

In search of sourdough

Great bread is a must for most meals. When chefs Tony Papas and Michael Klausen couldn't find a sourdough they liked enough to serve in their restaurant, they started their own bakery business.

When chefs Tony Papas and Michael Klausen decided to serve sourdough bread to diners at the now-defunct Bayswater Brasserie in Sydney little did they know that it would be the first step of a journey that would see them become one of Australia's leading wholesale bakeries, supplying around 600 restaurants, cafes and hotels with artisan bread.

Unable to source sourdough they were happy with, Papas set out to learn how to make it himself, studying what was happening in France and travelling to San Francisco to work at Chez Panisse, a restaurant which is renowned for its bread. Back in Australia

Papas and Klausen experimented for six months, reworking a recipe for Levain bread donated by Steve Sullivan, Chez Panisse's first in-house baker, and playing around with various sourdough starters (also known as "ferment") until they found one they were happy with.

After debuting the sourdough loaf at the Bayswater Brasserie in 1996, the pair added several other breads to their repertoire, which they baked in the small kitchen above the restaurant. A hit with diners, word soon spread about the restaurant's bread and by 2000, Papas and Klausen found themselves supplying 20 other restaurants seven days a week. Having outgrown their tiny

kitchen, they realised that producing the bread range was a business in its own right and The Brasserie Bread Company was formed.

A labour of love, baking artisan sourdough bread is both labour-intensive and time-consuming. The method uses a natural fermentation process similar to that of making wine and takes three days to complete.

"First we have to prepare the starter, our yeast culture, which takes a whole day," explains Klausen (pictured). "We use that to make a dough, and that dough has a very slow proving process. After the bread is shaped it gets put into a retarder, which is a kind of cool room, where it sits for 18 hours, before it's baked. After baking it has to sit before at least four to five hours before its ready to serve."

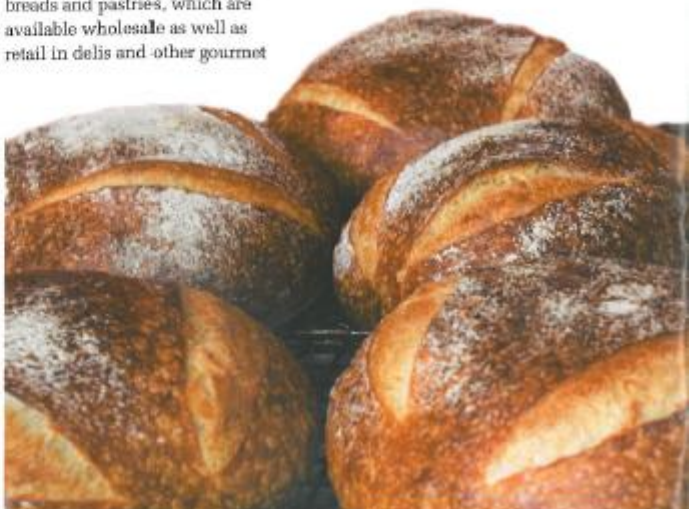
With so much work involved, it's little wonder then that so many restaurants leapt at the chance to outsource their bread making.

Almost 12 years on Brasserie Breads produces dozens of varieties of breads and pastries, which are available wholesale as well as retail in delis and other gourmet

providores; has a popular cafe at its Banksmeadow headquarters, and runs a range of baking classes for both amateurs and food professionals in a dedicated training school. As of next month, Brasserie Bread will start distributing to foodservice in Victoria and open a cafe retail shop in Melbourne.

In addition to the original sourdough loaves, the range of Brasserie Bread products available for wholesale distribution includes a Light Rye Sourdough, Quinoa & Soya Bread, Spelt & Honey Banana Bread, Seeded Baguette, Levain Roll, Broche Bureger buns and French Mountain bread (which was a medallist in the Artisan category in *Delicious* magazine's 2011 Produce Awards, announced last month).

"When we started, there was no tradition of artisan baking in Australia," says Klausen. "There were a few people doing it but most of the breads that were considered 'artisan' were really just Italian-style breads, such as ciabatta. It was a great opportunity for us and



perfection



we took it at full speed."

With the popularity of Brasserie Bread evident, the company soon found themselves joined by other artisan bread makers such as Sonoma and Fuel. Far from being upset however, Klausen welcomes the competition.

"Competition is very healthy and is not just a result of increased demand for breads such as sourdough, but also a major reason why there is such widespread demand for these

products," says Klausen.

Klausen has himself been actively involved in training many of the artisan bakers currently working in Australia, both through his work with Brasserie Bread's Training School and through his role as a board member of the Baking Industry Association.

"I have spent a lot of time talking to bakers about how they can move into making 'real' breads, rather than going the opposite way which is fast and cheap mass-production, and pre-mixed flours" he says. "It's a very hard business for bakeries that are competing against Coles and Woolies. For bakers to be able to see that there's another way of doing business is fantastic.

"I gave a talk about artisan bread at a food fair in Narrabri (in North West NSW) not long ago and the local baker there emailed me afterwards to say he'd just started making a sourdough bread and his customers really like it."

Closer to home, Klausen points to the example of the duo behind Sydney's Bourke Street Bakery, whose range of mostly sourdough breads has developed an almost cult-like following since they opened the doors of their first store in 2004. A fourth retail store and cafe will open

in inner-Sydney suburb Potts Point next month.

"They [Paul Allam and David McGuinness] actually met each other while working here," says Klausen. "They're both chefs so they've come at the business from a different perspective. They have a great sense of flavour and structure and all those sorts of things that are important in food."

Along with the burgeoning artisan bread industry, Klausen also points to a change in the way foodservice operators think about bread.

"The main change we're seeing is that cafes are starting with nice bread and then building the sandwich from there, rather than the other way round," he says. "You can see it happening with burgers too; chefs are sourcing the perfect burger bun, and then thinking about what ingredients to put in it."

While the most popular choice for Brasserie Bread's foodservice clients remains the company's signature organic white sourdough batard – a white loaf with a sweet flavour, chewy texture and a

crunchy crust – Klausen suggests that chefs run the risk of getting left behind if they don't embrace other varieties of bread.

"Australia is still a white bread country but it's starting to change," he says. "We sell more grain and wholemeal bread in our retail stores than white bread, and also a lot of wholemeal and grain breads into cafes but with restaurants it's still pretty much all white bread."

Figures from industry analysts IBISWorld which put the growth of premium wholemeal and grain breads in the "vicinity of 10 to 15 per cent over at least the past five years" suggest that Klausen's observations are spot on. He predicts that German-style breads such as light rye breads will be the next big thing and that consumer demand for organic breads which are perceived to be "cleaner" and healthier will rise, presenting an opportunity for savvy chefs to use it as a selling point.

"Organic is a very important factor for the retail side of our business," he says. "But you don't often see organic sourdough listed on menus."



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