



BREAD

time reading

BAKER & SPICE

54-56 Elizabeth Street, Belgravia, London SW1W 9PB
(020 7730 3033)
47 Denyer Street, Chelsea, London SW3 2LX
(020 7589 4734)
75 Salisbury Road, Queens Park, London NW6 6NH
(020 7604 3636)

The original Baker & Spice was set up by Gail Mejia in a traditional bakery on Walton Street just around the corner from Harrods. To the rear of the shop and downstairs were a pair of magnificent (and ancient) gas fired ovens installed in Victorian times and still working when Baker & Spice were obliged to move out. Now there are three shops across London but all with the same vibe. You'll find a communal table with newspapers, jams and preserves on offer and there is always a commendably unbending attitude to the issue of quality, this is (in the best sense of the word) an ethical business where the search for excellence is on-going. At B&S the signature

products are the croissants and the sourdough breads. The croissants are large, flaky and benefit from being freshly baked while the sour dough loaves fall at the "lighter" end of the genre. Gradually B&S

has broadened its appeal and is becoming more of a café and a food shop than a purist bakery. We must hope that these diversifications do not undermine the quality of the bread!



DUNN'S BAKERY

6 The Broadway, Crouch End, London N8 9SN
(020 8340 1614)

Despite being called "Dunn's" the bakery in Crouch End has been in the Freeman family for over 150 years, which makes them a fifth generation family of bakers very much like ourselves! But Dunn's is part of a very select group as this baker's shop is still very much at the heart of a community. In the often featureless expanse of North London, Crouch Hill has managed to retain a really villagey feel and, as was once true of every village, at the heart there is a bakery. Currently the business is run by Christopher and Christina Freeman, despite the fact that Christopher is now registered blind. One of his favourite sayings is that "a basket of bread graces any table and is essential as a bowl of fruit", he might have added that fine bread is also just as good for you as that apple a day. Dunn's produce a large range of breads and it is interesting to note how the variety ethnic groups in Crouch End are reflected in the list: rycob loaves (40% rye); scofa (traditional Scottish crofter's soda bread); crusty white oven bottom breads like cobergs, cottage loaves, bloomers, Danish and crusty rolls; white tin breads (sandwich, split tin and farmhouse); speckle (with sunflower seeds and soya flakes); ciabatta (plain or with olives); shamrock (an Irish soda bread with buttermilk and oats); sunflower cob (honey and sunflower seeds); oatie (oats, wheat and malt flour); malt "n" seedy (a tin loaf with malt); baguettes (from French wheat); and that old favourite Hovis. It is grand to see a successful, traditional, family bakers bucking all the trends.

PAUL - BAKERY, SHOP AND TEAROOM

115 Marylebone High Street, London, W1
(020 7224 5615)

There's no doubt about it, the Paul chain of bakeries is something of a monster; not content with 250 shops in France they now have 30 more scattered across the world with nearly 20 in Britain. The business started in Lille in 1889 - around the same time as our family started in the flour milling

business. Even though Paul is now a large, slick and International business they are to be congratulated for sticking to the principles that make

even insist on wheat grown to their own specifications - over 8,500 acres of it! When you visit Paul, be sure to try the palmier.



for good bread and the bakeries (which at Marylebone you can glimpse through a window by the toilets) are a blend of the traditional: proper proving baskets - and the modern: plenty of stainless steel. The loaves are good, particularly the

"The business started in Lille in 1889 - around the same time as our family started in the flour milling business."

"Country" bread, the "Six Grain" and the "Bio". The croissants on the other hand are a bit of a let down - they are certainly buttery enough but the texture is very light indeed and they seem a little too insubstantial. I'm convinced that the perfect croissant should always have an echo of breadiness. The star turn here is the "Palmier". These pastries are just about perfect - large, not thick but very brittle with a grand flavour. Filling enough to be the perfect compliment to a cup of tea. The management of Paul leave nothing to chance apparently they

MAISON BERTAUX - PATISSERIE AND TEA ROOM

28 Greek Street, London W1 (020 7437 6007)

This shop and bakery has occupied the same cramped site in Soho for over a century. The lady who runs it at the moment started as a Saturday girl during the war and it is hard to spot anything that has changed, certainly not the decor. You can only suppose that once upon a time this bakery served Soho's French Community before ending up marooned in the modern world. Somehow Bertaux manages to cling on to the older, more eccentric, Bohemian feel of a bygone age and this shows up in the patisserie which is outstanding - the small fruit tarts and the special occasion cakes are elegant and delicious. Look out for the Paris Brest and the simpler stuff like the traditional eclairs. The star turn here, however, is the croissants



which may well be the finest in London. The proprietor Michelle is coy about just what flour they use and there was a ghastly period a year or two ago when they changed the recipe until public outcry made them revert to the old version! These croissants are very flakey and buttery but with great many, quite thick layers. All of which makes them very satisfying to eat. The variants - like the almond croissant, pain au chocolat and even the cheese croissant that's a lunch time favourite are all very well, but I urge you to try the plain croissant in all its simple glory. You have to salute the place, Maison Bertaux is probably the last café in London that refuses to have an espresso machine!

