

BAKING FOR BEGINNERS

Via Strong kneads her way toward beautiful artisan bread with a beginners baking class at the One Mile Bakery



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See page 86

It's interesting that universities, the government, and whoever else decides these things, have recommended that \$9,000 a year for a degree is fair enough. The least they can do, in this case, is throw in lunch and a large glass of wine like Elisabeth Mahoney of One Mile Bakery.

University students pay about \$6 more an hour than this introduction to bread baking costs, and many students, myself included, only come away with a fancy bit of paper and the capacity to drink more than one's liver would like. I have spent one day with Elisabeth, and not only had a lot of fun and learnt how to make bread, but I've come away with two heavy bags of self-made bread and a full belly of food. The six-hour course takes you through the techniques and recipes of making artisan bread and much to the amazement of all the participants, we managed to make: rye, wholemeal or spelt, pain de campagne, a classic bloomer and to finish, a lesson in baguette rolling. There was no Kitchen Aid at all so some serious kneading was the order of the day – each loaf required kneading for ten minutes or 15 for the spelt. I chose the wholemeal and watched as the spelters panted over their dough. Elisabeth kneads all the bakery's bread by hand – 50 to 60 loaves every week. Our group of would-be bakers had never met before but there's nothing like a communal activity to get people chatting. Elisabeth is also a great communicator: funny, self-deprecating and a very patient and complimentary teacher. I was not shouted at, which is what I'm used to when learning something, but praised for my maverick baguette rolling. All the flour is organic, of the highest quality, with no additives or strange sounding ingredients, and may well be something you've never tasted before – especially the spelt, which by the sounds of it is pretty much the same as when Caesar was eating it.



For the less robust bakers out there, me again, you'll be glad to hear that like any good day out, there are lots of tea breaks (and good coffee) and a break for lunch. For the starter we were given a One Mile Bakery chorizo and chestnut soup which was basically a meal in itself: thick, full-bodied, incredibly tasty and all the better for being washed down by a glass of red wine (or raspberry lemonade etc if your prefer).

The baking didn't stop there. Between the starter and main we were back in the kitchen, but only for a little bit, to get our bread ready for the oven before sitting down again for the main: courgette and turkey burgers with a sour cream sumac sauce accompanied by a leek, spelt and squash salad. The meal was well timed as the majority of the concentration work comes before the lunch, otherwise the bread may have turned out a little less remarkable than it did.

All this activity is done in Elisabeth's kitchen, which is also her bakery, soup kitchen and where she makes her jam. When we arrived it was like a show kitchen; when we finished it looked more like my kitchen. It's this homely, true-to-life vibe that gives the course something that school, university or anything taught in an institution can't really recreate – a warm, relaxed and laidback atmosphere that not only makes the learning easier, but makes the day a really fun experience. We were all astonished at how the time had flown by and how much we'd achieved in just six hours.

The course costs £75 per person and is limited to groups of four. To book a course, order bread, soup or jam, or find out more about the One Mile Bakery, visit the website.

Info: 07939 211809 / www.onemilebakery.com