha are proxy to superior dishes. Kitchen Table was brought up for sandwiches including their whole bird, meatloaf sandwich and peanut butter and jelly."

A short trip across 114th street takes dashers to **Greenbelly**. Greenbelly is a local family run business that focuses on eco-friendly cuisine. At Greenbelly, a sandwich searcher can find Greek, Asian, Cuban and Italian paninis. Greenbelly excels by taking standard flavors and adding their own unique twist. Cucumber wasabi on a caprese, sauerkraut and Greek peppers on a Cuban sandwich, and bacon bits and spinach on a grilled cheese provide a subtle yet satisfying result.

I frequently run and ride the **Keystone Trail** in the evenings and my appetite follows me closely. **Foodies**, between Cass and Dodge on 78th street, is the perfect stop after a workout. Foodies' menu extends well beyond their sandwiches and wraps, making their excellence in the sandwich craft more impressive. The dill chicken salad is fantastic whether it's in bread or paratha wrap form. The extra bonus with a sandwich from Foodies is the choices of sides. I always go for their side salad, which includes fresh greens, homemade raspberry vinaigrette, a cheese and even toasted almonds. I'm impressed at how they manage to serve such a variety of excellent fresh sandwiches and sides so quickly without compromising quality.

"The definition of a sandwich is pretty straightforward. What Omaha eateries are doing with that definition, though, is anything but standard."

"We are constantly prepping, since we believe our food should be homemade, it's important to stay on top of our supply" said **Brian Hilger**, owner of Foodies. Their excellent prep skills allow Foodies to be versatile. Customers can get similar, yet distinctive flavors with sandwiches, wraps, salads, pizzas and more: "Our employees love food, and we believe you can taste the passion we have for the food we serve," Hilger added.

Omaha's excellence in sandwiches extends well beyond my work and home areas, so my next task was to discover what a panel of sandwich experts believed was their favorite sandwich. My panel included people of varying age ranges and residence locations



Patty melt at Kitchen Table

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A BLT at Mantra

"Those that frequent the Benson district would be remiss to not stop at Mantra, especially for the BLT."

within the metro. I asked each respondent, "What is your favorite sandwich, where is it from, and why?" The responses were diverse in their location and style of eatery. The common theme amongst them was passion: "It's the best, it's amazing, and I'd eat one every day" were included frequently in responses.

Several experts chose sandwiches that could be made fresh, fast, and allow them to return to their day. Coffee shops such as **Caffeine Dreams** on 4524 Farnam Street produce tasty treasures. "Their grilled cheese is the best I've ever had" said Craig Howell, "its thinly sliced apples, havarti and white cheddar cheeses grilled to perfection".

Omaha's local bar scene also showcases excellent sandwiches. The beet burger at **Wilson & Washburn** on 1407 Harney Street is at the top of Ashley Berndt's list. "Although it's a burger of sorts, it's interesting because it has beets, smoked peanut butter and jalapeños on it. Seriously, I'd eat one right now".

Philly sandwiches of all types from **Barrett's Barleycorn** on Leavenworth Street received high marks. "The chicken Philly is loaded with cream cheese which gives it more of a creamy sauce and a rich flavor" said Ryan VanRoy, who lives nearby. "It also has to be eaten with a fork and that's a plus in my book."

One of my personal favorites is the Sicilian muffuletta from **Jimi D's** near **Aksarben**. Muffulettas are not an easy thing to find in Omaha. Jimi D's version presents a blend of deli meats, toasted focaccia, tapenade, and fresh greens to give diners a brilliant mix of savory and fresh flavors.

Reubens from both the **Crescent Moon** and **Goldberg's** stood out to multiple respondents. **The Dundee Dell**, famous for fish and chips, also has a sandwich specialty. "The Dundee melt at the Dundee Dell is amazing, it has tons of flavor" said Midtown



resident Sarah Hanify. “I love their amount of cheese and unique sauce.”

Sandwich lovers in downtown Omaha are proxy to superior dishes. **Kitchen Table** was brought up for sandwiches including their whole bird, meatloaf sandwich, and peanut butter and jelly. “Kitchen Table’s PB and J is the perfect nostalgic comfort food with a grown up twist thanks to its bread, nut butter, and jam,” said Anna Wastell, a ten-year Omaha resident. **Block 16’s** Philly and other unique creations garnished attention. In addition to the excellent patio, **Nicola’s** panino prosciutto Mozzarella received rave reviews as a sandwich that bursts with flavor.

“If you’re heading west and looking for a supreme sandwich stop, then a visit to the Railcar on 144th and Blondo for the chicken and goat is recommended.”

My sandwich panel also gave high marks for dine-in sandwiches at eateries throughout the city. If you’re in Northeast Omaha, a stop at **Big Mama’s Kitchen** for the cold fried chicken sandwich will not disappoint. Those that frequent the Benson district would be remiss to not stop at **Mantra**, especially for the BLT. I’ve known April Koske for over 20 years and she told me Mantra BLT is, “amazing because of the thick bacon and a fantastic balsamic drizzle”. The balsamic adds another layer of flavor not found on many BLT’s in the Metro.

If you’re heading west and looking for a supreme sandwich stop, then a visit to the **Railcar** on 144th and Blondo for the chicken and the goat is recommended. A blend of natural grilled chicken, fresh roasted tomato, fresh greens and goat cheese with a balsamic vinaigrette makes it a favorite of locals. A short trip south to 156th and Industrial Road will lead you to **Vidlak’s Brookside Café**, a spot known for a fantastic breakfast. Vidlak’s serves tasty and popular sandwiches such as their hot turkey sandwich. It’s comfort food done right.

The definition of a sandwich is pretty straightforward. What Omaha eateries are doing with that definition, though, is anything but standard. No matter if you’re a diner or a dasher, if you’re looking for fresh and flavorful, cutting edge or comforting, the Omaha Sandwich scene has a plate to enjoy.



Foodies’ dill chicken salad sandwich and side salad.  
Photo by Brian Hilger, Foodies owner.



The Italian Grinder at Which Wich





Lippy's Lip Bomb: smoked chicken on a toasted jalapeño bun with fresh jalapeños, jack cheese and a spicy sauce

# FINDING THE FOOD

## Lippy's BBQ in Malcolm, NE by Marq Manner

Ever since the demise of **Amarillo BBQ** in Bellevue, I and many others have been on the search for great BBQ in Omaha. Every now and then, I or someone else will put up a Facebook post asking for "the best BBQ" in hopes that there is something new out there. There have been some fine additions to the area BBQ scene that are very satisfying, but nothing I could get as passionately excited about as Amarillo.

There was one name that kept creeping up on this list from a few people, and the people recommending were adamant about trying it. It was **Lippy's BBQ** in Malcolm, Nebraska. I didn't immediately seek out Lippy's, but one day I had a show I was going to in Lincoln and had the day off. I decided to make a day of it and see if this place was as good as people claimed it was.

"Everywhere in the place is the motto 'Eat Naked'. Lippy's rub is supposed to be so good, that you shouldn't use sauce."

I made sure to head down early, as I did follow Lippy's on Facebook and would occasionally see the "sold out" post. The first good thing about the BBQ joint is that it is so much easier to find than I had imagined. It's only fifteen minutes or so out of Lincoln on mostly major roads. I drove into Malcolm and the place was pretty easy to find. There is a big smoker right out front with someone manning it. You have to love a place with the smoker out front for everyone to see, and to see someone manning it. Inside,



Ribs and potato casserole. Photo by Marq Manner

"You have to love a place with the smoker out front for everyone to see... It's been quite a while since I have had ribs this good."

the place is small, but quaint and clean. The walls are full of blues posters, pictures and memorabilia. Included in these posters are some from past **Lippy's BBQ Blues Festivals**, which happen every year outside the joint and feature the best blues bands in the area, along with some regional favorites.

You walk up to the window to order your food. I went with a half rack of ribs and a potato casserole-type dish. I sat down and checked out the sauces on the table, but everywhere in the place is the motto "Eat Naked". Lippy's rub is supposed to be so good, that you shouldn't use sauce.



Jalapeño poppers

"Make the drive down and make sure to get there early as I just looked at Facebook and saw another 'all gone' post."

Quickly my food came and before me were six thick, meaty ribs that looked amazing. The ribs had a delicious rub on them that was slightly sweet, slightly spicy and super tasty. I tried a couple of the sauces and the sweet and spicy were my favorites, but the focus here is on the rub and the meat, and I only used one rib to experience the sauces.

The thick ribs were not fall off the bone (I personally like a little stick to the bones on my ribs), but they were fresh, tender, of quality meat and smoked perfectly. It's been quite a while since I have had ribs this good. The potato casserole was a lot of small, diced potatoes in a thick mix of tangy cheese served smoking hot – almost a decadent soup. It was very tasty and I nearly asked for seconds. The owner checked on me a couple of times, gave me some history of the place and just seemed very happy with his chosen profession.

Is this the place to replace my hallowed Amarillo BBQ? Maybe. I just have that place too built up in my head to ever be replaced. Is this the best BBQ I have had in Nebraska since that institution closed? Absolutely. Make the drive down and make sure to get there early as I just looked at Facebook and saw another "all gone" post.

