



Baking

Dough!

If only we'd known the surprisingly simple secrets of perfect French bread sooner. Happily, Breton chef and baker Richard Bertinet is on a mission to spread the word. After a day at his Bath cookery school, Tonia George is converted

RECIPES BY **RICHARD BERTINET** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JENNY ZARINS**

'I still get very excited about the smell of freshly baked bread,'

confesses Richard Bertinet. "It's like an addiction." On the morning of one of his bread-making courses at his cookery school in Bath, the kitchen is filled with the scent of yeast. The school is a hive of activity: students slap dough on the benches; timers beep as batches of baguettes are ready to remove from the oven; and everyone looks on in wonder as loaves of artisan bread fill up the baskets around the room.

"Good bread starts with a good dough," explains Richard. "People look at bread completely differently once they have spent the day here. First, they are all surprised to see how wet the bread dough must be. They want to add flour when working it, but this makes for a dense brick." This is our first lesson; our second is vocabulary. "I 'work' the dough to trap the air," says Richard. "I don't 'knead' and I hate the term 'knocking back': instead, I 'fold'."

He lifts the dough then slaps it down on the worktop, working quickly so it doesn't stick. The technique does take a bit of getting used to, but once it's mastered, we have a basic white dough that is the starting point for all sorts of breads and also our lunch, a leek and Gruyère *flamiche*.

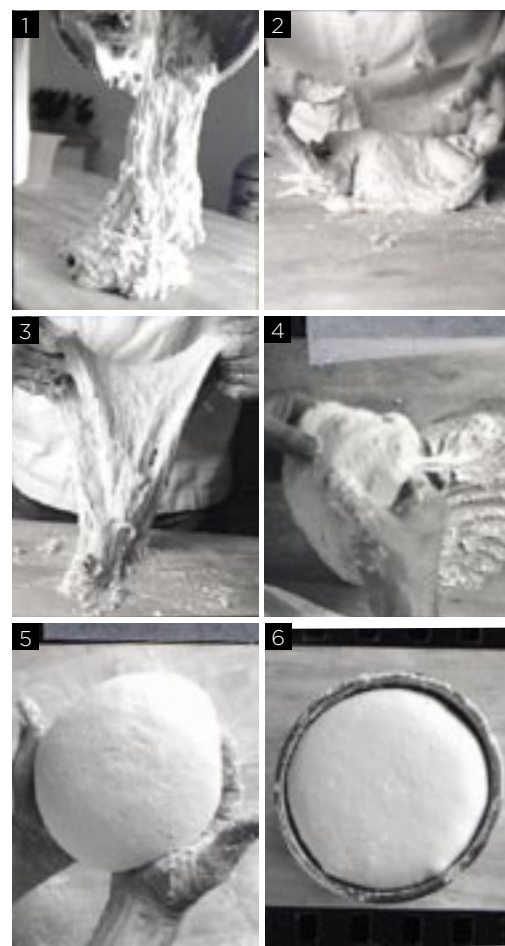
We slide our dough onto the wooden lids of champagne cases – the ideal size for transferring bread to the oven. The atmosphere becomes tense as the speedy loading of ovens commences. One of the students sprays water inside them to create a mass of steam. Details like this create the perfect crust. "You can hear a good crust singing," says Richard.

There's a real precision to Richard's baking and he is a perfectionist – his assistants can tell from his voice on the phone if the morning's bread was good – but it's the quirky shapes and irregular crusts that give his bread distinction.



Rather like the sign that sways and squeaks outside the school – they could get it fixed, but it's more charming to hear that occasional creak as the wind blows.

For information about Richard's cookery courses, visit thebertinetkitchen.com. His books 'Dough' (£15.99) and 'Crust' (£19.99) are published by Kyle Cathie.



White bread dough

• **PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES, PLUS 1 HOUR RESTING**

10g Yeast or 7g dried easy-blend yeast
500g Strong bread flour
10g Salt

Rub the yeast into the flour using your fingertips as if making a crumble (if using easy-blend, just mix it in). Add the salt and 350ml water. Hold the bowl with one hand and mix the ingredients around with the other hand or with the rounded end of a plastic scraper for 2–3 minutes, until the dough starts to form. Pour the dough onto an unfloured work surface. It will feel soft and moist, and look like sticky porridge (**picture 1**).

Forget the way you might think you knead dough. Don't pummel it with the heels of your hands: instead slide your fingers under it like two forks with your thumbs on top (**picture 2**), swing it upwards and slap it back down away from you. Stretch the front of the dough towards you (**picture 3**), then lift it back over itself in an arc. Repeat until the dough feels smooth, silky and elastic (**picture 4**). Allow 5–10 minutes.

Lightly flour the surface of the dough and fold the edges over to make a ball. Turn it over so the top is smooth (**picture 5**). Lightly flour a bowl and place the dough in it. Cover the bowl with a clean tea towel and leave it to rise for 1 hour, until almost doubled in size (**picture 6**).





Fougasse

Crunchy on the outside and soft inside, *fougasses* freeze well. Bake them at 230°C/gas 8 for 6–7 minutes, then remove from the oven, cool, wrap in freezer bags and freeze. To use, bake from frozen at 200°C/gas 6 for 12 minutes.

