



LEARNING FROM THE MASTER

BY SANDRA GUTIERREZ

Step into La Farm Bakery in Cary and sense the spirit of tradition. While the walls and support beams are built of brick and wood from an old house in Virginia, the emblematic origins of this European-style bakery date back to an artisan guild founded in the 12th century. French-born owner, Lionel Vatinet and his Southern wife and business partner, Missy, created La Farm Bakery in 1999 to be the marriage of the artisan traditions of France and the history of the American South. They surprise customers with crusty, flavorful creations, giving a new definition to daily bread.

Lionel Vatinet, a *Maitre Boulanger* (Master Baker), joined the ancient guild *Les Compagnons du Devoir*, at the age of 16 and discovered a passion for artisan bread. He has long been recognized as a leading authority on artisan baking around the world. As the founding instructor of the San Francisco Baking Institute, Vatinet taught bakers from some of the most famous bakeries in America, including Nancy Sil-

verton of La Brea. After nine years of breaking bread with Triangle residents, Vatinet is happy to call North Carolina home.

Bakers fire up the deck-oven twice daily so that customers can pick up freshly baked bread first thing in the morning and again on their drive back home from work. “The Dragon,” as Vatinet likes to call it, has injection steamers that shoot cold water into hot bars within the oven, hissing and spewing steam to create the perfect crust on each loaf of bread.

Every night, Vatinet and his bakers begin their ritual with reverence. “The yeast is alive,” Vatinet says as he folds the dough with careful control, “You must treat it with respect and love,” he tells his apprentice, 19-year-old Marc Antoine Bosque, who has just arrived from France to begin a one-year apprenticeship under Vatinet.

Hour after hour, hands move in unison, expertly caressing, folding, pressing and molding dough until it gives way under deft fingers, yielding with each soft — albeit commanding — movement. Dough goes from *couche*, to loader, to oven, with swift rhythm. On the way, *baguettes* and signature La Farm loaves are slashed with a *lame* with the precision of a surgeon’s hand. While the city sleeps, hands lovingly create the artisan daily bread.

“Artisan means that something is made from scratch, without chemicals or preservatives, and that you use your hands,” explains Vatinet, who believes that the term is often misused. The quality, according to Vatinet, translates to “a deep respect of the fermentation.”

The “mother” (ferment) is as old as the bakery, but Vatinet explains that it is not the age of the ferment that develops the flavor in bread, but rather the lactic or acidity levels — that gives it character. What does matter, says Vatinet is the proper feeding of the “mother” on a daily basis.

“Don’t call me ‘Chef’”

Vatinet does not like to be called “Chef,” and explains that in the artisan tradition of baking, bakers go by their first names only, without the need for hierarchy. “It is part of our sharing, learning and teaching together, in the spirit of camaraderie,” he said.

The most important person in a bakery, Vatinet went on to say, is the *brigadier* — a title reserved for the person in charge of the oven, usually, the most experienced person in the bakery. “You see, whoever is in control of the oven is in control of everything else in a bakery. This person tells people what needs to go in and out and how things need to move. But me...just call me Lionel, please,” he said.

Deeply devoted to the instruction of his craft, Vatinet compares teaching to breaking communal bread. “To me, bread should not be and is not a trade secret. It’s a knowledge that needs to be shared.” Vatinet teaches baking classes for customers, taste testing and daily sampling of products.

He teaches customers the importance of purchasing bread on a daily basis, in the European tradition. His bread, free of preservatives and chemical agents, is meant to stay fresh for only a couple of days.

Vatinet uses locally milled flour for organic spelt and whole wheat flour and other sources for local honey and herbs. “Whenever it is feasible for us to use local ingredients, we do it.” His signature breads are baked daily and delivered fresh to the shelves of Whole Foods stores. La Farm Bakery does not sell old bread, so it donates the remnants every night to local charities.

The Vatinets are beginning a 2,000-square-foot expansion next door, where they will add a café with sandwiches, soups and salads. They hope to be open in time for the holiday season or by the beginning of 2009.

