

## Aracabake 2017

New bakery this year – “Les Magnolias”:



which is curious because the name above the door is clearly “Magnolia” singular.



Not sure if it matters so long as we all know what I’m talking about.

For the past twelve years we’ve stayed just across the road, a mere 100 yards away, but the contrast couldn’t be greater. Villa l’Alma is amongst the most magnificent houses in Arcachon, built by one of Napoleon III’s generals on a spacious terrace right above the water which breaks against its sea-wall at high tide. Les Magnolias is a cottage of three rooms opening in to each other, what might be called a shotgun shack if it wasn’t boomerang shaped. Very ‘umble but no less charming in its way. The main difference is the lack of sea and it’s a bit hard to take. To live on l’Alma’s terrace is to be totally immersed in the maritime environment, puts you right into the subtle and sometimes dramatic shifts in atmosphere, winds, tides, boats of every type, holiday makers. Here we look out to a pair of white uPVC gates, above which float the hair styles of the taller

passers by, underneath the shoe fashions, and whirl of poodles legs, hear anonymous voices heading for the beach and the sounds of all types of physical exertion – cyclists, joggers, speed walkers, skate boarders, roller-bladers - on the cycle track across the road, not to mention, of course, the full range of motorised conveyances. How can so many people afford Harley Davidsons and why do they make such a ridiculous noise?

I'm only whingeing because I miss the sea.

Les Magnolias is an excellent place to stay. And for the first time ever on a French holiday let I have a half-decent oven:



It claims to go up to 300C. It can certainly get very hot – you can actually burn bread intentionally. It's even got a pizza setting. Given that this has to be a combination of top, bottom and fan heat plus thermostatic control, I'm not sure what this means. But I've never had the luxury of having to check if my pizza is burning before.

Flour has been the struggle this year. There's a pretty comprehensive organic food shop just five minutes away where I am known as the odd English bloke who turns up once a year and buys nothing but flour. Usually they have a very good selection of flours but I suspect that the worldwide outbreak of glutenphobic hysteria has arrived on some rat infested plague ship and had its debilitating effect. They have some wheat flours but amazingly no T65 (the most common flour for bread) and the selection is different every week. No rye, and when after two weeks it arrives, it's in measly 500g packs. But it means I have to bake with what is available. So we start off with a bag of T110 (the higher the number, the closer to wholemeal) and a 500g bag of Petit Épeautre Intégrale (wholemeal einkorn) plus supermarket organic T65 which fortunately is widely available.

First bread, and a personal record being baked within 24 hours of arriving, is a Pain de Campagne masquerading as a Pane Pugliese:



That is to say, I gave it a severe dimpling immediately before it went in the oven. Note the open crumb despite being just under 60% hydration.

Then we played with the Petit Épeautre – I say “played”, but when 500g costs as much as I can sell a large loaf for, maybe I should take it more seriously. And it leads us to a grand muddle. Look at this:



I find this photo really evocative of baking at l'Alma. It's ten years old (I checked – 2007) and it's Petit Épeautre – I remember it because I haven't baked with it since.

Anyway, I scour my spreadsheets and find a formula for Petit Épeautre. In theory, if there's anything that differs from my basic method, I record it in a text box along side the formula. In practice .....??? So I wonder at the starter in the final dough being 153.1% and the starter to produce this amount being only just over 4%. But there's no text box to give any clues.

So my first attempt comes out like this:





More than edible but very tight crumb. I put this down to my method. With starter at 153% I should have treated it as an overnight sponge followed by a single rise. But I made up the starter and gave it eight hours, made up the dough and refrigerated it overnight (fridge much too cold) and then proved it. I assumed the difference between this and the very open crumb in the 2007 photo was that the original was much lighter flour.

