

Breakfast of champions

DANIEL COMBS offers four winning ways to nourish your Sunday.

Breakfast is America's meal. Whether your lifestyle is raucous or relaxed, few people can withstand the allure of a runny egg, the smoky tinge of bacon, or the perfect elegance of a bagel with a schmear.

Six days a week, breakfast is just that, a simple way to break the nightlong fast. But on Sunday, breakfast takes off the gloves and shows us what's really possible. Sunday is Brunch Day.

For the weekend warrior, after a few wet and haggard nights, Sunday brunch serves as a vital, almost necessary reconstitution. The true cure for a hangover is fatty foods and the light sheen of a single drink. Soak it up and numb it down.

For those who spend weekends finishing The Times' crossword puzzle and jogging on the beach, brunch is one of the few admissible avenues of gluttony during an otherwise wholesome seven-day spread.

With this democratizing spirit in hand, Daniel Combs set out to discover Newport's best brunch spots. Where can you find the perfect hollandaise sauce? Who mixes up the best Bloody Mary? Where can you go with just a few bucks in your pocket?

What followed wasn't so much a contest as it was a celebration of all things brunch. Here are his four favorite places to fill up on Sunday:



Lox of love. Diego's grilled quesadilla filled with homemade scallion cream cheese and topped with grilled tomato, smoked salmon and a blend of fresh tomato, red onion and zesty caper salsa. PHOTO BY JACQUELINE MARQUE

BEST VALUE BRUNCH POUR JUDGEMENT

32 Broadway, Newport
(401) 619-2115

www.pourjudgement.com

Brunch served Sun., 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

If you walk down SoBro on a weekend night, you're likely to hear the noise from Pour Judgement before you ever see it. As the door to the long and narrow room opens and closes, the sounds of a diverse clientele all trying to make themselves heard spill out into the street.

Friday and Saturday nights at PJ see one of the most eclectic groups of drinkers at any bar in Newport. It wouldn't be out of place to see a table of twentysomething surf bros sitting next to a 50-year-old couple out for a date, while a group of Navy sailors stands nearby trying to get the bartender's attention.

The diversity continues on into Sunday. Bargain prices and a well-run kitchen attract an eclectic crowd of drinkers to the bar, and PJ manages to keep things just as tasty and cheap for brunch the next day.

Picture-perfect families sit at the tables while the worn-out partiers line the bar. Both are here for quality food at an unassuming price. The cooks at PJ know how to make a plate that's filling without being over-the-top. Their brunch menu features a slew of variations on the classic eggs benedict (\$7-\$11). These are made well, two heaping mounds of meat, egg and dairy that divulge their yolk-y contents onto the plate — perfect sopping material for the equally delicious English muffins.

If your brunch is alcohol-inspired, don't forget that PJ is first and foremost a bar. The lovely ladies behind the counter know how to mix a good Bloody Mary.

BEST BRUNCH BUZZ DIEGO'S

11 Bowen's Wharf, Newport
(401) 619-2640

www.diegosnewport.com

Brunch served Sat., 9 a.m.-noon & Sun., 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Diego's is a relative newcomer to the Newport dining scene. Situated in the middle of Bowen's and Banister's wharves, the small restaurant is surrounded by a claustrophobic sea of commercial buildings. The small area off America's Cup Avenue is home to



Over the top. Flat iron steak served with a poached egg and rich béarnaise sauce has a starring role on the menu at The Grill at 41° North. PHOTO BY DAVE HANSEN

more than 10 restaurants and dozens of retail shops.

This heavily trafficked area presents a dizzying amount of motion and commotion. For weekend visitors this spring and summer, a respite undoubtedly will be necessary.

Look no further than the shady oasis in the center of the hubbub. The small indoor space with enormous east-facing glass panel windows is an excellent place to enjoy the mid-day rays while enjoying arguably the best Mexican food on the island. As of May 1, the outdoor patio will be open and the most sought-after tables will be on the idyllic, shade-dappled ground.

Diego's gives brunch a south-of-the-border kick. Huevos Rancheros (\$9), Smoked Salmon Quesadilla (\$12) and Baja Steak & Eggs (\$12) are your breakfast babies unrecognizable after a Mexican makeover. This is a good thing.

