



PRESS RELEASE

Press contact : Jacky G. Lesellier CONM CMA

BRITISH BAKER (7 Mars 1997)

Stormin' Norman lands in a capital position

A presidential banquet or just a morning brioche - Paul Rozario talks to Jacky Lesellier who wants customers to rediscover the taste of bread.

Emerging from South Kensington tube station in London's museum quarter' is an intriguing experience. Many surrounding shops have a strongly gallic flavour, and - with 1,200 pupils at the nearby Lycée Charles de Gaulle - passers-by are as likely to speak French as English. So, for Jacky Lesellier, owner since 1990 of Bagatelle Boutique pâtisserie on Harrington Road, his shop in the centre of what he laughingly calls Frog Valley, is a home from home. With his north London Bagatelle Concept bakery supplying bread, pastries and croissants to the Kensington shop, the latter is normally supervised by manageress Brigitte Lacoste. Originally from the Calvados region of Normandy, Mr Lesellier radiates a passion for authenticity and flavour natural to the heir of a long family tradition. "We are trying to get people to rediscover the taste of bread and our 47 varieties all use only natural ingredients - and no improvers," he explains.

This month, fresh from his recent Best Croissant in the UK Award, he goes to the BBC Good Food Show in London Olympia, to reach consumers directly. Pride of place goes to a new creation, pain au chou. This is baked with bacon and black peppers in a cabbage wrapping.

To catch the attention of passers-by, the aroma of toasted sourdough bread will waft over the Bagatelle stand - and free tastings are on offer.

One recent novelty is the suitably Franglais-styled Bread in le Basket, a 350g loaf "direct from oven to the table" proved and baked in its own popular wood basket. This sells for £1.60-£1.98 according to bread type. "People are startled at first by the price, but when you point out that it is totally natural, nourishing - and low-fat - they come round." This now also sells to several restaurants and airlines.

Bagatelle produces a small amount of organic bread, and Mr Lesellier sees a bright future for this area, but notes that realistically customers should expect to pay about twice as much for organic products.

All ingredients come from France - including sea-salt for organic breads, Bourbon vanilla beans and Normandy Butter. Flour is taken only from three specially chosen mills in northern France. Breads vary in size from 30g to 2.5Kg with a typical four days shelf life. Both preservatives and artificial colourings are taboo. Mr Lesellier's bread is also low-yeast, using Bagatelle's own fermentation process. One product with an interesting history is pain brié from Normandy.

Traditionally used on sea voyages, this is very dense with a low-salt content. Wheat-free bread is also available in small amounts. In fact, Mr Lesellier has been told by a dietician that one cause of the rise recorded in wheat allergies is the fat which has been added to bread for many years. Interestingly, wheat allergy is less common in France, where national regulations on fat content of

bread are strict - and 90% of the nation's bread is fat-free. Bagatelle follows these rules to the letter, and uses only butter or virgin olive oil as a fattening agent. After years of plummeting bread prices, he is hopeful of success in winning public enthusiasm for the taste of additive-free bread.

"People now travel more, and there is more demand for quality"

However, Bagatelle's bread extends far beyond French varieties. Traditional English and Irish breads, US sourdough, and even a Cajun two-kilo round loaf have all been made.

A typical baguette sells for 70p, and most breads are £1. However an approximately 350g wholemeal pain integral sells for £1.98.

His Baguettes, for authenticity, are baked to a richer hue than the pale shade of the standard variety found in this country. Incidentally he points out there is plenty of room for varied baguettes.

Wholesale makes up 90% of Mr Lesellier's business., and Bagatelle supplies 43 four and five star hotels plus most Michelin-rated restaurants, as well as Harrods and Harvey Nichols. Deliveries are made daily at 6am, noon and 6pm, via the firm's five vans.

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

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The firm also runs a full-scale a la carte catering service and major events are, so to speak, meat and drink to Bagatelle, which can cater for up to 500 sitting guests and 3,000 standing. During the week of last year's Paris Air Show, Bagatelle served 3,500 delegates. Mr Lesellier laughs at the irony of a prestige French event importing food from Britain. Bread, he finds is often marginalised at major events, so he normally creates an elaborate bread pyramid or other spectacular table centrepiece to draw the eye. Where pastry is concerned, there is definitely no agonising about low-fat! "Pastry is an indulgence, and must be made with butter," he insists. Chocolate is also given in-depth treatment, with six varieties used to offer a subtle range of tastes. For Christmas, Mr Lesellier needed to produce petit fours for a customer, and hit on the idea of mini-mince pies - eventually selling 6,000.

The Bagatelle production team includes 14 bakers, 14 Danish chefs, and 6 pastry chefs. All staff are recruited in France and hold relevant French Diplomas. To maintain standards, trainers in baking, pastry preparation and cooking with Meilleur Ouvrier de France status are employed.

This master Craftsman state diploma is awarded every four years to France's most experienced chefs. For staff who stay over one year, there is also paid training leave in France, as well as profit-related pay and bonus schemes.

Most equipment is French-made - but Bagatelle also uses a range of other continental and British equipment. Danish pastries and white rolls are baked in four rotary models, while a large nine-deck oven takes care of all speciality breads. This gives a rich even bake to the loaf from top to bottom. In fact, Mr Lesellier sometimes has to reassure worried chefs used to a pale bread colour that the loaf bottom is not burnt - just properly baked. Celebration cakes are also important. As well as the familiar British weddings cake, Bagatelle produces a traditional French croquembouche. This comprises individual caramelised profiteroles filled with flavoured pastry cream. These are combined with caramel to create the distinctive cone shape. The price varies according to size and décor. Other options include cakes shaped as hearts, letters or figures.

Innovation is a constant concern, often linked to seasonal events. Among recent landmarks have been a Royal Pimms Cake for summer, and a cake for the 1995 French presidential election cake, featuring Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin.

Whatever the result of this year's general election, Bagatelle seems to already have a winning formula.

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