Solo Pane: A Study of Italian Bread

by

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solo pane

A STUDY OF ITALIAN BREAD
17 RECIPES

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I BAKED MY FIRST BREAD DURING THE SUMMER OF 2009. IT WAS A HONEY-MOLASSES BROWN LOAF, dense and moist. I can still smell the molasses and wheat, seductive and mouth-watering, wafting through the house. Earlier that season, I had visited a friend in Vermont while she made the same bread, following a hand-written recipe from a neighbor, and I became infatuated with understanding this meticulous, scientific, and artful form of cooking. I scribbled notes and quantities in my journal, and made the decision to learn to bake bread. Soon, I started inheriting my grandma’s favorite bread cookbooks and working my way through each of them (in one, she inscribed: “For my dear Gemma, to make bread all your life long, and share with your loved ones. Xmas 2009.”).

There is something therapeutic about preparing bread. A form of meditation. To have all your stresses and tasks fade into the background, while you focus all your energy into the rhythm of working a ball of dough. I love mapping out my day around the schedule of a loaf; coming and going from the kitchen to carry out the next step. As soon as you mix together water and flour, the substance begins to awaken and come alive. The process requires paying attention to the temperature or humidity of your kitchen, and feeling the dough with your hands to see if it is too dry or wet. It is possibly the most tactile form of cooking, and is scientific in its chemical and precise nature, yet artful in its variance. And of course, there is nothing like a warm kitchen filled with the scent of freshly baked bread.

This thesis was first conceived as a means to merge my passion for food, cooking, and breadmaking with my Italian Studies undergraduate experience. In a country that revolves around food, Italy’s alimentary history and context is crucial to understanding Italian culture. It seemed obvious and logical to not only conduct a typical research process, pouring through books and articles to piece together a historical thesis, but also to tie this process to a baking practicum. My project therefore took on a form made up of several components: breadmaking, documentation of my baking experience, and synthesis of the historical and social context of Italian bread. After taking photographs and compiling notes all semester, a cookbook seemed to be a natural form for the final written piece of my project. All photographs included in this book are my own, and the recipes included are adapted from traditional recipes, with my notes and thoughts incorporated. My project concludes with a bread tasting and book presentation, to share my bread and experiences with the Wesleyan community. I hope, through my written work and baking practice, to communicate the significance of bread in Italian society as well as to encourage others to bake these breads themselves.
ITALIAN BREAD MIGHT NOT BE THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF ITALIAN cuisine. The first things you think of would probably be pasta and pizza. Perhaps even cheese (i.e. mozzarella or parmigiano), cured meats (i.e. salami or prosciutto), or wine (i.e. Chianti or Prosecco). But bread? One of mankind’s most ancient inventions, bread came into existence about ten thousand years ago, as people learned to domesticate cereals. It is present in some form in nearly every diet around the world; so ubiquitous that it is often taken for granted. Bread is one of the most elemental and pervasive pieces of Italy’s alimentary story; whether you visit a mountainous town in the northern regions of polenta and risotto, or a sunny, arid town in the heel of the boot, bread has always been, and will always be, a central part of the popular diet.

It seems arbitrary to speak of “Italian” bread, since breads vary drastically from town to town, let alone region to region. Regional diversity plays a large role in Italian culinary identity, dating back to the first “Italian cookbook” by Pellegrino Artusi (La scienza nella cucina e l’arte di mangiar bene, 1892), which emphasized regional distinctions. Before the turn of the twentieth century, however, the bread of the masses was not particularly appealing (nor particularly healthy), often dark and made from substitution grains such as sorghum or beans, and not widely spoken about, as it was simply an assumed component of anyone’s diet. As historian Simon Varey articulates in regards to medieval Italy, “Bread, of course, is universal, and for that reason it is hard to find much detailed information about it.”¹

Unlike French bread, which has had its quintessential baguette for centuries, Italian bread did not begin to become unified until the second half of the twentieth century. That being said, Italy did not become unified as a nation until 1884, which is an obvious setback in its national culinary identity. It wasn’t until the mass production of ciabatta in the 1980s that Italy began to have a particular “Italian” loaf found everywhere throughout Italy. Even now, a bakery is likely to produce only loaves typical to its region. Many of these “typical” or “traditional” breads might not have a formal name or recipe, adapted from the pane casareccio (home baked bread) from that region. It is therefore important to keep in mind, when looking at the recipes that follow, that many of these recipes do not necessarily replicate the same bread you would find in Italy. With the exception of a few, a uniform “recipe” for regional Italian breads simply does not exist. Additionally, the names pane pugliese or pane siciliano are misnomers; if you visited Puglia and asked...
for pane pugliese, you would most likely be greeted with blank stares. Pane pugliese is one pane casareccio from Puglia. Pane nero (literally “black bread”) is name common in many regions, and connotes a different bread for each region. The pane nero included here is one made with rye, based on breads typical of Trentino Alto-Adige, while a pane nero from Sicilia would most likely be made with barley. In other words, my recipes can only serve as a tiny sample of all Italian breads.

Italy’s cooking distinguishes itself from the rich and intricate cuisines of neighboring countries such as France primarily in its simplicity. Bread in particular is connected to the traditional and sustained austerity of Italian culinary history. The role of bread in Italian culture underwent several stages in history, the majority of its changes occurring only in the last century. Dating as far back as the Middle Ages bread historically served as a status indicator. It was one of the “very few foods [...which was] thought to possess a perfectly balanced nature,” and for this reason, it was coveted by all members of society. Until the turn of the twentieth century, bread consumption habits illustrated above all else stark status differences. It wasn’t until the First World War that bread truly became a dietary staple for Italians, ubiquitous and affordable for all. The era of the fascist Ventennio served as perhaps the most critical moment not only for the history of Italian bread, but also for Italian cuisine as a whole. Fascist food policies reversed the trends surrounding World War I “toward greater diversification in popular diet” and instead emphasized an Italian diet based almost entirely on carbohydrates (namely bread). The twenty years following World War II brought about an incredibly rapid industrial growth in Italy, accompanied with a shift of the population into cities and towards the north. Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the role of bread in Italian society became almost superfluous. Italians began to no longer depend on bread as a dietary staple. Bread “became the support or container for a condiment or filling.” Today, bread is present as a merenda (midafternoon snack), slathered with Nutella, or during a meal, to accompany a secondo.

The common thread throughout these stages in history is bread’s role in Italian culture as a symbol of austerity. A defining feature of Italian cuisine and culture, bread serves as an illustration of the simplicity present throughout Italy’s alimentary history. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, austerity was a constraint of poverty which overwhelmed the masses. The Great War began a move away from this constraint, while fascism ensured the value and prominence of austerity in Italian culture, as a manifestation of nationalist patriotism. In the postwar era, austerity has remained central and significant in Italy’s culinary identity, no longer a societal constraint or a tool of fascist propaganda. In each of these periods, bread remains central to an understanding of Italy’s austere cuisine.

“The fleeting bread” of the poor (prior to 1914)

In medieval Italy, bread was valued and sought after. A status indicator, starkly dividing the peasants from bourgeois, the constant struggle for bread serves as evidence of the austere diet forced upon the peasant population by poverty. The character of Menego in Ruzante’s Dialogo facetissimo, performed during the famine of 1528, counts on his fingers the months that separate him from the “fleeting bread”:

January, February, March, April, May and half of June as well, until wheat. (Sigh!) Oh, we shall never make it! Blast, but it’s a good long year, this one. I know the bread flees from us, indeed it does, more than sparrows from the falcon.
The character Menego describes the constant pursuit of bread as a struggle to stay alive. This struggle for bread was a normal and daily part of peasant life, and famine constituted an almost permanent structural feature of medieval Italy. For many centuries, the dietary history of most Italian regions was the history of a cereal diet based primarily on dishes made with bread and grains. Wheat, however, was characterized by its graduated use across the social spectrum. It was reserved for the most affluent city dwellers, while as Luigi Messedaglia observed, “the country people continued to eat mostly inferior cereals.” The division of the population into “grain-mouths” and “fodder-mouths” is referenced by numerous sources. The bread of the poor “had a dark color that contrasted visually and symbolically with the whiteness of wheat bread, a luxury food reserved for the nobility.” In the north substitute grains consisted largely of rye, among other grains, whereas in the south, barley was the primary grain for the peasant class. While the rich ate “good sumptuous bread,” the poor ate “surrogate bread” (pane succedaneo) that was not only less appetizing, but also potentially dangerous for their health.

According to the records of Giovan Battista Spaccini in Ferrara during 1596, “it is believed that the cause of many illnesses, of which numerous people even die, is the bad breads which the people eat, namely that of beans, cabbage and plain oil.” The scarcity of grains for the poor resulted in bread-making which disregarded the quality of the mixtures of “surrogates.” Grasses such as darnel were used, with seeds that have an intoxicating and nauseating effect on humans. Spaccini reported, “The bread that has this [darnel] in it, besides disturbing the mind by making people act as if drunk, causes much weariness and nausea.” Vetch grains were also used, which produced “melancholic humours,” as well as unripe broad beans, which were “not only disagreeable to the taste, but difficult to digest and constricting for the body.” Therefore, the peasant class not only suffered from the damaging physical and mental health effects of the substitute grains, but also these health effects aggravated the polarization of social distinctions. Bread came to represent “a status symbol that defined human condition and class according to its particular colour.”

In sixteenth century Sicily, wheat cultivation yielded ten bushels harvested to one sown, in contrast to the average yield of four to one for the rest of Europe. These high yields came linked, however, to a dependence on the single crop, which in turn made the Sicilian farmer vulnerable to atmospheric catastrophe. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought Sicily some of its worst famines in history. Following Palermo’s declaration of a municipal monopoly on the production and sale of bread in 1683, Sicilians took to the streets, protesting the new prices. One youth known as Saturapesci, proclaimed, “People of Palermo, put an end for once to your patience: you have suffered too long. White bread we demand, white bread.” Mary Taylor Simeti describes that “a visitor from the north might well have thought that Saturapesci was forgetting his station in life, for elsewhere in Europe white bread was the prerogative of the rich.”

The role of bread as a status indicator, marking the austerity of peasant cuisine, persisted all through the nineteenth century. One study performed in 1872–1878 by the Società Antropologica Italiana found that “in over 488 comuni in all regions of Italy, the majority of Italians consumed polenta, rice, pasta, or chestnuts. For the poor, wheat bread was as rare as meat.” Also referring to the luxury-status of wheat flour, a Piedmontese peasant woman recalled how her parents, struggling to live, subsisted mostly on potatoes and chestnuts. “In that time it was rare to see someone with a loaf of bread... you asked them, ‘Is someone sick in your household?’”
Becoming a dietary staple (1914–1922)

The First World War changed everything. State intervention during and immediately after the war substantially improved people’s eating habits. Increased imports, controlled prices, and full employment meant that Italians could afford more food and a higher-quality diet. State subsidies made bread inexpensive and consequently, more Italians could afford to purchase items like pasta, olive oil, wine, and even meat. Wheat-flour imports increased over 900 percent from 1914 to 1918\textsuperscript{19}, reflecting the use of wheat for military and civilian provisioning. State intervention extended and homogenized certain eating practices, thereby solidifying the foundations of Italian cuisine, particularly with bread and pasta at the center of the food culture.

For the first few years surrounding Italy’s entry into the war, the country was plagued with frequent food shortages. The year 1915 brought about many strikes and street-protests regarding the price and availability of bread. While consumers and local officials clashed over these matters, the national government took no direct action, preferring to instead adopt voluntary and temporary measures in 1915–16. In these years, the national government shied away from implementing a central policy to distribute or fix the price of grain, allowing public unrest to remain a local problem. Local control worked well in cities like Rome and Milan, where municipal governments reacted quickly and forcefully to avert possible price increases.\textsuperscript{20} In cities and towns where authorities had little experience controlling prices however, violent protests frequently broke out. In 1916 near Genoa, for example, a prefect reported that in response to bakers going on strike, a crowd “flung themselves at all the bakeries and shops where bread is sold, breaking down the doors and destroying everything inside.”\textsuperscript{21}

Civil unrest grew in 1917 due to the devastating losses of the war, as well as even greater food shortages. Rioting peaked in Turin during August of 1917, when public demonstrations left fifty dead, 200 injured, and over 900 arrested.\textsuperscript{22} Not long after the riots in Turin, Italian troops were humiliated at the Battle of Caporetto. These events led to more intensive interventions and Italy’s participation in inter-allied provisioning efforts. Also during that fall, Silvio Crespi was positioned as the undersecretary for provisioning and consumption. Aware that food shortages could bring about even greater and more widespread revolts, Crespi was determined to increase grain imports in order to alleviate some of the food shortages. By the summer of 1918 Italy had been granted “most favored nation” status, and the Allies provided the nation with almost twice as much wheat in 1918 as they did in 1917.\textsuperscript{23} By the war’s end in November of 1918, there were sporadic shortages, yet citizens were not in danger of starvation or malnutrition; the Ministry for Provisioning and Consumption prevented any severe shortage or crisis. Municipal governments maintained wheat prices at artificially low prices, allowing more consumers to afford wheat bread.

After the war ended in 1918, Silvio Crespi noted the irony of the Italian situation, stating that “victory gave us an enormous population to provision; a population lacking in every resource and for whom we must now provide everything.”\textsuperscript{24} Crespi’s words highlight, above all else, the popular attitude of having a right to the improved dietary standard. The war had solidified food habits and unified the consumer desire for more foods of higher quality. Wheat bread was now a dietary staple, and Italians were not going to readily give that up. However, wartime food policies had created a serious debt for the government to manage, especially in the context of postwar inflation. Postwar liberal governments could not continue to satisfy consumers without destroying the financial stability of the state. In 1920 Prime Minister Nitti decided to abolish the bread
subsidies which had so far remained as a vestige of wartime policy. Nitti’s decision fell not long after the cost-of-living riots, which had began during the summer of 1919, and also coincided with the rapid inflation of the summer-fall of 1920. In November of 1921 reports revealed that consumers now paid 600 percent of what they paid for wheat bread in 1914.25 A series of work stoppages and strikes by bakers and millers swept through Italy in the summer of 1920 and continued sporadically through the early months of 1921. Temporary shortages of bread and flour aggravated the problem. Not coincidentally, the newly formed National Fascist Party played a large role in the riots and demonstrations of the postwar period.