La Farm Bakery is located at 4248 Cary Parkway, in Cary, North Carolina. You may reach them at 919-657-0657 or visit their website at: www.lafarmbakery.com. eP

Sandra Gutierrez is a freelance food writer, recipe developer, and culinary instructor in North Carolina. The former columnist for *the Cary News* has had over 600 articles published on food topics. She teaches cooking at A Southern Season, Williams-Sonoma, and from her kitchen studio in Cary. Visit www.SandrasKitchenStudio.com

Les Compagnons du Devoir

Founded by a group of Masons, this ancient artisan guild was started by stonemasons and carpenters first, and later by bakers. The bakers of this guild — albeit a discreet group — are not secretive, instilling in their members their mission to share and teach their craft of artisan baking to whoever wishes to learn it, be it a teacher, a professional or a home baker. Vatinet explained that in the tradition of *Les Compagnons* the oldest teach the youngest. “At the base is the respect of tradition for our craft, with the three most important values being family, work and spirituality,” he said.



Lessons by a Master Baker

Vatinet teaches classes at various locations around North Carolina, including various Williams-Sonoma stores, Johnson and Wales in Charlotte, and A Southern Season in Chapel Hill. Upcoming Fall/Winter classes at La Farm Bakery include the following:

Pate a Choux

Tuesday, November 4, 2008
5:30 - 8:30 p.m. \$65.00

Please Pass the Rolls!

Wednesday, November 5, 2008
5:30 - 8:30 p.m. \$65.00

Kids Baking Class

Saturday, November 8, 2008
1:00 - 3:00 p.m. \$40.00

Holiday Breads

& Decorative Centerpieces
Tuesday, December 2, 2008
5:30 - 8:30 p.m. \$65.00

Death by Chocolate Dessert Menu

Wednesday, December 3, 2008
5:30 - 8:30 p.m. \$65.00

Bread & Chocolate Dessert Menu

Thursday, December 4, 2008
5:30 - 8:30 p.m. \$65.00

For More Information contact them at:
919- 657-0657.



**Make Corporate and Holiday Gift-Giving Easy
with our Delicious Southern Foods and Unique Gifts**



Visit us at SouthernThings.com OR
240 Newton Rd #112, Raleigh, NC • (919) 847-0666

LA FARM COUNTRY FRENCH BREAD

Master Baker, Lionel Vatinet, shares his recipe for La Farm Bakery's signature bread. A cloche is a clay baking container. The recipe has been adapted for the home-baker.

3 level cups white bread flour, unbleached

1 ½ level teaspoons sea salt

1 ½ level teaspoons of dry yeast (Perfect Rise from Le Saf)

1 ½ cups of water (60° F)

Place flour, salt, and yeast in a mixing bowl, mix at low speed (#2 on a Kitchen Aid Mixer). Slowly add water to the dry ingredients and mix for 5 minutes; stop mixer and scrape the sides and bottom of the mixing bowl and work the dough from the hook with a scraper. Increase speed to medium and mix for 2 minutes (#4 on a Kitchen Aid Mixer). After 2 minutes, stop mixer and take temperature of the dough. If the dough is between 72°F and 80°F, remove dough from mixing bowl and place it in a clean bowl lightly dusted with flour. Dough should be soft to the touch and should feel moist—NOT wet—and should not stick to fingers.. Cover the bowl with plastic and set it aside in a warm location 75° F (plus or minus 3 degrees). Let dough rise for 1 hour.

Remove the dough from the bowl and onto a lightly flour-dusted counter top. Gently, fold it into a round shape. Place on a baking sheet; cover with plastic wrap and let dough rise again for 1 hour. Preferred method of baking is in a cloche. Preheat oven for 450° F. While the oven is preheating, invert cover of cloche and fill with warm water; let stand. Take bottom of cloche and place it in the oven while it is preheating. Remove cloche bottom from the oven and gently, roll dough bottom over top into palm of one hand and then invert dough right side up onto the heated cloche bottom, being careful not to deflate the dough. Lightly dust the top of the dough with flour and score with a razor blade across the top of the dough.

Drain water out of cloche cover/lid and place over the dough and cloche bottom. Place the cloche back into the oven. After 15 minutes, open the oven door and remove the cloche. Continue baking the bread for another 20-25 minutes. Remove from oven and cool on a baker's rack.

