

The maple bacon croissant has landed in the UK



This year's best bacon sandwich so far is at once familiar and surprising. It's not the standard rashers-trapped-in-bread experience, but rather a pastry, with ribbons of maple-soaked bacon snaking around croissant dough in what looks like a pain au raisin, or a particularly attractive snail shell.

The maple bacon croissant is the work of Pophams Bakery, a new café in London. They have frequently sold out by 10am — you have to hotfoot it there fast to get your fix.

The flavours are a winning combination. Pastry is high quality, flaky but not too hard, buttery but not overwhelming or stodgy. Smoked streaky bacon is from the butcher next door; it enlivens the experience and makes each bite more satisfying, with variations in texture between soft pastry and toothsome meat, while the maple syrup perks it up without being cloyingly sweet — a common casualty of the American staple of maple syrup and bacon pancakes. This is a dish that makes a nod to that classic but is lighter and more sophisticated, more President Macron than President Trump.

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Head chef Florin starts laminating the pastries (that's basically folding butter into dough of flour, water, salt, yeast and milk and layering it up) as early as 2am so they can be ready fresh from the oven as soon as the bakery opens at 7.30am. Croissants can end up with as many as 729 layers of dough. The more layers the better and you can see them here, crisped on the edges, with air between them.

Founder Ollie Gold hit upon the idea when thinking about the bacon and maple pancakes he ate when visiting family in America, and the occasional triple-decker bacon and maple sandwich. He and Florin experimented with shape and size, settling on the swirl because "the shape lends itself to perfect flakiness, a great glazing platform and of course the best way to get the delicious bacon in there — there's no better hangover cure, according to our maple-and-bacon regulars".

Pophams has an extensive menu of croissants and sourdough bread, with daily specials, all served on tasteful plates made at Stepney City Farm.

The name of the bakery comes from the street it is just off. It's actually on Prebend Street but Pophams sounds jauntier. Gold jokes that he wanted to be near his beloved Arsenal football club and his creations certainly provide the cheer much needed by fans of Wenger's team at the moment.

These are pastries to linger over and eat with a fork (although they are available to take away too). Raspberry jam, peanut butter and banana is another popular creation. Gold grew up on the combination and mentioned it to Florin, who put it in a croissant.

If you want something both more low-key and less meat-based get a rosemary and sea salt plait. It was Ollie's girlfriend Lucy's idea and it's a thing of wonder, with crisp flakes of croissant meeting in a plait for the ultimate texture and satisfying salt crystals. Toasted rosemary takes the edge off the saltiness with its invigorating, savoury, herbal taste. At weekends there are walnut, fig and blue cheese croissants and Scandi-inspired creations strewn with poppy seeds. Pophams is woke to waste. Surplus plain croissants are used the next day for almond croissants.

Coffee is from Ozone, which is originally from New Zealand but has a London factory, and a strong range of teas and hot chocolate. All work well as dipping vessels for the croissants, which, of course, are the star attraction.