



Pinit

Pastranomy: Close to Katz's Home Made Pastrami Recipe

"I'll have what she's having."

Lady at the next table

By Meathead Goldwyn

Pastrami is Jewish barbecue, it is corned beef with *chutzpah*, and it is at its ballsiest at **Katz's Delicatessen** in New York City. Katz's is a timeless throwback is where Harry met Sally's fake orgasm and they both met real pastrami. When you go, make sure to have what she's having, and leave your diet behind.

I have never *duplicated* Katz's pastrami, even though I pumped Chef Kenny Kohn for tips on technique, but I've come mighty durn close. That's what it looks like above. It is complex and smoky, but not in the way that other smoked meats are smoky. The smoke is not overt. It is blended in thoroughly. It is highly seasoned, but the black pepper and coriander rub is never domineering, and swimming across all your buds are a range of other herbs and spices. That's because pastrami is probably the most complicated process on this website. We start by soaking the beef for a week in a highly seasoned brine/cure to make corned beef. Then we soak it in plain water to remove excess salt. Then we rub it and let them nestle in for a few days, then we smoke it, then we chill it, and finally we steam it. Whew!

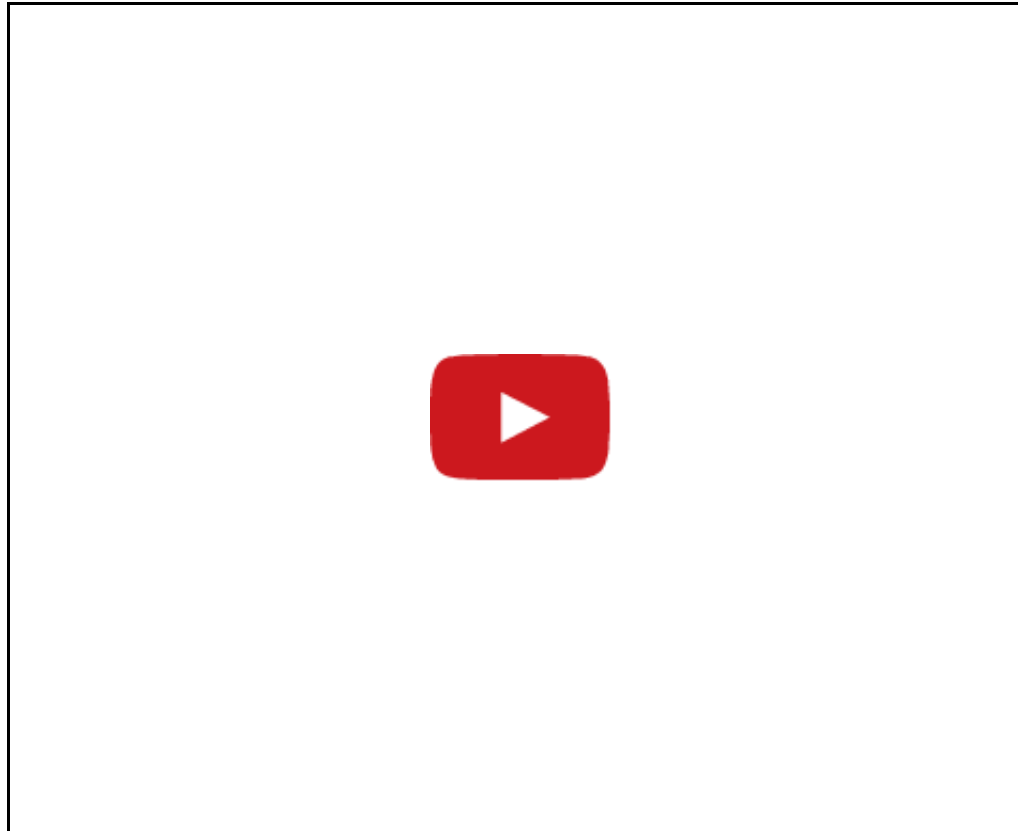
Of course I can't be sure Kohn was leveling with me about the Katz's method. I asked him some questions twice in two interviews and I got two different answers. And if you spend a few hours at Katz's watching them, then you spend a day watching YouTube videos of Katz's and reading reviews (as I have), you get a variety of conflicting stories from Katz's management and employees. I'm not saying they lie, but they do seem to be protecting their secrets with a straight face.



