Every time I visit Austria, I’m amazed at the variety of open-face sandwiches eaten there. The Austrians love these savory little sandwiches made of thinly sliced bread with colorful, tasty toppings, many of them so beautifully garnished they look like miniature works of art.

“Art Sandwiches” (in English) is actually a term used by the Austrians to describe the prettiest of these small savories. They’re also known as *offene Butterbrötchen* (buttered open-face sandwiches) because the bread is usually lightly buttered before the toppings are applied. However, the most common Austrian term for these single-bread sandwiches is simply *Brötchen*. (In Germany, however, *Brötchen* means something else: a small roll or bun.)

Whatever you call them, they’re beloved by Austrians, who eat them for the appetizer course of a main meal, as a light lunch on their own, and as a satisfying snack any time of the day.

These *Brötchen* are traditionally small enough to be finger food, but a bit larger than canapés. In many cases, the bread that forms its base is known as *Kastenbrot* (box bread), because it’s baked in special long pans divided in half, lengthwise, that snap together to completely enclose the dough during baking. The small loaf that emerges from these little metal boxes has a uniform size, with identical crusts on all four sides, perfectly suitable for being thinly sliced for these special sandwiches. Austrian *Kastenbrot* pans come in forms that produce breads that, when sliced, are shaped like squares, rectangles, circles, triangles, diamonds, and even hearts.

The toppings that adorn them are limited only by the imagination and resources of the cook: meat, fish, cheese, eggs, vegetable salads, and dozens of garnishes that run the gamut from chopped chives to caviar.

My favorite places to nibble on these Austrian *Brötchen* are Zum Schwarzen Kameel and Trzesniewski in Vienna [see “Noshing Around Vienna, page 46] and Delicatessen Frankowitsch in Graz.

Zum Schwarzen Kameel in Vienna’s Old Town is the most elegant in decor, offering an enticing array of delicious fancy finger-food *Brötchen* in its mahogany-paneled bar-delicatessen. The rectangular slices of bread are topped with the finest-quality ingredients, including smoked salmon, shrimp in aspic, mushrooms with celeriac, corn salad with mandarin orange slices, red cabbage with tuna, ham salad with sauerkraut, curried egg salad with chives, spicy meat salad with beans, lentils with chopped ham, and mixed vegetable salads with watercress.

Trzesniewski’s flagship sandwich shop in the Old Town is a well-known Viennese institution, with its own distinctive *Brötchen* style. All the toppings for its twenty-two varieties of open-face sandwiches have approximately the same texture, because the ingredients are put through a mincer before being spread on fresh brown bread. Toppings include egg salad, crab with egg, onions with egg, spicy green pep-
pers, sweet and hot red peppers, salami, mushrooms, cream cheese with carrot or onions, Swedish herring, and smoked salmon with horseradish-flavored cream cheese. These rectangular Brötchen are small enough to hold in one hand and devour in three bites, but still substantial enough that six of them are plenty for a light lunch.

Delicatessen Frankowitsch in Graz, the capital of Austria’s Styria Federal State, makes the most artistic Brötchen of all. Each of its forty-four different kinds of open-face sandwiches is almost too pretty to eat. However, once you’ve taken the first bite, you’ll want more. Most of the colorful toppings are arranged on thin slices of brown bread or thicker slices of white bread (like French baguette). Whenever you’re in Graz, you’ll certainly want to sample Frankowitsch’s beautiful Brötchen, which include toppings of shrimp, crab, trout, salt-preserved salmon, lumpfish caviar, rare roast beef, curried egg, Gorgonzola cheese, wild garlic spread, and Styrian pumpkin-seed spread. The only problem is deciding which ones to choose, because they’re all so tempting!

Of course you can make Austrian-style open-face sandwiches at home, too. Use your imagination to mix and match breads, spreads, and garnishes, covering the top of each bread slice entirely with the main topping. And remember that it’s best to lightly butter the bread before adding the toppings, to keep it from becoming soggy.

BREADS: Small thin bread squares with crusts on all four sides, such as Rubschlager Cocktail Breads, made in the USA (rye, pumpernickel, sourdough, whole grain, http://www.rubschlagerbaking.com/). Also diagonally cut 3/4-inch-thick slices of French-style baguettes, and rectangular slices of densely textured brown or black breads, about two inches wide, three to four inches long and one-fourth-inch thick.

