



*Shaping the knowledge and skills of the artisan
baking community through education since 1993*

Try This At Home Series

May 22, 2020



Indisputable Bread

John McDonald, Weaver Street Market

“For there is nothing more indisputable than bread” is certainly one of the best bread quotes, from Dostoevsky. And indeed the last few months have borne true the idea that bread, now as ever, remains “essential” to our lives. It can be hard for us bakers to not feel taken for granted -- have journalists not hit the ceiling of how many sourdough how-to articles they can publish? -- especially

given that we work in an industry that undervalues its workers and growers and vendors and products.

Perhaps we find a more apt adage for this particular moment a few lines later: "For the mystery of man's being is not only in living, but in what one lives for." At Weaver Street Market, our cooperative grocery in the Triangle region of North Carolina, "living" used to mean lounging outside on the vast Weaver Street patio in Carrboro, sharing fresh baguette or miche or croissant with a friend or three, lunch running over into happy hour into dinner, the spontaneity of the whole thing so predictable it almost seemed planned. A true "third space", Weaver Street has been the heartbeat of the towns in which we operate, and our bread program has been the heartbeat of the Weaver Street experience, binding together a community of over 20,000 owners through organic flour, salt and culture.

We're not living that way anymore, and it's possible that our community gathering spaces won't be the same for a long time. But as a co-op, the pandemic has revealed the strength we possess in our common cause. Our 20,000 consumer owners still need to feed their families. Our 300 worker owners still need good jobs. We're in this together.

Patio seating and service bars became online shopping, no small feat. The online grocery vendor we use typically on-boards customers in six months; we went live in ten days. There were new operational challenges -- line cooks becoming "pickers"; the internal politics of choosing which items show up on the front page (make it all bread!) -- but also philosophical ones. So much of our identity follows from the bonds between owners, workers and local vendors; can those sustain in a world of online shopping? A world dominated by international corporations with seemingly endless resources and negligible accountability?

We're in this together. In messaging to our consumer owners we've emphasized that their participation is crucial to the safety and well-being of everyone in the co-op. Since we never closed, being a grocery store, by simply operating our business we're asking our workers to put themselves at risk. So we've asked our customers to shop less and buy more, wear masks in stores, use online shopping. We've also asked folks to hold in balance potential dissonance between the chatter from governments, other organizations and our own co-op needs and experience as we prioritize our owners' safety and well-being above all else.

We've asked workers to learn new skills, to unlearn old ones (it doesn't feel like good customer service to enforce six-foot distancing rules). In the bakery, skilled bread bakers, some with over twenty years of experience, now devote a third of their day to packaging (our self-service bread cases feel like they're from another century). And while we're still baking fresh bread daily, our product variety has shifted to prioritize sliced sandwich breads and sourdoughs in favor of products with one day shelf-lives like baguettes and pretzels.

But we're in this together, and so far it seems that the hand-in-glove relationship of our workers and consumer owners generates more than enough strength to overcome these unique obstacles. Online transactions now contribute a fifth of our total sales, which has eclipsed the loss in prepared food and bakery sales. We've maintained our thirty-two year streak of never having to lay off any workers. And as far as bread goes, by some miracle we've actually maintained sales at pre-pandemic levels.

As bakers, especially in America, we can tend to be incredibly craft-oriented -- hydrations, mill-settings, starter build schedules -- often forgetting the central role we've played, and continue to play, in our communities across the globe. And whether it's in a corner shop, farmer's market, or commissary, our bakeries serve our communities in ways most businesses can only dream of. For so many of us the pandemic has only bolstered those essential relationships, those bonds that we live for, and are, in fact, more indisputable than bread.

WEAVER STREET MICHE
Contributed by: Jon McDonald

This dough defies logic a bit by prefermenting a rather larger percentage of the flour. The bread includes a wheat and rye starter and should achieve a beautiful dark, shiny mahogany crust, redolent of fresh-ground coffee and butterscotch. The flavor is complex and robust, but not super-acidic. The crumb should have a medium consistency.

Total dough weight	TOTAL FORMULA		LEVAIN		RYE SOUR		FINAL DOUGH	
	%	Kilograms	%	Kilograms	%	Kilograms	%	Kilograms
1.800 kg	100.00	1.015	100.00	0.550	100.00	0.146	100.00	0.320
	66.73	0.678	100.00	0.550			40.00	0.128
	18.89	0.192					60.00	0.192
	14.39	0.146			100.00	0.146		
	70.45	0.715	66.00	0.363	95.00	0.139	66.88	0.214
	1.92	0.020	0.10	0.001			5.94	0.019
	4.33	0.044	8.00	0.044				
	0.58	0.006			4.00	0.006		
							299.38	0.957
							90.94	0.291
Totals	177.28	1.800	174.10	0.957	199.00	0.291	563.13	1.800

*Protein around 11.8%

†Freshly milled, local grain is preferred

PROCESS–Weaver Street Miche

Preferment

Mix	Type of mixer	Levain	Rye Sour
	Time	Hand	Hand
	Dough temperature	Until incorporated	Until incorporated
		55°F	80°F

Ferment	Time/temperature	16:00 at 72°F	16:00 at 55°F
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Final Dough

Mix	Type of mixer	Spiral mixer
	1st speed	0:06
	Dough temperature	76°F

Ferment	Time	1:30
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Scale	Divide	1,800g
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Shape	Shape	Boule
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Proof	Proofing device	Linen basket
	Time/temperature	3:00–4:00 at 75°F

Bake	Steam	Normal
	Time/temperature	0:30 at 445°F then 0:30–0:40 at 420°F, until dark mahogany in color
	Vent	Open after 0:30

Process Notes

(No process notes for this formula)