Culinary historians believe the highly seasoned, smoked, juicy, bright pink beef in a dark robe, was invented by poor Jews in *shtetls* (a Yiddish to English dictionary is below) in Romania where it may have been made from goose or duck meat. Today some avant garde chefs are returning to that tradition, even making it from salmon, turkey, or other cuts of beef, like round. Without refrigeration, meat spoiled quickly, so they rubbed it heavily with salt and pepper and other spices, and smoked it. This both tenderized it, flavored it, and helped it keep longer. Today, most pastrami is made from beef brisket or navel (a.k.a. plate), tough, stringy, fatty, cheap cuts. The process turns it tender and succulent.

Some say beef pastrami was first made in the US by an immigrant kosher butcher, Sussman Volk, in 1887, but that date is disputed by the owners of Katz's which opened in 1888. Katz's is the oldest deli in the nation, and a *haimish* New York landmark. If you have never been there, make the *schlep* to 205 E. Houston St. (pronounced HOW-ston) right after you get off the boat from the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island to complete the immigrant experience. Spend some time checking out the photos of presidents and other *macher* on the walls. The place is a museum.

It is absolutely worth waiting in line for the hand carved hot pastrami sandwich (doesn't that picture of the carving table, below, just make you *verklemt*), and if you are lucky, you can rest your *tukhus* at the table where the most memorable scene from the movie *When Harry Met Sally* was filmed. Yes, it was in Katz's that Sally (Meg Ryan) demonstrated for *nudnik* Harry (Billy Crystal) how a woman can fake it. Estelle Reiner, the *mamele* of director Rob Reiner, after watching Sally moan and groan and pound the table, utters one of the best lines in the history of filmdom: "I'll have what she's having". Kohn says Sally's ecstasy wasn't an act, it was the pastrami, but it looks to me like she is having the turkey. The whole scene is on the video at right.

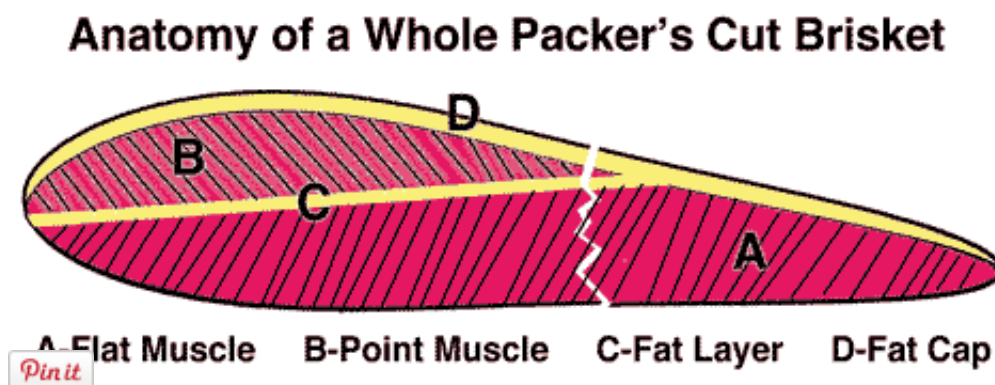


When you enter, you will be given a ticket. Don't lose it or you'll have to pay \$50 when you check out. Take your place in a fast moving line and *schmooze* with the other droolers. You can get table service, but then you'll miss the show at the counter.

When you get to the front of the line, know what you want. Naturally I recommend the pastrami, but you can order all manner of traditional kosher-style cured meats like **corned beef**, a **Reuben sandwich**, beef tongue, a first rate kosher hot dog, knoblewurst, killer salami, and kishka. There's also chopped liver, liverwurst, and, of course, bagels with a *schmear* and lox. Save room for the bowl of half-sour pickles and **pickled tomatoes** on every table, or order matzo ball soup, knishes, **latkes**, blintzes, or kugel. Finish with a classic New York cheesecake and wash it all down with a beer or an egg cream. They sell no *chazeray* here. If you need a cheat sheet, scroll down. Learn

these terms so you sound like a *maven* and so you don't have to ask for an explanation like a *goy*, even if you and all the Irish *shamuses* and most everyone else in the joint are. When you're done, you can "Send a Salami to a Boy in the Army" something they have been doing since the 1940s.

My standard order when I get to NY is pastrami on rye with yellow mustard on both slices of bread. That's it, *bubbie*. When the carver asks if you want "fatty or lean", don't be *meshuga*. Answer "fatty". If you want to sound expert say "plenty of *speck* (pronounced "shpek"), please". This is no time to count calories. If he said "juicier" or "drier" you wouldn't hesitate, would you? But this is serious *fleishig* so they call it the ways they see it. You got a problem with that?



