Rose Levy Beranbaum author of THE CAKE BIBLE

the bread bible



the bread bible ALSO BY ROSE LEVY BERANBAUM

The Cake Bible Rose's Christmas Cookies The Pie and Pastry Bible

Rose Levy Beranbaum

the bread bible

photographs by gentl & hyers / edge illustrations by alan witschonke

foreword by michael batterberry

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To my paratrooper father, Robert Maxwell Levy, who gave me his wings, the courage to fly, and the freedom to dream.

For the generous bread bakers who shared their recipes with me and bread bakers everywhere.

To the memory of Lionel Poilâne, one of the greatest bread bakers of all time.



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Foreword

by Michael Batterberry
Founding Editor of Food Arts and Food & Wine magazines

IF CIVILIZATION, AS IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED, WAS BORN OF THE FIRST settled riverbank farms, bread made from harvested grains may well have been its first, and most profound, culinary expression. Millennia ago, bread became synonymous with the absolutely essential. In ancient Egypt, the word for bread meant "life," the force of which still shows remarkable staying power, according to the scholarly English food writer Jane Grigson, who, roaming widely in the groves of academe, observed that her scattered archaeologist friends all gave place of honor at their tables to small Near Eastern flatbreads, edible talismans keeping them in day-to-day physical touch with earliest recorded times. Over the centuries, bread's kinship with the sacred continued to grow: the sacramental bread and wine of the Christian communion service; the Passover matzoh, unleavened flatbread to ceremoniously commemorate the Jewish Exodus; the Puritans' "white bread of God," symbolizing the purity of their Lord. Parenthetically, in feudal connotation, the titles "Lord" and "Lady" signified the provider and the doler-out of bread, respectively.

Seen from these perspectives, the title of Rose Levy Beranbaum's invalu-

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able new book, *The Bread Bible*, seems hardly a stretch. If civilization were to fall, this volume could be used as an appropriate tool to help jump-start it.

When Rose decides to delve into a subject, as devoted readers will readily swear on stacks of her earlier *The Cake Bible*, she immerses herself like an oceanographer descending in a bathysphere to probe the darkest deeps. Personal experience confirms this. After mutually agreeing that Rose would write for *Food Arts* magazine a comprehensive study, of interest to professional chefs, on the topic of sugars, more numerous, she said, than we imagined, she resurfaced many months later with a text so exhaustively researched, so scrupulously tested, that it went on to win two coveted food journalism awards, one American, the other global, the following year.

As an elementary human need, bread runs a close third to air and water. Back in the 1970s in New York, a French diplomat once described to me over dinner his experiences in a German POW camp during World War II. The shortage of food was acute, and to keep up morale, he and his captive fellow officers, Frenchmen to the genetically coded core, entertained each other with the minute details of sumptuous prewar cuisine they had partaken of back home. As time wore on, engulfing hunger led them to reminisce about simpler and simpler fare, homey family dishes, beloved childhood treats, until, at the famished last, to stave off despair, the only thing they cared to deliberate narrowed to the subtle nuances of bread and the arguable superiority of its variable scent, crust, crumb, flavor, even its sound.

Had she been alive then, Rose, with her limitless supply of bread tales, could have nightly played Scheherazade to the imprisoned French. "Bakers say that the bread's song," she writes, "is the sound of the crust crackling as it cools," an unbottled genie remark that swiftly conjures up for me an encounter with chef Alain Sailhac, Dean of the French Culinary Institute. Outside a bread baking kitchen classroom, he snatched a warm baguette from a rolling rack, grinned with delight upon pressuring it gently close to his ear, as if testing the merits of an elephantine cigar, and then thrust it at me, urging, "Listen, listen!"

Bread, that miraculous metamorphosis of flour, water, and yeast,

becomes a living thing shortly after the introduction of the yeast, the metabolic action of which is fermentation. Rising bread dough is a warm and companionable being, if you listen to Rose, who, after a couple of decades of pulling loaves from the oven, can still pose the question, "Could it be that I'm only completely happy now when a bread is *happening* [the italics are mine] somewhere nearby?"

The goal of bread baking, she states succinctly, "is to get good volume and a beautiful crust." A born teacher with a dual scientific and artistic bent, she is determined to lead you to this victorious and glorious end. To spare readers taking any avoidable chances, Rose has carved in hearthstone what she declines as "The Ten Essential Steps of Making Bread," a canon that entails, aside from mixing, shaping, and baking, the procedures of pre-fermenting, dividing and preshaping, slashing, glazing, cooling, slicing, and storing.

