

The Baking Syndicate Zine

Yours Bread

by The Baking Syndicate

We say "sourdough is the only real bread" because it draws attention to the fakes thrust on us by industrial capitalism and because slow, polycultural fermentation is the truest way to create something tasty and nutritious from grains.

Our slow process mean more attention, and everything - including bread - loves attention.

Our dough contains only starter, Canterbury flour, water and sea salt. That is to say we don't add commercial yeast, dough "improvers", enzymes or malt - with proper fermentation none of these are necessary. You might notice our bread isn't very sour and that's because we select for yeasts in our starters by using them while young and feeding them a little wee bit of (organic fair trade raw cane) sugar. The wild diversity of the microbial friends in our starters means various agents of fermentation, giving us easy digestibility and leading to a variety of biological byproducts to create complex and sensational flavours.

Our main starter, The Manager, was born in September 2021 in Tāmaki Makaurau while Carl was still in MIQ, started on flour from Millmore Downs. Granny, used for our dark and seedy loaves, is from mid-2023 has a microbial population harvested from the bottom of a bucket of our wild fermented (yeah, sourdough booze) Yours-pressed apple cider (from which we create vinegar and laughter).

We use a high proportion of starter in our mix (~15% of the total dough weight) to get things off to a roaring start and ferment our dough overnight in the chiller ("cold bulk fermentation") because slow is tasty.

The next day we divide and shape by hand and bake when the Manager says so. We watch the dough, not the clock.

We do all this in a little room out the back with 2 cheap old pizza ovens and an ancient German spiral mixer called Heidi Crumb.

Our Loaves

These are the loaves we usually bake. We're always experimenting because it's fun to play. % values are baker percentages: a proportion of the total flour weight.

Bastards

700g / our blend of stone ground and roller milled white flours from Canterbury / 71% hydration
Our most popular loaf is the sourdough emoji if there was one. A hearth-baked loaf with a thick crust, a variable but usable crumb, a big ear and pointy ends. The name come from the French loaf the bâtard, mythically a crossbreed between the baguette and the boule.

Bricks

700g / our blend of stone ground and roller milled white flours from Canterbury / 71% hydration
Bake a bastard in a tin and you get a tighter crumb that your butter won't fall through, a more tender crust and a more orderly sandwich.

Beefies

1000g / our blend of stone ground and roller milled white flours from Canterbury / 71% hydration
A bigger rounder crusty hearth loaf that has been allowed to develop a wilder crumb and is scored different every time.

Boodies

Various sizes / our blend of stone ground and roller milled white flours from Canterbury / 85% hydration
A very hydrated bread with a boofy, squishy crumb and lovely dusty crust. At its best sliced lengthways for an epic sando. Ciabatta means slipper in Italian and Frances calls her slippers "Booties"

Brannies

700g / 100% stone ground wholemeal / 10% nz linseed / 84% hydration
A whole bunch of whole grains and a big load of nz-grown seeds. Hearty, moist crumb and branful taste. Baked in a tin and raised using our apple cider starter Granny. Move over Vogels.

The Bread-shaped object problem

80% of the bread Aotearoa is made using the Chorleywood Bread Process. Also called the "no time" method, the CBP involves high speed mixing and (in its modern form) a bevy of enzymes and "dough improvers." It can turn flour into a sliced and packaged product in 3 and a half hours. But: The problem here is that grains have stuff in them that isn't food (phytic acid and other anti-nutrients) that inhibit proper digestion and block the body's ability to extract the good stuff - this is why eating a bunch of supermarket bread makes your tummy feel weird. Bread made via the CBP is [shown to increase](#) the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome. But why make such shit food? The CBP, because of its short fermentation, allows the use of low protein (read: poor quality) wheat and of course the fast turnaround and easy mechanisation make for fantastic scalability. Yep: they do it because it's cheaper. That stuff in the supermarket is not bread, just a bad fake: a bread-shaped object.

Time is an Ingredient

If grains are so bad for you then how come many human societies through the millennia have relied on them as a staple crop? First: The grains themselves contain enzymes that will begin to break down a lot of the bad stuff - it just requires the introduction of water and some time. Second: many people for many thousands of years have been leavening their bread. Leavening is the process of fermentation that makes bread rise. Before the isolation and selective breeding of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* that began in the 19th century, everyone was using some kind of natural leavening - known primarily in the Anglosphere as "sourdough."

The sourdough process usually involves capturing a variety of resident microbes from wherever you are and creating a stable community - called a starter or levain or bug - that you use to ferment your bread. The variety in the average sourdough starter is vast, and each is unique, but they usually consist mainly of *Saccharomyces* and *Candida* yeasts and *Lactobacillus* bacteria. When the starter is fed - usually with flour - the various microbes rush to eat the bits they love the most, creating heaps of gas (the puff), a bit of acid (hence the sour in sourdough) and breaking down all kinds of stuff in the process.

Many people who experience digestive trouble with industrial wheat products report less issue or none at all when consuming naturally leavened breads. This is backed up by research showing that sourdough fermentation improves digestibility by reducing: phytic acid (blocks the uptake of minerals), FODMAPs (short chain carbohydrates that can be hard to digest), ATIs (α -amylase/trypsin inhibitors - trigger an immune response in some people), and gluten. The longer the fermentation, the more digestible the bread becomes.

A perceived drawback with this method is that you're on the starter's clock. Our main starter is named The Manager for this reason. Even the most active starter cannot match the speed of a big dose of commercial bakers yeast, let alone the CBP and - as the greedy people of this world like to remind us - time is money. But all the corners that are cut in the various parts of the industrial baking supply chain end up as problems externalised to the biosphere - including your gut.

Gluten is Good

We love wheat. We love it because it represents a long history of human involvement with the botanosphere. The wild plants related to wheat (and its popular cousins barley, rye and spelt) are kind of hard to eat: their seed heads fall off with the slightest breeze as soon as they're yum. Luckily some clever people many thousands of years ago started selectively breeding wheat so the seeds stayed stuck so we can bundle it up and carry it somewhere else so we can whack it on something to pop the seeds off (threshing), blow away the chaff (winnowing) and smash it up (milling).

Wheat also contains gluten. The "viscoelastic" properties of gluten are those that allow its working into all manner of fun shapes and, crucially, its ability to trap gas and stretch as that gas expands with heat: allowing the puff we all know and love. It's these magic properties that have spawned a massive variety of leavened bread traditions and methodologies across huge parts of the human world.

It also so happens that Canterbury is a great place to grow wheat: flat, soil's still ok, hot(ish) summer with long days, not too dry (mostly), not too wet (mostly). Yield for milling wheat is about 9-10 tonnes a hectare - among the highest in the world - compared to 2-3 tonnes a hectare in Australia - where most of the wheat eaten in New Zealand comes from (it's cheaper).

So what's our bread made from? Some our flour is supplied by Farmers Mill in Timaru, an independent grower-owned mill that only processes grain grown in South Canterbury. We use their roller-milled Pioneer Spray Free flour, which is grown without the use of chemical sprays, though it "may have had synthetic fertilisers used at certain points in the growth cycle". We also source flour from Minchin's Milling, a cropping farm and mill in Sheffield, west of Christchurch. They've built their own traditional stone mill in an effort to smash their grains in a way that retains more flavour and nutrition than modern roller milling. They grow their wheat in rotation with legumes, brassicas and livestock to maintain fertility and plant biodiversity.

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