Place a tip on the counter as he carves, and he'll slip you a nice free *nosh*. The meat is piled high, and you can get it with mustard, kraut, and melted Swiss. Don't be a *putz* and ask for mayo. And by the way, when it comes out of the steam box, it looks like a meteorite. It is not burned. That is just the black pepper laden spice rub that has darkened during the smoking process. And when it is carved, it is bright pink. It is not undercooked, that's just the color it turns during the curing process.

How Katz's makes pastrami

As best as I can tell by triangulating from interviews with cooks, counter men, cutters, and watching hours of YouTube, Katz's process begins with brisket. This is the pectoral muscles. Some think it is plate, a.k.a. navel. This is a cut from the area below the ribs, behind the brisket and it is a lot fattier than brisket. The picture I took below looks a lot more like brisket to me than plate. I use brisket because carving plate leaves huge rivers of fat in the meat.

Chef Kenny Kohn says they soak the meat for weeks in a salty, spicy brine. What comes out is essentially **corned beef**, but their pastrami process is different from their corned beef process because the corned beef is dry cured, not soaked in a brine. At least that's what they tell me.

After brining, the pastrami is then coated with a secret rub that tastes to be mostly black pepper and coriander, and then it is refrigerated for a day or two. Then it is smoked, refrigerated for a day or two, and finally, the day it is to be served, it is steamed. That's a carver at Katz's below.



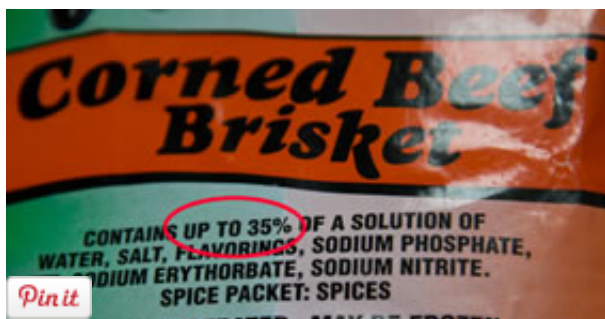
How Meathead makes pastrami

Montreal Smoked Meat

To do it all the way from scratch there are several time consuming steps:

1. Cure the beef.
2. Soak the corned beef.
3. Rub and let it sit.
4. Smoke the corned beef.
5. Let it sit.
6. Steam it and serve.

You can eliminate the step (1) and go straight to step (2) by buying a good corned beef. But beware, not all commercial corned beef is the same. Some is poor quality and some have up to 35% of its weight injected water and salt.



Making your own corned beef and turning it into pastrami means that you can make it to your taste. Like cloves? Gahead. Want sugar in the rub? I won't tell on you. Want more smoke? Who's gonna stop you? More pepper? Bless you. Trust me, *boychik*, do it yourself and you will eat shards of meat packed with spicy flavor and silky richness *mit groys fargenign*. Surprisingly, the smoke wraps its fingers into everything without being obvious. Forgive me if I *kvell*.

Here. I'll spill the whole *megillah*:

Recipe for Close to Katz's Pastrami

Since the Romanian Jews started in the 1890s they've been making a version of pastrami in Montreal that they call simply smoked meat. I am told it is usually made from brisket, not plate.

No smoke ring in pastrami

Notice that there is no smoke ring in pastrami, the pink ring on and below the surface typical in smoked meats, even barbecue brisket. That's because the smoke ring is nitrate tinged myoglobin in the meat caused by compounds in the smoke. This meat is pink throughout because of the pink curing salt used in making the corned beef which has sodium nitrite in it. **Don't worry, it's safe.**

Grocery store pastrami

Most of it is made from lean cuts like round, injected with brine and nitrites, and sliced thin. Not the same by a long shot.

Other delicious delis

Makes. About 3 pounds of pastrami after shrinkage, enough for 4 good sandwiches after trimming

Preparation time. Oy!

Cooking time. 6 hours approximately to smoke a thick 4 pound chunk at 225°F. Actual cooking time depends on thickness not weight. Then it goes into the fridge about 12 hours, and then it steams for about 2 hours. Larger and thicker cuts will take longer.

Serve with. **Latkes** and **dill pickled tomatoes** and **potato salad**. Skip the kosher wine and go for a beer.

Ingredients

4 pounds of good corned beef, preferably **home made (click for recipe)**

4 tablespoons fresh coarsely ground black pepper

2 tablespoons coriander powder

1 teaspoon mustard powder

1 tablespoon brown sugar

1 tablespoon paprika

2 teaspoons garlic powder

2 teaspoons onion powder

4 to 8 ounces of **smoke wood**

About store bought corned beef. *Corned beef comes in two forms, ready to eat, and brined. Ready to eat corned beef is cured, then cooked, and usually packaged in slices or sliced at the deli counter. Do not use this! Brined corned beef is usually a hunk of brisket that has been cured in a salt solution and packaged in a hearty cryovac plastic bag with some of the brine. It has not been cooked yet. That's the stuff you want.*

About the rub. *The paprika mostly adds color. If you want to veer from the conventional and amp it up a bit, substitute*

Want to start a fight?

