

## Dining in the Hamptons Breaking Bread at the Blue Duck

For the first time, you can look at bread the same way again after learning how the daily bread is prepared at the outstanding Blue Duck Bakery Cafe on Hampton Road in Southampton Village.

For walk-in customers, Blue Duck offers a variety of delicious, freshly made breads, cakes, pastries, cookies and even lunch sandwiches served on freshly made rolls. The colorful display is quite a sight to behold, especially considering that virtually everything there will be replaced the next day. Blue Duck also offers freshly brewed coffee and has a refrigerator containing a selection of drinks. There are several simple tables and chairs in the shop. And on top of all that, Blue Duck provides its products to several local restaurants, farmstands and even the Sag Harbor Farmers' Market.

Creating all this bread starts at dawn the day before the bread is to be sold. Over the course of several hours, bakers work to mix the flour, water and yeast in enormous vats, making so much dough that it seems almost impossible to imagine how it will all be turned into bread. Various types of dough are made each day, and each type requires absolute precision in relative amounts of flour, water and yeast, depending on the type of bread and what is being added (olives or nuts and raisins, for example). The dough then ferments for three to four hours, again depending on the precise requirements of the particular bread being made.



It is now the afternoon before the bread is to be sold. The dough from the huge vats is now formed into the proper shapes, over the course of about four hours. There are rolls, there are boules, there are loaves. I was given a tour of the kitchen during this phase, and seeing the many dozens of shaped breads was an amazing sight. Once the dough is formed, it is all refrigerated until 11 that night. Then, the night crew of bakers comes in to remove the bread from the giant refrigerators and allow it to come to room temperature. The bread is then baked, usually for about three hours.

Which brings us to the morning, almost 24 hours after the process started. The fresh bread is ready to be eaten, and the process begins again for tomorrow's bread. What makes this all the more amazing is that, while the bread is fermenting or chilling the bakers are working on the many cakes, cookies, pies, brownies, eclairs, cupcakes and pastries. The magnitude of the operation is astounding.

Blue Duck is owned by Keith Kouris, the master baker, and his wife Nancy, who handles the business

side and made up the name out of the... oh... Blue Kouris did not start out as a baker, though. His original dream was to own a deli. To make the money to buy a deli, he delivered freshly made Italian bread from up-island to the Hamptons, which he had discovered and fallen to love with when he was 18. Although this work piqued his interest in baking, he did buy a deli in Huntington. The deli had its own Scottish baker who made savory breads like meat pies. Kouris figured out when he could further develop a passion for baking.

Kouris then sold the deli business and worked for a variety of private bakeries, honing his craft.

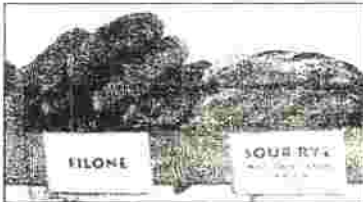


Photo by Deborah...

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# Dining in the Hamptons

## Silvia (continued from page 91)

1. Prepare the pesto: Place garlic cloves in a food processor and process until finely minced, pushing down sides as necessary. Add cilantro leaves and process until chopped, then add pignoli nuts, salt and pepper, and process until thoroughly blended with the cilantro. With machine running, add oil through the feed tube in a steady stream. Scrape into covered container. Can be prepared up to two days ahead. Refrigerate until ready to use.

2. Prepare your grill until coals are a gray ash or preheat a gas grill to medium-high. Spray the grill with oil to prevent skin from sticking. Rub kosher salt on the skin side of the salmon and put on the grill. If using a gas grill adjust the heat to medium as fish may be too close to the coals.

3. Grill the fish for 8-10 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fillets. As the fish cooks the flesh will become opaque from the bottom and the skin will char. I prefer to cook the salmon until the surface is still a bit pink, or slightly undercooked. To cook it longer, carefully turn with a spatula and cook for another minute or two.

4. Meanwhile bring the pesto to room temperature and taste to adjust seasoning if necessary. The sauce

should be a little runny. Spoon a little sauce across the center of each fillet. Garnish with cilantro sprigs, if desired, and serve.

### GRILLED PORTOBELLO MUSHROOMS

*You'll love these grilled portobello marinated in a savory basting mixture.*

Serves 6-8 as appetizer or side dish.

3 large (about 5-inches in diameter) portobello mushrooms

1-2 cloves garlic, finely chopped.

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary

Coarse (kosher) salt and freshly ground pepper to taste.

Generous pinch red pepper flakes

5-6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1. Cut stems from the portobello mushrooms, level with the cap. Cut a criss-cross pattern in the stem end so mushrooms cook evenly. Peel the caps and score the mushrooms with a sharp paring knife. Wipe the gills clean with moist paper towels.

The mushrooms are ready to marinate.

2. In a mixing bowl large enough to hold the mushrooms put in the garlic, rosemary, salt, pepper and pepper flakes. Slowly whisk in the olive oil until mixture is homogenous. Place the mushrooms cap-side down in the marinade and allow to sit for up to an hour. Carefully turn the mushrooms in the marinade from time to time.

3. Preheat gas or charcoal grill to medium-high. Place the mushrooms cap side down on the grill and cook about 4 minutes, basting with the marinade occasionally. Watch for flare-ups from the oil in the marinade and be prepared with a squirt water bottle. Turn the mushrooms, and cook another 3-4 minutes until tender, basting with remaining marinade.

Allow to come to room temperature and cut into wedges for serving.

*Silvia's Lehrer will give a cooking class featuring a Mediterranean Summer Buffet, to take place on Thursday, June 30th at 6:30 p.m. at the Wolfert Estate Vineyard in Sagaponack. Call 537-5106 ext. 20 for information and registration.*

## Duck (continued from page 91)

largely with Italian and German mentors. He then enrolled in the French Culinary Institute. (Anyone who cooks well but fears baking, like me, knows that cooking is to baking as finger painting with water colors is to master oil painting.) Six years ago, the building in which Blue Duck

resides became available for rent, and Blue Duck was born.

Kouris loves running a local operation and has no interest in expanding his base of commercial customers up-island or to Manhattan. And I doubt he would have room anyway. As it is, his multi-

room kitchen is filled to the brim with bakers and bread ovens, pastry ovens, refrigerators, mixers, sinks and storage space to hold the two tons of flour Kouris uses each week. By the way, Kouris's artisan breads are made without preservatives, and without any bleached flour.

Because I am so devoted to you, my dear reader, I consented to sample two types of bread and several pastries so as to report on their quality. Although I do not have much of a sweet tooth, I had to admit that the pastries and cookies were sinfully delicious. As for the bread, let me just say this: whoever thinks that serving prisoners nothing but bread and water is cruel and unusual punishment has obviously not been to the Blue Duck Bakery.

—David Stoll



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