

Bread's RISING ROLE



Par-baking and finishing bread on location create signature sandwiches that have exceeded all expectations at Atlanta Bread Company.

Tap the surging interest in artisan and whole-grain bread to add flavor, texture and rustic charm to menus

BY PRISCILLA MARTEL

Consumers' interest in artisan and whole-grain bread reflects an appetite for handcrafted, pure and authentic food. Studies by AC Nielsen and Information Resources Inc. indicate that whole-grain and organic breads also have helped boost sales in what has been a stale category. Despite a decrease in the number of loaves sold at retail, fresh bread showed gains in dollar sales in 2006.

In foodservice, bread, an often-overlooked element of mainstream dining, finds itself at a crossroad. Customers are demanding and consuming a wider variety of breads with the full favor of natural leavening and whole grains, but when Wendy's succeeds with a sandwich on "artisan" bread, the word runs the risk of becoming meaningless, much like the marketing buzzwords "gourmet" or "natural."

But chefs and operators can use the true artisan style of baking to enhance flavor throughout the menu, from breadbasket to sandwiches, croutons and bread pudding.

PUTTING THE ART IN ARTISAN

Many credit Lionel Poilâne with putting artisan back into the craft of bread-making. The iconic French loaf — a long, golden wand with a white, open crumb — dates to the 20th century, when modernization of the kneading process during the 1920s ensured airier bread with a softer crumb than was previously available. When bread was rationed and bakers were forced to work with inferior, coarse grains during World War II, historian Jérôme Assire asserts, longing for the white, fluffy loaf intensified.

The post-war advances of more intensive mixing machinery and rack ovens ensured a steady supply of this type of bread, even though flavor often was sacrificed.

Poilâne began working at his father's Parisian bakery in the 1960s and learned to make dark, rustic loaves like those sold by 18th-century bakers. Blending carefully selected flours, using natural yeast, giving the dough a long and slow rise and baking in a wood-fired oven on a stone hearth gave this peasant bread its character. By the 1980s, Poilâne had cataloged vanishing regional bread recipes, which he documented in his book "Guide de L'Amateur du Pain."

Following his lead, other bakers in Paris were inspired to rediscover traditional bread-making. Though Poilâne was killed tragically in a helicopter crash in 2002, his bakery thrives under the direction of his daughter, Appolonia.

AMERICAN ARTISANS

The culinary apprenticeship of some of our most respected artisan bakers — Steve Sullivan of Acme Bakery in Berkeley, Calif., Dan Leader of Bread Alone in upstate New York and Nancy Silverton, founder of La Brea Bakery in Los Angeles — took place in Europe in the 1970s and '80s under Poilâne's spell. The only option for an American seeking to learn about this style of baking was to work alongside bouchers or pick their brains. In the process, they absorbed the essential elements of artisan bread-making:

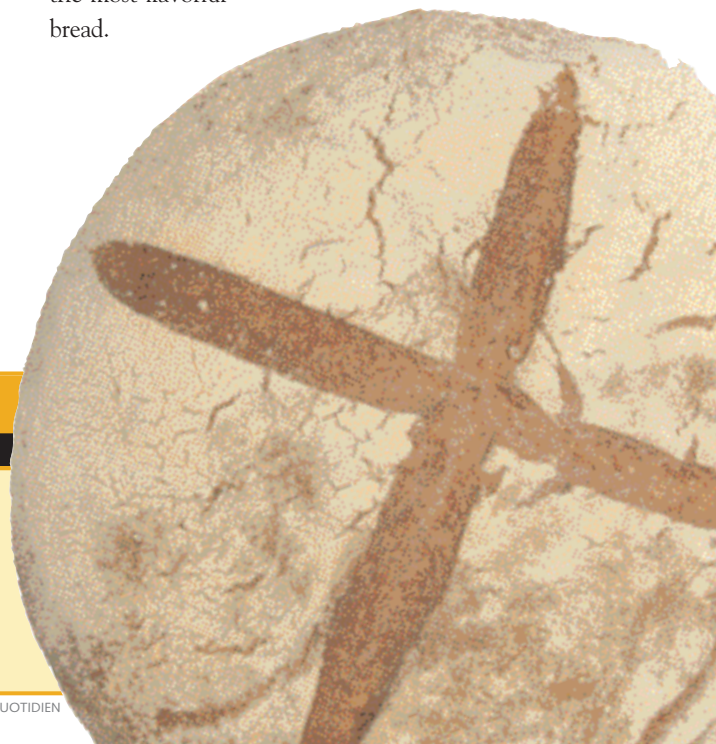
- ▶ Keep milling in mind when selecting blends of stone-ground wheat and grains.
- ▶ Use natural liquid starters, not commercial yeast, and moister dough to produce the most flavorful bread.

