Saving Lunch
(writing credits if called for only: Kasper Fogh Hansen, www.thefoodproject.dk)

Somehow time had almost passed it over. The open sandwich tradition of Denmark – known as smørrebrød - was not a thing that ambitious chefs or fashionable restaurants would put on their menus. That was until a young chef, looking for some more time with his kids, started out to save what is perhaps the only Danish addition to the world’s culinary map: the open, rye bread sandwich lunch. He has been joined by a band of culinary hard-hitters and now smørrebrød is back in fashion in Copenhagen.

The open sandwich: A working class hero

Fast currents of new food trends and the arrival of a globalized consumer culture, where every supermarket have shelves of Indonesian, Chinese and Italian foods, left the once popular smørrebrød tradition almost retired and relegated to restaurants with little ambition and a retired audience. The open sandwich was the combination of a working class hero - the rye bread lunch sandwiches of farmers and workers - and the lavish dinners of the urban bourgeoisie and nobility. The urban wealthy made the sandwiches stylish in the latter part of the 19th century, drawing on an old tradition of serving meats and fish on slices of bread instead of plates.

Restaurants in the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen introduced menus with more than a hundred varieties of open sandwiches, mostly on dark rye bread, and these places became the watering holes for Copenhageners on the weekend. The sandwiches strutted with towering combinations of cold meats or pickled and fried fish, some more exotic than appetizing. The sandwich tradition was kept alive through the 20th century, primarily by the working class who adopted the tradition both as an inspiration.
for the everyday lunch as well as the backbone of ordinary restaurants and beer joints.

The traditional herring is fermented with salt for a year, then gutted and skinned only to be marinated again for several months. Here is one of Adam Aamann’s own marinated herring filets, with juniper berries, curry and bay leaves. Pickled herring is the traditional starter in the lunch tradition. Notice the silvery shine on the filets indicating that these fish were caught at exactly the right time, being fatty and thick.

The bastard son of gastronomy

It is long ago that it was the pastime of young families to eat open sandwich lunches in the flowery Tivoli Gardens. And the working class is now sitting down in offices without getting sufficient exercise to build up appetite for the rich sandwiches. Recently, the sandwiches had become synonymous with an antiquated and unhealthy, mayonnaise-loaded lifestyle. That was how Adam Aamann found it. More than anybody else he has pioneered the resurrection of Denmark’s perhaps lunch tradition”.

“I think the sandwich tradition had become excessively fatty and meaty, different kinds of meats stacked, few quality products, few vegetables, no herbs, too little fish and maybe a little general sloppiness – to little

Adam Amann at the staircase of his deli, pioneering the restoration of lunch.
craftsmanship and too many pre-prepared ingredients” says Adam, who started a small take-away joint five years ago with modern interpretations of the classic open sandwiches. He added a fine-dining restaurant three years later. Not many people believed that lunch could be reinvented.

He laughs briefly at the word “modern”, an adjective loosely used by food writers to describe anything that stands out. “It’s quite funny”, he says. “To many people modern means making your food from scratch; you would think it would be the other way around”.

“I wanted to take lunch seriously,” he says, referring to the fact that the midday meal are considered by many fancy chefs to be the bastard son of gastronomy: a laborious and inglorious meal, that most top chefs only serve to pay the bills, with their real love being evening gourmet experiences.

The fish nation

Before the industrial and agricultural revolution, which made pig the dominant species of Denmark, the main source of protein in many places were fish and the harvest of the rich seas. Denmark consists of more than 400 islands. “Denmark is fish nation,” Adam says. “The farm workers stipulated in their contracts that they could only get served salmon or herring six days a week. They had to demand one day without fish, not to go nuts.”
“I try to establish a healthier and better balance between fish and meats. The true charm of the open sandwiches was always variation, “he says, showing his own pickled herrings, and pointing to the weever lying besides the fresh herrings on the table. “They’re totally cheap and people abstain from them because of their poisonous fins, but I try to include them in my food. They’re great. The herring, which many only eat pickled, is also remarkable when fresh. Just rub them with some lemon juice and the acid will take care of the little bones really fast. Fry and eat with no hesitation. I think there is a tendency for many to stick to preserved fish products and that’s a shame.”

The lump sucker with its pink and fresh roe. An early warning of spring and summer, as the fish is caught in March and April.

