

Baking Bliss

BY LIESEL SCHMIDT

If you've ever smelled the aroma of fresh bread baking or torn into the pillowy soft interior of a crusty loaf still warm from the oven, the thought of living "by bread alone" certainly seems tempting – and easily within the realm of possibility.

It was this very love of the loaf that inspired longtime friends and seasoned restaurant industry insiders Dave Rauschkolb and Phil McDonald to partner up and start Black Bear Bread Company. They rolled out their first batches of bliss in spring 2016 at the Seaside Farmer's Market to give the locals a taste of the breads and baked goods they planned to feature at their soon-to-be-opened bakery and café.

It wasn't an idea that rose out of thin air. Quite the contrary, as the two had long been working on the idea to launch a business together but hadn't quite found the right niche. And filling niches in the market is Rauschkolb's expertise – having opened Bud & Alley's, Taco Bar, and Pizza Bar.

It was at Pizza Bar that talented chef Phil at last got to showcase his skills working directly with Rauschkolb. "Phil is a phenomenal chef, and he's done incredible things at Pizza Bar while he's been there," says Rauschkolb, who encouraged one of McDonald's unique talents to rise – literally – as one of the cornerstones of the menu at Pizza Bar: baking fresh breads and doughs for their gourmet pies.

"While I was working in New York, I worked in a restaurant where they were doing absolutely everything from fresh from scratch, right there in-house, from baking the bread everyday to breaking down and butchering their meats," McDonald says. "The baker taught me how to make fresh sourdough from a starter, using the process of fermentation for natural leavening instead of making the bread with commercial yeast, and it creates such a fantastic product. The taste is amazing," he continues.

That amazing taste certainly gave Rauschkolb and McDonald something to chew on, especially in light of the fact that nowhere in the area was there a bakery or café offering freshly baked breads, pastries, and coffees. And so their half-baked idea for creating a partnership of some kind came to life, and the pair set out to found



Artisan Sourdough Bread

similarities to a croissant, but sprinkled with sugar and salt before being baked in a muffin tin. A breadly delight common to the French region of Brittany, Swenterton has been baking them like mad over the past year that she's been working with McDonald and Rauschkolb, using them as a canvas for fresh fruits and nuts and anything else that inspires her creativity.

It's the perfect meeting of the minds, it seems, as the whole concept behind Black Bear is, of course, that naturally leavening sourdough.

Sourdough that serves as the foundation for a full menu of items that showcase McDonald's culinary skills in their fresh breakfast and lunch dishes as well as Swenterton's addictive pastries and breads. Complementary to that is a coffee bar featuring Stumptown Coffee Roasters from Portland and an impressive offering of "dynamically seasonal and sustainable food," McDonald says. "Every single thing on the menu at the café is going to be locally grown and sourced produce and meats from farms where we have a personal relationship with the farmers. We've been to the farms, we've seen the cows, the pigs, the chickens. We know how they're being treated and how they're being raised, and we're passing that down to the customer, making sure we're doing things that are sustainable and responsible."

Sustainable and responsible in every bite, the food from Black Bear Bread Company is something that embodies the soul of good bread – wholesome, comforting, and absolutely tasty.



Phil, Dave and Debbie



Fresh baked goods



Pop Up Market

Black Bear. The dynamic duo, however, needed to become a trio in order for their plans to be successful, as McDonald's baking skills were not quite fortified enough to carry things on his own. Quite fortuitously after the baker they initially hired moved out of the area, they welcomed Debbie Swenterton to the team as the "head dough slinger", putting her hands to work kneading everything from sourdough loaves to baguettes, bagels, and something quite fancy: a buttery, layered pastry called Kouign-amman that bears

Black Bear Bread Company is located at 26 Logan Lane, Santa Rosa Beach, Florida 32459. Open daily from 7:00a.m.- 4:00p.m. For more information, call (850) 588-1703 or visit www.blackbearbreadco.com.