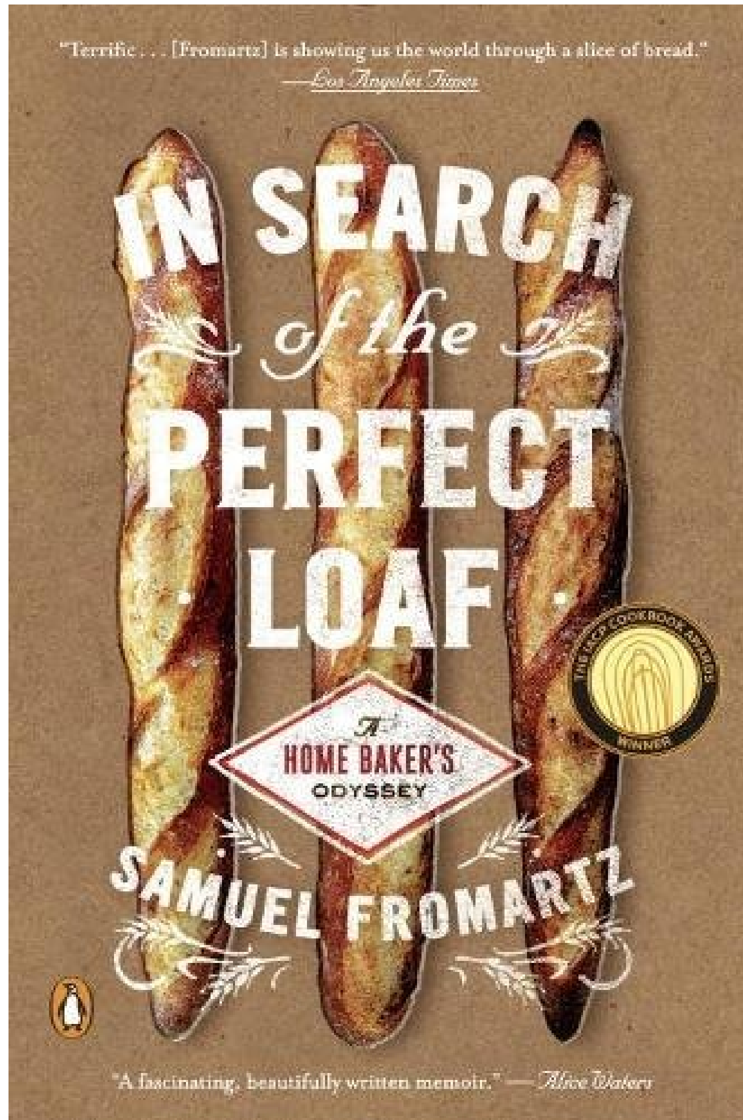
In Search of the Perfect Loaf: A Home Baker's Odyssey

Samuel Fromartz
*DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub*



DOWNLOAD READ ONLINE

#168347 in Books Fromartz Samuel 2015-07-21 2015-07-21Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.30 x .70 x 5.40l, .66 #File Name: 0143127624320 pagesIn Search of the Perfect Loaf A Home Baker s Odyssey | File size: 53.Mb

Samuel Fromartz : In Search of the Perfect Loaf: A Home Baker's Odyssey before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In Search of the Perfect Loaf: A Home Baker's Odyssey:

27 of 28 people found the following review helpful. A different kind of bread bookBy MarcusA great read for the avid home baker. Loads of information delivered in a narrative that will really resonate with anyone who obsesses (even if just a little) about bread. Even if you've tried baking at home and been frustrated this may just inspire you to give it another go.Not a Bread Book in the usual sense, the handful of recipes are there to highlight the author's various bread-

related adventures and give you a starting point to find your own. There are plenty of "nuts and bolts" bread books out there and if you bake you probably already own a few. This is not one of those. It is the sort of read that, if you don't already own a bunch of bread books, might just start you down that path.As a home baker I appreciate that Mr. Fromartz has clearly done his homework and is passionate about great bread without going all mystical and sentimental. Neither is he trying to sell a technique to make it easy-to-make-great-bread-at-home. Most Bread Books tend to gloss over the fact that if you really want to make great breads you will need to practice... probably a lot. And, you will make some disappointing loaves... probably a lot. The lesson here is that the result can be very much worth the trouble, and that sometimes even the trouble is worth the trouble.As the title implies, it's not about the perfect loaf, it's about the search.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Read this and you'll want to make bread every day!By Just JayThis is an excellent read for any home or professional baker. This is great combination of a travel/cookbook even though the author prefaces the book by saying it's not a recipe book. The introduction explains how he started his quest for food and travel and then goes on to explain the process of turning wheat into that perfect tasting loaf of bread. This isn't a "recipe every page" kind of book. In fact there's only a handful of recipes in it. But the ones he choose to include are amazing.... Once you practice perfecting them! That's what this book is about. The title is right on spec, "In Search of the Perfect Loaf" isn't going to make you a master breadmaker overnight. Fromartz is giving you the history, nuances, and a few little secrets and it's up to the reader/baker to go and search for YOUR way to make that perfect loaf.Each chapter is about a different experience followed by a recipe or two. The Stirato I think is the best stretch bread recipe I've found aside from a little restaurant in my home town! This is a great read and it really will set you out to start experimenting on your own at home. Buy it! Read it! Start baking bread! You won't regret it!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Every home Baker's dreamBy Brendan HasenstabThe subtitle of this book really summarizes the intensity with which the author, Samuel Formartz, has pursued his quest for that perfect homemade loaf of bread: "A home baker's odyssey." He travelled widely, worked in bakeries and boulangeries, and with each new experience, he comes home and works to replicate that bread at home. (You and I benefit from the recipes, which allow us to dive right in and make great bread without too many variables to worry about.) What a lovely adventure this must have been, and for any eager baker, I recommend it as a great tale, filled with insight and information from a guy who went the distance and came back with the goods. It's completely motivating to me, in the same way that Ken Forkish's "Flour Water Salt Yeast" is.