# Sodas You May Not Be Entirely Aware Of

by Eddie Morin

## Earp's Sarsaparilla

Right from the start, you know you are dealing with a serious soda when you choose Earp's. This bottle is adorned with a haphazardly placed label that is clearly meant to intimidate cowards and the lawless. Earp himself stands with gun smoking, looking just over your right shoulder at the villain he has just ventilated. Thanks, Earp! That was a close one.

Going beyond the label, Earp's Sarsaparilla is one of the best sodas available today. For your average soda gulper, this is a root beer. Sarsaparilla is made from the sarsaparilla vine, whereas root beer is made from the roots of the sassafras tree. The end taste is similar. There are certainly bad sarsaparillas and good sarsaparillas, however. Earp's has a bite that lets you know it's there, but ends with a nice foamy finish.

Choosing a nice steak or even some barbecue to pair with Earp's would not be a mistake. Avoid drinking it with salads or fish. These favors would clash and leave you confused when the dust settles. Stick with beef or pork and everybody is bound to get along.

Earp's proclaims, "After a hard day of gun fight'n, nothing beats a real Sarsaparilla." You probably don't need to go that far to enjoy an Earp's Sarsaparilla.

"Going beyond the label, Earp's Sarsaparilla is one of the best sodas available today... Choosing a nice steak or even some barbecue to pair with Earp's would not be a mistake."







# The Supper Club

An evening out at The Mouth of the South

story by Angela Nichols,  
photos by Angela Nichols and Sheri Potter



Mouth of the South's beignets

*Publisher's Note: Omega Omega Omega (Tri Omega), the culinary fraternity at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College, strives to provide students with opportunities to apply and develop their skills through unique experiences. One of these experiences is the Supper Club. The Supper Club selects a restaurant once a quarter and works with the chef of the restaurant to provide a unique dining experience to challenge the palate and minds of the students with the unique ingredients and techniques found in that chef's kitchen. The article and photography for this article are also done by students.*

Spring quarter found Tri Omega dining at **The Mouth of the South** in North Omaha. Walking up to the brick building that houses the restaurant, you notice the windows that run along the entire front of the space, which allows the sun to shine in, casting light and shadows into the dining room.

Inside, the atmosphere is warm, and eclectic with barrels, wood tables and modern art hanging on the brick walls. With a tag line of "Southern Grub," you would expect nothing less than food that is made from scratch and service that is attentive and friendly, which is exactly what their mission for their customer is. The bar is a nice size and the specialty cocktails are refreshing. One delicious example is their version of a Kentucky mule made with Bulleit bourbon, ginger beer and blood orange liqueur, served in the requisite copper mug. It was a perfect way to start the evening.

"With a tag line of 'Southern Grub,' you would expect nothing less than food that is made from scratch and service that is attentive and friendly, which is exactly what their mission for their customer is."

After drinks, the meal started with appetizers of deep fried boudin balls and gizzards served buffet style. The boudin balls are made with house made boudin, a Cajun sausage made from rice, smoked pork, liver and seasonings, served with tangy remoulade sauce. The breaded gizzards were plump and tender, deep fried and tossed in a mouthwatering pepper glaze.

Next up was a play on soup and salad with an offering of southern salad and gumbo. The mixed green salad was studded with toasted pecans, tomatoes, bell pepper and cheddar cheese, and dressed with a house made blackened ranch. The gumbo, a Cajun stew served with rice, had tender chicken, sausage kissed with smoke and was perfectly spiced.

Following soup and salad was a short rib etouffée entrée course – a special dish that is not on the menu, but should be. This dish halted conversation while everyone experienced the divine texture and flavors. The melt-in-your-mouth beef ribs were smothered in etouffée sauce, nestled on top of creamy stone-ground grits and served with a luscious slice of cornbread.

Sugar dusted beignets with a duo of chocolate and plum sauces ended the meal. The warm, comforting fritters were crunchy on the outside and soft on the inside. The tangy plum sauce was a perfect complement to the rich chocolate and sugar.

As the evening came to an end, the promise of good, hearty southern cuisine was more than fulfilled. The students and their guests lingered about, talking with each other and the staff about the wonderful experience, and the passion that brings them all together – delicious food.



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# The Supper Club

A Sunday dinner at Benson's Lot 2 story by Bailey Price,  
photos by Miseon Lee

*Publisher's Note: Omega Omega Omega (Tri Omega), the culinary fraternity at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College, strives to provide students with opportunities to apply and develop their skills through unique experiences. One of these experiences is the Supper Club. The Supper Club selects a restaurant once a quarter and works with the chef of the restaurant to provide a unique dining experience to challenge the palate and minds of the students with the unique ingredients and techniques found in that chef's kitchen. The article and photography for this article are also done by students.*

The Supper Club took a trip to **Benson** this quarter to see what the chefs at **Lot 2** had to offer. This time the group sported four groups of seven to eight diners. The restaurant was asked to create a unique three-course menu for the evening.

Lot 2, at 6207 Maple Street, is a cozy spot with a warm and relaxed environment. The students filled the restaurant's candlelit tables and ordered drinks off of the vast list of wine and intriguing cocktails.

The first course was a lyonnaise salad with frisée, Dijon vinaigrette, croutons, finely chopped chives, a 64 degree poached egg and house made bacon. Ohhhh, the bacon... many at the tables



Lyonnaise salad at Lot 2

"Lot 2 is a great place to enjoy warm hospitality, delicious food and an exceptional experience overall."



could not get enough of it, some even tried to steal pieces off others' plates. The frisée was crisp and the egg yolk balanced out the acidity in the vinaigrette to balance everything out. The heartiness of the salad was not lost on the students either.

The second course was served family-style and was sweet tea brined fried chicken, apple cider braised greens with a ham hock, biscuits with salted chive butter, Yukon gold mashed potatoes and a Sriracha maple syrup to drizzle over everything. Chef Joel said when it comes to Sunday dinners in his house, "Sunday is for comfort food."

"Overall, the evening was a delightful, cozy experience many of the students wished to have for every Sunday dinner."

The students could not agree more. This course "couldn't be more comforting" according to Nina Sodjj and many other students. The tender chicken with crispy skin drizzled with Sriracha maple syrup was something that was a big hit with students as well. Some wanted to take the syrup home to put on everything.

The third and final course was the best components of candy bars. A layered dessert with a fudgy brownie, soft caramel, fudge sauce, caramelized white chocolate mousse, toffee crisp and graham cracker shortbread crumble. All the students enjoyed it immensely. The bar provided something crunchy, chewy, creamy, not too sweet and was the perfect end to a delicious meal.

Overall, the evening was a delightful, cozy experience many of the students wished to have for every Sunday dinner. Many plan on returning to sample more offerings from Chef Joel and are looking forward to his take on chicken and waffles for Sunday brunch. Lot 2 is a great place to enjoy warm hospitality, delicious food and an exceptional experience overall.



Chef Joel



Dessert at Lot 2



# Seeing Purple

by April Christenson

Lavender adds flavor and flair to food and cocktails



In the past few years, lavender has been popping up more and more frequently as an ingredient on bar and restaurant menus. With its vibrant purple hue, sweet floral aroma and distinctly herbal qualities, it's incredibly versatile and can be used in everything from food and cocktails to bath and beauty products to home health remedies.

**"With its vibrant purple hue, sweet floral aroma and distinctly herbal qualities, lavender is incredibly versatile."**

"It has so many benefits," said **Mary Hamer**, owner of **Loess Hills Lavender Farm** (located near Missouri Valley, Iowa). "It's good for the digestive system and it's great in cooking because it enhances flavors as an herb like rosemary or thyme."

Hamer and her husband opened Loess Hills Lavender Farm in 2009 a few years after attending the Sequim Lavender Festival in Washington state. They visited a lavender farm and it was love at first sight.

"I walked into the field and just thought 'I have to do this in Iowa.'"

Since opening six years ago, the farm has grown beyond their wildest expectations. In 2013, more than 25,000 people visited what Hamer calls their "little slice of heaven" in the Loess Hills. Hamer makes a number of different products using lavender – including lotions, soaps, lip balms and her famous lavender sugar cookies – and sells them in their gift shop.

I wanted to explore how chefs in Omaha are using this versatile ingredient, so I spoke to **The Grey Plume** Owner and Chef, **Clayton Chapman**, who told me he uses the herb in many different ways, including a dark chocolate lavender confection.

"It ties into how we universally use lavender," Chapman said. "We use the flowers and treat them how people would treat a tea

leaf, steeping them in liqueurs and things for cocktails. The lavender flavor also transfers really well in fat. Chocolate being high in milk fat, we like to put it with that.”

But lavender’s versatility extends far beyond desserts to savory dishes.

“We also use it in game dishes like bison, elk, duck, other game meats,” Chapman said. “The lavender helps cut through and balance the flavor.”

**“In cocktails, lavender complements citrus and pairs particularly well with gin.”**

Mary Hamer also said she likes using lavender in savory dishes, as a complement to other flavors. “We’ll put it on roast pork or chicken and kind of enhance it with rosemary, thyme and lavender.”

“We make a one-bite chocolate truffle with a lavender ganache garnished with fresh lavender,” Chapman said. “Like the dark chocolate confections, the lavender helps cut through the fat and provide balance.”

