



"Kathleen thinks like a cook, with a strategic but instinctive approach, and her book is filled with invaluable bread-baking techniques."

—THOMAS KELLER

# DELLA FATTORIA BREAD

**63** FOOLPROOF  
RECIPES FOR  
*Yeasted, Enriched &  
Naturally Leavened  
Breads*

KATHLEEN  
WEBER

with FOREWORD BY THOMAS KELLER with

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FATTORIA  
BREAD



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**KATHLEEN  
WEBER**

*with Amy Albert & Amy Vaquer  
Photographs by Ed Anderson*

❦ FOREWORD BY THOMAS KELLER ❦





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TO MY HUSBAND, ED, AND MY CHILDREN, ELISA AND AARON,  
*who were always willing participants in my escapades*

AND TO MY DELLA FATTORIA FAMILY OF BAKERS,  
*past and present, who have always worked so hard to make the best bread every day*

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# FOREWORD

BY THOMAS KELLER

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In 1995, about a year after taking over The French Laundry, I started hearing rumblings about a local baker. She was baking bread in a wood-burning oven outside the kitchen door of a family-run ranch in nearby Petaluma. Through the server at our restaurant who first told me about the bread, I asked for a sample.

A few weeks later, on a scorching Yountville summer day, a couple pulled up to The French Laundry in a worn '78 Volvo sedan. Kathleen Weber was holding a bread basket filled with loaves of pain de campagne and pain au levain. She and her husband, Ed, introduced themselves, and I took them on an impromptu tour of the kitchen. We talked about wild yeast and the importance of quality ingredients. We also spoke about their elemental approach to their craft, how they baked their hand-shaped loaves directly on the hearth. I tasted what they'd brought. It was some of the best bread I'd ever tried. We didn't know it then, but breaking bread together marked the start of a beautiful friendship.

That summer, I ordered five loaves a day (a custom bâtard shape rather than a boule). We became the Webers' first fine-dining customer, and a business relationship formed, one that continued for the next eight years. The recipe for pain de campagne dough appears in this book, along with a number of variations, from pumpkin seed and olive to chocolate cherry and Meyer lemon–rosemary. As both our ventures grew, the number of wood-burning ovens and the number of loaves produced increased, until I opened Bouchon Bakery to address the growing needs of The French Laundry and Bouchon Bistro.

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During those early years, in the spirit of preserving artisanal tradition, Kathleen and I worked together on developing breads—from a seeded whole wheat reminiscent of a bread I first tasted as a young chef in New York City to a walnut baguette that Kathleen wrapped in craft paper as only a true *boulangère* would. We also tested with mini loaf pans in various shapes. The process was always experimental and convivial, and together we learned from our successes and failures.

As Kathleen told me later, every evening in those early years, Ed would stoke the fire in their lone oven (which he had built for Kathleen's birthday) so she could work into the night. When she learned that well-known personages in the culinary world were dining at The French Laundry, she began to bake with even greater intention, knowing that a gourmand she admired might be enjoying her bread the next day. That commitment to craft lives on in the Webers' son, Aaron, who worked for us at The French Laundry before joining Della Fattoria, the family business.

I believe chefs have a responsibility to make a positive impact, in part by supporting the people around them. That has been a guiding goal since I opened my first restaurant—to help the fishermen and farmers, foragers and gardeners, and, in this case, suppliers whose work is so closely

intertwined with mine. I know that what they do enriches what we do, and ensures that our guests enjoy memorable experiences. Kathleen and Ed set out with a great idea and a superior product. The small boost we gave them was the least we could do.

In *Della Fattoria Bread*, you'll learn how to make many of the breads Kathleen serves at her bakery and you'll also find unique and personal recipes such as Grape-Harvest Levain Boule and Weber Family Pizza. But this book is much more than an instructional guide. It is filled with invaluable bread-baking techniques, including starters, along with important information on baking equipment and proper technique. Reading it, you'll see what I have seen throughout the years. You'll come to appreciate Kathleen's fearlessness, a fearlessness that will give you courage to take risks yourself. Kathleen is a baker, but, as she says, she thinks like a cook, drawing on her senses and her experiences in what you might describe as her strategic but instinctive approach to baking bread. Her teachings will rub off on you, informing your decisions as you cook and bake.

