



## DISH OF THE DAY

# A toast to toast

Forget alphabet spaghetti; grilled bread has popped up in the world

**W**HO would have thought that beans on toast, beloved staple of time-hungry cuisine, could be improved upon? Yet at Villandry, head chef Steve Evenett-Watts has given the über-snack a makeover. And given the vogue for poshed-up comfort food, his snazzy new rendition is the talk of the brunch set.

"My beans look like baked beans," he explains, "but they are darker and not so sugary. My beans are spicier and richer." In truth, Steve's beans are to tinned baked beans what freshly squeezed orange juice is to Sunny Delight. He soaks dried cannellini, borlotti and pinto beans overnight, then bakes them in large, foil-covered trays together with tomatoes, molasses, maple syrup, a hock of prosciutto, rosemary, thyme, cinnamon, lots of garlic and a couple of chillis for 4-5 hours. Mr Heinz, eat your heart out – beans on toast has gone glam.

Scrambled eggs and mushrooms on toast has also been reformatted. It's the most popular starter at the fashionable new Eyre Brothers restaurant in Shoreditch, where they cook the dish up with ceps, black trumpettes, oysters and chanterelles (above). "Tear up the mushrooms with your hands," advises the chef, Peter Quarrie. "If you chop them with a knife, they will become soggy." He sautés the mushrooms with garlic, red chillis and seasoning, then adds them to a mixture of beaten eggs (free range, of course) and cream.

Quarrie scrambles the mushroom and egg mixture on a low heat, stirring only occasionally so as to keep the egg in large

crumbs. Finally, he throws in some chopped, flat-leaf parsley just before serving.

Eclectic establishments elsewhere are, it seems, competing to see who can come up with the grandest toast topping. Snails on toast at La Trouville (which tastes better than it looks) comes a close second to what must be the most decadent of them all: foie gras on brioche at Pétrus. Traditionally, foie gras is cooked inside the brioche; here, toasted slices of brioche are laden with 1.5cm-thick pieces of foie gras and served with a dollop of peach chutney on the side.

It isn't just the toppings that have been poshed up, either. Mighty White has been banished to the culinary wilderness, replaced by modish choices from the ever-expanding array of exotic loaves. Right now, the choicest loaf, as toasted at Eyre Brothers and Villandry, is French sourdough, which is available from the Poilâne bakery and Flâneur Foodhall. It's a bulkish bread with a characteristically tangy, sour-sweet flavour.

If this sounds too far removed from the quick snacks we know and love, take heart – sourdough bread keeps for a week and Everett-Watts' beans recipe takes a while to make but can be stored in the fridge for up to four days. Time it right, and you'll keep yourself in gourmet snack-food for the best part of a week.

**KARYN MILLER**

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