Public protest against inflation and the abolition of the bread subsidy revealed Italians’ new attachment to the wartime changes in consumer habits. The transformation of consumption habits included, on a fundamental level, the new role of bread as an assumed dietary staple. Once one could afford bread without the struggles characteristic of food culture prior to 1900, diet diversification followed. This period of alimentary development represents one deviation from the trend of austerity in Italian food culture. Previously at the center of a diet characterized by its austerity and simplicity, bread’s new role as a dietary staple created implications for the food culture. Italians began to expect more on their plates; bread was no longer “the complete meal par excellence,” as it was for centuries.26 In the years between 1914 and 1922, bread was merely a stepping stone to the other desirable products brought about by diet diversification, thereby revealing that bread was considered a necessity, but too simple and ordinary to be satisfying. The function of bread in this time period demonstrates that despite the momentary trend away from austerity in Italian culinary identity as a whole, bread remained an icon of simplicity.

A symbol of nationalist fervor (1922–1945)

With the rise of fascism came Mussolini’s commitment to alimentary sovereignty. Most important to this food policy was the Battle for Grain, launched in June of 1925 with the goal of freeing Italy from the “slavery” of imported grain.27 The Battle for Grain distorted Italian food culture, by giving more attention to wheat cultivation and therefore causing less diversity in the average Italian’s diet. For this reason, alimentary sovereignty reversed the trends surrounding World War I, toward greater diversification in popular diet. The regime promoted the ideal Italian diet, which was based on carbohydrates, not animal proteins, supplemented by fresh produce, legumes, olive oil, citrus fruit, and wine.

Because it conserved more wheat than white bread (pane di lusso) in the refining steps of processing flour, fascist propaganda continually emphasized the health benefits of whole-wheat bread (pane integrale). The campaign for whole wheat bread attacked the production of refined white bread, “insipid because of the taste of the undercooked parts, indigestible, and endowed with only a few hours of shelf life.”28 The regime financed scientific reports on the differences between white and whole wheat bread, resulting in the publication of many reports criticizing white bread. The publications claimed that white bread caused malnutrition, nervous disorders, decreased blood alkaline, a predisposition to tuberculosis, pellagra, cavities, beriberi, peptic disturbances in children, and exhaustion among adults.29 Giuseppe Tallarico, parliamentary deputy and member of the Food Committee in the National Research Council, published extensively on the connection between wheat bread and fertility, postulating that the wheat germ found in whole wheat bread somehow aided human fertility.
Mussolini devoted a great deal of propaganda to the fascist diet, writing poems about the virtues of bread and publicly celebrating the beginning of the annual wheat harvest. Il Duce wrote and circulated several poems which celebrated bread. One began, “Italians, love bread” (“Italiani, amate il pane, frutto del lavoro, profumo della mensa e gioia del focolare...”):

Heart of the home,
Perfume of the table,
Joy of the hearth.
Honor bread,
Glory of the fields,
Fragrance of the earth,
Feast of Life.

This poem, among with other methods of propaganda, praised bread due to its supposed high nutritional value and grain efficiency. Though the fascists did not attempt to abolish pasta, like the Futurists, the fascist commemoration of bread placed bread above pasta at the center of food culture during the Ventennio. Food celebrations were the most popular methods of disseminating propaganda, the most heavily promoted being ones which emphasized the conservation of wheat supplies in Italy. Instituted in 1929, the Festa del pane had local fascist confederations of bread makers distributing free sandwiches to the public, along with pamphlets stressing the need to conserve wheat. The last verse of Mussolini’s poem venerating bread highlighted this effort to conserve wheat:

Don’t waste bread,
The Fatherland’s wealth,
God’s sweetest gift,
The holiest reward for human toil.

With the Ethiopian invasion, and preparation for World War II, food scarcity grew, and conservation became increasingly important. Individual consumers were advised not to waste even a crumb of food: “because even a mouthful of bread [...] multiplied a million times, constitutes an incredible amount”33. The regime spread the feeling of “he who eats too much steals from the nation” (“Chi mangia troppo, deruba la Patria”), emphasizing that each individual’s consumption either directly supported or opposed the regime. Maurizio Ferrara, fifty years after the era of fascism, reflected on the effects of the fascist conservationist mentality, confessing that even then (1990) he felt instinctual discomfort to see anyone waste or throw out bread (“Di quel periodo di semicarestia m’è rimasto qualche riflesso condizionato. Vedere sprecare il pane, o gettarlo via, mi dà un sussulto”). This mentality of austerity was the most important value of fascist food culture, and was inherently linked to the consumption of bread.

Ultimately, fascist alimentary sovereignty failed. Its lack of success was tied above all else to the regime’s “neglect of agricultural production while pursuing a policy of restricted imports.” Although wheat imports dropped steadily from an average of 22.2 million quintals of wheat in 1922 to only 4.7 million quintals in 1937, Mussolini’s regime was unable to provide enough food domestically to support the Italian population and led to near starvation for much of the population. Historian Carol Helstosky articulates that after the fall of fascism and the end of the Second World War, Italians “were only too happy to break with fascism, which represented
hardship, but the food habits formed earlier on in the fascist years lingered.” The roles of bread and austerity, which were central to and characteristic of food culture during the Ventennio, remained significant in the second half of the twentieth century.

“The challenge of abundance” (1945 onward)

The unprecedented surge of industrial growth between 1958 and 1963 turned a nation of agricultural workers into a nation of factory operatives. Demonstrating the rapid industrialization, we can look at statistics in production of refrigerators: in 1951 Italy manufactured 18,500 refrigerators; by 1957, it was making 370,000; and by 1967 Italian factories produced 3,200,000. Industrialization was accompanied by an increased geographic mobility in the Italian population. Between 1955 and 1971, more than nine million people moved between regions. This mobility was particularly characterized by the migration of Italians from the south to the north, and from the country into the city.

Surprisingly, even with the drastic improvements in living standards that accompanied Italy’s “economic miracle” after 1957, the types of foods included in the Italian diet did not dramatically change. Rather, Italian consumers purchased more of the foods they consumed prior to the war but did not alter the content or structure of their daily meals. Although meat consumption levels doubled between 1940 and 1970, this dramatic change is largely because of the extremely low meat consumption levels under Mussolini’s plan for alimentary sovereignty. Moreover, the contours of the Mediterranean diet held firm. According to ISTAT (Italy’s National Institute for Statistics) figures, Italians consumed an average of 54.2 kilograms of meat in the year 1970, compared to 339 kilograms of fruit and vegetables of 185.6 kilograms of bread and pasta. Scientific studies of popular diet revealed that increased meat consumption led to higher levels of fat consumption after the war, but total protein consumption actually decreased slightly. Even though they could afford to do so, Italian consumers did not embrace the “American” high-fat, high-protein diet, choosing instead to maintain the nutritional balance which had dominated all of Italian history, favoring carbohydrates and vegetables (pasta, bread, and fresh produce).

After the fall of fascism, Italy’s political landscape was divided primarily into two spheres: the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) and the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI). The DC dominated national politics for several decades after defeating the communist party in 1948. Despite the significantly different political approaches of these two spheres, both parties proposed a generally anti-consumerist, anti-American food culture. The Catholic church, and the affiliated DC, advocated against the materialistic and over-indulgent habits of American consumerism. Similarly, the PCI leaders “had cut their teeth on the black bread of farm laborers or the slops of fascist jails, and had a stern self-denying streak.” The communist party chief Palmiro Togliatti proudly consumed only bread, mozzarella, and the “occasional fried fillet of salt cod.” Proud of the simplicity of his diet, Togliatti’s consumption of primarily bread and cheese emphasizes bread’s continued role as a symbol of austerity. Both parties disseminated an antipathy toward consumerism, and helped further entrench the values of simplicity and austerity in national cuisine.

One new development in Italian food habits during the second half of the twentieth century is the merenda or spuntino (snack). The food industry developed and promoted snack foods for sale in cafés, bars, and family-run grocery stores. The production of crackers and breadsticks
began to compete with home breadmaking. “Eaten purely for pleasure, [snacks] are symbols of a new industrial trend that emerged in response to the decrease in domestic baking and the simultaneous increase in consumption outside the home.” Though the merenda (afternoon snack) had been part of the daily meal structure prior to 1950, the spuntino came into existence as a small snack consumed purely for pleasure outside the home. Prior to 1950, the merenda consisted primarily of pane e companatico (bread and “that which goes with bread”); the companatico might have been olive oil, wine and sugar, homemade marmalade, or occasionally a sliver of butter, ricotta, cold cuts, or pecorino cheese. But by the 1980s, a merenda often consisted of pastry, cookies, fruit, or bread and Nutella.

The advent of Nutella brought the sweet spread to even the poorest of villages in Southern Italy. After the war, children could go to the local store, bread in hand, for their spalmata of gooey chocolate-hazelnut spread (the official name of Nutella was not used until 1963); a light smear cost as little as five lire, a more generous portion cost ten lire. In his recent history of the Nutella phenomenon, Gigi Padovani argues that this product embodies a certain paradox. On the one hand, Nutella is a decadent chocolate spread. However, the product was (and is) advertised and promoted as a nourishing food for children and it is packaged in reusable containers so as to lessen consumer guilt about its decadent nature. Because it is intended to be eaten with bread, this product encourages children to eat a balanced and healthy colazione (breakfast) or merenda. In this way, Nutella’s marketing schemes serve as evidence that despite the evolution of certain aspects of the Italian diet, the role of bread remained a symbol of nutritional practicality and austerity.

Carol Counihan cites interviews she conducted in Tuscany, stating that although in the 1980s her subjects ate much less bread than they used to, it remained a central component of Italian cuisine. One of her subjects, Baldo, said, “I would not be able to eat without bread. Even just a little, for we really don’t even eat very much bread anymore, but there has to be some, because without bread I just could not eat.” In fact, Counihan asserts, Italians never sit down to a meal without bread. Today, bread is most commonly found as a merenda or colazione (perhaps with Nutella), as the vessel for the fillings of a panino, or as an accompaniment to any secondo. Although it has moved away from role it had historically played, satisfying all nutritional needs as a “complete meal,” the importance of bread in Italian cuisine has remained constant even today.

**Conclusion: From survival to scarpetta**

Frugality in food consumption was a necessity for survival for most of the Italian population prior to 1900, was entrenched as a central value during fascism, and today remains a vestige of those eras of poverty. Today, though “fare la scarpetta” (“to do the little shoe”), or wiping up the sauce on one’s plate with bread, is frowned upon in formal meals, this common Italian dinnertime practice further represents bread’s function as a symbol of austerity. Wiping up every last drop of sauce might not be necessary for survival, but serves as an example of the prevailing Italian habits of frugality even in today’s abundance.

Despite the constantly evolving role of bread in Italian food culture, it has retained a role of austerity and simplicity for hundreds of years. Prior to the First World War, bread served primarily as a status indicator; the darker the crumb, the lower the class. Substitution grain flour was widespread and often far more common than white flour. White bread (pane di lusso) was a
commodity almost exclusively available to the rich, and coveted by the poor. Peasant cuisine was largely dominated by dark breads, accompanied by the occasional crushed tomato or even more rare piece of meat. For this reason, until the turn of the twentieth century bread was representative of the struggle and the austerity of the common Italian diet.

World War I brought a greater diversification of foods to the Italian diet, transforming bread into a food item both universal and assumed throughout the population. The era of fascism reversed the trend of diversification in consumption, and forced austerity back on the population due to the constraints of Mussolini’s food policy. While the goal of alimentary sovereignty cut back on the level of food diversity, bread became exalted as a symbol of nationalist patriotism. Pane integrale became valued not only for its nutritional balance, but also for its statement of frugality as support for the nation. Of course, the Second World War brought food shortages and near starvation for much of the Italian population, and therefore it came as no surprise that alimentary sovereignty was abandoned after the fall of the regime. The second half of the twentieth century brought industrialization and urbanization, as well as great increases in the standard of living. Despite these changes to the Italian diet, most changes occurred in quantity, rather than in what Italians chose to eat. The Mediterranean diet prevailed, and Italians even today have a diet centered on carbohydrates, vegetables, and olive oil. The symbolic value of bread as an icon of austerity has changed little throughout time, drawing a common thread in Italian alimentary history.

4 Capatti, 153.
8 Capati, 44.
15 Simeti, Mary Taylor. Pomp and Sustenance: Twenty-Five Centuries of Sicilian Food. 113–114.
16 Ibid.
19 Giufidda, V., Profital: Approvvigionamenti alimentary d’Italia durante la Grande Guerra, Padua: CEDAM, 1936. 316–317. Cited in Helstosky, 41. Helstosky cites this statistic twice, with a typo in one of them; the
first time, she says “9,000 percent,” and the second time she says “900 percent.” I have assumed that 900 was the correct statistic.

20 Helstosky, 43.
21 Ibid.
22 Helstosky, 44.
23 Dentoni, Annona e consenso in Italia, 121. Cited in Helstosky, 49.
24 Speech of Crespi to the Chamber of Deputies, 25 November 1918. Cited in Helstosky, 51.
25 Wheat bread was measured along with other “staple foods” (macaroni, beef, bacon, oil, milk, rice, and butter). Ugo Giusti, “Methods of Recording Retail Prices and Measuring the Cost of Living in Italy,” International Labour Review 4, 3 (November 1921), 259. Cited in Helstosky, 57.
26 Capatti, 153.
28 “Mentre il Duce indice l’XI concorso nazionale per la vittoria del grano”, La voce del consumatore 4, 7 (15 July 1933), 3. Cited in Helstosky, 77.
30 Harper, 41.
32 Ibid.
35 Cited in Ceccarelli, 23.
36 Helstosky, 125.
37 Helstosky, 76.
38 Helstosky, 126.
39 Dickie, 269.
40 Ibid.
41 Helstosky, 139.
42 Ibid.
43 Dickie, 278.
44 Ibid.
45 Capatti, 271.
46 Helstosky, 142.
48 Counihan, Carole M. Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Florence. 65.
understanding breadmaking

Recommended equipment

1. Baking stone
   Stones retain heat much more effectively than sheet pans do, and thus promote a more even bake and a crispier crust. In tandem with different steaming techniques, a stone is the home baker’s best means of replicating the hearth ovens used by artisan bakers.