Bread. Is there any food richer in symbolism? At once simple but essential, it is, in many ways, like friendship. Kathleen puts it slightly differently: "Bread is our boss," she says, "our art form and our way of life."

And what a life it is.

**THOMAS KELLER,**  
*The French Laundry*





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# PREFACE

## BREAD FEVER

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**T**he hiss of bakers' feet skating over flour-covered floors. The clap and scrape of wooden peels against the oven floor. The calls of "Load up," "Doors off," and "Behind you!" Our ten bakers are scrambling in a space too small to produce more than a thousand loaves of bread, using an oven that, as the bake progresses, cannot be reheated. It's Friday, our busiest day of the week. Our mixer is Lindsey; at five foot two and ninety-five pounds, she's all brains, muscle, and observation. She doesn't miss a thing. She always has a smile, and she loves her dough. She arrives at 6 A.M. to mix, transfer, and fold more than two thousand pounds of it! The rest of the crew starts arriving at 10 A.M. to begin shaping. All these people are smart, really smart: they love to bake, and they love each other.

Isaac is not only a master baker, he is also a master teacher and a team builder. Emerson is our Zen guy. He knows his bread, and he has an energy about him that is steady, focused, and calming. Rachel, full of drama, rolls in on her bike, greets the dogs, and then, shoulders squared, tackles the shaping. Lorenzo, our brainy social director and political commentator, gives his bread the importance it deserves. He is funny and keeps us laughing. Betty, another tiny but mighty one, works with the speed of a machine. She has been with us for many years, and her daughter, like our grandsons, grew up in the bakery. Wesley is long and willowy, and she always knows what's happening everywhere in the room. I know I can count on her. Chad, our math brain, is a little shy. You might mistake him for someone very serious because he is always concentrating, but then his sense of humor will surprise you. Marguerite is Lorenzo's cousin, full

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of energy and efficiency and always with a smile on her face. Unless it's freezing outside, she arrives in her running shorts ready to move! Charlie, tall and handsome, didn't bake before he came to us, but he was sure that was what he wanted to do. Driven by passion and with an easygoing personality and natural leadership qualities, he quickly became an invaluable member of our team. If it sounds like I love these people, I do. They are my dream crew.

Restaurants always need more bread on the weekends, and so on Fridays we are baking for them and for our rain-or-shine Ferry Plaza Farmers Market in San Francisco. Friday is game night, the busiest night of the week at Della Fattoria.

Our family bakery is attached to our house, on the family ranch on the north side of Petaluma. It is run by the four of us—me; my husband, Ed; our daughter, Elisa; and our son, Aaron—and it is where we bake our wood-fired breads. We also have a café in downtown Petaluma, and we sell our bread throughout the Bay Area.

Della Fattoria grew out of a passion for wood-fired baking, an obsessive quest for lost tradition. We started in 1995 and quickly developed a following: noted chefs who feature our bread in their restaurants, independent food markets that sell our bread, and devoted regulars who visit our stand at the farmers' market every week. In the Bay Area, opinions about who makes the best pain au levain run strong, and we're in it to make the greatest we can. As our bakers have heard me say often, there's no reason to do this work unless you strive to create the best bread in the world. Isaac, our head baker, is committed to the "Old World" way of baking. He reminds his bakers that the dough is alive,

like you and me—it just has a shorter life span.

Late on Friday night, the bakers are still going strong. I marvel at the breads lined up row after row on metal racks. There's a certain way our breads look when they're just pulled from the oven—radiant and golden, as if they're filled with the glow of a candle. The rustic shapes and nut-brown crusts are magic, and the distinct aroma of our bread—roastiness, sweetness, and smoke—is like no other. After all these years, I still feel the thrill of the bake.

I'm lulled to sleep by the racks rolling across the floor and the rock 'n' roll that the bakers play as the sound track for their work. How lucky am I to get to fall asleep and then wake up to the wonderful smell of freshly baked bread?

