

EDITED BY JESSICA FLINT

BLACKBOOK

WHERE TO GO & WHAT TO KNOW



Josef Weghaupt was a butcher before becoming a baker.

PERIPATETIC GOURMET

THE VIENNESE BAKER

Austria's Josef Weghaupt is kneading the world's best bread.

BY JOSHUA LEVINE

Josef Weghaupt, Vienna's prince of bread, comes bounding out to meet me at a table outside his two-year-old **Joseph Bakery Patisserie Bistro** (4 Landstrasser Hauptstrasse; 43-1/710-2881; joseph.co.at), near Vienna's Wien Mitte train station. Before it was renovated, Wien Mitte station used to attract a fair number of junkies and derelicts, and the gentrifying neighborhood still has a whiff of the tenderloin that appeals to Weghaupt. The 35-year-old is tall and dashing, more like the Byronic baker played by Nicolas Cage in *Moonstruck* than like a Keebler elf. I tell him he doesn't look like most peoples' idea of a baker, and he

says maybe that's because he didn't start out as one. He started out as a butcher, which was his father's idea of a steady job. He hated it immediately: "You're always cold and there's the stench of death in the air. Baking is warm."

In 2009, Weghaupt created a sourdough-based multigrain bread that he named the Joseph (more on the spelling later). When Weghaupt arrives, I'm already munching happily on thick slabs of it in a club sandwich. This is epic bread: dense and rich but not leaden; just acidic enough to be perky without the funky tang that ruins so much sourdough; with a crust like tree bark—and I mean that in a good way (it helps if you favor a crust that fights back a bit, this is bread for people who like to chew).

Joseph bread has made Weghaupt something of a star in Vienna, although, given his human-scale ambitions and his reluctance to stray too far from his dough, he may never be a star outside the city. It's unlikely, for instance, that Joseph will ever win a global following like Paris's Poilâne's.

There are still only three Joseph shops in Vienna—including one making its debut this month. He sells three bread varieties, but they all use the same magical sourdough base over which Weghaupt labors personally with the care and focus of a goldsmith. At the end of the day, it is all about the sourdough. He does make some sweet baked stuff—croissants, brioches, cookies—but that's not what you go to Joseph for. It's like ordering the duck at Le Bernardin: They do it, and it's good, too, but it's just not what the trip is about.

Joseph is a small operation: 120 employees producing between 500 and 800 loaves of bread a day and supplying perhaps 100 restaurants, almost all in Vienna. Some food markets also sell Joseph bread, but he's thinking of cutting back on the number of vendors. Restaurants that serve Joseph bread tend to say so on the menu. It makes them look good. "Joseph bread is unique," says Birgit Reitbauer, who, along with her husband, owns **Steirereck** (2A Am Heumarkt; 43-1/713-3168; steirereck.at), a Michelin two-star restaurant in Vienna's Stadtpark. "You can tell the qual-

ity because after a few days, it doesn't get stale. A lot of our guests ask about it, and then they start buying it regularly."

Weghaupt doesn't want to get any bigger, and he couldn't handle the added volume even if he wanted to, at least not without lowering his ridiculously high standards. He also doesn't want his bread sold by people who don't share his fanatic commitment to healthy organic ingredients and high quality. He was recently approached by a large franchise operation that wanted his bread; he asked me not to say the name, but it is known for an

The acclaimed Joseph sourdough.



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extremely unhealthy fried bread with a hole in the middle, favored by policemen. It was the kind of contract that could put an ambitious young baker on the global map. Weghaupt had one word for them: *nein!*

How did the unhappy butcher turn himself into the happy baker? When Weghaupt hung up his butcher's apron, he went back to school to study food technology. His new skills took him to one of Austria's three big industrial bakers. "Bread prices kept going down to compete with the Germans, the Spanish, and so did the quality. I told my boss that I thought the company should change the recipe. I said, Believe me, we must increase quality and be in smaller shops. We must sell good bread. He said, Go to hell; what we need are more machines and less people. So I said, Screw you, I go."