"An invaluable guide for beginning bakers."The New York Times An irresistible account of bread, bread baking, and one home bakers journey to master his craft In 2009, journalist Samuel Fromartz was offered the assignment of a lifetime: to travel to France to work in a boulangerie. So began his quest to hone not just his homemade baguettewhich later beat out professional bakeries to win the Best Baguette of D.C.but his knowledge of bread, from seed to table. For the next four years, Fromartz traveled across the United States and Europe, perfecting his sourdough in California, his whole grain rye in Berlin, and his country wheat in the South of France. Along the way, he met historians, millers, farmers, wheat geneticists, sourdough biochemists, and everyone in between, learning about the history of breadmaking, the science of fermentation, and more. The result is an informative yet personal account of bread and breadbaking, complete with detailed recipes, tips, and beautiful photographs. Entertaining and inspiring, this book will be a touchstone for a new generation of bakers and a must-read for anyone who wants to take a deeper look at this deceptively ordinary, exceptionally delicious staple: handmade bread.

WINNER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CULINARY PROFESSIONALS' AWARD FOR LITERARY WRITINGNAMED ONE OF THE BEST FOOD BOOKS OF 2014 BYTHE ATLANTICANDNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICTerrific.Fromartz is much more than an obsessive cook. Hes also a fine reporter and writer. And Perfect Loaf is much more than a book about baking bread.What Fromartz is really writing about is how a deeper understanding of something leads to a deeper appreciation of it. He is showing us the world through a slice of bread. Los Angeles Times [An] engaging and informative bookabout, among many things, the return of artisan baking in France and its rise in the United States, the cultivation of wheat here and abroad, the magic and mystery of sourdough starters, and by no means least, the education of a baker. Washington Post Terrific to read.This is the book for beginning and would-be bread bakers, with information on flours, sourdough making, loaf formation, and oven rejiggering anyone needs. The Atlantic, The Best Food Books of 2014 A flavorful delight.Fromartzs Odyssey is just that; he has stoked every coal when it comes to bread. Though this isnt a cookbook by any means, he does include nine recipesall graded by difficulty and annotated so that its like having an expert at your side. Does he find the perfect loaf? He finds a lot more than that. Kansas City Star This is no mere cookbook, but a journey[Fromartzs] evolution lays out a compelling path for anyone with flour, water, salt and yeast and an appetite for the perfect loaf of bread. Minneapolis Star-Tribune [Fromartz] educates readers through a journeyman narrative, with a handful of recipes from an easy-to-make baguette inspired by travels in France, to pain de compagne from California bakers and German Roggenweizenbrot he learned in Berlin..If you dont know much about how or why handcrafted bread is vastly different from whats sold inbakeriesand grocery stores, start with this book. Pittsburgh

Post-Gazette In Search of the Perfect Loaf asks and answers some essential questions.I hope his book leads other people to go on their own search for the perfect loaf. Jim Lahey, The Wall Street Journal A memoir, recipe book, and ultimately, a meditation on reviving diversity and flavor in a food too many take for granted. The Plate, National Geographic, Best Books of 2014 [Fromartz] mixes practical advice and age-old wisdom and leavens the combination with interesting characters and irresistible writing. What arises is an absolute must-have book for the bread baker on your listBut it is also a page-turning read for anyone with a vicarious curiosity about how this miracle food is made. Barry Estabrook, Civil Eats, 10 Book Recommendations for Conscientious Eaters Thoroughly researched and engagingly written.This impressive work falls somewhere between a cookbook, an exploration of bread-baking techniques, and a history of bread....Even those who think they know bread will find something to gain here.Highly recommended. Library Journal, starred review [A] fun and informative memoir [that] provides a fascinating miniature course on the techniques involved in making different varietiesbaking methods used by our ancestorsand even a little history on grains and practices dating back to the Fertile Crescent. Publishers Weekly A consummate celebration of the deceptively simple loaf of breadBesides imparting a history of grains and their places in culture over the past 105,000 years (when grain consumption appears to have begun), Fromartz includes step-by-step recipes for nurturing dough starters and for baking baguettes, flatbread, rye bread (which he learned to make in Berlin) and a loaf made from an artisanal grain, Turkey Red wheat.Richly detailed [and] lively. Kirkus s Part food science, part cultural history, part memoir, Fromartz's book blends a variety of ingredients (the history of wheat production, the science of yeast fermentation, half a dozen bread recipes) into a delicious, informative dish that will have readers reaching for their aprons. ShelfAwareness Fromartz offers the fruits of his researches so that other home bakers may profit. His recipes are detailed and accessible for any earnest and patient home baker committed to an honest loaf. Booklist "This fascinating, beautifully written memoir reveals Sam Fromartz as that rare breed of cook: craftsman, historian and scientist all in one, following his senses and questing after what is delicious, authentic, and pure." Alice Waters, vice president of Slow Food International, owner of Chez Panisse, and author of The Art of Simple Food "In this lovely book, Sam Fromartz offers a signature mix of baking insights and wonderful storytelling as he hits the road to find his perfect loaf. If you make breador ever intend toyou need to read this book." Ruth Reichl, former editor-in-chief of Gourmet and author of Delicious! "Sam Fromartz's odyssey teaches us that being a great baker takes more than simply following recipesit is a relentless quest. His conversations with bakers and then his reinterpretation of their lessons at home is a double education. I love this book." Nancy Silverton, founder of La Brea bakery and author of The Mozza Cookbook "In Search of the Perfect Loaf is really the best kind of reada quest for true bread enriched by research, knowledge and pleasure. The passion Sam Fromartz brings to this journey is incredible and infectious. Fromartz is generous in sharing his baking intel, but the real recipe for delicious bread, we learn, begins long before the kitchen. This book will change the way you look at bread. Dan Barber, co-owner/executive chef of Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns and author of The Third Plate In his search for the holy grail of baguettes, Sam Fromartz has beautifully captured the joys, loneliness, frustrations, and rewards of his bread making journey. And, wonderfully for us, he shares both the life and baking lessons learned from the many amazing people he met along the way. You will want to bake from this book. Peter Reinhart, author of The Bread Bakers Apprentice and Bread Revolution "This book makes the reader reexamine a subject truly overlooked: the culture of the baker and, in particular, of bread. Through his quixotic quest to find and learn how to make the perfect bread, Sam Fromartz brings us into the bakery and illustrates and captures the essence of what bread culture is. It is an exquisite work, written with passion and expertise. With many of the stories, Fromartz helps the reader understand the mind of the baker. He himself is truly obsessed, and this book is ideal for anyone wishing to further their knowledge of the subject of what craft or artisan baking is and ought to be. He presents, through the lives and stories of other practitioners of the craft, a future for bread which is both meaningful and dignified." Jim Lahey, owner/founder of Sullivan Street Bakery and author of My Bread "If you love great bread, you will love this book! Inside, Sam shares his journey in search for the perfect loaf, baking with some of the most inspirational and leading bakers of our time. From Paris, to Berlin, to Marienthal, Kansas, we follow Sam on his quest as he shares his love for great bread and the baking secrets he learned along the way. I read this book with my favorite music in the background, in my most comfortable chair, a glass of wine in hand, and a rustic loaf of bread." Daniel Leader, founder of Bread Alone Bakery and author of Bread Alone: Bold Fresh Loaves from Your Own Hands "Great bread is one of life's simple pleasures, and this book captures so much of what is inspiring in the realm of bread baking right now. From California to Berlin, we meet passionate, committed bakers, and see how Sam translates their craft to the home kitchen. Bread geeks will love it, but so too will those wondering about all we've lost in our daily breadand what we might recapture." Heidi Swanson, author of Super Natural Every Day Fromartz is a passionate, deeply serious home baker who writes eloquently and gracefully about what it takes in skill and ingredients to produce a delicious baguette or country loaf. His account of the history and comeback of heritage wheat grains is a revelation that will send even the most gluten-phobic reader to search for breads made from them. In Search of the Perfect Loaf is a lovely booka perfect read for anyone who cares about good food. Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health at New York University and author of Eat, Drink, Vote: An Illustrated Guide to Food Politics "Fromartz has managed to elevate the humble loaf of bread into a riveting tale of history, passion and practical technique along

