

Whole Wheat Bread - *A modern rendition of a timeless recipe*

By Lord Simon Hondy OW, CDB Aug 2005

I have used a recipe drawn from the Poilâne Bakery in Paris France, as written by Peter Reinhart, the author of The Baker's Apprentice. Some of the additional touches I have made to the recipe came from the WebPages of the Poilâne Bakery itself. The overall process is not altogether different from the sourdough baking of present day, nor many of the processes as put forth by Elizabeth David in her wonderful book English Bread and Yeast Cookery.

For ingredients I chose the best I could obtain locally, except for the salt.

Water: I get locally from the tap, I do run it through a filter in the pitcher, this is done for several reasons, one to remove some impurities, and primarily to filter out as much of the chlorine in the water as I can. Chlorine is good for keeping our waters healthier, but also good at killing bacteria other things in our waters. The killing action is bad for the starter as its life force is built on bacteria and yeast working together.

Flour: To make this "household" loaf from unbolted flour "as it cometh from the mill". Now to equate to more period European flour I should use soft red spring wheat. I could have ordered soft whole wheat flour from several sources, but I chose locally the Great Harvest Bakery whole wheat flour as it is truly freshly milled. I cannot get it much fresher, this was of more importance to me than the type of wheat. I believe their flour to be from Hard Red Spring Wheat, and I came to this conclusion through a bit of sleuthing. The lady at the Great Harvest counter said it is "soft red spring wheat" (which is what I really wanted), but the lady I called at Great Harvest customer service said it is "high protein wheat and the rest is a trade secret", so I am thinking it is hard red spring wheat. Rub the flour between your fingers it feels like fine sand, it also does not hold its shape after being squeezed. As well the mention of its high protein content all indicative of a hard wheat flour. In baking taste tests it tends to provide a sweeter loaf than another flour that is known to be hard red winter wheat, Spring wheat tend toward more sweetness than the winter wheat, having less 'bite'.

The other flour in this recipe is spelt flour, *Poilâne flour contains about 30 percent Spelt¹*. Spelt is a close cousin to wheat, adding its form of gluten to the rising process and adds its own flavors to the bread making it more than 'just whole wheat'. As pointed out by Bear (Terry Decker), *The common wheat in medieval Europe was emmer which was a soft wheat. Spelt was less common and is a hard wheat. So either may have been available, although spelt was more common in Central Europe.* Appropriate for a French recipe I would think.

Leavening: This particular leavening I have has been passed to me by my Laurel, Mistress Gwyndlyn Caer Vyrddin, which she got from Baroness Sgt. Gwenhwyvar fitzHerbert. From Sourdoughs international *The French sourdough is from a small bakery on the outskirts of Paris that has been in business for over 150 years. The starter rises very well and the dough has one of the mildest sourdough flavors²*. I keep it tightly sealed so it does not get to much of the Midlands wild yeasts in it, but it has changed

some from the original I am sure. It does still maintain a mild flavor, with the slow process used in the recipe it plays a nice accompanying role to the other flavors in the bread.

Salt: Here I did not do what was easiest, I went to King Arthur's web site and ordered *Light Grey Celtic Sea Salt(tm), ocean-harvested at summer's end off the coast of Brittany in the northwest of France*³. It is moist and grey and has a flavor that cannot be compared to regular table or what I have gotten from the store as sea salt, which is dry and bland in comparison. *The salt used in Poilâne bread, with its scents of seashore violets, comes from the salt marshes of Guérande. In this town in the west of France, which was the capital of Brittany for a short time in the 15th century, salt has been produced since the Middle Ages*⁴. True Sel Gris De Guerande averages 5 to 8 dollars per pound, which while I can get this salt, I decided to save a few dollars and go with that from King Arthur.

For my process I do use modern methods in making this bread, in that I set it in the refrigerator over night and use an electric oven. I use the refrigerator for one major reason, *cold fermentation gives us a wider berth and a greater margin of error and allows us to call the shots when to take the next step*⁵. This modern world pulls me in ways that do not always allow for constant watching of the dough.

