



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

All about bread: Joe Ortiz of Gayle's Bakery fame has written a book, 'The Village Baker,' for the professional and home baker alike.

Wonders of bread

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MAN MAY NOT live by bread alone, but Joe Ortiz is giving it his best effort. In fact, he's spent the past few years working on his new book, "The Village Baker," a 264-page illustrated guide that's surely destined to become a bread baker's bible (\$21.95, Ten Speed Press, available in about a week at local bookstores).

Here's a publication that includes something for everyone — from the novice to the pro — who wants to create freshly baked bread that's a thick slice above the rest.

These are no ordinary bread recipes, mind you. Instead, they're the result of Joe's many forays into the village bakeries of France, Italy and Germany. There, he learned the secrets of creating crusty brown loaves with rustic flavors and a fragrant aroma — the kind of bread that's made his own bakery so famous.

Since 1978, Joe and his wife Gayle have been attracting connoisseurs and plain folk alike who travel across several counties to purchase a cache of goodies from Gayle's Bakery, now a Capitola

Capitola's Joe Ortiz
tells the secrets
of village bakeries
in France, Italy
and Germany

landmark. Publishing a book was the logical next step.

"The Village Baker" is divided into three sections, with the first part discussing the history of bread, the four main ingredients (flour, salt, water, and yeast), and the basic techniques. The second part is devoted to the home baker, with a large variety of recipes from Europe and America. The last section is for the professional who wants to learn new techniques and recipe variations for large-volume production.

"It's possible for a beginner to take this book and learn enough to

move into the advanced section," says Joe, who also included a comprehensive glossary and a chapter on bread sculpture. "Originally, this was going to be a reference book just for professional bakers. I wanted to pass my information on to caterers, bakers or restaurant people who wanted to do their own breads. But the more I talked to people, the more they told me that home bakers would want to learn, too."

So Joe revised his plan and spent two years translating his large-volume recipes into the kind that would yield only one or two

loaves. His ultimate goal is to encourage bakers at all levels to become so familiar with techniques and ingredients that they will divert from the book and create their own breads.

"The Village Baker" includes the predictable yeast dough recipes, but Joe goes several steps more and provides instructions for using other less-familiar methods.

"A professional baker will use many different ways to leaven bread because each one gives a different result," he says. "For instance, there's the sponge method, the old dough method, the sourdough method, and the porridge method."

The porridge method? Sure. You just mix up a porridge and let it sit around creating the right bacteria to leaven a hunk of dough. Historians speculate that this was the original way to make bread, discovered accidentally when someone left their breakfast out on a stone to long.

But even if you never actually bake your own bread, this is a book that gives a new appreciation of the bakers' craft — how different flours affect texture and flavor, how various leavening agents can

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be controlled for the perfect result, how salt and sugar affect fermentation, how individual handling techniques can change the finished product, and even how different types of slashes in the surface of the loaf can affect the final appearance.

With these lessons in hand, it's entirely possible to taste and compare breads the same way one tastes wine or olive oil, noting the variations in texture, acidity, color, aroma, appearance and other qualities.

Ironically, when Joe and Gayle started their business in a converted real estate office, she planned to have only pastries. But Joe, a former house painter with no bakery experience, insisted that he would be in charge of doing breads.

"It was miserable!" he groans in retrospect. "I had this recipe from a guy in Berkeley, but I didn't know any techniques, I had no idea how to finesse, I didn't have a clue about the finer points of rising. It was really frustrating because I knew I had to improve, but I didn't know where to go."

Two years later, on a trip to Europe, he saw real French bread in the making and convinced local bakers to teach him what they knew.

Joe shakes his head, "It took us in a whole new direction. I found books in Europe, I learned the standards and then the variations of each baker — they all have tricks to show you. I was so impressed by the care they took because up to that point I would just mix it, let it rise, and throw it in the oven. Suddenly, I knew I wanted to do it right."

His fruitless quest for a good bread book led Joe to publish his own, hoping that others will benefit from the knowledge he gained in the village bakeries of Europe.

"If people compare the home recipes to the professional recipes, they shouldn't have any trouble learning how to improve," he says. "Many of the home recipes also have my own hints on how to go the next step once you learn the basics."

Because of space considerations, some of the refining techniques for the following recipes have been omitted. More detailed instructions can be found in the book.

CLASSIC YEASTED FRENCH BREAD

- 1 pkg. active dry yeast
- 1 1/4 cups water
- 3 cups unbleached white flour
- 1 1/2 tsps. salt

Glaze: 1 egg white whisked into 1/2 cup cold water

Stir the yeast into 1/2 cup warm water (115 degrees). When the mixture is creamy (10 minutes) pour it into a large mixing bowl and add 3/4 cup lukewarm water.

