

World Class Bread Is Just a Drive Away

“Bread baking is something I always wanted to try,” Bill Malatesta tells me as we sit talking in Annarosa’s, the handcrafted bread and pastry bakery in Salisbury, Massachusetts that he now owns with partner Jane Kenny.

It’s ten o’clock on a Saturday morning in late June, and Bill is winding up his workday after a shift of baking that began at 1 a.m. The pastry cases present flaky croissants and glistening fruit jam-filled danish, the wicker display baskets almost burst with bread, the metal baker’s racks behind the counter hold more loaves ready for restocking as necessary, and Bill is done for the day, nicely dusted with flour from the neck of his tee shirt right down to the toes of his work boots. Bread bakers everywhere would smile knowingly at Bill’s bread dough encrusted cuticles, proof that the work is indeed manual labor.

The work is both physically demanding and exhausting, Bill agrees, but he loves it so much that he left a longtime career as a structural analyst over ten years ago to dedicate himself to making bread. “Real bread,” he notes, “using classic techniques.”

“Once I started learning, I found myself completely saturated in the study of it – in bread history, baking techniques, artisan bakers. I knew wanted to make great bread.”

We talk at a long table set in the front of the bakery’s new spacious digs. About a year ago, Bill and Jane pulled up stakes in Newburyport in search of a larger, more centrally located spot. They have found it. The new Salisbury storefront is a commercial baker’s dream: plenty of display space, seating for customers, and what seems like acres of prep area. I look around longingly. It’s my dream kitchen.

Theirs too. “The differences between here and our former location are huge!” Bill remarks. “We’ve got lots more room, tons of parking, and we’re right off the highway. Because we attract customers from a 60-mile radius, we think this spot is just about perfect.”

Yes, you read that correctly: customers from a 60-mile radius, meaning all the way up into Maine, down through the south shore, and into parts west, traveling to Salisbury to buy bread and pastries. The bread Bill and Jane make is that good. It is bread worthy of a day trip.



Bill was taught by acknowledged master baker Jeffrey Hamelman – cookbook author, former captain of Baking Team USA, and current Bakery Director at the Baking Education Center of King Arthur Flour in Norwich, Vermont. Using Hamelman’s techniques and even similar equipment to that which he learned on in the Master’s teaching kitchen, Bill bakes many different types of European hearth-style breads, each formed in its own traditional style.



Since Annarosa's opened for business in August of 2001, Bill and Jane have turned out loaves crowned with the holy grail of chewy, crackly, dark crusts. The depth of the external caramelization infuses each loaf of bread with rich, complex flavor all the way to its softer center.

Those delicious interiors are equal parts soft, spongy, and toothsome, so satisfying to pull straight from the crust and eat plain or slathered with olive oil or sweet butter. With just a few exceptions, most of the bread doughs are naturally leavened with one of three levains (starters). These levains – one rye and two wheat – are rigorously maintained to keep their yeast cells robust and strong. Vigorous yeast cells together with a long ferment, loose dough, and gentle deflating mean just the right amount of air gets trapped as bubbles inside dough walls. As a result, Bill's baked breads possess fine internal structure and enough tang to complement the sweetness of the grain without being overpoweringly sour.

Providing the best product possible has always been Bill's priority. Another priority is to honor the vow they made to use local produce in season whenever possible.

"We are so lucky to be situated here, surrounded by active farms," he tells me.

When fruits appear in farmstands and markets, Bill buys what's on hand and immediately makes the fruit into jams for the danish. "I've just made strawberry-rhubarb jam, some for now and some for the freezer. With it frozen, I can top the baked pastry with the jam all year long." Blueberry jam is next, he adds. "Buying local means I get the best, freshest product. Imagine, jam made immediately from fruit that was picked an hour ago. There's nothing better."

Bill and Jane shop for their fruit at both the Merrimac and Middleton farmers' markets, where they are also purveyors of bread at their own stand. A favorite farm to frequent is Glenn and Karen Cook's Cider Hill Farm in Amesbury. "We regularly buy their apples and cider for our Normandy apple bread," Bill explains.



When I tell him that the apple bread is one of my favorites, that it is fantastic on a cheese board paired with either a sweet and creamy cow's milk cheese or an aged sharp cheddar, Bill smiles, gazing off into the distance as if he is still back at his bench baking bread even though the work is done for the day.

"That bread is a classic, and one of the breads from Jeffrey's course," he adds. "We slice and roast the apples until they are slightly dessicated to concentrate the flavor. And we hydrate the dough with Cider Hill's unpasteurized cider to enhance the tang. The finished bread has a great balance of sugar and acidity."

It truly does.

Bill and Jane bake their breads on a rotating schedule, however, and you won't always find the apple bread on the shelves. But you can feel confident that a day trip up to Salisbury on any day of the week will reward you with some type of delicious loaf or a crisply flaky pastry or two. I guarantee you'll be back for more.

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