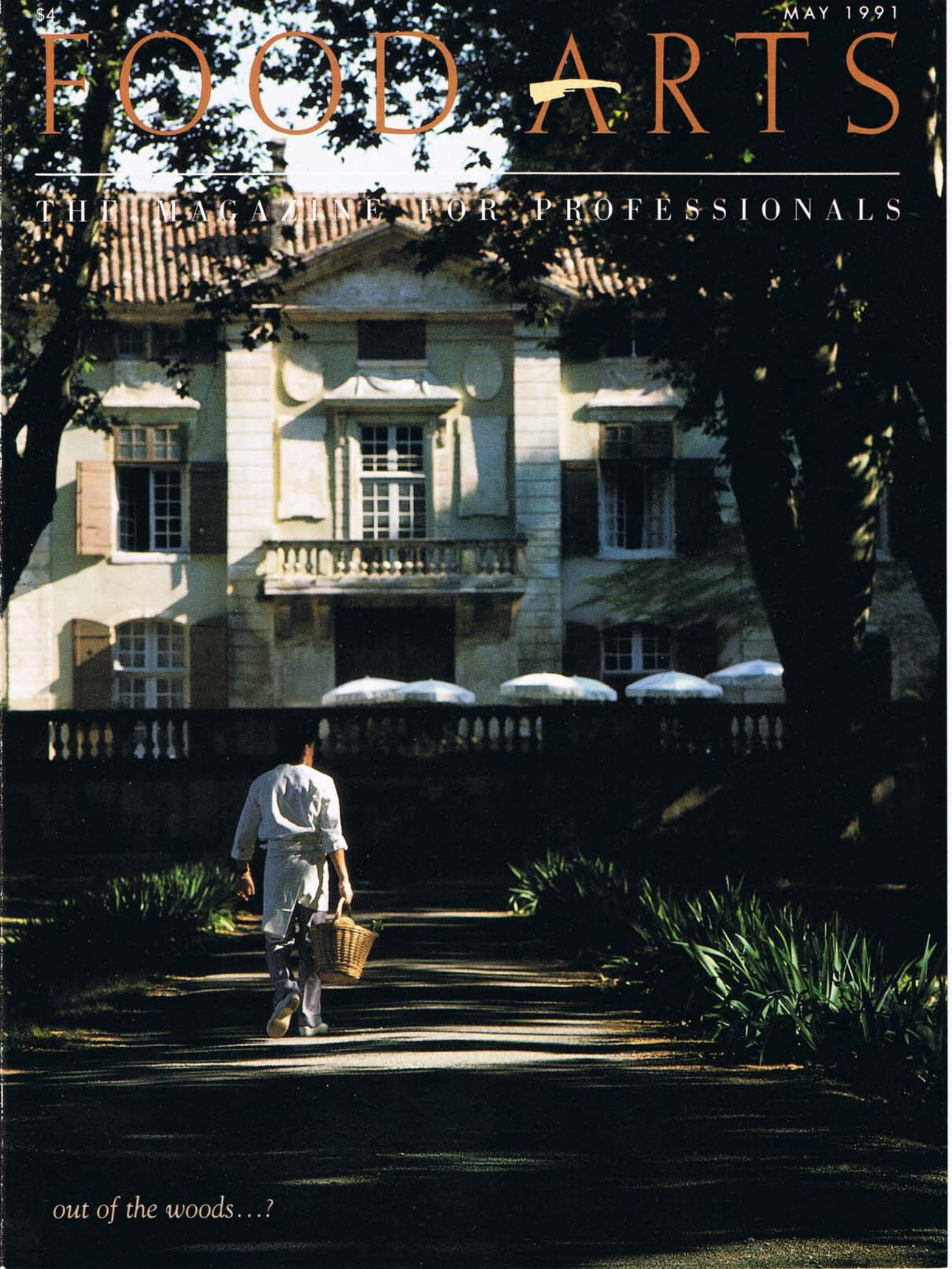


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# FOOD ARTS

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*out of the woods...?*



# and Rise Shine

For operators who have made their bread their business, superior baking equipment is *not* an option. Marilyn Myers pokes her head in some ovens.

Good bread is good for business.

Some restaurants, like the **Popover Cafe** in New York City, make baked goods their profitable signature item. Others, like the **Ark Restaurant and Bakery** in Nahcotta, Washington, have found that an irresistibly poignant

smell of yeast wafting from the kitchen can be parlayed into bankable dough.

And an increasing number of restaurants are baking on premise because the chef has the training to do so. "Chefs today know how to do everything from chocolate to bread baking,"

notes Rich Wall, technical manager at Rondo and a spokesman for the Bakery Equipment Manufacturers Association. "So there's a good deal of crossover now, with restaurants making their own products and setting up a small baking section within the kitchen."