Pronounce that Katz's is the best deli in New York. There will surely be someone within earshot who will argue

vigorously in favor of the Carnegie, 2nd Avenue, Stage, Eisenberg, Zabar's, or one of the dozens of others. Ask me and I'll say Katz's. I have not tasted them all. That is a lifetime of work. Notice that Carnegie Deli is not on my short list. The meat is OK, but the schtick of this tourist trap is just a bit too much for a real pastrami lover.

Sadly, Jewish delis are an endangered species. If this is a topic of interest to you, and it should be, get ahold of David Sax's book **Save the Deli: In Search of Perfect Pastrami, Crusty Rye, and the Heart of Jewish Delicatessen**.

Click here to read his article about **The Roots of the Deli** in



*ancho powder or **American chili powder**, but be careful, the black pepper and mustard supply an ample kick. You can leave anything out that you want except the black pepper and the coriander.*

Method

1) **Make your own corned beef.** It is just plain better than storebought. For pastrami, the flat section of the brisket is favored by many because it makes nice even slices for sandwiches, but I prefer the point section of the brisket because it is fattier, richer, and more tender. Yes, it sometimes breaks apart, but who notices on a sammy? If you can get it, go for navel (a.k.a. plate). But it can also be made from flank steak, or leaner cuts. If you are using brisket, one side of the meat will probably have a thick layer of fat on it called the cap. Remove all of the fat cap except about 1/8" and if there is any filmy membrane on the other side, remove it all. That thin layer of fat is important. The process takes about a week.

2) **Desalinate.** Put the corned beef in a pot slightly larger than the meat and cover it with cold water in the fridge for at least 8 hours. This removes excess salt. Trust me, you need to do this or you will be gulping water all night after your meal.

3) **Rub.** Make the rub by blending together all the spices. Rinse the meat, pat it dry with paper towels, coat it with a thin layer of cooking oil, apply the rub liberally, about 4 tablespoons per square foot of surface, and press it into the surface to help it adhere. If there is a thin part of meat, use less rub. Put in the fridge for a minimum of 2 days. Don't wrap it. The rub just sticks to the plastic wrap. Normally I say you do not need to let meats marinate in a rub, but the wait

Saveur magazine.

Cheat sheet for Katz's menu and translating the Yiddish used in this article

Forgive me for being a bit too cute for my own good, but I could not help, ahem, spicing things up with a little Yiddish with a lot of help from the **Yiddish Glossary on Bubbygram**. Yiddish is like Spanglish, a mashup of an old world language or two, in this case German, Russian, and Hebrew, with English. Ditto with the menu. The recipes originated in Old Country peasant food, and were adapted in the US. Many of you will recognize some of the words which have crept into daily use by even *goys*, but if you need a translation, here you go:

Bagels. Let's get this straight. True bagels do not have raisins, chocolate, jalapeno, or cheese. They are either plain, onion, garlic, sesame, poppy, and everything (all of the above). The rest are what I call *bageloids*.

seems to help this particular rub adhere.

4) **Smoke.** Set up your smoker or your grill for smoking. You will find instructions for this in my **Tips & Techniques** section. If you can, use a charcoal smoker. It produces a deeper darker crust than gas, electric, or even pellets, but it still comes out fabulous on a pellet burner or gasser. Preheat to 225°F. Pick your wood. I don't think it makes a huge difference with all the other flavors banging around in there. My best batch was with cherry wood. Smoke it fat-side up over indirect heat at 225°F until it reaches 190°F to 200°F. Add wood when the smoke dwindles. If you wish you can smoke it for 3 to 4 hours and finish it indoors, but this stuff can take all the smoke you throw at it, so outdoors is better. It could take 12 hours or more depending on the thickness.

Blintzes - A crepe stuffed with a ricotta-like cheese, folded into an eggroll like packed, and pan fried.

Boychik. Little boy. Ususally used to describe a big boy.

Bubbie. Short for *bubala*, which is what grandma, calls her grandkids. It means something like "sweetie". Then again, it might be short for *bubba*, which means brother.

Charoses. A chopped apple sauce with raisins and sweet wine served at Passover. It deserves to be served more often.

Chazeray. Junk.

