

Baking Portfolio

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Introduction:

This class will be the first foray into baking for a lot of us; I have done a small amount of baking at my house, mostly what others have done: Muffins, cookies, brownies and a few pies. I am lucky enough to really enjoy making pie dough from scratch although it has given me some trouble in the past.

Bread is an important part of a fine dining meal; it is often served as a palette builder before the appetizers are served. Some restaurants pride themselves on their beautiful fresh bread and butter: Olive Garden and The Keg for example

By the end of the course I would like to achieve the following:

- Be more comfortable with doughs and bread making
- Have a better understanding of the science behind bread production
- Be more confident with pie doughs
- Have a better understanding of how to work with gluten
- Have a better understanding of operating in a bake shop (ingredients, tools, etc..)

Baking methods and Techniques

Cutting in:

This is a method of 'mixing' butter and flour where the butter is cut with knives or a special tool into the butter until it is the desired size. When cutting in butter for certain dough's it's very important that everything is ice cold: put the mixing bowl in the freezer, put your round bladed knives in the freezer, put the flour and obviously the butter in the fridge. This way all the product is super cold before you start cutting in.

Deck Oven:

These take a long time to get hot and they tend to go 30F over and then come back down while achieving the desired temperature. So make sure these are turned on at the start of the class.

Proofing:

When proofing the product is done when you press into it and it bounces back and doesn't collapse.

Ingredient Handling:

When baking we were taught that it's important for most of the ingredients to be added at room temperature unless the recipe states otherwise, and while still handling the food safely and holding it at the proper temperatures.

Butter can be removed from the packaging quicker by running hot water over it for a couple seconds.

Weigh ingredients together that are used together, with the smallest quantities added last, this saves time and reduces mess.

Creaming butter:

Butter creams quickly, 3-7 minutes depending on how much you desire it to be creamed. The more you cream it the more air that is incorporated. It's important to pay attention to the process and not walk away from the mixer while it's on.

Pan Grease/preparing trays:

One of the other students prepared pan grease that we can now refrigerate and use in the class, this is a mixture of equal parts shortening, vegetable oil and bread flour and is used in commercial operations to stop food sticking to pans. Otherwise for small batches or home use it's best to spray quickly with pam or rub with some butter (expensive.) and then coat with flour, tapping out any excess.

Kneading:

Kneading is the process of creating gluten by expanding the gliadin and glutenin proteins. It takes time and if over needed the gluten can break back down again.

Cooling:

Food should be left in the tray while it cools down enough to be handled and then quickly removed and placed on a cooling rack to avoid any additional cooking.

Preparing cake pan:

Chef showed us a method of folding parchment paper to properly fit it into a bread tin. By cutting into the corner about 6" and then creating a little box inside the tin, this seemed like the easiest way to remove the cake or bread after baking.

Emulsified batter:

The carrot bread was made by mixing eggs and sugar and then slowly added oil to create an emulsification. This results in a creamy batter which holds the air in better when it is cooked is creates light and fluffy cakes and sponges.

Kneading and rolling dough:

Bread making is getting a little easier now i've spent some time in baking class working with dough, it's important to know the consistency of the dough and make sure it is right before it goes into the proofer and once it is proofed and inconsistencies or errors will be amplified.

Meringue

I made my meringue early as we've done it many times in our intro to pastry class and i've done it many times at home. Usually just dumping the sugar and egg whites into the mixer, turning it on and walking away for about 10 minutes. However we were showed that we should begin whipping the egg whites first until they begin to turn white and thicken a little bit and then VERY steadily adding the sugar. This did result in meringue with much more volume that will be less dense once baked and a meringue with a better gloss.

Lemon curd + Cornstarch

Curd can be made by adding everything in the mixture together (except butter), although it needs to be permanently stirred to avoid burning. Cornstarch needs to be brought to a boil and then will thicken after one minute, this process is very obvious but it's important to be patient and make sure it takes place properly.

Mealy and Flakey pastry

The top of a pie should be flaky, this is achieved by baking the puff pastry straight without par baking, allowing it to puff up in the oven. The mealey bottom which is used for pies which have moist or already cooked mixtures added to them is achieved by par baking the crust first with pie weights.

