

Foreword by Bill Granger

the world's best
brunches

**where to find them
& how to make them**



Melbourne * London * Oakland





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Foreword

By Bill Granger

When I opened my first bills café in Darlinghurst, Sydney, in 1992, I can honestly say that I wasn't intentionally setting out to make serving all-day brunch my 'concept'. Restricted by the fact that the local council would only allow me to trade between 7.30am and 4pm, I decided that it would make sense to take a leaf out of the classic brasserie's book and serve unfussy offerings throughout the day with no particular division between breakfast and lunch. At the time there was no one I knew of in Sydney doing what I was doing, so I guess that's why brunch-style dishes became my signature repertoire. And they still are to this day, over 20 years later, at all my restaurants in four different continents. I guess that's testament to the appeal of brunch!

As far back as 1895 author Guy Beringer wrote an article entitled 'Brunch: a plea' for the UK's *Hunter's Weekly*. An extract from it reads: 'Why not a new meal, served around noon that starts with tea or coffee, marmalade and other breakfast fixtures before moving along to the heavier fare? By eliminating the need to get up early on Sunday, brunch would make life brighter for Saturday night carousers.' It makes perfect sense. Whether you've been out late the night before or awoken early by your beloved little larks, a substantial late-breakfast-come-early-lunch fits the bill like nothing else.

My own early adult experiences of brunch were catching up with my friends at about 2pm, after a big night out in hedonistic, late Eighties Sydney (is 5pm the reasonable cut off for brunch?). However, my true indoctrination was when I had children. I still smile at the irony of the fact that the same relaxed meal is just as appealing to sleep-deprived young parents, keen to share their highs and woes with sympathetic sorts, as it is to nocturnal rabble rousers.

So what constitutes brunch? We know *when* you eat it, but what type of dishes are best suited to and most commonly consumed during this particular time slot? The answer is, these days, a pretty wide range of things. For me, the important parts are good, fresh ingredients put together in a simple and pleasing way – and coffee. Always coffee.

For a long time those American favourites: pancakes, eggs (every which way), crispy bacon and all the rest were considered 'classic brunch fayre'. But these days the options have become a lot more diverse and 'New World'. In the Granger household it might be eggs Benedict one weekend, shakshuka or nasi goreng another or organic sourdough toast with avocado or buffalo mozzarella and fresh tomato when I can't be bothered to cook. There are no rules. And, for me, it's been this way for a while.





As a schoolboy I made mid-morning excursions to Chinatown in Melbourne with my friend Simon and his family, where we were greeted by yum cha trolleys laden with piles of steamed dumplings, white fluffy barbecued pork buns and spring rolls. Then, ten years or so on, backpacking across Thailand and India, I brunchd on pretty much every type of street and beach food; from green chilli omelettes with cumin and fresh chutney in a soft bread roll to fried rice, with banana coconut pancakes drenched in palm syrup. These days, when I'm in Japan, I love onigiri with salted fish, or steaming bowls of udon with spring onions, egg and crunchy tempura batter. Anything goes.

And the same applies to whether you're having a lazy morning-into-afternoon at home or refuelling in a favourite local café or restaurant. Brunch should feel like a treat, never an effort or a rigid commitment.

America has always had a culture of diners, that wonderful idea that you can eat at any time of the day, not unlike the English caff. This has inspired me no end and, to this day, I love to be able to serve anyone whatever they want whenever they want it, not constrained by societal ideas of when we should be eating. I like the rebelliousness of brunch and I wholeheartedly encourage anyone who is eating in one of my dining rooms to be as rebellious as they like.

There is no other meal but brunch that can be stretched from 9am until 5pm, depending on who you are, your stage in life and what your mood dictates. It's the most flexible meal and the most intimate, best served with close friends and family.

It helps if the sun is shining, of course, and that sense of light, bright, laid-back dining is something I've always tried to instil in my restaurants, but even the gloomiest of days and spirits is lifted by that most indulgent of gastronomic pursuits.



