

ON THE RISE

BAKERS ARE THE ROCK STARS OF ARTISANAL BREAD, THEIR CRUSTY LOAVES AND SWEET TEMPTATIONS TRAILING LONG QUEUES OF ARDENT FANS. HERE ARE FOUR BAKERIES - INSIDE AND OUTSIDE CAPE TOWN - THAT EVERYONE SHOULD VISIT
BY LES AUPIAIS

RHYTHM OF THE NIGHT

Bob Marley. The track: 'Is This Love'. It's midnight and Talent Musatyira is bobbing and weaving to the reggae riffs while his hands stretch and pound life into the dough that he kneads on a broad table. He is lit like a Renaissance painting caught in a single pool of light cast from vintage factory spotlights overhead, and when he flings down a handful of flour to dust the surface, the particles remain suspended in the beams. He takes centre stage for the four-hour choreography of precise measurement, heat, and the alchemy of natural yeasts.

Assistant baker Panashe Mushore keeps to a steady rhythm of measure, chop and prep while the ovens soar to 230°C. By 4 am, the air is heady with the bake – artisanal baguettes, brioche, rye. The raisins in the *krentenbollen* add a touch of sweetness on the nose, the woody tang of freshly chopped rosemary lingers with the herb now buried in the soft heart and crust of potato bread, and there's just a trace in the air of the piquant spices used in the Spanish loaves. By 7 am, the queue is building, and restaurants will serve still-warm bread for breakfast.

Talent is a big man. Wide grin. 'This is my passion,' he says. If he'd followed his head for accountancy when he'd completed O-levels in Zimbabwe and had not run short of funding at university in South Africa, his life would have taken a different turn. But he has since found his passion for baking and learnt that precision is essential when you bake for a profession. From the Woodstock Bakery to the Cape Grace Hotel, SA Chefs Academy and finally to Daan's Bakery in Hermanus, Talent was offered profit shares by the Gonggrijp family. Now he fuses the business of baking with a flair for the craft.

Daan's Bakery, 16 Dirkie Uys St, Hermanus,
071 115 1205
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John Williams composes bread. He tugs at your desire by the nose, then by taste and texture

BREAKING BODACIOUS

John Williams – not the musician and composer of famous movie scores and the man who captures the emotional pull of a scene with music, but close. This John Williams composes bread. He tugs at your desire by the nose, then by taste and texture. He bakes big-booty bread. None of that skinny machine-sliced stuff that freakily lasts for weeks. You purposefully break John's bread, drizzle the springy heart of it with olive oil and chew into the crust, eyes closed.

It all happens in a 10 m² home bakery with re-engineered pizza ovens. No magic in the basics – just sea salt, spring water and two types of stone-ground flour – but it's the spores in the air that kick-start the process and the baker who adds the quirk. 'There's something profound about bread,' he says. 'Sourdough in San Francisco is not sourdough in New York.'

John, who once ran a below-the-line ad agency and went deep-sea fishing for five years, says he 'doesn't do the science'. He's a self-taught maven and over 15 years has learnt the art by talking to people who shared what they saw, what worked, and what didn't – like an African oral tradition of storytelling. You add your chapter of the tale and then it's down to nature: The temperature for the leaven starter, the fermentation that follows, the hydration and a fierce heat finale.

John, The Village Baker, delivers batches of bread minutes before the market opens. Customers stand at the stall and point. 'That one. No, perhaps the slightly wider one with the split crust?' Much deliberation. Somewhere in a small mountain of sourdough, ciabatta, and a few large French-style miche (in homage to the famous French baker Lionel Poilâne, whom John credits as the sourdough maestro), is your loaf.

In your car, the smell of warm bread is a molecular tease, and you can think of nothing but what to have with it ... fresh cheese, butter, maybe honey ... and you step on the gas.

Greyton Village Market, Saturdays
9:30 am to 12:30 pm.

John Williams, 076 782 7076

HOW STELLA GOT HER GROOVE

Stella is a 2.8 tonne Spanish matriarch with fire in her belly. Jeremiah's her muscly sidekick. The two massive wood-fired ovens, characters in the Woodstock Bakery bread pageant, are coaxed into life every night, fed raw loaves by the night-shift baking team, and by 5:30 am, many hundreds of crisp, browned ciabatta, brioche, sourdough, croissants and other temptations pop up on the menus at hotels, restaurants and coffee shops all over the city.

'It was originally Paul Cremer, Paola D'Oliveira, Siya Getye and me, with an outlet at the Biscuit Mill market back in 2013,' says Paul Hartmann, who now owns the Woodstock Bakery and the adjacent South African Chefs Academy in Salt River.

Two years later, success meant bigger space and Stella was reverently disassembled and rebuilt at the new premises. 'That was fine until most of her roof collapsed and we had to fly out a Spanish expert to rebuild her from scratch,' says Paul. The Spaniard couldn't speak a word of English but made it quite clear in translation that he had no idea how they had baked anything before Stella threw her toys.

Jeremiah was shipped in as indirect oven number two, and yes, the two ovens result in a slightly different character of bread. 'Ours is more German style, hard-crust, robust, firm and with colour,' says Paul, products that now have something of a cult following in Cape Town. If the fans are not hunkered over their brioche or ciabatta at a coffee shop, they head to the Oranjezicht Farm City Market at the V&A Waterfront and stock up for home consumption. No one skips a fix.

The Woodstock Bakery,
13 Brickfield Rd, Salt River, Cape Town
woodstockbakery.co.za, 074 797 7324



THE SOURDOUGH SAFARI

Mo Lewis lifts a slim and tanned arm and shows off a sculptured bicep. No weights. No personal trainer. Bread is to blame, she says, and so the story begins. Steve – her husband – is an architect and she’s a fashion designer. They decided life in the Netherlands was too structured, predictable, and it was time for an adventure, a safari in Africa. Kenya or perhaps South Africa?

The couple, with no plan, no set compass point or sight-seeing agenda kitted out a sturdy Nissan Patrol. For a year they spent nights in remote sites, exploring, meeting people and finally, in 2016, they crossed the Swartberg. There, spread out beneath them was the valley and Calitzdorp, their journey’s end. They found and bought an organic farm, which had come on to the market days before their arrival – in the height of the worst drought in decades.

The bread-baking began in defence of bland, mass-produced loaves on sale. ‘We’re Dutch and we love good bread, and the only way we could get what we wanted was to bake it ourselves the old-school way.’ In cast-iron pots, basic flour and water took time to bubble and rise in the coal-fired stove... The first sourdough loaves were a little ‘funky’ she admits, with no shelf-appeal, but they were delicious, and moreish. Friends loved them. Could Mo just bake a few loaves for a party? Friends told friends. At one point, she was producing 25 loaves a day. Fridges were bursting with raw ingredients. ‘There’s no space for Steve’s beer to chill,’ she admits.

The business grew, an expansion as natural as the proving itself. The secret, in part, was the Bio-Wheat organic flour from Golden Reef Milling. The precision of the fashion designer – with an eye for texture, and the integrity and form of a garment – translated into The Accidental Baker’s ciabatta, baguette, focaccia, ‘Very Berry’ bread, and a jalapeño and chilli savoury loaf. Steve designed self-catering studios, sleek, minimalist spaces for guests, and Mo has launched a fashion range in denim, an honest, no-frills fabric with authentic roots – organic bread’s doppelgänger. lenieshof.com, [@theaccidentalbaker_co](https://www.instagram.com/theaccidentalbaker_co) etc

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