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## Edible Expert - Practice Makes Perfect Hollandaise

*"One of my favorite ways to draw out the natural vibrancy of great ingredients is Hollandaise sauce, a creamy emulsion of butter, egg yolks, and lemon juice."*



Toast restaurant's Benedict Oh, a breakfast specialty. Photo by Leah Harb

## PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT HOLLANDAISE

By Donald Kotler  
For Spring 2008

**Growing up in Suffolk County, Long Island, I spent weekends with my grandparents.** They had a big old house, and most importantly, a quarter of an acre that my Grandpa Clarence tended. He worked in his garden whenever he had a spare second: in the morning before heading off to work at our family-owned paint and hardware store, and in the evening when he returned home. Our family ate from that garden and our pantry every day, all year.

I can't remember a time when I didn't love to eat cooked green vegetables from our garden with a little butter, salt, and lemon. I've since discovered that one of my favorite ways to draw out the natural vibrancy of great ingredients is Hollandaise sauce, a creamy emulsion of butter, egg yolks, and lemon juice.

Hollandaise is one of the five "mother" sauces of classic French cooking. When done well, it enhances all the flavors on the plate. Balance and subtlety are key — no element should overwhelm the others. Hollandaise is perfectly suited to warm dishes that take butter, lemon, and salt with grace, such as cooked green vegetables, steak, flaky fish, and eggs.

**Variations on Eggs Benedict have become some of my favorite spring breakfasts.** In April and May, when sunlight begins to linger in the sky, chickens become their most naturally productive. Hollandaise brings forth the wholesomeness and great flavor of naturally raised eggs.

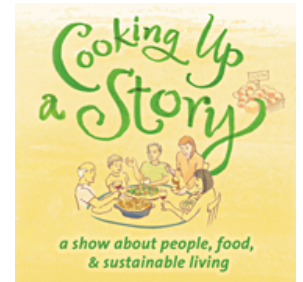
I first attempted to make Hollandaise while at college. As I whisked the melted butter into the egg yolks, something went wrong. It "broke," separating into solid egg curds and oily liquid. I have since learned, with practice and patience, that Hollandaise is technique driven. With a basic understanding of why it works and practice under your belt, you're set.

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## SLOW AND STEADY

At Toast, we make a non-traditional Hollandaise that is more stable, dense, and failsafe than the classic emulsion. We also use whole butter rather than clarified, and infuse both the lemon juice and butter with herbs to impart a subtle, layered flavor.

To begin, have all your ingredients measured and at room temperature. The first trick is to warm the egg yolks with a lemon juice reduction just above the melting point of butter. Heat the yolks and reduction slowly in a double boiler set over a pot of simmering water to maintain an even, low heat. As you whisk, feel the yolks with your finger. When they're warm and a few air bubbles appear along the edges, begin drizzling in the melted butter.

Work slowly, drizzle by drizzle. The yolks can only take in so much fat at once. Whisk continuously — sip some coffee, check the box scores, but don't rush and don't walk away.

As you whisk, you'll watch and feel the sauce thicken. When the butter is fully incorporated, increase the heat and continue to stir until the sauce is like a loose mayonnaise. Take the bowl off of the simmering water and while still stirring, add warm water from the pot to thin the sauce.

With your whisk, lift a little sauce from the bowl and let it fall back in. If the Hollandaise "lays on itself," not fully reincorporating, but instead leaving an outline where it falls (the French term is *nape*), then you're good to go.

If you plan to toast [English muffins](#) and poach eggs, keep your sauce in a covered container set in warm water — around 145 degrees, or the temperature of a perfect cup of coffee. Stir the sauce occasionally to keep it from over-thickening. Before serving, taste the sauce again. It may need another squeeze of lemon juice and salt and pepper.

Hollandaise teaches us to appreciate the natural vibrancy of good, clean ingredients. For all its contradictions — its richness and lightness, its clean and complex flavor — Hollandaise is timeless. It was as delicious in France a century ago as it will be in your kitchen this weekend.

*Donald Kotler, a twenty-plus year industry veteran, opened his first restaurant, Toast, in 2007, serving brunch and dinner made from locally sourced ingredients to his Woodstock neighbors.*

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Posted by Laura Ford on April 4, 2008 11:33 AM | [Permalink](#)

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Hey uncle Don! Great article, Grandpa loved it!!!! tell Gretchen and Aunt Ellen I say hi and that I love them!!!! Food looks YUMMY!!!! Miss you

~Kaitlyn Stabile

Posted by: kaitlyn stabile | [May 10, 2008 5:15 PM](#)

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