2. Spray bottle

3. Steam pan

4. Banneton (not necessary)

5. Couche (not necessary)

6. Instant thermometer
   An instant-read food thermometer is incredibly helpful when taking baked loaves of bread out of the oven.

Ingredients

Flours

There are two basic types of flour produced from all varieties of wheat: whole wheat flour, which is made by grinding the entire grain, and white flour, which is produced from only the endosperm.

Basic varieties of white flour:

- **High-gluten flour**: Generally made from the highest-gluten-forming protein wheat, which is hard red spring. It may vary in protein content from 13.5–16%.

- **Bread flour**: Made from hard red winter wheat or a blend of hard wheats. 11.5–13.5% protein content.

- **All-purpose flour**: A mix of hard and soft wheats. 9.5–11.5% protein content.

- **Pastry flour**: 7.5–9.5% protein content.

- **Cake flour**: 6–7% protein content.

The yellowish tint in unbleached flour is caused by beta-carotene, which contributes better aroma and better flavor to the bread. This is destroyed by chlorine bleaching, which also weakens the proteins. Therefore, you should always try to use **unbleached flour** when working with these recipes.
**Durum** is a variety of wheat with the highest protein content of all wheat flour, and the variety of wheat most common in southern Italian breads. Durum flour does not form gluten that is as elastic or stretchy (extensible) as other hard wheat flours. It is, therefore, usually used in combination with all-purpose or bread flour (see Pane Pugliese or Pane Siciliano, for example). Because of its high protein content, if it is overworked, it will produce an excessively chewy bread. Both durum flour and semolina are ground from the endosperm of durum wheat, but durum flour is finely ground and semolina is coarsely ground. Note that you cannot substitute semolina for durum flour. Durum flour is sometimes labeled “extra-fancy pasta flour” or “patent durum flour.” It is as silky-fine as all-purpose or bread flour. If you cannot find durum flour at your local supermarket, you can order it online from distributors such as King Arthur Flour.

**Yeast**

I will not be discussing wild yeast in this text, but it is important to note that all the breads in this cookbook were traditionally made with a *pasta madre*, or sourdough starter. For today’s home baking, commercial yeast is much easier to handle, particularly for less experienced bakers. I would, however, recommend learning about sourdough starters; wild yeast adds a complexity of flavor to bread that can never be matched by commercial yeast.

There are three common types of commercial yeast:

- Fresh yeast
- Active dry yeast
- Instant yeast

You can substitute yeasts, according to the following standard formula:

- 100 percent fresh yeast = 40–50 percent active dry yeast = 33 percent instant yeast
- To (approximately) convert recipes calling for instant yeast to active dry yeast:
  - 1 teaspoon instant yeast = 1 ¼ teaspoons active dry yeast
- To (approximately) convert recipes calling for active dry yeast to instant yeast:
  - 1 teaspoon active dry yeast = ¾ teaspoon instant yeast

In Italy, if using commercial yeast, home and professional bakers most commonly use fresh yeast. Here in the United States, active dry yeast is one of the most common types, though instant yeast (also called “rapid-rise” or “fast-rising yeast”) is becoming more common. Most American bakers today advocate the use of instant yeast. It is more concentrated than fresh or active-dry yeast, it has a longer shelf life, and it can be added to the flour instead of hydrating it first. There are 25 percent more living yeast cells per teaspoon than in an equal amount of active dry yeast, and there are three times (300 percent) more living cells than in an equal amount of fresh compressed yeast.

**Fundamentals for understanding bread chemistry**

Milling crushes wheat berries, which are the seeds or grains of mature wheat grass, into various degrees of powder. The three main components of a wheat berry are the outer skin, or bran; the oily, vitamin E-rich embryo, or germ; and the starch- and protein-rich section, called the endosperm. The gluten protein that is utilized in breadmaking processes is derived from the endosperm of the wheat berry.

Wheat flour is the only flour that contains the proteins glutenin and gliadin. When they are combined with water to make a dough, they form gluten, an elastic network that enables the gases produced by the yeast to expand without breaking through the dough, resulting in a high rise and chewy crumb. The protein glutenin is responsible for elasticity.
in the dough — the ability of the dough to spring back when stretched. The protein gliadin is responsible for the dough’s extensibility — the ability of the dough to stretch.

Understanding some steps in breadmaking

Mixing
Most commercial wheat flour will develop gluten within 6 to 8 minutes of hydration. Typically, the higher the protein, the longer it takes for gluten to bond full, so high-gluten flour may require 8 to 12 minutes of mixing to develop. One of the techniques that bakers often use to minimize mixing is to mix the flour and water for only a few minutes, then to let the dough rest for 20 minutes. During this resting, the protein molecules complete their hydration and begin bonding on their own. Then, when the mixing resumes and the other ingredients are added, it takes far less time to complete the mixing process, during which time the newly formed gluten molecules continue to bond to one another in more complex ways.

The most reliable method to determine when gluten development is sufficient is called the windowpane test. This is performed by cutting off a small piece of dough from the larger batch and gently stretching, pulling, and turning it to see if it will hold a paper-thin, translucent membrane. If the dough falls apart before it makes this “windowpane”, continue kneading for another few minutes and test again.

Fermentation
Yeast will double its rate of fermentation for every 17°F increase in heat, up to the killing point (about 140°F). In most cases, slower is better. Bread that might rise in 1 hour in a commercial proof box at 90°F will take 2 hours if the room temperature is 73°F. But during that extra hour, more flavor comes out from the flour due to the organic activity that is going on inside the dough. Peter Reinhart claims, “Fermentation is the single most important stage in the creation of great bread. [...] No matter how good your oven is, or how perfect your shaping technique, if the bread is not properly fermented, it can never be better than average.”

Whatever fermentation specifications a dough may require, it always comes down to an equation of time, temperature, and ingredients, especially sugar. Sugar is one necessary ingredient for fermentation to occur, as it is ultimately converted into alcohol (ethanol) and carbon dioxide by the yeast. The sugar is either added as an ingredient, or it is derived (as in many of these breads) from the flour starch molecules as they break apart into simpler sugar molecules. Typically, the less enrichments in a dough, the longer the fermentation will take because most of the flavor will come exclusively from the wheat, the starches of which need time to release their natural sugars. In a dough that is enriched with added sugar, dairy, or fat, much of the bread flavor is derived from the enrichments rather than from the flour, so shorter fermentation time is preferable.

I once set up a dough for its first rise, outside in the September sun. It was a brisk day, so it didn’t occur to me to be extra vigilant with how hot the bowl got under the cellophane wrapped across the top. Of course, the bowl heated up extremely fast, and when I checked on it a few hours later, it had fermented far past the desirable point. I threw out the dough. Needless to say, I have never tried that method again.

Shaping
The most common shapes of bread in this text will be a boule and a torpedo.

- **BOULE (BALL)**
  The boule is a fundamental shape from which many other forms can be made. The most important principal in shaping almost all breads is surface tension. Creating tight surface tension across the skin of your dough allows the bread to rise up and not just out; the dough retains its cylindrical shape rather than spreading and flattening. To shape your loaf into a boule, first (1) gather the

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1 Reinhart, 60
dough in your hands into a rough ball. Then, (2) with cupped hands, draw the outside of the
dough from the top of the ball down and under, making a crease underneath the ball. (3) Repeat
this stretching motion, moving your hands around to all sides of the dough, to round the ball
evenly. (4) Tighten the surface tension by pinching to seal the bottom of the dough where the
creases converge.

- TORPEDO
  To shape your dough into a torpedo, first (1) start with the dough in a rectangular shape. (2) Bring
  the upper corners of the dough down to meet at the center. (2) Fold the peak down to meet the
  edges at the center, and seal the dough with your thumbs pushing away from you, to increase
  surface tension. (3) Fold the dough down partway, then all the way, to the bottom edge, sealing it
  and pushing it away with your thumbs (again, to increase surface tension). (4) Press along the entire
  length of the seam with your thumbs, and roll the dough forward so that the seam is centered
  underneath the loaf.

Proofing
Proofing is the baker’s shorthand term for the ending phase of secondary fermentation. This stage gives the
dough its final rise in preparation for baking, bringing the dough to the appropriate size. In many cases, this
is 80 to 90 percent of the desired finished size, with the expectation of additional rising in the oven (called
the oven spring or oven kick). Proofing may involve loaf pans, proofing bowls or forms, or simply flat sheet
pans covered with parchment. Temperature and humidity are extremely important in controlling proofing
time. Professional bakers often use atmosphere-controlled proof-boxes, which are usually set to around 90°
F, and approximately 80 percent humidity. Food-grade plastic bags (which many bread cookbooks call for)
provide a somewhat controlled atmosphere. The bag protects the dough from any moving air that could dry
the skin and traps humidity to keep the dough surface soft. It functions differently from plastic wrap in that
it fits loosely and therefore does not restrict the growth of the dough. You can also use an inverted bowl
large enough to cover the rising dough. If the bowl is large enough, you can even increase the temperature
and moisture by placing a cup of just boiled water next to the dough before covering with the bowl. When
time is not a factor, it is still best to proof slowly and gradually at room temperature.

Baking
USING A BAKING STONE
When using a baking stone, it is important to preheat the oven (with the stone in) at least an hour before
you put the bread in. It can take up to an hour for the entirety of the baking stone to become preheated.

STEAM IN YOUR OVEN
I have not come across one accepted way to create steam in an oven. Steam is not required for all breads,
but is definitely important for hearth breads. The steam delays the onset of gelatinization, allowing the
bread additional time to spring in the oven. Its value is only during the first half of the baking process.
After that, the bread needs a dry environment in which to develop its crisp crust properly. For this reason,
all of the steam is generated during the first few seconds of the bake, with its lingering effects fading out as
the bread continues to bake. There is no advantage to steaming late in the process, nor even after the first
few minutes, once the crust has set. The recipes that I have included in this text have differing techniques,
from spraying the oven walls with a plant mister to create steam, to throwing ice cubes in a steam pan, to
pouring hot water in a steam pan, to no steaming at all.

For spraying, the 30-second-interval technique is an attempt to replicate as closely as possible the steam of a
bakery oven, but each time the oven will lose heat. This is why it is helpful to set the oven 50°–100° F above
the desired temperature during the preheat stage. Only after the final spray should you lower the oven
setting to the specified baking temperature.
I am inclined to side with bakers who generate steam in some form, though I have yet to understand why some would prefer certain techniques over others. Once you become totally comfortable with these recipes, I would recommend playing with different steam techniques, to see how they effect the “oven spring” of your loaf.

HOW TO TELL WHEN THE BREAD IS DONE
There’s nothing like an instant-read thermometer to know for sure. I’ve thumped the bottom of many loaves and not always been entirely certain of what I’m hearing or if the hollow sound is quite “hollow” enough.

- **Hard, crusty bread** is baked until the center of the loaf registers 200°–210° F. Of course, if the outside is changing from golden brown to black (caramel to carbon), you may have to pull the bread out before it reaches that internal temperature. Or, you can make a tent of aluminum foil and cover the bread with it to buy a few more minutes of baking time.
- **Soft bread**, such as enriched festive loaves, need to exceed at least 180° F in the center. For full-sized loaves (such as panettone), I wait until the dough registers at least 185° F to ensure no underbaked doughy sections.

Cooling
It is important to cool breads with a crisp crust on a rack so that there is enough air circulation to allow the moisture to escape. Cooling is part of the baking process. If cut while still hot, most bread will be unpleasantly pasty and even gummy. It is almost always better to allow the bread to cool completely and then reheat it briefly if you want to serve it warm.

Storing
- If you want to preserve the crustiness of loaves of bread, store them in paper, but they will become stale within a day and are best eaten on the same day they are made. If you want to preserve them for more than a day, “cater wrap” the loaves in plastic wrap (wrap them completely in both directions to prevent any air from getting to them), or use zip-lock bags and try to squeeze as much air out of the bag as possible. Then, either freeze them or place them in a cool dark place.
- Soft, enriched bread is always best stored in plastic and either frozen or kept in a cool, dark place (exposure to sunlight causes condensation in the wrapper and, eventually mold on the loaf).
- If you have a frozen unsliced loaf and want to thaw it, pull it from the freezer at least 2 hours before you need to use it. Do not try to accelerate the thawing by putting it into the oven or microwave; this will only dry it out.
- To recrisp the crust of an unsliced loaf (either from storing at in a plastic bag or from freezing and thawing), put loaf in the oven for 10 or 15 minutes at the temperature at which it was originally baked.

STORING DON’TS
- Never refrigerate bread. It dries out, even when packed in sealed plastic bags.
- Don’t store crusty breads in plastic bags or in plastic wrap unless you plan to recrisp the crust in the toaster or oven. (Or unless a crispy crust doesn’t matter to you!)
- Never store warm bread in plastic bags or plastic wrap. Wait until it has completely cooled down (no warmth at all!), to prevent condensation from forming in the bag and thus accelerating mold development.
Hearth Breads

Ciabatta
Pan Giallo (Pan di Mais)
Pane alle Olive
Pane di Altamura
Pane Nero
Pane Pugliese
Pane Siciliano
Pane Toscano (Pane Sciocco)
Piccia Calabrese
Pan Tramvai (Pane all'Uva)
Ciabatta

Region of origin: Veneto

This flat and oblong shaped bread has become one of the most famous globalized Italian breads. Originating from the casareccio tradition of rustic, slack-dough breads, in 1982 Arnaldo Cavallari gave up his car-racing career to work at his family’s mills in Adria, la Mulini Adriesi, and developed this “slipper-shaped” bread. By 1985, Marks and Spencer introduced ciabatta to the United Kingdom, and shortly after in 1987 the Orlando Baking Company (in Cleveland, Ohio) brought the product across the Atlantic. Since the 1980s, ciabatta has become one of the most nationalized breads within Italy, as well as an international icon of Italian hearth bread.

