

SOURCE



Bread Winner

The Berkshires are home to some of the country's best loaves

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

WHEN MOST TOURISTS VISIT THE Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts, their first stop might be Norman Rockwell's old studio, Edith Wharton's country home, the farmhouse where Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick*, or another of the area's seemingly countless cultural attractions. Not me. Anytime I'm in this corner of my home state, I head for a source of more ephemeral pleasures: Berkshire Mountain Bakery, where owner Richard Bourdon crafts loaves that are among the best in the country.

Since opening his bakery in 1986 in the tiny village of Housatonic, Bourdon has been perfecting his naturally fermented breads, building on experience he gained in France and Holland, where he trained as a baker. Here, in a 3,000-square-foot former paper mill, he devotes the majority of the cavernous space to around-the-clock baking, while a sliver of a retail counter shows off his diverse breads: sesame-crustured sourdoughs, rich jalapeño-and-cheese ciabattas, French peasant loaves, and, during the holidays, sweet breads such as buttery stollen with an almond-cream core, the world's fluffiest panettone, and more.

No matter the style, each bread is made with meticulous attention

to detail. To insure the freshness of volatile oils that would otherwise be exposed by cracking the germs further ahead of time, Bourdon grinds whole grains to make spelt, wheat, or rye flour for each batch of dough. Then, using little more than water, salt, and a sourdough starter, he transforms these grains into singular loaves with an incredible balance of texture, moisture, and flavor.

Whether it's nutty wholemeal spelt, cakey multigrain, or—my personal favorite—the finger-staining “bread and chocolate” (pictured), with its equal parts sourdough boule and semisweet Belgian chocolate chunks, each loaf bears Bourdon's marks: a glossy, tender crumb; a buoyant, tooth-clinging chew; and a mouthwatering tang. The breads are all brilliant when eaten in the usual ways—smearred with butter, used in sandwiches, munched on their own—and the sweet ones, like the bread and chocolate, make for a complex bread pudding or decadent French toast. No matter how I eat them, each bite reminds me that the transformation of flour and water into something extraordinary is, in its own right, a serious art. Loaves range from \$3.75 to \$5.75 apiece and can be purchased at berkshiremountainbakery.com. 🍌

MICHAEL KRAUS