

West Coaster

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**AMERICA'S TOP
HOMEBREWER:**

San Diegan

NICK CORONA

(QUAFF MEMBER)

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When one goes out to dine on Convoy Street, they come expecting fantastic dishes hailing from nearly every culinary culture throughout eastern Asia. It's what this Kearny Mesa thoroughfare is best known for, and rightfully so. No other microbial section of San Diego boasts such a dense and impressive concentration of Asian eateries. I'm used to coming across everything there, from kung pao, kanpachi and kimchee to jellyfish, frog's legs and chicken intestines. But recently I stumbled upon something undoubtedly American—in fact, I'm relatively certain this satiating wonder could only ever happen in this country—that I immediately knew I needed in my life. Enter the chicken-fried cheeseburger. Hopefully that paragraph break provided you sufficient time to pull yourself up from the floor. Just reading those words floored me. It was one of those moments where you wonder how something like that doesn't already exist. This instinctual query seldom fails to predict a good thing and that was certainly the case with this delicacy, a product of the kitchen team at Common Theory Public House (4805 Convoy Street, Kearny Mesa). It was crispy on the outside while retaining all the juicy, meaty mammal appeal one desires in a traditional burger. Throw on some fun toppings—scallions, horseradish-accented Havarti cheese and an herbed bacon aioli—and epic-status was achieved. “Our whole approach on food is to create delicious pub fare with an upscale twist, while providing emphasis on making the dishes pair-able with our craft beers,” says Common Theory co-owner Cris Liang. “The idea behind this dish was to fulfill the craving for a delicious chicken-fried steak, so our twist on this authentic Southern-style cuisine was to create a burger version that could be enjoyed in the palm of your hands. Southern comfort food and a refreshing beer. What else do you need?” On the beer-front, there's plenty to choose from. The beer was actually what led me to check out Common Theory in the first place. (Have I ever mentioned I'm pretty into beer?) I found Thorn St. Brewery's Got Nelson? India pale ale a great brew for cutting through the richness of the burger, but there were dozens of other

beers on-tap that would have fit the bill. Recent visitors to Convoy have probably noticed that craft beer has crept its way into the equation for many restaurants, new-and-old. So much that, each month, a promotional event called the Convoy Flight takes place, where a selected guest brewery will put numerous beers from its portfolio on tap at four designated businesses— Common Theory, Dumpling Inn’s Shanghai Saloon, O’Brien’s Pub and SoHo—so guests can enjoy ever-changing pub crawl experiences. Craft is big business on Convoy now, but it actually wasn’t part of the equation for Cris and business partner Joon Lee when they decided to go into the hospitality business. “Now, everyone knows and feels how important craft beer is, even the non-craft drinkers and the craft beer haters...who will soon be converted anyway,” Cris says with a chuckle. “After a year-and-a-half of searching for a location for a hospitality business, and going through multiple concepts and business plans, a light bulb went on in my head. My friends and I were always searching for and drinking craft beers, constantly buying different bottles to try at home, spending every weekend visiting breweries. We loved craft beer, craft beer drinking was on the rise, and a space good enough finally became available, so we dove in head-first and here we are celebrating more than two years in business.” I’m glad they took the plunge into Convoy’s rising pool of quality ales and lagers. More craft beer and a most decadent and inventive take on the almighty burger are good things. So good that I’ve been thinking about that deep-fried gem ever since having it. Now it’s time to share the dish with all of you—along with the recipe thanks to the generosity of Common Theory. Give it a whirl or roll down Convoy and indulge in the genuine article. Either way, you’ll want to do it with a beer, of course.



Chicken-Fried Cheeseburger WITH HAVARTI CHEESE, HORSERADISH, SCALLIONS AND COUNTRY AIOLI
yield: 10 8-ounce burgers

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil - $\frac{1}{2}$ red onion, minced - $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz garlic, minced -5 lbs ground beef - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Worcestershire sauce - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh parsley, minced - $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp smoked paprika -salt and freshly ground pepper to taste - $1\frac{1}{4}$ lbs Havarti cheese, grated - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup prepared horseradish, drained of excess liquid -10 bulbs scallions

-canola oil for frying -2 cups all-purpose flour -2 cups eggs, beaten thoroughly -2 cups panko breadcrumbs -Country Aioli (recipe follows) -10 hamburger buns, sautéed in butter (optional preparation) -French fries

Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and sauté until golden brown, about 6 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool. Place the beef, Worcestershire sauce, parsley, paprika, onion and garlic in a mixing bowl along with the remaining ingredients. Season with salt and pepper, and mix the ingredients until thoroughly combined, Form the mixture into 10 equal-sized patties and place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Place the pan in a freezer for 1 hour so the patties will hold their shape. Mix the cheese and horseradish together. Set aside. Heat the remaining olive oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the scallions and sauté until golden brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and set aside. Preheat an electric fryer or large pot filled halfway with canola oil to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Place the flour, eggs and breadcrumbs in 3 individual shallow bowls. Remove the patties from the freezer. One at a time, coat each patty in flour, then coat in egg, then breadcrumbs. Place each of the breaded patties on a separate baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Once all of the patties are breaded, fry each one at a time by submerging in the oil until they are golden-brown

and a thermometer inserted into the center of the patty reads 160 degrees Fahrenheit, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from the oil and transfer to a baking sheet lined with napkins or paper-towels to drain. Repeat the process with the remaining patties. Place a generous handful of the cheese mixture on top of each patty and transfer the oven. Bake until the cheese is melted. To serve, spread aioli onto the inside of the hamburger buns with aioli. Place the patties on top of the bottom-half of the buns. Top with scallions and the top-half of the buns. Serve immediately with French fries.

Country Aioli yield: 4 cups

-½ cup bacon, crumbled -4 roasted garlic cloves -juice of ½ lemon -½ oz basil, minced -1 tsp smoked paprika -3 cups mayonnaise -salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Place the bacon, garlic, lemon juice, basil and paprika in a food processor. Blend the ingredients until they reach a puréed consistency. Place the mayonnaise in a mixing bowl, season with salt and pepper, and add the bacon purée. Mix until all of the ingredients are thoroughly incorporated.

—RECIPE COURTESY COMMON THEORY PUBLIC HOUSE

Chicken -Fried Awesomeness

EXAMINING COMMON THEORY PUBLIC HOUSE'S BURGER TAKE ON CHICKEN-FRIED STEAK