Equally delicious and similarly successful as a breather from the surrounding tourist crowd are the well-balanced, imaginative cocktails, which arrive on a menu of eye-daunting length.

Standard margaritas come by the glass (\$6.50) or the pitcher (\$23), which is perfect for sharing between four friends. A plethora of possible upgrades make for a rainbow of tequila tasting. Brunch has its own drinks menu, with equally intrepid variations on the classic Bloody Mary (blue cheese-stuffed jalapeno as a garnish) and mimosa

(hibiscus syrup).

Sipping a salted rim and wearing sunglasses is hard to beat — almost impossible on a Sunday afternoon. It's too easy to watch the middle of the day float by on a wave of perfectly mixed cocktails. The sea of nameless out-of-state faces fades as you enjoy the company of friends, some laughs, and a sunny Sunday buzz.

BEST STUFF-YOUR-FACE BRUNCH

ATLANTIC BEACH CLUB

55 Purgatory Road, Middletown
(401) 847-2750

www.atlanticbeachclub.com

Brunch served Sun., 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

Whoever invented the term "brunch," was a pragmatist. You look at the word and without any context you know exactly what it means. You take breakfast, you take lunch, and you squash them together.

Part of the reason we don't have a corresponding word to combine lunch and dinner is that the foods you eat for those meals are too similar. Whereas there is a clear demarcating line between breakfast

and lunch — a line that brunch slides from one side to another on like a runny poached egg.

Atlantic Beach Club takes to the extreme the idea of brunch being breakfast and lunch together. The Sunday Brunch Buffet (\$14.95) is an all-you-can-eat extravaganza. Elbows go flying as you compete to grab that last eggs benedict. Forks turn to fencing weapons over the golden, syrupy spoils of the French toast sticks. These battles ensue around one long table dedicated to breakfast foods only. It also holds enormous bowls of sliced melon as well as several small mountains of bacon and sausage.

This table is for plate number one. Because once you sopped up that last runny yolk you can go back up, pick up another plate, and advance onto table numero dos — devoted to the pleasures of the mid-day meal.

Caesar salad, chicken parmesan, scallops and baked scrod, none of these foods really scream "BRUNCH!" at you. But that's fine, because here is your opportunity to eat two complete meals in one sitting.

Your spoon works better as a shovel as you keep marching up to the trough, filling your plate, and stuffing your maw until you cannot move. Just be sure to wait 30 minutes before swimming.

CLASSIEST BRUNCH THE GRILL AT FORTY 1° NORTH

351 Thames St., Newport
(401) 846-8018

www.41north.com

Brunch served Sat. & Sun., 7 a.m.-4 p.m.

The Grill, 41° North's upscale restaurant, is mere feet away from the hubbub of lower Thames Street. But when you step through the hotel's massive double doors and into the swank lounge on the first floor, it feels like another world.

This is a world of starched white collars that never get fully buttoned. Skin that never loses its bronzed tone, Ray Bans that are never out of reach. This is luxury, and The Grill and hotel cater to a very specific world. The restaurant extends outside to a waterside dock on the back of the hotel. This is where the yachts dock in the summer, the power players step off, and the hotel and restaurant greet them with all the amenities befitting their class.

But all that can be yours, too. You can enjoy the nautical themed modern design. You can move from seat to seat in a room whose point seems to be an endless display of chair design (I counted at least 15 different types of seating in a single room). You can walk on opalescent tiles that glitter in the bright morning sun bouncing off the surrounding water.



Triple delight. A trio of lobster sliders flavored with lemon-basil aioli and served with fries is oh so wonderful at The Grill at 41° North.

PHOTO BY DAVE HANSEN



Classic. The Grill at 41° North does a Bloody Mary with Grey Goose vodka, caper berries and cucumber. PHOTO BY DAVE HANSEN

And you can lose yourself in the food, which for brunch ranges from the simple summer taste of fresh lobster sliders with lemon-basil aioli (\$18) to the over-the-top decadence of steak and eggs with béarnaise sauce (\$19). Whether the food mimics the delicate cleanliness of life on a yacht or the richness, it is all expertly prepared and immaculately plated.

If you're looking for class without the crass, come to The Grill and stare out the windows at the bay and think about what life could be like, "if only..."