And that's just for openers. A quotation that I apparently utter with the repetitiveness of a mantra is Escoffier's declaration that "the art of cookery is the constant expression of the present." Trust Rose to understand this fully, as she uninterruptedly demonstrates with constant pitch-perfect responses to the craving for technical know-how of today's younger generations. Throughout *The Bread Bible*, she follows up recipe procedures with expository passages beneath the heading "Understanding." A fragmentary example: "allowing the batter to rest enables the flour to absorb the liquid evenly," as in the case of her Yorkshire Popovers, which she confesses to have been perfecting for fifteen years. Further amplification comes in the form of bulleted "Pointers for Success," i.e., helpful hints typified by this one for producing flawless Soft Golden Potato Bread: "If not using the dry milk, you can replace the water with 1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon of milk, preferably nonfat, scalded (brought to just under the boiling point) and cooled to lukewarm."

Elsewhere she drops random tips with the profligacy of Johnny Appleseed. If, for example, you don't possess a piping bag for loose muffin dough, simply scrape it into a gallon-size heavy-duty Ziploc bag, zip, and snip off the tip of a lower corner. An avid runner in private life, she'll even happily

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put you through the paces of home-curing olives for olive bread, should you care to go those extra ten miles.

Yet another boon is that the author is never shy about recommending specific brand names, often with sourcing information, that have passed her rigorous testing muster, be it an electric mixer, household flour mill, baking pan, frozen Maine blueberry, or freshest-tasting extract.

The planet-circling sources of some of her recipes provide further evidence of her attunement with Escoffier's dictum. Present-day bread bakers, even if bonded for life to soulfully comforting treasures hoarded in their grandmothers' recipe files, simultaneously exhibit an insatiably far-ranging appetite, as well as a sophisticated connoisseurship, for the best the world has to offer. An inveterate traveler who makes each trip a Mount McKinley tasting expedition (we've seen her in softly smiling, gently spoken, all-devouring action), Rose has compiled in this landmark volume recipes of her own invention, along with others gathered from a pantheon of some of the world's most talented, dedicated, and skillful bakers of everything from traditional hearth breads to newly created bread based desserts.

The years this oeuvre has taken, the author concludes, she now looks back on as a humbling as well as an elevating experience, "opening the way for a lifetime of continued discovery," a path that readers, taking her hand, can follow, too, to the end of their bread-enlightened days.

Introduction



THIS IS MY BREAD BIOGRAPHY. IT IS A PERSONAL HISTORY OF BREAD FROM MY first memory of its appearance into my existence—the bagel my mother gave me as a teething ring—to my most recent achievement—a bread risen entirely from my own sourdough starter. Some of the recipes along this journey were created from my imagination. Others were inspired by breads tasted on my travels abroad. Still others are treasures shared by other bakers that I have made my own, as all bakers are wont to do. The experience of putting together this book and researching all the aspects of bread making has been one of the steepest and most gratifying learning curves of my life. And it has been a humbling experience as well, opening the way for a lifetime of continued discovery.

Occasionally people suggest that making bread, particularly kneading it, must be a great way to get out aggression. The irony is that when I start making bread, I am immediately blissed out and any possible aggression immediately evaporates. I don't need to pound the bread with my fists to arrive at this blessed state. In fact, when I don't have a bread going, I feel that something is missing. Could it be that I'm only completely happy now when a bread is happening somewhere nearby?

There is a satisfaction derived from the act of baking bread that I get from no other kitchen activity. Perhaps the most engaging aspect is that yeast is a dormant live organism one is bringing to life and feeding so that it will grow and expand, providing texture and flavor in the bread. It always

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seems utterly amazing that flour, water, yeast, and salt, judiciously proportioned, transform into the most perfect loaf of bread.

Coincidentally, my serious interest in wine began about eight years ago, the same time I started working seriously on this bread book. It was at the Huia vineyard in South New Zealand, when the vintner was explaining to me why he had to cool down the fermenting wine to prevent undesirable flavors, that it hit me how incredibly similar the process of making bread is to that of making wine. Both rely on yeast fermentation, time, and temperature control to produce fantastic flavors in the end product. The wild yeast for wine is present on the grapes' skin; for bread it is present on the wheat. But both usually rely on the addition of a commercial yeast starter or culture.

