



Don Walsh and
Fred Hartman

ON A ROLL

BY NICOLE BARLEY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN WYLIE

My dad loves visiting the Breadworks North Side bakery. When he comes home with his arms full of those giant brown paper bags, crinkling with dozens of rolls and ciabatta loaves, there is joy on his face. He cannot wait for dinnertime to sit down with that warm bread and the butter dish.

Breadworks' executive baker and partner Don Walsh and partner Fred Hartman, who is in charge of customer relations, also display a similar sort of passion for this bread. Walsh's 56 types of dough are formed into 136 different shapes, sizes, and slices. It's Hartman who harnesses this baking power, delivering to a 40-mile radius of retail and wholesale customers. They stress to me the preservative and chemical-free nature of their bread, insist on presenting perfectly shaped loaves to customers, and eschew food waste, every day donating all leftover bread to local food banks, charities, and shelters. Not just that, but every piece of bread that's baked is pre-ordered.

Unlike the ciabatta bread, which Hartman explains was developed in a region of Italy where water was more readily available than flour, the boys at Breadworks develop their products to meet their customers' needs and to suit the Pittsburgh community. "You gotta have a Kaiser bun for the Pittsburgh fish fries," Hartman says, smiling. 🍞



A few of
Breadwork's
56 doughs.

Breadworks is such an institution in Pittsburgh. How would you say the bakery impacts the local economy?

Fred Hartman: Breadworks has been supplying Pittsburgh and the surrounding vicinity with wholesale bread products for 30 years. Eighty-five percent of our business is wholesale to local restaurants, country clubs, hotels. The other 15 percent is retail. We jumped into the retail market really strong in 1992.

When people start to read the labels on our breads, they realize we're better than the low-carb breads on the market because we're not doing anything but flour, water, salt. Some breads don't even have baker's yeast in them. It's nothing but natural products.

Don [Walsh] has baked in different parts of the world, and like all of us who work here, we learned by, "Oh, you need this tomorrow? Hang on, we'll work on something, we'll get it there." When Don introduced the Breadworks' hard-crust rustic line to the city in 1991, it gave chefs what they needed to make their meals special.

How long does it take to develop a new kind of bread?

Don Walsh: That depends on what we're trying to develop and the customer. These past couple months, we've been working with the Rivers Casino on products just for their restaurants. It can take a week. It can take a month. Ciabatta took me 15 years [laughs]. It's never done because we're always looking for a better way to do it, without changing the principles of what we do. To develop the formula is one thing. Making the loaf of bread is another. It takes anywhere from about four hours to three days to make the dough.

We use three different types of flour — soft wheat, Breadworks flour, rustic flour. I blend the flours together for the different products. Depending on what time of year it is, I can go through anywhere between 65,000 and 85,000 pounds [of flour] per week. All of the flour is milled for us. We pick our own grains to make the flour. It's not flour you can go in the store and buy. I like a long, slow mill. It seems to give us a better reaction, a better flavor.

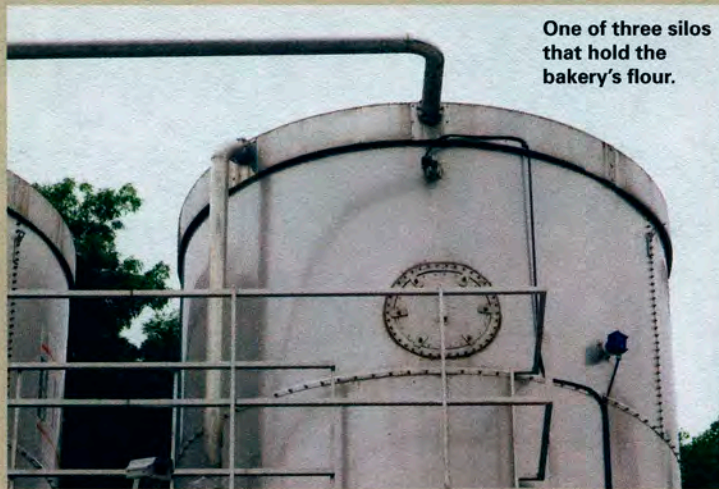
Bread is like a sponge. It's either taking moisture on or giving moisture up, so how we mix our bread the next day depends on the atmosphere. If it's going to be real wet out, we take water out. If it's dry out, we put water in. We're always messing with the formula depending on what the

weather's doing. With weather like this, the humidity, the dew point close to 70, there's nothing we can really do to get real crusty bread. August and September aren't my favorite months.

Clearly, there's a lot of science involved.

DW: More science than we let on. That's where the secrets are. The rest of it's the art. The art is the passion that I have for it. The science, I love. I study food chemistry because it's interesting — putting ingredients together, figuring out what exactly is happening to each one. Everything has a chemical reaction. When you add water there's a reaction. What is it?

The Tuscan bread is made based on the people of Tuscany. They didn't want to pay



One of three silos that hold the bakery's flour.

the salt tax to the Italian government years and years ago. I studied them because I didn't understand why you would make bread without salt. That's your flavor, that's your gluten structure. You count on the sodium for a lot of things in that bread.

What is the quintessential Breadworks bread?

FH: It's always been the baguette to me. When you say, "What started Breadworks?" We say it's the individual dinner roll, split roll, or the baguette made from that same dough. Today, we make 1,300 dozen of that split roll, on an average night. That's something people recognize on the table.

DW: That's something we started rolling out by hand. Now we have a machine that cuts the whole thing.

So, is this a 24-hour operation?

FH: The only two days we choose to close are Christmas morning and New Year's Day. This [business] started with an AMC Pacer as a delivery vehicle. Did we think we were going to be two of the biggest names in the bread industry? Probably not. We were 18 years old, and we were having a blast.

DW: Our customers are going to have the bread when they need the bread. Somehow, some way, if they call us by four o'clock today, we'll have the bread on the truck by five o'clock tomorrow morning. The baguettes are coming out about quarter-to-five, right about when those trucks are leaving. They're still hot leaving the bakery.

You started with an AMC Pacer as your delivery vehicle. How many trucks do you have now?

FH: We started with 13 accounts. We still service 11 of those. The two that we don't are closed. We now service more than 760 accounts. We run 15 a.m. routes, not counting individual distributors, and

six p.m. routes.

Twenty-one individual bread trucks have the potential to take routes Monday through Saturday. Sunday, we limit the routes to the morning delivery that runs about 8 trucks. If Don wants to bring out baguettes at quarter to five, that gives me six hours and 15 minutes to get the bread off the trucks, and get it to the chefs.

Everything's strategically planned.

We know what shops can take orders later. We know what guys need their bread for breakfast.

DW: The G-20 Summit will be the next thing we'll get set up for.

Fred's going to have to get trucks and drivers cleared to get into these hotels. We thought the U.S. Open Golf Tournament [at Oakmont Country Club] was crazy. This will be totally nuts. What country's staying at what hotel? What kind of bread do they eat? It will be interesting.

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