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a round the late nineties, the French rediscovered bread—not just any old bread, but the bread that, these days, is offered by exceptional artisan bakers. The use of natural leavens and quality flours, the alliance of tradition and technology, the inventiveness—these are some of the reasons for the renaissance. Tired of soulless commercial products, consumers now want to understand how their bread is made, and this book is a response to those demands.

It is a short journey from the quest for good bread to making it yourself, and renowned French artisan baker Éric Kayser wants you to take that step. His goal for you is ambitious because he invites you to throw yourself into the process of making bread using natural leaven. You will easily find the ingredients you need for the recipes in this book in good supermarkets and specialist stores. You already have an oven. If you don’t want to knead by hand you can use an electric stand mixer. If you work with good ingredients, you are already more than halfway there. For the rest, there are the step-by-step explanations of the recipes, which you can follow in Massimo Pessina’s close-up photographs.

Éric Kayser, who runs many bakeries in France and abroad, receives a constant stream of requests from private individuals who want to spend a night in the bakery, baking bread. This book demonstrates his eagerness to satisfy the urge that many of us have to touch and feel dough with our own hands and, through making it ourselves, to understand what bread really is. “People today are seeking authenticity in all kinds of things,” he explains. “And what could be better than bread, when it is made honestly, with no trickery or artifice, to convey this feeling of authenticity?”
I come from a long line of bakers originating in Alsace in France. My family is from the Franche-Comté, specifically from a town called Lure, where my father practiced the craft and passed it to me. As a child, I loved the time that I spent with him in the bakery and I always saw myself following in his footsteps—but in a different way, somehow combining the job with my childhood dreams of traveling the world. Although my father was happy in his work, I had the impression that he was tied to his bakery. The image of the artisan baker, working seven days a week and part of the nights, will either entice or deter you. I persisted, starting an apprenticeship in Fréjus, at Gérard Levant’s bakery. There I learned how to mix the dough, how to make the leaven, how to put bread in the oven with a baker’s peel.

Levant was a good teacher who passed on to me the love of work well done. At that time, there were no restrictions on working hours for minors, and I often started before 1 a.m. One time, I took a girl out to go dancing and explained that I would disappear by midnight, like Cinderella. When she asked why, I told her that I was a baker... and the spell was broken. But while these can be the drawbacks of the occupation, they did not discourage me.

While doing my military service I took the opportunity of signing up as a conscript in Lebanon, where I joined the blue berets of the UNFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon). That experience only reaffirmed my desire to see the world. On returning to France, I joined the Compagnons du Devoir (“Companions of Duty”), a workers’ association that offered apprentices opportunities to further their training and to travel. The chance to gain practical knowledge while traveling appealed to me. Collective life had many rules. My daily routine comprised a total of 10 hours of work, on top of which I had 5-6 hours of lessons—or either giving or receiving them—as well as various tasks and duties to carry out within the community. I completed my “Tour of France” in four years, earning on graduation the name Franc-Comtois le Décidé (“The resolute Franc-Comtois”).

Living with others, sharing, receiving, giving: these are the values most at risk in young people, who often prefer to shut themselves in their rooms playing video games. I learned from the Compagnons the desire to do good, as well as tenacity and a love of honest work. My own experiences instilled in me a desire to help prevent apprentices going astray in the world, to teach them how to respect others and to earn respect themselves. I believe in humankind. Within every lost soul, there is always something good that will help him find his way, provided he allows himself to be helped. I am absolutely delighted that the Compagnons du Devoir is now open to women, which was not the case in my day. Some of them have become remarkable stonemasons or bakers.

At the request of the Companionship, I was asked to help develop training programs for the future. At that time, I was already running training courses and work-placement schemes for the Institut National de la Boulangerie Pâtisserie (the INBP, or the National Institute of Baking and Pastry-Making—France’s leading technical college for bakers). These internships operated within the framework of the Centres de Formation d’Apprentis (CFA, or Centers for the Training of Apprentices) and then shifted to bakeries. Over the course of two to three nights, we would show bakers how to organize their work. It was a question of not hurting people’s feelings and I found the experience character-building.

In the course of these training sessions Patrick Castagna (a greatly valued trainer by INBP) and I began to realize that bakers who had abandoned natural leavens after the war wanted to go back to using them, but did not know how.