The sugar in the grape feeds the yeast that produces alcohol and carbon dioxide, the two end products of fermentation, just as the sugar in the flour feeds the yeast to the same end. And just as a specific variety of grape or blend of grapes produces a specific variety of wine, different varieties of flour produce different types of bread. Surely it is more than coincidence that the ancient tradition of Hebrew grace before the meal begins with the prayer of thanks for the wine and immediately follows with the prayer of thanks for the bread—the only two parts of the meal thus honored. Though I don't speak conversational Hebrew, these Hebrew prayers are ingrained in my soul. And I think of bread and wine as the foundation of my culinary existence.

My first experience of eating home-baked bread was not until I was seventeen and a freshman at the University of Vermont. A local resident paid my boyfriend with a loaf of her bread for mowing the lawn. It vaguely captured my attention—he was so pleased about it. He made fried egg sandwiches for us for a hunting trip—something I would normally have rejected on concept (both the fried egg and the hunting)—but I was in love, it was so cold, and I was so hungry . . . and it was an epiphany. My first school vacation back in New York I borrowed "The Joy of Cooking" from Rosalind Streeter, a neighbor and friend of my mother's, and made my first bread. It is a tribute to the perfect instructions that so was the bread.

But the seed of desire to bake bread actually had already been planted deeply within me by my craftsman father, whose dream it was to make a real hearth beehive oven. I remember the first time he mentioned it, and my reaction: Why? Now, all these years later, I share the dream. One of my favorite childhood stories was my father's about his canoeing trip up the Hudson River. (I was a city kid, but with the benefit of a genuine backwoods—by choice—father.) A short while before the trip he had begun a sourdough starter, from a book called Camping and Woodcraft by Horace Kephart. My father's plan was to make sourdough muffins in a reflector baker, which got its heat from a wood-burning fire. During portage, when he had to carry the canoe across land, he tightened the caps on the jars to keep the liquid starter from spilling if they tilted. Apparently he had created a very active starter, because during one of the portages he heard an explosion, muffled by the bedding that was wrapped around the jars. It didn't take long for him to realize that it was the starter. His bedding all needed to be washed, and this incident spelled the end of his short-lived sourdough experiments. But he was captivated by the possibilities of the fermentation, so he passed the scepter to me. It was fortunate that the starter exploded, because he remembers that it was so alive it had streaks of color. When this happens it means that undesirable bacteria have taken over and the starter needs to be discarded. Had he used it for baking, he would at the very least have been taken ill. Perhaps I would never even have been born to write this book!

I never had the experience of home-baked bread as a child, but the three first smells I remember loving were honeysuckle, fresh-ground coffee, and, most of all, the smell of baking bread from the Silvercup Factory when we crossed the Queensboro Bridge every weekend. For me it was the one good thing about returning to the city from Far Rockaway, where I was born.

When my father visited his mother in the Bronx, he would always stop by his favorite bakery and bring home a fragrant fresh loaf of Jewish rye and another of cornbread. But I also enjoyed shopping with my maternal grand-mother and watching the Pechter's rye bread shuddering its way through the

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then-new electric slicing machine. I even loved the little piece of printed paper that stuck to the loaf and always made sure to save one of the tiny crusty end pieces, which my grandmother called the *crychick*, for my little brother. I wasn't sure if it was a Russian or Jewish word, but I found the sound adorable and perfectly descriptive.

Bread in one form or another is part of everyone's childhood memories. Bread has been a part of our civilization for a long time. Yeast-leavened wheat bread and the milling of wheat flour are thought to have originated about five thousand years ago in Egypt. Bread is now basic to all cultures. The timehonored quote of Brillat Savarin, "Show me what they eat and I'll tell you who they are," works wonderfully when applied to bread. For example, is it light and delicate, soft and fluffy, dense and hardy, complex and chewy? Is the bread cut into neat slices or torn into crusty pieces? Is it enjoyed for its own value or simply used as a vehicle to hold a filling? Bread is considered so vital to life by the Swiss that during World War II they created a bread they referred to as hundred-year-old bread, a bread that could last for years buried underground, in case a soldier became lost and needed it for survival. The armed forces were given maps to enable them to find the hidden bread. Self-contained bakery trucks were created to produce the bread. I learned of this from my friend Albert Uster, who purchased one of these loaves from the Swiss government a few years ago for his business in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

While it's true that bread ties us to our past, it does much more than that. It also connects us to our present reality. In this day and age, when many children think milk comes from the supermarket and don't even know what a potato looks like, baking bread puts them in touch with the most fundamental source of their need for nourishment. Beyond that, making bread yourself nourishes both body and soul.

It's surprising how many people prefer bread even to cake! (Although in my house, they still expect cake as well and probably always will.) For years now, I've served my breads as the appetizer or first course of a dinner. And the bread has never been the vehicle for another substance; it serves as the main