In cocktails, lavender complements citrus and pairs particularly well with gin. At The Grey Plume, they use lavender in the Monarch’s Addiction; a mixture of Boomsma genever gin, yellow chartreuse, honey, lavender and kumquat.

Also popular with bartenders is lavender simple syrup. You can find it in the Josie Washburn, a tasty mixture of Sapphire gin, lavender simple syrup and weizenbier (wheat beer) that has been on the menu at **Wilson & Washburn** since their opening in 2013.

“When we make a cocktail we all chip into it and try it and see what we can do to make it taste better,” said Wilson & Washburn

bartender **Marina Sima-Sova**. “The Josie’s been on our menu since we opened and it’s been really popular. There’s a really good wheat beer in it that goes well with the lavender. The gin also goes well with the lavender because it’s a little herby and the lavender is floral and herby.”

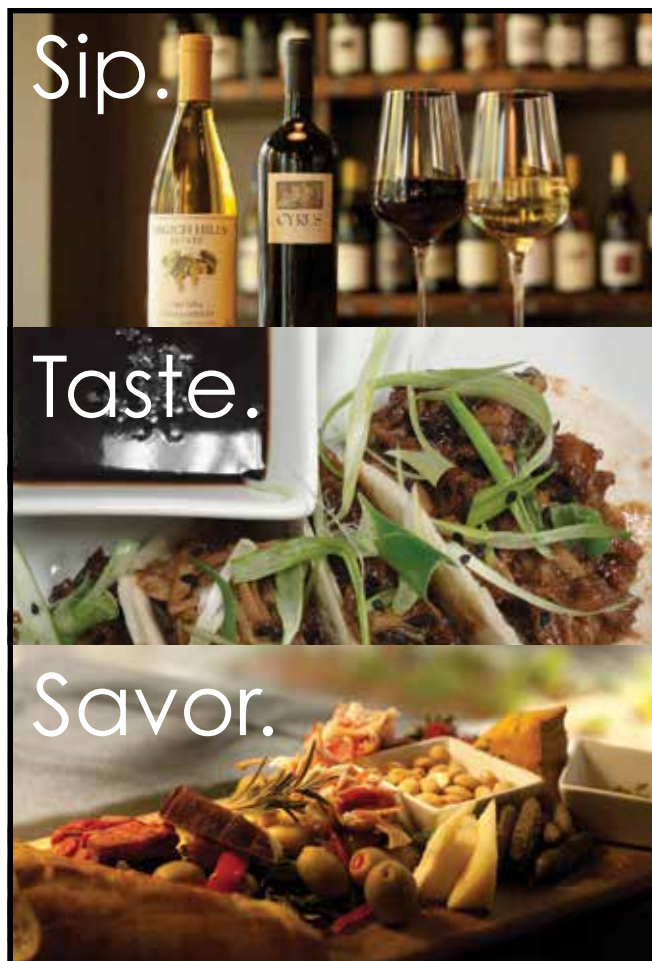
If you’re ready to take the leap into cooking with lavender, look for culinary-grade lavender at the farmers market or well-stocked grocery stores. You can also visit Loess Hills Lavender Farm between May and October and purchase lavender or lavender products. When cooking or baking with this fragrant herb, keep in mind that some of its best friends are lemon, peppermint, thyme, rosemary and of course, chocolate. Feel free to experiment as it’s a truly versatile ingredient.

**“When cooking or baking with this fragrant herb, keep in mind that some of its best friends are lemon, peppermint, thyme, rosemary and of course, chocolate.”**

Lavender is also quite easy to grow in this area, Hamer added.

“It’s easy to grow lavender here if it’s the right type, which is zone five,” Hamer said. “There’s over 46 types and over 200 different kinds. Some aren’t strong enough to be grown here, but it can definitely thrive in this climate.”

You’ll no doubt find many uses for it, from confections to cocktails and beyond.



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# Nosh Wine Lounge

Striving to provide consistent, excellent service

by Erica Viola



Lila Anderson, owner of Nosh

Omaha is a city with more than its share of bars and dining establishments. There's something to accommodate every taste and every personality. Lately, it seems that a new restaurant rises up on every corner, from the ashes of another. For **Lila Anderson**, owner and operator of **Nosh Restaurant and Wine Lounge**, making it work long-term is a combination of sumptuous food, excellent wines and a stylish, relaxing atmosphere. More than just a wine bar, Nosh offers a full menu, monthly wine tastings, a wine club and private parties.

Lila's background is an unexpected one for a woman who now runs one of the most popular high-class bars in Omaha. "This is my first attempt at a restaurant business," she explains. After having worked as a director at TD Ameritrade in Texas, Lila decided to move her family back to Omaha. "Before leaving my corporate job, I really never would have thought too much about the restaurant business. After coming back to Omaha though, I asked myself, 'do I want to do something different?'"

**"More than just a wine bar, Nosh offers a full menu, monthly wine tastings, a wine club and private parties."**

The idea for Nosh came when Lila spent an evening with friends. "We went out one day to one of my favorite bars for happy hour and that's what gave me the idea. I thought, 'I want a bar like this!'"

Her friends encouraged her to follow her impromptu dream, "and that planted the seed," she says. Lila opened Nosh in February of 2011 and the business has been growing steadily, both in what they offer and in popularity.

Lila's role at Nosh is that of owner, manager and helper. "I pretty much do it all; when we started I had to step into a variety of roles," she remembers. "When I didn't know something, I was fortunately able to bring in people that did. Now I run the operation but let my staff do all the details."

It works to the restaurant's advantage, though, if she doesn't know all of what's going on; "I've been able to learn that these past four years."

Some afternoons, before the bartender and evening staff arrive, you can find Lila chatting with clients, pouring drinks and waiting tables. Aided by her general manager, she also does all of the party planning, and works with Jordan on handling some of the ordering and retail end of the business.

At first, Nosh started out as a wine bar with a limited menu. Because they are located in the Capitol district at 10th and Dodge, however, the restaurant began to attract attention from concert-goers, attendees of special events, downtown residents and hotel guests. From the demands of this traffic grew a full menu and the need for added kitchen staff. "One of the main challenges is getting the right staff in here," reflects Lila, "getting in people who know what they're doing. There are a lot of restaurants in Omaha; you need to find people that are committed to you."

**Jordan Gallner**, General Manager of Nosh, has something in common with Lila – this is his first foray into the restaurant business. Previously, he owned and operated a lawn care service. "I had to learn very quickly!" he laughs. "I've always been very interested in the restaurant and hospitality industries. It was something I knew I wanted to do, but I just never got my foot in the door."

One night, Jordan was sitting at the bar and a friend working behind the bar asked him to function as a bar back. Within six months of his spur-of-the-moment hiring, he was helping out and within a year and a half he became general manager.

Nosh is a big step away from both of their backgrounds, "but it works, and it works well," says Lila. "Our staff likes the flexibility and the opportunity for creativity I give them in the kitchen."

Lila oversees the menu, but is happy to let her staff come up with new dishes and ideas.



Pork belly at Nosh. Photo by Erik Totten

"I think Nosh is a great concept," enthuses Jordan, "and I'd love to see it expand."

The dedication of the staff at Nosh is helping that dream come true. Hard work and a devotion to the clientele are key. While recovering from a serious motorcycle accident, Jordan, walking with a cane, slipped behind the busy bar and began making cocktails for thirsty patrons.

Décor is an essential part of the atmosphere at Nosh. Lila wanted it to be "comforting, relaxing and a little bit upscale. I think people are tired of bars in Omaha that just throw a bunch of furniture in there and open their doors. They don't seem to take time for any other details. I wanted to create an environment where people could feel comfortable relaxing and staying a long time."

In fact, she says, she's had people come in for lunch and stay until six in the evening. Jordan says "We strive to be customer friendly, make sure everyone's having a great time. We also want to know if there's something we could be doing better. In my book, there's no bad criticism."

**"Striving to provide consistent, excellent service to clients who wish to relax for a few hours is paying off for Nosh."**

Striving to provide consistent, excellent service to clients who wish to relax for a few hours is paying off for Nosh. Comfortable plush leather chairs and sofas compliment stylish tables and elegant light fixtures. The lighting is subtle and soothing, and the well-stocked bar is lined with stools. "Our clientele is really a mix," says Lila. "We do late-night happy hour on Friday and Saturday nights, which brings in a younger crowd. Often, our demographic during the week is older; thirty-somethings and up. I used to think that it would be more women, but we get a lot of men coming in wanting a quiet evening and a nice glass of wine with a good dinner."

Adds Jordan, "Meeting new people and talking to new people is my favorite aspect of Nosh. We get people from all over the world in here. It's all about being a people person."

Special events are another thing that gives Nosh an edge over other Omaha restaurants and bars. Lila organizes special events including a monthly wine tasting, which are free to members of the wine club. The wine club is an exclusive deal, open to the public, which includes two bottles of wine each month, discounts to other Nosh-sponsored events and a complimentary glass of wine on your birthday.



