

Noble Crust

A Personal Tour of West County Artisan Bakeries



Story by Kevin McKenzie | Photos by Sarah Bradbury

FROM THE BEGINNING of civilization, or since wheat, water and yeast have been combined; we have been enjoying bread in one form or another. Whether it was cooked on hot rocks in flat cakes, thrown in the pit of a fire, or baked in a makeshift stone oven, artisan bread has been around forever; it's just that as a burgeoning American culture we sacrificed the art of bread making (for a generation or two) in exchange for convenience.

Now, great bread is back with a vengeance and I am happy to say that in Sonoma County we have some of the most passionate and determined bakers in America putting the full force of their

talent and focus towards sustaining the heritage and craft of this noble trade while enriching it along the way.

People come from all over the world specifically to snap open a crusty loaf of authentic San Francisco sourdough and savor the sharp yeasty tang which can only be reproduced in our Northern California climate.

I had a hard time deciding where to begin, because in a county as large as ours, there are many people punishing their shoulders and forearms by working with bread for long hours in front of a fiery oven. My solution was to ask around to see which bakeries elicited the most

enthusiastic recommendations from their customers in the area. In the long run it was not difficult to nail the choices down to a manageable few that seem to stand out by virtue of their popularity.

My first stop is at the now legendary Wild Flour Bread in Freestone. It's located a few minutes west of Sebastopol on Highway 12, just off the main highway in the small and quaint village of Freestone. Former stained-glass artist Jed Wallach owns the bakery, which is only open Fridays through Mondays. Wallach turned to baking as a way to support his family through some rough times. It has

continues on page 32