So together, in 1992, we created a baking consultancy (Panis Victor) and started to develop a concept for a machine that would be capable of handling natural leavens. The gradual adoption of natural leavens by French bakers meant that millers were starting to offer us bakers ancient varieties of high-quality wheat flour that had been abandoned because of low yields. The entire industry, from field to bakery, began to be questioned. We developed the concept for our Fermentolevain machine in association with the bakery division of the Swedish company Electrolux. It meant a great deal of traveling around the world to launch our machines. Fermentolevain won the Innovation Award at Europain 1994.

On 13 September, 1996, I opened my first bread shop at 8 rue Monge in Paris—partly inspired by memories of my father’s bakery. I wanted to reproduce a child’s picture book image of the traditional bakery, complete with a bread oven built on a hearth of firebricks. We were resolved to banish people’s feelings and the spell was broken. While these can be the drawbacks of the occupation, they did not discourage me.
KNEADING IN A STAND MIXER

Put the flour and water in the bowl and mix for 4 minutes at low speed. Remove the bowl from the machine and cover it with a damp cloth. Leave to rest for 1 hour, then add the starter, fresh yeast, and salt. Knead with the dough hook for 4 minutes at low speed, then for 7 minutes at high speed.

KNEADING BY HAND

Put the flour on a work surface or in a mixing bowl and make a large well in the center. Pour in two-thirds of the water and mix until all the flour has been incorporated. Leave to rest for 1 hour under a damp cloth, then incorporate the rest of the water, the starter, fresh yeast, and salt. Knead the dough until it becomes smooth and elastic.

Shape into a ball and cover with a damp cloth. Let rise for 1 hour 30 minutes. It will have increased in volume by the end of the rising time.

Dust the work surface. Divide the dough into 3 equal pieces. Fold each piece over on itself, pulling gently to stretch into a longish log. Cover with a damp cloth and leave to rest for 30 minutes.

Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, use the palm of your hand to flatten it gently. With the long side facing you, fold in a third towards the center and press along the edge with your fingertips [1]. Swivel the dough 180 degrees. Fold in the other long edge so that it overlaps in the center and press with the heel of your hand. Fold one half on top of the other, and seal the edges together with the heel of your hand [2].

With lightly floured hands, roll the baguette out to 21 inches (55 cm) long, then pinch each end into a point [3]. Shape the other 2 baguettes the same way.

Carefully lift the baguettes onto a lightly floured baker’s cloth, seams underneath. Separate them by making folds in the cloth. Cover with a damp cloth and leave to proof for 1 hour 40 minutes, by which time the baguettes will have increased in volume [4].

Place a baking sheet on the bottom shelf of the oven and preheat to 450°F (230°C). Gently place the baguettes, seam down, on another baking sheet lined with parchment (baking) paper. Dust with flour and make 4 evenly spaced oblique slashes along the length of each baguette [5]. Just before putting the baguettes in the oven, pour 50 g (scant ¼ cup) of water onto the preheated baking sheet. Bake for 20 minutes.

Remove from the oven and leave to cool on a wire rack.
KNEADING IN A STAND MIXER
Put the flour, water, starter, fresh yeast, salt, sugar, and egg in the mixing bowl. Knead with the dough hook for 4 minutes at low speed, then for 3 minutes at high speed. Add the butter and knead at high speed for another 3 minutes.

KNEADING BY HAND
Put the flour on a work surface or in a mixing bowl and make a large well in the center. Pour in half the water, then add the starter, fresh yeast, salt, sugar, and egg. Mix well, then add the remaining water and knead until all the flour is incorporated. Add the butter and knead the dough until it becomes smooth and elastic.

Put the dough onto a floured work surface. Use your hands to flatten and roll it into a rough oblong. Use a dough cutter to divide the dough into 9 equal pieces. Cover with a damp cloth and leave to rest for 15 minutes.

Roll each piece of dough under your hands to form nicely rounded balls. Dust the tops with flour, then push your finger into the center of each ball to form a hole. Gradually stretch the holes and widen them to a diameter of around 1 inch (2.5 cm) to create the traditional bagel ring. Cover the bagels with a damp cloth and leave to proof for 30 minutes.

Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Reduce to a simmer, then lower in the bagels, 1 at a time, with a slotted spoon. Cook for 1 minute 30 seconds, then turn the bagels over in the simmering water and cook for another 1 minute 30 seconds. They will expand as they cook.

Let the bagels drain on a wire rack set above the sink. Cook the remaining bagels the same way.

Prepare 2 large plates, 1 covered with poppy seeds, the other with sesame seeds. In a small bowl, lightly beat the egg. Brush the cooked bagels lightly with beaten egg, then roll them in poppy or sesame seeds. Leave some plain. Arrange them on baking sheets lined with parchment (baking) paper.