Perhaps the reason for its success nationally and internationally, the most characteristic feature of ciabatta is the contrast between its crisp crust, and its soft open crumb. As Rose Beranbaum states, “The holes proved the biggest challenge, to the point that it came to seem Zen-like to be working so hard to achieve empty space.” The big, shiny holes in each loaf are due to the extremely high water content. Many bakers recommend using a mixer to handle the dough; by hand, one will be tempted to add too much flour. I accepted this challenge by hand and after several attempts, managed to obtain the large holes. The key is to work quickly and to not be phased by dough sticking to the counter and your hands. The faster you work, the less you will be tempted to add flour. As you become comfortable with wet dough, you may want to try increasing the hydration and stickiness. The wetter the better, as long as it holds together enough to make the stretch-and-fold maneuvers. It is during the stretching and folding that the gluten has a chance to strengthen, resulting in the large holes so distinctive and prized in this bread.
The type of flour determines the consistency of the crumb. For the softest, most gauze-like crumb, use Pillsbury or Gold Medal unbleached all-purpose flour. For a soft but slightly firmer crumb, use King Arthur all-purpose flour. If you prefer a much chewier ciabatta, replace the all-purpose flour with an equal weight of bread flour. Beranbaum claims that a stronger gluten framework will create a tighter crumb, and therefore it is better to use a flour that is very extensible (ideally unbleached all-purpose), with lower protein-forming gluten than bread flour, and not to knead it too long. She maintains that the softer and more tender texture is also more similar to the ciabatta found in Italy, where ‘00’ flour is lower in protein.

### Recipe

**makes two 1-pound loaves. Total time (excluding biga and cooling time): 4½–5½ hours**

**BIGA** (makes about 18 ounces)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>½ teaspoon</td>
<td>instant yeast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ½ cups</td>
<td>unbleached bread flour</td>
<td>(11.25 ounces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ cup + 2 tablespoons (to 1 cup)</td>
<td>water, room temperature</td>
<td></td>
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1. **Mix:** Combine the yeast and flour, then mix in the water. Mix with a spoon for 3–4 minutes. Adjust the flour or water, according to need, so that the dough is neither too sticky nor too stiff. (It is better to err on the sticky side.)

2. **Knead:** Transfer dough to a floured surface. Knead for 4 to 6 minutes, or until the dough is soft and pliable, tacky but not sticky.

3. **Rise:** Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at a cool room temperature for at least 6–24 hours. The starter will triple in volume and still be wet and sticky when ready. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. The biga will keep in the refrigerator for up to three days. Generally speaking, the longer the biga ferments, the more complexity it will bring to the flavor of your final bread.

4. **Prepare for use:** Remove from refrigerator 1 hour before making the dough. Cut it into about 10 small pieces. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit to take off the chill.

**DOUGH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 cups</td>
<td>(16 ounces)</td>
<td>biga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups</td>
<td>(9 ounces)</td>
<td>unbleached all-purpose flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ½ teaspoons</td>
<td></td>
<td>salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ½ teaspoons</td>
<td></td>
<td>instant yeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ cup + 2 Tbsp. (to 1 ⅛ cup)</td>
<td>(7–9 ounces)</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ cup</td>
<td>(2 ounces)</td>
<td>olive oil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Mix the dough:** To make the dough, stir together the flour, salt, and yeast in a 4-quart mixing bowl. Add the biga pieces and ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons water and the oil. With a large spoon (or with your hand), mix until the ingredients form a sticky ball. If there is still some loose flour, add the additional water as needed and continue to mix. Repeatedly dip the spoon or your hand in cold water and use it, like a dough hook, to work the dough vigorously into a smooth mass while rotating the bowl in a circular motion with the other hand. Do this for 5–7 minutes, or until the dough is smooth and the ingredients are evenly distributed. The dough
should clear the sides of the bowl but stick to the bottom of the bowl (see Illustration 1). The dough should be quite soft and sticky.

Sprinkle enough flour on the counter to make a bed about 8 inches square. Using a spatula dipped in water, transfer the sticky dough to the bed of flour.

2. “Stretch and fold”; Lift the dough from each end, stretching it to twice its size. Fold the dough over itself, letter style, to return it to a rectangular shape. Mist the top of the dough with spray oil, dust with flour, and loosely cover with plastic wrap.

Repeat this process twice more, letting the dough rest covered for 15 minutes in between each stretch-and-fold.

3. Ferment: Allow the covered dough to ferment on the counter for 1 ½ to 2 hours. It should swell (but does not necessarily double in size).

4. Shape: Using a large un-serrated knife (or a pastry scraper) that has been dipped in water, divide the dough into two rectangles, taking care not to degas the dough. Sprinkle the top of the dough generously with more flour and pick up the dough carefully with a pastry scraper to coat the bottom with flour as well. Lay the loaves on parchment paper, on top of a couche, and bunch the cloth on the sides of and between the pieces of dough to make walls along the long edges. Tug the dough from each end to a length of 9–12 inches. Mist the dough with spray oil, then cover loosely with plastic wrap.

5. Proof: Proof for 45–60 minutes at room temperature, or until the dough should have noticeably swelled (longer is fine).

Illustration 1
6. **Prepare the oven:** Have an empty steam pan in place on the bottom-most shelf of the oven, and a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 500°F **at least an hour before baking.**

7. **Bake:** Taking care not to degas the dough, slide the parchment paper (with the loaves) from the couche onto the back of a baking sheet. Slide the parchment paper (with the loaves) onto the baking stone. Pour 1 cup hot water into the steam pan and close the door. After 30 seconds, open the door, spray the side walls of the oven with water, and close the door. Repeat twice more at 30-second intervals. After the final spray, turn the oven setting down to 450°F and bake for 10 minutes. Pull the parchment paper out from under the loaves (allowing them to bake directly on the baking stone) and rotate them 180 degrees, if necessary, for even baking and continue for 2–10 minutes longer, or until done (this will depend on the reliability of your oven temperature — with a hotter oven, you will have to be careful that the loaf does not brown too much). The bread should register 205°F in the center and should be golden in color (but the flour streaks will also give it a dusty look). The loaves will feel quite hard and crusty at first but will soften as they cool.

8. **Cool:** Turn off the oven, open the door about a foot (prop it open with a wooden spoon, if necessary), and allow the bread to sit inside the oven for 5 minutes. This ensures a crisp crust. Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours). Brush off the flour from the surface.

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**Pan Giallo (Pane di Mais)**

Region of Origin: Lombardia

Reaching back to the 1500s when corn was first introduced to the Italian peninsula, *pane di mais* or *pane al mais* is common throughout the northern regions of Italy — the Veneto, Piemonte, and Lombardia — while still found further south in areas such as Abruzzo or Molise. This Italian bread is nothing like the corn bread we’re used to from the American South, which is enriched with butter and sugar, and leavened with baking soda. *Pan giallo* feels like a brick when you pick it up, dense and heavy. For a slightly less dense loaf, the dough is made with half cornmeal and half flour. It is crumbly and boasts a distinctly rich corn flavor. In Lombardia, Italians would traditionally eat *pan giallo* with a rich broth or minestra, using leftover stale bread from days earlier to thicken the soup.

The dough is incredibly hard to work, so I recommend using a stand mixer or food processor. Because the dough is half cornmeal, there is a much lower amount of gluten present in the bread, which causes a lack of elasticity and extensibility in the dough.
Recipe
Makes 1 small boule. Total time (excluding cooling time): 2 ¾–4 hours

1 ¾ teaspoons instant yeast
¾ cups + 3 tablespoons cold water
¼ cup olive oil
3 ¾ cups plus 2 Tbsp. (10.5 ounces) cornmeal (preferably stone-ground)
1 ½ cups (7 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ tablespoon salt

1. **Mix the dough:** Place the cornmeal, flour, yeast, and salt in a food processor and process with several pulses to sift. Mix the cold water and oil. With the machine running, add the dissolved yeast, cold water, and oil as fast as possible (through the feed tube). Process longer to knead. 

2. **Knead:** Finish kneading by hand on a lightly floured surface. The dough should be soft and slightly tacky, but not wet. Because of the low level of gluten protein, you should not expect the dough to pass the window-pane test.

3. **Rise:** Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, about 1 hour.

4. **Shape and second rise:** Shape into a rounded loaf, place in a buttered 4-cup soufflé dish, sprinkle the top lightly with flour, cover with a towel, and let rise about 45 minutes. It must not double in volume or it will collapse in the oven.
5. **Prepare the oven**: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400°F **at least an hour before baking**.

6. **Bake**: Just before baking, cut a pattern (i.e. a tic-tac-toe) on top of the loaf. Bake 30 minutes. It will be slightly underdone, but corn dries out as it cools. You may bake the loaf directly on the baking stone for the last 5 to 10 minutes to brown the bottoms and sides.

7. **Cool**: Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

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**Pane alle Olive**
Region of origin: Liguria

One of Italy’s regions famous for its olive oil, olive trees (ulive) cover the hillsides of Liguria. The “endless ranks” of silvery green trees yield the tiny Ligurian olives such as Ardoino or Crespi Olivelle, which make their way into the cuisine of the Italian Riviera. This bread was traditionally taken by sailors to sea, as the rich olive oil kept it fresh and the tiny pungent black and sweeter green olives gave it its flavor.

I make this bread in a food processor, in order to break down the olives enough to provide some of the liquid for the dough. The dark color of the crumb is purely from the olives, which are blended thoroughly into the dough. If you cannot find Ligurian olives, you can use other pitted olives such as kalamata, though it will have a different flavor.

Recipe

Makes 2 small boules or round rings. Total time (excluding cooling time): 3–3 ¾ hours

2 ¾ teaspoons instant yeast
¾ cup cold water
¼ cup olive oil
3 ¾ cups (17.5 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 ¼ cup (6 ounces) tiny black pitted Ligurian olives (such as Ardoino or Crespi)
1 ¼ cup (6 ounces) green olives
1 ½ tablespoon salt
Several whole olives for garnish

1. **Mix the dough:** Mix the flour, yeast, and salt in a food processor with several pulses. With the machine running, pour the water and oil through the feel tube. The flour will be moistened but will not yet make a dough. Add the olives and process until the dough gathers into a ball and pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Try to process as little as possible. 15 minutes

2. **Knead:** Knead briefly by hand on a floured work surface.

3. **Rise:** Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, about 1½–2 hours. 1½–2 hours

4. **Shape and second rise:** Cut the dough in half for 2 loaves or into 16–18 pieces for the rings. For the loaves, you can simply form the dough into a boule by cupping your hands around the dough and pulling the outside of the dough tight down and under the loaf. Continue this motion until you have a round boule. Place the boules on parchment paper on the back of a sheet pan.

For the rings, roll each piece of dough into a ball, and arrange 1½ inches apart in two rings on oiled baking sheets. When baking, the rolls will expand into one another, but break apart easily.

Press the reserved olives very firmly into the tops. 1 hour

Cover with a towel or loosely with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm spot for about 1 hour.
5. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450° F *at least an hour before baking.*

6. **Bake:** Slide the parchment paper onto the baking stone, or place the sheet pans in the oven. Bake for 35–30 minutes.

7. **Cool:** Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

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**Pane di Altamura**

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Region of Origin: Altamura, Puglia

This sourdough durum wheat bread is chewy, compact, full of holes, and famous all over Italy. The only Italian bread recognized with la dop, the European mark of protected designation of origin (PDO), each loaf must be produced with the grano duro (durum wheat, specifically the varieties known as appulo, arcangelo, duilio and simeto) grown and milled in five municipalities in the Murgia region. The Protection Consortium of Pane di Altamura was established in 1979 by its current president, Giuseppe Barile, and currently has members from over 20 businesses. The Consorzio works to ensure that the quality of the product and is kept up to standards throughout the process: encompassing all levels of production, marketing, distribution, and retail.

The loaves typically weigh about one kilogram, but in Puglia can occasionally weight up to 44 pounds (20 kilograms). Traditionally, pane di altamura was baked in communal oak-wood-burning ovens, each able to hold up to 300 kilograms (660 pounds) of bread. The dough was mixed, kneaded, and shaped at home before being baked in the public ovens. The baker marked the initials of the head of the family on the loaves with a wooden or iron stamp before putting them in the oven. There are two traditional shapes of pane di altamura: the first type, known in dialect as u skuanète (folded loaf), is a tall loaf formed by folding the dough from either side into the center; the second type is known locally as u cappidde de prèvete (the priest’s hat), is a flat, round loaf with slashes cut into the top.

Traditionally made with a sourdough starter (la pasta madre), this recipe uses a biga which, though still using commercial yeast, mimics some of the complexity of pane di altamura. Do not try to make this bread with semolina flour, even if the label says “durum” in small print. Semolina is fine for pasta but is too coarsely ground for this bread. If you cannot find durum flour in your supermarket, you can order the flour online or appeal to a local Italian bakery.

Recipe
Makes 1 large loaf. Total time (excluding biga and cooling time): 5–5½ hours

BIGA

3/8 teaspoon instant yeast
1 ¾ cup (8.8 ounces) durum flour
1 cup water, room temperature

5. Mix: Combine the instant yeast and durum flour, then mix in the water. Mix with a spoon for 3–4 minutes. The dough will come together in a ball and should be sticky.

6. Rise: Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at a cool room temperature for at least 6–24 hours. The starter will triple in volume and still be wet and sticky when ready. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. The biga will keep in the refrigerator for up to three days. Generally speaking, the longer the biga ferments, the more complexity it will bring to the flavor of your final bread.

