

A Path Towards Total Enlightenment { or at least a Hundo croissant }

By DR. STEPHEN JONES

Guild Member and Director of the Washington State University – Mount Vernon Research Center, Mount Vernon, WA

IT WAS AN OLD-SCHOOL STANDOFF. FERRAN ADRIÀ WAS STANDING IN FRONT OF A GROUP OF THE BEST CHEFS IN THE WORLD, AND TO QUOTE MOTHER JONES MAGAZINE:

“...making a dismissive gesture, (Adrià) asks: ‘Has anyone ever made a whole wheat croissant?’ It was a scene as surreal as one of Adrià’s tapas: a radical European chef challenging a salt-of-the-earth, US land grant university professor over separating flour from bran and germ – and in a high-ceiling stone-walled room that once served as a cow barn for the Rockefeller family’s country estate, no less.”

Jonathan Bethony, the resident baker of the Bread Lab, and I were in the room that day. The meeting was inside Blue Hill at Stone Barns, the James Beard Foundation’s Outstanding Restaurant for 2015. Adrià’s statement was directed at us. Jonathan had made three incredible versions of 100% fresh stone-milled loaves for a formal tasting. The built up flavors were mind-blowing, and many in the room acknowledged that, directing their words to the whole group.

A few days later when we returned to the Bread Lab, Jonathan called Jeff Yankellow, Chair of the Board of Directors at The Bread Bakers Guild of America, and shared the story. Jeff and Jonathan then started on a quest to prove “the globe’s most decorated chef” wrong. In Jeff’s words, “I think it is safe to say that

Chef Adrià cooks with no limitations and redefined what is possible with food. That’s why I was so surprised to hear that he said he would never see a whole wheat croissant. Hearing that was enough for me to go bake one.”

It began in earnest in the short days of winter, when baking seems so right. Jeff worked at home, using only a normal sized oven, while Jonathan worked in the professionally equipped Bread Lab. Already friends, they became more than that – electronic pen pals sending photos and trash talking, or at least what bakers understand as trash talk. It’s a gentler version of what would be found on the neighborhood basketball court, a mix of encouragement and competitive jeering.

They both agreed that there would be no cheating, no almost-whole wheat. “Hundo (100% whole wheat), or go home!” became their rallying cry. They acknowledged the work of Craig Ponsford as inspirational in their quest.

In the beginning, Jonathan’s pastries were no match for Jeff’s. The color was there, but the loft was disappointing. At other times, the loft and interior, with dramatic accordion-like layers, were flawless, but the color was wrong. All the while Jeff was, in Jonathan’s words “...willing to share the ups and downs... both learning and growing together.” The trash talk was just hype; they were in this together.



PHOTO: JEFF YANKELLOW

Jeff Yankellow’s 100% whole wheat croissants, mixed and baked in his home kitchen.

What was fascinating to watch, beyond the obvious skill and love that they both put into each croissant, was the maturation of the process. They agreed that they would emulate, but not duplicate, the all-white croissant. Wouldn't duplicating it be like the goal of the perfect vegan hot dog? I mean, really, why bother? However, even with the notion of emulation comes the ability for excuses: "Yeah, it's not so flaky and tastes sort of like a barnyard, but it's 100%!" That doesn't work. Structurally, it should be a croissant, but flavor-wise, it can and should be different.

In Jeff's words, "Once I started eating the whole grain croissant, I didn't want a white one."

Jonathan said that the selling point for him was the "richness of flavor, paired with a feeling of nutritional satisfaction afterwards." By early spring, they had achieved something good enough to share. As Jonathan became more confident of his results, many tours through the Bread Lab featured his Hundo croissants. The oohs and aahs from visitors became so common that I almost grew weary of hearing "This is the best croissant I have ever had!" Even the "failures" were incredibly good.

Like any form of enlightenment, the length, depth, and width of the path is self-defined, and capturing the beauty is a personal responsibility. Both bakers acknowledged that each failure only

urged them on.

