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# ANY GIVEN SUNDAY

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London chefs pay tribute to  
the ultimate home-cooked meal:  
the Sunday roast.

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## NO MEAL IS MORE BELOVED BY BRITS THAN THE SUNDAY ROAST.

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The classic meal is a gray-weather-soothing, all-day-eating, then veg-on-the-couch-in-a-food-coma affair (think Thanksgiving, if it came once a week), and the communing around slabs of roast meat is a remarkably sturdy tradition—one that’s survived mad cow disease and the new appreciation in Britain for healthy (even vegan) eating and remains a nostalgic bulwark against the spread of American-style brunch.

“What’s brunch?” says chef and roast fanatic James Knappett of London’s Bubbledogs and Kitchen Table restaurants. “A bit of granola and a poached egg? What’s the point? Let’s get something proper to eat.”

Knappett and I are among 200 or so hardy diners attending what’s advertised as the ultimate gluttonous Sunday roast on an unseasonably warm Monday night in the spring. It was scheduled for Sunday originally, but a last-minute change in venue bumped The Great Roast, as the banquet’s being heralded, forward a night. The festivities kick off with cocktails outside Royal Hospital Chelsea’s Great Hall in West London at 6 p.m. Like any truly great Sunday roast, The Great Roast promises to kill us with excess. That its 14 courses are from some of Britain’s most celebrated contemporary chefs, cooking alongside award-winning European colleagues from across the continent, helped this marathon meat fest sell out fast.

By 8 p.m., we’re gathered at long wooden tables enjoying a family-style feast. Regimental banners from bygone British wars dangle overhead like house flags at Hogwarts. Simon Rogan of two-Michelin-starred L’Enclume in England’s Lake District sends out big platters of dry-aged roast duck. Stephen Harris of The Sportsman in Kent, the country’s most acclaimed country pub, offers roast pork loin with crisp crackling. There’s lamb neck from Dutch chef Jonnie Boer, spicy chicken from Sweden’s Björn Frantzén, and potato salad with baby shrimp from Belgium’s Kobe Desramauts.

Three hours in, antique silver trolleys arrive with the main event: giant blistered haunches of roast British beef, carved tableside by the London chefs who prepared them, Knappett and Shaun Searley of The Quality Chop House. The two are best mates who spend their Sundays off cooking meat together. Their final savory course comes with Yorkshire pudding and roast potato “trimmings,” as well as an extravagant, creamy morel mushroom gravy.

Despite the international mix in the kitchen, it’s an elementally British evening, built on generosity and conviviality and copious amounts of good food and drink. Former music executive Steve Plotnicki, who organized the dinner in lieu of an awards show for his Opinionated About Dining European restaurant survey, puts it best: “What could be more British than a Sunday roast?”



*Stalwart and true, a carved Sea Salt Rib Roast stands ready for serving with Morel Cream Gravy. See pp. 90–91 for recipes.*



ACROSS LONDON, the Sunday roast is a class leveler enjoyed by every demographic, from Mayfair mansions to council estate flats. Though best eaten at home, it’s also long been the purview of the neighborhood pub. “People love on Sunday to go for a long walk in the country and end up at a pub having a roast by the fire,” says chef Merlin Labron-Johnson, formerly of London’s Portland restaurant, who contributed an eel and beet starter to The Great Roast.

The roast became a democratized British birthright starting in the 19th century, according to food historian Ivan Day, as the cost of meat and fuel began to plummet. “Suddenly, ordinary working people could roast meat using this new cheap fuel—coal—and the day when they stop working, on a Sunday, would become the time for it,” he says.

For most Brits, the Sunday roast remains about family first, which is why even the most meager versions still have emotional resonance. “If you go and see your nan and she’s managed to put together a roast dinner, and the Yorkshires are frozen, and the veg is frozen, there’s still something about it,” says Knappett. “You’re like, this is right; this is good. There’s so much nostalgia to that meal.”

