

Taste Test: Dunkin' Donuts' Fake "Artisan" Bagels vs Real Artisan Bagels

Davidovich's Pumpernickel Bagel (right) vs Dunkin' Donut's Rendition (left)



As promised in my last [post](#) on the complaints filed by Davidovich Bakery, NY, against Dunkin' Donuts for false and misleading usage of the descriptor "artisan" in relation to Dunkin's new line of bagels, I present the ultimate arbiter in the bagel war: an old-fashioned taste test.

Before I lay bare the results of the test, let me clarify one thing. When it comes to *taste*, I am categorically not a food snob. Sure I care deeply about provenance and integrity, but when it comes purely to the matter of *taste*, I can squarely judge whoever, and whatever, rocks my palate. I count [McDonald's](#) Filet-O-Fish sandwich among the most delicious foods on earth, but I also dream endless dreams of the meticulously prepared, handmade soba at the tiny 16-seater Concoron soba house in [New York](#)'s Lower East Side.



So what are the hallmarks of a great bagel? Of course, everyone, or at least every New Yorker has an opinion here. But, there are a number of standards most of us can agree on. The exterior should be shiny, glossy, deeply golden but not not perfectly smooth or consistent in color – imperfections are not only permitted, but welcomed. The crust should be crisp with a discernible crunch, and the interior should be dense, chewy, springy and somewhat doughy. Still, while your facial muscles should get a decent workout, the bagel shouldn't be tough, or dry, bread, or indeed cake. Pillow soft tenderness, should not be commended in this instance. There should be depth of flavor, a complex

slightly yeasty, malty taste that develops and evolves in the mouth, and a slight sweetness. For Maria Balinska (as reported in the [New York Times](#)) author of *The Bagel: The Surprising History of a Modest Bread*, "the crust has to be shiny and crunchy; the inside consistency chewy and slightly damp; the taste should be yeasty with a tangy bite, and the overall effect of eating a bagel should be that you feel like a stone has landed in your stomach — in the best possible way, of course."

Methodology: We tested 3 bagel varieties: plain, pumpernickel and cinnamon raisin from Dunkin' and Davidovich. The bagels from the latter company were delivered at 7.30 am and the the bagels from Dunkin' were purchased from a store in [Manhattan](#)'s West Village at 9am. The bagels were sampled at 9.30am. Although the bagels were sampled plain and untoasted, as well as plain and with cream cheese and toasted with cream cheese, we deemed it most fair to present only the results for the plain and untoasted test, as we did not take measures to ensure a regulated, even amount of "schmearing" or toasting across the board.



Davidovich's Artisan Bagels (left) vs Dunkin' Donuts "Artisan" Bagels (right)

Results: None of the untoasted bagels exhibited any crunch in the exterior. We put this down to the fact that it had been a few hours since they emerged from the oven which meant that the crusts had softened somewhat.

Plain:

We hate to be superficial, but if looks are anything to go by we wouldn't even have to taste the bagels to tell you who is our favorite in this category. Davidovich's plain bagel (like all the bagel varieties they sent us), were appealingly voluptuous but certainly not grossly so. Their surfaces were shiny, smooth for the most part but marred with a few imperfections, and ridges. The Dunkin bagel was significantly duller and even though about the same diameter as the Davidovich bagels, they substantially less risen. The Dunkin' bagel was very tasty, but a little singular in flavor. Davidovich's plain bagel, on the other hand, was delicious. A good amount of sweetness, balanced by yeasty, malty notes. In terms of texture Dunkin' was far less successful. Though easier to cut through, the crumb inside was very dense and overly firmer especially in terms of mouthfeel. It also got gummy very quickly in the mouth and stuck to the roof of the palate after a couple of initial chews. The Davidovich bagel was definitely chewy but significantly less dense, and more moist, and airier. Also the crust was appreciably thinner and less leathery than with the Dunkin' bagel.

Winner: Davidovich

Pumpnickel:

If there's one thing you can't fault Dunkin' on, it's the fact that they weren't beating about the bush when they said that the new bagels have a bolder flavor. In fact, the pumpnickel flavor here really slaps you in the face, or in the mouth. It's direct, brazen and holds court over any other flavor in the bagel. The Dunkin' crust like in the plain bagel is thick and a little leathery and requires substantial mouth work to get through. Overall, it's not a bad bagel, though. There's a good amount of chew, but it's a little bit too dense. As was the case with the plain bagels, when we cut through a cross section of the bagels, the crumbs in the Dunkin' version were very compact and the air bubbles small and consistent. The Davidovich bagels, on the other hand had various different-sized air bubbles that were more irregular and larger in general, and the overall impression was of a looser dough. There's little question that Davidovich is the the winner here. As you can see from the photos, this bagel was much plumper with considerably more rise than its Dunkin' counterpart. Both on the outside and on the inside, the color was much richer and much darker, and there was much more gloss on the outside than the Dunkin' bagel. Tastewise, there was a definite pumpnickel flavor to the Davidovich bagel but it was more subtle, more nuanced and you could still taste some of the yeast and the maltiness. Also, there was a nice background note of sweetness that countered the spice of the pumpnickel.

WINNER: Davidovich

Cinnamon Raisin:

The Davidovich bagel was pretty eye-catching with its distinct streaks and swirls of cinnamon against a pale golden, glossy crust. Like the pumpnickel it had a natural robust cinnamon flavor that was balanced and wasn't overpowering. There was a sweetness but tempered by savory undertones of malt and yeast. There were plump, juicy raisins inside, but I did wish for a few more. The Dunkin' bagel was much darker on the outside and on the inside. It was very sweet, and had a lot more raisins. It seemed a little like a pastry masquerading as a bagel. Again when it came down to flavor, the cinnamon hit was bold and upfront. In fact the aroma of artificial cinnamon flavor was so strong, it was almost off putting. Still, it wasn't a bad bagel by any means. It was quite tasty, but seemed more like a sweet confection than a bagel.

WINNER: Davidovich

The overall winner here is Davidovich Bakery. Whether their superior bagels are a product of their truly artisan process is hard to say. However, one can't help but to suspect that their use of all natural ingredients: real sugar, unbromated, unbleached flour, and their lack of use of preservatives and artificial flavorings, might have a little something to do with it. Also, it's well known, that when baking, allowing your dough to have a long, slow rise develops flavor, taste and complexity: Davidovich leaves their shaped, raw bagels to rise overnight. Still, Dunkin' Donuts offerings didn't fall flat on their face. In isolation, they were quite good, it's only that Davidovich's bagels were, in comparison, really, really, really good bagels.