Par baking

Par baking a pie crust prior to filling allows the bottom to become mealy and to not absorb any moisture when the filling is added, some pie crusts are only partly par baked and then filled before being baked again and some are fully baked such as in a lemon meringue pie.

Rolling dough (Awkward Gluten.)

Sometimes gluten will pull back a lot while rolling, if this is the case then you can let the dough rest for a little bit while shaping other pieces and return to it later to work on it again while the gluten relaxes.

Straight Dough:

Straight dough method is activating the yeast with the water and then dumping this into all of the dry ingredients and turning the mixer on. All the ingredients are combined at the same time and then it is kneaded (or mixed in the blender.) for 10 minutes until it reaches 25C or is smooth and no longer tacky to the touch.

Whipping Cream

We messed up our whipping cream. I like to whip it by hand because i've eaten a lot of cream in Europe and different desserts call for different thicknesses of cream and the turning process happens very quickly so I like to have complete control over it. However I left it to my partner and he just made butter.

This isn't the worst thing but he unfortunately threw it out even though it could of been repurposed in culinary or we could of continued whipping it into butter and used it on our soft rolls. The Keg serves whipped butter with their complimentary rolls.

Custard (controlling and cooling.)

When handling custard it needs to be cooled quickly but not in the saucepan. Get a mixing bowl and pour the custard into the bowl, place this over ice and then stir constantly to cool very rapidly (5 mins.) The stirring will also stop a skin from forming.

Par baking - Upside down.

Today we were shown to place another pie tin over the pastry and then just turn it upside down and place it into the oven. This worked way better than beans or weighing it down as the pie can't bubble upside down.

Sourdough starter:

The bread we made with a sourdough starter; it is just a simple mixture of a special type of flour and warm water in 3:2 ratio. Over time the natural yeast in the flour will activate and slowly create a flavourful starter for the bread

Shaping bread and keys

When shaping bread it's important to work quickly and keep the dough that isn't being worked covered so that it doesn't form a skin. A loaf can be folded quickly and the key is usually folded underneath so that it isn't obvious on the top.

Scones and Raising (Baking powder.)

I've made scones a lot of times and always forget that they don't raise very much; maybe a quarter of an inch...So it's important to cut them about $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick for the desired final outcome. Also the dough is always a little moist but can be dried by using a large amount of flour when rolling out. It was important to cool the shaped scones before baking them to avoid them melting out.

Pound cake cracking on top

We were told that a pound cake that is made properly cracks on top. But there is a way to get this to happen every time: by piping a thin line of clarified butter down the centre of the pound cake. Mine was one of the lightest and nicest tasting but didn't crack so it's a good idea to do this as a guarantee.

Rolling a filling into a dough

Filling should be spread evenly and then the dough is rolled lengthwise for maximum distribution. It can usually be prepared in advance or while the dough is proofing.

Egg wash

A lot of our rolls today were burnt on top, I think this is because the egg wash that the other students made was pretty bad, it hadn't been mixed properly and there was no milk. It resulted in an uneven browning on the top of our rolls and some burning in spots.

Adding Icing

Our powdered icing needed sugar so was still slightly acidic, we also added it while the buns were still a little warm which resulted in it mostly running off and onto the sheet pan below, which is not where most of the product should be.

Baking Recipes And Notes

Focaccia:

The focaccia went well but it was a little too dense. The person who achieved the desired product had punched the dough down twice during proofing instead of once and took the focaccia out of the oven while it was a little under done.

Chocolate chip cookies:

Our chocolate chip cookies were very good. Chef said that the doneness is a desired thing (or will be told to you.) I prefer mine to be quite gooey with a crisp outside. Some people like a crispy cookie. I've seen cookie dough before and it started going quite dark when adding the chocolate so I stopped about 50% into adding it. This is one of the few times where my instinct paid off because using 100% of the real chocolate made the cookies far too moist and unbakeable.

Apple Pie 1:

A fun product which I struggled with but amazing came out really well. I know that dough is very difficult and I tried my best with this one to listen to chef and do the important steps correctly. I used his round bladed knives to cut in the butter and cooled my ingredients adequately.

When rolling the dough I became very nervous. Everyone else was having an easy time and mine was dry and cracking. But also still a light colour; the butter had melted into everyone else's dough, causing a yellowing, softening and the product to change. When we finally baked the pies my dough was the only one which fell down with the apples properly and the pie got a great deal of compliments from my friends and family. In fact they ate the whole thing while I was at school the next day!