Place another baking sheet on the bottom shelf of the oven and preheat to 400°F (200°C). Just before putting the bagels in the oven, pour 50 g (scant ¼ cup) of water onto the preheated baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes.

Remove from the oven and leave to cool on a wire rack.

Makes 9 bagels, each about 100 g

TIMINGS
• Mixing & kneading: 10 min
• First rising: 1 h
• Resting time: 15 min
• Proofing: 30 min
• Boiling: 30 min
• Baking: 15 min

INGREDIENTS
• 500 g (4 cups) all-purpose (plain) flour, plus extra for dusting
• 200 g (scant 1 cup) water at 68°F (20°C)
• 100 g (scant ½ cup) liquid sourdough starter (or 25 g [2 tablespoons] dry sourdough starter)
• 5 g (1 ½ teaspoons) fresh baker’s yeast
• 10 g (2 teaspoons) salt
• 20 g (2 tablespoons) sugar
• 2 eggs
• 25 g (2 tablespoons) softened butter
• Poppy and sesame seeds for topping
Bagels

Specialty Breads
KNEADING IN A STAND MIXER
Put the flour, water, starter, fresh yeast, salt, milk powder and sugar in the bowl. Knead with the dough hook for 5 minutes at low speed [1], then for 7 minutes at high speed. Mix in the butter [2] and knead for another 3 minutes. Add the walnuts and mix in briefly at low speed.

KNEADING BY HAND
Put the flour on a work surface or in a mixing bowl and make a large well in the center. Pour in half the water, then add the starter, fresh yeast, salt, milk powder, and sugar. Mix well, then add the rest of the water and blend until all the flour has been incorporated. Add the butter and knead the dough until it becomes smooth and elastic. Add the walnuts at the end of the kneading.

Shape the dough into a ball, cover with a damp cloth, and leave to rise for 1 hour 30 minutes. Midway through the rise, deflate the dough by folding it in half. It will have increased in volume by the end of the rising time.

Dust the work surface. Divide the dough into 5 equal pieces and shape them into balls. Cover with a damp cloth and leave to rest for 15 minutes.

Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, use the palm of your hand to flatten it gently into a rough oval. With the long side facing you, fold in a third towards the center and press along the edge with your fingertips. Swivel the dough 180 degrees. Fold in the other long edge so that it overlaps in the center and press again. Fold one half on top of the other and seal the edges together with the heel of your hand [3]. With lightly floured hands, roll the dough out to form a plump oval. Shape the other 4 loaves the same way.

Score the loaves diagonally in a "sausage" cut [4] (see page 41). Place them, seams underneath, on a floured baker’s cloth. Separate them by making folds in the cloth. Cover with a damp cloth and leave to proof for 1 hour 15 minutes.

Place a baking sheet on the bottom shelf of the oven and preheat to 450°F (230°C). Arrange the loaves on another baking sheet lined with parchment (baking) paper. Just before putting the loaves in the oven, pour 50 g (scant ¼ cup) of water onto the preheated baking sheet. Bake for 17 minutes.

Remove from the oven and leave to cool on a wire rack.
husks (bran*) are present in the fermentation*.

into carbon dioxide, which makes very rapidly in sugar-rich environments. This is a European method used to determine a flour’s type (‘T’ grade). It represents the mineral residue left after flour is burnt at a temperature of 1452°F (900°C). The higher the T grade, the more husks (bran*) are present in the flour, making it more “complete.”

BAKER’S LAME
A razor-sharp baker’s knife, usually mounted on a special handle, used to score* dough prior to baking. BAKER’S PEEL
A wooden paddle used to slide dough—especially flatbreads and pizzas—into the oven.

Baker’s Yeast
A single-celled micro-organism (Saccharomyces cerevisiae) used to leaven bread. It is capable of reproducing and multiplying very rapidly in sugar-rich environments, converting sugars into carbon dioxide, which makes the dough rise.

Banneton
A wicker proofing basket, usually lined with heavy linen. Used for proofing* particularly for very wet doughs.

Base Temperature
Used to calculate the temperature of dough after kneading, usually 75–77°F (24–25°C), by adding the ambient (room) temperature to the temperature of the flour and water.

Bassingine
A process whereby a quantity of water is held in reserve and then added at the end of kneading to loosen a very stiff dough.

Boule
To shape dough into balls. The French boule (round loaf) gets its name from this word.

