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# Culinary Review®

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## THE FARMER/CHEF RELATIONSHIP

*it's something special*

*to market, to market  
to fatten your profits*

*swim upmarket  
with the lowly catfish*

*switch it up 30 ways with white rice*



# ON *the* RISE

*Bread baked in-house is burgeoning.*

BY CAROLYN WALKUP

**B**aking bread in-house is a labor-intensive, time-and-space-consuming task that most restaurant operators do not attempt to take on. However, those who do consider it well worth the extra effort.

Bread is an obvious part of the burgeoning artisanal, made-from-scratch restaurant movement that continues to spread across the U.S. What better way to start a meal than with fresh-from-the-oven bread?

“A lot of times, people don’t pay attention to bread,” says Michael LaScola, chef/co-owner of American Seasons, Nantucket, Mass. “I think bread is as important as coffee or dessert or anything else. If it’s not good or interesting, why do it?”

## Breakfast/brunch favorites

It’s no surprise that many of the artisan bread styles being baked in American restaurants originated in Europe, particularly in Italy and France. Chefs with a special affinity for baking French-style breads in the U.S. include French native Alex Ageneau, executive chef of Paris Club in Chicago, who has a background in pastry.

Paris Club features a weekend housemade brunch pastry basket for \$9.95 that includes pretzel croissants, pain du chocolat, pistachio financier and apricot Danish. The pretzel croissant also is available as a dinner appetizer with mustard and sweet butter.

Monkey bread, cheddar/scallion scones and buttermilk biscuits with honey butter are on the weekend breakfast/brunch menu at Sable Kitchen & Bar in Chicago, part of an a la carte basket priced at \$7. Heather Terhune, executive chef and 2012 contestant on Bravo TV’s “Top Chef,” credits both learning from her mother and working in restaurants in the South for instigating her bread-baking skills.

“Breakfast was always a big deal in my family, and my mother was a great baker,” Terhune says. Baking pull-apart butterscotch monkey bread with butterscotch dipping sauce reminds her of her childhood. She accents her savory cheddar/scallion scones with bacon jam.

## Focaccia

American Seasons offers a complimentary bread basket with daily-changing contents, often including focaccia and a salted pretzel baguette. Focaccia allows for the flexibility to change ingredients that are folded into the dough, which range from oven-roasted tomatoes and basil to sliced lemons and oregano.

In peak summer season, the restaurant, known for LaScola’s whimsical twists on American favorites in a vintage dining room, usually does between 180 and 200 covers nightly. “We do the same level of food as we do when we have between 30 and 60 covers,” LaScola says.

Focaccia is also one of the favorite house-baked breads at Surf Spot in Pacifica, Calif., where Derek Burns is chef/partner. Focaccia doesn’t require a complicated proofing process or a lot of kitchen space, he notes. “I make bite-size disks for an amuse in which I enrobe something like aged sheep’s milk cheese and olives inside before I bake it,” Burns says. “It can be a surprise, like duck confit warm right from the oven.”

Focaccia is the house and sandwich bread at The Root Restaurant & Bar in White Lake Township, Mich. Chef James Rigato describes focaccia as “an industrial-strength bread” that keeps in the cooler for a couple of days. He uses a simple recipe and then hand-flattens the dough for everything from pizza to cinnamon rolls.

In keeping with his dedication to using locally produced ingredients and maintaining control by making everything from scratch, Rigato buys all he can, such as honey and herbs, from regional producers. He believes in handcrafting everything from bread to cocktails, he says.

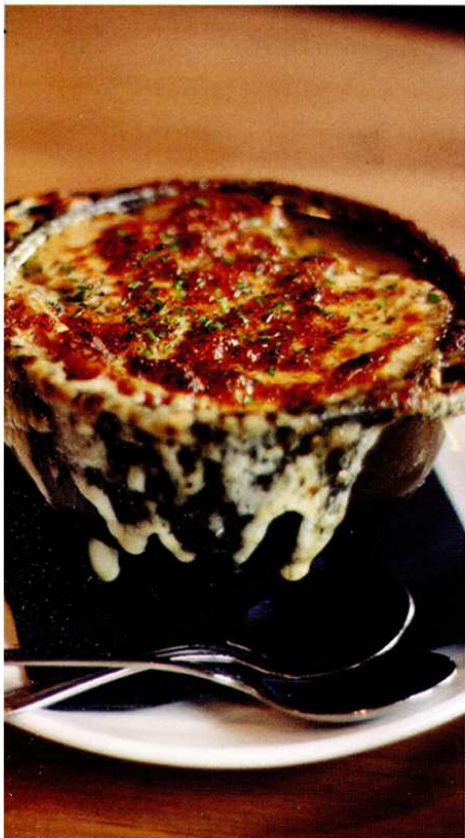
## Baker at work

Pain D’Avignon and Café-Boulangerie in Hyannis, Mass., consists of two parts—a bread bakery and a cafe. In addition

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The bread basket at Island Creek Oyster Bar.





to supplying breads for the cafe, including free loaves sent home with the cafe's dinner customers, Pain D'Avignon operates a wholesale bread business, and cafe customers often observe bakers at work.

The bakery staff bakes more than 20 different breads daily, says Matthew Tropeano, executive chef. Dinner guests receive a complimentary bread basket at the start of their meal in addition to the loaf to take home.

With an average dinner check of \$40, giving away bread is a cost-effective part of doing business. Bread is not given away at lunchtime, when all sandwiches are made with the bakery's fresh breads.

