



# Freshly Baked

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Wherever you are in the world, the appetising smell wafting from a bakery is a reminder of home. From flaky croissants to a mouth-wateringly savoury pie. *Ascott Living* takes a look at the rising popularity of the artisanal baker

If you think there's only one kind of bread out there, be prepared to be pleasantly surprised. Pictured here from bottom left, you can take your pick of gluten-free bread, *pain au levain* (the classic sourdough), Turkish *pide* (a type of flatbread), an all-butter French croissant and *ficelle* (a type of a mini-baguette)

## INTEREST IN “REAL” FOOD MADE WITH LOVE AND QUALITY

is growing once again. Despite some modern diets which shun carbohydrates, everyday items made with care are on the rise again — quite literally in the case of the home-made bread our grandparents might have taken for granted, which are largely mysterious to their great-grandchildren. Sadly, to many of today’s generation, the smell of a crispy, freshly baked loaf has been replaced by the image of a flavourless, mass-produced rectangle swaddled in a plastic bag.

Bread is one of the oldest baked foods known to man, and some think the most primitive version — probably a flatbread made by mixing flour and water together before baking — was invented around 10,000 BC. Then came the closed oven, invented around 3,000 BC, which ushered in ever-more baking possibilities.

The humble pie was first referenced in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1303. Meat was originally wrapped in leaves or mud to stop it burning, until an industrious medieval baker formulated a pastry crust to protect and preserve the meat. From its simple savoury origins, the pie has been elevated from its role as common sustenance, and is now found in many guises — layered with international savoury ingredients, or glisteningly sweet with seasonal fruit.

For baking enthusiasts, there’s nothing quite like the fragrance of a cake fresh from the oven. According to some accounts, fruit cake, a sign of Christmas in many parts of the world, traces back to Roman times. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was allegedly outlawed across Europe, after being deemed sinfully rich — a major part of its appeal today.

Despite the fact that more people are dining out than ever before, food programmes and baking shows are becoming even more popular. Last



**Above:** Baking might seem like simple fun to most of us, but watching Dean Brettschneider plying his craft will show you how serious the art can be. **Opposite:** If you’re hosting a party, a tray of pecan tarts and raspberry tarts (bottom left) or a cherry tart (bottom right) are great for afters. On the other hand, those with a taste for something savoury might prefer the curried egg, ricotta and bacon pie (top left). And there’s always a well-made loaf of sourdough (top right) for the traditionalist

year, four million viewers in the United Kingdom tuned in to the first episode of the BBC’s *Great British Bake Off* — a programme where amateur bakers are pitted against each other, to see who can produce the most delicious baked goods.

As discerning diners and fervent foodies become more interested in where their food is coming from and how much better we feel when we are eating something healthy, artisanal bakers are going from strength to strength.

With a wide range of bread from across the globe, a bewildering variety of sweet

and savoury pies, and cakes packed full of rich goodness, baked goods are now drawing people back into the bakery — from London to Shanghai.

In some Eastern cultures where a baked delight is not part of the traditional cuisine, contemporary demand for baked goods is growing. Today, bakeries producing croissants and delicious patisserie are flourishing as much in Dubai as they are in Paris.

Whether we come from a family that enjoyed cooking or not, there is something comforting about the smell of baking, an aroma that enfolds and caresses, making a dark day brighter and bringing comfort to hectic times. Even during times of austerity, people take comfort in the simple pleasures of tradition — and baking ticks all the boxes, whether you aspire to do it yourself, or you prefer to enjoy the fruit of someone else’s labours.

Global baker Dean Brettschneider is one of those responsible for this newfound love affair with the world of baking. A New Zealander by birth, he now spends much of his time travelling the world, advising restaurants and large supermarkets about how best to bake. Travellers to Singapore and Shanghai can taste some of his wares at his Baker & Cook and Baker & Spice outlets respectively. As *Ascott Living* went to press, he had a brand-new project due to open in Abu Dhabi.

“Food has always been a passion. Baking was the first stop and I got fully involved in all aspects, from working with large industries to craft bakers,” Brettschneider tells *Ascott Living*.

“There’s a resurgence in the artisan style of baking, things that used to be everyday — good bread without preservatives, something that tastes good and is not out of a packet — we’re returning to that. People really don’t mind paying for something of quality.”



