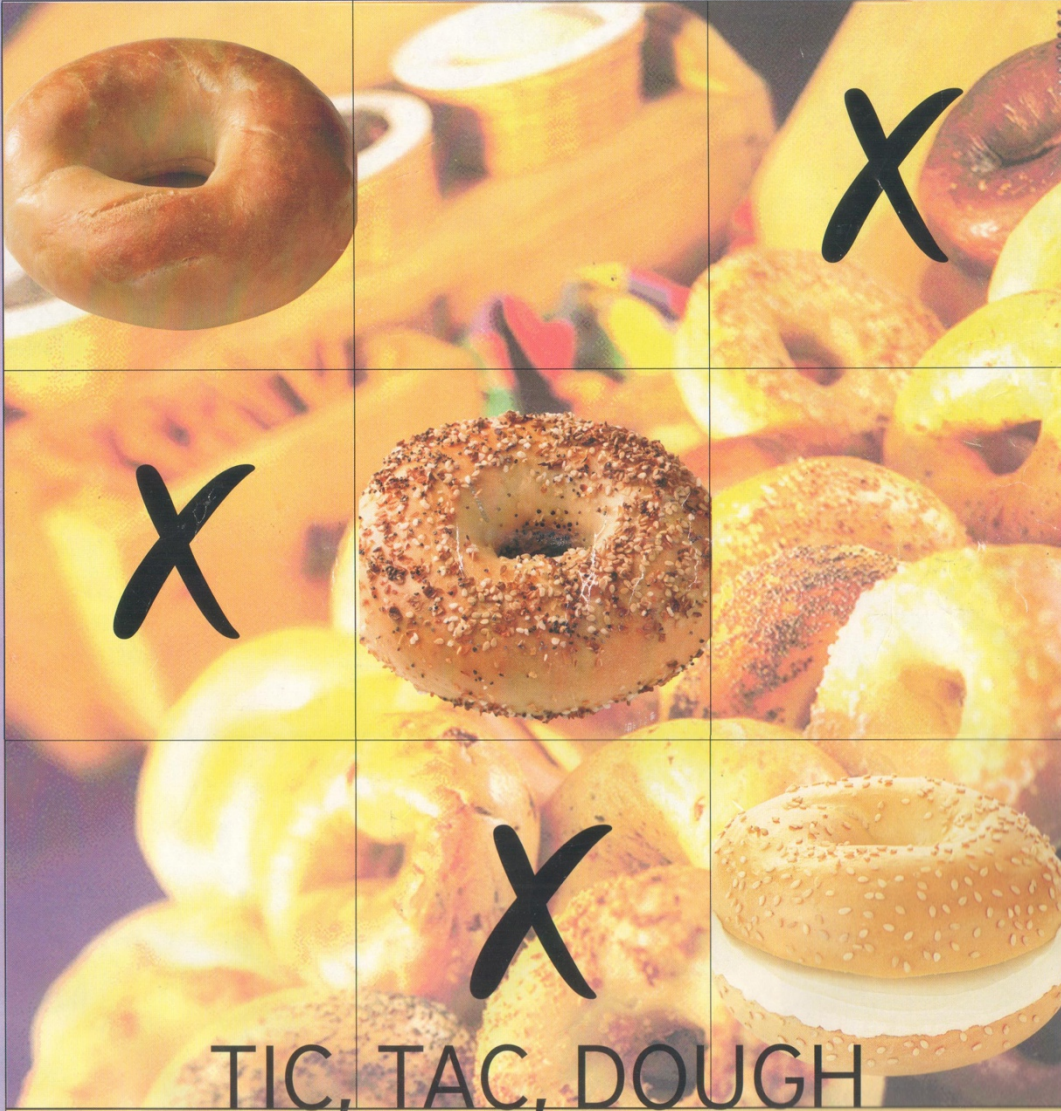


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# Atlanta Jewish Times

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TIC, TAC, DOUGH

Bagels lose Jewish flavor while cornering the market

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By TOVA FRUCHTMAN  
*The Jewish Times*

Nestled between a coffee shop and a hair salon in an upscale neighborhood of Tokyo is a place where you can find the crunchy-crusted, chewy-centered taste of American Jewish culture.

Maruichi Bagel is owned by Minho Inagi, whose story and passion for bagels were featured in *The Wall Street Journal* in October.

