

August 28, 2009

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## THE MIAMI NEW TIMES FOOD BLOG SHORT ORDER



Sunday Night Dining in Brickell



An Heirloom Czech Spaetzel Recipe is Illuminated



Does Brooklyn H2O Make for a Better Bagel?

### Does Brooklyn H2O Make for a Better Bagel? Curious Cook Harold McGee Weighs in on The Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Co.

By Jackie Sayet in Food Fights

Friday, Aug. 28 2009 @ 9:00AM



Jackie Sayet

Now that's a bagel we can sink our teeth into... This one's from Roasters N' Toasters, who sources its boiled babies from Bagel Express. We can say it does some of the best nova in Miami. The best bagel? The jury's still out, although we're partial to The Bagel Emporium.

Is there something in Brooklyn water that makes a bagel great and authentically New York-tasting? Steve Fassberg thinks so, but others find a hole in this theory, particularly our local bagel shops and some consumers and food bloggers

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who have  
tasted the goods.

But in this edition of debunk-the-myth on Short Order, we'll ask the tough questions and have renowned food science author and New York Times columnist, [Harold McGee](#), offer some invaluable insight into this bagel debacle. May the debate continue...

You may have heard of Fassberg's new bagel shop called [The Original Brooklyn Water Bagel Co.](#) in Delray Beach. He's getting tons of buzz on the concept: rather than shipping the real McCoy, this bagel entrepreneur is claiming to be able to re-create Brooklyn water through a patented filtration and fortification process to make for an authentic New York taste outside of New York.

So laymen like us can understand, Fassberg boiled it down on a recent phone interview. Basically he's taking local water and, through a series of deionization and reverse osmosis steps, is purifying it down to just "zero" water. That's just one hydrogen and two oxygen atoms, for those of you who flunked high school chemistry. After that, Fassberg's machinery, on display in a glass showcase at the store, adds back the same mineral composition his scientists identified in a typical Brooklyn water sample. He says it is being used for the first time in a bakery application, usually locked away in a laboratory in Europe performing more scientific, important-sounding tasks.

He also is espousing that on a scale of one to 10, the water used to make bagels is an eight or nine when it comes to importance in the bagel-making process. Fassberg's getting three to four calls a day from prospective franchisees, and he's confident he'll win one of the [Miami International Airport food service contracts](#) that were just put up for proposal. So we Miamians will get to be the judge of that soon enough.

Part of the media frenzy -- rightly so -- is focused in the home of the *real* original: New York. But what? [The New York Daily News](#) stuck to a fluff piece on the opening without going into much examination of the store's claims, and if they are merited beyond a clever gimmick? How uncharacteristic! I guess the dirty work will be left up to us. Oh well... But thank goodness there's food genius Harold McGee to get to the bottom of these dense questions. Here's what we asked, and what we learned from the good "Curious Cook."

> When we pressed the owner on whether or not he has done side by side testing



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to see if his water is in fact exactly like Brooklyn water, he admitted that they do not add back in any elements they feel are impure/not healthy/contaminants, like lead. Clearly those are present in Brooklyn water, not in dangerous amounts, but nonetheless present. Is this a big deal, in terms of how much of a "re-creation" this really is?

> With all other variables isolated, how would the chemical composition of Brooklyn water affect a bagel's characteristics?

> Is it possible to get those characteristics using any purified water as long as factors like the bakery atmosphere/environment, dough composition and cooking method (length of boiling, size of dough, etc.) are optimized in the New York-style?

Take it away McGee:

I would say that you're asking exactly the right questions, and my feeling is that while water quality can affect dough behavior, it's only at the extremes that it would make a practical difference. Doesn't matter what kind of water you have, if the oven isn't hot enough or the flour doesn't make good gluten or the dough thickness is wrong or there's too much topping, the bagel won't be as good.