

Butter My Biscuit

Food musings of a southern ex-pat



Derby Bites: The Kentucky Hot Brown



Complementing last week's appetizer of Benedictine, Derby revelers will no doubt want something a bit more substantial. After all ? drinking, socializing and horse racing can run a body down! Meet the **Kentucky Hot Brown**: chunky roast turkey slices, layered over slices of white bread, cloaked in a cheesy Mornay sauce, then topped with sliced tomatoes and cooked bacon. The entire piece is then broiled for a few minutes to give everything a bubbly, suntanned look. Sound tempting? Then read on ...As the story goes, the Kentucky Hot Brown was an invention of The Brown Hotel of Louisville during the Roaring Twenties. The chef there, Fred Schmidt, needed something to please the hotel's dancing party crowd and guests that would want to nosh something late at night; nothing as heavy as a dinner, but different from breakfast. The sandwich was a hit, and soon became a draw unto itself. My personal guess is that the revelers were toasted and needed tasty grub to combat the pending hangover ? similar to any college student these days headed out to Waffle House at 2am after a frat party. At any rate, the specialty open faced sandwich had staying power, living long after The Brown Hotel closed down for a period in the early 1970's. And somewhere along the way, it became a culinary symbol of the Derby. Of course, the recipe has mutated and changed over the decades with exponential variations. Many Kentucky housewives and beyond have made their own version, culled from different Junior League and community cookbooks.

The Brown Hotel did re-open in the 80's, and the Hot Brown reappeared on its dining menu as an iconic institution. In fact, the hotel was the background for the Food Network's Hot Brown "throwdown" with Bobby Flay and then hotel executive chef Joe Castro (with his chef brother, John Castro). The recipe featured in this post is The Brown Hotel's classic version of the Hot Brown (via [Food & Dining Louisville Edition](#) magazine) ? which apparently has a few cheffy tweaks by Chef Joe Castro versus the recipe published on The Brown Hotel website. Meanwhile, there are some other renditions of Hot Browns out there of which you should be aware:

"BOBBY BROWN": This is the version by Bobby Flay in the Food Network's Hot Brown throwdown. In a nutshell, Bobby uses a savory French toast base to the turkey, sauce & bacon. I actually like his version a lot; for some reason I think of a de-constructed Croque Monsieur. If you want to give Bobby's recipe a try, click [here](#).

"NOT BROWN": Chef John Castro of Winston's Restaurant in Louisville (and brother to Chef Joe Castro mentioned above), does his own variation of the Hot Brown, aptly named *Not Brown* and is made of fried green tomatoes, shrimp, crab, bacon, spinach and a Mornay sauce. This sounds heavenly and I would pretty much sell my soul to get this recipe. If you have this recipe, please contact me! <http://www.buttermybiscuit.com>

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"HAMISH BROWN": Hah! I couldn't help myself ... I made this label up! With that said, there are quite a few variations of the Hot Brown that utilize some form of ham ? country ham or prosciutto ? in addition to the turkey. Everybody needs options ...

"FOXY BROWN": Fellow food blogger Heather at [Gild the Voodoo Lily](#) created her own version by changing up the cheeses and seasonings of the more classic recipe. I'm a fan of the Foxy Brown as it has an element of spiciness with paprika in it. As she so eloquently states: "...I altered the recipe for a Hot Brown just enough to give it a newer, sexier name. I dub this sandwich the Foxy Brown." If you're feeling 'foxy' and want to give Heather's recipe a go, click [here](#).

"CANDY BROWN": I'd say this is my own twist, although I'm guessing it's been done already. Regardless, I wanted to boost up the Foxy Brown just a smidge by adding *candied* bacon to the top of the turkey & cheese sauce heap. And because there was more of a sweet element with brown sugared pig, I punched up the paprika and added some cayenne to the sauce. Perhaps I went way overboard, but come on ... who wouldn't want candied bacon on their sandwich?