7. Prepare for use: Remove from refrigerator 1 hour before making the dough. Cut it into about 10 small pieces. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit to take off the chill.
HEARTH BREADS

DOUGH

(7 ounces) biga

3/8 teaspoon instant yeast

1 3/4 cups plus 1 tablespoon water, at room temperature

3 3/4 cups durum flour, plus more for kneading

1 tablespoon salt

1. **Mix the dough:** In a large mixing bowl, mix 7 ounces of the biga with the water, squeezing the biga between your fingers to break it up and stirring vigorously with a spoon. In a separate bowl, mix the durum flour with the salt until well-combined, then add the instant yeast. Add the flour mixture to the biga and water, 2 cups at a time. 15 minutes

2. **Knead:** Knead vigorously on a surface sprinkled with flour, until the dough is smooth, elastic, and slightly moist, at least 10 minutes. Slam the dough on the surface while kneading to develop the gluten. 10-20 minutes

3. **Rise:** Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise until tripled, about 3 hours. 3 hours

4. **Shape and proof:** There are two ways to shape this bread.

   - For the "cappidde de prèvete" shape, simply form the dough into a boule, and let rise on parchment paper. 1 hour
   - For the "skuanète" shape, shape the dough into an oval torpedo, and let rise on lightly floured parchment paper. The rest of the shaping will take place just before baking.

5. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven, and a steam pan in place on the bottom shelf. Preheat the oven to 450° F at least an hour before baking.

6. **Final shaping:** For the "cappidde de prèvete" shape, leave the dough shaped as is, on the parchment paper, and slash the loaf in whatever design you prefer.

   - For the "skuanète" shape, make sure the dough is in an oblong shape (if it has become too round during the second rise, then reshape back into a torpedo). Turn so that the crease (from forming a torpedo) is facing up. Take one short end of the dough, and fold it two-thirds of the way across, business letter style.

   - Sprinkle the loaf with flour.

7. **Bake:** Slide the parchment paper onto the baking stone, or place the sheet pans in the oven. Just before you close the oven door, put ½ cup ice into the steam pan, and quickly shut the door. Bake for 30-55 minutes, or until the crust is a deep golden brown and the interior registers 205° F. If it looks like the crust is browning too much, but the interior has not yet cooked fully, place a aluminum foil tent over the loaf. 30-55 minutes

8. **Cool:** Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours). 2 hours
 Pane Nero

Pane nero is bottom left oblong loaf, and top center boule with banneton flour pattern.

Region of Origin: Bolzano, Trentino Alto Adige

Black bread made from rye flour is common in northern regions such as Trentino Alto Adige. Rye thrives in the colder northern regions where wheat cannot grow, and provided poor farmers with an extremely long-lasting loaf of bread. In Val d’Aosta, also located along the northern periphery of Italy, women would gather up to four times a year, mostly in November, to bake bread at the communal bakehouse. The bread was made almost exclusively of rye flour and would keep for a whole year, though of course it grew hard with time, so hard that a special tool had to be used to cut it. Now, almost all rye bread is baked with a considerably higher proportion of wheat flour so that it will have a lighter crumb. Because there isn’t much gluten in rye flour to hold the bubbles of fermenting gases, you can imagine how dense truly traditional northern rye breads were.

In Trentino Alto Adige, many recipes for different Pane Nero were invented in monasteries, where breads were made for distribution to the poor. Many loaves were traditionally flavored with caraway seed and put to rise in bannetons. The traditional holes poked in the top of the dough let the loaf expand without cracking, as well as give it a characteristic look.
Recipe

Makes 2 loaves. Total time (excluding biga and cooling time): 4–6 hours

BIGA

3 ⅛ teaspoons instant yeast
2 cups plus 1 tablespoon (8.8 ounces) rye flour
1 ½ cups water, room temperature

1. Mix: Combine the yeast and rye flour, then mix in the water. The dough will come together in a ball and should be sticky. 10 minutes

2. Rise: Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at a cool room temperature for at least 3 hours or overnight. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use. The sponge will keep in the refrigerator for up to three days. Generally speaking, the longer the sponge ferments, the more complexity it will bring to the flavor of your final bread. 3–12 hours up to 3 days

3. Prepare for use: Remove from refrigerator 1 hour before making the dough. Cut it into about 10 small pieces. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit to take off the chill.

DOUGH

1 cup water, at room temperature
1 tablespoon molasses
2 cups plus 1 tablespoon (8.8 ounces) rye flour
3 ¾ cups (17.5 ounces) all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon salt
2 ½ teaspoons caraway seeds (or 1 ½ teaspoons crushed fennel seeds)

1. Mix the dough: In a large mixing bowl, add the water and malt to the biga and stir thoroughly. Stir in 1 cup of the rye and then the all-purpose flour, 1 cup at a time, until the dough is too stiff to stir. Using your hands, mix in the remaining all-purpose flour, then the remaining rye, the salt, and the caraway or fennel seeds. 10 minutes

2. Knead: When the dough is no longer impossibly sticky, turn it onto a well-floured surface, and knead for at 10–20 minutes. If you find the dough too hard to work, let it rest for 5–10 minutes, then continue to knead. The dough will be dense and sticky at first, but, as kneading proceeds, it will become more workable. Slam the dough down periodically while you are working to help develop the gluten. Because of the lower gluten content of the dough, it does not need to pass the window-pane test. 10–20 minutes

3. Rise: Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, about 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. It will soften considerably (since the gluten is continuing to develop). 1½–2½ hours

4. Shape and second rise: Cut the dough in half on a floured surface. Form each piece into a boule, and let rise in a well-floured banneton. (If you do not have a
banneton, just let rise on parchment paper, on the back of a sheet pan.) Cover with a towel or plastic wrap and let rise in a warm spot, until doubled, 1½–2½ hours.

5. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 425°F **at least an hour before baking.**

6. **Bake:** Carefully transfer the loaves from the bannetons to the back of a sheet pan (lined with parchment paper). Poke 4 holes down the center of each loaf. Slide the parchment paper onto the baking stone. Bake for 45 minutes, or the interior registers at least 200°F. If it looks like the crust is browning too much, but the interior has not yet cooked fully, place a tin foil tent over the loaf.

7. **Cool:** Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

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**Pane Pugliese**

Region of Origin: Puglia

Many of the versions of Pane Pugliese in the United States are similar to *ciabatta* — sometimes they in fact are *ciabatta*, but are just called *pugliese* to differentiate them from the competition. One of the biggest differences between the two is their shape: *ciabatta* with its characteristic flattened “slipper” shape, and *pugliese* in a large, flattened round. *Ciabatta* and *pugliese* both have extremely high hydration levels, usually approaching 80 percent. In Italy, where the flour is naturally more extensible than the very elastic North American flour that we use, there is no need to overhydrate. But here we need to incorporate more water into the dough in order to stretch the gluten strands, giving the loaves their distinctive big-hole structure. The holes are smaller in *pugliese* than in *ciabatta*, because the gluten protein structure is developed and strengthened by stretching and folding the dough at intervals during rising. It also makes the crumb more chewy than *ciabatta*. Additionally, the use of durum flour in this bread gives the bread an especially delicious nutty and sweet flavor, pale golden crumb, and a particularly chewy crust. Although the following recipe uses a blend of durum flour and bread flour, you can play with the proportions of flour, moving even into a version with entirely durum flour if you’re feeling adventurous. The optional use of mashed potato will tenderize the bread because of the potato starch; if you choose to use it, you may have to increase the flour to compensate for the added moisture.
Recipe

Makes 2 1-pound boules. Total time (excluding biga and cooling time): 5–5½ hours

BIGA (makes about 18 ounces)

2 ½ cups (11.25 ounces) unbleached bread flour
½ teaspoon instant yeast
¾ cup + 2 tablespoons (to 1 cup) water, room temperature

1. **Mix:** Stir together the flour and yeast. Add ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons of the water, stirring until everything comes together and makes a coarse ball. Adjust the flour or water, according to need, so that the dough is neither too sticky nor too stiff (it is better to err on the sticky side).

10 minutes

2. **Knead:** Sprinkle some flour on the counter, and transfer the dough to the counter. Knead for 4 to 6 minutes, or until the dough is soft and pliable, tacky but not sticky.

10 minutes

3. **Rise:** Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at room temperature for 2 to 4 hours, or until it nearly doubles size.

2–4 hours

4. **Ferment:** Knead the dough lightly to degas, cover the bowl again with plastic wrap, and place the bowl in the refrigerator overnight. You can keep this in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

overnight
up to 3 days
5. **Prepare for use:** Remove from refrigerator and measure 1 hour before making the dough. Cut it into about 10 small pieces. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit to take off the chill.

**DOUGH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 cups biga</td>
<td>(10.8 ounces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ¼ cups durum flour</td>
<td>(10 ounces)</td>
<td>and unbleached bread flour, in any combination (such as 50-50 blend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ½ teaspoons salt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ cup mashed potatoes (optional)</td>
<td>(2 ounces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup (plus 2 tablespoons) water, lukewarm (90°–100°F)</td>
<td>(8–9 fluid ounces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semolina flour for dusting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Mix the dough:** Stir together the flour, salt, and yeast. Add the biga pieces, mashed potatoes, and 1 cup of the water. Using a large metal spoon, mix until the ingredients form a wet, sticky ball. If there is still some loose flour, add the additional water as needed and continue to mix. **10 minutes**

2. **Knead:** Repeatedly dip one of your hands or the metal spoon into cold water and use it, much like a dough hook, to work the dough vigorously into a smooth mass while rotating the bowl in a circular motion with the other hand. Reverse the circular motion a few times to develop the gluten further. Do this for 5 to 7 minutes, or until the dough is smooth and the ingredients evenly distributed. The dough should clear the sides of the bowl but stick to the bottom of the bowl. If the dough is still very sticky against the sides of the bowl, sprinkle a little more flour until it clears the sides. Don’t be afraid if the dough seems very sticky. The wetter it is, the better the final bread will be.

Sprinkle enough flour on the counter to make a bed about 8 inches square. Using a spatula dipped in water, transfer the sticky dough to the bed of flour. **10–20 minutes**

3. **“Stretch and fold”:** Lift the dough from each end, stretching it to twice its size. Fold the dough over itself, letter style, to return it to a rectangular shape. Mist the top of the dough with spray oil, dust with flour, and loosely cover with plastic wrap.

Repeat this process twice more, letting the dough rest covered for 15 minutes in between each stretch-and-fold. **10 minutes**

30 minutes

4. **Ferment:** Transfer the dough to a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and ferment the dough at room temperature for 2 hours (for an idea of how the dough may look after 2 hours, see Illustration 2). **2 hours**
5. **Shape:** Transfer the dough to a floured counter, taking care not to degas the dough any more than necessary. Divide the dough into two pieces, and gently shape the pieces into two **boules**. Let them relax on the counter, seam-side down, for a few minutes.  

6. **Proof:** Gently place each boule, seam-side up, in a floured banneton* and cover with cloth. Proof for 1 to 1 ½ hours, or until the dough has expanded to about 1 ½ times its original size.

7. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 500° F **at least an hour before baking.**

8. **Bake:** Transfer the dough to the back of a sheet pan lined with parchment paper. (Optional: Score the loaves with a sharp blade with a pound (#) sign.) Slide the dough onto the baking stone. Pour 1 cup hot water into the steam pan and close the door. After 30 seconds, spray the oven walls with water and close the door again. Repeat twice more at 30-second intervals. After the final spray, lower the oven setting to 450° F and bake for 15 minutes. Check the loaves at this point and rotate 180 degrees if necessary (for even baking). Continue baking for 5 to 15 minutes, or until the breads are a deep golden brown and register about 205° F in the center.

9. **Cool:** Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

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*If you do not have bannetons, you can improvise by lining a bowl with cloth. Be sure to coat with spray oil and generously dust the entire surface of the cloth with flour.*
Pane Siciliano

Region of Origin: Sicilia

Similar to the bread of Puglia, Sicilian bread uses flour made from durum wheat. This recipe uses half bread flour, half semolina flour, which is less finely ground than durum flour. The spiral shape of the bread, called occhi, is an homage to Santa Lucia, the patron saint of vision. Similar breads are also found in Sicily in the shape of malfada, which looks like a snake curled back and forth and over itself with a baton laid across it; without the baton, it is called a scaletta, or little ladder. Bakers also cut the dough to look like a corona, or crown. The loaves have a golden crust, and often are sprinkled with crunchy sesame seeds, which give a faint nutty taste to the bread.

Recipe
Makes 2 S-shaped loaves. Total time (excluding biga and cooling time): 2½ hours + overnight + 2½ hours

BIGA (makes about 16–17 ounces)

| 1 cup + 2 tablespoons       | (5 ounces) | unbleached all-purpose flour |
| 1 cup + 2 tablespoons       | (5 ounces) | unbleached bread flour       |
| ¾ teaspoon                  |            | salt                         |
| ½ teaspoon                  |            | instant yeast                |
| ¾ cup (to ¾ cup + 2 tablespoons) |        | water, room temperature      |

1. Mix: Stir together the flour, yeast, and salt. Add ¾ cup of the water, stirring until everything comes together and makes a coarse ball. Adjust the flour or water, 10 minutes
according to need, so that the dough is neither too sticky nor too stiff (it is better to err on the sticky side).

2. **Knead**: Sprinkle some flour on the counter, and transfer the dough to the counter. Knead for 4 to 6 minutes, or until the dough is soft and pliable, tacky but not sticky. 10 minutes

3. **Rise**: Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at room temperature for 1 hour, or until it swells to about 1 1/2 times its original size. 1 hour

4. **Ferment**: Knead the dough lightly to degas, cover the bowl again with plastic wrap, and place the bowl in the refrigerator overnight. You can keep this in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. overnight up to 3 days

5. **Prepare for use**: Remove from refrigerator 1 hour before making the dough. Measure 3 cups and cut it into about 10 small pieces. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit to take off the chill.