Ed and I never made a decision to be professional bakers. That came gradually as we started baking for one or two restaurants, and then others began to ask. We never put together a business plan. I was selling women's clothing part-time and began making bread at home because I loved it. If starting a bakery had been a conscious decision, a strategic plan, it would have never happened. Every aspect of making our kind of bread carries some uncertainty: starter that's fueled by wild yeasts, doughs that are pushed to the limit for moisture content, ovens that can't be heated up again once baking begins. Starting down this path was like having a baby: you do it and don't realize what you're in for until you're in it and can't turn back, yet you're propelled forward, caught up in the details and the joy. We invented the business as we went along. We don't cut corners, and we don't make decisions based on efficiency. Bread is our boss, our art form and our way of life.







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It's Saturday morning, 3:00 A.M. The alarm sounds and I hear the voices of NPR in the darkness. I drag myself out of bed and put the coffee on. When I bring Ed his wake-up cup, he's quiet, but I can feel his anxiety as he ticks off a farmers' market list in his head. Baskets? Cash box? Paper bags? He slips into the bakery to feed the oven.

Ed grew up on the ranch where we now make our home and our business. We moved here when our kids were small so they could grow up in the country and so Ed could help his parents. Composer, pianist, guitarist, farmer—my husband is a Renaissance man, and there isn't a person in the world he can't comfortably talk to. Ed has also been master of the fire since we began baking. He begins stoking the ovens early so they reach at least 900°F before tapering off for the bake. Baking by wood fire is a constant challenge, and it requires the fire chief to pay attention to all the daily variables, from the weather to how much bread we'll be baking.

By 4 A.M., Ed is starting to load the van. He has it down to a science now, and eventually the van is stuffed with tables, tents, baskets, and beautiful breads: *bâtards*, baguettes, *épis*, boules, Pullmans, and what we hope will be enough Meyer Lemon–Rosemary Campagne, our signature bread. Then off he goes: timing is important here; he needs to arrive at Ferry Plaza in time to get a place in line with the other merchants who queue up in their vans and then slowly caravan in so they're set up and ready for the hordes who arrive when the market opens at 8 A.M.

At 5 A.M., I head downtown to the café to help pack up the pastries. As I label and fill bags with cookies, our pastry chefs pull

croissants and Danish from the ovens and lift bagels out of boiling water. These talented and dedicated people move around each other effortlessly, carrying trays one-handed over their shoulders, like bricklayers carrying hods of mortar. Their practiced moves are almost as lovely as the pastries, almost as wonderful as the smells that fill the room.

Like a troupe of magicians, our pastry crew has packed up my little SUV, stuffing it with amazing temptations. Surely mine is the best-smelling car on the road. I make the forty-mile drive to the city, crossing the Golden Gate Bridge, a chile-red swoop of steel cabling peeking out of the fog. I'm at Ferry Plaza by 7 A.M. Vendors—many old friends of ours, who have come up in the business like we have—lug sacks of oysters, boxes of produce, and crates of jam into their stalls. Around a corner is Ed, hanging his signature can of flowers on the front of the tent. Our stall's tables are set with red and yellow Provençal tablecloths. Our beloved Kelly and Zac, who have been with us for years, fill huge French laundry baskets with the many loaves that we will sell today.

My cell phone goes off—it's Aaron. He and our daughter are putting on an event at the ranch this evening. Elisa is bursting with creative energy. She manages the ranch gardens and oversees our special events, vacation rentals on the ranch, and our website. She is also a talented photographer, documenting the various goings-on of each week. Aaron, a trained chef, has been manning our hearth ovens since 1997. Soon after we became Della Fattoria in 1995, he joined us, fresh from the kitchens at The French Laundry, The Sonoma Mission Inn, and Daniel Patterson's first restaurant, Babette's,



in Sonoma. These days, Aaron heads up the kitchen at the café, with an easy elegance that makes it all look effortless. He possesses the urgency of a line cook, the precision of a master baker, and an unerring palate. Right now, he is giving me a list of things he needs for the ranch dinner: a little cheese from Cowgirl Creamery and Andante Dairy; some porcini, if they have them, from Gourmet Mushrooms; and some apple balsamic from The Apple Farm.

It's almost opening time. The market doesn't officially start until eight, but some regulars come early. Over the years we've gotten to know our customers, and their lives, their work, how they like to cook. We've watched their kids grow up; we know their grandchildren. They gather at our stall to gossip and tease. Ed is in his element. The line gets longer and the crowd thickens, because the faithful who throng our stand week in and week out know we sell out early.