QUICK-TAKE

THIS STORY TAKES A LOOK AT:

- ▶ The history of artisan bread, both abroad and at home
- ▶ Techniques, ingredients and equipment used to create distinctive loaves
- ▶ How any restaurant kitchen can make the artisan breads, rolls or crackers that make a meal

LE PAIN QUOTIDIEN



Whole-grain Bread BASICS

Whole-grain bread is made from unrefined flour that contains the bran, germ and endosperm of a grain berry or seed. Traditionally, bread made from 100 percent whole wheat would be heavy, sticky and crumbly, with a pronounced, often bitter taste. Harsh taste in whole wheat can be attributed to the phenolic compounds in its bran.

“White wheat” is a strain with an albino hull and milder flavor when baked into a whole-wheat loaf. Bread labeled “whole white wheat” can have the eye appeal and lighter texture of regular white bread and the nutritional benefits of unprocessed grain.

Bakers are experimenting with some overlooked grains as sources of flavor. Among them are the ancient grains einkorn, emmer and spelt, some of the first ever cultivated. Kamut, related to durham wheat strains found in Egypt and Russia, is a hybrid praised for its rich, nutty flavor. Triticale is a hybrid wheat-and-rye cross often found in animal feed but useful in bread because of its moisture-retaining properties.

And intriguing studies out of Australia suggest that people experience a sensation of fullness when they consume lupin-enriched breads. Lupin is a legume more like peanuts or beans but is high in protein and has a promising future, if these satiety studies prove valid.

- ▶ Knead the dough gently to prevent oxidation.
- ▶ Ferment the dough slowly to allow enzymes to create complex flavors.
- ▶ Gently hand form the dough to preserve its texture and create the irregular holes and rustic appearance that ensure chew with every bite.
- ▶ Bake bread in a hearth oven until it is burnished and caramelized; color equals flavor.

Key bakers imported these craft techniques stateside, and over the next 20 years, American bakers perfected what they’d learned abroad. In 2005, a three-man U.S. team won the Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie, the prestigious international artisan bread competition held annually in

Hand-formed dough creates a rustic appearance and preserves texture, irregular air pockets and a desirable chew in bread.



CANELLE PATISSERIE

Paris. Today approximately 330 degree-granting schools offer baking courses across the United States, up from 157 just 10 years ago. Independent, artisan bakeries dot the culinary landscape in sleepy towns from Asheville to Anchorage, thanks to both small-scale mavericks and large commercial leaders like Panera Bread.

DEBATING THE DEFINITION

Despite the demand for handcrafted breads, once again, equipment advances have blurred the line between artisan and “artisan-style” breads. Take Chicago’s Turano Baking Company, based in Berwyn, Ill.. It began as a small retail bakery in 1962, baking Italian peasant loaves for home delivery. Today an “artisan bread” line produces 1,500 loaves of its 3-pound Pane Turano an hour.

“We used to adapt formulas to accommodate the equipment,” says Giancarlo Turano, one of the company’s owners. “Today we can adapt the equipment to the product we want to make.”