Inagi, 29, studied the art of making bagels while sweeping floors and taking orders at New York's Ess-a-Bagel, then returned to Tokyo to open her bagel shop in August 2004.

She was just in time, according to the *Journal* report.

"Ms. Inagi found her niche just as Japan was about to experience a bagel boom. Today local food magazines tout them as health food and bagel stores are opening everywhere. Connois-

seurs rate shops on a Web page called @bagel cafe, a kind of nationwide clearing house for bagel information in Japan."

While some bagel shops in Atlanta are gathering places where Jews often can't walk in without seeing someone they know, the shmeared round treats are making their way around the world and losing much of their Jewish identity along the way.

#### Coming to America

Bagels play no role in religious ritual, but the chewy and crunchy bread that was brought to America by Jewish bakers has long been identified as a Jewish food.

There is no definitive answer to where bagels originated. Legend has it that a baker in Vienna, Austria, made the bagel as a gift for King Jan Sobieski of Poland to thank him for saving the city from Turkish invaders; it's not clear whether that in-

ventive baker was Jewish. As the story goes, he made the bread in the shape of a riding stirrup, *bugel* in German, in honor of the king's skilled horsemanship and favorite pastime.

The bugels spread around Poland and have been documented as being used as gifts for women in childbirth and as teething rings for babies. In Russia, bagels were known as *bubiliki*, were sold on strings, and were said to bring good luck and possess magical powers.

When pogroms forced Jews to flee Russia and Eastern Europe in the early 1900s, they came to America, and they brought bagels with them.

In Donna Gabbacia's book "We Are What We Eat," a Harvard publication, she explores what it means to be what you munch in an America where ethnic foods have become common for all.

In one chapter she follows the bagel from Polish-Jewish stores whose patrons cared more about getting kosher meat, gefilte fish and *challah* than bagels; to mass-produced frozen treats paired with cream cheese (the spread was invented in 1872 in Chester, N.Y., and marketed as Philadelphia brand in 1880); to a Pakistani-owned bagel shop in Houston.

That chronological journey of the bagel takes Gabbacia to Israel, where an American who made *aliyah* began importing dough to make fresh bagels and even sold the dough to Dunkin' Donuts in Tel Aviv. Sabras (native Israelis) don't think of bagels as Jewish but as American. The closest counterpart to a bagel in Israel is an Arab-made bread.

"The bagel tells a different kind of American tale," Gabbacia writes. "It highlights ways that the production, exchange, marketing and consumption of food have generated new identities — for the foods and eaters alike."

#### Finding an authentic bagel

Gabbacia contends in her book that as bagels become more Americanized, people began to search for a true "New York Jewish" bagel.

Atlanta's Maggie Glezer, author of "Artisan Baking Across America: The Breads, the Bakers, the Best Recipes" and "A Blessing of Bread: Jewish Bread Baking Around the World," has watched with sadness the changes over the past 20 years





as bagels have become mass-produced.

"I know how they are supposed to be made," said Glezer, who recently learned to make bagels with Michael Yoss, whose parents owned the now-closed Royal Bagel in Atlanta's Ansley Park neighborhood. "I know there are few people who are making it that way."

Glezer said that making bagels the authentic way is no easy feat.

"To make them at home you have to be a little bit crazy," she said.

The process includes making a thick, dense dough, shaping bagels by hand, allowing them to proof in a refrigerator, boiling them and baking them.

"There are many steps, and it's very labor-intensive," she said.

But it's worth it, she contends.

The authentic bagel has a chewy, dense texture and a complex sour-sweet flavor. It also has a round cross section rather than a hemispherical cross section.

With the bagel bakers unions of early Northeastern bagel shops long gone, companies often make bagels quite differently from the traditional way, Glezer said.

Most bagels are made using regular bread dough. They are shaped by a machine instead of by hand. They are allowed to rise instead of being refrigerated or retarded, and they are baked in ovens with steam to simulate the boiling because they are not boiled.

In the steam ovens,

the bagels often are baked on screens, and Glezer said the screen marks on the bagels are visible.

"Although I understand that it's brutal work and there are not many people who are willing to do it, to lose all these traditions is a sad thing," said Glezer, who has seen many traditional breads face the same manufacturing fate.

"What would help is if people would recognize it and pay little more money for it," she said.

Glezer doesn't understand why consumers buy preservative-laden bagels out of grocery store freezers.

