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Step Away From The Egg

Just because eggs-as-condiment are the latest Big Thing doesn't mean they belong on every last dish.

by **ALEXANDRA HALL** • 3/21/2011, 12:45 p.m.

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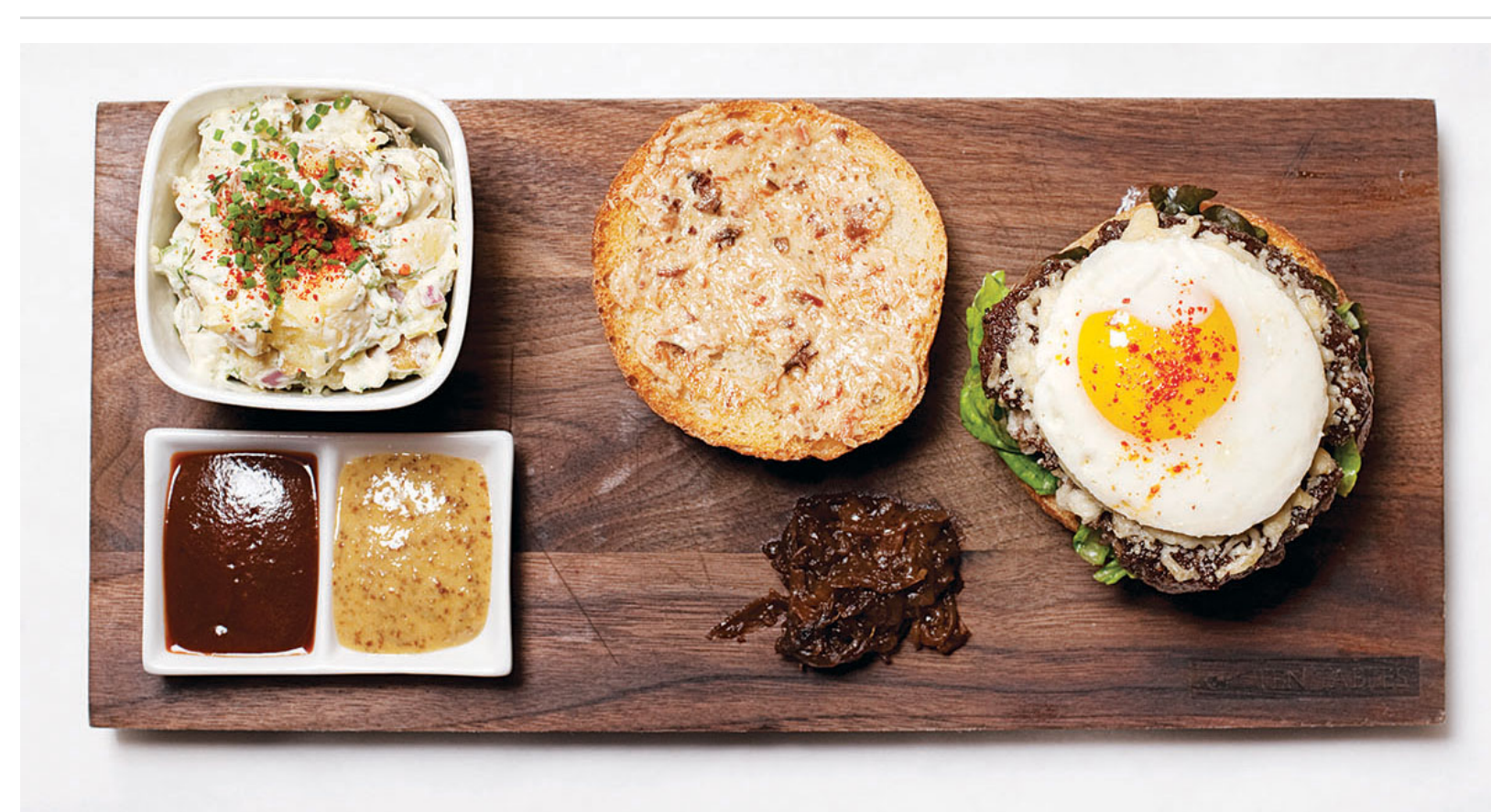
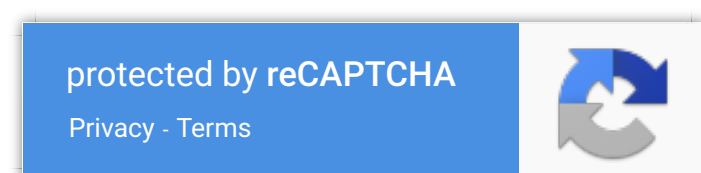


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PIAZZA

So there I am, happily installed at the bar of my favorite neighborhood restaurant, Ten Tables in Jamaica Plain. Candles surround me, as do friends. This is my mini Valhalla: Cocktail in one hand, menu in the other, I giddily order up what I consider to be one of the dreamiest burgers in town — the humanely raised Meyer beef number, crowned with sharp-flavored greens, deeply rich farmhouse cheddar, sweet caramelized onions, and a bacon aioli I only wish I could re-create at home. The very memory of it sends a microscopic shiver down my spine. And then, the inevitable question:

“Do you want an egg on that?”

An egg. Seriously: *again* with the egg question? Ever since *Bon Appetit* pronounced it the hot dish-topper last year, there's always someone trying to slam an egg (poached, fried, coddled, or shirred) onto my order — even if it makes absolutely zero culinary sense. Take Ten Tables' burger. It's already a complex convergence of toppings over a beautiful piece of beef — why mask the flavor? So no, thank you. By all means, hold the goddamn egg.

I am, for the gastro-record, rather a fan of eggs. And I'm hardly above addressing them as a precious (i.e., vaguely pretentious) foodstuff...when it makes sense. A raw quail egg on my tuna tartare (as offered at Haru)? Bring it. Fried on my thin-crust pizza (as Coppa's doing), recalling steamy nights in Sicily? Si. And poached, mixed into a *salade frisée lyonnaise* (à la Brasserie Jo)? *Bien sûr*. Those particular flavors and textures have, for eons, worked in harmony.

But what's annoying about our current egg-topper fixation is that it's seemingly willy-nilly. Even if the food shines on its own because it's nuanced (Kobe beef tartare and *anago* tempura at Clio; braised lamb shoulder at Russell House Tavern) or delicate (lobster; truffles), who cares? If you like it then, apparently, you shoulda put an egg on it! (Beyoncé must be running the kitchen.)

This is, of course, all a matter of taste; there are plenty of good palates out there that prefer their entrées smothered in runny yolk. But it's not merely the egg that irks me. It's the herd (correction: flock) mentality it highlights. Boston chefs are more judicious than to blindly follow a national trend. We are, quite simply, above this. For better or for worse, we as a city have a reputation for being stubborn, independent, and trend-resistant. If ever there was a time when that should work to our advantage, it's when we're faced with a silly idea that needs to be ignored.



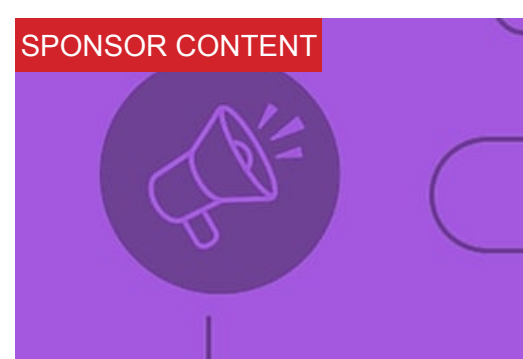
Haru's tuna tartare with quail egg. PHOTO BY MICHAEL PIAZZA

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