with a rare glimpse into the workings of early morning bakeries from Paris to Berlin to San Francisco. You won't look at bread the same way again." Kathleen Flinn, author of The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry and Burnt Toast Makes You Sing GoodFrom the Hardcover edition.About the AuthorSamuel Fromartz is a food, environment, and business journalist and the author of Organic, Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew. Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief ofthe Food Environment Reporting Network, his work has appeared inThe New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, Salon, Inc., Fortune, Business Week,the Nation and more, and has been selected forThe Best Business Stories of the Year.A native of Brooklyn, he lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife and daughter, where he bakes all his familys bread.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Praise for In Search of the Perfect LoafTitle PageCopyrightDedicationEpigraphIntroductionA Note on the RecipesRECIPE: StiratoRECIPE: Levain BaguetteRECIPE: Sourdough StarterRECIPE: Pain de CampagneRECIPE: Emmer FlatbreadRECIPE: Socca AmricainRECIPE: Turkey Red MicheRECIPE: RoggenweizenbrotRECIPE: Pain NatureEpilogueIntroductionIt was December 2008, two months after Lehman Brothers imploded and a week before Christmas, when I got the call. One of my editors at a university magazine wouldnt be needing my services anymore. Budget cuts were under way. Even he didnt know how long his job would last. I hung up. Forty percent of my freelance income had just evaporated. I went out for a walk on that chilly morning in Washington, thinking how typical this wasthe news coming just before Christmas. When I worked years earlier as a business reporter, I had covered these announcements of thousands of people cut, usually on Fridays, just before the holidays. After walking around the manicured lawns of the U.S. Capitol, I came back to my desk only to get more bad news. In disbelief, I listened as another editor, a good friend of mine, told me how he was being forced to end contract work. He hoped to keep me on but things didnt look good. Sit tight for two or three months, he said. So in one day, Id lost perhaps three fourths of my income. I looked at the picture of my young daughter staring back at me from my desk.Freelancing is often filled with ups and downs, but thats okay. It comes with the territory. The goal is to mix and match different projects, scraping by through lulls and working late or on weekends when things are really busy. But this was no lull. In a decade of freelance journalism, I had never experienced anything like this.Since much of this contract work comes from people I know, I got busy, really busy. I started to send out e-mails to every friend, colleague, and former colleague who might know of work. I got a couple of responses pretty quickly, including one from an editor I had known for years, who was now heading a travel magazine start-up called Afar. A travel magazine in a near depression, the worst since the 1930s, when airline seats were going begging? I didnt ask. This was a lead. A few days later I talked with her and you could hardly tell how bad things were. She described jaunts by writers to Madagascar, Venezuela, and Morocco. It was all about experiential traveldiving into the culture of a place rather than following the guidebook. Naturally, food was a big focus. Apparently this kind of immersion travel was a passion of the founders, who were committed to the magazine, recession or not. So did I have any ideas?Sure, I stammered, trying to think of something fast. You know, Ive always wanted to visit Paris and work in a boulangerie, because Ive never been able to make a true baguette. Then I launched into the backstory: How Id been baking at home for more than a decade, and how I always thought I could benefit from doing a stint at a real bakery. Though it was true that Id fantasized about this, the destination Id had in mind was Portland, San Francisco, Vermont, or New York. But on the spur of the moment, with the travel editor on the line, my destination had suddenly become Paris. After all, I spit out, a new wave of French artisan bakers had rescued breadthat national cultural symbolfrom years of neglect, bringing back truly great loaves. So yes, maybe ten days in Paris would do it. Could I line this up in a couple of weeks and go soon after that? Maybe get the article in on time for their premier issue? Sure, I replied, knowing not one baker in Paris. Three weeks later, early in 2009, I was on a jet to Charles De Gaulle airport, surrounded by rows and rows of empty seats.I felt like I had scored the ideal gig, but it also felt odd because I had rarely conflated my bread-baking hobby with work. Making bread was that special moment of the day when I could take my hands off the keyboard, stand up from my chair, and go downstairs to the kitchen and play with flour, water, sourdough, and salt. Instead of wasting time surfing the Internet on breaks, I would rummage through a cabinet filled with wheat, rye, and spelt flours; gathering sesame seeds and flaxseeds and tending to my sourdough starter. In this way, baking was the antithesis of writing, my version of chopping wood, crucial to maintaining my sanity amid the daily pressures of work. And thats the way I wanted it. Cordoned off from writing, baking offered a brief reprieve, and for many years I sought to keep it that way.But now, faced with a crisis and the need to generate work, any work, I had become pragmatic. This baguette excursion was the rationale to go deeper into bread and get paid at the same time, but I also knew that for a home baker the exercise wouldnt be easy. Even if I did learn to master a baguette in a boulangerie, I would need to translate the technique to my home kitchen. I wouldnt achieve a great baguette in a day or even a week. I knew, because I had tried many times and finally given up, convinced that a decent baguette couldnt be made at home. But standing next to a baker, and one in Paris no less, maybe I could learn that one tip or technique that would fundamentally alter what I did. If so, if I really got that kind of aha! moment, the entire trip would be worth it. So the baguette became many things: a story, an unexpected source of income, and a challenge, for this bread had defeated me. But it also became something elsea template that I would later repeat with professional bakers in the United States and Europe, applying the same hands-on approach to bread-making problems I so often encountered at home. I thought this work would bring me much closer to the perfect loaf,

