



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

## Try This At Home Series

May 29, 2020



Toscano Bread used by an Albemarle wholesale customer

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### Toscano Bread

Gerry Newman of Albemarle Baking Co

In the summer of 1993 I was working as a Pastry Chef at a hotel in Charlottesville, VA. During one of the many efforts to get them to build the bake shop they said they would build when they hired me the idea was floated to convince the board that we could sell wholesale. I was asked to look into the idea. I contacted a friend who I baked with in San Francisco for any input he would have to put things together to do this. He told me about this convention that happened every three years in Las Vegas that was coming up in the fall. He also told me about this group that had just started, and they were going to have a Sourdough Seminar at the convention.

I contacted Tom McMahon to find out how to join the Bread Bakers Guild, talked to my bosses about sending me to IBIE and the seminar, and talked to my wife about taking a week away from our young family.

My SF friend, Jan Schat, went to the show as well. This was a good thing for me because I was overwhelmed with the size of the show, the overload of information, and the sensory overload of Las Vegas.

The Sourdough Seminar was both amazing and confusing at the same time. Confusing because it was another case of sensory overload with all of this information from different people from around the country and the world passing on methods that work for each of the presenters. And amazing for exactly the same reason. A high point for me, that I will never forget, was when Dr. Jiirgen-Michael Briimmer, a baking researcher from Detmold, Germany gave his presentation. He was going over process and formulation based on practices and regulations in Germany. At one point he gives the amount of commercial yeast that is allowed to be in sourdough products in Germany as a way of controlling production. Grumbling starts in the crowd and bakers start letting him know that not only do they not want to hear this, but they would never allow commercial yeast in their bakery out of concern that it would contaminate their sourdough culture. He gets a puzzled look on his face, and sits down. I'm a bit shocked, I get not agreeing with someone, but it sure was no way to treat a guest-even if we were paying for his attendance. Moments later, he asks to speak again. He walks to the whiteboard and proceeds to draw a star shaped chart that shows the interactions of dough temperature, water absorption, nutrients, fermentation time, and starter micro-organism. He then starts a lecture on natural fermentation, and everyone, including his earlier detractors, is head down writing as fast as they can. The chart has a place today at our mixing table, and is often referred to as a way to explain why time/temperature are my constant reference points to trouble shoot any issue we have in our production.

Well you would think after all of that I would offer a sourdough based bread, but I'm going to offer a bread that was the last bread Jan and I baked in San Francisco in 1988. Toscono is a versatile bread. It can be a boule, it can be a battard, it can be rolled in sesame seeds.