J. GRODZINSKI & DAUGHTERS

9 Northways Parade, Swiss Cottage, London, NW3 5EN
(020 7722 4944)



Grodzinski's typifies the rich tradition of Jewish bakers. The Grodzinski family business has its roots in Vilna in Lithuania but by 1888 they had already established themselves in the East End of London. As the Jewish communities have re-located over the last century, so have the bakers and the four Grodzinski shops are now in North London. For anyone passionate about bread it is interesting to explore the links between Jewish dietary restrictions and the styles of loaf we associate with Eastern European bakeries. The Grodzinski product range includes a really stunning "Rye Granary Wholemeal" rich with caraway seeds and with a very good texture - rye often has the reputation for being

chewy, but not the Grodzinski. They also make good cholla plaits and bulka - a loaf made with egg-rich, slightly sweet cholla dough - as well as rolls, beigels, and platzens. There's no mistaking that Jewish customers have a well developed sweet tooth - Grodzinski's make several kinds of doughnut including jam, ring and iced, but the dietary laws which curtail the use of dairy products mean that they have to offer a custard or mock cream doughnut, and I would back our real cream doughnut any day!

FLOUR POWER CITY

Unit 5b, Juno Way, Elizabeth Industrial Estate,
Surrey Quays, London SE14 5RW (020 8691 2288)

Bread sold Thursday to Saturday at a stall in Borough Market, London SE1.

As you'd guess from the name Flour Power City is one of the newer, whizzier, baking operations to hit London and they sell mainly through stalls at farmer's markets including the monster Borough Market which, even if you are only a bit of a foodie, is well worth a visit on Friday and Saturday. The bakery was set up by Matt Jones who was previously a chef at various well respected London

restaurants, and they supply a good many top restaurants with fancy breads. Interestingly the bakery recognises the contribution of its flour supplier and gives credit to Shipton Mill who still mill the old fashioned way - low speed with stones. Flour Power make a good rustic-looking organic loaf; and one that is 100% rye. They also do range of rolls and some of the crustiest baguettes in town. From their cake range the chocolate brownie stands out, very rich and with just the right sort of sogginess - they use Caillebaut couverture which may account for the chocolatiness, but our mini chocolate brownies have the edge on them when it comes to presentation. Flour Power City's pastries are also well made, there's a competitive pain au chocolat, an almond croissant and a trad pain au raisin.



"the monster Borough Market which, even if you are only a bit of a foodie, is well worth a visit on Friday"



"I suppose our lemon torte is a cakey sort of dessert and our lemon meringue pie is a dessert sort of cake"

KONDITOR & COOK

46 Grays Inn Road, London WC1 (020 7404 6300)

So, just when is it that a "cake" becomes a "dessert"? I suppose our lemon torte is a cakey sort of dessert and our lemon meringue pie is a dessert sort of cake. Konditor & Cook have now got four shops across London and they have specialised in cakes - even though they produce the sort of cakes that you have to eat with a fork. In an article she wrote for Vogue magazine, Nigella Lawson paid Konditor & Cook a serious compliment describing their products as "Fabulous cakes, the sort you'd make yourself if only you had the time, energy or inclination," and that's really the point: a good dessert (or a good gateaux or torte) should be something that is either elaborate or difficult to do well at home. K&C do a very good lemon tart with just the right balance between sweet and sour, they use unwaxed organic lemons, very light pastry and the filling has a very good texture. Their banoffee pie is very well made and they have a seasonal range that includes pumpkin pie during the autumn and a low sugar bramley apple pie. K&C's four outlets also act as cafes, so it is only logical that their range of cakes and desserts is aimed at that market. But like our lemon meringue pie I'll bet that K&C cakes are a vital lifeline for a good many harassed dinner party hosts!

"Bread Matters : The State of Modern Bread and a Definitive Guide to Baking Your Own"

Written by Andrew Whitley, published by 4th Estate.

In twenty years time it will be interesting to look back at this book and assess the verdict of history. Whitley is a passionate man and founded the Village Bakery in Melmerby as long ago as 1976 - there's no doubt that can bake a good loaf, and there is no doubt that he has done a great deal to popularise the sourdough loaf.

In this fat book he lays into the plant-baking industry, he attacks the nutritional content of plant-baked

"Fresh bread has the most appetising smell in the world"

bread; he blames fast roll mills for diminishing mineral and vitamin levels; and he worries about enzymes. In short he sees everything as very black and white. Craft Bakers, yes! Plant Bakers, no!

A lot of what he says is very interesting and there are certainly

some terrific recipes for the home cook - calzoni; potato and quinoa bread; arkatena bread from Cyprus; caraway rye bread; and many more. But his commentary on the baking industry comes from an extreme standpoint and is sometimes well outside the mainstream of reality. We would all like to eat wild salmon, but we all know that on 99 occasions out of 100 we can only get, and we can

"At Country Style we stand squarely behind fresh bread, the technique of part-baking means that supermarket customers can pick up bread that is straight from the oven"

only afford, its farmed cousin. With the national diet in such a terrible state it would have been a good thing if he had made the case for people eating more fresh bread. At Country Style we stand squarely behind fresh bread, the technique of part-baking means that supermarket customers can pick up bread that is straight from the oven. Fresh bread has the most appetising smell in the world, and that aroma will do more to change the bread eating habits of Britain for the better than any rant against the Chorley Wood Process. Let's start by getting people to see the merits of fresh bread and then convert them to more artisan breads, such as wholemeal, rye and sourdough. Surely it is more worthwhile to encourage several million ordinary customers to enjoy fresh bread than to provide a small elite with ultra-traditional, slow-risen, exotic breads?

Joe Wood