Did you grow up eating French toast on the weekend? Perhaps your mom or dad taught you their simple approach: beat together eggs with milk, stir in some cinnamon and nutmeg, and maybe some vanilla and a little sugar. Let slices of bread (in my family challah was the preferred bread—but definitely an egg bread) soak in the mixture. Then you melt butter in a large skillet and cook the slices until they’re nice and brown. And, of course, drown the slices in maple syrup. It was a family classic.

So, it was a revelation when I learned how Breakfast Republic’s executive chef Cesar Garcia makes the local chain’s very decadent version—and it has inspired me to rethink how I make mine. I’m not just talking technique, but also the idea of incorporating other ingredients.

**French toast Revolution**

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Mr. Presley French Toast
S’mores French Toast

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To reflect the season, a brunch theme, or just to play with favorite foods, Garcia also shared Breakfast Republic's recipe for the treat: thinly sliced, smoky, spicy and sweet bacon they call "Jurassic Pork." Thick slices of smoked applewood bacon are dipped in a mixture of brown sugar, Spanish paprika and just a pinch of cayenne pepper; then oven baked, rendering otherwise run-of-the-mill pork into a melt-in-your-mouth experience that pairs perfectly with that French toast.

In case you still haven't been, Breakfast Republic, which now boasts nine locations in both California and Texas, is a breakfast/brunch fun house. The bright, quirky decor is pure experience branding, created by owner Jonathan Engmann. Also the owner of Fig Tree Café, El Jardin and North Park Breakfast Company under the Ruse and Rialto Restaurant Group umbrella, Engmann said he came up with the concept for Breakfast Republic after evaluating what he felt was an underserved segment of the market: breakfast.

"All of the breakfast and brunch places I know seemed pretty much the same," he said. "And when I think back on my dining experience, it's the overall vibe of the place -- the X factor -- that makes it memorable and makes you want to share this experience with friends."

So everything from human-size egg sub to over-sized ceramic coffee cups and the little messages on the coffee cup bottom, like "Definitely house in this cup," that only your companion across from you can read, to fortune cookies and "President's Choice" utensil wrappers fits into Engmann's Breakfast Republic sensibility.

And that extends to the menu. Sure, you could make French toast, but why not have some fun with it? Engmann's room is a fun of Elvis Presley -- the Elvis who loved fried peanut butter and banana sandwiches. So why not come up with a French toast version with Banana Foster? The menu's Striplin & Grills Breakfast with gouda, hot sauce, sweet corn and chives was inspired by his travels to Louisiana, and the "Cock Madame" with ham, gruyere and bechamel sauce is a twist on the Croque Monsieur he enjoys in Paris.

Ah, but the French toast!

How about Lemon 'N' Coconuts? Or Strawberry & Mascarpone? Or Banana Split? Or "Bombre"? All of them have the same base: egg yolks, heavy cream, brown sugar, vanilla -- and get this -- spiced rum. Once Garcia added rum to the bananas foster topping, he realized that the flavor would be perfect for the French toast batter, adding a little indefinable touch of flavor. Garcia said he is going for an rich a French toast as possible, so no to egg whites and yes to heavy cream. Brioche is really buttery, and egg bread absorbs the milk, so that's his bread of choice. He dips the bread (Bread & Cleo's brioche loaves, cut into 1-inch slices) but doesn't let it soak in the batter to keep it from falling apart. And he doesn't cook the bread in butter; it's just cooked on a hot, naked skillet. Butter would add an unnecessary additional flavor. And while you may wonder when you see the 24 yolks for six servings, don't worry.

"Twenty-four eggs seem like a lot," he said, "but it gets absorbed into the slices."

Both the Mr. Presley and S'Mores French toast dishes are simple to make. The difference in the batters is that the S'Mores, of course, requires graham crackers. Garcia turns them into crumbs (smash them or pulverize in a food processor) and adds them to the batter.

For Mr. Presley you'll shallow peanut butter onto one side of the cooked French toast and roll it up, then cover the rolls with the caramel bananas foster, unamed and spiced caramelized banana, and powdered sugar. For the S'Mores, you get to play with a kitchen torch to brown mini marshmallows sprinkled over the cooked French toast. Then drizzle the dish with your favorite chocolate syrup and add a sprinkling of powdered sugar.

Of course, you must have that Jurassic Bacon as an accompaniment. Just be wary you make the bacon. Garcia explained that it's the best method. Stove-top cooking will cause it to curl and cook unevenly. Laying the bacon slices on a baking sheet covered in parchment paper will allow it to cook evenly and stay flat.

Golden is a San Diego savant food writer and trigger.

Jurassic Pork
Makes 6 servings

FRENCH TOAST
24 egg yolks
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cups heavy cream
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
4 tablespoons spiced rum
12 slices brioche bread, cut into 1-inch-thick slices
Toppings
1/4 cup butter
1/4 cups brown sugar
3 whole bananas
1/4 cups spiced rum
3 cups plain bacon, cooked and chopped
Powdered sugar (as desired)

FILLING
1/2 cups peanut butter
(smooth recommended but crunchy is also fine)

For the French toast: In a bowl, whisk egg yolks and sugar until sugar dissolves; mix in cream, vanilla, and rum. Dip brioche bread slices in the mix, making sure to cover both sides. Cook slices over medium heat with either butter or oil) on the griddle or in a pan, flipping once, until both sides are golden and the center feels firm. For the Banana Foster filling: Melt butter in a pan, add sugar and cook until dissolved and turns into caramel. Cut banana into slices and add to the pan. Move with a spatula to cover bananas with the caramel sauce. Add rum to the mix and cook until it evaporates with the alcohol. (Note: Alcohol can be ignited by gas flames, so have a pot lid handy in case you need to extinguish flames.)

Assembly: Spread 2 tablespoons of peanut butter on one side of each cooked brioche slice. Roll the toast so that the peanut butter filling stays inside. Plate and pour banana foster mixture on top of the French toast rolls. Sprinkle with the chopped bacon and also sprinkle with powdered sugar as desired.

S'Mores French Toast
Makes 6 servings

FRENCH TOAST
24 egg yolks
1/2 cup brown sugar
3/4 cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons vanilla extract
1/4 cup spiced rum
1/4 cup graham cracker crumbs
12 slices brioche bread, cut into 1-inch-thick slices
Toppings
3 cups mini marshmallows
6 tablespoons chocolate sauce, such as Hershey's
Powdered sugar (as desired)

For the French toast: In a bowl, whisk egg yolks and sugar until sugar dissolves, then mix in cream, vanilla, rum and graham cracker crumbs. Dip brioche bread slices in the mix mixing sure to cover both sides. Cook slices over medium heat (without butter or oil) on the griddle or in a pan, flipping once, until both sides are golden and the center feels firm.

Assembly: Serve one slice on top of the other on your desired plate (3 slices per serving). Cover with 1/4 cup of marshmallows until golden brown. Drizzle chocolate sauce on top, and sprinkle with powdered sugar as desired.