Toppings (Unless you like beef tartare or sushi, in most cases the meat should be cooked before using):

Meats: Paper-thin slices of roasted beef, pork, lamb, duck, turkey; sliced or chopped ham, bacon, prosciutto, salami or other sausages; chicken, turkey, or other meat salads; meat pâtés.

Fish: Smoked salmon, trout, sturgeon, eel; pickled herring; sliced sardines; anchovy filets, anchovy butter; crab meat, whole shrimp and shrimp salads; tuna, lobster, crab.

Cheese: Thin slices of any kind of hard or semi-soft cheese (Swiss, Gouda, Emmental, Camembert, Brie); cream cheese, cottage cheese, and soft cheese spreads, plain or combined with herbs or spices; grated cheese.

Eggs: Sliced hard-cooked eggs; egg salad; small amounts of scrambled or fried eggs.

Vegetables & Salads: Potato, pea, cucumber, asparagus, artichoke salads (made with mayonnaise or sour cream); thinly sliced raw cucumbers, mushrooms, apples, radishes; cooked green or white asparagus stalks.

Garnishes (Chopped, sliced, whole, spread, sprinkled, dolloped): Onions, tomatoes, pickles, apples, pimientos, radishes, truffles; parsley, chives, dill, watercress, capers; sour cream, mustard, horseradish (fresh or creamed), butter (unsalted, salted, herbed); ground paprika, black pepper; black caviar (or any fish roe, such as salmon, herring, lumpfish, cod).
RECIPE:

Ham Spread

1 pound boneless cooked ham, cut into 1-inch chunks
1/2 medium onion
1/4 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon finely ground black pepper

Put all ingredients in a food processor and pulse until the mixture is smooth enough to spread on bread. Refrigerate until needed. Makes approximately 2 cups.

Spread on lightly buttered bread and garnish the open-face sandwiches with grated horseradish, chopped parsley, or ground paprika.

Egg Salad Spread

6 large hard-cooked eggs, peeled and finely chopped
3 tablespoons onions,
3 finely minced
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
2 tablespoons sour cream
1-1/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1-1/2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon salt

Combine the chopped eggs and onion in a medium bowl, tossing them together gently to mix. In another bowl, stir together the remaining ingredients. Add this dressing to the eggs, and gently toss all the ingredients together just until they are well combined, but the eggs are not mushy. Refrigerate until needed. Makes approximately 2 cups.

Spread on lightly buttered bread and garnish the open-face sandwiches with chopped fresh chives, a dab of sweet red pepper or green pepper spread, ground paprika, or slices of hard-cooked egg topped with salmon caviar.

Sweet Red Pepper Spread

Two 11-ounce (net weight) bottles of roasted sweet red peppers
2 large red bell peppers, cut into large chunks
Optional: 1 small hot red pepper (fresh or dried)
4 garlic cloves, put through a garlic press
1/4 teaspoon salt

Tear the bottled roasted peppers into large pieces and drain them in a sieve, using the back of a large spoon to press as much liquid out as you can. Pulse the bell pepper pieces in a food processor to chop them up a bit, then add the drained roasted peppers and optional hot pepper, pulsing until all the peppers are well chopped but still somewhat chunky (not smooth). Transfer the mixture to a sieve and again press as much liquid as you can out of it. Put the pepper mixture in a bowl and stir in the garlic and salt. Refrigerate until needed. Makes approximately 3 cups.

Spread on lightly buttered bread and garnish the open-face sandwiches with chopped fresh chives, finely chopped onion, or a dab of egg-salad spread.

Pickled Green Pepper Spread

Two 16-ounce bottles of sliced pickled pepperoncini green peppers
2 large green bell peppers, cut into large chunks
Optional: 1 small fresh hot green pepper
1/4 cup mayonnaise
1/4 cup sour cream

Drain the pepperoncini slices in a large sieve, rinse them well under cold water, and use the back of a spoon to press out as much liquid as you can. Pulse the bell pepper pieces in a food processor to chop them up a bit, then add the drained pepperoncini slices and optional hot pepper, pulsing until all the peppers are well chopped but still somewhat chunky (not smooth). Transfer the mixture to a bowl and stir in the mayonnaise and sour cream. Refrigerate until needed. Makes approximately 3 cups.

Spread on lightly buttered bread and garnish the open-face sandwiches with ground paprika or a dab of egg-salad spread.

Sharon Hudgins is a food writer who has eaten so many Austrian Brötchen that she long ago lost count.