**DOUGH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 cups (6 ounces)</th>
<th>biga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 3/4 cups (8 ounces)</td>
<td>unbleached bread flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1/4 cups (8 ounces)</td>
<td>semolina flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1/4 teaspoons</td>
<td>instant yeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 tablespoons</td>
<td>olive oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon</td>
<td>honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1/4 cups (to 1 1/2 cups)</td>
<td>water, lukewarm (90°–100° F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sesame seeds for topping

1. **Mix the dough**: Stir together the flour, salt, and yeast. Add the biga pieces, oil, honey, and 1 1/4 cups water. Using a large metal spoon, mix until the ingredients form ball. If the dough seems too stiff, add the additional water as needed and continue to mix. The dough should feel soft and pliable. 10 minutes

2. **Knead**: Transfer the dough to a floured counter, and knead. Add flour if needed, to make a smooth dough that is tacky but not sticky. Knead for about 10 minutes. The dough should pass the windowpane test. 10–20 minutes

3. **Ferment**: Form the dough into a ball, lightly oil a large bowl, and transfer the dough to the bowl, rolling it to coat it with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Ferment at room temperature for about 2 hours, or until the dough doubles in size. 2 hours

4. **Shape**: Gently divide the dough into three equal pieces. Shape into long baguettes, extending each piece to about 24 inches in length and taking care to degas the dough as little as possible. Then, working from each end simultaneously, coil the dough toward the center, forming an S shape. 5 minutes

Line the back of a (or multiple) sheet pan(s) with baking parchment and sprinkle some semolina flour on the baking parchment. Place each loaf on the pan(s). Mist
the loaves with water and sprinkle sesame seeds on the top of each loaf. Then mist the tops with vegetable spray oil and cover the pan(s) loosely with plastic wrap.

5. **Retard**: Place the pans in the refrigerator overnight.

6. **Proof**: Remove the pan(s) from the refrigerator. Leave the pan(s) out at room temperature to finish rising. The dough should stay dimpled when poked, and the loaves should be nearly twice as large as when first shaped.

7. **Prepare the oven**: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 500°F at least an hour before baking.

8. **Bake**: Slide the dough onto the baking stone. Pour 1 cup hot water into the steam pan and close the door. After 30 seconds, spray the oven walls with water and close the door. Repeat twice more at 30-second intervals. After the final spray, lower the oven setting to 450°F and bake for 15 minutes. Check the loaves at this point and rotate 180 degrees if necessary (for even baking). Continue baking for 5 to 15 minutes, or until the breads are a rich golden brown all over. If there are still light or white sections of the dough, extend the baking time for a few extra minutes to maximize color and flavor. The internal temperature of the bread should register about 200°–205°F.

9. **Cool**: Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

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**Pane Toscano (Pane Sciocco)**

Region of Origin: Toscana

Tuscans have been making this saltless bread for centuries. This may be due to the historically expensive nature of salt, especially with government taxes on salt and other items during the middle ages. Unfortunately, the lack of salt makes it rather dull and flat tasting. Tuscans remedy this by lavishing it with intensely flavored spreads and pastes, or eating it with flavorful dishes, such as a minestrone toscana. A technique that is unique to this bread is the use of a cooked flour paste, made the day before. This is different from a pre-ferment since there is no yeast added and the paste does not ferment, but the gelatinized starches release flavors that give this bread a distinct quality unlike other breads.
Recipe

Makes 2 loaves. Total time (excluding paste and cooling time): 3½–4¼ hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FLOUR PASTE</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ¾ cups boiling water</td>
<td>(9 ounces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups unbleached bread flour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Paste: Make the paste 1 or 2 days before making the bread. Pour the boiling water over the flour in a mixing bowl and stir vigorously until the flour is hydrated and makes a thick, smooth paste. Cool, cover, and leave out overnight at room temperature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOUGH</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 ⅔ cups unbleached bread flour</td>
<td>(12 ounces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ½ teaspoons instant yeast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 tablespoons olive oil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup water, at room temperature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semolina flour for dusting</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Mix the dough: Stir together the flour and yeast. Add the paste and olive oil. Stir together, adding as much water as it takes to make a soft, supple ball. Don’t be afraid of the dough being a little sticky; you can always add more flour while kneading.
2. **Knead**: Transfer the dough to a floured counter, and knead for about 10 minutes. The dough should be tacky but not sticky. Continue to sprinkle in more flour as needed. The dough should pass the windowpane test. **10–20 minutes**

3. **Ferment**: Form the dough into a ball, lightly oil a large bowl, and transfer the dough to the bowl, rolling it to coat it with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Ferment at room temperature for 2 hours. **2 hours**

4. **Shape**: Gently divide the dough into two equal pieces. Shape the pieces into **boules**, taking care to protect the internal gas. If you plan to bake the loaves as rounds, transfer the dough to the back of a sheet pan lined with baking parchment.

   If you prefer oblong loaves, shape the dough rounds into **torpedoes** after a 15-minute resting period, and then place them on the prepared pan. Mist the dough lightly with spray oil, and cover loosely with plastic wrap. **(20 minutes)**

5. **Proof**: Proof the dough at room temperature for 1 to 1 ½ hours, or until it nearly doubles in size. **1–1 ½ hours**

   (You can also retard the dough by placing the covered pan in the refrigerator immediately after shaping and leave overnight. The dough should be nearly ready to bake when you pull it out of the refrigerator. If not, leave out at room temperature for a couple of hours.) **(overnight)**

6. **Prepare the oven**: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven, and a steam pan on the bottom-most shelf. Pour 2 cups of water into the steam pan. Preheat the oven to 500°F at least an hour before baking. **20–30 minutes**

7. **Bake**: Just before baking, mist the loaves with water, dust lightly with bread flour, and score the loaves. Slide the dough onto the baking stone. After 30 seconds, spray the oven walls with water and close the door. Repeat twice more at 30-second intervals. After the final spray, lower the oven setting to 450°F and bake for 10 minutes. Remove the steam pan after 10 minutes, rotate 180 degrees if necessary (for even baking), and continue baking for 10 to 20 minutes, or until the breads are a rich golden color and register over 200°F in the center. If the bread is not yet at the correct internal temperature, but browning too quickly, place an aluminum foil tent over the loaves and continue baking.

8. **Cool**: Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours). **2 hours**
Piccia Calabrese

Region of Origin: Calabria

This recipe was taken from Carol Field’s The Italian Baker. The bread comes out with a golden and crunchy crust, and a wonderfully complex flavor. Field describes that it has “an interior fragrant with all the tastes of the south” and that to make it “you can practically work your way through your pantry, opening jar after jar and chunking bits and pieces into this dough.” Of course, don’t worry if you don’t have every ingredient; just double an ingredient you do have or leave out an ingredient or two. It tastes particularly good with fresh mozzarella, ricotta, or another smooth fresh cheese.

Recipe
Makes 1 boule. Total time (excluding biga and cooling time): 3–3½ hours

BIGA (makes about 18 ounces)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>instant yeast</th>
<th>unbleached all-purpose flour</th>
<th>warm water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>¼ teaspoon</td>
<td>2 1/3 cups</td>
<td>(11.6 ounces)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¾ cup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Mix: Combine the yeast and flour, then mix in the water. The dough will come together in a ball and should be sticky. Mix for 3 to 4 minutes. 10 minutes

2. Rise: Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise at a cool room temperature for at least 3 hours or overnight. Cover and refrigerate until 3–12 hours up to 3 days
ready to use. The sponge will keep in the refrigerator for up to three days. Generally speaking, the longer the sponge ferments, the more complexity it will bring to the flavor of your final bread.

3. **Prepare for use**: Remove the biga from the refrigerator 1 hour before making the dough. Measure 1 ¼ cups and cut it into about 10 small pieces (to help remove the chill). Cover with plastic wrap and let sit for 1 hour.

**DOUGH**

| 1 ¾ teaspoons | instant yeast |
| ¼ cup | (2 ounces) water, at room temperature |
| 1 ¼ cups | (10.5 ounces) biga |
| 2 tablespoons | (0.9 ounces) lard (or butter) |
| 2 tablespoons | sliced mushrooms |
| 1 tablespoon | olive oil |
| 3 tablespoons | chopped canned tomato with juice |
| 1 tablespoon | capers, drained and chopped |
| 6 | small cocktail onions |
| 2 tablespoons | artichoke hearts |
| 2 strips | roasted red bell pepper, chopped |
| 1 tablespoon | dried oregano |
| 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons | (10.5 ounces) unbleached all purpose flour |
| 1 teaspoon | salt |
| ¾ teaspoon | freshly ground pepper |

4. **Mix the dough**: Stir together the biga, yeast, and water in a large mixing bowl; squeeze the biga through your fingers to break it up. Stir in the lard until well blended. Sauté the mushrooms briefly in the oil and let cool. Stir the mushrooms into the starter mixture along with the tomato, anchovy, capers, onions, artichokes, bell pepper, and oregano, mixing the ingredients thoroughly. In a separate bowl, stir together the flour, salt, and pepper. Stir into the biga mixture 1 cup at a time. When the dough is too stiff for stirring, plunge in with your hands. 10 minutes

5. **Knead**: Using a dough scraper and sprinkling with additional flour as needed, knead the dough on a well-floured surface until velvety, moist, and elastic, 8–10 minutes. 8–10 minutes

6. **Rise**: Place the dough in an oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, 1 to 1 ½ hours. 1–1 ½ hours

7. **Shape and second rise**: Shape the dough on a floured surface into one large or two smaller round loaves by rolling the dough first into a fairly taut log, then shaping it into a round loaf. The dough will be slightly sticky; sprinkle the dough and the work surface with flour while shaping it. Place each loaf on the back of a baking sheet, lined with parchment paper, cover with a slightly dampened towel, and let rise until doubled, about 50 minutes. 50 minutes

8. **Prepare the oven**: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 425° F at least an hour before baking.
9. Bake: Just before baking, cut slashes in the loaf with a razor or sharp knife. Slide the loaves (on the parchment paper) onto the baking stone. Bake, spraying the oven three times with water in the first 10 minutes.

10. Cool: Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

Pan Tramvai (Pane all’Uva)

Region of Origin: Lombardia

While visiting Lake Como with my Milanese friends, I distinctly remember one of them insisting that we pull over the car to go to his favorite bakery in the area, so he could get a loaf of this raisin-crammed pan tramvai. This delicious bread is so packed with raisins that it actually has equal amounts of raisins and flour.
As soon as I tasted the bread, I understood why pulling over at this bakery was so urgent. It wasn’t until seeing this recipe in Carol Field’s *The Italian Baker*, that I had success at making it myself.

*Pan tramvai* was originally made in the nineteenth century by a bread baker at the tramway station in Monza, where commuters caught the horse-drawn tram for Milan, hence its name *tramvai*. Traditionally, it takes the form of a fat, long, and crusty loaf, though you can make it in any shape you prefer.

### Recipe

*Makes 1 large boule. Total time (excluding cooling time): 4–6 hours*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>golden or dark raisins</td>
<td>(17.5 ounces)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instant yeast</td>
<td>2 ¼ teaspoons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malt syrup/powder, honey, or molasses</td>
<td>1 teaspoon</td>
<td>sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sugar</td>
<td>2 tablespoons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsalted butter, at room temperature</td>
<td>3 ¾ cups</td>
<td>unbleached all-purpose flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unbleached all-purpose flour (for the raisins)</td>
<td>2–3 tablespoons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salt</td>
<td>1 ½ teaspoons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Soak the raisins** in water to cover (cool water for golden raisins, warm water for dark) at room temperature for 1 ½ hours. Drain the raisins, squeezing out any excess liquid, and pat them dry. Toss the raisins with 2–3 tablespoons of flour. Reserve the raisin soaking water. Warm 1 1/3 cups of the raisin water for the yeast.  

2. **Mix the dough**: Stir yeast, malt, and sugar into the raisin water in a large mixing bowl. Stir in the butter. Mix the 3 ½ cups of flour and the salt. Stir the flour mixture, 2 cups at a time, into the yeast mixture.  

3. **Knead**: Knead on a lightly floured surface until firm, elastic, and silky, 4–10 minutes. You will find that the dough comes together quickly.  

4. **Rise**: Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, 1 ½ to 2 hours.  

5. **Filling**: Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Without punching the dough down or kneading it, pat it gently with your palms or roll with a rolling pin into a circle about 14 inches in diameter. The dough will be slightly sticky and tacky. Work the raisins into the dough in three additions: sprinkle a third of the raisins over the dough, turn in the sides, and roll it up. Flatten the dough with your palms and sprinkle with half the remaining raisins. Roll up and let the dough rest under a towel until relaxed and easy to work again, about 15 minutes. Pat the dough as flat as you can and sprinkle with the remaining raisins. Try to get as many in as you can, but don’t worry if you can’t incorporate them all — this is an extraordinary amount of raisins.  

6. **Shape and second rise**: Shape the dough into a torpedo. Place the loaf on the back...
of a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Cover with a towel and let rise until well puffed and almost doubled, about 1 hour.

7. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450°F **at least an hour before baking.**

8. **Bake:** Slide the loaf (on the parchment paper) onto the baking stone. Bake 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to 400°F and bake 40 minutes longer.

9. **Cool:** Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).
Festive Breads

Casatiello
Gubana
Panettone
Veneziana
Casatiello

Region of Origin: Campania

This recipe is one of my favorite Italian bread discoveries. When served warm, the cheese is still melted and oozing, and each piece is studded with chunks of crispy salami. If you are feeling adventurous, you can experiment with adding freshly ground pepper or red pepper flakes. Similarly enriched with butter and eggs, you can think of this bread as a savory panettone. Originally made for Easter Monday in the countryside outside of Naples, a traditional casatiello was shaped in a large ring and with eggs still in the shell held in place on top with two crossed bands of dough. This version can certainly be made with eggs set on top.

Recipe

Makes 1 loaf. Total time (excluding cooling time): 3½–4 hours

BIGN

1 tablespoon instant yeast
½ cup (2.5 ounces) unbleached bread flour
1 cup milk

1. Mix: Stir together the flour and yeast in a bowl. Whisk in the milk to make a pancake-like batter. Cover with plastic wrap and ferment at room temperature for 1 hour. The sponge will foam and bubble and should collapse when you tap the bowl.
DOUGH

4 ounces dry-cured Italian salami or other meat
3 ½ cups (16 ounces) unbleached bread flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
2 large eggs
¾ cup (6 ounces) unsalted butter
¾ cup (6 ounces) shredded provolone (or cheddar, gouda, etc.)