Though its makeup can vary widely, the quintessential roast dinner revolves around a big piece of well-marbled beef, ideally roasted on the bone until it’s crisp around the edges and still pink inside. A love for roast beef runs at the historic heart of British culture. “The roast beef of old England became a symbol of British power, of patriotism,” says Day.

“Across the Channel, the French took the piss out of us and called us *les rosbifs* as a kind of joke, but hidden in that is a certain amount of respect for the fact that our meat was much better, and we knew how to cook it really well.”

And you can’t have roast beef without Yorkshire pudding. Many Brits judge their Sunday roasts by the size of those puffy popovers, like mini soufflés, made from a simple batter of milk, flour, and eggs cooked in molds filled with sizzling fat. “It would be met with a riot if there wasn’t Yorkshire pudding in our house,” says Rogan. The batter, ideally, should be made a day ahead, according to Paul Weaver of London’s Noble Rot restaurant, who prepared the Yorkies (as they’re sometimes known) that were served with The Great Roast’s beef. “It needs time to develop flavor and structure.” And they should crisp as they rise but remain soft in the middle. “The pudding part is important,” says Searley, “the contrast of two textures.”

From the finest hotels to the edgiest gastropubs in London, the Sunday roast is surging in popularity as a restaurant meal (find one to try with “5 Great Sunday Roasts in London,” at right). But even the most ambitious chefs rarely fiddle with the classic formula. On a recent roast tour through the city, the beef—whether individually plated or on big, pass-around platters—always came with Yorkshire pudding and golden potatoes cooked in duck or goose fat, with meaty gravy and horseradish cream for spooning on top.

“When I think of Sunday roast, I think of family, sharing, being happy,” says Labron-Johnson. “People don’t mess around with it. You won’t chef it up too much.”

## 5 Great Sunday Roasts in London

### BLACKLOCK

Blacklock’s spot in Soho serves London’s most popular Sunday roast, drawing a crowd for its heaping platters of charcoal-roasted beef, lamb, or pork. The “All In” features three meats piled high with all the trimmings, along with a bubbling crock of cheesy cauliflower. Book in advance. (From \$21 per person, [theblacklock.com](#))

### THE QUALITY CHOP HOUSE

Shaun Searley’s rustic tavern serves one of the city’s most elevated beef roasts, always pairing two cuts from the whole cows that come into its attached butcher shop—one slow-braised, the other butter-roasted. Don’t miss the justly famous thousand-layer confit potatoes. (From \$38 per person, [thequalitychophouse.com](#))

### THE DRAPERS ARMS

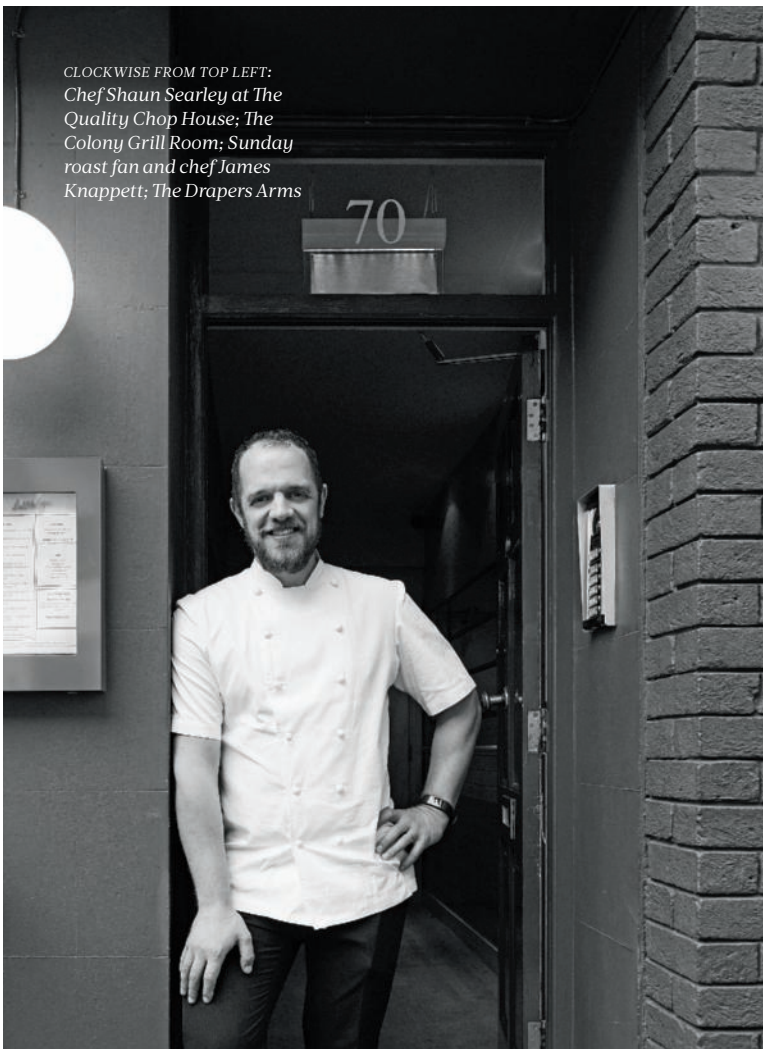
For the classic pub roast experience, head to this bright, bustling, duplex boozier in Islington, packed with rambunctious groups at big wooden tables whiling away hours tackling endless pints of ale and homestyle platters of meat. (From \$25 per person, [thedrapersarms.com](#))