Start adding the flour, a handful at a time, stirring after each addition, at first gently and then vigorously, with a wooden spoon until it resembles an elastic taffy. After all but 1/2 cup of the flour has been added (this will take about 10 minutes), turn the dough out onto a work table, sprinkle the salt over the dough, and knead for about 5 or 6 minutes while adding the rest of the flour. The dough should be moist and satiny.

Place the dough in a bowl large enough to accommodate its doubling in volume. The bowl can be greased or ungreaed. Cover the bowl with a moistened, clean dish towel and let rise in a warm spot away from drafts for 1 1/2 to 2 hours or until doubled in volume. Punch it down and let it rise again for 30 to 45 minutes.

Divide the dough into two pieces and allow it to rest on the table for 15 minutes, covered with a cloth. Then shape the balls into baguettes by flattening each one into a rectangular shape about 6 by 3 inches. With the 6-inch side toward you, fold over a third of the dough down from the top and seal with the heel of your hand. Do this two or three times until the piece is in the shape of a log about 8 inches long. Stretch each log by rolling it on the table under your palms until it is 12 to 14 inches long. Place each one on an oiled baguette pan or on a cookie sheet that has been greased and lined with parchment paper.

Let the loaves rise, covered, for 45 minutes or an hour, until they have doubled in volume.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. With a razor blade, slash each loaf 4 or 5 times diagonally on top. Brush on glaze. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until golden brown. They will sound hollow if they are thumped on the bottom. Place on a wire rack to cool. Makes two 10-ounce baguettes.

WHOLE WHEAT BREAD

- 1 1/4 cups milk
- 2 pkg. active dry yeast
- 1/4 cup warm water
- 3 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 1/2 tsps. fine sea salt

Glaze: 1 egg whisked with 1 Tbsp. milk

Scald the milk and let it cool for about 20 minutes, until it is just warm. Stir the yeast in the warm water and set it aside until it is creamy, about 10 minutes.

Pour the flour onto the work surface and make a well in the middle, ensuring that the sides are high enough to hold all the liquid. Pour in the yeast mixture and the warm milk. Mix the liquid together using the fingers of one hand and then gradually pull in small quantities of flour while swirling the mixture around. Continue mixing and adding flour until you have a stringy paste. Sprinkle in the salt and continue mixing. Use the dry hand to push some of the dry flour into the dough. After about 10 minutes, you will be able to clean off the work surface with the back of a knife or a dough scraper. The dough will start to come together. Then knead for about 5 minutes until it is moist, elastic and springs back when touched.

Let the dough rise, covered, for 1 hour. Punch it down and let it rise again for another 30 minutes. Flatten the dough and shape it into a pointed oval loaf. Fold the dough over onto itself and then roll it up into a tight log, sealing the ends with the edges of your hand. Draw the ends out into points by rolling them under your palms.

Place the loaf on a baking sheet covered with parchment paper, and let it rise for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Glaze the loaf and bake for 35 minutes, until it is deep brown and it sounds hollow when thumped on the bottom. Cool on a wire rack. Makes one 1 1/4-pound loaf.

PANE FRANCESE ANTIQUATO (Porridge method Italian-style French bread)

- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 cup boiling water
- 3 cups unbleached white flour
- 3 pkg. active dry yeast
- 1 1/2 cups warm water

To make the porridge (*bouillie*), place the whole wheat flour into a bowl, pour the boiling water over it, and let the mixture sit for 5 or 10 minutes to soak. Stir the mixture together and let it sit, covered, for 12 to 15 hours or overnight.

To make the dough, mix the yeast in 1/2 cup of the warm water. Dilute the porridge mixture in a medium-sized bowl with the remaining cup of warm water. Then add the yeast, salt and 2 1/2 cups of the flour, gradually, until you have a moist, shaggy dough. Turn the dough onto a work table and knead, using the remaining 1/2 cup of flour until you have a smooth dough.

Let rise, covered, for an hour. Then make the dough into 2 loaves, each about 10 inches long and 4 inches wide. Cover and let rise for 1 hour. Flatten them with the fingertips, flip them over, and let them rise for another 20 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the loaves on a cookie sheet covered with parchment paper, and bake for 40 to 45 minutes or until browned. They will sound hollow when thumped on the bottom. Cool on wire racks. Make two 1-pound loaves.