Need to remember that apples cook down a lot so to pile them very high.

Blueberry Muffins 1:

A nice recipe. I forced down the batter into the tray causing the muffins to be a little flat, next time I'll try just leaving it, I was just trying to use all the product.

The mixture was good though, perhaps a little overmixed as the ingredients only need to be incorporated, not mixed.

The taste was good, texture was nice and fluffy as a muffin should be and the blueberries were well incorporated in the mixture without bleeding or popping.

Soft Rolls 1:

I didn't work on these too much so I must make the dough next time. Chef gave us a demo on how to do it by hand, slowly incorporating flour on the table; telling us not to change the ratio as it will change the mixture, add more flour not more water as the flour might've dried out over time.

Peanut Sandies

A nice peanut cookie dough mixture. Cookies are one of those things that are very personal. I took mine out early before they had begun to get golden and they are soft and chewy; some people took them out a little later where they have a little more crunch to them.

The cookie dough was a little over mixed as I walked away from the machine for 30 seconds but the cookies still came out well.

Streusel topping

I made this quickly by hand, it can be used as crumble or added on top of baked ingredients before baking for a nice additional texture.

Fudge brownies:

I made these, they were very nice. I always prefer my brownies to be a little undercooked so that they are fudgy and chewy for the first day or two and then firmer and good with milk for the next day. I always take them out the second that the skewer is removed clean to achieve this, although leaving them in an extra 5-10 mins will give a crispier texture and make it far easier to remove from the pan. Underbaked brownies have to be left a little longer or the mixture just falls apart.

Carrot bread:

This was one of my favourite items of the day and was enjoyed by a lot of people at school and at my home. Another team added olive oil instead of veg oil and their product ended up having a light gold colour and lighter texture. We were told that this is a more expensive way to make the product but it is healthier and ends in an arguably better carrot muffin. I decided to make muffins and not a bread; we were told many times that they would be perfect with a little bit of icing on top.

Banana Bread:

One of my mother's favourite things to do with old bananas was make banana bread. This recipe was good, the bread came out moist and tasty. I like the addition of banana in the bread, either in the centre of the batter or layered on top (which we could of done.) Banana bread can be awkward, it's important to use very ripe bananas to achieve the best final product.

Italian Rosemary rolls 2:

These went ok. We had a lot of inconsistencies on the outside of our final product, after the dough has proofed our imperfect rolls were a little bumpy and uneven. Once I began eating them later that day I also found that the dough was very dense but it did have a nice rosemary flavour.

Lemon Meringue:

Turned out nicely although the meringue could of been lighter if i'd paid attention as mentioned above. The curd was nice without being too tart and the pie crust was well baked in the oven. I didn't take this home so I can't comment too much on the final flavour.

Baguette

We made out baguettes using a regular recipe and they came out nicely, if a little thin. They weren't too dense but were lacking in flavour. Other groups used the old dough recipe and their baguettes had that nice baguette flavour that one associates with a crusty baguette.

Pecan Pie

Perfect! One of my favourite pies so I made this myself. I like a decent ratio of pecans so I added enough to basically fill the base of the pie and then used the syrup mixture to fill in all the holes between the pecans. Another pie that is cooked once it no longer 'shakes' in the centre.

Raspberry Jam Birds nest Cookies

We made some mistakes on these which were just lapses in thought. They looked nice and liked a birds nest but we need to remember.

- don't fill by hand, use a piping bag and gently fill to avoid seepage
- Double tray baked goods in the oven to avoid the bottom over cooking.

Soft Yeast Dinner Rolls 3:

I wanted to attempt these today as I haven't done them yet and they are on the final. Initially I know I would have got them wrong, but with our experience from the past few weeks I found these really easy, I got some advice on the shaping and managed to prevent them from forming a skin. A quick egg wash after about 2 hours of proofing and then baked. I think mine were some of the bigger rolls in the class as I made sure to do them early and give them plenty of time to proof, while checking them regularly.

Oatmeal Cookies

Came out nicely, very easy. Just mix together ingredients, fold in dry ingredients and then drop onto a prepared baking sheet. I remembered to use two pans so as not to burn the bottom of the cookies. I should of underbaked them a little bit more as the next day they were already very dry and I like soft cookies.