Custom-designed production lines feature stress-free rolling equipment and mechanical rounders that mimic the gentle touch of human hands so that dough retains its irregular cell structure — key to airiness and crust. Recently, Turano installed a 130-foot stone tunnel to automate the hearth baking process.

A better understanding of the technique of par baking — baking bread dough only until yeast activity stops and the starches gelatinize — allows Turano, Ecce Panis of East Brunswick, N.J., and hundreds of other manufacturers to supply the foodservice industry with bread that can be finished on site to appear remarkably fresh.

La Brea Bakery is now the ninth-largest supplier of fresh bread to supermarkets in the United States. All of its bread products — more than 29 million units — are par baked using the same organic starter employed in the original bakery. Through its sale to Irish conglomerate IAWS Group in 2001, La Brea has a consulting relationship with Wendy’s.

Other styles of manufacturing preserve artisan characteristics. Dough for Panera Bread is mixed in 20 fresh-dough plants stationed strategically across the country, then delivered in temperature-controlled trucks to be baked on site, says chef Thomas Gumpel, the company’s director of

research and development. The system must be working flavor magic, because in May, Panera Bread won the Zagat guide's first rating of fast-food restaurants, appealing to 79 percent of survey respondents because of its "fresh-baked breads" and "topnotch sandwiches."

"I don't care if bread is made in a factory," says Abe Faber, co-owner of Clear Flour Bread bakery in Brookline, Mass., and an active member of the Bread Baker's Guild of America. "Just call it what it is. All artisan means is 'made by hand.'"

Although Faber is a craftsman operating a single shop dedicated to authentic, traditional bread, he respects the advances in baking technology. "One problem for the small artisan baker is that bread coming out of a large plant is a better product than it was 10 years ago," he says.

SMALL CRUMBS, LITTLE LUXURIES

With so many choices, operators often misunderstand bread and overlook its importance.

"Bread is the first thing a guest tastes, and you want it to reflect the very best you can produce," says Ciril Hitz, department chair of the International Baking & Pastry Institute at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I., and an award-winning bread baker.

In the traditional Western meal, bread is an accompaniment; its flavor complements a chef's creation. The flavor of carefully crafted French baguettes is subtle, like perfume or cheese, notes French bread authority Professor Steven Kaplan, whose definitive look at bread in France is titled "Good Bread is Back" (Duke University Press, 2006). Chefs looking to enhance rather than detract from their food would be well served to source bread with pleasing organoleptic properties — fresh-baked aromas, crusty and chewy textures and burnished surfaces.

"I make my bread to go with food," notes Faber.

Cuisine-complementing bread also extends to crackers or breadsticks, which can leave a memorable impression and become a signature mark of your cuisine. Patrons at Chef Allen's in Aventura, Fla., have enjoyed his yard-long, hand-rolled breadsticks for years.

A signature bread service that includes varieties with unexpected additions like nuts or herbs can complement a cuisine and create a dining destination.

In Las Vegas, where destination dining is heating up, there's a chariot race between bread carts, the latest trend in the city of excess. Restaurant Guy Savoy in the Augustus Tower at Caesars Palace and L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon at the MGM Grand offer bread service on carts rolled out numerous times over the course of a meal.

A WAY TO SAVE DOUGH

Whether long and fanciful or rough and rustic, bread baked in-house gives the chef ultimate control over ingredients.

"The quality of rolls we had before, even though [sourced] from one of the best companies, was not as good as what we can produce in-house," says Ian Phillips, proprietor of the Copper Beech Inn in Ivoryton, Conn. Phillips contracted with baking consultant and author Charles van Over to use his patented dough-mixing and baking system in the inn's kitchen.

"Our actual costs per cover are less than with outside suppliers of bread," says Phillips, for whom in-house bread required the purchase of a unique mixer and a Bongard deck oven. These big-ticket items proved worth the investment when a *New York Times* reviewer wrote that the baguettes are reason enough to eat at the inn.

