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Try This At Home Series

April 14, 2020

A Tale of Two Multigrains

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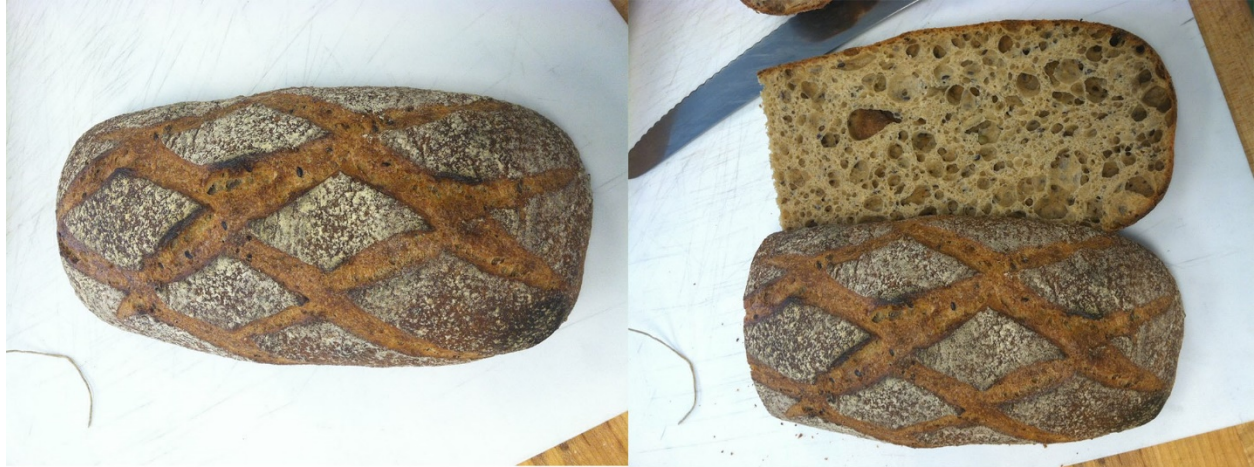
Mitch: If you're like me – and God help you if you are – you bake bread the way you like it and you like bread the way you bake it. We have so many considerations: Crust, crumb, color, chew, texture, aroma, appearance, shape, and, of course, flavor. And, we get to autograph it before the bake.

As a child, I was drawn to brown bread in the supermarket. You know, the sliced loaf in a plastic bag parked next to the fluffy white wonder on the supermarket shelf. I did not realize they were the same bread except for the use of coloring. I simply preferred it. Was that the beginning?

In 2006, I found myself on a team with pastry chef Jody Klocko at the National Bread and Pastry Championship. I chose multi-grain as my elective bread. Looking back, it was a safe (read: not challenging) choice. I had baked the version I learned at the National Baking Center for years. I was always happy, but not content, baking and eating it. Maybe it was reverence, but before the competition, my thought was, "Who in the world tweaks Didier's formulae?" Furthermore, why would they? Now, I know we are supposed to tweak them. Or graduate, as he taught us, to formulating our own versions.

This iteration has served me well for years. I enjoy every step of the process and it's become one of my favorites from my repertoire. I appreciate the complexity of employing rye and wheat cultures, and please forgive me, but I appreciate the volume and balanced flavors from the inclusion of commercial yeast, especially within the prescribed timeline of a competition. As a baking instructor, I'm faced with a similar timeline. The addition of commercial yeast enables students to present baked loaves in under six hours. Of course, similar results are obtainable without commercial yeast by extending the timeline.

I use this formulation in the Advanced Bread and Viennoiserie course at Johnson & Wales University. I prefer it without the oats in the soaker. Without the oats, the bread has a more open, chewy crumb; however, due to the dough's consistency, some students struggle with the handling. They are permitted to add the oats to facilitate handling. Omit the oats for a more open, elastic crumb. It's a small thing, but it's a step in encouraging neophyte bakers to tweak and eventually, create their own formulae.



Kristen: Toast, I wanted toast and plenty of butter, maybe some scrambled eggs too. The simple things, the standby bread, the bread you love but take for granted when fancier stuff like croissants and danish are around. You could grab it any day of the week pre-shelter in place but now that you can't have it, you NEED it. Multi-grain baking project for the Guild? Heck yes, sign me up.

My multi-grain contains more seeds and uses both our liquid and stiff levains. At work it is exclusively a pan loaf bread sweetened with agave to keep it vegan. Thinking back to when I was developing this product, I was that neophyte baker (and in many ways still am). Inspired by a loaf of bread I loved (Seven Stars' (Providence, RI) Multigrain Loaf, to be specific) and looking forward to what I imagined this bread could taste like and how it would fit in our production. This was the very first item I contributed to our staple menu over six years ago.

Looking at Mitch's formulae compared to mine, I begin to consider what the next evolution might look like. For my shelter in place bake, I used my three week old stiff whole wheat levain, maple syrup in place of agave and blend of seeds/grains tucked away in the freezer. (Note to self: the off tasting pumpkin seeds still need to be thrown out).

Baking at home can be frustrating when you are used to professional tools and equipment and this particular project was no exception. Regardless of the dull crust and weird expansion, I toasted it, buttered it and it felt like home.



Mitch: Our styles and tastes change over time, and our bread baking reflects that. A little tweak here or there and we act like we just discovered another star in the universe. Occasionally, due to circumstances, our environment, a limited pantry, or even a pandemic, we are forced to improvise or rewrite the formula. With experience, we face those challenges armed with knowledge and confidence. There is a lesson in every bake. Some are notable lessons like, "Oh yeah, I will never forget the yeast again." and some are so subtle they are buried in the subconscious to be summoned only when needed. Challenges encourage growth.