Chocolate Creampie

Up and down. The pie dough was nice but then we put it in the fridge after baking to cool it and it just split into three pieces and didn't come back together very well. The filling was nice and after we fixed our whipped cream with the help of chef, the topping was good. I think our pie could of been one of the nicer ones in the class if the pie shell hadn't split.

Raisin Bread

I didn't make the raising bread but it came out nicely, there was no raisin swirl in ours and I didn't see if we even put cinnamon in the center to create that swirl. It rose really well and was baked nicely if a little dark on top. It also went in quite late even though all our timing was good, causing us to have the first products and the last products out, which was weird. Because we were completely on time at 4pm

Sourdough bread:

Our bread came out very nice, if a little dense, the cuts in the top were nice and deep and done just before baking to give a nice contrasting appearance along the top. My only issue with this item is how long it took; I asked my team mate repeatedly how it was going and even though it had been punched down twice, it didn't proof for almost another hour, making our final product come out far later than it needed to.

White chocolate and cranberry scones

I made these, other than their lackluster height as mentioned before they were very nice, they were buttery and layered inside and the white chocolate had not burnt. A lot of the cranberries had sunk to the bottom even though I tossed them in the dry ingredients. Scones always give me trouble, they seem simple but there are lots of nuanced steps which take time to master and remember.

Pound cake

I made this and it was one of the nicer ones in the class and got completely finished. It didn't crack as I mentioned above and it could of rose a little more; I think because I swapped ovens from a 400F to a 350F immediately, instead of dropping the temperature of an oven, which would of been a shock to the batter. So just being too rough with the product once it was baking.

Morning Glory Muffins

My teammate made these without much trouble, the batter was very soft but it came up nice and airy and they domed nicely. Unfortunately I always want icing on a carrot based muffin and that would make these relatively healthy muffins contain even more sugar! Still they were tasty and moist.

Soft Yeast Dinner Rolls 4:

These came out nicely, although we were meant to go with 50g to get 36 rolls and we accidentally used the wrong measurement and did 40g rolls which are a little small, and as mentioned above they were a little too browned on the top because of the poor egg wash (or because of absent mindedness.) Either way they were still edible and presentable enough but I'd like them to be a little bigger.

Butter Cookies

These were hard for everyone, my group was used to the piping so they looked nice and the batter seemed ok but it actually has to be pretty stiff or the cookies run the risk of running out and their shape is lost. Ours still looked and tasted ok, sellable for a discount maybe! Other teams who had worked their batter for FAR longer had a better final result.

Cinnamon Rolls

These came out really nice and soft and the filling was delicious, other than the icing needing some sugar they were really good and a decent size, they could of been a little more uniform and a little thicker.

Sourdough coffee cake

I made this quickly at the start of class and it came out perfectly; like half of it got eaten in the class before the grading even started, and other peoples cakes were a lot less presentable compared to mine. Although I think a little more clarified butter would of helped the brown sugar to dissolve a little more giving a better flavour and texture, otherwise it was a bit grainy with brown sugar.

Apple Pie 2

Came out nicely although I didn't use enough apples; the recipes called for 850g which is approximately 6 apples. The pie dough didn't fall down enough and it needed to be dotted with butter for a better final appearance. I've got better at working with the pie dough and making it do what I want although it always seems to be a little dry; the final product however is always nice and not soggy and doesn't pull too much. I need to focus on appearance and make sure to crimp the edges nicely for the finals.

Blueberry Muffins

Nothing wrong with these; they portion size is perfect and i've learnt from my previous mistakes. Don't cream for too long and don't push the batter down, the muffins will dome nicely. Although I like a larger muffin.

Soft Yeast Dinner Rolls:

The outside of my dinner rolls were crispy, although the inside was soft; they don't taste yeasty however because I punched my dough down twice to release the gasses because the dough was fermented for a long time. Remember that the dough is done proofing once a finger pushed into it DOESN'T bounce back. And the crispy exterior is because of the oven temp being too low (375F)

Butter Cookies

I was going to make these; and would of had them out on time, before other peoples bread, but at 4:15 chef told everyone to stop scaling new recipes because a lot of people were just starting their apple pies (which take an hour.) I know if I was on my own on the final I'd have the time with this lesson to get everything out on time.