"VELVET BROWN": White trash. Velveeta. Need I say more?

HUMOR CONTEST: I did snicker coming up with a couple of those labels above. If you have a special rendition of a Hot Brown, share the name and your humor in the comments section. I don't have any prizes to give, but you'll have 15 minutes of fame...

Obviously, the recipe below is for a standard Hot Brown dinner serving, but on the kibbles & bits buffet strategy, you'll need to miniaturize the components of this recipe for yourself. But for the record, I'll tell you what I did so as to give you a jumping point for your adaptation.

- Bread: I decided to skip the boring sliced white route and got a loaf of a slightly soft Italian Ciabatta bread. I sliced it on the diagonal (2½" long) and gave it a little butter baste and a light toasting in the oven. I was going for a version of Texas toast (lightly colored, but still somewhat soft). My penchant for toasting revolves around wanting the bread sturdy enough to support turkey and cheese sauce without getting soggy; plus, you need to be able to pick it up with your hands and eat it without implosion. P.S. You can doll up the toast with a little sprinkle of paprika if you want.
- I totally cheated and bagged a rotisserie turkey breast at my local grocery store, and sliced that right up. It was mighty tasty and saved some time (you'd think I was doing a guest spot on Sandra Lee's "Semi-Homemade"!)
- Mornay: I followed the directions, but did take the opportunity to use up a couple of fancy cheese heels that were in still in my fridge. So, my sauce wasn't quite as pure as the recipe dictated, but it didn't matter. It was freakin' cheesy good.
- Tomato: It's still too early for tomatoes in New England. So, I went the route of large grape tomatoes instead, and it worked better from a scale standpoint with the miniatures.
- Garnish: Top with finely chopped parsley (or chives) for some visual punch.

"The Brown Hotel's Hot Brown"

Adapted from Chef Joe Castro, Published by [Food & Dining Louisville Edition](#)

Ingredients

Recipe provided by <http://www.buttermybiscuit.com>

- 4 ounces butter
- 6 Tbsp all-purpose flour

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- 3 cups milk
- 1 egg
- 6 Tbsp freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 ounce heavy cream (optional)
- Salt
- Pepper
- 8 to 12 slices of roast turkey
- 8 slices of good quality white bread
- Extra grated Parmesan for topping
- 8 strips of cooked bacon

Yield: Serves four.

The process goes fast, so have all your ingredients measured and ready before you start. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour all at once, whisking to make a thick roux. Add the milk, whisking to mix it in well. Stir in the Parmesan cheese. Reduce heat to low. Whisk the egg lightly in a cup or small bowl. Stir in a little of the hot sauce to "temper" the egg so it won't scramble when you add it to the sauce. When the egg is well mixed with a little of the sauce, whisk this combination into the saucepan. Heat the sauce briefly until it becomes smooth and thick, taking care not to let it come to a boil. Remove from heat. If you're using heavy cream, whip it and then fold it into the sauce gently. Check the seasoning and add salt and pepper to taste.

For each Hot Brown, place two slices of toast on a flameproof dish such as a metal plate. Put one or two slices of turkey on each piece of toast. Pour a generous amount of sauce over each and sprinkle with grated Parmesan. Place the dish under a broiler until the sauce is bubbly and speckled brown. Remove from broiler, cross two pieces of bacon on top of the dish, along with some tomato, and serve immediately.

Personal Notes: My cheese sauce got a bit too thick on me, so I did have to thin it out with a little more liquid. Additionally, the rotisserie turkey was a tad drier than I expected, but that was easily fixed by ladling out some chicken broth I had in the fridge and letting the slices warm up in the liquid a bit. Otherwise, I was quite pleased with this turnout. Just be aware that if you are serving guests, these will need to be served rather quickly as it doesn't have the same appeal after the Hot Browns have cooled and the cheese sauce has congealed.

GHTime Code(s): [2a604 8d676](#)