One of the other reasons I'm obsessed with brunch dates back to my early starts cooking in the café in Sydney. I'd have to be at the fruit and vegetable and flower markets at around 4am to clinch the best produce and get the best buys. And once I'd finished my shopping and I could go and have my toasted egg, spinach and provolone focaccia and stiff espresso with the Italian market traders. Having this early snack meant I was ready for brunch by late morning, usually something Asian which Sydney does so well. I'm still an early riser, an enthusiasm for seizing the day that my wife doesn't share, but luckily she *does* share my passion for eating at around 11am most days.

In a time when we're all increasingly busy brunch seems to have a new importance. Sure, in some ways it's a luxury, like afternoon tea, but we need these feel-good rituals that give us the chance to reconnect with friends, families, food and ourselves, all the more. The fact that brunch is not on the everyday 'schedule' in the same way that breakfast, lunch and dinner are gives it an air of spontaneous, devil-may-care, unstructured abandon that we all deserve to indulge in from time to time.



Dishes

Legend



Easy - A very basic recipe, eg, putting together a sandwich or tossing salad ingredients.



Medium - Suitable for the average home cook.



Complex - Several parts to make, or lots of ingredients to prepare, or a specific technique involved that may take some practice.



Vegetarian



Knife and fork



Spoon



Chopsticks



Hands



Healthy



Indulgent



* Açai Bowl *

B R A Z I L

It looks like ice cream, and tastes like ice cream, but this tropical Brazilian superfood snack couldn't be healthier. Refreshingly cool and satisfyingly filling (it's low GI), it's heaven in a bowl.

What is it?

An açai (ah-sah-ee) bowl (*açai na tigela*) is a mixture of slightly thawed, super-healthy Amazonian açai berries blended with liquid (such as guarana, almond milk, coconut water or apple juice) and served in a bowl topped with fresh fruit, granola and/or nuts, providing a crunchy counterpoint to the softness of the açai mixture.

Origin

Packed with antioxidants, amino acids, omega-3 fatty acid, fibre and protein, the berries of the Amazonian açai palm were barely known outside the Amazon until the 1970s. Legendary Brazilian Jujitsu founder Carlos Gracie popularised açai bowl in Rio de Janeiro in the 1980s, and it wasn't long before local surfers adopted the snack as the perfect post-session pick-me-up. In the early noughties, the first batch of açai pulp winged its way to the USA, and Hawaii and Southern California became the first places where açai bowl found a foreign home. Fast forward a decade and various incarnations can be found from Sydney to London.

Tasting

Waking up on a hot, sticky morning by the Brazilian seaside (especially when nursing a Caipirinha-induced hangover) the cool combination of berries and nuts in an açai bowl provide the ultimate wake-up call, with a health kick to boot.

With a similar consistency to lightly-defrosted gelato, the rich, deep-purple açai pulp or powder mixture forms the basis of this attractive tropical dish. Traditional Brazilian toppings include sliced banana and a sprinkling of granola, but Western cafes usually also offer an additional range of healthy toppings such as blueberries, shaved coconut, seeds and nuts.

While the açai mixture, which tastes a little bit like blackberries mixed with dark chocolate, is deliciously moreish by itself, the crunch of granola and nuts provides delightful texture. The fruity toppings add a healthy dimension, and help to tone down the chill of the açai mixture. But you'll have to scoff it all down before the mixture melts.

Finding it

Açai bowls are usually sold in beachside kiosks and juice bars for around BRL9 (US\$3.69) (with banana and granola).

*** TIP * While you'll gain more health benefits eating fresh açai in Brazil (outside the country, it can usually only be purchased in pulp or powder form), keep in mind that açai is traditionally blended with the juice from another Amazonian berry, guarana. Super-high in caffeine, it provides a great energy boost in the morning, but doesn't make the most ideal pre-bedtime snack.**