

LA REVIEW

PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN RATINGS LA



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Courage Bagels

BAKERY/CAFE • VIRGIL VILLAGE

PERFECT FOR: BREAKFAST FEELING HOT IMPRESSING OUT OF TOWNERS SEE AND BE SEEN BRUNCH

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KAT HONG JANUARY 13, 2022

The Montreal-style bagels at Courage come out almost charred; so dense and crispy, a sharp CRACK lets out whenever you bite into one. They're topped with a basket's worth of local produce, a bounty that would make any Alice Waters devotee swoon: heirloom tomatoes, sprigs of dill, and lemon slices that taste like summer.

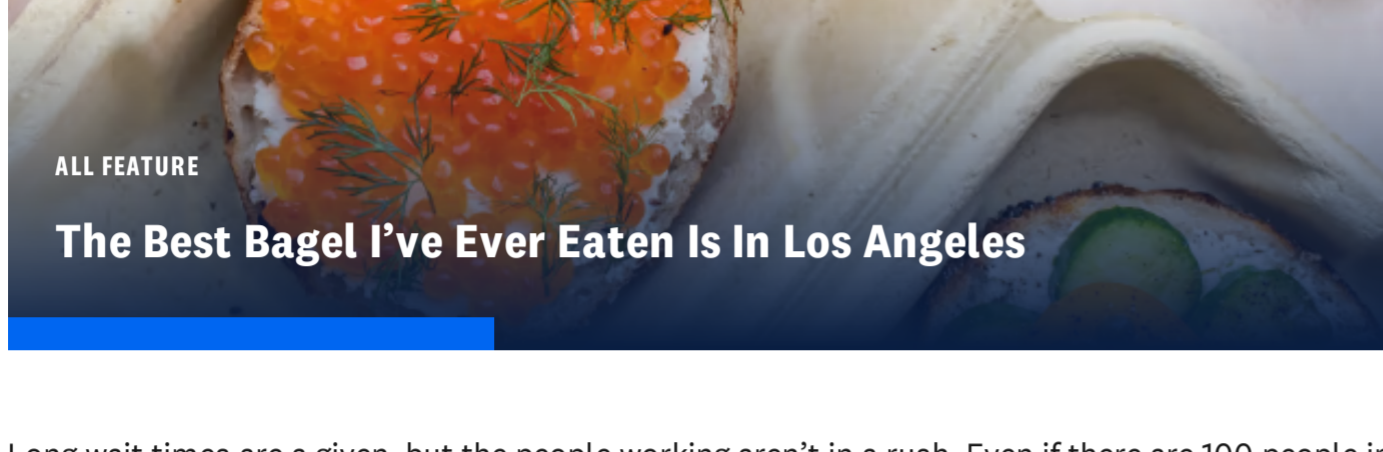
Courage Bagels makes the best bagels in Los Angeles - but perhaps you already knew that?



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Since opening in October 2020, this order-at-the-window spot in Virgil Village has captured the hearts of everyone from *The New York Times* to *The New Yorker* to us here at *The Infatuation*. After a few life-changing visits, fourth-generation Jewish New Yorker, Hillary Reinsberg (otherwise known as our Editor In Chief) declared that her most recent trip to California had produced something "[she] didn't even know [she] was looking for." She had found, without question, "the best bagel [she] had ever tasted."

Forged in the flames of a wood-fired oven, Courage's signature bagel is svelte - smaller, thinner, and sweeter than the ones on the East Coast. We say that for context, but what we love most about Courage is that they're wholly unconcerned with the "NYC v. The Rest of The World" debate. Instead, they host an unhurried bagel experience that highlights the bounty of nearby farmers markets. Everything about Courage Bagels is unapologetically Californian.



Long wait times are a given, but the people working aren't in a rush. Even if there are 100 people in line behind you, the person at the window will dreamily compliment your sweater (we got it on Depop) or stop to chat about the weather (it's hot, isn't it?). Each interaction is an unexpected treat - a personal touch that doesn't feel performative. A warm smile can go a long way, especially when you just waited 45 minutes in line for a freaking bagel.