but what I didnt appreciate was how this quest would fundamentally alter the way I viewed bakers, grains, and this basic sustenance, bread.Bread was always a part of my life, even if I didnt get interested in bread making until well into adult life. I never recall a time growing up in Brooklyn when we didnt have bread on the table. To be honest, there was usually bread and rice, representing the two cultural poles of my upbringing. My father, who came from a family of Russian Jewish immigrants, liked bread with every meal. My mother, who is Japanese American, usually had a pot of rice on the stove. This rich personal relationship with starches, from Japanese short-grain rice to Russian black bread, has become part of my identity.My dads family had emigrated from Kiev in Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century. But the links to our Russian heritage were indirect, for I dont remember eating anything in particular with my grandparents. There was no quintessential Nana food, no memorable dishes, no homemade loaves. Instead, the Jewish foods associated with New Yorkknishes, blintzes, pastrami, matzo ball soup, smoked fish, pickles, and, yes, breadfigured as prominently for me as they did for many New Yorkers, whether you were Jewish, Chinese, or Puerto Rican. Sometimes we got pumpernickel or a seeded rye at a Jewish bakery on Church Avenue in Brooklyn, or Levys Jewish rye, which I liked toasted. Wheres the broyt? my dad would ask at dinner, using the Yiddish word for bread. On Sundays, we often had fist-size bagels with cream cheese and Nova Scotia lox or smoked whitefish, which we picked up on Flatbush Avenue after ice skating at the Wollman Rink in Prospect Park. I still recall the bakery, with the white-haired guys in aprons and hats, turning the steaming bagels off wet wooden boards and popping them back into the oven for their final bake. In the evenings, we had rice with dinner. No one had even heard of a low-carb diet.Later, after my parents split, my dad moved into an apartment on Bedford Street in Greenwich Village, which broadened my culinary horizons simply because of the neighborhood. A. Zito Sons Bakery was around the corner on Bleecker Street, with a marble counter stacked with Italian American loaves. It had just enough room for a half-dozen customers to buy the bread. Many of the customers were elderly Italians who lived nearby and had been buying Zitos bread for years. The bakers dragged up the hot loaves in big plastic bins from the coal-fired oven in the basement through the steel trapdoor in the sidewalk. The bakery had its badge of honor prominently displayed: a picture of Sinatra holding one of its loaves.My job, as a somewhat morose, long-haired teenager visiting my newly divorced dad and his younger girlfriend, was to run around the corner and buy the bread for dinner, a job I always relished because I could get out of the house. I would first visit Murrays cheese shopnot the current store on Bleecker Street, which is an emporium of artisan cheeses, cured meats, and other delights, but the small, cramped place on Cornelia Streetwhere it often took twenty minutes just to get to the counter. Cheese in hand, I would walk around the corner to Zitos, which had three types of bread: a torpedo-shaped white loaf, a whole wheat that Id now guess was probably two-thirds white flour, and a round crown loaf studded with small bits of prosciutto from the leftover heels. When that prosciutto loaf came up from the basement, it filled the store with an incomparable smellyou had to rip into it as soon as you left the bakery. Id bring the bread and cheese back to my dads place, and if the loaf wasnt still warm by dinner, he would throw it in the oven for a few minutes.Like Jewish rye and Russian black bread, these loaves were part of an era in New York, one that has now largely vanished. One by one, the old men retired and those bakeries shut down: the bagel place on Flatbush, the Jewish bakery on Church Avenue, and Vesuvio Bakery in SoHo, with the iconic storefront window. Then Zitos shut down in 2003, ending an eighty-year run. The bakery stood empty for a long time, and whenever I passed by it I would wonder about its brick oven in the basementwhether it was still there, sitting dark and cold, maybe waiting for another baker to fire it up one day.Zitos didnt make artisan bread or the Italian loaves currently in fashion, like pane pugliese, ciabatta, or filone. At the counter, the clerks would simply ask, White or wheat? The bread wouldnt win any contests, for the crumb had an even and spongy texture that felt like a concession to squishy American bread. But the crust crackled and the entire package was perfect for mopping up spaghetti sauce. So why wax on about it, when its memory would unlikely make any top-ten great bread lists? Like many foods that sustained generations of immigrants, these neighborhood bakeries defined bread for me when I was growing up. This wasnt plastic packaged supermarket bread, nor was it the denser whole wheat bricks from health food stores. It was the bread of immigrants: Italian breads with sesame seeds, chewy bagels, flavorful ryes, even steaming hot pita coming right out of the brick ovens run by Arabs in Brooklyn. It was all just good, fresh bread from the oven. It wasnt artisanal and it wasnt a movement.When I moved to Washington, D.C., in the mid-1990s, artisan bread was starting to become popular. I knew little of the topography of the capitals culinary scene, though I began to think about bread in a way I hadnt before. That is, I actually began to think about it. When breads available, a part of a daily or weekly habit, you dont really bother. But when its absent, the mind begins to work: Where is it? Who makes it? Where can I get it? Such musings, in times of intense shortages, have led to events like the French Revolution or the Arab Spring. Yet, as far as I could tell, amid the surfeit of steak houses in the capital, there was little great bread to be had and there hadnt been so much as a protest, never mind a revolt. Bread, it seemed, lacked a constituency.The bagel chains had arrived and left their mark on the town in the form of soft, doughy concoctions filled with sweeteners and blueberries. Aside from Uptown Bakers, a notable wholesale operation, with few stores, there was little to remark upon. Mark Furstenberg, a rare local baker of renown, known for his crusty and critical mien, was between ventures. He hadnt yet opened what later became a favorite haunt of mine, Breadline, a bustling luncheon joint near the White House that featured house-made bread. In the meantime, I was stuck with other passable loaves that took a lot of effort to buy. When I finally met