Interior shot of Nosh. Photo by Erik Totten

The restaurant also supports local musicians. Lila dedicates Wednesday evenings to live music from 6-9 PM where you can enjoy local artists as well as an occasional young artist on tour. Nosh is also a popular destination for private events. There are at least two a month, says Lila, and the space can accommodate 50 – 100 people. It's an ideal spot for work functions, bachelorette parties, bridal showers and birthday parties.

A recent special event that received rave reviews from all dinner guests was Nosh's quarterly wine dinner. The evening began with relaxed chatting and a fizzy citrus cocktail. Lila and Jordan made



The charcuterie board at Nosh. Photo by Erik Totten

the rounds, organizing, planning and stopping to welcome and talk with the diners. The dinner was French-themed and it did not disappoint; while each dish was attractively arranged and served, it was also just filling enough and perfectly paired with a carefully selected wine. Nosh is sensitive to the dietary needs of diners, as well; two delicious dishes were quickly made kosher and vegetarian without the slightest disruption in service.

**"Thanks to its drink selection, service and delectable food menu, Nosh Wine Lounge is rapidly establishing itself as Omaha's premier wine bar."**

Although wine is their specialty, the bar also makes some great cocktails with the direction of Bar Manager **Sean Bokelman**. Sean specializes in craft cocktails that bring a new twist to the menu. He likes to feature a new drink each month using some unique products and spirits that introduce the customer to something they might not have tried before. The customers enjoy trying something new and look forward to what he might offer next month. Sean also likes to keep the beer list current with some of the latest local offerings as well as the popular seasonal beers.

Thanks to its drink selection, service and delectable food menu, Nosh Wine Lounge is rapidly establishing itself as Omaha's premier wine bar. It's a chill-out spot with class; it's a place to relax at lunch or after a tiring work day. At Nosh Wine Lounge, you can be sure of friendly service, a comfortable and attractive atmosphere and a dining experience that will keep you coming back for more.

*Nosh Restaurant and Wine Lounge  
1006 Dodge Street.  
402-614-2121.  
Open at 11 a.m. daily.*



# Diving into the Future

What lies ahead for the dive bar by Jill Cockson



The Homy Inn

I recently read an article suggesting that the existence of the American dive bar is being threatened by the onset of craft cocktail culture. The article was critical of a particular market where even iconic dive bars are closing their doors, while craft cocktail bars are popping up on every corner. As a part owner and manager of a craft cocktail establishment, I assure you, the American dive bar is safe, categorically speaking. What is being threatened, however, is the weak business model (trust me, many of those craft bars won't make it, either).

**"The dive bar has gone from being an unsinkable ship, to a much more vulnerable vessel, in need of a knowledgeable and involved captain."**

Let's define the 'dive bar': The dive bar is comforting. We identify with it. It isn't perfect. It's not necessarily clean. It's not trying too hard. It doesn't care how we look. We don't have to think too hard about what we want. It isn't judging us for having low standards, or for not being able to pronounce a fancy vermouth. It is the industry path of least resistance, which is why it will always exist. The difference between the dive bar of yesterday and the dive bar of tomorrow is that future dive bars will need to be executed strategically as such, whereas in the past they were successful mostly by default.

Our industry, like many others, is undergoing a tremendous revolution fueled by everything from pop-culture, a more knowledgeable consumer, and increasing costs of operations. In essence, the margin for error is narrowing. That narrowing margin has started to expose the weaknesses of many business models.

In the past, the dive bar thrived – not because it was a carefully thought out business concept, but because it was in sync with what the average bar-goer was looking for/expecting from a service environment. In short, it was easy. As the trends continue toward responsible hospitality and quality consumption (vs. quantity consumption), some of that market share is being shaved off, leaving dive bars to compete for the business of a shrinking demographic.

**"A built-in threat to the sustainability of the dive bar is that it targets a clientele that is not necessarily loyal... They are happy to go to Bob's one night, and Joe's the next."**

In addition, a built-in threat to the sustainability of the dive bar is that it targets a clientele that is not necessarily loyal. Very few dive bars enjoy iconic brand identity. Due to the very nature of the dive bar, most of them deal in the same products and same standard for service, which means that their target clientele's needs are met regardless of which bar they choose; They are happy to go to Bob's one night, and Joe's the next. The only determining factors dictating where dive bar-goers go are where their friends will be and/or the price of the nightly special. Essentially, dive bar owners compete for the business of cheap, fickle customers.

Previously, the sheer volume of these consumers allowed for incredible profitability despite these facts. With a shrinking percentage of the market share of the target consumer, however, the future dive bar will be dedicated to providing a reason for people to come there vs. another (i.e. creating brand identity). Further, as dive bars are profit margin-driven (vs. revenue-driven), and typically rely on volume sales. Dive bar owners of the future will remain



The Neighbor's



The Down Under

competitive only through an acute awareness of the equations governing profitability, and the importance of bar efficiency and ergonomics. The days of the dive bar being a money printing machine with an absentee operator are over. The dive bar has gone from being an unsinkable ship, to a much more vulnerable vessel, in need of a knowledgeable and involved captain.

**“The future dive bar will need to be executed with the same strategic development required by any other concept.”**

There is only one reason a business fails: More money went out than came in. The bar biz is a unique industry that everyone seems to think they can do well in, regardless of experience. With a substantial, generally accepted mark-up on cost of goods, and a reasonably recession-proof product, a bar seems like a safe bet. The incredible failure rate, unfortunately, is explained by the human element.

A pipe dream and over-eager investors do not necessarily lead to success. The majority of mistakes are made in the opening process: signing a lease that exceeds the standard gross revenue percentage allocation for that fixed cost; not having a very specific target demographic in mind (and not building out the space to meet the needs of that very specific consumer); not investing the proper amount in the development of a hiring/recruiting/training philosophy; not understanding staffing strategies that maximize service and minimize labor (so as to ensure staff profitability/retention, etc.).

**“The bar biz is a unique industry that everyone seems to think they can do well in, regardless of experience.”**

The future dive bar will need to be executed with the same strategic development required by any other concept. The difference between owning a business and building a brand starts here. The key will be to determine what, exactly, makes a great dive bar.

For example, if you are the dive bar that can get a drink in someone's hand the fastest, and with a smile, you can maintain a slightly higher price point (thereby increasing profitability). You can offset the slight increase in price with the added value of quick, friendly service. In conjunction, a bar that is set up for ergonomics and efficiency is geared for exponentially higher profits.

**“The American dive bar is not going away, but it is becoming a more difficult model to pull off successfully.”**

Imagine a volume bar that is simply rearranged to create two more drinks every 15 minutes. Consider just the added revenue of eight drinks per hour (let's say just \$4/each...so \$32/hour) X 7 hours of peak business Thursday through Saturday (so...\$32 x 7 x 3 = \$672/week) X 52 weeks/year. The result is an increase in gross revenue of \$34,944... and this is per bartender. If you have a volume bar with two bartenders, or three, you can easily double and triple that number.

The American dive bar is not going away, but it is becoming a more difficult model to pull off successfully. The silver lining is that the more our industry requires actual business skills and product knowledge, the lower the failure rate will become. Our industry boasts incredible opportunity for entrepreneurs who are willing to put in the time and effort to be present. The only thing going extinct is the lazy bar owner with zero business skills who does not care to be present, and who does not care to pay attention to evolving industry trends.



The Green Onion



# Babysitting After Midnight

## Simple summertime infusions by Jesse Erickson

It's about to be summertime, which means grilling and drinks with friends and family outside on sunny days. We'll be talking about some fun home infusions you can make at home and the drinks to go along with them. Infusions are a great way to play with your favorite liquors, or make that bottle you bought that wasn't so great better. This process of flavoring alcohol with ingredients also allows you to explore the mad scientist in you.

To begin, you will need something to infuse all of the following in. You can get large mason jars, or if you feel like being super fancy, you can get large infusion containers; they're pretty easy to find and not overly expensive.

For the whiskey drinkers out there and for the ones that don't *love* whiskey, but what to learn how to, this one's for you. This infusion will work with bourbon or rye, but I suggest using Rittenhouse Rye. The reason I chose this as the base is because of its high alcohol content and because it's just delicious. I suggest sampling it by itself before you put the upcoming yummy-ness in it. Also, the high alcohol content will make the flavors combine a little bit more quickly than something with a lower proof.

"Infusions are a great way to play with your favorite liquors, or make that bottle you bought that wasn't so great better."

So you've purchased your preferred bottle of whiskey. Next, you need to buy some fresh apricots as well as some fresh ginger. Yes folks, this is an apricot ginger whiskey. Just wait, it gets even better. In your container of choice, put in the peeled and sliced apricots, then add the fresh ginger, which will also need to be peeled and sliced. After you've spent some time doing that, add the most important ingredient, the whiskey. For this infusion it will only need to set for two or three days, then it's ready to be made into a delicious drink.

"Gin is already a fantastic liquor and that's why it's so much fun to play with."

I had help from one of my favorite humans on this cocktail; **Brian Grumet** had the genius idea of making a homemade honey simple syrup. It's rather easy – all you need is honey and hot water. On your stove top, put water (about three cups) in a pot and bring it to a gentle boil. Once the water is ready, add one cup honey and let it combine completely. You'll know it's done when the honey is dissolved into the water.