In the Bread Lab I get to watch the best chefs and bakers almost every day. I witness, and sometimes taste, what is right and wrong; I am a bystander,

gaining strength in impartiality. Through observation and tasting, I gather and build on the idea of what is very good versus what is great. Witnessing great bakers like Jonathan and Jeff fail as often as they succeed brings to mind Jeffrey Hamelman's advice to new bakers: Just shut up and go out and make a mess of things. It'll be OK.

"Both bakers acknowledged that each failure only urged them on."

Baking is a disposable art, a transitory beauty, like graffiti that disappears within a day or two of creation, or like a perfect but unrecorded aria. Its impermanence is its true value.

Jonathan and Jeff, and all bakers, know that the perfect anything doesn't exist – that it's the endless striving for perfection that's significant. Even Ferran Adrià would agree to that. ☀

Jeff Yankellow shared his new knowledge about whole wheat croissants in a workshop at the Bread Lab in July 2015.



PHOTOS: KIM BINCEWSKI

100% Whole Grain Croissant with Levain

Contributed by **JEFF YANKELLOW** and **JONATHAN BETHONY**

THIS 100% WHOLE GRAIN CROISSANT IS EVERYTHING A CROISSANT SHOULD BE. IT IS FLAKY ON THE OUTSIDE, MOIST AND LIGHT ON THE INSIDE, AND ALLOWS THE FLAVOR OF THE GRAIN TO BE THE STAR. THE KEYS TO SUCCESS ARE USING A HIGH-HYDRATION DOUGH AND MAINTAINING THE BUTTER IN A STATE OF PLASTICITY THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.

The formula and technique were inspired by the work of James MacGuire and the formula he printed in The Art of Eating, Number 93.



PHOTO: JEFF YANKELLOW

NOTES

- During the rest periods, keep the butter cold but plastic. Do not let the butter get too cold, or it will harden.

100% WHOLE GRAIN CROISSANT WITH LEVAIN

TOTAL FORMULA		LEVAIN		FINAL DOUGH		
Ingredients	%	kilograms	%	kilograms	%	kilograms
Whole Wheat Flour*	100.00	2.385	100.00	0.095	100.00	2.290
Water	73.00	1.741	100.00	0.095	71.88	1.646
Milk	24.00	0.573			25.00	0.573
Salt	2.40	0.057			2.50	0.057
Instant Yeast	0.70	0.017			0.73	0.017
Sugar	7.00	0.167			7.29	0.167
Starter	2.00	0.048	50.00	0.048		
Diastatic Malt	0.50	0.012			0.52	0.012
Levain					10.42	0.239
Totals	209.60	5.000	250.00	0.239	218.33	5.000
Roll-In Butter	27.00†	1.350				
Egg Wash‡		As Needed				

*13%–14% protein

†Based on total dough weight

‡100% whole egg, whisked smooth

PROCESS - 100% Whole Grain Croissant with Levain

Preferment	Mixing	Type of mixer	Planetary with dough hook
	1st speed		Until incorporated
Fermentation	Length of time		4:00
	Temperature		72°F–78°F
Final Dough	Mixing	Type of mixer	Planetary with dough hook
	Hold back		Sugar, salt, malt, yeast, and levain
	1st speed		Until incorporated
	Autolyse		0:20–0:30
	Add		Sugar, salt, malt, yeast, and levain
	1st speed		0:03
	Dough temp		75°F
Fermentation	Length of time		2:00
	Temperature		75°F
	Number of folds		2
	Timing for folds		1:00, 2:00
Retard	Length of time		12:00
	Temperature		36°F–38°F
	Number of folds		1
	Timing for folds		1:00
Détrempe Prep	Preshape		8"–10" x 24"–34"
	Rest		1:00–1:30
	Temperature		36°F–38°F
Roll-In Prep	Soften		Plasticize using any method
	Preshape		10" x 10"
	Temperature		55°F–60°F
Lamination	Lock-in		Standard
	Folds		2 single
	Final rest		0:30–0:45
	Temperature		36°F–38°F
Makeup	Sheet		3–4 mm, 10" x 24"
	Shape		Croissant
Proof & Bake	Final proof time		1:30–2:00
	Temperature		72°F–78°F
	Garnish		Egg wash
	Oven type		Convection Static
	Total bake		0:15 0:15
	Temperature		400°F 425°F
	Steam		Yes Yes