

*Making It*

## Eli Zabar's Recipe for the Perfect Summer Sandwich Is Fast, Easy and Full of Mayonnaise

By Adrienne Gaffney  
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Zabar's lettuce operation favors arugula and other smaller varieties. "I'm very impatient, and the whole idea of growing a head of lettuce that will take about a month doesn't appeal to me," he says. "We have very limited space so the idea for me was to do something that would grow quickly, and when things are small in nature they tend to be more delicious, more focused, more concentrated." *Paul Quirotiano*

Eli Zabar likes to keep things local. "I grew up on Riverside and 84th and I lived there when I first opened E.A.T, and I was frustrated by the commute from Riverside Drive and 84th to Madison Avenue and 81st. It was horrible," he says about the trek from the Upper West Side to his Upper East Side grocery and pastry shop. Now, the man whose celebrated meats, produce and highly coveted gift baskets have made him New York's most famous grocer lives on the Upper East Side, comfortably at the center of his [culinary empire](#) there — which includes a fine-dining restaurant, three markets, three delis, one wine shop and a recently opened wine bar, none

of which function completely independent of the others. A bustling bakery across the street from the Vinegar Factory, his decommissioned factory-turned-grocery, churns out all the shops' breads and pastries, while a greenhouse on the market's roof produces a bounty of fruits and vegetables to be sold downstairs. "We had all these ovens and we had all this heat that we were sending out into the atmosphere. I thought if I could harness that heat, we would have solved one of the main costs of doing greenhouse growing in the winter, when there isn't any heat and you have to pay for it. We had all this free heat and we were going to use it," Zabar explains, of the gardens that sit on the roofs of his 91st Street bakeries.

A testament to Zabar's approach is his P.L.T. sandwich, a summer favorite — and E.A.T. menu staple — that pairs mixed greens and tomatoes from his rooftop gardens with crispy prosciutto on slices from a freshly baked brioche roll. "It's all me," Zabar says of the sandwich. In the above slideshow, Zabar took T to the Vinegar Factory, where a trip upstairs revealed his greenhouse wonderland; then across the street to the kitchen space where he bakes brioche loaves just wide enough for a decadently savory sandwich; and finally to the newly opened market Eli's Essentials, where customers stared as he hopped behind the counter to bring it all together

At E.A.T., the P.L.T. is served with Zabar's housemade potato chips and a glass of lemonade. "It's something that anybody can do," Zabar says of the sandwich. "You can slice the bread at home, you can slice the tomatoes at home, you can make the salad yourself. It doesn't have to be this salad." Credit Paul Quitoriano

### **Eli Zabar's P.L.T. (Prosciutto, Lettuce and Heirloom Tomato)**

*Yield: 1 sandwich*

Brioche loaf (enough for 2 slices)



1 teaspoon (or more) mayonnaise  
4-6 slices Prosciutto di Parma  
2-3 thick slices heirloom tomato  
Salt and pepper  
A large handful of fresh salad greens

1. Preheat oven to 350. Place a sheet of parchment paper on a baking sheet and lay the prosciutto slices flat on the paper. Bake for around 13 minutes or until crisp. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly.

2. Cut your brioche loaf into slices length-wise; you get a bigger sandwich this way. Toast the slices in the toaster.

3. Spread the mayonnaise generously on both slices, then lay your tomato slices on one piece of bread.

4. Layer the prosciutto on top of the tomatoes. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Top with the greens.

5. Place the other slice of bread on top, then slice the sandwich diagonally. Serve and enjoy!

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Eli Zabar jets around his Upper East Side culinary empire in a van, which, combined with his Blackberry, may be the closest thing he has to an office. Here, he's at the Vinegar Factory, which produces at least 40,000 pounds of bread each day. The brioche loaves, used in his P.L.T. sandwich (available at E.A.T.), are egg washed before spending 30 to 45 minutes in the oven. *Paul Quitoriano*





Zabar grows tomatoes in the greenhouses that sit atop the Vinegar Factory and the adjacent bakery, from April to mid-July — in the months before the local farmers' crops come in. "My whole idea of growing tomatoes was to grow them in the colder seasons when nobody had tomatoes," he says. "And to grow them better!" *Paul Quiutoriano*



"You'll see bees flying around — oh, here's a bee!" Zabar notes. "They're kissing all the little flowers and pollinating them and then those flowers will turn into tomatoes." *Paul Quiutoriano*





The tomatoes grown in the garden are either sent to the markets — the Vinegar Factory, Eli’s Manhattan and Eli’s Farm to Table in Grand Central Station — to be sold as produce, utilized in meals at his restaurant Eli’s Table or cooked into tomato sauce at the Vinegar Factor. *Paul Quirotiano*



“I had the idea I would try to do some lettuces,” Zabar explains. “What happened was the lettuces are the most successful things I’ve ever grown. They very rarely object. They’re pretty resilient to diseases. Sometimes we get some little bugs in them; it’s only protein.” The greenhouses also grow basil, herbs, berries and lemon trees. *Paul Quirotiano*





Zabar makes the short trip from the Vinegar Factory to his wine bar via van. *Paul Quitoriano*



Zabar began making the P.L.T. sandwich years ago when he realized it would make great use of the short ends of the ham, which often go unused. "When you go a store and they actually slice the prosciutto, tell them, 'Oh, just give me the ends,'" he says. "They'll be thrilled. They'll love you!" *Paul Quitoriano*



If using a brioche loaf to make the P.L.T., Zabar recommends cutting it lengthwise rather than crosswise for longer slices that will well serve the hefty sandwich. *Paul Quiutoriano*



This is a generous sandwich," he says of the heaping creation, as he applies a thick coating of mayonnaise to the bread. "It's not like putting sunblock on." *Paul Quiutoriano*





“The real thing is to make a tomato sandwich using tomatoes that are a little broken because when you’re in the sandwich, it tastes just as good, but who sees the fact that they’re a little broken,” Zabar advises, in adherence to his “use everything” mantra. “You always want to put a lot of salt on,” he adds. *Paul Quioriano*



“I like the prosciutto, especially this cut here,” Zabar says. “It’s a little bit milder, it’s not smoky. It’s crispy and I think the sandwich needs a little crunch.” *Paul Quioriano*





"Here comes the most important step of all! You've got to take a lot of this and put it on," Zabar instructs, as he piles on the mixed greens. *Paul Quiutoriano*



To finish, Zabar gives the P.L.T. "a little haircut" to cut down on the messiness of the sandwich (which, truth be told, still remains rather messy). *Paul Quiutoriano*