up with Furstenberg years later, he had an explanation for D.C.s lackluster loaves. The city, he told me, didnt have a great tradition of bread because it didnt have a strong base of immigrants, like New York, Chicago, San Francisco, even Baltimore. What Washington had instead were lobbyists, the federal government, and big wholesale bakeries that fed the restaurants, grocery stores, and numerous hotels. A popular sandwich joint, Taylor, which opened a decade after I arrived, even trucked its trademark sesame loaves all the way from Philadelphia, though, facing one too many breakdowns of its van on I-95, it finally prevailed on a local bakery to make the bread instead. Aside from Breadline, which Furstenberg owned and ran for several years, there wasnt a single notable bakery in town where the bread was baked in the back and sold in the front.Now, for most people, this isnt an issue; an absence not even worth remarking upon, if it is noticed at all. For many, bread is an afterthought, even though globally it provides one fifth of humanitys calories and is the highest source of proteinyes, we get more protein from wheat than meat. Half of the worlds poor depend on wheat as their main source of nutrition. But in the part of the world where we live, the gluten-intolerant and the carb-phobic seem to be far more aware of wheat than the rest of us who blindly consume the stuff. For me, though, probably because of my upbringing, bread never was simply an afterthought. I was always on the prowl for a good loaf, the best pizza, or the freshest handmade pita, but I had never even thought about making bread myselfthat is, until I was confronted with its absence. I decided to give it a go.I started out with two bread books, Joe Ortizs classic The Village Baker and Daniel Leaders Bread Alone. Both were professional bakers who had traveled to Europe and then recounted stories in their books about the bakers they had met and the recipes they had learned. It was the stories that really hooked me. Leader had an especially infectious tale about his friend Basil Kamir, who had opened a world music record store in an old abandoned boulangerie in Paris. When the building was slated for demolition in an urban renewal project, he decided to save the place by firing up the long-neglected brick oven in the basement, thus making it a cultural artifact worthy of preservation. The protest saved the placewhich still exists and sits across the street from a row of drab apartment buildings. But in order to preserve the building, Kamir had to make good on his word and become a baker. So he did, putting away his records and helping renew Frances bread tradition. Stories like this were so compelling that I recall fantasizing I might want to meet these bakers one day. I hadnt an inkling that I was going to bake in any serious way, or pursue such travels, or eventually even visit Kamirs bakery, but I began, prodded by the simple quest for a decent loaf of bread in a city largely devoid of it.It took a lot of practice, but I eventually fell into a rhythm. On days when I wasnt facing a deadline, Id walk downstairs from my office on the second floor, turn the dough out on the island counter, knead it for a minute or two to strengthen the gluten, then cover it, wash up, and return to the keyboard. On busy days when the phone was ringing I couldnt bake. Or worse, Id be in the middle of a crucial phone interview just as the bread was due to come out of the oven. (Talking on a portable headset, I would slide the loaf out of the oven, trying not to miss a beat.) Usually, I could find two days a week in which I could bake fresh loaves, which was more than enough for our household. And when I was on a roll, Id bake every day, often mixing my dough late in the afternoon or evening, letting it rise through the night in the refrigerator, and then baking the next morning or afternoon. This really worked for my schedule, but for something else as wellthe quality of the bread. Though making good bread takes time, the work itself wasnt time consuming. It amounted to five to ten minutes here or there to take the bread to the next stage, whether feeding my sourdough starter bubbling away in a kitchen cabinet, hand-mixing the dough, or shaping and baking a loaf in the oven. Each was a distinct step that had to be carried out at the right moment, but it didnt mean slogging away in the kitchen for hours at a time. It involved a lot of waiting while the bread fermented or baked, which meant I could do something else, like write. Once I figured that out, I began baking a lot and the craft began to feel more natural.This came home to me one day as I slid a loaf of sourdough onto the baking stone in the oven, then set the digital timer on my oven (a KitchenAid electric oven, which I point out only because everyone asks). I had made this bread dozens of times, so each stage was familiar. But that day, as I was working in my office, I forgot about the bread and went about my work until a kind of toasty hazelnut aroma brought me to attention. I stopped, jogged downstairs, and arrived in front of the oven with just a minute left on the timer. I peered inside. The crust was dark, toasted. I grabbed the flat wooden peel, opened the oven door, and slid the loaf off the baking stone. I tapped the bottom and heard a rich, hollow knocknot a deadened thud. That loaf was done. My sense of smell had, in effect, woken me up and told me the loaf was ready. This wasnt chance. Not then, not now. No matter how long a loaf takes, smell guides me. Like so much else about baking, your sensessight, smell, and especially touchare your most valuable tools.Over the years, I realized I had much to learn, not only about the science of making bread but about the vagaries of this craft, because the recipes were at best a faint map of the process. There are many bread books out there, but books geared to home bakers often tell you just enough to get going and then focus on the recipe. The more I baked, the more I realized that the recipe was the least of my concerns. Far more important were the techniques, which were difficult to explain in a step-by-step format precisely because they depend on touch and feel. So lets just say I made a lot of bad bread by following very good recipes. I expect if you follow the few recipes I offer in this book you will at first make poor loaves, too (what cookbook author admits that!). But if you keep at it, you will no doubt improve, because your technique and understanding will grow. It was only after baking for some time that I realized: when you get good enough to follow a bread recipe and actually succeed, youre at the point where you no longer need a recipe. To reach that point, I read a lot, cornered professionals for advice, scoured