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At Baker & Cook, breakfast can be a thoroughly decadent meal, considering its extensive selection of pastries. You may be hard-pressed to pick from (clockwise from top left) the *pain au chocolat* (essentially a chocolate-filled croissant), almond croissant, chocolate almond croissant, classic butter croissant and apricot Danish

The quality aspect is an interesting one. Figures from the United Kingdom’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, or Defra, show that 32 percent of bread purchased in the country is wasted, which according

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to the anti-food waste organisation Wrap amounts to a staggering 680,000 tonnes — at a cost of £1.1 billion (US\$1.75 billion). It is thought that the easily available, mass-produced white loaf that retails there for as little as 20 pence (US\$0.39) has much to do with the lack of value that some people place on food.

As Brettschneider says, “With artisan food there is more value. When you have something yummy, why would you throw it away when it is wonderful? If you get something for almost nothing that comes in a plastic bag, there is no involvement.”

“Baking has become really emotional,” he adds. “Some bad bakers cut corners and think the consumer wants a loaf that is cheap and has a long shelf life. But if it’s a good product you want it fresh, daily.”

He notes, “Our grandparents talk about bread that had real flavour. We have read and heard about it. And artisan baking is all about that texture and taste.”

Proof that quality has longevity is the famous sourdough loaf of the Parisienne baker Poilâne, which has been baked in the French capital since 1932 — and is now enjoyed all over the world.

In a world where some feel pressure to ditch the carbs, it is interesting to see

that the appetite for “real” baked goods is growing. “People are moving towards bread that is much better for you, with more grain. We are all more mindful today about what we are putting down our throats,” observes Brettschneider.

From flaky croissants to pillow-soft Turkish flatbreads, densely seeded German loaves or a simple and beautiful white bloomer, there’s much to choose from straight from the oven. Brettschneider knows the loaf he loves the best. “Bread-wise, for me the favourite is a sourdough. It’s the king of breads, which is nothing more than flour, water, salt and wild yeast (which I grew 15 years ago). It’s uncomplicated and has strength and integrity. I like it toasted because it doesn’t shrivel — it stays just as it is.”

Baking is not just confined to bread. From cakes to tarts and succulent savoury pies, the aroma of baking from a nearby oven can evoke a warm rush of emotion in virtually any traveller.

As coffee shop culture grows worldwide, more people see the perfect weekend morning as a nice coffee in a homely environment, alongside a baked treat. Brettschneider feels for bread in particular, he’s seen a renaissance. “People come to the bakery and want to take a loaf home and share it with friends. It’s become a family activity.”

With an international drive by artisan bakers to provide quality baking, hopefully future generations across the globe will be able to appreciate what their elders took for granted. **T**

**BAKERY BEST**

**Singapore Baker & Cook**

77 Hillcrest Road, Greenwood Singapore 288951 Tel: (65) 6469 8834 [www.bakerandcook.biz](http://www.bakerandcook.biz) From croissants to flatbread, you’ll find it all here — but get there early



**Paris Poilâne**

8 rue du Cherche-Midi Paris 75006 Tel: (33-1) 4548 4259 [www.poilane.com](http://www.poilane.com) Aside from their famous sourdough, Poilâne’s other breads — such as raisin or nut — are also worth a try

**Perth Fiorentina**

44 Angove Street, North Perth WA 6006, Australia Tel: (61-8) 9328 7442 [www.fiorentina.com.au](http://www.fiorentina.com.au) Italian goodies for everyday — or special occasions



**Hiroshima Andersen Kitchen Buffet**

Hondori, Mashinakaku, Hiroshima, Hiroshima Prefecture 7300035, Japan Tel: (81-82) 247 4800 Offers a variety of baked goods from local favourites to Danish pastries

**Frankfurt Kronberger**

Vogelsbergstraße 19 60316 Frankfurt am Main, Germany Tel: (49-69) 431 585 Try their delicious bread — and maybe a slice of gâteau

**Beijing Comptoirs de France**

China Central Place 89 Jianguo Road Building 15, No. 102 Chaoyang District Beijing 100025 Tel: (86-10) 6530 5480 [www.comptoirsdefrance.com](http://www.comptoirsdefrance.com) With over 20 varieties of cake this is a foodie must

**Hanoi Saint Honore (Xuan Dieu)**

5 Xuan Dieu, Tây Ho, Hanoi Tel: (84-4) 3933 2355 Where locals and foreigners alike go for a crisp croissant or decadent sweet treat