Then I happened on a bag of Petit Épeautre Blanche T70. Did the overnight sponge thing, mixed the dough in the morning, shaped, single rise for 3½ hours:



Well, it was a very nice loaf and if it wasn't for that original photo I would be more than happy. But all the time there has been a little whirring going on in the old brain. So I dug out the photo which is when I discovered the date it was taken. I also noticed I had entitled it "Spelt" and I recalled that there was a time when mistakenly thought Petit Épeautre was Spelt when in fact it's Einkorn, and the French for Spelt is just Épeautre (without the "Petit"). Meanwhile I'm still knowledgeably telling Sue that Einkorn is the same as Emmer which it's not.

So just to clear this bit up, Einkorn and Emmer are separate types of early wheat. In French Spelt is Épeautre and Einkorn is Petit Épeautre. Got it?

Did some more research in the archives and discovered that my formulas for Spelt and Petit Épeautre are identical i.e must have come from the same source. Now I know my Spelt recipe came from a guy called Jochanan who occasionally posted on Dan Lepard's forum.

Back in 2007 I wrote: *"This is based on a rather vague recipe that Jochanan posted ages ago that I'd been meaning to try ever since. I was amazed to see that the second refreshment of the starter was fully activated overnight by just 8% of the first. I'm assuming that the malt in the original is powdered. I can only find syrup here so I decided arbitrarily to reduce the quantity to a third (and then forgot to put it in).*

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Refreshment

Starter	22g (8.1%)
Water	250g (92.6%)
Spelt	270g (100%)

Mix and stand overnight (8 hours).

### Dough

Starter	542g (153.5%)
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Water	125g (35.4%)
Spelt	353g (100%)
Malt Syrup	13g (3.7%)
Salt	18g (5.1%)

*All Jochanan said was “Mix, develop, divide and shape. Cold rise overnight. Bake next day.”*

*I did my usual Dan treatment – four hour fermentation starting with three short kneads at ten minute intervals and hourly folds. Shape + five hours prove.*

*Jolly tasty.*

*The spelt describes itself as, “Farine d’Epeautre Campagne Type 80 Mouture sur Meule de Pierre”.*

But wait! What’s this? Moving through the archives a stumble across this:



April 2010 photo entitled Wholemeal Petit Épeautre recorded as Complete T150 Triticum Monococcum which is Einkorn.

I am now hugely confused (I am sure you are too) to the extent that, now we are back in Wales, I’ve ordered 5K of Einkorn to see what I can make of it.

I’ve been taking my starter to France since 2000. Seems to like it there. A few years back I was so breaded-out I left it at home and decided to have a bake-free holiday. Apparently unable to help myself I end up making a new starter and posting day-by-day progress on the eGullet food website, encouraging readers to join in the fun and learn sourdough. A few of them did.





This is my batterie du fournil. Bear in mind that we do not drive so everything that goes has to be carried.

A large, rigid 6 litre plastic box: you might think this is a strange choice when space is limited but it fits the bottom of my big Berghaus wheelie and can be filled with both delicate and sharp items. More importantly it houses a litre of Ricard and a litre of 55 proof Dillons Martiniquean rum in plastic bottles on the return trip. It also acts as a dough box.

A hundred grams of starter is tied into a freezer bag. After only fifteen years of doing this I had the brainwave of taking 100g of flour with me so I didn't have to go searching for organic flour when we arrived which is usually in the evening and usually at the weekend and there are plenty of other things to do getting "Installed" (as they say in French) in our new accommodation. I draw the line at taking water.

The starter is packed in the little plastic pudding basin which is used for subsequent refreshments.

The tea towel and bubble wrap are for covering proving dough and also as packing in the big box for the journeys there and back.

The basic tools: a plastic dough scraper, a serrated tomato knife for slashing (and general kitchen duties), a trusty pizza tin for baking on, small electronic scales, spare battery.

Most important, the laptop with all my formulas without which I cannot bake.

A few loaves that I baked while waiting for a decent flour supply:



Mick's Classic Sourdough



This set out as a Classic but got hijacked late in the fermentation stage when Sue demanded olive bread and fine cured Greek black olives from the market were kneaded in.