A new Nordic food culture

Adam worked for years with Claus Meyer, a gastronomic entrepreneur who started numerous businesses based on Nordic food and the belief that Denmark and the other Nordic countries should explore their own nature and create a culture based on indigenous products. Adam too is focused on developing Nordic food, being of a generation of Danish cooks not looking south for inspiration, but utilizing what their own turf can deliver.

“Actually, the open sandwiches is where the Danish kitchen is the strongest, our lunch tradition is our own. Most people can’t mention ten dinner dishes that are really Danish. It’s the whole other way around when it comes to the open sandwiches. The most popular combinations and their names are like cultural DNA, everybody knows them, even if many don’t eat it anymore,” Adam explains.
He has written a book with modern recipes for lunch, and has a new book out on how to flavor *snaps*, the traditional strong Danish spirit. But the love affair with the sandwiches was also a practical choice.

“As a chef you work late hours and weekends, and you’re never home. I had young children, and I needed to find a work-life balance a little more humane. So I figured there might be a niche exploring lunch,” he says. Necessity seems to be the mother of invention.

*Tartar a la Aamanns: Cornichon, crisps, capers, mayo and tarragon – on rye off course.*
The whole-grain rye bread is the foundation of Adam’s kitchen, and to a large extent the popular Danish food culture. To many outside of the Nordic region, the dark sourdough bread is a coarse and hard experience. The sun-depraved northerners probably needed to develop a taste for it, since quality wheat was in shortage. Maybe rye bread were another child of necessity, along with the heavy use of cured and smoked fish and meats, pickling and other preserves, designed to endure long, cold winters, but ultimately it ended up creating it’s own culinary language. According to Adam, the wonders of rye is likely to spread, though, since it’s healthier than wheat flour, which is being blamed for weight problems in western civilization.

“All over the world people are looking for substitutes to wheat. Much white bread is only an edible spoon, but here is a whole other and deeper flavor in the rye bread. It’s healthy and rich in fibers. I use malts to make it deeper, rounder and darker. The sandwich tradition comes with a bread culture, that I believe is massively underrated outside Denmark, but it will spread also because of the nutritional value of the bread,” he says.
Making something of everyday food

Alongside Adams take-away deli and restaurant, several new places have picked up the sandwich tradition. This has started a new trend in Copenhagen where traditional lunch is one of the most sought-after experiences. Top chefs have started working with the open sandwiches, and the Michelin guide now recommends lunch restaurants as good value dining experiences, Bib Gourmands, in their prestigious guide. Aamann’s was the first place primarily known for its lunch to get that honor.

Copenhagen is currently associated with top gastronomy in places such as Noma, the world’s best restaurant, Bocuse d’Or winner Rasmus Kofod’s Geranium, but Aamann’s success shows that the food revolution of Denmark and the Nordic region is much deeper than the emergence of gourmet kitchens: “Denmark needs a bistronomy, an improvement also of the regular cuisine. And that is coming along. But it would be great if we were to install some pride in our own food culture, and maintain the traditions that we have,” Adam says. He hopes retailers will start to take Danish

*Adam in his kitchen in Østerbro, Copenhagen*
produce more serious, and market the open sandwich lunch as a special culinary experience.

“After all,” he says, “the open sandwiches are a great part of our identity. We should make something out of it.”

For lunch: Recipes from Adam Aamann

Baking that dark, sour bread

This takes time and dedication, but once you’re hooked, you’re most likely going to keep baking.

Making a rye bread sour dough starter

250 gram of rye flour
4 deciliters of water
Generous pinch of salt
2 tablespoons of honey
2 tablespoons of yogurt
Mix the ingredients to a mud-like consistency in a bowl. Cling film but punch some holes in the film, so that the sour dough can breathe. Leave for 2 days, on the third day, put some extra rye flour and water in, and leave for a day or two, until it starts bubbling. Now it’s ready. You can store sourdoughs in the fridge for up to two weeks or more. To keep them alive give them a little fresh rye or wheat flour once in a while.