### THE COLONY GRILL ROOM

This nostalgic, clubby Mayfair restaurant is an exceptionally civilized spot to enjoy a Sunday roast—and a great option for carnivores stuck dining with non-meat-eating friends. The sprawling Anglo-American menu features a top-notch brunch section as well. (From \$38 per person, [colonygrillroom.com](#))

### BRIGADIERS

Siblings Karam, Sunaina, and Jyotin Sethi opened this Anglo-Indian hot spot. Its Sunday roast, an enormous family-style feast, pairs masala-rubbed tandoori-cooked rib eye with breads, chutneys, and free-flowing cocktails. (From \$39 per person, [brigadierslondon.com](#))



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
Chef Shaun Searley at The  
Quality Chop House; The  
Colony Grill Room; Sunday  
roast fan and chef James  
Knappett; The Drapers Arms



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:  
Beef Tallow–Baked York-  
shire Pudding, Three-  
Cheese Cauliflower Gratin,  
and Braised Red Cabbage  
with Red Currant Jelly



**Three-Cheese Cauliflower Gratin**

ACTIVE 35 MIN; TOTAL 55 MIN  
SERVES 12

*If there's a better way to eat cauliflower than this gratin from Blacklock, we have yet to come across it. A powerhouse of English cheeses—Montgomery's crumbly and nutty cheddar; Oglesfield, a washed-rind Jersey cow milk cheese; and buttery, blue-veined Colston Bassett Stilton—blankets cauliflower florets in a béchamel.*

- 3 qt. water
- 1/3 cup plus 2 tsp. kosher salt, divided
- 2 medium cauliflower heads (about 4 lb. total), cut into florets (about 12 cups), stems discarded
- 2 2/3 cup plus 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter (about 6 2/3 oz.), divided
- 1 cup all-purpose flour (about 4 1/4 oz.)
- 4 cups whole milk, warmed
- 7 oz. Montgomery's mature cheddar cheese or other aged cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 3/4 cups)
- 7 oz. Oglesfield cheese or Dubliner cheese, shredded (about 1 3/4 cups)
- 1 oz. Colston Bassett Stilton cheese or other creamy blue cheese, shredded (about 1/4 cup)
- 1/2 tsp. ground white pepper
- 1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1/2 cup panko
- 1 1/2 oz. Parmesan cheese, finely ground in a food processor (about 1/3 cup)

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Bring 3 quarts water to a boil in a large pot over high. Season with 1/3 cup salt. Add cauliflower, and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer cauliflower to a large bowl filled with ice water. Let stand 5 minutes. Drain cauliflower, and arrange in a single layer

on a baking sheet lined with paper towels; set aside.