Now that all of that's done, the infusion as well as the honey simple syrup, we're onto the actual drink. In a rocks glass, or really any glass you have available, add  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz of the honey simple syrup,  $\frac{3}{4}$  fresh lemon juice, 2 oz of your fantastic infusion and top that baby off with some soda water. This drink is going to be light and refreshing, with a nice little kick at the end from the ginger and the Rittenhouse.

Next up is a savory garden margarita. Blanco tequilas are the best for infusions. Make sure that it's 100 percent agave tequila also (I used Cabrito for mine). What you'll need is jalapeño, cucumber, a red pepper and some fresh cilantro. This infusion is also perfect for you gardeners when you're trying to use up all your fresh produce. When slicing up the jalapeño, make sure you get all the seeds out of it. If you don't, this concoction will be extra spicy. Slice everything else.

When putting the veggies in, I always put the cucumber on the bottom because it will be soaking the longest, which will make your drinks light and refreshing instead of overly hot. I then add the red pepper/sweet pepper, with the jalapeño on the top. Toss the cilantro in last because after a day or two you'll want to take it out. Cilantro can be a very potent flavor; you don't want it to overpower the infusion. Sample the infusion before pulling out the cilantro to make sure the flavor is there, but not as the keynote speaker of the infusion.

Now onto how to make the margarita: Put 2 oz of the tequila into a glass filled with ice,  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz triple sec or Cointreau,  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz fresh lime juice and shake the living hell out of it. Shaking it will add a nice frothiness to your drink. Strain over ice and garnish with a lime



wedge and a cucumber slice. After this is all done, it's time for you to step outside into the sunshine and drink up.

Gin is already a fantastic liquor and that's why it's so much fun to play with. I chose to use a London Dry Gin because it's easiest to use its natural flavors. I used Brokers for this batch. You'll need fresh blackberries, a good green tea (three or four tea bags) and blueberries (one small container should be enough). Throw the blueberries in the bottom of your container and make sure to have the tea bag tabs hanging out of the top so you can pull them out in case it gets overly green tea forward.

The drink that pairs wonderfully with this infusion is a gin Collins. In a highball glass add ice, 2 oz of the gin infusion,  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz fresh lemon juice,  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz simple syrup and top with soda water. If you decided to make the honey simple syrup, you can use that instead of regular simple syrup. Presto, you have a tasty drink in your hands.

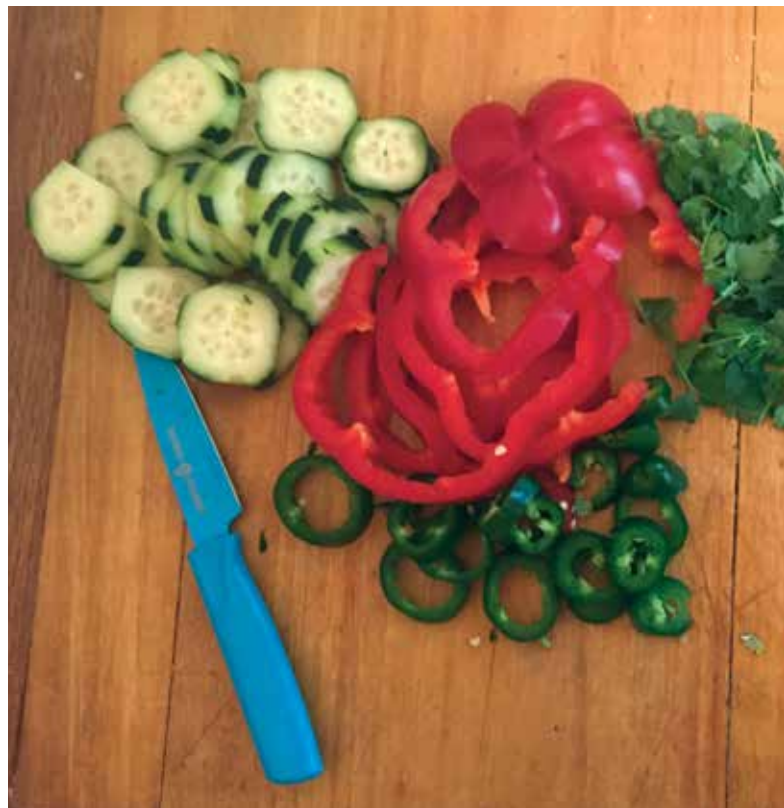
This next one might sound a little odd for the combination of ingredients, but this one turned out to be my favorite. When at the supermarket, grab the freshest honeydew, some fresh mint, a lemon and a decent vodka. I used Stolli (non-flavored). When cutting up the honeydew make sure to take off the rind. If you don't it will add a bitter flavor to the infusion. Layer the bottom of the infusion jar with the honeydew and throw a few fresh mint leaves on top. With the lemon, you'll just want to add some zest from the rind, about three tablespoons. Top everything with the vodka and let sit for four or five days. Honeydew has a very light flavor, so it takes a bit longer to get its flavor to hang onto the vodka.

**"Rum can be tricky to play with, so when in doubt, use white rum. Anything spiced can be a bit complicated to infuse with."**

I didn't get too experimental with the cocktail to go with this one. I decided it was best as a Collins also. When I tried to play with this infusion, anything slightly crazy I tried tended to overshadow the flavor of the infusion, which should be the star of the drink. When I finally tried it as a Collins, the honeydew had a wonderful presence and was never lost. Use the same measurements as the gin Collins above.

Lastly, for you rum drinkers, don't worry I didn't forget about you. Rum can be tricky to play with, so when in doubt, use white rum. Anything spiced can be a bit complicated to infuse with. You will need to get some fresh peaches and a little bit of lavender. Cut up the peaches; don't add the pit to the infusion. Add the lavender on top and put the white rum in. I used Bacardi, mostly because I'm just partial to Bacardi, but pick whatever white rum is your favorite. Let sit for two or three days and then make a traditional daiquiri. In a pint glass filled with ice, add 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz of the rum infusion, 1 oz fresh lime juice and 1 oz simple syrup. Shake vigorously, or until the lime juice has made the drink nice and frothy. Strain into a cup or a martini glass and drink up, buttercup.

All of these infusions were really fun to play with. Infusions are a great way to have a little fun with seasonal ingredients this summer. Plus, you get the added perk of being able to drink your research. Sometimes they work out and sometimes they don't, but you'll never know unless you try. A great source to help decide flavor combinations is a book that I use called *The Flavor Bible*, written by Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg. It's a great resource, not only for infusions, but a great book to have in the kitchen in general.



Cucumbers, red, peppers, cilantro and jalapeño can be infused with a blanco tequila to make a savory garden margarita.  
Photo by Jesse Erickson

A vertical image of a bar sign and menu. The sign at the top says "Sullivan's" in a pink, cursive font and "BAR" in a green, blocky font. Below the sign, it says "Serving Omaha since 1954." and "- Daily Specials -". The menu lists: "\$3 FIREBALL & POLISH BLACKBERRY BRANDY SHOOTERS", "Mondays \$1 PBR PINTS", "Tuesdays \$1 OFF DOMESTIC BOTTLES", "Wednesdays \$1 OFF IMPORTS AND CRAFT BEERS", and "Thursdays KARAOKE". At the bottom, a green banner says "Good people. good service. good times." and a black banner at the very bottom says "OPEN MON - SAT, 2PM - 2AM | 3929 FARNAM ST" and "402.933.7004 | WWW.SULLIVANSBAR.COM".

**Sullivan's**  
**BAR**

*Serving Omaha since 1954.*

*- Daily Specials -*

**\$3 FIREBALL & POLISH BLACKBERRY BRANDY SHOOTERS**

*Mondays \$1 PBR PINTS*

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*Good people. good service. good times.*

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**402.933.7004 | WWW.SULLIVANSBAR.COM**





# For Local Cocktails, Use Local Syrups

by Binoy Fernandez

When people talk about the craft of the cocktail these days, they focus on how fresh the juice is, how clear the ice, and where the spirit came from. However, this only addresses two of the four critical components of a cocktail. It covers the sour (or bitter) and the strong, but there isn't much talk about the sweet or the water. While water is getting more attention these days, the sweet has fallen by the wayside. However, the sweet is a critical component, as it exists to balance the drink.

"Syrups represent the first steps a bartender or cocktail person makes in their exploration of cocktails. By this virtue alone, they are an expression of 'local'."

Keeping this in mind, when I think about "local" within the context of drinks, it isn't usually about beer, spirits or wine. It's about what I can get at the farmers markets, or what some bartenders have found through foraging. For me, personally, with my background in Indian cooking, the flavors and ingredients are not local to the area. So when I really think about local in the context of cocktails, what I think about is our bartenders, and what they do. How they apply their skills, grow in the craft, and offer their libations up to us.

There are, truth to say, very, very few drinks that are truly original. Nearly a century ago, the basic formula for cocktails saw perfection, and what most bartenders do is small modifications, little tweaks to the ingredients, to create their drinks. This does nothing to take away from what bartenders around the world – and here in town – do. Some of the best drinks I've had are

combinations of flavors that, in my opinion, no sane person would try, much less conceive of, that are truly unique. Things such as beet syrups, or squash shrubs, or going so far as to create solutions of malic or tartaric acid. Through the use of science we make things such as Crème Yvette pearls. However, all bartenders start with their flavor experimentation somewhere, and that somewhere is with their syrups.

