

Good Living

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PARIS MATCH

One man's quest to make the perfect French loaf

INSIDE: Fish and chips, chia seeds, squab, rob roy

COVER STORY | HELEN GREENWOOD

A lust for the perfect crust

A baker's mountainous personal challenge produces an outstanding artisan loaf.

PEOPLE preserve a memory in a photo, in writing, even in a recipe. Michael Klausen has recreated a nostalgic moment in a loaf. It took him a year to perfect.

Klausen's French Mountain Bread is a hell of a memory, weighing in at a hefty 1.8 kilograms. The impressively proportioned sourdough was inspired by the famous Poilane loaf Klausen first tasted as a young chef in the early 1980s while doing the obligatory food tour of Paris.

"I was trying to recreate a flavour that I remember, sitting in cafes in Paris and seeing Polaine's bread on every menu," says Klausen, co-owner of Brasserie Bread.

"I was on Place de la Madeleine, where Fauchon is, and couldn't afford to buy anything in the shops. So I sat in a cafe and saw this sign saying 'Poilane bread' and ordered it as toast and jam. I really enjoyed it. The bread was complex; the crust and crumb and flavour stayed with you. You could use it in a sandwich and toasted and the slices were soft and big."

At the time, Lionel Poilane was pursuing his father's dream of toppling the silky crumb and varnished crust of the classic white-flour baguette from its perch. The younger Poilane had finally converted Parisians, still recoiling from the dark, dingy breads they had to eat during the World War II German occupation, to a 1.9 kilogram country bread called a *miche* or *pain Poilane*.

Poilane's *miche* was produced using stone-ground flour, natural fermentation and a wood-fired oven. More importantly, from Klausen's point of view, this now-famous signature sourdough loaf is made from a special flour milled to remove only 85 per cent of the wheat bran.

"I couldn't work out how to make the bread until I found out how the French flour was made and is still made for this product," he says. "I had to work with a

mill, [Queensland-based] Kialla, to recreate the style. With most flours you keep sifting until the bran is taken out. This flour puts back 13 per cent of the wheat bran that has been extracted."

Once he got the flour right, Klausen had to sort out the question of fermentation. The higher bran content was wreaking havoc with his customary baking methods, cutting the gluten which aerates the bread, and making it too dense, too heavy.

He hit upon the idea of soaking the flour in water for 24 hours to soften and kick-start the breakdown of the bran. To this porridge, he adds Brasserie Bread's 14-year-old starter culture that continues the fermentation process.

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Michael Klausen

He then uses the artisanal technique of mixing the dough in short, slow cycles and lots of water to hydrate the flour. Called *autolyse*, this practice, he says, "releases the minerals from the flour and creates a longer-lasting crumb structure and a creamy, oatmeal colour".

Then he hit another snag. The soaking helped but not enough.

"Things were going wrong until I added the salt at the beginning of the soaking, which is the opposite of what you do in bread baking," Klausen says. "Usually, you add the salt late in the mixing process. Adding the salt early preserves the bran and stabilises it so it doesn't go off."

Murray River salt is added to the



More than a handful ... Michael Klausen's French Mountain Bread weighs 1.8kg. Photo: Marco Del Grande

specially milled high-extraction organic wholemeal flour, which is topped up with about nine per cent of slow-ground, stone-milled wholemeal flour, and fermentation continues overnight.

The cold, slow fermentation slows the activity of the yeast and develops the bread's key characteristics, its sweetness and complexity. When baked, the sugars in the crust caramelize further and turn this bread into a children's delight.

The abundant measurements and name of this French Mountain Bread reflect

another memory that tumbled into Klausen's equation. "I worked in the Alps as a young man and we used to buy breads that looked like this, though not as big," he says.

If you haven't got a mountain-sized family to feed, wrap the loaf in a cotton or linen cloth and it will keep for a week. It will also freeze and thaw brilliantly.

French Mountain Breads, 1.8 kg round, \$16 and 700 g batard-shaped (oblong), \$6.50, Brasserie Bread, 1737 Botany Road, Banksmeadow, 1300 966 845.

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