2. Melt 2/3 cup butter in a large saucepan over medium. Gradually whisk in flour. Cook, whisking constantly, until mixture is smooth, about 1 minute. Gradually whisk in warm milk. Cook, whisking constantly, until mixture is thick and bubbly, about 2 minutes. Gradually whisk in cheddar, Oglesfield, Stilton, white pepper, nutmeg, and remaining 2 teaspoons salt until smooth.

3. Transfer cauliflower and 5 cups cheese sauce to a large bowl; stir to coat. Spoon mixture into a 2 1/2-quart baking dish. Pour remaining 1 cup cheese sauce over top. Bake in preheated oven until edges are bubbly, 15 to 20 minutes. Meanwhile, melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter. Place melted butter, panko, and Parmesan in a small bowl; stir to combine. Sprinkle panko mixture over casserole, and bake at 425°F until golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes.

**Braised Red Cabbage with Red Currant Jelly**

TOTAL 55 MIN; SERVES 6

*A mainstay of traditional British Sunday roasts, red currant jelly brings balancing sweetness to vinegar-braised cabbage from chef Luke Frankie at The Drapers Arms. Retaining just enough crunch, the bright side helps cut through the richer dishes on the table.*

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter (about 4 oz.), divided
- 2 small white onions, thinly sliced (4 cups)
- 1 medium-size red cabbage (about 2 1/2 lb.), cored and thinly sliced (about 12 cups)
- 1 1/2 cups red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup red currant jelly
- 2 tsp. kosher salt

Heat 1/4 cup butter in a large, high-sided skillet over medium. Add onions, and cook, stirring often, until

tender and translucent, 10 to 12 minutes. Add cabbage, and cook, stirring often, until slightly wilted, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in vinegar and sugar. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until cabbage is tender, 35 to 45 minutes. Add red currant jelly, salt, and remaining 1/4 cup butter; stir until jelly and butter have melted. Serve hot.

**Thousand-Layer Duck Fat Potatoes**

ACTIVE 1 HR; TOTAL 12 HR  
SERVES 10

*When chef Shaun Searley prepares these crispy potatoes at The Quality Chop House, he starts with King Edward potatoes, which have a fluffy texture. Be sure to start a day ahead so the cooled confited potatoes slice cleanly. The portioned potatoes can then be stored in the freezer for up to a month before frying.*

- 4 1/2 lb. King Edward, Kennebec, or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut lengthwise into 1/8-inch-thick slices

- 1/2 cup duck fat, melted
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt, divided
- Vegetable oil, for frying

1. Preheat oven to 300°F. Line an 8-inch square baking pan with parchment paper, allowing 2 inches of overhang on all sides. Toss together potatoes, duck fat, and 1 tablespoon salt in a large bowl until well coated. Place a single layer of potatoes in prepared pan. Top with a second layer of potatoes, covering any gaps in first layer. Repeat layers with remaining potatoes. Drizzle any remaining duck fat in bowl over top. Cut an 8-inch square of parchment paper, and press directly onto surface of potatoes. Cover pan tightly with aluminum foil. Bake in preheated oven until potatoes are tender (removing foil to test with a wooden pick), 2 to 3 hours.

2. Transfer pan to a wire rack, and remove foil, leaving parchment sheet on potatoes. Set a second 8-inch square pan on top of potatoes in pan, and weigh it down with unopened canned goods. Let



Crispy Thousand-  
Layer Duck Fat  
Potatoes



cool to room temperature, about 1 hour. Chill potatoes 8 hours or overnight with weighted pan on top.