"There is a difference in the quality of ingredients, the quality of craftsmanship, the actual flavors that you are buying," she said. "Keep our crafts and our traditions alive."

There are a select few shops in Atlanta where bagels are made the old-fashioned way.

One such shop is Bagel

Break, the only Atlanta bagel shop certified as kosher by the Atlanta Kashruth Commission. Each day a mashgiah checks the store to ensure kashrut standards, and every Shabbat the store is closed.

Mel Meyer, who owns and operates Bagel Break on Roswell Road with his wife, Donna, said he chose to open a kosher bagel shop four years ago because he saw a need in the community.

"There was nothing on this side of town that could feed everybody," he said.

Bagel Break makes fresh bagels daily.

"My kind of bagels are New York bagels," said Meyer, who has owned a bagel shop in Atlanta for 22 years — Bagel Eatery before Bagel Break.

Unlike the frozen bagels Glezer detests, Meyer's bagels have no preservatives.

He tells people not to buy more bagels than they can eat in two or three days.

Meyer's customers come back for the fresh, retarded, boiled and baked bagels, he said.

And what used to be a Jewish customer base has expanded, even at the kosher bagel shop in town.

"Years ago, it was an ethnic food. The only people that ate bagels were Jewish people," Meyer said. "Today, everyone eats bagels."

The most popular types are plain, sesame, poppy and everything.

Like many bagel shops trying to stay "authentic," Meyer also serves whitefish, smoked salmon (lox or nova), baked salmon and sable.


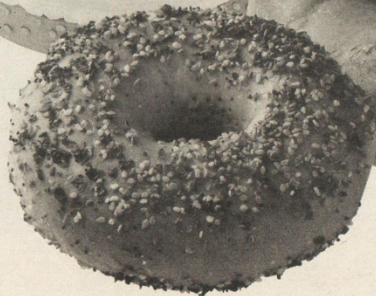
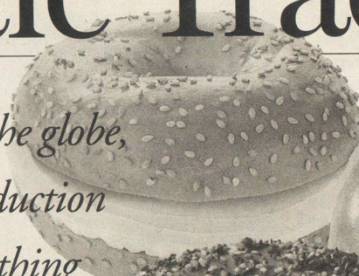
"I get all of my smoked fish out of New York," said Meyer, who spent eight years working at a bagel shop in New York before moving to Atlanta.

Although Meyer wouldn't comment on the product coming out of the corporate-giant bagel companies, he did



# Little Tradition

*Bagels circle the globe,  
but mass production  
changes everything*

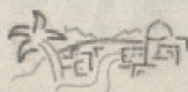




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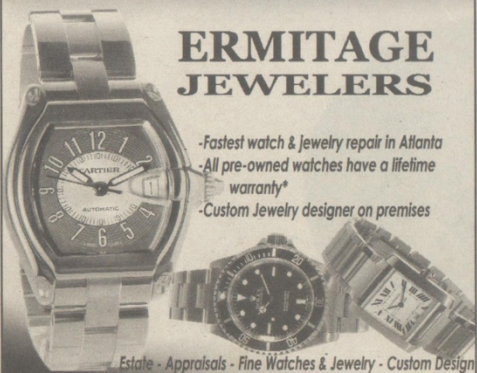
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say his store offers a different mentality.

"It's quality and service," he said. "It's a mom-and-pop operation. It's not a commercial, strictly by the book one. My customers are always right."

### Selling in the 21st century

Nowadays you can find a bagel almost anywhere — the coffee shop, the morning office meeting, the grocery store, the chain sandwich shop, the doughnut shop, the fast-food joint and even the gas station.

Dunkin' Donuts, which began selling bagels in 1996, is now the largest bagel retailer in the world, selling more than 285 million bagels each year. The chain sells a variety of styles, from the traditional — plain, sesame and poppy — to the innovative — sour cream and onion, blueberry, and berry berry.

Other shops offer flavors from chocolate chip to sun-dried tomato.

Just as bagels are everywhere, so it seemed to be with bagel shops.

In the mid-1990s bagel stores in America peaked, according to a 2000 Atlanta Business Chronicle article that examined why some bagel shops around Atlanta were shutting down. Too many bagel shops opened in a short time, and with competition from coffee shops, grocery stores and doughnut shops selling fresh-baked bagels, the market for bagels became oversaturated.

