



Montclair Eats: hot sandwiches for chilly days



The "Ben Special" from Watchung Deli. STEVEN DESALVO/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

By STEVEN DESALVO

For Montclair Local

In Montclair Eats, food writer Steven DeSalvo compares dishes at Montclair restaurants.



STEVEN DESALVO

DeSalvo has a degree in hospitality business management from the University of Delaware and has worked extensively in restaurants and hotels.

Are you hungry? If you have a restaurant you'd like to see covered, and want to make a suggestion for Montclair Eats, write to us at culture@montclairlocal.news.

Last year, I wrote about my favorite Italian sandwiches in town. I think sandwiches are much too broad a topic to cover in just one article, and feel the need to revisit sandwiches from a different specific perspective: hot sandwiches.

But narrowing down this category to three options in this town is virtually impossible! There are so many options! Somehow, I managed to make my choices. If I missed your favorite place, I do apologize. Sincerely. Here are the three hot sandwiches I decided to feature this month:

- The “Ben Special” from **Watchung Delicatessen**.
- The “Italian Cooked Ham” from **Cafe Giotto**.
- The “Clam Strip Po-Boy” from **Jack’s Seafood Shack**. I had so much fun sampling these sandwiches, mainly because they are so different, yet from the same general food category.

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2. The **“Ben Special”** from **Watchung Delicatessen** is a very nostalgic sandwich for me. I have been ordering it for more than 10 years now and it is among my favorites that the deli has to offer. Its simplicity is its strength. Consisting of “only” chicken cutlet, bacon, melted cheddar, and barbecue sauce, this sandwich contains a massive amount of flavor, texture, and mouthfeel that all participate in a wonderfully complete experience. The smokiness of the bacon and barbecue sauce, the crispiness of the chicken, and the really nice creamy-fatty element from the cheese brings everything together into a thrillingly warm, lasting flavor experience. I would definitely suggest exploring the entire “Special Sandwich Menu” at the deli if you haven’t already. They are worth a try, every one of them!



4. Another one of my local favorites is the “Italian Cooked Ham” sandwich from **Cafe Giotto**. This sandwich was first recommended to me by a coworker, and based on the sincerity and the passion in his endorsement, I knew before I even tried the sandwich that I was going to like it. This sandwich consists of perfectly sliced Italian “prosciutto cotto” (cooked ham, in English) which has more of an herbaceous and meaty quality to it than typical store-bought ham. This ham is grouped with caramelized onions, melted white cheddar, thinly sliced roasted potatoes, and homemade garlic aioli. These special ingredients are sandwiched between fresh ciabatta. For me, the roasted potatoes on the sandwich are the real game-changer. Once again, this sandwich perfectly executes the balance of flavors while also paying attention to textures. All of the different tastes here compliment one another. I really enjoy the concept of a “full meal” on a sandwich and I think that this is a perfect example of that. Another fantastic sandwich to try is the “Leg of Lamb.”



Clam Strip Po'Boy from Jack's Seafood Shack. STEVEN DESALVO/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

6. Finally, the “Clam Strip Po-Boy” at **Jack’s Seafood Shack** is yet another example of a multi-sensory eating experience. The sandwich consists of freshly fried clam strips, arugula, sliced tomato, pickles, and a delicious tartar sauce. This is all served on an expertly grilled piece of bread, which is a fantastic touch. The layers of flavor in this sandwich are varied and intense. Each bite also has a fantastic blend of crunchy pickle, crispy clam and soft tomato, and the peppery flavor of the arugula adds more of an effect than you could imagine. The tartar sauce ties all of these robust flavors together with subtle herbaceous notes and much needed acidity to cut through the fat of the fried clams. This sandwich comes with two side options: salad or potato chips. My advice? Get the potato chips, which are house-made, and put them on your sandwich. You are welcome in advance.

I would suggest trying other sandwiches at Jack’s as well, with the lobster grilled cheese being quite good, especially if you aren’t counting calories.

I love all three of these sandwiches and they are remarkably similar despite using distinctly different ingredients. They are texturally compelling, as well as flavorful and exciting. The ingredients used in them aren’t frilly. On the contrary, they serve an actual purpose. I would implore that you try them all but, as always, try not to do it all in the same day!

In this column:

- • Watchung Delicatessen
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watchungdeli.com
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- • Cafe Giotto
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973-746-0111
- • Jack’s Seafood Shack
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