

Borrowing a lesson from barbecue for a better grilled cheese

By **ELIZABETH KARMEL**
Associated Press

For me, a grilled cheese sandwich is just pure comfort. And truth is, even a bad grilled cheese is satisfying. But a great grilled cheese will change your day for the better.

Most of us have childhood memories of our perfect grilled cheese. Mine is the classic sandwich dished up at my local drugstore. My best friend and I would ride our bikes there, sit at the counter and order a fresh-squeezed lemonade with a grilled cheese. The sandwich was made on a griddle with white bread and a single slice of American cheese.

As I got older and my tastes grew more sophisticated, my allegiances changed. For a while, my favorite was a Chicago Greek diner version with rye bread, Swiss cheese and bacon. It, too, was made on a griddle. But when I tried to duplicate the experience at home, it was never as good.

Most of the time, the bread would burn long before the cheese was perfectly melted. That’s because I was grilling my sandwich in an open skillet on the stovetop. That was my problem.

So I borrowed an idea



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Grilled pear and blue cheese sandwich on cinnamon raisin bread.

from grilling. Delicate meats — or those that need long cooking times — can’t stand up to intense, direct heat. Just like my grilled cheese sandwiches, they burn outside before cooking on the inside. In grilling, the solution is to use indirect heat. You cook the meat for a longer period at a lower temperature, and often away from the direct flame.

I decided to try something similar with my sandwiches. Instead of a very hot open skillet, I used medium-low heat and covered the pan. This

created just the right environment to slowly toast the bread while gently melting the cheese inside. Presto! Grilled cheese perfection!

Once I had my technique down, I started exploring different fillings, including one of my top fruit and cheese combinations — pears and blue cheese. Out of all the crazy variations I tried, this is the only one that I have made over and over again. In this recipe, I grill the pears first with a simple “dessert rub,” then let them cool slightly before assembling the sandwich.

The grilling of the fruit intensifies the flavor of the pears so that they aren’t overwhelmed by the blue cheese. I also use cinnamon-raisin bread, which makes this a slightly sweet grilled cheese, better served as an appetizer or a slightly savory dessert.

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Tulsa emerging as hipster hub

By **JUSTIN JUOZAPAVICIUS**
Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — Punching far above their weight, starry-eyed Tulsans have tried for years to demonstrate to fellow Oklahomans and outsiders alike that the state’s second-largest city was more funky and less in a funk.

With a re-energized downtown and a welcome mat for a much younger generation of business owners and urban dwellers, this meat-and-potatoes Midwestern city of about 400,000 is hitting a stride.

“Seems like there’s a huge portion of people happy to have an Urban Outfitters and Fuddruckers, then there’s a small population section that’s starving for authenticity,” says Brian Franklin, owner of DoubleShot Coffee Co. and an unofficial poster boy for Tulsa’s hipster revolution. Franklin’s straight-up, perhaps fussy, shop rules became the model for a sketch on the comedy show “Portlandia” after actress Carrie Brownstein visited.

Brownstein wasn’t available for an interview, but explained in a 2013 interview with Splitsider that she’s found hidden Portlandias in places she visits, like Tulsa.

“All over Tulsa are little pockets of collectives and boutiques and artisan bakeries ... I feel like that is popping up in so many cities, especially in places like Birmingham or Tulsa, where there was a time where those downtown areas were somewhat abandoned and people moved to the suburbs,” she said.

Tulsa’s pop culture cred is a long way from where things in this city were a few years ago — a period that saw lots of soaring, big-concept ideas go horribly, and embarrassingly, awry.

Leaders campaigned to land one of four retiring NASA space shuttles a few years ago, but lost out to mostly larger cities. Two years ago, straight-faced boosters wanted to assemble a bid to host the 2024 Summer Olympics, \$3.5 billion



AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki, File

In this June 27, 2013, people walk past The Tavern in the Brady Arts District in Tulsa, Okla. The Brady Arts District is a valentine to Tulsa’s creative class.



AP Photo/Justin Juozapavicius

Brian Franklin, owner of DoubleShot Coffee Co., stands with some of his raw materials on March 19, in Tulsa, Okla.

price tag and all.

