

Recipes

Brioche Blaster! elBulli at the Office

By Nicholas L. Hall, Fri., Feb. 11 2011 @ 12:26PM

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About a month ago, Top Chef Michael Voltaggio started talking about his technique for microwave brioche, posting [YouTube videos](#) and splattering Twitter with his tales of rich, buttery goodness, à la minute -- a clever, savory riff on the microwave sponge cakes the [Ferran Adrià](#) and his pastry chef brother have been doing for years.

Voltaggio got me thinking about the technique, and how I could adapt it for [Shiftwork Bites](#). The idea itself is simple enough. Voltaggio makes a modified brioche batter, fairly loose and without yeast. He then places it in an iSi (a fancy cream whipper, charged with nitrous oxide), and uses the gas to aerate the batter. The aeration step is key, as the yeastless batter would otherwise be unleavened.

Once the batter is ready, it is dispensed from the whipper into a paper cup that's been stabbed a few times with a sharp knife, to allow steam to escape as the bread cooks. The batter-cup is microwaved for about 40 seconds, then allowed to rest, upside down, for another minute. When the bread is unmolded, it is light and fluffy, with large air pockets that give it an intriguing texture.

As easy as the technique is, it rests on one key factor - an iSi canister. I asked Voltaggio, via Twitter, if other aeration methods would work. His response was a firm no, but I'm not so sure. I bounced the idea off of a few Houston chefs, trying to figure out a work-around. The consensus seems to be that an iSi is by far the easiest way to achieve the desired results, but that aeration is the key. There are plenty of ways to aerate, and I'm working on a couple of methods to determine the best alternative to dropping \$110 or so on a device that would see such infrequent use. Plus, it'd be fun to prove a Top Chef wrong.

In the meantime, I decided to do a dry run with a method that was suggested as a joke. The principle is the same as the Adrià/Voltaggio method; aerate batter with gas, dispense into cup, steam, and enjoy. My method doesn't require the extra step of making batter, filling a siphon, and charging. Just shake, press, and pop it in the nuker.

Of course, some might scoff at "brioche" made out of canned pancake batter, so I decided to dress it up a bit. Once it was steamed and torn into artful pieces, I added a nice drizzle of cardamom-scented honey (honey warmed in the microwave, one cardamom pod added to steep) and a contrasting line of spice from the "Peppercorn Medley" grinder (black, white, and pink peppercorns, as well as some coriander) one of my coworkers had. It was made entirely with things that I can easily keep on hand up at the office, and it tasted and felt surprisingly elegant. I'm betting that, whenever [elBulli re-opens](#), you just might see some Batter Blaster™ in his walk-in.



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