So why syrups? Unlike making your own spirits or bitters, syrups are a low cost and high yield ingredient. It is the rare cocktail that does not have a sweet component to it. Sometimes that sweet is a liqueur, sometimes a mixer (such as coke), but more often it is a syrup. Syrups are most commonly a solution of sugar and water, although really, any kind of sweetener will work. Honey, agave, sugar... hell, you can even use stevia if you want. The three most common syrups are a simple syrup, a rich syrup and grenadine. Simple syrup is merely a solution that is equal parts sugar – usually a white sugar – and water. A rich syrup generally is made with a demerara or turbinado sugar, and made by dissolving two parts sugar to one part water. Grenadine is a simple syrup made with sugar and pomegranate juice.

**“Unlike making your own spirits or bitters, syrups are a low cost and high yield ingredient.”**

These are basic syrups, and a skilled bartender can use them to influence a drink in myriad ways. Rich syrups are more concentrated, thicker on the palate and lend a silkier mouthfeel. Just make yourself three old fashioned cocktails: one with sugar added directly to the drink, one with a simple syrup, and a third with a rich demerara syrup.

You'll find that the first, where we started with two barspoons of sugar muddled with four dashes of bitters, and then the other ingredients added, doesn't fully integrate the sugar into the drink. Despite having all the ingredients, it tastes flat, one dimensional, and as if it is a whiskey on the rocks. With the simple syrup, you find that it is good. The sweet gets fully integrated with no residual sugar at the bottom of the glass. It's a drink that works, and works well. Now, let's try the third, the one with the rich demerara. It has a weight to it, a smoothness that works to mellow the whiskey.

While the simple syrup was good, the rich simple syrup makes it something else entirely.

Now imagine throwing some rosemary, thyme, or basil in that syrup when you were making it. You use that in your old fashioned. Or imagine a honey syrup with added cinnamon, cloves, cardamom and star anise, and you made a whiskey sour... now you have a drink that is a variation on the gold rush cocktail (created at the bar Milk & Honey, one of the first craft cocktail bars in the US in NYC). To create something spicy, you can steep some jalapeños in a simple syrup; perhaps add some fresh coriander to give it a little twist. Use that with some fresh lime and gin and you can create the Kama Sutra cocktail (a creation of ours at the **Indian Oven**, which became a staple on our menu).

**“To create something spicy, you can steep some jalapeños in a simple syrup; perhaps add some fresh coriander to give it a little twist.”**

Syrups take minutes to make, and there are an infinite combinations of flavors available to try. They are easier to make than bitters, and take less time and effort than making a block of ice. Syrups represent the first steps a bartender or cocktail person makes in their exploration of cocktails. By this virtue alone, they are an expression of “local”.



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# It's Beer-ginning to Look Like Spring

by Jessica Clem

During one particularly chilly evening this past winter, I remember staring at my road bike from the couch, leaning sadly against my office door, looking as forlorn and out of shape as I felt. The sun was just a dream, as was the memory of my friends and I as we hauled off the trail from last year's weekly summer rides, popping a couple of fruit beers under the open sky. *Would I ever feel that again?* I thought as I watched the snow press against my window, drowning my drama in a chocolate stout.

"While the summer trends in beer are still evolving, there are a few distinct styles that will be present on nearly every bar patio and backyard chair."

Luckily, as it always does, winter melted into spring, shoving both the chill and my melancholy out the door for a few months. It is the season for brighter beer trends as well, and each summer, breweries and distributors analyze the most popular styles to provide drinkers with new and exciting ways to enjoy craft beer.

A major trend this summer is beers that are full of flavor with low ABV, keeping drinkers enjoying the weather rather than feeling under it. "People are going to be drinking a lot more craft pilsners and lagers, and session IPAs are going to be popular," said **Dennis Coonfield**, Assistant Manager at **Beertopia**. "Saisons and beers with hints of lemon and pepper are always good summer beers."

While the summer trends in beer are still evolving, there are a few distinct styles that will be present on nearly every bar patio and backyard chair of beer drinkers in Omaha. Fruit beers, session IPAs, and radlers, with their low alcohol and high taste content, are the current front-runners.

"A growing trend are beers with a mellower flavor and much lower alcohol, giving more of an emphasis on taste rather than the resulting stupor."

## Fruit Beers

Fruit-forward beers are delicious brews that blend a gorgeous base with fresh fruit. One of the most popular types, lambics, are Belgian specialties that (for it to be a true Lambic) are produced only in the Senne River Valley, making it the champagne of fruit beers. Lambics are comprised of fruit that is sweetened by the bacteria and yeasts specific to this region of the world. If you buy a bottle from Beertopia (amongst other places that sell this delicious brew), it is like sipping a bit of Europe right here in Omaha.

One type of lambic, gueuze, is a blend of lambics that are between one and three years old. New Belgium's Transatlantique Kriek is a great example that can be found here in the states. A spontaneous fermented brew combined with sour cherries, this beer is pleurably sour, and with just a touch of bitter that makes the tongue dance. Gueuze is best slowly enjoyed slowly on a hot summer evening, and it great for those who may want to ease slowly into sour fruit beers.

There are a number of ways fruit beers can meld with other flavors. "Belgian yeast offers a depth of flavor and complexity that can be beautifully decorated with herbs and fruit," said **Lindsey Clements**, local craft sales representative and co-founder of **Vis Major**, a brewery in planning. "Herbs and spices were historically used to bitter beer before hops were discovered. The style, Gruet,



isn't seen often but breweries are taking inspiration and blending in these diverse flavors. Try Posca Rustica, made by Brasserie Dupont of Belgium, which uses a dozen spices, recreating a Gallo-Roman era ale. Contemporary examples are Stone Hibiscusicity made with hibiscus, orange peel and wheat, **Boulevard Spring Belle Saison** blends chamomile, with rose petals and elderflower. Look out for Squatter's Bumper Crop, made with honey and lavender."

Flanders-style sours, similar to gueuze, are light to medium bodied but unique in their vinegar and sour flavor notes. Petrus Aged Pale Ale and Duchess De Bourgogne – both Flanders style ales – are delicious examples of Belgian sours. For a beer a little closer to home, **Farnam House Brewing Company** has an excellent Oud Bruin on tap. With a higher ABV (7%), this big-bodied beer is meant for sipping after a long day. With a sour front flavor that mellows into the subtle sweetness of cherries, this beer is what dreams are made of.

"A refreshing beer with very low ABV, radlers are a refreshing way to recoup after a day of bike riding, moving or mowing the lawn."

#### Session Beers

There is nothing wrong with a full-bodied, brazen Belgium beer with a hefty ABV. Velvety and full of flavor, these are the Joan Holloways of the beer world. A growing trend are craft beers with a mellower flavor and much lower alcohol, giving more of an emphasis on taste rather than the resulting stupor.

Born out of British legislation during World War I, pub hours were cut to lunchtime and evening "sessions" that limited the amount of time drinkers could enjoy their brews. Low ABV beers helped keep drinkers satisfied and awake. Session beers are still popular for their easy drinking character and hoppy, fresh flavors.

**Scriptown Brewing** in the **Blackstone District** in midtown has some excellent session ales on draft as we speak. The Lone Tree IPA is a great example. The initial taste is a slightly bitter floral, with notes of pine that develop into a zesty aftertaste. With a low ABV (4%), this ale will be perfect for humid evenings. The Nutjob Brown Ale, with its malty initial taste and toasty, slightly sweet flavor, feels robust with flavor, but is easy to enjoy at 4.8% ABV.

#### Radlers

We can thank a German bartender and 13,000 bicyclists for the development of this brew. In the 1920s, a man named Franz Xaver Kugler owned a bar 12 miles outside of Munich. During a particularly beautiful day, thousands of bicyclists flooded his bar, drinking nearly all of his supply of beer. Realizing what 13,000 thirsty bicyclists could do to him, he remembered his massive supply of lemon soda in the bar basement. He promptly mixed equal ratios of beer and soda, making enough to go around, saving the day. He named the concoction a Radlermass, *radler* being the German word for cyclist, and mass, a liter of beer. This accidental invention is still popular all over the world today.

A refreshing beer with very low ABV, radlers are a refreshing way to recoup after a day of bike riding, moving or mowing the lawn. "Radlers are low alcohol, around 4% following the ongoing trend of session beers," said Clements. "Look for lemon or grapefruit or ginger radlers. Kick back with Stiegl Grapefruit Radler of Austria, or Warka Lemon Radler from Poland. Domestic options are Shiner

Ruby Red, or Boston Beer Company's newest line, The Traveler, has both lemon and grapefruit."

Herbs and spices are also becoming popular additions in beer; New Belgium's Lips of Faith run Coconut Curry Hefeweizen is a great example. Coriander, juniper, chili and cinnamon are other spices that can be great when brewed with wheat beers, making for both a summer sipper and the base of a great beer cocktail. More craft breweries are exploring these flavors in their beer, including one that is still in planning, but already bringing a whole new level to the local beer game.

Vis Major Brewing is already creating small batch wonders that will be readily available to the public in 2016. Run by husband and wife team Thomas and Lindsey Clements, their beer will take the latest trends in beer and make them perfect for any season.