New World Restaurant Group is the parent company for Noah's Bagels, Einstein Bros. Bagels, Manhattan Bagel, Chesapeake Bagel Bakery and New World Coffee. The company owns, licenses or franchises 643 stores in 34 states.

In a report released Nov. 2 about the company's 2005 third quarter, New World reported higher revenue and comparable-store sales, and for the eighth quarter in a row it posted improved operating cash flow.

"The continued gains in customer traffic in our company-operated locations strongly indicate that our introduction of new menu items and ongoing improvements in restaurant operations

### Five Steps to Fine Flavor

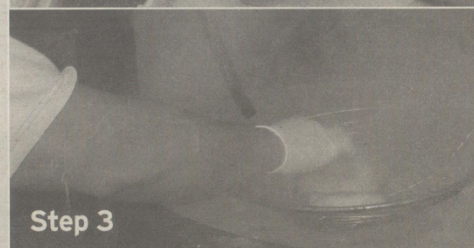
Jewish Times reporter Tova Fruchtman watched bagels being made at Bagel Break in Sandy Springs. Co-owner Mel Meyer says this is how "New York bagels" are made:

#### Step 1

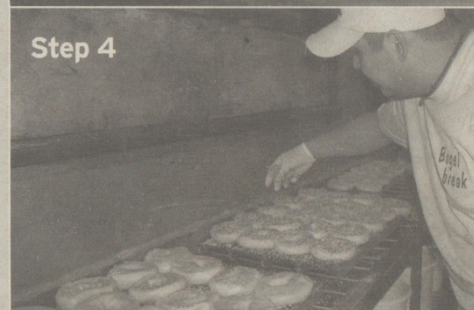
The dough is made. Bagel Break relies on the same recipe Meyer has used for more than 30 years. There are no preservatives, so the bagels last only two or three days if they are not frozen. There are four base dough types: the original, used for plain, sesame, everything and similar bagels; whole wheat; pumpernickel; and cinnamon-raisin.



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4

#### Step 2

The dough is put into a shaping and portioning machine. The machine makes all the bagels the same size and puts the hole in the middle. Someone stands on the end as the bagels come out, puts cornmeal on the bottom of the bagels, and places them on a board to be put into the refrigerator to slow the rising process. Mini-bagels at Bagel Break are hand-rolled from the larger bagels before being placed in the refrigerator.

#### Step 3

The dough must sit in the refrigerator for about 24 hours. The next day, the bagels are ready to be boiled. They are boiled for about a minute in a kettle, then are placed on burlap-covered planks. By this time, the bagels are cooked.

#### Step 4

Now the bagels get any toppings and are ready to be baked. They are baked top-side down and flipped halfway through the baking. They usually bake for about 15 minutes.

#### Step 5

The bagels are removed from the oven and are ready to eat.



## How do you like your bagel?



Spector Solomon Weitz Hirsch Prusin Mayo

### Chantal Spector

The best bagels can be found in Canada, especially Montreal. Vancouver's bagels are very good too. They have a great crunch to them. My husband, Mike, and I always bring back a dozen or so bagels whenever we go visit. I like poppy seed, sesame, cinnamon-raisin and plain. I usually just eat bagels toasted with butter. Sometimes strawberry jelly. Pizza bagels are good too.

### Nicole Solomon

My favorite bagel is plain. In East Cobb I buy my bagels at Bagelicious, but intown I would definitely go to Bagel Palace. I like my bagel with tomato and sweet Muncie cheese melted on top.

### Ari Weitz

My favorite bagel would have to be the everything bagel. I usually get it at Bagelicious or

when I'm at shul on Saturday. There's something that they put on an everything bagel which gives it the magical touch (it's probably just salt), but I've never been able to figure out quite what it is. So I just order an everything, put on some white-fish or lox, and go to work on it.

### Joe Hirsch

I get an everything bagel toasted with lox. As long as it's not from a coffee shop or a grocery store, that means it's good. You know the old joke: How do Jews protect their bagels? They put lox on them.

### Barry Prusin

I just go to Goldberg's, buy my bagels, and that's it. I usually get plain or sesame and put light cream cheese and nova on it.

### Betty Mayo

Usually I like cinnamon-raisin Lender's bagels.

are proving attractive to consumers in an intensely competitive climate," New World CEO Paul Murphy said in the quarterly report, which showed a 68.3 percent rise in income from operations for the first nine months of 2005. "Our increase in revenue and cash flow are primarily the result of this increase in retail sales."

