

SUN LIFE

Bite-sized soiree

This holiday season, think tiny, perfect brunch!



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Eat

If you're worried about the "same old same old" this holiday season, perhaps it's time to think outside the giftbox — and plan brunch, instead of dinner.

Bite-sized instead of full-course meals.

So says Sebastian Centner, celebrated director of Toronto's Entertainment Special Events & Catering, whose party concepts have been featured all over the globe, and who has appeared frequently on such programs as *ET Canada* and *CTV's Canada AM*.

Not to mention, he's spearheaded such high profile events as the Toronto International Film Festival and for such figures as President Bill Clinton and Brad Pitt, to name a few.

An industry trendsetter, Centner suggests that you "mix things up a bit this holiday

season with a bite-sized brunch party that combines the comfort of brunch foods with the elegance and style of a cocktail party."

Centner notes the hot food ideas include "quail eggs. They're tiny and really look wonderful when poached or fried like regular eggs. Devilled eggs are making a big comeback — and consider pheasant again. It was so popular, and it seems to have gone by the wayside, but it's a wonderful meat that taste fabulous and presents beautifully."

The key here is to plan — and be part of the celebrations. "A great host is one who

spends time with their guests. Prepare as much in advance and plan to have some items which are more labour intensive and some which are more 'self-serve.' The little things make all the difference. Find small touches to impress your guests and leave a lasting impression."

Here's a selection of mini brunch recipes courtesy of executive chef Christopher Matthews for Entertainment (entertainment.com). Note, each recipe makes enough for about 12-14 servings.

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BLUEBERRY PANCAKES

1 cup (250 ml) all-purpose flour
4 tsp. (20 ml) baking powder
1 tsp. (5 ml) kosher salt
1 Tbsp. (15 ml) sugar
2 large eggs
1½ tsp. (7 ml) vanilla extract
1¾ cups (425 ml) milk
¾ cup (60 ml) unsalted butter

Sift dry ingredients together and set aside. Whisk together eggs, vanilla and milk in a mixing bowl until frothy. Add dry ingredients until just evenly mixed. Melt a tablespoon of butter in a non-stick skillet over a medium-high heat.

Using a squeeze bottle, add batter one teaspoon at a time — flip when top bubbles and

edges are golden. Continue until all batter is used — keep warm in 200F (140C) oven. Stack and skewer and top with blueberry compote when serving.

Blueberry Compote:

1 cup (250 ml) frozen wild blueberries
1 cup (250 ml) maple syrup
¼ tsp. (1 ml) ground cardamom
¼ tsp. (1 ml) grated ginger
Pinch lime zest

Place all ingredients in a small sauce pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer and reduce mixture to half volume — about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and serve over pancakes.



CROQUE MADAME

6 thin slices pumpernickel
1 Tbsp. (15 ml) Dijon mustard
3 pieces thinly sliced black forest ham
12 quail eggs
Ground black pepper

Preheat oven broiler. Lay out bread slices and spread Dijon evenly between three slices and top with ham. Divide half of béchamel sauce between remaining 3 bread slices and top with remaining cheese. Close sandwiches. Melt 2 Tbsp. (30 ml) butter in a nonstick pan over medium heat. Add sandwiches and cook both sides until bread is golden brown and cheese is melted, about 3-4 minutes. Cut 4 small sandwiches out of each larger one using a round cookie cutter and place on baking sheet. Top each with remaining béchamel, and place under broiler until bubbly.

Meanwhile, melt remaining butter in the same skillet

over high heat — fry quail eggs, sunny side up, about 1 minute. Top sandwiches with fried egg, season with black pepper, and serve immediately.

Béchamel Sauce:
5 Tbsp. (75 ml) unsalted butter
1 Tbsp. (15 ml) flour
1 cup (250 ml) milk
¼ tsp. (1 ml) kosher salt
¼ tsp. (1 ml) ground black pepper
Pinch ground nutmeg
1 cup (250 ml) grated Gruyère cheese

In small saucepan melt 2 Tbsp. (30 ml) butter over high heat. Whisk in flour and cook until lightly golden. Add cold milk and salt and whisk constantly until mixture thickens — about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and stir nutmeg and half cheese into the milk mixture. Set aside.



MORE ONLINE

Visit torontosun.com/eat for more recipes.



CHICKEN AND WAFFLES

Chickens:

1 cup (250 ml) buttermilk
1 Tbsp. (15 ml) Sriracha sauce (available at your supermarket)
1 Tbsp. (15 ml) lemon zest
2 boneless chicken breasts, sliced crossways on a bias into 6-8 medallions
4 cups (1L) vegetable oil
¼ cup (60 ml) flour
¼ cup (60 ml) cornstarch
1 tsp. (5 ml) cajun spice
Salt & pepper

Blend together buttermilk, Sriracha and lemon zest. Marinate chicken in mixture at least 4 hours or overnight. In a bowl, blend flour, cornstarch, cajun spice, salt and pepper. Set aside. Heat oil in a non-reactive saucepan to 350F (180C). Dredge chicken in flour, shaking off excess. Fry in heated oil for approximately 5 minutes or until done.

Sauces:

¼ cup (60ml) honey
1 jalapeno pepper, finely diced

Heat honey over medium heat with jalapenos and

allow to steep for 10 minutes. Drizzle over chicken.

Waffle:

¾ cup (175 ml) flour
½ cup (125 ml) cornmeal
1½ tsp. (7 ml) baking powder
1 tsp. (5 ml) baking soda
½ tsp. (2 ml) each salt and black pepper
¼ tsp. (1 ml) smoked paprika
1 Tbsp. (15 ml) sugar
1 egg
1 cup (250 ml) buttermilk
4 Tbsp. (60 ml) unsalted butter, melted
½ tsp. (2 ml) vanilla extract

Preheat waffle iron. Combine cornmeal, flour, baking powder, sugar, baking soda, salt, pepper and paprika in a large bowl.

Beat together egg, buttermilk and melted butter and pour into the dry ingredients. Stir until just barely combined and allow to sit for 10 minutes. Spoon batter onto seasoned waffle iron and cook until evenly browned. Serve chicken on waffles (cut to size, if necessary) and drizzle with maple-jalapeno.

PARTY IN STYLE:



Sebastian Centner of Entertainment Special Events & Catering offers the following tips for a flawless soiree:

DAESS CODE: While the entire idea of hosting a brunch instead of a dinner or evening event is to bring a "casual" feel to the get together this doesn't necessarily have to apply to the dress-code. It is a stylish "bite-size brunch" after all... combining the feel of a cool cocktail party with comfortable brunch items "upscaled." Dress-down or play it up with a big of elegance, either will work well, even if people come dressed either way, it all mixes well for this type of event.

DAY OF THE WEEK: Brunch isn't just for weekends! Especially over the holidays when our weekends are already jam-packed. During the holiday break take advantage that most guests may have some weekdays off and host the brunch on a "shoulder day" - maybe a few days before Christmas, on Boxing Day or leading up to New Year's Eve, or even on New Year's Day.

TIME OF DAY: Ideally brunch is served from late morning to early afternoon. You really want to aim for a 11 a.m. to 3 p.m./4 p.m. window.