Bran
The outer husk or hull of cereals, which can be removed or retained during grinding. The bran contains the bulk of a grain’s fiber.

COUche
Heavy-weight linen fabric (also known as a baker’s cloth) used for proofing*. Folds in the cloth keep the pieces of dough separate and prevent them from touching.

Crumb
A term used to define the inside of the bread. By looking at the cell structure of the crumb, bakers can analyze the hydration, flour types, and yeast amounts.

Deflate
To release air from the dough during the first fermentation (first rise). This is achieved by folding the dough over on itself. It helps strengthen the gluten structure and helps the dough rise more effectively during the second fermentation* (proofing*).

Fermentation
An organic chemical activity whereby sugars contained in the flour are transformed in an anaerobic environment (without air) through the action of yeasts and enzymes (see amylase*).

In baking, the fermentation is “alcoholic,” in that the simple sugars (glucose, maltose) are broken down by yeasts into carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol. Carbon dioxide then expands the dough, while the alcohol gives the bread its flavor.
dioxide causes the dough to rise. The fermentation comprises two stages: first rise* after kneading, and proofing* after shaping.

FIRST RESTING
Also known as autolysis, this is a pre-fermentation resting period, prior to kneading. This process helps the gluten* develop more quickly, gives a more elastic dough, and reduces the length of kneading time.

FIRST RISE
The first period of fermentation* that begins after kneading but before the dough is divided into pieces and shaped*. It is done at room temperature in a draft-free spot and can include a period in the refrigerator.

GLAZE
To create a glossy appearance on the surface of a bread. Often achieved by brushing the dough with a lightly beaten egg just prior to baking.

GLOTTEN
The elastic matter formed in dough by the proteins (mainly gliadins and glutenins), when kneaded with liquid. Found in nearly all cereals used for bread. Kneading* develops the gluttons into strands that form a gluteninaceous network. These contain the carbon dioxide that expands during the fermentation and subsequent baking.

HYDRATION
The ratio of water to flour in a given recipe.

KNEAD
The process of working a dough, by hand or in a stand mixer, to evenly blend the ingredients and to develop the gluten. Kneading* by hand involves pushing and pulling the dough on a work surface, turning it and shaping* it to aerate the dough and help it form a gluteninaceous network. As the structure changes, the dough becomes smoother and more elastic.

LEAVEN
To incorporate a rising agent—natural starter, yeast, baking powder, etc.—into a dough to make it ferment and rise. Natural leaveners, such as sourdough starters, use natural "wild" yeasts in the dough to start the fermentation*.

POOLISH
A pre-ferment (starter) made with a mix of equal parts of water and flour. Used in conjunction with fresh baker’s yeast.

PROOF/PROOFING TIME
Known as l’apprêt, this is the second stage of fermentation, which begins after the dough has been portioned and shaped, and continues until it is put in the oven. It is done at room temperature in a draft-free spot.

REFRESH
To keep a natural starter alive by feeding it with flour and water.

REST
To set a dough aside after kneading* or working. This allows the gluten* which will tighten as the dough is worked, to relax.

SCORING
The process of making shallow cuts or slashes, in various designs, along the surface of the dough. Usually done just prior to baking. Scoring helps to control the way the bread rises as it bakes.

SEAM
The point at which the edges of the dough—both in a ball and a long shape—meet to form a closure, or seam.

SHAPING
The process which gives the dough its form. Often done in two stages, but it is the second, more precise shaping, that creates the final appearance of the baked loaf.

SIMMER
To cook in liquid just below the boiling point, around 208°F (98°C). Small bubbles rise through the liquid and break the surface.

STALE
Over time, moisture is gradually lost from bread and it becomes stale. As it does so, the bread becomes hard and both aroma and flavor deteriorate.

STEAM INJECTION
A process of introducing water into an even to create steam as the dough goes in to bake. This is achieved by splashing water onto a preheated baking sheet.

STEET
To immerse and soak seeds or fruit (usually dried) in a liquid to soften and rehydrate them.

TOURAGE
A term used in French patisserie, whereby butter is rolled out and folded into a dough to enrich and lighten the texture as it bakes.

WELL
A large hollow created in the center of a mound of flour (on a work surface or in a bowl) to contain liquid ingredients. The dry ingredients are gradually worked into the liquid, so as to create a smooth, well-blended paste.

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The Larousse Book of Bread

Éric Kayser

Step-by-step home baking recipes from France’s foremost culinary resource, Larousse, and Parisian master baker Éric Kayser.

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