- **MAKES 6**
- **POST-DOUGH PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES**
- **COOKING: 12–15 MINUTES**

1 batch White bread dough, rested for 1 hour (see page 84)
50g White or maize flour, for dusting

Preheat the oven to 240°C/gas 9 (or as high as your oven will go). Flour a work surface. Once the dough has rested, use the rounded end of a scraper to scoop it out from the bowl without stretching it. Taking care not to deflate it, let it spread out on the worktop and flour generously. Cut the dough into two rectangles, then cut each piece into 3 rectangles. Keep the pieces well floured, especially at the edges.

Using the flat edge of the scraper, make a diagonal cut across the centre of one piece of the dough, cutting all the way through to the work surface but being careful not to go up to the edges. Using scissors, make three smaller, diagonal cuts fanning out on either side of the central one. Put your fingers into the slits and gently open them out to form holes. Flour the cuts. Repeat on the other pieces.

Lift the *fougasses* onto a lightly floured baking tray and slide onto a second upside-down tray. Using a water spray, mist the inside of the oven. Turn the heat down to 230°C/gas 8 and bake for 12–15 minutes until golden brown.

PER FOUGASSE 337 KCALS/1.4G FAT/0.3G SATURATED FAT/1.7G SALT/1.4G SUGARS



Pain façon beaucaire

The true *pain beaucaire* originated on the Cote d'Azur and uses a special local wheat. This version uses white dough but is made with the same folding technique, which looks smart.

- **MAKES 8 SMALL ROLLS**
- **POST-DOUGH PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES**
- **COOKING: 12–15 MINUTES**

1 batch White bread dough, rested for 1 hour (see page 84)
50g White flour, for dusting
50g Wholemeal flour, for dusting

Preheat the oven to 240°C/gas 9 (or as high as your oven will go). Once the dough has rested, use the rounded end of a scraper to transfer the dough onto a work surface dusted with a little white flour and flatten it out with your hands into a 25cm x 35cm rectangle. Brush with a little water and sprinkle on some wholemeal flour. Fold the dough over lengthways, leaving 3cm of the bottom half exposed. Brush this edge with water, fold it back over the dough and seal.

Lay a well-floured, clean tea towel on the worktop. Place the dough, seam-side-down, on the tea towel and flour the exposed surface. Cover with another tea towel and leave to prove somewhere warm and draught-free for 30 minutes.

With a sharp, serrated knife, cut the dough widthways into 8 x 3cm slices. Place the pieces on a baking tray on their side, open out the holes gently so they look a bit like oval doughnuts with smaller, thinner holes. Mist the inside of the oven with a water spray. Bake the rolls in the oven for 12–15 minutes until golden brown.

PER ROLL 252 KCALS/1.1G FAT/0.2G SATURATED FAT/1.3G SALT/1.1G SUGARS



Flamiche

In Champagne and Lorraine, they say that they were making this flatbread long before the Italians made pizza famous.

- **SERVES 6**
- **POST-DOUGH PREPARATION: 30 MINUTES**
- **COOKING: 15–20 MINUTES**

1 batch White bread dough, rested for 1 hour (see page 84)
50g White flour, for dusting
25g Butter
2 Leeks, finely sliced
3 Eggs
300g Crème fraîche
A pinch Grated nutmeg
50g Gruyère, grated

Preheat the oven to 240°C/gas 9 (or as high as your oven will go). Lightly flour a 45cm x 35cm baking tray. Once the dough has rested, use the rounded end of a scraper to transfer it to the baking tray. Using your fingers, flatten and dimple the dough to fit the tray. Ridge the edges all the way round so they're high enough to hold in the topping. Cover with a clean tea towel while you prepare the topping.

Heat the butter in a frying pan, add the leeks and sauté until they start to colour. In a bowl, mix the eggs and crème fraîche together, add the leeks and the nutmeg, and season. Spread over the dough and scatter the Gruyère over the top.

Bake for 15–20 minutes until golden brown with crisp edges. Remove from the oven and transfer to a wire rack to cool slightly. Cut into slices and eat while still warm.

PER SERVING 706 KCALS/37.9G FAT/19.9G SATURATED FAT/2.9G SALT/3.5G SUGARS



Mini baguettes

The cuts along the top of a baguette are not just decorative: they let the crust burst open so it is good and crunchy.

- **MAKES 8**
- **POST-DOUGH PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES, PLUS 5 MINUTES RESTING AND 45 MINUTES–1 HOUR PROVING**
- **COOKING: 12–15 MINUTES**

1 batch White bread dough, rested for 1 hour (see page 84)
50g White flour, for dusting

Preheat the oven to 240°C/gas 9 (or as high as your oven will go). Line a baking tray with a lightly floured, clean tea towel. Once the dough has rested, use the rounded end of a plastic scraper to turn the dough out onto a floured work surface. Using the sharp side of the scraper, cut the dough into 8 pieces, roll each one into a ball and rest for 5 minutes.

Lightly dust your worktop with flour. Turn the first ball rounded-side down and flatten it with the heel of your hand into a flat oval. Fold the longer side of the dough into the middle and use the heel of your hand to press it down and seal. Bring the other side over to the middle and press down to seal. Fold in half lengthways and seal the edges to make a log shape. Roll to extend to the length of your baking tray. Repeat with the other balls.

Lay the baguettes on the tray, pleating the tea towel between them. Prove for 45–60 minutes, until they double in size. Transfer to another baking tray; make 3 or 4 diagonal cuts on the top of each baguette. Mist the inside of the oven generously with water. Bake for 12–15 minutes until golden.

PER MINI BAGUETTE 253 KCALS/1.1G FAT/0.2G SATURATED FAT/1.3G SALT/1.1G SUGARS