"We love to push the boundaries and when approaching any new recipe," said Lindsey. "Our goal is to achieve balance, complexity, and character in our beers. Recently we have had fun playing around with herbs and berries. Tom's latest brew is a Belgian wit with juniper berries, and we are also exploring jasmine and elderflower."

"Character and complexity in a beer begins with the yeast strain. Belgian yeast offers fruity esters with moderate spice that compliments the additions of fruit and herbs. We will be sampling our Raspberry Hibiscus Saison at this year's **Benson Beer Festival**, along with our India Black Ale."

The beauty of beer lies in the ability to evade boundaries. No matter your taste preferences, there is a beer for you. With the warmer months approaching, it is the perfect time to explore styles and flavors, and find new favorites.

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# Beer Chat

Local brewers strive to use local ingredients by Jason McLaughlin

Local Nebraska beer is a wonderful thing. It's fresh. It didn't spend a month floating across an ocean and it hasn't been driven down hundreds of miles of interstate highways to make it to our glass. It supports our local economy, builds jobs, creates tourism and keeps our hard earned cash in the community. But unlike wine, where grapes are often grown in the same region as the winery, beer in America is conventionally made up from many ingredients from all over the map. For instance, American hops are typically grown in Oregon, Washington and Northern Idaho. Domestic malted barley comes mostly from the Dakotas and Montana. The yeast usually comes from a lab in Colorado, California or Oregon. The only ingredient that is commonly sourced locally in most breweries across the nation is the water. You would be hard pressed to find a 100% Nebraska sourced beer, but many breweries are reaching for homegrown ingredients whenever possible.

"You would be hard pressed to find a 100% Nebraska sourced beer, but many breweries are reaching for homegrown ingredients whenever possible."



Brickway Brewing Company uses apple juice sourced from Kimmel Orchard to create a commercial cider

## Hops

The most common ingredient found in Nebraskan beer is hops. With the craft beer boom has come hop shortages and breweries often need to contract their hop supplies years in advance. However, the rich agricultural history of Nebraska has helped to fill in the gaps with hop farms that have popped up across the Eastern part of the state. Almost every brewery here is using Nebraska hops in some capacity and with great results. **Dallas Archer**, Brewer at **Upstream Brewing Company** in Omaha, says, "We buy the entire crop from two local hop growers, **Bauman's Hop Farm** and **Schwedhelm's Hop Yard**, and use whole leaf right in the boil. In addition we started growing our own hops on site".

## Grains

The sugar collected from malted grains in the mashing process accounts for the bulk of the fuel used by yeast to produce alcohol. One may think that with the vast farming region across the state, harvesting a local grain product would be a no-brainer, but sourcing regional grains for brewing can be a challenge... for now.

**Marcus Powers** of **Zipline Brewing Company** in Lincoln sought ways to get Nebraska grown grains into their beers saying, "We wanted to infuse local ingredients into our beers where we could, and do it in a meaningful way. No brewing grains are malted in Nebraska and it's nearly impossible to track down any Nebraska grains malted in other states. We did extensive research and found **The Grain Place** in Marquette, Nebraska. After a tour of their plant I found they had organic flaked white wheat and organic rolled oats which we now use regularly in a number of our year round beers".

"Sourcing regional grains for brewing can be a challenge... for now."

**Brian Podwinski** from **Blue Blood Brewing Company** in Lincoln is looking to fill the malted grain void and is in the process of starting up a second business as a maltster. He hopes to bring Nebraska grown malted barley and wheat to breweries across Nebraska and beyond. Brian said, "Soon, with the start of **Nebraska Malt**, we will be able to source even more from right here at home. Currently, we have to use unmalted grains if we want to use Nebraska products and that isn't all bad. However, being able to incorporate Nebraska grown malted barley and wheat into our mix will be huge."

## Apples

After being on somewhat of a hiatus in popularity for well over a century, beer's cousin, cider, has gained substantial popularity over the past few years. In fact, according to the market research company, **IRI**, cider sales were up over a whopping 75% from 2013 to 2014. **Zac Triemert** at **Brickway Brewing Company** in Omaha

has taken note and is using Nebraska grown apples to create a local commercial cider. "Most recently at Brickway we've been using apple juice from the **Kimmel Orchard** in Nebraska City. We wanted to do a local cider as there's a big hole in that category. I brew it with our Pilsner lager yeast and finish it with a champagne yeast to dry it out. It's light, easy to drink, has nice apple character and finishes dry", explained Zac.

#### Coffee

Affectionately referred to by many as "breakfast beer", the combination of the stimulant caffeine and the depressant alcohol can be a little bit offsetting, but the result may in fact bring out your inner superhero\*. Brewer **Adam Cunningham** from **Lucky Bucket Brewing Company** in La Vista teamed up with roaster **Jason Burkum** of **Archetype Coffee** in Omaha to create their own version. The two took the task of creating a blend that was just right with a complimenting flavor balance between both beverages. Adam shared, "We brewed a coffee milk stout called Superfly with locally roasted coffee. Jason provided us with several batches of coffee roasted to varying degrees according to our desired flavor profile, and it made for a pretty fantastic focal point for Superfly!"

#### Dandelions

To many, dandelions are nothing more than a nuisance, but to **Ploughshare Brewing Company** in Lincoln they are very special ingredient. When the spring dandelions were in full bloom this past April, a group of volunteers worked together at the **Branched Oak Organic Farm** to pick 68 pounds of the blossoms to be used in a French-style Saison. Ploughshare brewer **Brendan McGinn** added, "The dandelion blossoms are going to add a green tea-like character with hints of marigolds and a nice earthy bitterness that was taken



This past April, volunteers at Branched Oak Farm picked 68 pounds of dandelion blossoms to be used in a French-style Saison.  
Photo by Jason McLaughlin

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into consideration when adding the bittering hop earlier in the process”.

#### Popcorn

Who would think to create a beer around the movie goers' favorite snack, popcorn? Look to **Caleb Pollard** at **Scratchtown Brewing Company** in Ord who explained that Valley County in Nebraska is known as Popcorn County USA. There is more popcorn produced there than any other county in the entire country. He says that, “Last August we teamed up with **Zangger Popcorn Hybrids** of North Loup, Nebraska to source locally grown air-popped popcorn for a Cream Ale. We called the beer “Popcorn Daze” in honor of Popcorn Days held every August in North Loup. We poured Popcorn Daze at the brewer's party the night before the **Great Nebraska Beer Fest** in August 2014, where it was very well-received and it absolutely tasted like popcorn. What a great beer for the dog days of summer”.

#### Honey

Honey has long been used in the production of alcohol. Some archaeologists believe that a form of honey wine was likely the first alcoholic beverage produced by humans. Because honey is nearly pure sugar, it is highly fermentable and is used by many brewers to boost alcohol levels and lighten body. **Trevor Schaben** from **Thunderhead Brewing Company** in Kearney quite literally uses tons of it every year. Trevor says, “I use a lot of Sandhills Honey in my Golden Frau honey wheat beer. The fact that the honey is local is almost secondary to me, because it is simply the best honey for what I'm trying to do with the beer. Honey Wheat has been our best-selling beer for the last five years and we use about 5,000 pounds of honey per year”.

#### Vanilla

Derived from the vanilla orchid indigenous to Mexico and Central America, production of the vanilla bean has spread to several other regions around the equator. It is hard to believe that anyone could find a local supply of the flavorful pods, but **Nebraska Brewing Company's** head brewer **Tyson Arp** has a special hook-up that made it possible. His wife Angela shared with us that Tyson's parents Greg and Jean Arp have successfully grown vanilla beans in Bennet, adding, “They grew the orchids, hand pollinated all the flowers and processed the beans over a few months”. The beans were then added to a special one-off Imperial Brown Ale brewed at their Papillion brew pub, and was cleverly named Papilli Vanilli.

#### Sustainability

**Kinkaid Brewing Company** in Broken Bow has a unique opportunity to produce numerous beer making ingredients right on location while finding good use for brewery waste. Production manager **Nate Bell** explains, “We are located about two miles outside of town on an operating pumpkin patch and are excited about what this will allow us to do. We currently make a Honey Wheat beer made with local honey, some of it sourced from hives on site. We also have plans to grow our own jalapeños for our jalapeño beer, use corn from the corn maze, hops and of course pumpkins from the pumpkin patch. We really feel we have a unique opportunity to grow and source many ingredients right at our location. Another cool thing is we feed the spent grains to the cows and calves on site, as well as using the yeast and other nutrient-rich chemical-free waste water byproducts from brewing to fertilize and irrigate the crops we plan to grow.

*\*there has been no known study to support that breakfast beer can result in superhero powers.*



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A close-up photograph of three wine glasses filled with different colored wines. The glass on the left is filled with a dark red wine, the middle glass with a bright pink wine, and the right glass with a pale yellow or white wine. The glasses are arranged in a row, and the background is a plain, light color.

# A Color-Code for the History of Wine

by John Finocchiaro

I'm sure that somebody somewhere has written a comprehensive book on the history of wine. Surely it must be one thick book, since wine dates as far back as the written page, or more likely, the chiseled rock.