the Internet for tips, and focused on that key phrase or paragraph in a book that would change my entire understanding of bread, even if the author mentioned it only in passing. And I baked. I baked a lot.Baking bread depended on recognizing the moist sheen on a well-mixed loaf, the subtle spring of relaxed gluten, or the hollow knock of a loaf removed from the oven. Its what home bakers knew long ago. How much water did you use in a loaf? Just enough. How long did you bake it? Until it was done. Giant communal ovens in villages had no temperature gauges or timers. Flour was far more inconsistent than it is today, so each batch of dough had to be fine-tuned. Old varieties of wheat were highly diverse and wheat wasnt even widely available in many parts of Europe until the eighteenth century, so loaves were more often made from barley, spelt, or rye (a weed that grew between wheat). Each of these grains required a slightly different method and opened up endless variation. In Germany and Poland, dense ryes were far more common because it was the primary grain in the cold north. Loaves made with brewers yeast were common in England because it was a by-product of a nation of beer drinkers. In Scandinavia, rye crackers were favored because they kept well through the long winter months. And barley was for millennia the common mans flour, because it grows from Ethiopia nearly to the Arctic Circle and has a thick enough hull to thwart insects. It was hardy, nutritious, and filling, feeding the slaves who built the pyramids and the gladiators of Rome. When sprouted and dried, it became malt for beer.Bread making is something humanity has done for thousands of years. The impregnation of dough, its slow rise, and the spring upward of the loaf in the heat of the oven, before the yeast died, was a metaphor for life. The ancient Romans held an annual festival of the ovens on February 17 called Fornicalia, which shares the same Latin root as fornication. Even in prehistoric times, baking was associated with procreation. Baking was a metaphor for life because bread is life giving.The story of why I began to make bread might end there, but another ingredient played a crucial role. I remember, at age eight or so, chiseling a piece of marble in my fathers basement woodworking shop after I had seen Michelangelos David. All I managed was the rough outline of a snake, but I worked at it for days. I remember, too, spending hours after school watching a team of carpenters who were building out the interior of a small store in Brooklyn. Eventually they put me to work. After college, I worked in an art framing shop in a second-story loft on the Bowery, just below Houston Street in New York. It was there that I really dove into this enduring interest in hand work.The area where the shop was located was still seedy thena mix of vagrants, artists in loft buildings, restaurant supply stores, and junkies who frequented the nearby park over on Chrystie Street. It wasnt yet home to the trendy eateries and clubsand the Whole Foods supermarketthat you find there today. Arlan, a painter, and Karl, who had trained as an architect, owned the shop and both were true craftsmen. But the place also had the feel of a private social club, which was part of the appeal. Arlan would often work all day, then return at night to paint in a cramped studio in the back of the loft. Sometimes Id arrive in the morning to find Karl crashed out on a lawn chair next to the kitchenette after a night of fishing on Long Island. Wed ramp up when things were busy, and drink coffee and chat when things were slow. At the end of the day, after the sanders and table saws were shut down, the frames piled on the tables ready for artwork, wed pull out the piecesby Sol LeWitt or Richard Diebenkorndestined for a SoHo gallery, collector, or museum and just look at them. There were a lot of moments like that in the shop.If there was an ethos at Squid Frames, it came from the elevation of craft. When a piece of wood was stained and finished particularly well, eyebrows were raised but little was said. The type of things that would score the most admiration were precisely the things that others would not recognize at all, because when the frames were well made, the eye would simply travel to the art.I also remember the shock of first coming to work and spending hours sanding wood, or trying to sand wood, because I couldnt manage to do this simple task correctly. The work was dusty, noisy, and monotonous but it was a good lesson, for it forced me to be attentive to the most tedious of tasks. And that was necessary before I could accomplish anything elsenot just at the frame shop but really in any endeavor. Thinking back on this two-year experience, the lesson I learned was to pay attention. I also learned that by virtue of constant repetition, the body, or senses, eventually took over in this craft work so that it felt as if my hands were thinking. But that didnt happen quickly. It took a long time to develop, and you can easily lose those sensory skills once you stop. Decades later, I know enough to be cautious near power tools. They arent second nature to me any longer, so usually, I leave that kind of work to others. Roger Gural, who once worked as a baker at the French Laundry Kitchen and now teaches bread baking in New York, mentioned something like this to me when we were baking together one evening. He told me that when he went away on vacation for a couple of weeks he could lose the feel of the dough. It took a day or two to get it back. I usually measure how good I am by how quickly it returns, he said.And what precisely is the it that returns? Recognizing the sound of the dough in the mixer, knowing its feel as you pinch it, or the sheen of the doughs skin during fermentation; these visual, tactile, and auditory cues become the signals for what you should or should not do. It takes time to learn. Repetition keeps those senses honed. But if you stop baking, making frames, or whatever it is that you do, you can lose that sensory edge, just like that.So when beginning bakers try a recipe and get frustrated when it doesnt work out, they are kind of missing the point. The real recipe is to make bread time and again, until one day it becomes second nature. Beginners can make good, even extraordinary bread. But until they understand the craft, under- and overfermented loaves and misshapen and dense breads will be the rule. Thats what happened to me, but perhaps I saw enough of a promise to keep going. Maybe, too, I knew enough about craft work from my time at Squid to understand the nature of these failures: that they are not ultimately failures. If you take one lesson away from the