So, at age 29, Weghaupt opened his bakery in Austria's Waldviertel region, about 90 minutes north of Vienna, and started making bread his way; the bread he makes now still travels from the same bakery every morning. He named the bread Joseph with a *ph* after his grandfather—Josef with an *f* became more common in Austria after World War II. The old-fashioned spelling also signals a return to baking's bygone days. "A lot of guys, when they see the spelling, think there's some old guy doing the baking," says Weghaupt.

It's hard to imagine that anyone, even in the good old days, ever took this much time and trouble to turn out a loaf of bread. Weghaupt starts with slow-acting rye sourdough; all of his bread is made with rye. In most sourdough bread, the lactobacillus culture—and sometimes added yeast—ferments the rye flour in about 12 hours. The faster the fermentation process, the more pungent the aftertaste. Weghaupt uses no yeast, and lets his sourdough ripen over four days, feeding it additional flour and water very slowly. After four days, he mixes in white flour, salt, and other ingredients, and lets it sit around for another two days—six days in all. He then takes the dough, cuts it into loaves, and folds the corners of each loaf over as local bakers do

WONDER BREADS

Joseph's baked goods fall into three categories: sourdough, sweet, and savory.



Viennese Brioche Kipferl



Graumohnflösserl



Viennese Kaiser Rolls



Whole-Wheat Seed Bread



Honey-Lavender Rye Bread



Artisanal Baguettes



Pumpkin-Seed Bread



Kaisergugelhupf



Olive-Tomato Ciabatta with Rosemary

when making a flaky pastry called *Golatschen*. The dough then rests between two and five hours more.

So far, the only metal object that comes into the process is a mixing bowl; no machines, which means Weghaupt can work with a wetter dough, and that makes for a lighter bread. “You must feel the dough, otherwise it doesn’t work,” he says with great conviction. The water helps, too, Weghaupt says. He uses something called Grander water, named for an old Tyrolean guru who claims to have discovered a way to give normal water more oomph. Weghaupt can’t really explain it better than that, but he swears by the “power” it gives his bread, and he’s the baker.

Finally, the bread is baked, allowed to stand for between 8 and 12 hours, and then baked again, which is how it gets its arboreal crust. None of this comes cheap. Joseph, the

priciest, costs \$7.50 per loaf. There’s a reason: “Each of my bakers can produce maybe 60 loaves of bread per day—that’s nothing! But we’re not talking about industrial bread baking. This is something else.”

This is the bread Weghaupt started peddling in 2009. It would be heartening to report that a better loaf of bread has the same magnetic effect on customers as a better mousetrap, but to go by Weghaupt’s experience, it does not. At first, “nobody cared—nobody! I went to restaurants, I went to delis: I have this bread, maybe you’re interested? No, no, no! You know what they said to me? They said, It doesn’t taste like bread!”

I was eating lunch at **Ulrich** (1 Sankt-Ulrichs-Platz, 43-1/961-2782; en.ulrichwien.at), a charming bistro near Vienna’s Volkstheater, and happened to notice Joseph bread on the menu (close to \$3 for an order!) Gerald, the manager, remembered Weghaupt from the shaky days

when he was just starting out. “I was working at another café and we were looking for great bread, but Josef was very nervous. What if the café went under, or stopped taking his bread? I told him, We’ll take the bread.” And so it began, one Viennese bistro at a time.

And that’s where it’s likely to stay. “I have enough. It’s cool,” says Weghaupt, who has visited New York (he loved the pastrami at Katz’s Deli; the rye bread...meh) and held desultory talks with food impresario Eli Zabar. Each was impressed with the other but in the end, things went nowhere. “You can’t be too far away from the dough, otherwise it’s not you anymore,” says Weghaupt, who’s lived in Vienna for years now, though he’s a country boy at heart. One day, he says, he will return to his roots and move back to Austria’s Waldviertel region. What will he do there? “Well,” he says, “I’ll always have my bakery.” ♦