Total revenue for New World rose 3.1 percent to \$285.2 million from \$276.5 million in their first nine

months of 2004.

With the low-carb craze of recent years, bagel sales have dwindled some, but bagel stores have adjusted by adding menu items. As the healthy balance diet takes the lead in the weight-loss industry, lines at bagel shops are growing again.

Americans also are buying bagels at grocery stores from a wide variety of manufacturers.

In 2004, Americans bought \$159 million worth of Thomas' bagels — found next

to the bread in most grocery stores — according to statistics compiled by the American Institute of Baking.

In a category labeled "fresh bagels," referring to bagels that aren't frozen or refrigerated, Thomas made up most of the market, followed by Sara Lee with \$70 million in sales.

The company synonymous with grocery bagel sales, Lender's Bagel Shop, sold \$18 million worth of frozen bagels in 2004.

Meanwhile, grocery stores increasingly are baking their own bagels each day.

Publix began baking fresh bagels more than 30 years ago. It has 16 varieties available, based on customer demands.

"It's a very popular item," said Brenda Reid, a spokeswoman for the 870-store chain.

And the bagel is popular not just with just Jewish people, but with Americans in general. Reid said Publix sells fresh-baked bagels in all of its stores, and they are a successful item in each one.

"It is no longer considered an ethnic food product," she said. "It is a general-market item." □



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## King of Atlanta's Bagels

Often touted as the best bagel shop in Atlanta, the Royal Bagel started serving bagels and bialys at a time when fresh-baked bagels were a novelty.

From Oct. 4, 1974, to May 25, 1997, the Royal Bagel attracted Jewish and non-Jewish bagel lovers to Ansley Mall. Michael Yoss owned the store with his parents, Kenny and Rose. He was ready for a change when they closed the store for good.

Tova Fruchtman talked with Yoss about the shop, memories and bagels.

**Q. What was a typical day at Royal Bagel?**

A. When we first started, my father and I would get there at 12:30 a.m., and we'd work until 6 p.m. six days a week. ... I was 22 in 1974. I would make the deliveries, come back, start working on the doughs. ... Then we got a driver, and I didn't have to make deliveries anymore. My cousin, who is now a dentist in Atlanta, would work on the weekends and when he wasn't in school. ... And weekends were so busy that we'd have people snaking through the store and out the door and down the mall.

**Q. Why did you open Royal Bagel?**

A. I was at Ohio State University at the time, and my parents asked me if I wanted to be a partner. ... We had been down here separately to visit my aunt, and from Ohio State we were going for blind dates with some UGA co-eds. I was the overriding force to come down here vs. stay up there. I just did not want to be near the big city. My father had a wholesale bread and rolls bakery for 28 years [in New York]. They had closed it due to union issues.

**Q. What was the customer base like?**

A. Back then down here in the South in Atlanta, bagels certainly aren't what they are now. My father and I were sitting in the front of the store before we opened. We were waiting on equipment to come. We already had the sign up, and a man stopped in and asked, "What

other kind of dogs are you going to have besides beagles?" We looked at each other and said, "What have you done?" Our customer base could

be homeless who lived in the overpass behind the mall, to Emory and Tech students, to Jewish people. ... I don't think there is anyplace in Atlanta quite like the area behind Ansley Mall. ...

When we first opened, certainly the bulk of the people who were coming in were Jewish. ... We eventually ended with a very diverse group.

**Q. Why did Royal Bagel have the reputation of being the best bagel shop in town?**

Certainly the product that we made, I thought and still think to this day was the best, but what made Royal Bagel so popular and famous was basically my parents. People would come to see my father because if you knew him, you instantly loved my father. There was no one alive who did not love my father. He was the cookie man to my kids. I remember many occasions when children would not leave the store without seeing Kenny the cookie man. ... My mother was everyone's mother or grandmother.

**A. Did you ever imagine Royal Bagel would leave such an impact on Atlanta?**

No. Never ever. ... I have a box full of remembrances from people. About a month before we closed, I put a sign on the window asking people to write down their memories. ... To me, we opened a business. It was a way for me to make money. ... I would have never, ever guessed, nor did I until the day we closed, what an impact a cockamamie little bagel shop could have made on a city. People met their wives or husbands in the line at Royal Bagel. We were included in many family simchas. ... There would have been no way I could ever have guessed that that would have happened. That was more about my parents. That's their legacy. □



Michael Yoss