My electric oven is set up for hearth style baking with stones on the rack and a way to create steam for the initial start of baking. Getting the oven to steam at the beginning of the baking cycle is important. It allows for the outside of the dough to stay soft just a little longer while it rises from the initial oven spring. When the air inside the dough heats and expands as well as the leavening getting one burst of energy before it dies. Modern commercial ovens use steam injection, home bakers can create steam in their ovens, and such is covered in the recipe. In a wood fired oven the wet mopping floor of the oven to remove the embers before baking provides the required moisture. Steam is not necessary, but you most likely will notice the difference in your breads with out it.

All my ingredients are weighed to maintain consistency in the final product. Weighing ingredients is not new to baking one did not want to be punished for making loaves that were to small! Also when making larger batches it is easier and more consistent to weigh than to measure by volume. Whether one uses a beautiful set of balance scales or a modern electric scale all ingredients are weighed. To much or to little of any one ingredient and the whole batch is off. As a side note, this is why I believe baking to be a science, not an art, much the same way brewing is a science.

Using leavenings like barm, or as some may know it 'sour-dough' we need to use a slower fermentation process. It just takes longer for the yeast and bacteria to propagate through the whole of the flour, water, and salt that we add to build the dough. This slower process also affects the ingredients differently than faster modern baking, allowing attributes of each ingredient to join in, from the nuttiness and bite of the whole grain wheat to the slight piquant flavor of the starter.

I had planned to use two forms of marking my bread, first the slashing pattern on the top, second was to be a imprint on the underside of the finished loaf of my badge and motto. The second is not to be as the mold did not fair well, I also need to learn more about pewter casting before finishing that project. I have kept the slashing pattern, *Thrupp states that baker's marks in England were "a combination of dots and initials, less elaborate than merchants' marks."* She also cites a 1440 court case, where a baker named William Hobold sued another for using his mark (three prick-marks)⁶. It represents an arrowhead part of my personal device, and allows even rising in the oven so it won't split out at unexpected places. The marks show this as my product, so any one who likes it, or finds fault can return to me and share their views. *(After making the dough into loaves, but before baking) the bread then received a "mark" unique to each baker which permitted, at the time of inspection, a quick and indisputable identification of the bakery where the merchandise came from⁷.* As a modern example of such being in use today the Poilâne bakery today still slashes their loaves with a "P" to mark their breads.



I believe this is very close to bread making in the Middle Ages, a very simple list of ingredients, and process. The slow fermentation is not a new process, it is out of necessity due to the time the leavening takes to act upon the ingredients. I have been testing a loaf a week since being asked to provide a little for this display, and have settled on the ingredients I have due to their quality, the consistency of the loaf, its flavor, and appearance. I have also tested this bread “a simple meal” setting, home brewed ale, bowl of broth, and a slice or two of the bread. This will definitely keep you going and full for a good long time!

If you are not one for hearty wheat breads I will not be offended, this bread is only a small portion of the items available here today. If I may be so bold to speak for others, what is on display is truly something we are passionate about, enjoy sharing, and enjoy learning more about.

This recipe makes one large “Miche”, a large “round” loaf of good farm bread.

Bibliography

1 Poilâne bakery flour

[http://www.poilane.fr/index.php?](http://www.poilane.fr/index.php?index_module=listings&index_theme=english&index_template=en_ingredient1.htm)

[index_module=listings&index_theme=english&index_template=en_ingredient1.htm](http://www.poilane.fr/index.php?index_module=listings&index_theme=english&index_template=en_ingredient1.htm)

2 Sourdoughs international **Copyright Sourdoughs International**

<http://www.sourdo.com/culture.htm#fra>

3 Sea Salt - Light Grey Celtic

[http://shop.bakerscatalogue.com/detail.jsp;jsessionid=08301420691122696558370?](http://shop.bakerscatalogue.com/detail.jsp;jsessionid=08301420691122696558370?id=1079&pv=1122696558679)

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4 Salt [http://www.poilane.fr/index.php?](http://www.poilane.fr/index.php?index_module=listings&index_theme=english&index_template=en_ingredient3.htm)

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5 Reinhart, Peter. The Bread Baker's Apprentice.

Berkley: 10 Speed Press. 2001. pg 228.

6 A bit more information on Baker's Marks

<http://www.whirlwind-design.com/madbaker/marks.html>

by: Wulfric of Creigull Changes last made on: *December 10, 2003*

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