



## Meet the Chef: 5 Napkin Burger's Andy D'Amico

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What's the story behind 5 Napkin Burger?

In 2003 I opened a French restaurant, Nice Matin, on the Upper West Side with my partner Simon Oren. He asked if I'd put a burger on the menu—he had an idea for the name, "5 Napkin Burger," so I said sure, and I built a burger that was somewhat provençale: it has rosemary aioli, comté cheese, and caramelized onions. The burger itself got a lot of press, and down the road Simon wanted to open a restaurant called 5 Napkin Burger—he always did. So we opened the first one in 2008. The same burger is on that menu, and is still the best selling one.

So 5 Napkin is a premium burger concept featuring 10 ounce burgers. We're one of the only premium, chef-driven, burger chains. And along with the burgers, we serve both comforting and interesting sides and appetizers; we do a nacho dish with waffle fries that is very popular. The newest burger we've been featuring is a truffle egg burger. It has truffle butter on it, a fried egg, and mushroom ketchup. It's very good. But I'm not doing a burger for the Art of Food Event.

Why not?

I knew right away, after reading about The Art of Food, that my dish was supposed to have an artsy quality to it. I had, at the time, just started doing an avocado hummus that I'm really fond of. I knew right away, plating wise, that I'd be able to do an abstract kind of plate using the garnishes on the dish, and that I could make something pretty and artsy while showing the other side of 5 Napkin. We do burgers, and we're famous for them, but we also have these very creative appetizers and sides, so I wanted to show this other dimension of who we are.

How did you get started in the culinary world?

I wasn't cooking since I was 15, or doing dishes as a child. I got started late, and it really was a second career for me.

My father was a musician, so I grew up around music. I was always in the school band, and ended up picking up the base guitar in high school, wanting to be a young rock musician. I wound up in a club band. We're talking early-seventies, so we played rock and disco. But, I eventually decided it was time to do something else.

It was one of those odd things, I had started to set myself up to go back to school and find a job, and I wound up working with a friend in the restaurant at the front of the house, and I worked my way to the back because I wanted to work in the kitchen. And a friend of a friend told me to look into the Culinary Institute, and one thing led to another and I ended up leaving community college and going to the CIA. I did it on the flip of a switch. I got straight to work in a hotel in Manhattan when I finished school—it was 1978, which was right at the beginning of the American Renaissance of food. It just so happened that Wolfgang Puck was the consulting chef on the job at this hotel at the time, and Emril was the cook that was next to me. It was a typical hotel staff of young guys like us.

What's your number one cooking tip?

People don't realize how important it is to work with a sharp knife. When you go to school it's the first thing you learn: the different cuts. It's endlessly boring, and you're terribly scared of cutting your fingers off, but there's just a real difference when you prep ingredients properly with a sharp knife. Even if you're just garnishing with cilantro or parsley—if you don't cut it properly it bruises and doesn't taste right.

Taste what Andy is serving up for The Art of Food on 2/4 at Sotheby's:  
[www.artoffoodny.com](http://www.artoffoodny.com)