attempt, then its worth it. Maybe, too, I just valued the meditative nature of the work, and the respite it offered.My own progression as a home baker also mirrored what happened in food culture, as heirloom, handcrafted, and local foods became much more valued. As much as I liked all the bakeries I grew up withwhose breads holds a special place in my memoryI did not try to reproduce their loaves. Ive moved on, continually trying to find new ways of making bread at home. It was an approach that became clear when I tried, almost in desperation, to make a decent baguette in Paris in the darkest days of the recession.A Note on the RecipesWhile this is not a recipe book, I do provide recipes. Many are quite simple, such as flatbread, but others require more commitment and Ive tried to illuminate this by labeling each recipe Easy, Moderate, or Difficult. While they were influenced by many bakers I encountered, and the recipes I read, they reflect methods that became part of my baking regime. I continue to make all of these breads today, and I find them endlessly fascinating and flexible. That said, if youre starting out and really want to learn the craft of baking, I would point you to books highlighted in my bibliography.In these recipes, I use a scale to weigh ingredients and I measure weights in grams, which can be unfamiliar, especially for someone used to measuring flour in cups or even ounces. While volume measurements are more common, weighing is more accurate. Many baking books also include metric measurementsnow the de facto standard at least among artisan bakers. While weighing ingredients might be a foreign concept, its not difficult. Nor is it a big investment. The first scale I bought was a small plastic version from a grocery store that cost $9.99. I used it for several years and learned how to bake with it. It broke, and Ive since graduated to digital scales which can be found for about $25.I sometimes use the phrase natural leaven to refer to the substance commonly known in the United States as sourdough or sourdough starter. French bakers refer to this substance as levain. Rather than pick one term, I use all three depending on the context. But they refer to the same thing: natural leaven, sourdough, and levain contain populations of wild yeast and bacteria, which when added to dough cause it to fermenta process I explain in depth in chapter 2.Although I provide rising times, they depend on a dough temperature of around 75F (24C). If your kitchen is 80F (27C) or higher in the summer, the dough will ferment more quickly. If the rise is moving too quickly, you can add cooler water of around 65F (18C) when you mix the dough. If the rise is sluggish in the winter, because your kitchen is a cool 65F (18C), then mix the dough with 85F (29C) water and ferment the dough in a closed space, such as an oven, with just the light on. The bottom line: you will need to adjust based on your experience.A word on flours: I use unbleached all purpose flour, although all-purpose can mean many things. Ideally, the flour should be milled from hard red winter wheat with a protein level of about 11 to 11.7 percent. Some all-purpose flours aim for protein levels of around 10 percent, which might be challenging for bread making. (You should be able to find this information at a companys Web site or through a call to its customer service line.) I find bread flour, which has a protein level of around 13 percent, too strong for handmade breads, though it is well suited for bagels, pretzels, and pizza. If you do use bread flour, you will need to adjust the hydration by adding a bit more water.Generally, I bake with Whole Foods 365 Unbleached Organic All Purpose Flour (10.5 to 11 percent protein), but Ive found many other flour brands perform just as well, including King Arthur and Gold Medal flours. Ive also found that whole wheat flour is more variable than white flour, in the amount of water it requires and the way it performs, because the milling can vary. So once you settle on a brand, you might want to stick with it. Ive had good success with stone ground whole wheat flour from Bobs Red Mill, though Ive used many others as well, including those from smaller, specialty mills as I discuss in the pages ahead.CHAPTER 1Boulangerie Delmontels BaguetteAt three A.M., Rue des Martyrs, a narrow artery in the ninth arrondissement of Paris, was empty and the stores dark except for a narrow ray of light coming out of the side bakery entrance of Boulangerie Delmontel, nestled in the corner of a rococo building. The day before, the street had been crowded with couples out for a Sunday stroll, taking in the wine shops, bistros, and small food stores. It reminded me of Greenwich Village in the 1970s, before it gentrified. The ninth was popularhip, evenbut still had the close-knit feel of a residential neighborhood, the kind of place where a restaurant matre d would banter with the regulars when they arrived. But now in the predawn hours the streets were quiet.I had woken up a half hour before, weary from the jet lag and the early hour, and gotten dressed in my white cotton baking jacket and pants. I didnt need a lot of time to get ready for there wasnt a lot to donot even a cup of coffee to be had. I drank a glass of water and went down to the hotel lobby, surprising the night clerk. Youre leaving? he asked, perhaps wondering if I were headed to the Pigalle, the red light district nearby. No, Im going to bake bread, I replied. He looked puzzled as I headed out into the cool February night air.How many bakers over the centuries had walked these same dark streets, heading to the fournilsthe baking roomsto give Paris its daily bread? Marx had called them the white miners. They began well before midnight, sweating over hundreds of pounds of dough that they kneaded by hand in basements and baked in wood-fired ovens. The boys were known as les geindres, the groaners. The poorest slept by the hearth, inhaling flour, often suffering from tuberculosis. There is no species more repugnant than that of the geindre, a French physician remarked, naked to the waist, pouring out sweat, gasping in the last throes, spilling and mixing into the dough that you will eat several hours later all the secretions of his overheated body and all the excretions of his lungs, congested by the impure air of the asphyxiating bakeroom. But if they did their job well in this sweltering basement dungeon, faithful to the demanding and time-consuming task of coaxing bread out of natural leaven, flour, water, and salt, the resulting loaves might well have surpassed many sold today, excretions notwithstanding. As I walked down the cobblestone streets that early morning, I felt as if I was following in

the footsteps of these ghosts.I was closing in on the final chapter of what had been a long questone that actually began many years ago when I first began baking. At that time, the baguette defined bread for me and I saw no reason why I shouldnt try to bake it, even as a beginner. This isnt unusual. Many novices start out with this iconic loaf. And thats where the trouble begins, because its the equivalent of wanting to knock out a Beethoven sonata when you sit down at the piano for the first time. So what is it about this loaf that nearly guarantees failure? First, there is the flavor, which must be coaxed out of the flourit doesnt come by simply mixing the ingredients together. Second, the crumb: It must be light and open, full of holes so prized by bakers that they have their own technical name, alveoli. Third comes the crust. The baker slashes the loaf with a razor blade, right before sliding it into the hot oven. Properly formed, the loaf bursts open through the slashes. But if the surface of the dough is at all flaccid, the slash, or grigne, becomes a diminutive wiggly line. Fourth, the crust must crackle when you bite into it, adding depth to the taste and aroma of the bread. To achieve a crust like this requires a method of creating steam in your home oven, which might result in second-degree burns if youre not careful. All of this, of course, depends on yet a fifth factoryour ability to shape sticky, loose dough by hand into a long cylindrical form that must have a taut skin and yet be open and pliable within. Sprinkle too much flour on the counter and you will fail because the dough will slide around and you wont be able to create surface tension in the dough. But sprinkle too little flour and the dough will stick to the counter and you might rip the skin open. (You want just a dusting, which you achieve, I learned, by taking a pinch of flour in your thumb and two fingers and flicking it across the surface by snapping your wrist.) None of this is easy, but its further compounded by the fact that the baker needs to have a solid understanding of what is perhaps the most difficult aspect of bread makingfermentation. If you misjudge thisand fermentation is truly a judgment callthen the defects will be magnified in every other step of the process. The result is that youll often end up saying, This isnt a baguette, its shit.I became convinced that it was impossible to make the loaf at home despite all the recipes and lessons that baking books contained. (This was compounded by a not infrequent ruse in baking books: the authors often use specialized bread-baking ovens that easily run into the tens of thousands of dollars to bake the breads pictured in their books, putting them out of reach for the home baker.) So, I moved on to other breads. Though I learned quite a bit over the years, I kept the baguette at bay, feeling defeated. I really didnt return to it until that fateful call with the travel editor, who was willing to commission a story on precisely what I wanted to do.After wed spoken, I had no idea how to proceed. I didnt speak much FrenchI could order a meal, but not much more. The only French bakers Id met were in the United States. But then I remembered: I had a friend in Paris who might be able to help out, Denise Young, a former colleague now living in Paris with her French husband and daughter. When I e-mailed her, she graciously offered to help. Within a few days, we had gathered a list of around eight boulangeries that looked promising and then she began calling. Now, Denise is well schooled in French manners, but has a kind of full-throttle reporters approach that gets results quickly. Her assessments were brief, opinionated: He was kind of gruff, not what you would want, or Sounds like she just got out of bed, and doesnt speak a word of English, but wants to know the dates, and so on. Within a few days, she had gotten three positive responses, including one from Arnaud Delmontel, who had recently won the annual prize for the best baguette in Paris. He had also worked in the States for a time and spoke English. Very charming, typically French, heres his mobile number, she said. I e-mailed him pictures of my bread and then gave him a call. I explained the nature of the project. He listened politely. But he was busy, and really, there wasnt much to discuss: when would I be there, he wanted to know. When I suggested a date, he said it would be best to arrive before four A.M. on a Monday. His head baker would meet me. His name was Thomas Chardon. And that was it.When I arrived that first day in the predawn hours, Chardon let me in. A wiry energetic man in his mid-twenties, he said Salut!, then slid across the flour-specked floor to go back to his dough. He was placing baguette loaves onto a couche, a linen cloth that supports the shape of baguettes as they undergo a final rise before baking. He was covered in flour, his blue fleece a snowy white. Pop music blared from a portable radio. I could smell the unmistakable toasty, faintly nutty aroma of freshly baking bread from the oven that filled about a third of the room. Thomas had to rearrange everything just to let me in the cramped space: he slid aside bins filled with just-baked baguettes, rolled cabinets that held the rising loaves, and pushed aside the steel frame loader which is used to slip the loaves into the oven. There wasnt much time for pleasantries. He pointed me toward a narrow circular staircase to a small dressing room where I could keep my things. Then I returned to the baking room, where he motioned me to join in.Delmontel was one of the new artisans in France, uncompromising when it came to ingredients and technique. But as I soon found out, Delmontel mostly spent his time running the businessthree dozen workers more or less, two bakeries (now three, as I write this), making breads, pastries, cakes, and macaronsso it fell to Thomas to be my teacher. Although he spoke no English, the language barrier hardly mattered as he guided me through the entire bread-making cycle, prompting me with hand gestures and a few words. The techniques werent uniqueit wasnt as if Thomas were sharing Delmontels secret recipebut they did reflect methods that serious bakers were now applying to bread. Time was their most important tool: the time to let the dough come together gently, the time to let fermentation work its magic, and the fortitude not to be pushed by anything but the demands of the bread itself.This approach was evident when Thomas first dumped flour, a small bit of yeast, salt, and water into a massive mixing bowl and let the mixing arm run for a few minutes at a slow speed. Once the shaggy dough came together, he turned off the machine and then let the dough sit for twenty minutes as the flour slowly