1. Dice the salami into small cubes and sauté it lightly in a frying pan to crisp it slightly.

2. Mix the dough: Stir together the flour, salt, and sugar with a spoon. Add the eggs and the biga and mix together until all the ingredients form a coarse ball. If there is any loose flour, dribble in a small amount of water or milk to gather it into the dough. Stir for about 1 minute, then let the dough rest for 10 minutes to allow the gluten to develop. Divide the butter into 4 pieces. Begin working the butter into the dough, one piece at a time, stirring vigorously with the spoon. The dough will be soft but not a batter. Continue mixing with the spoon, or switch to your hands but keep them floured as you knead, working the dough into a smooth, tacky mass. It will take about 10 to 15 minutes.

3. Filling: Add the meat pieces and knead until they are evenly distributed. Then gently knead in the cheese until it too is evenly distributed. The dough will be soft and stretchy, very tacky but not sticky. If it is sticky, sprinkle in more flour until it firms up.

4. Rise: Lightly oil a large bowl and transfer the dough to the bowl, rolling it around to coat it with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Ferment at room temperature for about 1½ hours, or until the dough increases in size by at least 1½ times.

5. Shape and proof: Shape the dough into a boule, and place either in a buttered paper panettone mold or round 8-inch cake pan. Mist the top of the loaf with spray oil, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and proof for 1 to 1½ hours.

6. Prepare the oven: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350° F at least an hour before baking.

7. Bake: Place the loaf on the baking stone and bake for 20 minutes, then rotate the loaf 180 degrees. Bake for an additional 20 to 30 minutes, or until the center of the loaf registers 185°–190° F. The dough will be golden brown on top and on the sides, and the cheese will ooze out into crisp little brown pockets.

8. Cool: Remove the bread from the oven and transfer it to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).
Region of Origin: Friuli, Friuli-Venezia Giulia

The name “gubana” most likely comes from the Slavic guba, which describes the shape of a snail, although there are those who say the name is derived from bubane, Friulian dialect for “abundance.” Some say the gubana dates back to the sixth to eighth centuries, when the Lombards settled on Cividale as the capital of their duchy. The first recorded evidence dates it to 1700.

The gubana Easter bread comes originally from Friuli, the region east of Venice that sits close against the Slovenian and Austrian borders. You can imagine the Slavic influence in the dense and complicated flavors of the nut and fruit-spiraled filling and in the bittersweet bite of its liqueurs. Gubana boasts essentially equal parts dough and filling, which consists of raisins, walnuts, hazelnuts, pine nuts, and almonds, moistened with the robust flavors of different wines and liqueurs. The recipe on which I based this one came from a fourth-generation baker in the town of Cividale, and called for even more varieties of alcohol. So, if you happen to have grappa or maraschino liqueur, try substituting them for parts of the Marsala, rum, and amaretto. Because it is laced with liqueurs, gubana is usually eaten for dessert and is especially good with sweet white wines.
Recipe

Makes 2 loaves. Total time (excluding cooling time): 3–3 1/2 hours

BIGA (makes about 16-17 ounces)

| 1 cup + 1 tablespoon | (5.3 ounces) | unbleached all-purpose flour |
| 1 tablespoon + 2 teaspoons | instant yeast |
| 3/4 cup | milk, warmed to about 110° F then cooled to 75° F |

1. **Mix**: Stir together the flour and yeast. Add the milk, stirring until smooth. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise 30 minutes to 1 hour.

DOUGH

| 2 large | eggs |
| 2 large | egg yolks |
| 2/3 cup | (4.9 ounces) | sugar |
| 3 to 4 tablespoons | milk |
| 3 3/4 cup | (17.5 ounces) | unbleached all-purpose flour |
| 1 1/4 teaspoons | salt |
| 2 1/2 teaspoons | vanilla extract |
| 1 stick | (4 ounces) | unsalted butter, at room temperature |

Grated zest of 2 lemons

2. **Mix the dough**: Add the eggs, egg yolks, sugar, and 3 tablespoons of the milk to the sponge and stir until smooth. Stir in the flour, 1 cup at a time, and the salt and keep stirring until smooth. Stir in the lemon zest, vanilla, and 1 more tablespoon of milk, if needed. Cut the butter into small pieces, and mix them into the dough.

3. **Knead**: Flour your work surface generously, flour your hands, and transfer the dough to the counter. Knead until velvety, 8 to 10 minutes. The dough will be sticky at first; add flour as you knead until it feels tacky but no longer sticky.

FILLING

| 2 3/4 cups | (10.5 ounces) | toasted hazelnuts |
| 3/4 cup | (3.2 ounces) | toasted walnuts |
| 1/3 cup | (1.3 ounces) | lightly toasted pine nuts |
| 2 tablespoons | (0.7 ounces) | blanched almonds |
| 1 1/2 cups | (5.6 ounces) | crumbs from leftover sweet breads or cookies |
| 1 cup | (6.3 ounces) | raisins |
| 1/2 cup + 1 tablespoon | (4.5 ounces) | apricot jam |
| 1/2 cup | (2.6 ounces) | candied orange peel |
| Grated zest of 1 lemon | unsweetened cocoa powder |
| 1 1/2 tablespoons | ground cinnamon |
| 1 teaspoon | Marsala |
| 4 tablespoons | rum |
| 2 tablespoons + 2 teaspoons | amaretto liqueur |
| 2 tablespoons | egg |
| 1 large | water |
| 2 teaspoons | egg white, beaten, for glazing |
4. **Filling:** Combine the nuts, bread crumbs, raisins, jam, orange peel, lemon zest, cocoa, cinnamon, Marsala, rum, and amaretto.

5. **Shape:** Cut the dough in half on a lightly floured surface. Roll out each piece into an 18 by 12-inch rectangle. Spread the filling over the dough rectangles, leaving a 2-inch border on all sides (see Illustration 3). Mix the egg and water in a small bowl and brush the edges of the dough with the egg wash.

Starting at one long edge, roll up each dough rectangle and pinch the ends. Shape each log into a spiral so that it looks like a big snail (see Illustration 4).

6. **Proof:** Place each dough spiral into a well-buttered baking or soufflé dish. The *gubana* can also be baked free form on a buttered baking sheet, but the dish will help it keep its shape. Cover with plastic wrap or a towel and let rise until well puffed but not doubled, 2 to 2 ½ hours.
7. **Prepare the oven**: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 375°F at least an hour before baking.

8. **Bake**: Just before baking, brush the tops of the loaves with the egg white and poke several holes in the tops with a skewer to let air escape from any air pockets. Bake 25 minutes. Reduce the heat to 325°F and bake until deep golden, about 25 minutes longer. If the bread appears to be browning too quickly, place an aluminum foil tent over the loaves. 40–50 minutes

9. **Cool**: Remove the *gubane* from the oven, unmold them very carefully, and transfer them to a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours). 2 hours
**Panettone**

Region of Origin: Milano, Lombardia

Panettone was probably born as the Christmas bread of Milan in medieval times, when bakers enriched the dough of daily bread, which they called *panett*, by adding butter, eggs, sugar, and raisins, to make a big, dense festive loaf, which they naturally named *panettone*. Though this is one reasonable story of the name “*panettone*,” there are countless more explanations. One popular legend dates back to the 15th century, during the time of Milanese Duke Ludovico il Moro. As the legend goes, in an attempt to win over the father of his beloved, a young baker named Toni filled his bread with the most luxurious gifts he possessed: butter, brandied dried and candied fruits, nuts, and sugar. The father agreed to the marriage, and the bread became known as “*pan di Toni*”. Most likely fiction, but celebrated nonetheless.

One Milanese custom associated San Biagio, the protector of the throat, is one still observed by many families in Milan. Keeping one whole *panettone* until February 3, the feast day of San Biagio, popular tradition states that those who eat the stale *panettone* with its hard crust will be spared from sore throats during the year to come.

Over the course of the *Risorgimento* and the first half of the twentieth century, *panettone* was politicized to represent Italian identity. Red candied cherries were substituted for raisins, and green citron was added so that the bread symbolized the tricolored Italian flag and liberty itself. In the 1920s, a Milanese baker named Angelo Motta was one of the first to bake *panettone* in large quantities, sparking the global spread of this holiday bread. He began using the high-sided cylindrical baking paper which we now associate with the loaf, and refined a three-rise process with natural yeast which allowed the bread to have its characteristic tall
domed shape. The soft and delicate bread was such an immediate success that the following year, Giacchino Allemagna set up a rival company to compete with Motta. Today, Italian bakers turn out more than 117 million panettone and pandoro (the Christmas bread typical to Verona) a year. Now globally exported all over the world and known internationally as the national Christmas bread of Italy, panettone has come a long way from the modest peasant loaf of the middle ages.

Recipe

Makes 2 loaves. Total time (excluding cooling time): 5–6½ hours

BIGA

1 teaspoon instant yeast
½ cup (2.5 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1/3 cup warm water

1. Mix: Stir together the yeast and flour in a small bowl. Add the water and stir until smooth. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and let rise until doubled, 20 to 30 minutes

FIRST DOUGH

1 ¾ teaspoons instant yeast
1 ¼ cups (6.3 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
¼ cup (1.8 ounces) sugar
2 large eggs, at room temperature
3 tablespoons water
1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2. Mix the dough: Stir together the flour, yeast, and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Add the eggs and the biga and mix together until all the ingredients form a coarse ball. If there is any loose flour, dribble in some of the water to gather it into the dough. Stir in the butter thoroughly. The entire process will take 5 to 6 minutes.

3. Rise: Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for about 1 to 1½ hours, or until doubled.

SECOND DOUGH

2 large eggs
3 large egg yolks
¾ cup (5.3 ounces) sugar
2 tablespoons honey
1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
2 sticks (8 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature
3 cups (14.7 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt

4. Mix: Add the eggs, egg yolks, sugar, honey, vanilla, and salt to the first dough, and mix well. Add the butter and stir until blended. Stir in the flour and keep stirring until smooth. The dough will be soft, a bit like cookie dough. Knead gently on a well-floured surface until it is smooth and holds its shape. You may need as much as ¼ cup of additional flour during the kneading.
5. **Rise:** Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise until tripled, 2 ½ to 4 hours. The dough can also rise overnight at a cool room temperature (65°–68° F)

6. **Prepare raisins:** At least 30 minutes before the end of the first rise, soak the raisins (and/or cranberries, cherries, etc.) in cool water. Drain and pat dry.

**FILLING***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2/3 cups</td>
<td>8.8 ounces</td>
<td>golden raisins, soaked and dried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup</td>
<td>2.7 ounces</td>
<td>chopped candied citron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup</td>
<td>2.7 ounces</td>
<td>chopped candied orange peel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grated zest of 1 orange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grated zest of 1 lemon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3 tablespoons</td>
<td></td>
<td>unbleached all-purpose flour</td>
</tr>
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</table>

7. **Filling:** Cut the dough in half on a floured surface. Combine the raisins, candied citron and orange peel, and orange and lemon zest and dust with flour. Pat each piece of dough into an oval and sprinkle each with a quarter of the fruit mixture. Roll up into a log. Gently flatten the dough again to create as much surface as possible, sprinkle with the remaining fruit mixture, and roll up again.

8. **Shape and proof:** Shape each piece into a boule and slip into two well-buttered 6 by 4-inch paper panettone molds**. Cut an X in the top of each loaf with a razor or a very sharp knife. Cover with a towel and let rise until doubled, about 2 hours. If your kitchen is cold, warm the oven at the lowest possible setting for 3 minutes, place a large pan of hot water on the lowest rack, and let the dough rise in the warm, slightly moist atmosphere. With a gas oven, the heat of the pilot light may be enough.

9. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400° F at least an hour before baking.

10. **Bake:** Just before baking, cut the X in each loaf again, and insert a nut of butter into the cut. Bake 10 minutes. Reduce the heat to 375° F and bake 10 minutes. Reduce the heat to 350° F and bake until a tester inserted in the center comes out clean, 30 minutes. Check periodically to make sure the loaves are not browning too quickly; if they are, construct an aluminum foil tent over the loaves for the remaining baking time.

11. **Cool:** Remove the loaves from the oven and place them on a wire rack to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours).

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* Candied citron and orange peel are traditional panettone fillings. However, you can choose to add any combination of dried fruits and nuts (i.e. dried cranberries, apricots, cherries or apples), as long as it totals around 2 2/3 to 3 cups. My personal favorite combination is ½ cup golden raisins, ½ cup dried cranberries, 1 cup chopped dried apricots, and 1 cup blanched slivered/chopped almonds.

** For this panettone, which is as light and airy as the traditional bakery panettone, the pan is very important. If you use a 2-quart cake pan, you will not get the same spectacular height or delicate porous texture.
Region of Origin: Veneto

This sweet bread from Venice, made for Christmas and especially for New Year’s Eve, is very much like *panettone* but has no citron or candied fruits. The top is covered with an almond-sugar glaze, studded with whole almonds, and dusted with confectioners’ sugar. The soft, airy crumb is nicely contrasted by the crunchy sugar coating on the crust.

**Recipe**

*Makes 2 loaves. Total time (excluding cooling time): 7½–8 hours*

**BIGA**

- 2 ¾ teaspoons instant yeast
- 2 cups (8.8 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup (1.8 ounces) sugar
- ¾ cup warm water
- 3 large egg yolks
- ¼ cup (2 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1. **Mix:** Stir together the flour, yeast, and sugar. Add the water and egg yolks, and stir until it forms a soft dough. Beat in the butter thoroughly. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise until tripled, about 2 hours.
DOUGH

¾ teaspoon instant yeast
1 cup + 2 tablespoons (4.4 ounces) cake flour
1 cup (4.9 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ cup (3.5 ounces) sugar
1 tablespoon honey
3 large egg yolks
3 tablespoons warm water
1 stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
Grated zest of 2 oranges
Grated zest of 1 lemon
1 teaspoon salt

2. Mix the dough: Stir together the flour, yeast, and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Add the honey, egg yolks, and the biga and mix together until all the ingredients form a coarse ball. If there is any loose flour, dribble in some of the water to gather it into the dough. Beat in the butter, vanilla, orange and lemon zest, and salt.

