

With the big Meet-Up less than a month away, we can't stop with the baking talk.

Here are interviews--with Peter Endriss, co-owner and head baker at Runner and Stone, and two wonderful home bakers in our community, Mika and David--to get you in the spirit:

Peter Endriss
Co-owner and Head Baker at Runner & Stone

Q: What was your introduction to regional grains?

A: When I first started thinking about having a bakery, I went to a Slow Food talk in Brooklyn about grains. I had been living abroad, and it was the first event I went to after coming back to New York. That's where I met June Russell who told me all about what she was doing with grains. Then, later, I worked at Hot Bread Kitchen. They had been using local corn and local flour. It was a great introduction.

Now, Runner & Stone is predicated on using as much local flour as possible.

Q: What has surprised you most about working with regional grains?

A: One of the most rewarding aspects of using regional grains is having direct contact with the producers, grain growers, and millers.

If we ever have an issue (which has only happened once or twice), like if a product seems different, I can talk to the miller and they can figure out what went wrong or what accounts for the difference. This is especially nice from a holistic point of view, and it gives me a lot of confidence in the product because I can put a face with it.

Click here for the rest of Peter's interview, as well as interviews with two inspiring home bakers.

Q: Do you have advice for home bakers, especially those working with regional grains?

A: Keep trying. Keep making different products. Eventually you will hit on something that you like.

A lot of our products don't have all the attributes that you might see in those from a commercial bakery, but they are still good. Go easy on yourself.

At the last last Home Bakers Meet-Up, a bunch of people were using einkorn flour, and that ended up in the back of my head. We wound up making our einkorn croissant, which uses 50% einkorn flour. We also use that dough for both our pecan honey and Brussels sprout pesto ricotta Danish.

Q: Have you been influenced by home bakers in other ways?

A: When you own your own bakery, you are in a bit of an echo chamber – which is your own head. It's nice to get out there and see what other people are doing.

The Home Bakers Meet-Up is really good because it provides a home baker's perspective rather than a professional one. People are doing things that aren't being done in commercial bakeries as the commercial bakeries can't handle things that are so variable or finicky.

Mika Goines
Home Baker

Q: How did you first become involved in baking?

A: I look at food and then at the ingredient list and there are so many things there that I can't even pronounce. I wanted to do something really honest and natural, and I didn't want to use chemicals. So, I started cooking more. And then I thought, why don't I also bake?

Q: What is your specialty?

A: Sourdough. I don't use any yeast – just the sourdough starter. I also make a starter out of raisins. I don't want to use anything with chemicals, only flour, water and salt. That's it!

Q: Do you bake all your bread?

A: Yes. I don't buy bread any more. Well, only if it's really a necessity, but very seldom. Maybe I buy bread three times a year. When I do, I only buy it from Claus Meyers' bakery in Grand Central Terminal.

Q: How did you discover GrowNYC Grains?

A: I was concerned about what I was eating, so I tried to eat only local. I became very knowledgeable about grains, and I learned that GrowNYC sells a lot of local ones, heritage and ancient grains, too.

I use some grains to add flavor. I will use a base (80%) of something like Redeemer wheat and Warthog wheat, and then I will play with the rest. I like to add 20% of emmer or Oland.

I'm having a good time with it. I like to play with grains a lot.

Q: Do you have any advice for home bakers who are just starting to work with regional grains?

I have a trick!

When you use a sourdough starter, it can be very hard to make a puffy dough. My trick is to use the cable box. It's always warm. After you add the flour and the water, put it on top of the cable box. This trick always works.

David Lamoureux
Home Baker

Q: How did you get into baking?

A: At first, I was interested in pizza. I love pizza and I wanted to learn everything about making it. Sometimes I get a little obsessive, so I decided that if I was going to learn pizza, I had to learn how to bake bread.

Q: When did you start using regional grains?

A: I am originally from Vermont, and Vermont is very big on upholding the local economy and local agriculture. When I moved to New York, I brought that sensibility with me.

I'm a big fan of Greenmarkets in general.

My first baking was done with commercial flours, and it seemed like more of a challenge to use local grains. I liked the idea of a challenge. And the results are better, too. It might be a little harder to get the results, but the end-product is more flavorful and more interesting.

Q: Which local grains do you use when you bake?

A: I love Farmer Ground Flour – it's my go-to when I am baking in New York. My pizza dough is entirely wheat flour, but I did experiment with spelt in the past. When I make bread, I use rye, wheat, or spelt...or sometimes a combination.

I like trying wheat from different farmers. Wheat from different producers tastes different. It makes sense.

The only exception I make to using local flour is if I am visiting someone. Then I will just use what they have.

Q: Is there anything that has surprised you about working with regional grains?

A: It's not as difficult as some people make it out to be. If you are patient and you pay attention to what you are doing – just take a little bit more time – it's not difficult.

Baking is fascinating. I love all the variables, and I approach it scientifically. I like to see what happens when I follow the same recipe but use flour from a different farm.

Q: Do you have any advice for home bakers just starting out with regional grains?

A: Don't get frustrated. Even when you think that what you are making is a complete disaster, you can almost always get something good out of it.

I keep a simple record of what I do every time I bake. I record the amount of flour, water, and salt I used, as well as the times and temperatures. It's helpful to be able to look back when something goes wrong.

And the season makes a big difference – especially in a New York City apartment that's sweltering in the summer.