What an astounding mix they are, from people we otherwise would never have met to those whose work we've long admired. A remarkable array of chefs and home cooks, they all generously share information on cooking methods and tips on what's best at the market today.

The market is still in full swing when I see Zac beginning to load empty baskets into the van and hear Kelly saying, "Sorry, we're out of that." We'll be on our feet until

everything is gone. We'll be bone-tired this afternoon when we get home, where we'll rest our weary selves, then resume the rhythm of the week and do it all over again before coming back to the market next Saturday. We could never have imagined this life for ourselves, but I wouldn't trade it for the world.



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# INTRODUCTION

## THE ACCIDENTAL BAKERS

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I started baking traditional Italian-style breads while I was working as the manager of a high-end clothing boutique. It was the early 1990s and my kids were independent. Baking turned into an obsessive quest for me, but I was certainly never thinking “career.”

Long before Ed and I thought of starting a bakery, some friends gave me a copy of *The Italian Baker* by Carol Field. I had never seen a baking book like it before, one that shared the bakers’ personal stories along with regional history. I hadn’t ever made rustic traditional bread, yet I was instantly drawn to this way of baking. Immediately I made my first pre-ferment, or *biga*, a starter that is used in many Italian breads. The *biga* needed to sit overnight, so I had a little time to think about which bread I would make with it.

Pane Pugliese was the recipe I finally chose. I was excited to bake bread not contained in a pan. The dough was wetter than anything I’d worked with before, and it seemed a miracle that such shaggy floppiness turned into the best thing that had ever come out of my oven. In all my years of baking, I had never seen anything like it. The crust was crunchy and crackly; the interior crumb was golden, chewy, and full of lacy holes. The fragrance was out of this world. From that moment on, I baked day and night, reading through *The Italian Baker* as if it were a novel I couldn’t put down. I was under the spell.

A good twenty-five years before my pre-ferment revelation, during the sixties and early seventies, I’d started baking as a young bride. Ed and I would



gather with an expanding group of friends to drink cheap wine, smoke cigarettes, play bridge, and talk about the war in Vietnam and the meaning of life. Food was the backdrop for it all. It was the new art form, and we reveled in cooking, experimenting, and feeding our Bohemian tribe. We were in the starving-student stage of our marriage, but my being able to cook and bake meant we could still have great parties. The aroma of baking bread made our house feel like a home and a place where our friends wanted to gather. For very little money, I could create beautiful and delicious loaves that tickled my husband, and that made me very happy. (My nana used to say, “Cookin’ lasts, kissin’ don’t.”)

Of course, during the 1960s and '70s not every woman felt that way. For centuries, a woman's day was a very busy one, and every chore that she didn't have to do was time saved. Then women began entering the workforce. Store-bought bread and processed foods (like instant soup and TV dinners) seemed like wonderful time-savers, and baking bread, now thought of as difficult, messy, and time-consuming, fell out of favor. Feminism and baking just didn't go together. For lots of women, the idea of making food to please others carried heavy baggage, as did anything to do with the home arts.

Thankfully, a counterreaction took place, a push against mass-produced food and the industrialization of our food sources.



Julia Child challenged us to cook things our mothers never would have thought of cooking. Alice Waters and Deborah Madison taught us to use beans and vegetables and to make food delicious by keeping it fresh and local. Paula Wolfert traveled through Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries spending time with home cooks and professional chefs and then shared exotic dishes that many of us had never even seen in restaurants. We began to realize that cooking and baking were something that everyone, not just women, could take pride in. One of the delicious results was the artisanal food revolution that started sweeping the country in the late 1970s and continues to this day.

My passion continued to grow, and I spent years perfecting classic recipes. The

baguette that I first learned from Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* would later find its way into my repertoire as Della Fattoria's first baguette. Baking from Julia was knowledge that I hung on to. I was training my senses and teaching myself good instincts. I often baked the bread for Elisa and Aaron's school lunches; those sandwich loaves later morphed into our café Pullman loaf.

After Elisa and Aaron grew up, I moved on to experimenting with rustic Italian breads, reformulating the recipes to use natural starters made from grapes grown on the ranch. That Pane Pugliese, the first Italian-style bread I mastered, with its crunchy, nut-brown crust, large holes, and moist, chewy interior, was a Della Fattoria best seller from the get-go (see page 117).



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