I was attempting a different kind of knot from memory – a sort of figure of eight knot with an additional loop and didn't quite get it right. The rope was too short so the last part was too tight. You get one chance ... But then when it tastes this good ...

The next one I did get right:





Pretty perfect knot – T110 flour.

Then, of course, with my favourite 80% hydration dough, pizza:



I'm sure the Guardian newspaper is very impressed with its own food coverage and would be amazed it drives me crazy. Anna Jones, Cook, Guardian 06 May 2017: *"My favourite pizza is a simple one made with a thin sourdough base ...( rave, rave, rave) ... but that kind of slow-risen dough is labour-intensive stuff, so it is rare I make this kind of pizza at home."*



Mix the dough by stirring in the bowl. Knead by lifting and letting the dough fall back under its own weight a few times. Put in the fridge and forget about it for a couple of days. That wasn't too hard now was it Anna? What isn't used for pizza can be used up in all sorts of ways:



Instant rustic baguettes. No proving, rough shaping.



Black olive and mozzarella focaccia.

And , how about this for labour-intensity, Anna? Got up, made coffee, took the dough out of the fridge and loosely shaped it. Turned on the oven to 250C.



Had shower while oven heated up. Sue has shower during which time I slash the dough and bake for about 25 minutes.



Breakfast!!!



After a couple of weeks visiting the local *épicerie bio* it was clear the flour situation wasn't going to improve. As an excuse for going to lunch at *Le Boeuf sur la Place* at Pessac for the second time this holiday, we took the train to Bordeaux and went to the *BioCoop* near Victoire for flour before legging it back down to Pessac for the main event.



Never mind the Petit Épeautre on the left - we've been there. It's the 2½K of Froment on the right that we are interested in. I can never get my mind round the finer points of British flour never mind French. But froment is proper bread flour so from this point I've run out of excuses.

You'll have to take my word for it but the first one was virtually identical:





For the last loaf I used up whatever flour was left, proportionate to the amounts remaining: approximately T130 Seigle 50%, T65 Froment 20%, T110 Wheat:



A little less well behaved due to the lack of gluten.



During the time we were there, Mme Nicole Hirigoyen, who ran the superb cheese stall at Marché Arcachon for decades, died. It's strange when



someone with whom you have never had a conversation, but who is very familiar to you and who clearly remembers you well each year you stand in her queue to be served, dies. We felt very fond of her and respected her high standards.

When we came back I reproduced that last loaf and named it after her because, the French would never do it, but, the deep flavours of this bread go very well with cheese.



Pain Hirigoyen.- Strong White 20.0%, Wholemeal Wheat 30.0%, Wholemeal Rye 50.0%, Water 66.5%, Starter 28.0%, Salt 1.6%.

## Postscript

Before we left Arcachon my starter went down the sink. I've done this business so many times I have absolute confidence the starters I left in Wales will be absolutely fine.

Before we left for Arcachon I put a small quantity of white wheat and wholemeal rye starter in plastic bowls in the fridge. The bowls were covered in cling-film and tied in to freezer bags more to stop them drying out than for any other reason.



You can see the rye on the left is still quite aerated after five and a half weeks and the wheat has produced enough gas to inflate the bag.



The rye stripped of its packaging. The surface tells you very little:





The wheat on the other hand looks totally flat, inactive and has shed two or three tablespoons of greyish liquid (hooch). I suspect that this kind of appearance persuades the beginner the starter is dead. It looks pretty much the way I felt after a long and tedious journey and a few hours sleep.



I poured off the hooch and refreshed both starters at a ratio of 1:1:1, starter,



water, flour, at about 12 midday.

By early evening the wheat starter was showing signs of activity. I was forced to share my photographic plinth with an immovable object. Legs, the pest control officer, determinedly nonchalant about our five week absence.



By next morning both starters were well on their way back to full strength.



And the gentle Welsh rain was there to welcome us back.



I could have baked with the wheat starter (if I'd had the energy) but gave it another refreshment and put off the bake a further day.

What's next?