absorbed the water. This crucial moment of rest is known in French as autolyse (autolysis, which means self-digestion, and which is often accomplished without yeast or salt). What happens in this time of do-nothingness is that the water slowly hydrates the proteins and starches in the flour, beginning the process of dough formation. The mixer can develop the dough, too, but it also incorporates oxygen, which can bleach out the flour, tighten the loaf, and alter the inherent flavor of the grain, especially if overdone, as mixing often is. Its better just to let the dough sit in this initial stage and let time do the work.PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN DOBEN Boulangerie Arnaud Delmontel in ParisWe mixed again briefly, with two more twenty-minute rest periods. After this one-hour period of mixing and sitting, we scooped chunks of this heavy dough and put them in plastic bins that went into a refrigerated cabinet for a full day. Again, time came into play. While the dough rested at 40F (5C) during this first rise (known as the pointage), it also slowly fermented, meaning that the flavor, texture, crumb, and crust would all improve. Without this languid first rise, the bread would be bland, lacking character.Chardons sense of craft was also apparent. Sure, there were scales to measure flour and water, since bakers measure by weight, and a timer above the mixer, but the main gauge he used to tell if the dough was ready was observation. He looked at the dough, then pinched it between his thumb and fingers. As the mixer turned slowly, he poured in more water at one point because the dough looked slightly stiff. You cant teach that in a cookbook. Delmontel later told me he had been flown to South Korea to consult on a new bakery operation; the company timed his every move with a stopwatch, trying to re-create what he was doing as a measured series of steps. They kept asking me, How long do you do that? and I just shrugged. He laughed. I do it until its done!I saw this approach with Chardon after we had shaped a series of baguettes. The loaves finished their second risethe apprtresting on a linen couche for about thirty minutes. The timing of this final rise depends on the temperature of the bakery, for bread rises more quickly when its warm. The key question I always have at this point is, Are they ready for the oven? The moment, which cant really be measured, is a point of tension when the dough is both relaxed and elastic. If the baker gets the timing just right, the loaves will spring up in the oven. But if he doesnt, the crumb will be tight, and at worst, gummy. The thing is, this inferior crumb can result from either under- or overfermenting the loaf. But how do you know when its ready? Ultimately, its a judgment call.This takes time to learn. It took me many awful loaves to know when the dough had fermented properly. When I asked Thomas how he knew when the rise was finished he pointed to his eyes. I studied the loaves closely, poked the skin to feel the tension, which is a common method, and said, Finis? I thought they were. He peered close without touching a thing and replied, Cinq minutes. So we waited five minutes for the dough to relax a bit more, then carefully transferred the thin, long ptons onto a canvas mechanical oven loader. I had the honor of making the five swift signature slashes on the top of the baguettes with a lame (a curved razor), which create the bulging grigne when baked, and then we quickly slid them into the 500-degree oven.This work slashing the bread was really my first significant lessonand if I left the bakery at that moment, never to return, it would have been enough, because I slashed maybe twenty-five loaves at a time, and then did so repeatedly through the morning as we loaded more and more baguettes into the oven. At home, I never really got to practice this technique because Id slash maybe two or three loaves at a time with a razor. At that rate, you tend to obsess over each cut. Its difficult to figure out the speed and pressure of the blade, or the depth or length. So home bakers tend to slash too slowly and then go back, correcting what they perceive as defects. This is far too fastidious. Watch a professional and they simply slash down the loaf quickly, in a rhythmic series of cuts (and actually if you count the beats while you do it, this helps, for each beat corresponds to the time the blade is touching the dough). Slash dozens of baguettes in the course of a morning or two and pretty soon the action becomes so natural that your wrist, fingers, and arm will never forget iteven when you return to just two or three loaves a day. Its technique, craft, and rhythm wrapped up in a loaf.