A few of the cafe's dishes that include housemade bread are foie gras on brioche, French onion soup with French country bread crouton and mussels bouillabaisse with slices of baguette for dipping in the broth.

Pazzo Ristorante in Portland, Ore., also has an on-site bakery. The bakery-cafe is open for continental breakfast and lunch but not for dinner, except for private events.

Pazzo's best-selling bread is pepper ciabatta, says chef John Eisenhart. Mild pickled Peppadew peppers from South Africa are baked into the bread dough. He especially recommends the bread for sandwiches containing his tuna salad or Italian cold cuts.

Another large-scale baking operation is done at Boston's Island Creek Oyster Bar, which also supplies bread for the company's Eastern Standard Kitchen & Drinks, Hotel Commonwealth and The Hawthorne cocktail lounge. Lauren Kroesser, executive pastry chef, oversees the baking for all these entities from one large pastry kitchen, which bakes different breads for each venue.

"The owner and executive chef are passionate about the program," Kroesser says. "It's not just for the profits. It enhances the overall dining experience." Some of her signature breads include five-grain sourdough, oatmeal, caraway rye and ciabatta, all of which are served with housemade honey/cayenne butter.

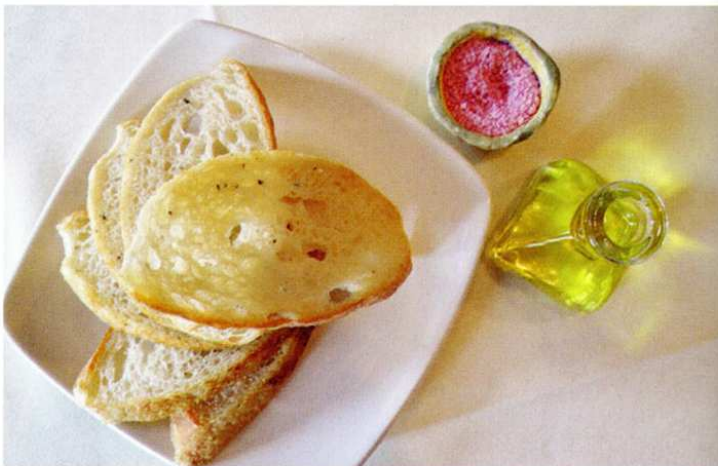
Pain D'Avignon's French onion soup with French country bread crouton.

## Bread stars

Dickie Brennan, owner of Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse, Bourbon House and Palace Café in New Orleans, also is passionate about serving house-baked breads, according to Sara Toth, pastry chef. "If we can make it ourselves, we do it," she says, summarizing the owner's philosophy.

Several dishes where bread is a star player accent local New Orleans' flavors. Palace Café serves a fried oyster loaf of corn-fried oysters on grilled ciabatta bread with melted St. Andre cheese and sherry-tasso cream sauce. The grilled Gulf fish panzanella salad showcases housemade olive bread croutons, along with local cucumbers, tomatoes, grilled eggplant, capers and spinach tossed in an Italian parsley pistou.

One of Bourbon House's breads, a butter-toasted brioche, is the sandwich bread for its shrimp or seasonal crawfish rémoulade BLT with bacon, Bibb lettuce, fried pickled green tomatoes and crab boiled egg. At dinner, the shrimp rémoulade entree is served with



Top to bottom: Bourbon barbecue shrimp with rosemary biscuits at Bourbon House. Lilly's sourdough potato bread with rosemary olive oil.

brioche croutons. Another Bourbon House signature is bourbon barbecue shrimp with rosemary biscuits.

Toth and another baker bake breads two-to-three times a week and freeze the loaves for the chefs to use as needed.

## Regional, ethnic

A complimentary basket of sourdough potato bread is a long-standing tradition at Lilly's in Louisville, Ky. The sliced bread is brought to each table with a carafe of rosemary olive oil. Butter is served with the bread by request only. "We'd love to have people get away from butter," says chef/owner Kathy Cary, noting that the bread doesn't need butter to taste good. Although she describes the daily bread-baking chore as "a monster process," she finds it to be well worth the trouble.

Origins of the organic wheat and whole-wheat flours (Great Plains) and the flaxseeds (Nebraska) used to bake the breads at Benny's Chop House in Chicago truly represent America's breadbasket. Pastry chef Aaron Lindgren is dedicated to using the highest quality flour, milled entirely from premium hard red winter wheat.

All the steakhouse's breads are baked in-house from scratch. The complimentary dinner bread basket includes a honey wheat fruit bread containing raisins, dried cranberries and honey,



Fruit bread, Benny's Chop House

topped with crunchy sugar grains, and country organic whole-wheat bread topped with flaxseeds.

Turkish flatbread, Syrian mountain bread, Lebanese olive bread with labne (yogurt cheese) and other flatbreads meant for sharing are signature housemade breads at Figue, a new Middle Eastern/Mediterranean restaurant in La Quinta, Calif. The long flatbreads are meant to be torn apart by guests at communal tables, much as was done at extended family meals at executive chef Francois de Melogue's boyhood home in Marseilles, France.

"We use huge pottery plates to serve the flatbreads, which are baked in the wood-burning oven," says de Melogue, noting that the initial flatbread served is complimentary. "You dip them in hummus or other dips. A lot of what we do here is sharing.

"We realized that the first thing you do is to have bread. That's how you start a meal." ■

CAROLYN WALKUP, BASED IN CHICAGO, WRITES NATIONALLY ABOUT RESTAURANT TOPICS.

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