Prepared bagels are sold by the half, so utilize that option. The Hand-Sliced Smoked Salmon is cured fish in its ultimate form, shaved so thin it's almost translucent, then showered in dill, onion slices, heirloom tomatoes, and a drizzle of olive oil. Get a half of that on sesame. For your other half, we strongly recommend a Run It Through The Garden. As the name suggests, it tastes like someone dumped a salad on a bagel - there are tomatoes, lemons, salty capers, onions, cucumbers, plus a sprinkle of pepper. We like that on the burnt everything. It's an original creation that tastes sticky and sweet, as if rolled in garlic, sesame seeds, and an open flame.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

There's also a darker side to Courage's sunny, laid-back atmosphere. Lines are known to snake around the block, obstructing streets and sidewalks, and Virgil Village's residents have grown concerned. For [This Side of Hoover](#) (a digital archive of the gentrification in East Hollywood), Samanta Helou-Hernandez reported on Super Pan, the Guatemalan bakery that used to occupy Courage's current space.

After 20 years of operations, the building's landlord refused to renew Super Pan's lease, forcing owner Elvia Perez to relocate to a South Central strip mall. Courage Bagels opened in its place. Walls made way for windows, ovens were installed, and the mural created by Ceaser C. Tepekyuyt was painted over. "The original Super Pan of Virgil Avenue was completely renovated to make way for a gourmet bagel shop," writes Helou-Hernandez on her [website](#). "The mural of Indigenous women that donned Super Pan's walls were whitewashed."

Since opening, an anonymous Instagram user said that living next to Courage Bagels was a "nightmare." In a [post](#) uploaded to Twitter, they described "crowds of unmasked people using [their] lawns as [a] public park to sit and eat." Luxury cars clog the street, littering is frequent. "[Courage Bagels] doesn't serve the community," they concluded. "It serves outsiders."



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

So, where does that leave us? On one hand, with incredible bagels. On the other, a questionable location choice, right at the heart of [LA's gentrification discussion](#).

Is Courage Bagels at fault for opening in Virgil Village? How will we judge the other new tenants in the neighborhood like [Ken's Ramen](#) and [Kinkan](#)? What responsibility - if any - does Courage have when it comes to line control and uninformed customers? Would we still be having this conversation if they were located elsewhere?

These questions aren't meant to shame you, nor Courage Bagels. They're mostly to provide context, some alternative ways of thinking about a neighborhood with a complicated past. No one person gets to be the authority on Who Gets To Open A Restaurant And Where, but rather it's up to all of us to not be assholes while eating in a neighborhood that isn't ours.

Oh, and do get that burnt everything bagel. Just please stay off the freaking grass.

Although the plain bagels are quite good, the move here is to order with toppings.