Chef-educators such as Johnson & Wales' Hitz believe on-premises bread-making can be accessible to more operators. Hitz created instructional DVDs to show chefs how to make versatile, high-quality bread dough in the confines of any restaurant kitchen.

"Specialized hearth ovens and mixers are not always available," Hitz notes. "My formulas were designed to help chefs bake quality products in convection ovens."



GLOBAL Gluten Creations

Here are a few flavorful combinations of bread and fillings from around the globe

BANH MI — Vietnamese baguette made with wheat and rice flours, filled with pickled vegetables, cilantro and pork or chicken, among other savories

BOCADILLO — a sandwich on a crusty, French-style roll or loaf, stuffed with savories; in Valencia, a favorite filling is Bocado de tortilla con aioli, a Spanish potato-and-egg omelet

CROSTINI — little servings of toasted bread with toppings, as in the Fava Bean Crostini at 2 Amys Neapolitan Pizzeria in Washington, D.C.

CROUSTADE — a thick slice of bread hollowed out to make room for fillings, such as the Croustade of Veal Cheeks and Sweetbreads with Reblochon that chef Laurent Grangien serves at Bistro Laurent in Paso Robles, Calif.

SOPES — discs of corn-flour dough with raised edges that form a fresh pizza-like tortilla; Barton Creek Resort and Spa in Austin, Texas, serves South Texas Wild Boar Sopes with pineapple and ancho puree and pasilla chile coulis

PIADINE — Italian flatbreads cooked on a griddle; at Pizzeria Tra Vigne in Napa Valley, Calif., they are piled high with salad, as in Piadine Caesar, with roasted garlic and hearts of romaine dressed in creamy anchovy dressing

TARTINE — a French open-faced sandwich topped with ingredients as humble as butter and jam or as sophisticated as the tartine of egg salad with capers and anchovies at Le Pain Quotidien in New York

TRAMEZZINI — slender sandwiches served at bars in Italy, where Tramezzini alla Nutella, spread with toasted hazelnut and chocolate, is a common treat

BRANDING WITH BREAD

Chefs use bread as a flavorful way to extend their brand message in diverse concepts. Baleen restaurant at the Grove Isle Hotel & Spa in Miami cleverly exploits the resort's whimsical monkey-themed décor in its signature monkey bread. The pull-apart creation is made with sourdough starter and served at Baleen restaurants system-wide.

“The bread is not sour, just more complex,” chef Jordan Mackey explains. The sourdough also is used to make hamburger buns, mufaletta sandwich rolls and bread pudding.

Bread speaks many languages, with forms native to the cuisine of most countries, from Asia to Latin America. Global versions are slowly changing how Americans dine, especially in emerging grab-and-go segments. Lunchtime crowds queue up for the Vietnamese pork buns at Out the Door in the Ferry Building in San Francisco. Filled with seasoned meat and/or vegetables, they are staples in the Asian kitchen.

Pastry Chef Jennifer Martin recently added Latin-inspired artisan breads to the menus at Cuba Libre Restaurant and Rum Bars in Philadelphia and Atlantic City. The restaurants' breadbasket, called a Canasta de Pan, features hojaldres, a type of filled puff pastry, and a Latin chile-seasoned corn stick, among other items.

The service is so popular that an expanded version is offered on the Cuba Libre menu, all from bread that doesn't require specialized equipment or much space.

“There's nothing special as far as equipment: one table, one convection oven, a mixer, and I work right alongside the prep crew,” says Martin.

BREAD ALONE

European imports are changing the bakery-café landscape. Two bread-centric restaurants are led by traditional bakers exploring the boundaries of volume production. At Le Pain Quotidien, signature rustic loaves support a European-farmhouse atmosphere. A Belgian chain, Le Pain Quotidien now has 14 locations in Manhattan and nine in Southern California.

