

Kentucky Hot Brown Pizza – Comfort du Jour

The signature dish of the Derby is an open-faced beauty of a sandwich known as the Kentucky Hot Brown. It's served warm with slices of turkey breast, fresh tomato, draped in Mornay sauce and topped with criss-crossed slices of bacon—all of that lusciousness is piled high on a thick slice of buttery, rich brioche toast. That's the tradition, anyway. But in case you haven't noticed, I'm not prone to follow tradition to the letter. I am all about twisting up the classics, and I'm doing it again, moving all the Kentucky Hot Brown ingredients off the thick brioche and onto a thin crust pizza. All the flavors are in attendance, but in a slightly different order and a more casual presentation.

Do yourself a favor and prep all the ingredients ahead of time. Once you begin building one of my thin crust pizzas, things move quickly. Kind of like the Kentucky Derby.

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 Tbsp. salted butter
- 2 Tbsp. finely diced onion
- 2 tsp. all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole milk
- About 1/8 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 oz. white American cheese* (see notes)
- 2 oz. cubed smoked Gruyere cheese*
- 2 Tbsp. shredded white cheddar*
- A pinch of ground white pepper
- 4 slices thin-cut smoked bacon, stretched and cut into two-inch pieces
- 3 slices low-sodium turkey breast*
- 1 large Roma tomato, washed and thinly sliced
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 ball of [My Real N.Y. Pizza Dough](#)* (or your own favorite), rested at room temperature

*Notes

American cheese is usually some form of cheddar, processed with a special enzyme and salts that make it ultra-melty. This is a go-to ingredient for any creamy cheese sauce I make. If you are skittish about using “processed” cheese, you can use regular block cheese, but the sauce will not be as creamy and is likely to separate and become oily during baking of the pizza.

The Boar's Head brand of smoked Gruyere that I used here is also a processed cheese, but a regular Gruyere will work fine in combination with the white American cheese.

I added a bit of shredded white cheddar for more of the sharp flavor I wanted. It's optional.

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I recommend using a low-sodium version of turkey breast, or fresh, home-roasted if you wish. Typical deli turkey is very salty, and it may be too much, given that the bacon and cheese sauce already have a fair amount of sodium.

For this pie, I did something a little different with my N.Y. pizza dough. I subbed in a small portion of corn flour, in place of some of the white whole wheat, as a subtle nod to the bourbon in our accompanying Derby drinks. It was terrific! Never stop experimenting, friends. If you choose to use my pizza dough recipe, please note that it should be made a couple of days ahead, so plan accordingly.

Finally, I bake my N.Y. style pizzas on a pizza steel at 550° F. If you use a stone, follow manufacturer's instructions. If you use a pan, do yourself a big favor and buy a stone or pizza steel. We use a 3/8" steel made by Dough-Joe, and it has been an absolute game changer for our pizzas at home.

Instructions

1. Prepare the bechamel by melting butter in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the diced onion. When butter begins to brown, add flour and whisk until smooth. Continue cooking, whisking occasionally, until flour begins to brown and is very bubbly.
2. Add milk and whisk until blended and thickened. Continue to cook a few minutes to soften the flavor. Stir in the freshly grated nutmeg and the skinniest pinch of kosher salt.
3. Add the cubes of American cheese and whisk until melted. Repeat with smoked Gruyere and then with cheddar. Stir in the white pepper. Remove from heat and cover the pan so that the sauce does not form a skin. If you work ahead and refrigerate this, warm it to smooth, spreadable consistency before making the pizza.
4. In a cast-iron skillet, cook the bacon pieces over medium-low heat, long enough to render the fat and brown the meat, but not long enough to crisp it. Transfer bacon pieces to a paper towel to drain excess fat.
5. Cut the deli turkey slices into thin strips, then chop cross-wise into bits.
6. Spread the tomato slices onto a paper towel and season with kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper. Rinse the thyme sprigs, then pat dry and strip the leaves from the tough stems.
7. Shape the pizza dough into a 14-inch round and place it on a floured, cornmeal-dusted peel for easy transfer to the oven.
8. Spoon small dollops of the cooled Mornay sauce onto the dough, and gently even it across the dough with the back of your spoon.
9. Arrange the turkey all over the sauce, then the bacon and tomato slices.
10. Add more small dollops of Mornay, between and around the other ingredients. It's OK to overlap the other toppings, but try not to "bury" them, and keep the dollops away from the edges of the pie.
11. Sprinkle all over with the fresh thyme leaves, and slide the pizza onto the preheated steel. Bake at 550° F for about 7 minutes, until crust is golden and crispy and Mornay is browned and bubbly.