If we fast forward through the prehistoric era of caveman chianti, legends of the 'big boom' that initiated the modern era of wine would probably begin with stories of *vino tinto*, *vin rouge* or *vino rosso*. The term *Dago red* was a familiar slang term used for the homemade wines of many Italian Americans (even though the 'D word' is quite disrespectful, such a term was typically not derogatory as long as you were speaking of the wine and not the person).

*"Vino tinto, vin rouge, or vino rosso...  
All of these terms mean only one thing  
– red wine."*

All of these terms mean only one thing – red wine. Whatever your preferred language, such a description was all the information that was needed. The actual grape type used to make the wine was not important. Neither was the vineyard location. The fact that the wine may taste different with each batch – sometimes sweet, sometimes dry – was also not important. It was red and it made people happy; Period. There was no need to muddle things up with technicalities.

Then we discovered colors. Pink became the new red, and white zinfandel was born. No one seemed to care that the wine wasn't actually 'white'. It was usually some shade of pink, or sometimes a disgusting orange, but never white. Never mind that the juice bore about as much character resemblance to the actual zinfandel grape as Britney Spears does to Mozart. It didn't matter, it was sweet and cold and yummy – and wine looked pretty in pink. But we humanoids can only consume so much Kool Aid, and hundreds of headaches later we decided to find a new color.

So we moved on to the white stuff. White was safe. White goes with everything, right? And it didn't stain the carpet – or your teeth – like the red stuff. But the word "white" was boring and already misused on the aforementioned vino pinko. We needed a new name, something that sounded exotic and sophisticated. French words always sounded cool, so we called our white wine *chardonnay*. Mind you, most consumers didn't know their chardonnay from shinola. Nor did they care, as long as it was white and served über cold. And it was SO fun to say that new word – especially if we were within earshot of, well, anyone. People weren't particularly interested in the fact that this was a well-respected grape type of noble Burgundian origin. It wasn't until much later that the masses discovered that the word "chardonnay" was actually supposed to mean something. Kind of like that corsage we gave our first prom date (sigh).

By now we have come full circle. Having exhausted the three color wine box of crayons, we've moved back to the red stuff. Only this time we crave something new. Cabernet and pinot noir are terrific, but we're a bit restless with such stalwarts. As a



"Having exhausted the three color wine box of crayons, we've moved back to the red stuff. Only this time we crave something new."



result, blended red wines, composed of multiple wine varieties are becoming increasingly popular. Without getting too technical, these wines do not restrict the winemaker to predominantly use one type of varietal grape in the bottle. Without such restrictions the winemaker's creativity can frequently shine. These red blends can cover a wide range of flavor profiles, from the big and bold to the smooth and elegant.

The Godfather of such red blends would have to be the Super Tuscans of Italy. With its origins in the late 1970's, a number of newer generation Italian winemakers felt that the traditional chianti rules in Tuscany were too restrictive, thus inhibiting their ability to make the best wines possible. Blending nontraditional grape types such as cabernet and merlot with their indigenous sangiovese grape produced some outstanding wines. Thus, by shunning age-old Italian regulations and foregoing the traditional chianti label on their wines, the unofficial "Super Tuscan" category was born. These Super Tuscans provided a template for many of the red blends we see on store shelves today.

But these red blends can be more than a bit confusing. Without searching the fine print on the back label or even online, it may be difficult to ascertain exactly what is in the bottle, let alone the flavor profile or style of such wines. Perhaps this is by design. Winemakers of red blends may want us to sip without any preconception as to what his or her wine should taste like. Undoubtedly these red blends require a trusted leap of faith on the part of the consumer. However, we seem to enjoy the mystery, as the wine drinking public is scooping up red blends at a rapid pace these days. The wines are red, pretty tasty and they make us happy. And that's really about all we know.

Sounds kind of like Dago red, doesn't it?

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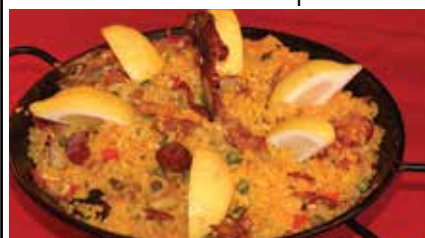
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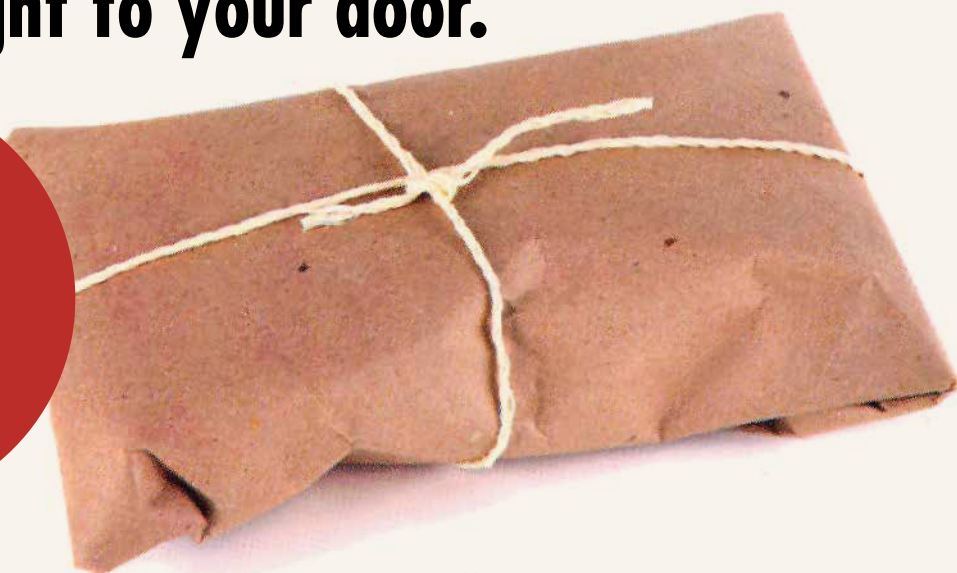
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# THE DUMPSTER Trending Markets

by Michael Campbell



"Here in the heartland of agriculture we've cultured something that grows great on four acres of parking lot: the farmers market."

Here in the heartland of agriculture we've cultured something that grows great on four acres of parking lot: the farmers market.

A farmers market isn't much of a market and there aren't any farmers. Mostly it's rows of big white tents anchored with sandbags in case farm weather shows up. With tie-dyed scarves and homemade herbal ointments, most farmers markets look like the merch tables at a Phish concert.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

The "farmers" are mostly handsome, fresh-looking kids in their twenties, wearing linen and expensive sunglasses. All have clean fingernails. None is wearing Key overalls. They're bright and charming and I like them. I just don't trust them.

I don't trust them because they sell tomatoes in April. They sell corn-on-the-cob in May. They sell goat cheese even though nobody around here has encountered a goat outside of a petting zoo.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

In fact, I like these people better. The real farmers I know are too busy for a farmers market. They're busy steering million-dollar combines that harvest a 45-foot swath of genetically perfect corn that's delivered direct and fresh to an ethanol factory. They're busy maintaining the machines that deliver a ton of hormonally enriched by-products from the other end of the ethanol plant, to feed a thousand chickens who would be blinded by the bright sun reflecting off the sweet white skin of a farmers market vendor.

On a real farm, you browse pigs. I prefer browsing farmers market small-batch cheeses, hand-crafted in a small town in Iowa, which is fairly near a farm. Each is lovingly hand-wrapped by a person who recently quit her executive vice president position at First Data.

"On a real farm, you browse pigs.

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I love avoiding the local wines. I love the smell of steaming funnel cakes, which look a lot like farm-fresh cow pies.

I love the street music. (Well, c'mon—it's not farm music.) Banjos and accordions and straw hats and zydeco, perfect music if your farmers are from Louisiana. I'm a little less enthusiastic about the prodigious three-year-old drummer they trot out occasionally. He's great for a three-year-old, not so interesting otherwise, beyond his being freakish. Not to mention his sad back-story: only somebody spiteful buys a three-year-old kid drums.

"I go from booth to booth, figuring one vendor must be a better farmer than others... I get stressed when I can't tell any difference."

Customers are good about wearing their farmers market uniforms: huge hats and sunglasses and tank tops and baby carriages and PBA-free water bottles. Once my wife had to walk the six blocks back to our car because she forgot and wore her bra.

And dogs. Why is it charming to bring along your boxer to enjoy an hour on a hot summer sidewalk, drooling on the flip-flop feet of every sympathetic bystander?

I go from booth to booth, figuring one vendor must be a better farmer than the others, with fatter onions, greener kale, and a better drawl. I get stressed when I can't tell any difference. I eventually go to whomever is closest and buy a pound of kale and radishes, promising myself I'll eat healthy this week. When I get home I make room in the fridge by throwing away last week's kale and radishes.

The one thing definitely local about our farmers market is that customers approach each booth politely, admiring the kiwi and leeks and whatever else doesn't grow well in Nebraska, turning it over, asking a lot of questions ("What can you make with this?"), involving you in a long discussion about the organic, bio-ethnic, pro-biotic yogurt they prefer, while their kid wipes a booger on your lettuce. Then they set it all back down and move politely to the next booth without buying anything.

Now that's Omaha-local. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

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