**3.** Remove weighted pan and top parchment sheet; discard parchment sheet. Run a knife around edges of pan to loosen potato cake. Invert potato cake onto a cutting board; remove and discard parchment liner. Cut potato cake into 7 equal strips (about 1 inch wide). Cut each strip crosswise into 3 equal pieces. Using a knife, carefully split each piece in half to form 42 (about 2½- x 1-inch) pieces (about ¾ inch thick). Transfer potato pieces to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, and freeze until solid, at least 30 minutes or up to 1 month. (If freezing to use at a later date, transfer frozen potato pieces to a large zip-lock plastic freezer bag.)

**4.** While potatoes are freezing, heat 1½ inches of oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high to 375°F. Working in batches, fry frozen potato pieces (keeping remaining pieces frozen), turning occasionally, until golden brown and crispy, 5 to 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon or spider, transfer potato pieces to a brown paper-lined rimmed baking sheet. Sprinkle fried potatoes evenly with remaining 1½ teaspoons salt. Serve immediately.

**Beef Tallow–Baked Yorkshire Pudding**

PHOTO P. 88  
ACTIVE 15 MIN; TOTAL 3 HR 50 MIN; SERVES 8

*Yorkshire pudding was born in the days of roaring hearth fires, where it was baked underneath roasting spits of meat, catching the juices. Chef Sean Searley spoons off beef tallow, the clear fat drippings pooling below a resting beef roast, to grease the tins.*

- 1 cup whole milk
- 5 large eggs
- 1 cup all-purpose flour (about 4¼ oz.)
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt

**2 Tbsp. beef tallow or melted unsalted butter**

- 1. Whisk together milk and eggs in a large bowl. Gradually whisk in flour and salt until well combined. Pour mixture through a fine wire-mesh strainer into a bowl; discard any lumps. Cover and chill batter 3 hours or up to overnight.
- 2. Place a large 12-cup muffin pan (6 ounces per cup) on middle oven rack. Preheat oven to 425°F. When oven is preheated, remove pan, and add ¾ teaspoon beef tallow to 8 muffin cups. Return muffin pan to oven, and heat until tallow is hot but not smoking, about 6 minutes.
- 3. Pour about ¼ cup batter into each muffin cup with hot tallow, and bake at 425°F until golden brown and puffed, 16 to 20 minutes. (Do not open oven while baking or puddings will collapse.) Using an offset spatula or a butter knife, carefully remove puddings from pan, and serve immediately.

**Sea Salt Rib Roast**

PHOTO P. 85  
ACTIVE 20 MIN; TOTAL 4 HR 20 MIN; SERVES 12

*Longtime friends James Knappett and Shaun Searley teamed up to deliver this grand rib roast—a crowning moment for any meal. Show-ering the roast with a handful of English Maldon salt adds an extra layer of crunch to the roast’s crust. The sliced roast is then further seasoned with sel gris, a coarse sea salt with deep minerality that pairs beautifully with beef. Be sure to remove the roast from the oven when the internal temperature reaches 120°F; it will continue cooking during the 40-minute rest time.*

- 1 (9-lb.) boneless beef rib roast
- 3 Tbsp. flaky sea salt (such as Maldon)
- 1½ tsp. sel gris
- Morel Cream Gravy (recipe follows)



*This Sticky Toffee and Earl Grey Pudding is infused with the flavors of bergamot—making it a perfect complement to a post-roast cup of tea.*

**1.** Preheat oven to 425°F with oven rack in lower third of oven. Rub roast all over with sea salt, and place roast, fat cap up, on a wire rack set inside a roasting pan. Let roast stand at room temperature while oven is preheating, about 30 minutes. (Roast may be seasoned and refrigerated, uncovered, up to overnight. Let stand 30 minutes at room temperature before proceeding.) Insert a probe thermometer in thickest part of roast.

**2.** Roast in preheated oven until meat is lightly browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Without opening oven, reduce oven temperature to 225°F. Continue roasting until internal temperature of meat registers 120°F, about 2 hours and 30 minutes for medium-rare. Transfer roast to a cutting board, and let rest 40 minutes before slicing. Sprinkle slices with sel gris, and serve with Morel Cream Gravy and carving board juices.

