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Meet and eat Ina Pinkney (above) believes in leaving her customers (left) to talk over the coffee pot

Achilles—an advocate of the eve-of-conflict fast—take the advice of Odysseus and down a nectar smoothie at sunrise before heading into battle at Troy? And in 1815, a feature of the Vienna Congress was the café-au-lait-fuelled tête-a-tête between the French diplomat Talleyrand and his Austrian counterpart Metternich, negotiators of the future boundaries of Europe.

Ina Pinkney wasn't inspired to open her "white-tablecloth breakfast restaurant" by history's early-rising power-brokers. Her motivation, she says, was simply a desire to enjoy breakfast in a place that was "somewhere between the relaxed, Formica-top coffee shop and an upscale, formal hotel dining-room".

So what has made it a success? Scrupulous attention to detail, she says—and privacy. "My goal is total sound-absorption," she says, as earnest as a physicist. "The room is carpeted, the tables have distance between them, and each is covered with vinyl-backed foam, a fabric tablecloth, a piece of heavy-duty butcher paper and a soft table-paper." As a result, Ina's is the antithesis of clattery, chattery dining rooms; no corporate secrets can be overheard. The waiting staff is similarly discreet. "Once the food is served and the coffee topped up," Ina says, "we stay away from the table as much as possible, so as not to interrupt."

Her formula is as popular with weekend brunchers as it is with the business community. So much so that Ina herself misses out. "I never get to eat a hot breakfast on days when I'm working," she admits. "I live for Monday mornings, when I am at home by myself and get to make a really good pot of coffee, eggs and toast. Then—like Pooh—"I am in heaven." ■

Ina's 1235 West Randolph St, Chicago, +1 312 226 8227, [www.breakfastqueen.com](http://www.breakfastqueen.com); breakfast served Mon-Fri 7am-11am, Sat 8am-2:30pm, Sun 9am-2pm

**Edinburgh** **The Balmoral**  
Power up from the à la carte menu or circumnavigate the spectacular buffet table at Edinburgh's five-star Balmoral Hotel. Executives of every stripe greet the day in its fresh and airy breakfast room, where international tastes are superbly catered for: granola, fruit, pastries, sushi, omelettes, charcuterie—and, of course, the Full Scottish, complete with grilled black pudding. — JH  
1 Princes St, Edinburgh; +44 (0)131 556 2414, [www.thebalmoralhotel.com](http://www.thebalmoralhotel.com); breakfast Mon-Fri 7-10:30am, Sat 7-11am, Sun 7:30-11am

**Paris** **L'Avenue** There can be few choicer spots for a breakfast meeting in Paris than this elegant brasserie, wrapped monochromatically around a corner of Avenue Montaigne and fringed outside with an inviting rank of linen-clad tables. The staff are swift and attentive, and the breakfast menu refreshingly international: all kinds of eggs, muesli, pastries and fruit salads, as well as particularly good coffee. — SARAH DALLAS  
41 Ave Montaigne, Paris; +33 (0)1 40 70 14 91, [www.avenue-restaurant.com](http://www.avenue-restaurant.com); breakfast Mon-Sat 8am-12pm, Sun 9am-12pm

*"Feed, you slave; thou must think thyself happy to be fed from my trencher."*

Christopher Marlowe, "Tamburlaine the Great" (Act 1, Scene 2)

Tamburlaine the Scythian shepherd and bandit (as he was beginning of the play) would not have been able to issue a command to Bajazene, the Turkish emperor; only Tamburlaine the Conqueror, who could, for trenchers—slices of stale bread, six inches wide and four fingers tall, that served as plates—times—featured only on the tables of the wealthy. After the meal, up all the juices from the meal's roast joint, they were cut up by servants, dogs or poor people; and who, other than the king, to do anything with bread other than eat it?

The name "trencher" probably came from the word for "slice". The bread used was probably wholemeal, typically, four days passed between baking and trencher bread, and the loaf itself would have been quite basic, made more than flour, salt and some sort of fermented starter (leavening was not yet invented; medieval bakers relied on natural yeasts, not dissimilar to beer wort—a mixture of water and sugars, mashing malted barley). The combination of wholemeal and a natural starter would probably have produced a dense, thick-crumbed, quite chewy bread similar to modern sourdough.

There's a trencher recipe in "Beyond the Veil to Taste: Adventurous Recipes for the Adventurous Cook" (Bloomsbury), the noble booster of forgotten British foodways, Ferguslieh Justin Piers Gellatly, head baker at Henderson's, London, and John. The recipe calls for white flour, caster sugar, salt, yeast and (to dot over the trencher just before placing the joint) dripping. The most notable addition here is the milk, which makes a dense bread, ideal for sopping and soaking. For the same reason, Asian bakers often add yogurt or ghee to their naan, the most luxurious, less austere mouthfeel.

Gellatly's trencher is oblong, sized not for an individual but for the whole roast. Before serving, the top crust is sliced off, and the juicy meat placed upon the interior. The result—soft, warm, saturated with savoury, beefy, rich juices—is too good for anyone, no matter how deserving.



ILLUSTRATION CLIFFORD HARPER