**Rye bread with seeds (2 breads of 1 kg)**

**For the first day:**

- 500 grams of sour dough
- 250 grams of rye grains
- 50 grams of linseed
- 150 grams of wheat flour
- 5 deciliters of lukewarm water
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- 1 ½ tablespoon of honey

**For the second day:**

- 1100 grams of rye flour
- 3 tablespoons of salt
- 1 ½ tablespoons of honey
- 9 deciliters of water

A little corn oil for the baking tins

On day one stir the first-day ingredients together, leave for next day under a wet cloth. On the second day, take the dough from the previous day and knead together with second batch of ingredients for 10 minutes. Take away 500 grams of sour dough for next time you’re baking, put in a plastic container in the fridge. Rub a little oil in two large baking tins and pour in the dough that should be the thickness of heavy mud. Leave to rise for 4 – 6 hours and bake at 170 degrees for 1 hour ad 45 minutes. Then take out of tins and bake for another fifteen minutes. Let cool completely before cutting in thin slices of approx 4-8 millimeters.
Curing a salmon “gravad”-style

The dill-flavored gravid-salmon is known by many, and quite easy to make. Eat it like the Danes, on rye with sweet and strong mustard sauce, or with horseradish in something like a salad. Usually mustard or horseradish is used to contrast the rich and dense taste. Black pepper is also an option. Avoid the lemon for this kind of cured fish; it dominates the other flavors too much. Remember the method also works on other fish and meats.

For 12:

1 whole filet of salmon. See if you can get it wild, or farmed organic or unstressed. Approx 1.5 kg in weight usually.

6 tablespoons of sea salt
5 tablespoons of cane sugar
1 deciliter of snaps/aquavit (preferably dill-flavored)
1 ½ tablespoon of dill seeds
1 tablespoon of coriander seeds
1 large bundle of dill
Black pepper

Clean the salmon, removing bones and fat. Leave skin on. Dry fish with cloth. Make a ground mixture of salt, sugar, aquavit, dill and coriander seeds and pepper and rub it all over the fish. Place on tray meat side down and cling film. Leave for 2 – 4 days in refrigerator, but turn it over every day so it cures evenly. When served, dry of most of the herbs, chop the fresh dill finely and cover with an even layer. Slice thinly preferable with a long, thin and flexible knife.

Here served with salads, apples, herb mayonnaise and horseradish. You can eat it on rye bread, here the bread is sliced thinly and roasted.

Facts of Lunch:
Around the year 920 the Arab Ibn Fadlen describes the traveling diet of the Vikings who ate an early version of the dark bread sandwiches. The Vikings sandwiches were made of onion and cold meats on bread. The bread was based on almost the same as today’s rye bread: Rye, barley and wheat.
The sagas of the Icelandic Vikings describes rye bread almost identical to the one known today, based on sourdough and whole grain rye flour.

In medieval Denmark farmers ate rye bread sandwiches with fat or butter, occasionally with smoked and salted fish of meats. The male farm workers were issued a bottle of snaps along with their sandwiches.

During the 16th century a tradition developed were slices of bread were used instead of plates, which were very expensive and a rare possession. The king, Christian the second, abolished the use of bread plates at special occasions around 1520, because he now had enough plates to serve all at parties. This is the forerunner of the open sandwich tradition with as a celebrative meal with many combinations but as an evening meal.

In the Nimb restaurant in Tivoli the army officers association often dined and held meetings. The staff introduced a list, at which the officers could write their open sandwich requests. This is seen today in many traditional lunch restaurant – there is so many varieties and combinations, that the waiters simply gives you a list to check of which combination you want, since it’s too demanding to do remember or write down the often complex orders. The most famous lunch order list is from Oscar Davidsen who in 1933 featured 178 kinds of open sandwiches. Oscar Davidsen’s descendants still run a traditional restaurant.

A traditional open sandwich lunch can be a demanding task to devour. A normal sequence of sandwiches could look like this:

- Cold fish, normally at least two kinds of pickled herring. Small hand peeled shrimp are a summertime delicacy highly valued.
- Fried fish, often plaice with pickles and mayonnaise
- Cold meats, tartar, roast beef, smoked sausage, chicken salad – or occasionally some combinations based on vegetables like potatoes and onion and tomato and eggs.
- Warm meats, like pies of pate's, roasted fresh sausages
- If sweets are served, it is often depending on season, traditional apple cakes in winter, and rhubarb trifle in spring, and thick strawberry soup in the summer.
Five great places for lunch in Copenhagen:

(free to use and quote freely - If writing credit is needed: Kasper Fogh Hansen, www.thefoodproject.dk)

Aamanns Etablissement // www.aamanns.dk

Adam Aamann pioneered the new wave of “smørrebrød” in Copenhagen. He is modernizing the tradition, finding a more modern way of presenting the food. More importantly though, he is a fantastic developer of the craftsmanship, always seeking out new kinds of fish, experiments with wild herbs, creative pickling and a clear dedication to the ambition of creating a Nordic food language. But if you are one of those who thinks, that sometimes the top gastronomers in Scandinavia are making too mild a cuisine, lacking intensity in taste, Adam will show you a different direction in Nordic cooking, knocking your socks off with concentrated flavors. His food is both traditional innovative at the same time.

Schønnemanns // www.restaurantschonnemann.dk

Old school is often the only school: Schønnemanns is a place that does it the old fashioned way. Once slumbering place, that a few years back were turned around and now are amongst the top places for lunch in Copenhagen. It looks the same though, a traditional cellar, heavy waiters with a tone like a master sergeant, long list of classical interpretations, and no nonsense servings. This is a traditional place that has kept the atmosphere of an everyday lunch restaurant unimpressed by modern ventures in gastronomy or interior decorating. Try the fried, smoked eel with scrambled eggs on rye bread - it’s addictive. Most of the time you’ll dine with Copenhageners meeting for working lunches or catching up on old acquaintances.

Gammel Mønt // www.gammel-moent.dk

The place that was there all along, a place for traditional gastronomy, classic haute cuisine dominated by Danish seasonal foods at night, and during the day possibly the best lunch restaurant in Copenhagen, also serving several of the open sandwich classics. The charismatic patron, weighing past the scale of most weights, is a walking advertisement for his own kitchen. He has won several awards for his traditional pickled herrings, taking pride in setting the standard for traditional quality. The restaurant is located in and old brothel, one of the oldest and protected buildings of Copenhagen. It is often uniquely decorated by the finest artists of the town, that also eats here regularly, since the chef, Claus Christensen, has sponsored many since college and are running a gallery for contemporary art along side his passion for fish, wild mushrooms and some of the most concentrated sauces you’ll ever taste. His fried plaice is absolutely untouchable. Gammel Mønt is connoisseur's place, but not for health fanatics overly concerned with their cholesterol count.
Restaurant Paustian // www.restaurantpaustian.dk

Bo Jacobsen is an institution in Danish gastronomy. He has run a first class restaurant several times awarded a Michelin star in Copenhagen. Besides running an haute cuisine restaurant, Bo and his wife has recently started a classical Danish restaurant in one of the famous architect Utzon’s (Sidney Opera etc) finest constructions in the northern harbor of Copenhagen. Here you can get their homemade hams, Danish cheeses and a lot of the best traditional products in contemporary style – but very rooted in an ambition of being the best guardians for Danish quality foods and an original culinary tradition. Bo Jacobsen is a self-proclaimed custodian of Danish food, and he serves an unpretentious but very ambitious cuisine.

Orangeriet www.restaurant-orangeriet.dk

A beautiful old green house in the middle of the preferred recreational parks in Copenhagen, at summer filled with sun craving young people. Jasper Kure is a former Danish competitor at the Bocuse d’Or championships, where he came in at fourth place in 2009. He virtually grew up in the neighborhood and always dreamt of getting this charming and bright restaurant for himself. He has been a chef at several of the top restaurants in the city, and it’s a rare thing that a chef with a top gastronomy profile like Jasper is giving attention to “smørrebrød” which he interprets in modern style. This is a place where decorative and modern haute cuisine lives alongside the classic lunch. Orangeriet is great place for feeling the essence of Nordic gastronomy, which arcs both a working class tradition like open sandwiches and ambitious gastronomy.
Other available images:

Classic combinations:

Roasted pork, walnuts, onions and a small touch of red currant gelée.

Rye bread with roastbeef, pickles, horseradish. A classic combination.
At night, Aamanns stay in the Nordic cuisine, but skips the rye bread: Braised shank of veal with spelt, leeks, browned butter vinaigrette, walnuts and sea bucktorn.

Tartar a la danoise served as a starter.