



The Hungry Ghost Bread Book: An Offbeat Bakery's Guide to Crafting Sourdough Loaves, Flatbreads, Crackers, Scones, and More

Jonathan Stevens

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Jonathan Stevens flavors his sourdough baking book with his unique phrases, wit, and a sprinkle of philosophy, as distinctive as the loaves made in his Northampton, Massachusetts, bakery, the Hungry Ghost. Noting that “bread is the plate, napkin, and the bulk of almost any traditional meal,” he points out that naturally-leavened sourdough bread is an amazing dietary staple, since fermentation from wild yeasts and good bacteria makes it truly digestible.

Experienced bakers will love the book's advice on flours, essential equipment, and mixing and shaping techniques. Stevens narrates the bakery's typical day of tending to the starter and wood-fired ovens, transforming dough into a wealth of bread and baked goods. The recipes for bakery-quality sourdough bread require some expertise, but they come with zippy instructions and advice on musical and beverage accompaniments.

There are detailed recipes for sixteen kinds of bread loaves, starting with the simple, crusty French Batard and building toward loaves that require more techniques and ingredients. There is Semolina-Fennel Bread, perfect for “wiping a plate of tomato sauce clean”; Hat Trick Bread full of wheat, oats, and barley, in a nod to one of the Canadian-born author's hockey heroes; and Fig and Sage Bread “screaming for a schmear of hairy goat cheese and a glass of grappa.” There are also delectable recipes for adjacent flatbreads in a range of appealing flavors, including Beet and Coriander Fougasse, as well as for naan, pizza, crackers, scones, bagels, pasta, and an energy bar stuffed with barley seeds, dates, and cashews. In the unlikely event that one has a sourdough surplus, there are several recipes for tucking leftover bread into casseroles and stuffings too.

As enticing as warm, buttered bread straight from the oven, *The Hungry Ghost Bread Book* is an alluring and playful invitation to get started on some sourdough.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2024)

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