**WINE** Substantial, old-school Bordeaux red: 2015 Château de Pez Saint-Estèphe

**Morel Cream Gravy**

ACTIVE 45 MIN; TOTAL 55 MIN  
MAKES 3 CUPS

*This cream gravy from chefs James Knappett and Shaun Searley is infused with the heady aroma of caramelized morel mushrooms spiked with sherry vinegar. If morels are unavailable, simply substitute with sliced button mushrooms. Keep the cream gravy hot until ready to serve, up to 30 minutes, and add the tarragon just before serving.*

- ¼ cup grapeseed oil, divided
- 1 lb. fresh morel or button mushrooms, sliced (about 7 cups), divided
- ⅓ cup sherry vinegar
- 1½ tsp. fleur de sel
- 4¼ cups heavy cream, divided
- 1½ tsp. chopped fresh tarragon

**1.** Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a large skillet over high. Add 3½

cups mushrooms, and cook, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms are deeply caramelized, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer mushrooms to a medium bowl. Repeat browning process with remaining 2 tablespoons oil and remaining mushrooms.

**2.** Return all mushrooms to skillet over medium. Stir in sherry vinegar and fleur de sel, scraping browned bits off bottom of skillet. Cook until liquid is reduced by half, about 1 minute. Add 4 cups cream, and bring to a simmer, whisking occasionally. Cook, whisking occasionally, until gravy is thickened and reduced to about 3 cups, about 30 minutes. If gravy gets too thick or separates, whisk in up to ¼ cup more cream, 1 tablespoon at a time, until desired consistency is reached. Whisk in tarragon, and serve.

**Sticky Toffee and Earl Grey Pudding**

PHOTO AT LEFT  
ACTIVE 35 MIN; TOTAL 1 HR 30 MIN; SERVES 9

*One bite of chef Merlin Labron-Johnson’s take on this classic dessert and you’ll understand why he earned a Michelin star at the tender age of 24 at Portland. Dates are a regular player in sticky toffee pudding recipes; Labron-Johnson steeps them in Earl Grey tea, infusing them with the bright, aromatic lift of bergamot.*

- 2 cups pitted Medjool dates, finely chopped
- 2 Earl Grey tea bags
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1¼ cups boiling water
- 2 cups all-purpose flour (about 8½ oz.)
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1¼ tsp. sea salt, divided
- ¾ cup vegetable shortening
- 1 cup light muscovado sugar, divided
- ¾ cup dark muscovado sugar, divided
- 3 large eggs

- 1 cup unsalted butter (8 oz.), plus more for greasing
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Vanilla ice cream or clotted cream, for serving

**1.** Preheat oven to 350°F. Place dates, tea bags, and baking soda in a medium bowl. Add 1¼ cups boiling water, and let stand 15 minutes. Remove and discard tea bags. Stir mixture with a fork to break apart dates.

**2.** Stir together flour, baking powder, and ¾ teaspoon salt in a medium bowl; set aside. Combine shortening, ¼ cup light muscovado sugar, and ¼ cup dark muscovado sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer. Beat on medium speed until no lumps remain, about 1 minute. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. With mixer running on low speed, gradually add flour mixture just until incorporated. Stir in date mixture. Lightly grease a 9-inch square baking pan with butter. Pour batter into prepared pan, and bake in preheated oven until a wooden pick inserted in center of pudding comes out clean, 30 to 32 minutes.

**3.** While pudding bakes, combine butter, heavy cream, remaining ¾ cup light muscovado sugar, remaining ½ cup dark muscovado sugar, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high, whisking often. Boil, whisking constantly, until sauce reaches 218°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat.

**4.** Remove pudding from oven, and immediately prick all over with a wooden or metal skewer, piercing all the way to the bottom of pan. Pour 1½ cups warm toffee sauce evenly over pudding, and let stand until sauce is absorbed, about 30 minutes. Cut warm pudding into 9 (3-inch) squares. Drizzle servings evenly with remaining ½ cup toffee sauce; top with ice cream or clotted cream.