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Food Rundown

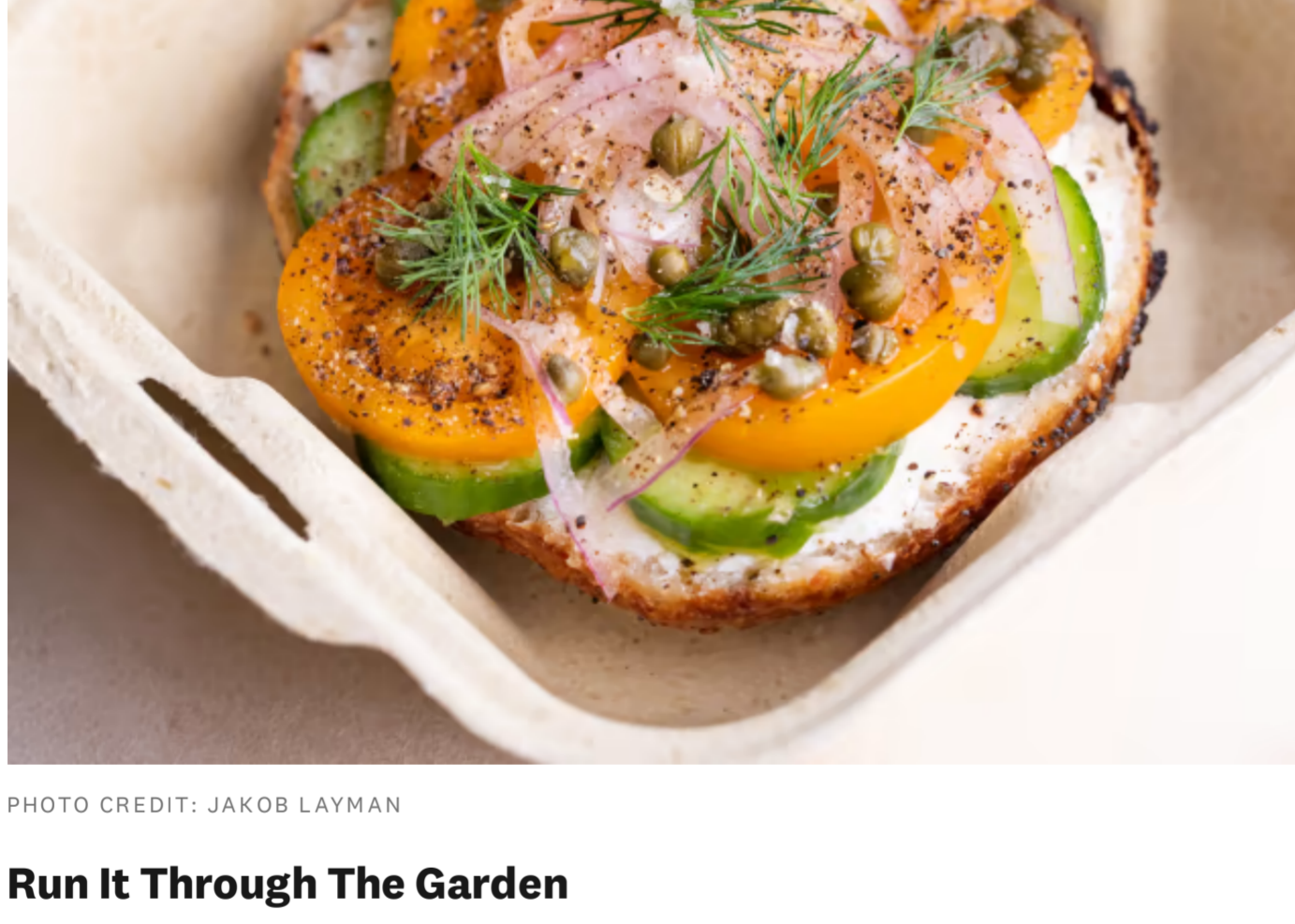


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Run It Through The Garden

Courage Bagel's sleeper hit. Cured fish will always have a special place in our hearts, but this bagel changed everything for us. It's a uniquely California dish, covered in so many cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, salty capers, lemon slices, and dill (plus a thin layer of pepper), it could double as a salad. It would be impossible to recreate this in any other state.



PHOTO CREDIT: KAT HONG

Hand-Sliced Smoked Salmon

A dense, crackly bagel is topped with all the normal stuff (smoked salmon, cream cheese, onion, and capers) plus lemon slices, olive oil, dill, and the juiciest heirloom tomatoes we've ever seen in our entire lives. The juice from the tomatoes seeps into the dough when you bite into it, and the charred crust releases a sharp CRACK. Oh, and that dill! Sweet and aromatic, we wish we could make a wreath with it to hang in our home during the holidays.







PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Loose Bagels, Two Per Customer

A great addition to your order. This way, you'll be able to focus on that unique Montreal-style technique. The loose bagel is delightfully light, crackly, and guaranteed to leave crumbs all over your shirt. We like the burnt everything, an original creation that tastes sticky and sweet, like it was rolled around in garlic, sesame seeds, and an open flame, but the normal everything, sea salt sesame, and onion are also worthy choices.

SUGGESTED READING

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Squirrel
BREAKFAST AMERICAN
VIRGIL VILLAGE
Squirrel is a perpetually-crowded cafe/bakery in Virgil Village and our favorite brunch spot in LA. | 
Melody
WINE BAR VIRGIL VILLAGE
Melody is in a converted bungalow in Virgil Village, and it's one of the more versatile spots in the neighborhood. | 
Bowery Bungalow
MEDITERRANEAN SILVER LAKE
Bowery Bungalow in Silver Lake is an ideal first dinner date spot—candles, hummus, and gazoze included. | 
Maury's
AMERICAN SILVER LAKE
The best bagel spot in town, Maury's is a fantastic go-to for breakfast or lunch - no matter where your coastal allegiance lies. |
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