

## Training What can we learn from overseas?

# ANDY'S AMERICAN ARTISAN ODESSEY

By: Andrew Toogood

What comes to mind when you think about Americans and their food habits? I used to think of a nation of obesity and super size meals consisting of foods high in fat and sugar. Is this because it is what I was used to witnessing on the six o'clock news or in the latest Hollywood blockbuster movie?

However during the month of May I spent time in four different parts of the United States of America and now when I look at Americans and their food habits, in particular concerning breads a new word comes to mind...trendsetters. Don't worry I am not going to bust the myth that Americans are an obese and lazy nation. I am merely going to converse with you why I believe that Australians will once again follow the trends of Americans and for once this will be for the benefit of Australian bakers and bread consumers.

Just like fashion, food is a stylish commodity. Do we eat the same types of foods that were popular in the 1950's? Surely not. Refresh to the 1990s when the muffin was the king of small cakes however lately we have seen resurgence in the classic cupcake refaced for the 2000s. This begged me to ask myself with new trends and focuses on healthy eating, whole grains and low-gi products, how many days has the humble sandwich sliced white loaf have left?

Therefore for two weeks of my American endeavor I invested heavily in myself and my future in the baking industry by attending the famous San Francisco Baking Institute. Why would I invest such money when I had already completed Leon Bailey's two week Artisan module at Regency TAFE based on the same principles and techniques? In fact I was lucky enough to be part of the inaugural class of sixteen apprentices taken by Leon Bailey and Robert Schwert back in 2004.

Compared to many people in the baking industry I have relatively little experience. I have been baking for several years and during this time I have competed in some national competitions. However in San Francisco I was able to experience many new things which will



hopefully in time forward my career further in my baking ventures. It wasn't until I arrived in San Francisco that it all actually began to make sense. This wasn't purely just an endeavor in learning how to create, improve and develop Artisan breads, it was a course which helped me redevelop myself and my passion for baking.

The San Francisco Baking Institute is one of the highest regarded baking schools in America. Founded in 1996 by Michel Suas a French baker himself, the institute has trained many award winning Baking USA teams. As well as Michel himself SFBI was once home and occasionally still is to other such bakers in particular Didier Rosada making SFBI the perfect environment to learn the very best artisan techniques in the world.

I did put on the white pants and learn from some of the best. In a class of sixteen I was mixing it up with other bakers, a famous chef and many home baker connoisseurs which ranged from lawyers to stay-at-home mums. We came to terms with the science between short, improved and intensive mixing and how to develop and change

flavours with these three techniques. We also spent time learning how to control sourdough and not let it control us by making various forms of liquid levain's, stiff levain's, poolish and biga's. We were then able to create some fantastic breads including baguettes, rye, pan bread, olive sour dough, raisin bread and of course ciabatta.

There was also some sightseeing and observations that I encountered in San Francisco. I was able to experience a region which is very similar to our own culture in Australia. Fantastic farmers markets, a multicultural environment, rich winegrowing area of the Napa Valley and lots of fresh produce. I visited many famous Artisan bakeries in the area including Boudin, Acme Bread, Semifreddi's, La Brea and SFBI's very own Thorough Bread to name a few. The region is rich with choice for Artisan bakeries and although some do it better, some do it bigger than the other but they all share the same belief that although artisan baking is from the past and will become the future.

So has the profile of Artisan bread been lifted in the past five years in Australia? Surely yes, not at lightning speed but I believe it is gaining momentum. It is then up to us the Australian bakers of the future to teach and inspire the common bread eating community. Let's face it, that is pretty much everybody!

*"And when you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change"*

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