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FEATURE C9

New Zealand baker Dean Brettschneider pushes the boundaries of traditional baking and introduces new ideas to China, like his pumpkin and red onion baguette, something that French purists would abhor, says Kate Chapman.



Kiwi baker rolls out new ideas

short chubby man with a bright red smile painted on his face stands in the shop window, surrounded by piles of custard squares and loaves of bread, and rolls the same piece of plastic dough every day — a childhood memory of the local bakery.

The nostalgic notion of a man covered in flour, his cheeks red from the heat of the oven is an old and stereotypical depiction of a baker. But Dean Brettschneider dispels all the myths. He's not short, or chubby, or covered in flour. He's wearing jeans and a shirt and there is not a white hat in sight.

Nicknamed "the New Zealand baker,"
Brettschneider is also a modern baker. His approach to baking and his ideas about what baking should be are breaking traditional boundaries. "I like to break the mold a little bit, but to maintain the integrity of the culture and product," he says.

His pumpkin and red onion baguette is an example of this. His fiddling with this traditional staple was questioned by his colleagues from "great baking countries" like Germany and France. "If I did things like that in France I'd probably get kicked out. That's what I like about it here (China). I can do this," the Kiwi baker says.

Brettschneider's fourth book, "Global Baker: Dean Brettschneider," is due out this October. About 2,500 copies will be printed in both English and Chinese in Shanghai, as a promotion for his company Bake Mark. The publisher in New Zealand is Random House.

His first three cookbooks were co-written with Lauraine Jacobs, a famous New Zealand food writer. This latest book will be his first solo one and he is taking a different approach with it. "I learned a lot from Lauraine. But this fourth book is all about me. About what I want to do and how I want to portray baking."

Brettschneider says it is important for baking to been seen as part of the "food world" not as a separate industry. "I want to get people away from thinking that baking is just a whole lot of recipes in a book. I want to get people thinking about the influences."

And influences are what his latest book is all about.

The influences behind each item are explained throughout the book in words and in pictures. He recently spent three weeks in Europe with the book's photographer, Aaron McLean, where they took masses of photos. They traveled through Holland, where his parents are from. He and McLean went to France, Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom. They took pictures of old flour mills, both windand water-operated and of tractors in wheat fields.

The photos range from these rustic pictures depicting the beginnings of baking's key ingredients to pictures of Brettschneider with some of the food world's heavy weights: Rick Stein, Peter Gordon and Anton Mosiman. "Here are myself and Peter Gordon where I'm just showing him a few techniques," Brettschneider says of one photo in his modest, nonchalant way, as if people show Peter Gordon what to do every day.

His new book will also come with a DVD that he filmed in Shanghai in April. The DVD has several sections beginning early in the morning at his bakery in the Slice store in Pudong. Brettschneider then takes to the streets to talk to some local bakers. "China is a baking nation too, it's just

different baking," he says.

Afterwards, he returns to the bakery to "bring some pages of the book to life," showing people certain techniques such as how to properly knead dough. Finally he heads to Laris at Three on the Bund to talk with his friend David Laris. The DVD ends with the stunning view of the lights of Pudong at night.

Brettschneider and Laris have a close relationship. Laris owns Slice, of which Brettschneider runs the bakery component. "We share the same philosophy on baking in the food world, we have the same vision about baking as part of the whole process," says Brettschneider. His breads are available in Shanghai exclusively through Slice.

Brettschneider has lived in Shanghai with his wife, Susan, and 11-year-old son for four years. As well as writing books and running a bakery he works full time for Bake Mark, the world's largest suppliers of baking ingredients.

He says his role there is about bringing Western influences into the Chinese baking world, part of which means educating people about baking. "In today's world you can't just sell ingredients and leave it at that, you have to show people what to do with them," he says.

He enjoys Shanghai and said he lives "a comfortable life in expatville." His original assignment with Bake Mark is for another two and a half years, but he said he has no fixed plans.

"It'd be nice to say to people that I have a bakery in Shanghai, one in New York and one in Auckland, New Zealand. Lots of people want me to open a bakery in New Zealand but the costs there are horrendous," he says. "My kick is to see people enjoy baking and to see people bake better."

And while he is working



on improving the image of baking he would like to see others doing the same, especially in New Zealand. "Everyone needs to become business-minded. Just to produce lovely loaves of bread is not enough."

Brettschneider says the traditional bakeries are being overtaken by chains and supermarkets, and bakers need to become more proactive.

He is making moves towards this by taking traditional recipes and adding a modern twist, a mission helped by his time in China. "I'm bringing Western influences and combining them with Chinese tastes and flavors."

An example of this is his desserts with a sweet potato topping inspired by the baked sweet potatoes sold on the streets of Shanghai in

winter and spring.

While traditional bakeries with their little mechanical bakers in the window are becoming rarer, it is good to know that there are still bakers out there, like Brettschneider, producing high-quality breads, pastries and cakes, even in China.

For more information, go to www.deanbrettschneider.com or www.nzbaker.co.nz