Personal Thoughts regarding each week:

Week one:

I think for a first baking class a lot of us did very well. Very few burnt items and people worked together well, the kitchen was relatively clean throughout the day.

My teammates and I need to work together differently. The culinary arts are very separated: entremetier, garde manger, saucier that it's easy to focus on what you are doing; whereas in the bakery, it's very important to work together and help each other complete recipes on time as batches can be very large with lots of intricate work.

I'd like to gain some confidence in baking so i'm excited to be taking this class.

Week Two:

Focus more on the entire process. In the bakery compared to the kitchen it's lots of stop and starting. Rolling dough, chill, Rolling, proofing, baking. However every single step is important and so I need to buy a decent timer that I can attach to the fridge or to the oven/cooling rack, I need to focus on each stage equally rather than seeing the baking or proofing times as a time to rest.

Week Three:

A good day today with solid work from both members of my team, I still would like to get better at making bread as it's a very hands on process that takes experience to understand and achieve the desired results and it's something I've not made a lot of, except with a machine.

I've done a certain amount of baking and pastry products so I do tend to be a bit personal with the recipes, such as the cookies and brownies being underbaked to my tastes. I know I can produce the recipes I know the way the book wants them, so I think it's nice when it's one of the few recipes I'm familiar with to try and show the other students what else is possible.

Different groups this week and I didn't realise how many mistakes quarter one students (like I was.) make. My teammate hardly ever cleaned up behind themselves and tended to leave the station dirty which I can't stand, but it's nice to be with the new students and use what little experience we have to help them improve quickly.

Week five:

I am too keen in class, wanting to get out on time and rushing ahead of chef; I need to calm down a little bit, take a breath and enjoy the class and what we are learning a little more. I like all the product so any extra tutelage is appreciated.

Week six:

I was much happier in the group this week and we worked very well together to get a lot of nice product out. I'm getting more confident in the products and the methods although there always seems to be something I could be doing better. Or something I forgot.

I should re-read my journals before class each week and I also need to prepare timelines when I find the time or get to class earlier and do it.

We started scaling right away this week and I much preferred how we went over the recipes. If people have questions, ask and clarify. Otherwise go over the whole recipe assuming people don't know. We still made nice product with a little less chatting at the start.

I need to start making a baker's dozen so that I have a tester and something other people can 'steal' and eat without affecting my final yield

Week Seven

A really nice class, initially I thought I was going to be on my own and was happy to work like that, in the end I got a good team member: although he was quiet he worked very efficiently and seemed to be very confident in the kitchen. The day went well with very few mistakes this time around. The other teams seemed a little flustered but we worked quietly and efficiently and kept our station clean and our product was some of the first ready and graded and of good quality.

Week Eight

An interesting and kind of wild day without our main chef there; we followed the recipes that were given and produced them to the best of our abilities. It was a good chance for people to practice a couple of the techniques that will be coming up in the final and make sure they have them down.

The class was much better at cleaning up this week, unfortunately some of them need teaching how to return a blender, they always clean all the items separately and don't respect the equipment, leaving the entire shelf a mess at the end of class which I spend 20 minutes trying to fix; tidying and making sure each mixer has a bowl and all three attachments.

Week Nine

A fun class where I learnt a lot about my organisation and how other people operate on their own. I was impressed that we managed to keep the scaling station relatively clean but some of the other areas were a mess and nobody was doing their dishes properly...and I can bet their sanitation was lacking too. It's important to remember that even in a pinch you can't afford to sacrifice sanitation and kitchen procedure.

Conclusion

I have greatly enjoyed being in the baking class; although not all the extra pounds on my waistline that have come along with it. It's nice having a better understanding of doughs and how bread production works. It's also important to know how to use the different equipment and understand how to handle the ingredients as it is very different in baking compared to culinary.

I definitely feel like I have gained a new appreciation for how hard it is to consistently make a decent bread by hand.

I'll be happy to go back into the kitchen feeling a lot more confident with the feel and consistency of different types of doughs and how to knead, roll and work better as well as having a better understanding of fermentation and proofing. I can now start to work making bread with a good understanding of what it takes to produce a nice loaf.