



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **It's not just food pseuds BREAD OF HEAVEN**

At four o'clock this afternoon the sound of wailing will be heard at my local deli. That's when it will sell out of sourdough loaves, diminishing dozens of dinner parties. But the craze for this distinctively flavoured bread its not restricted to the capital's food pseuds. Part-baked sourdoughs will have disappeared from the shelves of marks & Spencer in Liverpool long before Saturday afternoon. "Customers may not be sure what it is, but it sells out in every store that stocks it," says the company.

Bread experts agree that sourdough loaves are set to find a permanent place on our tables. In sourdough baking, a fermented starter culture - which makes use of the wild yeasts in the air - is used to raise and sour the bread. One half of the starter goes into the current patch of dough, the other is replenished with a little flour and retained for culture baking. The process can take more than a week, and is notoriously pickle.

Purists favour long fermentation, claiming that this develops all sorts of weird and beneficial properties in the yeast, and never - but never - give their bread a quick shot of yeast, the sourdough fiend's equivalent of steroid doping. (Most commercial recipes do use some yeast). Sourdough bread (there are French, German, Italian and American versions: the famous Parisian Pain Poiline and our own Innes loaf among others) can

be made with any flour and to a varied sourness. Those distinctively chewy little white rolls served in the best French restaurants are refined relations of the full-size loaf. Many are supplied by Bagatelle, a two-year-old French bakery that has a glamorous bread boutique at 44 Harrington Road, London SW7.

Bagatelle also bakes pain de campagne, the French country loaf made with sourdough and a mix of white and rye flour.

The shop reports that English customers enjoy it as a breakfast bread - it toasts well and keeps for a couple of days, so it is more like the bread we are used to. The M & S American sourdough is the latest loaf to come from the baker who introduced that other mightily fashionable loaf - ciabatta - to this country. Peggy Czyzak-Dannenbaum is an American of Polish descent who became bored with venture capital, took a master's degree in business administration and opened the La Fornai bakery in 1985.

Her timing proved prefect. "Ciabatta is the Como version of a loaf made with olive oil found all over Italy. I never thought it would appeal to English taste: it was an indulgence of mine." Now 40,000 loaves worth of indulgence sell out every day; its success has had the effect of fast-acting yeast on the other bakers. Suddenly shelves are laden with Continental breads. There is flat foccaccia sprinkled with rosemary, ring-shaped ciambella, tricolour loaves tinted with spinach and tomato, and breads flavoured with everything from chocolate to onion. The writer and cook Anna del Conte applauds our enthusiasm but thinks we should use these loaves with more restraint. "Italians eat a lot of bread

with meals, but it is white country bread that has a simple, wholesome taste.

"Expensive loaves with more fanciful ingredients are used for snacks or as a starter - it is waste to mix them up with other competing tastes.

The fruit and nut breads you can find in the shops now are a teatime treat for Italian children, not the perfect accompaniment to an Italian stew."

A pugliese loaf is Peggy Czyzak-Dannenbaum's latest Italian line. It is a round white crusty loaf with a finer texture than ciabatta that sells in M& S, Sainsbury's and Waitrose.

The basis, as with all her breads, is untreated, unbleached flour, a slow, traditional proving process (as opposed to the quick process used to make most British bread, in which air is beaten into the dough in huge mixers) and with reference to authentic recipes.

Ms Czyzak-Dannenbaum says: "In Apulia it would be made as a giant loaf to feed the whole family, but I have not persuaded the supermarkets to try a two-kilo loaf."

"Doing the Continental: Stocking up with loaves of all sorts at the Bagatelle bread boutique"

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