Bread Bar, with three locations in the Los Angeles area, is the latest in an emerging field of fast-casuals where bread leads the concept. Under the direction of French master baker Eric Kayser, respect for technique is a given. Kayser descends from a bread dynasty and is inventor of the “fermento-levain,” the machine that allows bakers to create and maintain a liquid leaven. His unexpected use of grains such as buckwheat in the Outland Hearth bread and exotic spices is exciting the marketplace around the world.

A baking zeitgeist must be at work, because the Bread Bar at Tabla is another notable bread concept. Tandoori-baked naan, paratha and roti breads are a major component on the menu at this offshoot of Tabla Indian restaurant in New York. These breads are offered in street-food sandwiches or as starters. Waiters recommend pairing the breads with chutney to create an Indian bruschetta-like treat.

There's profit to be made with these dough-based products. Professionals such as Charles van Over estimate that even organic wheat dough costs less than 45 cents per



WHEAT FOODS COUNCIL

The flavor of finely crafted bread is nuanced and meant to complement food, much like a fine wine.

pound. Imagine the margin for a side of bread and chutney that sells for \$8.

THE ARTISAN ADVANTAGE

Artisan and specialty breads help sandwich shops, especially mass-market ones, differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

"In the fast-casual segment, consumers demand more artisan signature items," explains Chris Campagna, marketing director of Atlanta Bread Company. Sales of its new Turkey Club Rustica on "artisan ciabatta" have exceeded expectations. "The bread is hand finished in each location in view of our customers," say Campagna.

Wendy's success with the Frescata sandwich resulted in the best same-store sales for the brand in more than a year and a half, according to the company's July 2006 quarterly report. The bread is called artisan because it is baked in-store from dough delivered from a commissary. And Jack In The Box still promotes and develops new items for its "premium" ciabatta-bread sandwich line.

WHOLE-GRAIN OPPORTUNITIES

Foodservice demand for whole-grain bread is not universal. "Our whole-grain bread sells to those already committed to that kind of eating," says Panera's Gumpel. "But having it there readies the operation for when consumers fall in love with whole grain."

There are signs, however, that demand is increasing. Turano notes that one national

foodservice customer projected 20 percent of its sales would be in whole wheat, but the demand came in at 50 percent.

Efforts from organizations like the Whole Grains Council (WGC) may cause operators to take notice. "We are not advocating that everyone throw out white bread," says council spokesperson Cynthia Harriman. "But if [operators] put whole grains on the menu, they'll see how people react when they have a choice."

Founded by a group of concerned millers, manufacturers and scientists, the WGC is dedicated to increasing awareness of the benefit of whole grain in the diet. The council's "Just Ask" campaign encourages consumers to ask for whole grains when they dine in restaurants. This spring, the group invited restaurants to join in by adding whole grains to their menus.

"We want to break the cycle for chefs who say, 'No one asks for whole grains, so we never have it,'" says Harriman.

Restaurants that serve at least one whole-grain choice on their menu for a month are encouraged to enter a "Just Ask" contest and have their name added to the council's website.

Harriman's experience confirms that proper labeling can help sell whole-grain breads. "An upscale image can be a better way to promote whole-grain products," she notes. "McDonald's has whole-grain bread but calls it 'premium' bread."

Statistics from Mintel's Global New Products Database posted on the WGC website show that in 2007, more than 10 times as many whole-grain products were introduced as in 2000. "Smart chefs can make healthy taste delicious," notes Harriman.

Just as customer expectations for better coffee and greener greens have risen, so will their demand for better breads. Serving bread with no flavor or character is simply no longer acceptable, particularly when really good bread is accessible, purchased or produced in-house. ☺

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- ▶ **GO LONG:** Slender, house-made breadsticks make a signature breadbasket
- ▶ **THE NEW WHITE:** White whole wheat is fluffy enough to please even the youngest diners