

Food

Fresh-baked bread on demand Busy So. Mpls. dad rolls out a recipe for bakers in a pinch

April Fool's Day may not seem the most opportune time to launch a cookbook project. But on April 1, 2000, amateur baker Jeff Hertzberg took advantage of the call-in portion of Lynn Rossetto Kasper's radio show, "The Splendid Table," to ask how a total unknown might break into the cookbook market.



Home Fires By Jo Marshall

Hertzberg claimed he had a "revolutionary concept" in bread baking. As luck would have it, book editor Ruth Cavin happened to be listening.

Cavin tracked down Hertzberg to offer encouragement. Meanwhile, Hertzberg's daughter just happened to be taking music lessons with the son of a professional pastry chef named Zoë François, who recognized Hertzberg's bread recipe as a springboard for all kinds of tasty products. Lucky for him, François joined in the project.

The birth of Hertzberg's second daughter in 2001 put the book on hold for a while. While that may have seemed like a setback, the postponement coincided with the height of the Atkins' no-carb craze. When the cookbook project resumed, Americans were once again ravenous for bread. Kasper put co-authors Hertzberg and François in touch with an agent, and they finalized a publishing contract.

The result is *Artisan Bread in Five Minutes A Day*. Released last November, the first edition of the cookbook sold out before Christmas. Since then, the authors have been featured in media ranging from the *New York Times* to the radio show "West Coast Live." By some accounts, it's one of the fastest selling cookbooks ever.

Pretty lucky for the two first-time authors. But then, Hertzberg is the kind of person who creates his own luck. A doctor who discovered he wasn't quite cut out for medicine, he went back to school at the University of Minnesota for a master's degree in computer science, became a professor and then a computer consultant who helps doctors keep abreast of the latest technology. Obviously, Hertzberg is a transformative kind of guy, and the glue that connects his various endeavors is gluten.

A native New Yorker, Hertzberg first fell

in love with European breads as a child. The breads that were available in the Twin Cities when he arrived here in the early 1980s paled in comparison. So whether he was working as a medical resident or as a 70-hour-a-week professional supporting a family, he always found time to bake, experimenting with new and simpler methods to fit his avocation into his busy home life.

Admittedly, I wasn't the first cook in the kitchen to embrace his "revolutionary" method. But after one friend, then another, and then another told me, "You've really got to buy this book," I finally got the message. I tried one recipe, and the very next day I was on the phone to the nearest bookstore, asking to reserve a copy for me.

In a nutshell, Hertzberg's method is to refrigerate moist, unkneaded dough that can be baked whenever you want fresh bread. The master recipe yields eight one-pound loaves. And once you've baked the bread, you'll want to try the other items the dough recipe can produce.

On an August day in his kitchen in South Minneapolis, Hertzberg demonstrated how to turn the dough into pizza that he would later bake on a grill. He also showed how to roll out dough for a brioche, making slits on the sides, filling the center with almond cream and fresh raspberries and gathering the loose strands of dough to enclose the rustic pastry.

I'm not the only cook who has been anxious to hear from this guy. The website that Hertzberg and François launched to support their book has become a lively forum for newly converted bread bakers. Fresh suggestions for using the dough are frequently posted, and visitors with questions have found the authors to be generous in sharing their knowledge.



Amateur baker and newly published author Jeff Hertzberg and one of his braided almond cream and raspberry pastries. PHOTO BY BRAD STAUFFER

In fact, the on-line conversation has led to another project—a new cookbook due out next year that employs whole grains and healthy sweeteners.

"It became obvious that we should do (another book)," Hertzberg said. "Given the questions we were getting, Zoë and I came to exactly the same conclusion at exactly the same time."

In today's competitive cookbook market, the chances of new authors succeeding without a name like Rachael or Martha or Emeril are slim to none. But this time, the idea was ripe and a couple of unknowns who were willing to create their own luck made it to the top of the heap.

Hertzberg assured me that he is not getting rich off the project, but his satisfaction was more than obvious. Enjoying a second helping of his warm raspberry pastry, so was mine. I'm glad this guy has brought bread baking back into busy kitchens.

For more information on Hertzberg's method, pick up the book or visit www.artisanbreadinfive.com. Hertzberg and François offer classes at such local venues as Cooks of Crocus Hill (visit www.cooksofcrocushill.com). They will also appear on Sunday, November 2, at the Jewish Community Center, 1375 St. Paul Ave., as part of the 2008 Twin Cities Jewish Book Fair. For more information, call 651-255-4752.

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