

Bread with Personality

By Sarah Dougherty

BREAD MAKING IS AN ART THAT DATES BACK BEFORE MODERN CIVILISATION AND SOME OF THE EARLIEST TECHNIQUES ARE STILL EMPLOYED. OTHERS GO IN AND OUT OF FASHION; MAKING BREAD IN A TROPICAL CLIMATE IS ALMOST AN ART IN ITSELF SO A TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS WENT TO GET SOME EXPERT TIPS RECENTLY FROM MASTER BAKER JEAN MICHEL FRAISSE.



According to French baker Jean Michel Fraisse there are two things the books won't tell you about making bread in the tropics. Firstly that you need to mix your yeast with cold water, and the temperature is important. Secondly that you should turn your oven down after the initial blast and bake your bread longer than you normally would, resulting in a thicker crust that won't go soft after a couple of hours.

In the latest professional cooking course held at the workshop at Mozaic, a group of pastry chefs representing some of Bali's best hotels and restaurants, and Jakarta's Dharmawangsa, learned the secrets of great bread. Jean Michel has his own cooking school in Kuala Lumpur and runs his own small food empire there, as well as travelling the world sharing the secrets of baking, among other things.

"I am a great reader and collect cookbooks, but none of the books I read really related to what works in a tropical kitchen. I was very interested in starter doughs, yeast free breads and perfecting a great crust. These are things I had to work out for myself in the end," explains Jean Michelle.

It is said that each loaf of bread is unique and Jean Michel believes that absolutely. In his kitchen he claims he and his staff will work on the same equipment, same kitchen, same recipe and yet each loaf that is hand made will be slightly different. Not better or worse just slightly different. One tip he gives is to always have some left over dough that you can refrigerate for the following day. It gives the bread a more interesting flavour and you can add as much or as little as you like as the proportions of flour to water won't change.

Of course we aren't talking about commercial supermarket bread here, but rather artisan breads, made by hand. The dough, naturally, in a restaurant kitchen will be kneaded by a mixer, probably left to prove in a design-built prover and then baked in a bread oven that releases steam to order. Not something the home cook will probably have. But time spent in the hands of the baker will influence the final product. It has a personality, reflecting the creator.

My own obsession is with sourdough bread, and up till now baking it myself was only



an idea, however here I was finally able to see for myself how the process begins. To make it sour, Jean Michel says you need to use some rye flour. He starts his levain (starter dough) with raisins: 20 raisins and 65ml of water and leaves it to ferment for 2-3 days. He then strains the mix and adds an equal amount of flour to water (65ml of water + 65 g of flour = 130g of dough). This is the beginning. It is complicated and everyone was shaking their head until we started to use the starter. 2-300g of levain is equal to 15g of dry yeast. He still adds 5g of commercial yeast just to be sure.

While most bread books will instruct you