And, perhaps most memorably, thousands of spectators watched in 2007 as crews hoisted a 1957 Plymouth Belvedere out of its concrete tomb below the courthouse lawn, only to find that the time capsule on wheels was a rusted, muck-caked mess. The gimmick didn’t take into account that 50 years of Oklahoma weather could wreak havoc

on anything, even Miss Belvedere.

In the time since the rust-bucket incident, Tulsa’s slowly fashioned a downtown with a new arena, ballpark and epicenter of thriving nightlife called the Brady Arts District, a once-rundown swath of concrete and abandoned warehouses carpeted with weeds and syringes that was aching for a second act.

Brady’s success is a valentine to Tulsa’s creative class: hole-in-the-wall bistros, art galleries and studio space, the national Woody Guthrie Center, legendary music venues like Cain’s Ballroom and Soundpony and a trendy gay nightclub, among many others. The revival that’s taking place in Brady is part of the reason *The New York Times* dubbed Tulsa one of the 52 places to go in 2015.

“My downtown’s an exciting place,” says Natasha Ball, whose family’s lived in

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— Carrie Brownstein,
actress who visited Tulsa

the Tulsa area since before statehood. “There are teenage kids going into Cain’s and doing a poetry slam about the Tulsa Race Riot.” The riot was a 1921 attack by whites on a wealthy black community in which some 300 African-Americans were believed killed.

Way before blogs were considered a thing, Ball started one in 2005, showcasing adventures that could be had in her beloved city if folks would just walk that extra half-block or get over misplaced fears and park in a supposedly sketchy part of town. “TashaDoesTulsa” soon became required reading for plugged-in locals during its seven-year run.

For Franklin — sipping an Americano out of a piece of Navajo pottery at his shop, which calls itself “the white buffalo of coffee” — hip isn’t found by bolting to seemingly greener pastures in other places around the country, it’s “stay in town and be cool and make something.”

And Tulsa has put that rusted Belvedere in the rear-view mirror.



AP Photo/File

In this 2007 file photo, a 1957 Plymouth Belvedere buried under the city’s courthouse lawn fifty years ago is pictured after it was unveiled in Tulsa, Okla.

Grilled pear & blue cheese sandwich on cinnamon-raisin bread

The most common mistake in making a grilled cheese is turning the burners up too high. Just as with barbecue, low and slow is key. The cheese will ooze out, but that’s the beauty of it; the melted, cooked cheese gives the sandwich a crave-worthy crunchiness.

Start to finish: 15 minutes
Servings: 2

- 1 to 2 tablespoons butter, room temperature
- 4 slices cinnamon-raisin bread
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- Tiny pinch of kosher salt
- 1 pear, peeled, halved and cored
- 1 tablespoon blueberry or other berry jam
- 2 to 3 ounces blue cheese, thinly sliced

Use the butter to coat 1 side of each slice of bread. In a small bowl, mix together the sugar, cinnamon and salt. Sprinkle over the pear halves. Heat a heavy (cast-iron is best) grill pan with a lid over medium-low heat for 1 minute. Place pears across the grill grates and cover. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, or until warmed and marked. Turn over and cook another 1 to 2 minutes. Remove the pears from the pan and let cool to room temperature. Slice each pear half lengthwise into 1/4-inch-thick slices. Spread half of the jam over the unbuttered side of 2 of the bread slices. Top the jam with half of the pear slices, then half of the cheese. Top with a second slice of bread, buttered side up. Return the grill pan to medium-low heat. Coat the pan with cooking spray. Once the pan is warm, add the sandwiches, then cover and cook until golden brown on the bottom, 3 to 5 minutes. Flip and cook the other side for about 2 minutes, or until the bread is golden brown and the cheese is oozing.

Nutrition information per serving: 460 calories; 200 calories from fat (43 percent of total calories); 22 g fat (12 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 50 mg cholesterol; 53 g carbohydrate; 5 g fiber; 30 g sugar; 14 g protein; 650 mg sodium.

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