3. Knead: Knead on a lightly floured surface until smooth but still soft and slightly sticky, 8 to 10 minutes

4. Rise: Place the dough in a lightly buttered bowl, and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Let rise until doubled, about 2 hours. The dough should be full of air bubbles.

5. Shape and proof: Transfer the dough to a floured surface, and knead it gently. Cut the dough in half and shape each piece into a boule. Because the dough is very sticky, shape the ball in your hands, holding it in the air and stretching the skin taut as you turn it and pinch the dough together on the bottom. Place each ball in a buttered soufflé dish. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise until doubled, about 2½ hours.

TOPPING

¼ cup (1.4 ounces) blanched almonds, ground
10 to 12 whole blanched almonds (for the top)
½ teaspoon almond extract
¾ cup sugar
1 to 2 large egg whites
1½ tablespoons sugar (for the top)
Confectioners’ sugar

6. Topping: Process the ¼ cup almonds and the sugar in a food processor. In a small bowl, combine the almond-sugar mixture with almond extract and enough of the egg whites to make the mixture easily spreadable but not runny. When the loaves have fully risen, brush the topping all over the surfaces. Dot each loaf with whole almonds and then sprinkle with the 1½ tablespoons sugar. Finish with a heavy dusting of confectioners’ sugar.

10 minutes
10 minutes
2 hours
2 ½ hours
2 hours
7. **Prepare the oven**: Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400°F at least an hour before baking.

8. **Bake**: Bake 10 minutes. Reduce the heat to 350°F and bake 35 to 40 minutes longer. **40–50 minutes**

9. **Cool**: Let cool 10 minutes and unmold very carefully onto wire racks to cool completely (can take as long as 2 hours). **2 hours**
Flat Breads

Grissini
Piadina
Focaccia
Region of Origin: Torino, Piemonte

Most Americans know grissini as the pale, uniform, insipid breadsticks that are served in individual wrappers on every table at Italian restaurants. These “Italian breadsticks” have about as much in common with traditional grissini as industrially made Wonder bread has in common with a rustic country boule. Originally from Torino, grissini are made of yeast-leavened dough, and are shaped individually by hand, giving each one a characteristically knobbly form.

Like the history of most breads, the story behind the invention of grissini is widely contested. They first appeared in Torino sometime in the 17th century, and were so common by the following century that Napolean reported back to France about “le petits batons de Turin.” Most histories regarding the origin of grissini are based on the story of Vittorio Amedeo II, future Duke of Savoy, who suffered from digestive problems. His physician advised him only to eat bread crusts, discarding the soft, inner part. The court baker came up with the long, thin, easily broken breadstick, which was essentially all crust. The word grissino derives from an old type of Piemontese bread, gherse, with a diminutive suffix; in short, a small bread.
Recipe

Makes 20 grissini. Total time (excluding cooling time): 1½ hours

3 ¾ cups (16 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ cup (3 ounces) semolina flour
1 ⅛ teaspoons instant yeast
2 tablespoons olive oil (plus more for brushing)
1 ½ teaspoons salt
1 ¼ cups warm water
1 tablespoon malt syrup (or molasses)
Optional: sesame seeds, poppy seeds

1. **Mix the dough:** Stir together the flour, yeast, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Add the water, malt, and oil, and stir until the dough comes together.

2. **Knead:** Knead on a lightly floured surface until smooth, soft, velvety, and elastic, 8 to 10 minutes.

3. **Rise:** Pat the dough with your hand into a 14 by 4-inch rectangle on a well-floured surface. Lightly brush the top with oil. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise until doubled, about 1 hour.

4. **Shape:** Sprinkle the dough with semolina flour before cutting and stretching. (Optional: Instead of semolina flour, use sesame or poppy seeds for variations on the grissini.) Cut the dough crosswise into four equal sections and then cut each section crosswise again into five strips, each about the width of a fat finger. The dough is so elastic that you can simply pick up each piece, hold each end with your fingers, and pull and stretch to fit the width (or length) of a baking sheet. Place the breadsticks several inches apart on the backs of lightly oiled baking sheets.

5. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 450° F at least an hour before baking.

6. **Bake:** Bake the breadsticks for 10 to 20 minutes, or until golden. If you like crunchy breadsticks, bake directly on the baking stone, which has been sprinkled with semolina, for the last 5 minutes.
Piadina

Region of Origin: Romagna, Emilia-Romagna

Most Italian breads are leavened, with the notable exception of piada bread, familiarly called piadina, the gastronomic symbol of the rustic Romagna region. Each piadina is a round and thin sheet of dough made without yeast, to which some fat — usually lard or oil — and baking powder are added to increase softness and lightness. Today, piadina is a very popular fast food in Romagna and is usually cooked over a burning hot slab of stone, acquiring uneven color and crunchiness, and eaten warm together with prosciutto or cheese. The same slab of stone, called testo, is also used to prepare testaroli, a local specialty in the northern tip of Tuscany. The Romagnolo flatbread can now be found everywhere throughout Emilia-Romagna, and has even been industrially exported to other Italian regions. In Milan, 400,000 piadine are sold a year. Piero Camporesi bitterly describes this piadina industry, stating, “Today, wrapped in cellophane and resembling packages of thinly sliced cheese, it has migrated to the great cities of the North.” Hot off a cast-iron pan on your stovetop, a piadina with meat and cheese can make the perfect snack.
Recipe
Makes 6 piadine. Total time (excluding cooling time): 25 minutes

3 ½ cups (16 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
6 tablespoons (3 ounces) lard (or butter)
1 tablespoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 ¼ cups warm water

1. **Mix the dough:** Stir together the flour, salt, and baking powder with a spoon. Add the lard and water and mix until all the ingredients come together, continuing to add water until you have a firm dough. 10 minutes

2. **Knead:** Knead the dough until very smooth and soft. 5 minutes

3. **Shape:** Divide the dough into 6 pieces, and form each piece into a ball. Wrap each ball with plastic wrap to prevent from drying. Roll out each small ball of dough until quite thin. 5 minutes

4. **Cook:** Heat a griddle to a very, very hot temperature and cook each piadina as quickly as possible, piercing the bread with a fork and turning it a few times. When it is cooked, the piadina should be scorched in some places, and almost uncooked in others. 5 minutes

5. **Cool:** Cool on racks. ½ hour
Focaccia

Region of Origin: Genova, Liguria

Now found everywhere across Italy, and incredibly popular internationally, this flatbread has its true home in Genova. *Focaccia* is to Genova as *pizza* is to Napoli. The sharp, salty air characteristic of Genova and the Ligurian coastline, makes it hard for yeast to rise properly, and the high moisture content in the atmosphere also prevents the crust from hardening and causes bread to go moldy soon after baking. The Genovese solved this bread problem by inventing a thin loaf that required less leavening than normal bread, and could be eaten straight from the oven. It is called *focaccia* in much of Liguria, though as you get closer to France the name changes to *sardenara* or *sardinaire*, similar to the nearby Provençal name, “*sardenaira*”. It is known as *schiacciata* in Firenze and parts of Puglia, and sometimes called *pinze* in other southern regions.

*Foccace* are traditionally very simple; the delicious flavor coming most importantly from the high-quality Ligurian olive oil. Historically, olives and olive oil were the main Genovese exports, and, though it may seem paradoxical, olive oil sometimes cost less than flour. Therefore, there was no reason for Ligurians to cut back olive oil as they often needed to with wheat flour, which was not a local product. *Foccace* were made thin and flat, with dimples across the top crust which would collect oil in little pools. Varieties in *focaccia* use fresh herbs, garlic, olives, onions or other flavorful vegetables, *pancetta* or *prosciutto crudo*, or grated cheeses. They are usually savory, but there are sweet ones common across Italy as well. *Schiacciata con l’uva* from Toscana is sweetened with sugar and filled with black grapes, Vin Santo-soaked raisins, and walnuts. In Bologna, there are *foccace* made with brioche-like dough, and served with *gelato*. You should feel
free to embellish your focaccia with whatever flavors you desire. My only advice would be that, as with pizza, simplicity is often better than using everything in your pantry as a topping.

Recipe
Makes 1 pan of focaccia. Total time (excluding cooling time): 2 hours + overnight + 3 ¼ hours

5 cups (22.5 ounces) unbleached bread flour
2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons instant yeast
6 tablespoons olive oil
2 cups water, at room temperature
⅛ to ½ cup herb oil (warm olive oil slightly and add garlic, fresh herbs, salt, and pepper)
Toppings (see page 42)

1. Mix the dough: Stir together the flour, salt, and yeast with a spoon. Add the oil and water (see Illustration 5) and mix with a large metal spoon until all the ingredients form a wet, sticky ball.

Repeatedly dip one of your hands or the metal spoon into cold water and use it, much like a dough hook, to work the dough vigorously into a smooth mass while rotating the bowl in a circular motion with the other hand. Reverse the circular motion a few times to develop the gluten further. Do this for 3 to 5 minutes or until the dough is smooth and the ingredients are evenly distributed. The dough should clear the sides of the bowl but stick to the bottom of the bowl. You may need to add additional flour to firm up the dough enough to clear the sides of the bowl, but the dough should still be quite soft and sticky (see Illustration 6).
2. **Rest**: Sprinkle enough flour on the counter to make a bed about 6 inches square. Using a scraper or spatula dipped in water, transfer the sticky dough to the bed of flour and dust liberally with flour, patting the dough into a rectangle. Wait 5 minutes for the dough to relax.

3. **“Stretch and fold”**: Lift the dough from each end, stretching it to twice its size. Fold the dough over itself, letter style, to return it to a rectangular shape. Mist the top of the dough with spray oil, dust with flour, and loosely cover with plastic wrap. Repeat this process twice more, letting the dough rest covered for 15 minutes in between each stretch-and-fold.

4. **Rise**: Allow the covered dough to ferment on the counter for 1 hour. It should swell but not necessarily double in size.

5. **Shape**: Line a 17 by 12-inch sheet pan with baking parchment and drizzle ¼ cup olive oil over the paper. Spread the oil around with your hands or a brush, to coat the surface. Transfer the dough to the pan, maintaining its rectangular shape as much as possible. Spoon half the herb oil over the dough. Use your fingertips to dimple the dough and spread it to fill the pan simultaneously. Do not use the flat of your hands (only the fingertips) to avoid tearing or ripping the dough. Try to keep the thickness as uniform as possible across the surface. Dimpling allows you to degas only part of the dough while preserving gas in the non-dimpled sections. If the dough becomes too springy, let it rest for about 15 minutes and then continue dimpling. Don’t worry if you are unable to fill the pan 100 percent, especially the corners. As the dough relaxes and proofs, it will spread out naturally. Use more herb oil as needed to ensure that the entire surface is coated with oil.
6. **Retard:** Loosely cover the pan with plastic wrap. Refrigerate the dough overnight (or for up to 3 days).

7. **Proof:** Remove the pan from the refrigerator 3 hours before baking. Drizzle additional herb oil over the surface and dimple it in. (You can use all of it if you want; the dough will absorb it even though it looks like a lot.) Add any other pre-proof toppings desired (see page 42). Again, cover the pan with plastic and proof the dough at room temperature for 3 hours, or until the dough doubles in size, rising to a thickness of nearly 1 inch (see Illustration 7).

8. **Prepare the oven:** Have a baking stone in place in the center of the oven. Preheat the oven to 500°F at least an hour before baking.

9. **Bake:** Gently place any pre-bake toppings on the dough, and place the pan in the oven. Lower the oven setting to 450°F and bake for 10 minutes. Rotate the pan 180 degrees and continue baking the focaccia for 5 to 10 minutes or until it begins to turn a light golden brown. If you are using any during-bake toppings, sprinkle them on at this point and continue baking an additional 5 minutes or so. The internal temperature of the dough should register above 200°F (measured in the center), and the cheese (if using), should melt but not burn.

10. **Cool:** Remove the pan from the oven and immediately transfer the focaccia out of the pan onto a cooling rack. Allow the focaccia to cool for at least 20 minutes before slicing or serving.
Toppings for *focaccia*:

Peter Reinhart designates three types of toppings for *focaccia*: Those that go on before proofing the dough (pre-proof), those that go on just before baking (pre-bake), and those that go on while the focaccia is baking (during-bake), usually in the last few minutes. Here is a sample list of topping ideas for your focaccia.

**PRE-PROOF TOPPINGS:**
Marinated sun-dried tomatoes; olives; roasted garlic; fresh herbs; walnuts, pine nuts, or other nuts; and sautéed mushrooms, red or green peppers, or onions.

**PRE-BAKE TOPPINGS:**
High-moisture cheeses, such as blue cheese, fresh mozzarella, and feta cheese, and cooked ground meat or meat strips. Also coarse salt or sugar.

**DURING-BAKE TOPPINGS:**
Dry or semihard cheeses, such as Parmesan, Romano, regular mozzarella, Jack, Cheddar, and Swiss.
4 L’Italia del pane. 50, 135, 176, 316.
5 Recipe adapted from Field, 107-108.
6 Recipe adapted from Field, 115-117.
7 L’Italia del Pane, Slow Food Editore, 217.
8 Recipe adapted from Field, 95-97.
9 Recipe adapted from Field, 108-110.
11 Recipe adapted from Reinhart, 198-201. Field, 100-103.
14 Recipe adapted from Field, 119-120.
15 Recipe adapted from Field, 183-185.
16 Recipe adapted from Reinhart, 129-132. Field, 121-124.
17 Recipe adapted from Field, 219-222.
19 Recipe adapted from Field, 206-207.
21 Recipe adapted from Field, 244-246.
24 Recipe adapted from Reinhart, 159-167. Field, 269-271.
25 Reinhart, 167.


