

Honest

to

goodness



For Cesare Salemi of Sydney bakery Dust, bread is a staple to be respected and should be about the truth, in its make-up and making, writes **NADIA BAILEY**, and he has the carefully crafted, naturally leavened loaves to prove it.

Photography **ANDREW FINLAYSON**



“To most people,” says Cesare Salemi, “bread is just the two bits that hold the sandwich together.

It never gets the accolades. Bread is the servant – it’s never the king.” He leans forward, conspiratorial. “But to those who understand, bread is the king.” At Dust, a small Sydney bakery dedicated to using stone-milled flour and the wild-fermentation process, he turns out loaves of sourdough as brown as the earth, with a chewy, malty crumb.

The breaking of bread was central to Salemi’s upbringing. He traces his love of baking back through his family line: from his father, a bread vendor who drove the streets of Sydney’s western suburbs selling loaves out the window of a van like a Mr Whippy, and his grandfather, who did the same on the streets of Sinopoli in southern Italy.

Salemi thinks of himself as a servant to the craft. He speaks about God, women and bread in the same expansively

passionate tones. “Growing up, we had respect for bread ingrained in our spirit. What is the value of a loaf of bread? Bread means survival. Bread means life.”

It’s not an especially popular point of view right now. It happened slowly at first, and then all at once: we’ve fallen out of love with bread. We regard carbs with the same fearful suspicion once reserved for fat. About one per

cent of the population is diagnosed as coeliac, but countless others choose to avoid gluten. These days, people say they’re not eating bread in the same rueful tones they might talk about finally quitting smoking: “Oh, sure, I miss it. But I feel so much better now.”

But not all bread is created equal, and the work Salemi does at Dust is a quiet protest against mass-produced

bread culture and its perfectly shaped, tasteless loaves. He uses grains like spelt, amaranth, quinoa and a pre-modern, small-yield wheat called bok, all of which are processed on site using a custom-built stone mill. He takes

a slice of the village loaf and pulls it apart with his hands. “Smell that,” he says. “The browner the bread is, the better it is. It shows that there are lots of natural sugars

occurring that turn to malt.” Salemi explains how the yeast is still living, and the scent is sweet and tangy and comforting. It’s good, honest food.

Each loaf is produced using a natural sourdough levain, rather than fast-acting baker’s yeast, and left to ferment over 12 to 24 hours, the gluten breaking down in the process. And most people know that sourdough is a better bread

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than a supermarket loaf, but that’s not the whole story.

“I have people come in asking me for sourdough – it’s like the world’s been indoctrinated,” says Salemi. He affects a plummy accent: “Oh, it’s sourdough, oh, it’s handmade, it’s artisanal, it’s sourdough!” He raps one hand on the table in frustration. “Now we have artisan bakers. I grew up with artisans my whole life and, let me tell you, when an artisan introduces himself as an artisan, you’ve got a problem.”

For Salemi, the sourdough process is a wasted effort if the bread is made with rubbish flour. “A lot of ‘artisan’ bakers are using the roller-milled flour to make their sourdough,” he says. “Bread made from roller-milled flour has the wheatgerm and the bran extracted out of it.”

This process sees only a fraction of the grain – the endosperm – used. The germ, which contains valuable proteins, is discarded because its high oil content shortens the life of the flour, and the fibre-rich bran is also removed because it makes the flour heavier and rougher. Open a packet of roller-milled flour and you’ll have the same experience every time: It’ll be uniformly white and utterly without character.

“To me, that’s not flour,” says Salemi. “It’s endosperm, which is a third of the grain. I find it fucking hilarious; it’s actually very hard for me not to go berserk – that we take the wheatgerm off. The wheatgerm in grain is 2.5 per cent; that’s the oil, the fat – the natural fat. We take that off because that oil shortens its lifespan, but then we load the fucking flour with 30 per cent butter.” It’s no wonder Salemi thinks that bread made this way is making people sick.

When the wheat is milled at Dust, the endosperm and the germ is retained, and the bran removed to keep the bread light. But once the dough is ready to be baked, it’s rolled in bran, which results in a loaf as close to wholegrain as you can get while retaining an airy profile.

“When we started mucking around with stoneground flour, we were taken aback by the colour, the feel, the oil.” The difference in the bake was palpable. “The taste of the bread is like a macadamia nut

versus a Black and Gold peanut. It’s got so much more depth,” he adds.

The time it takes to produce such loaves means that Dust will never be the kind of bakery that churns out bread for the masses. But Salemi hopes that as people become more aware of this way of handling gluten, that stoneground, fermented sourdough bread will make the leap from niche to the mainstream. Still, he worries that people are more interested in food that looks good on Instagram than what’s good to eat.

“It’s the lust of the eyes,” he says darkly, and shows me a photo of Nutella oozing from the puffy innards of a deep-fried doughnut. “Doughnuts on a milkshake is a trend, but bread should never be a trend. Bread should be the truth.” He pauses for emphasis. “Bread should be the truth!” ●

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PREVIOUS PAGES Cesare Salemi at Dust. Clockwise from below: the endo loaf; uncooked loaves ready to be rolled in bran; Dust’s brick oven. Opposite: Cesare Salemi at work in his Sydney bakery, Dust, and loaves of ciabatta (right).