Chopped Liver. Cooked chicken liver chopped and mixed with onions, seasonings, and occasionally brandy. Typically served on rye bread. Like much Jewish food, it is peasant food, hence the expression "What am I, chopped liver?"

Chutzpah. Brazen cheekiness. Ballsiness. Like the boy who killed his parents and then begged the judge for mercy



5) **Chill.** When it is done cooking, go ahead and cut a taste. I know you want to. All the flavor is there, but it may still be a bit chewy. Wrap in foil and refrigerate for at least 12 hours. You can keep it for a week if you wish.

6) **Steam.**

When it is
time to
serve it is
time to

because he was an orphan.

Egg Cream. Chocolate or vanilla syrup mixed with milk and seltzer, no egg.

Ess, bench, sei a mensch! - Eat, pray, don't act like a jerk!

Fleishig. Flesh. Meat.

Goy. Non-Jew.

Haimisch. Simple. Affable.

Kishka. A fat beef sausage.

Knishes. A baseball sized potato dumpling sort of thingy.

Knoblewurst. A garlicky sausage.

Kosher. Adheres to the dietary rules handed down to Jews and described in the Old Testament.

Kugel. Noodle pudding.

Kvell. Bursting with pride.

Latkes. Potato pancakes.

Liverwurst. A soft spreadable sausage made from pig livers. No, it is not kosher.

Lox. Raw salmon cured with salt. When most people speak of lox they really mean Nova lox, which are lox smoked.

steam heat and tenderize. If you have a bamboo or metal steamer in which the



meat will fit, you can use that. If not, you can make a steamer by putting a wire rack in a baking pan. If necessary you can sit the rack on wads of foil to keep it out of the water. Unwrap the meat and put it on the foil in which it was wrapped or the steam will wash off much of the rub. Do not slice the meat first.

If you made a steamer with a baking pan, cover it with foil. If the pan is steel don't let the foil touch the meat. The salt, the water, the steel, and the aluminum can interact and create electrical charges that can melt the foil! This is a phenomenon called the "lasagna cell" because it happens to lasagna often.

Put the pan on a burner, turn the heat to medium low, and steam it an hour or two until heated through to 203°F. The exact time will depend on the meat's thickness and how hot the water is. Add hot water as needed, making sure the pan never dries out. Don't rush this. Take it all the way to 203°F.

7) **Slicing.** Slicing is crucial to maximize tenderness. Look at the meat and notice which way the grain is running. Cut it by hand in thin slices, about 1/8" thick, perpendicular to the grain. If you cut parallel to the grain it will be much chewier. Don't try to slice it with a machine. It will just fall apart.

Macher. A big shot, a guy who makes things happen, literally a maker.

Mamele. Mother.

Matzoh. A flat cracker made from unleavened dough, which means dough without yeast.

Matzo Ball Soup. Chicken soup with balls made from ground matzoh floating in them.

Maven. An expert. Often used sarcastically.

Megillah. The whole, unedited, long, boring story.

Meshuga. Crazy. Waaaaay crazy.

Mit groys fargenign. With great pleasure.

Reuben. One of the world's great sandwiches. Corned beef, Swiss, kraut, and Russian dressing on very fresh rye.

Schlep. Drag one's self somewhere.

Schtetl. Small European towns with mostly Jewish populations.

Schmear. A smear of cream cheese on a bagel.

8) **Serve.** I serve it nekkid on fresh untoasted rye bread. A good brown mustard on both slices and a few shreds of sauerkraut is nice but not necessary. Now this is going to sound wierd: It may need a light sprinkling of salt. The soaking process occasionally removes too much. So taste it and if you wish, sprinkle it on lightly. At Katz's they put about 1 pound of meat on each sandwich, and the Carnegie Deli uses even more. That's just too much for me devour without unhinging my jaw. 1/2 to 3/4 pound per sandwich is more than enough for home use. If you want, you can make a **Rockin' Pastrami Reuben** with sauerkraut, melted swiss, and thousand island dressing. Reubens were originally made with corned beef, but there's no rule that you can't make one from pastrami. In fact, I highly recommend it.

9) Leftovers freeze well and they can be reheated in the microwave or steamed. They can also be made into a **killer hash**. *Ess, bench, sei a mensch!*

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Schmooze. Network, chat, gossip.

Shamus. Someone who helps officiate and guard at the synagogue.

Speck. Fat. To be cherished, not avoided.

Nosh. Nibble. Taste.

Nudnick. An annoying person.

Putz. A nickname for a diminutive male organ used to refer to a really distasteful person.

Tukhus. Your butt.

Verklemt. Overcome with joy.

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