But for good bread to spell good business, the operation must make financial sense. "It has to be reasonably cost-effective," Wall says. "A lot depends on the volume of the business, and if there's a payback."

The chief stumbling block is the sobering truth that baking equipment doesn't come cheap. As a result, chefs and restaurateurs must give long, hard thought to their purchases.

**Carol Baer**, owner of the Popover Cafe, says that when she expanded the kitchen and the front of house—adding 16 seats to the original 100—it was crucial to test the big convection oven she planned to buy. She went downtown to **Umanoff and Parsons Bakery** in TriBeCa,

with batter and custard cups in hand, to see firsthand how the Blodgett double-stack gas convection ovens work.

"I was afraid that the big fan would blow the tops off the popovers," Baer says. "It's a very wet batter. They collapse pretty easily." Baer also wanted an oven with glass fronts. "I really do have to be able to look at the popovers without opening the doors," she says. "Baking them isn't an automatic process."

Baer found that her popovers popped perfectly, and ordered a new Blodgett oven. She now bakes 180 to 200 popovers in it at a time. "We tried to bake them in the range oven," she says, "but it just wasn't reliable."

At **Domaine Chandon** in Napa Valley, chef **Philippe Jeanty** uses both a "very old" Vulcan deck/pizza oven and a Montague double-door convection oven for bread and brioche baking.

He starts the molded breads (every-

thing from black and green olive to caramelized onion) in the deck oven. Then, once the loaves are partially cooked, he unmolds and finishes them in the convection oven so that they brown evenly. Likewise, brioches are baked in the convection oven because, as Jeanty says, "I like to have a nice golden color all around the bread."

Jeanty is convinced that freshly baked bread "really helps in the overall experience of eating out." It's also a highly sensory experience. "I *love* making those breads," he says. "We're located next to the winery and the visitor center so people can smell the bread all through the winery. It drives them crazy."

If he were to buy other ovens, Jeanty says he'd like a deck oven with a steam option. "It helps you to make a more crusty bread," he explains.

But when it comes to a dough mixer, Jeanty is still happy with his 40- and 80-quart Hobart mixers which are "strong enough to pull a truck."

At the Ark Restaurant and Bakery, co-owner and baker **Nanci Main** also relies on her old Hobart and has found that the "big-as-a-bathtub" 60-quart model is strong enough to handle even her French bread dough. "It takes two of us to take it off and take it over to the table," Main claims.

At that point the dough is scaled to five pounds and placed in what Main calls "the great divide"—an ancient Dutchess Tool Company dough divider. Before acquiring this manually operated piece of equipment, she scaled each roll separately. Now, one-hand action cuts 30 equal-sized pieces from a large round. Having an automatic divider/rounder isn't an option for her. "I feel very strongly about my energies going into my dough," she says, "and hand rolling is part of that. I would never use a machine to shape it."

At the Ark, baking is done in a Montague deck oven designed for pizzas. Main creates her own steam with two homespun methods: First she adds ice cubes to a pan, then she mists each French loaf before it goes into the oven.

## RACKING IT UP

At bakeries where huge batches are the order of the day, the process is usually more mechanized. **Janos Kiss**, corporate executive chef and assistant vice president of **Hyatt Hotels Corporation**, notes that Hyatt kitchens are usually equipped with steam-injected rotating ovens. "The rotating ovens are still the best for pastries," Kiss says. Three ovens often used



David Auer (shown above and on previous page), co-owns Baking by the Auers in Michigan with his wife, Terry. The Auers depend on two Rondo rack ovens and a Pavailler deck oven with loader to efficiently run their full-service bakery, which sells retail and to Detroit restaurants.

Photos by Andrew Sacks/Black Star.

at Hyatt Hotels are from Cutler, Bakers Pride and Lucks.

But Kiss finds that rolling rack ovens are also useful for quantity baking. "They save time and space," he says, referring to the upright ovens that accommodate their own special rolling racks.

Alto-Shaam, according to spokesperson Mary Krebs, produces one oven that

accommodates a roll-in cart for 20 sheet pans. "And if you want to serve warm pastries," Krebs says, "you can roll the cart right out of the oven into a companion-piece holding cabinet." In other words, you can proof it in the holding cabinet, roll it into the oven to bake it off and then roll it back into the holding cabinet to keep it warm for at least an hour.

At **Baking by the Auers** in Southfield, Michigan, **David Auer** uses two rack ovens by Rondo. "We go through hundreds of bake-sheet trays a day," he reports.

The European-style bakery he

runs with his wife, **Terry**, also has a Pavailler deck oven complete with an oven loader. Since their full-service bakery sells retail as well as to restaurants in the greater metropolitan Detroit area, Auer needs to bake efficiently. "I've got a lot of equipment, basically, to help me produce lots of food," Auer says.

At **Tom Cat Bakery**, in Long Island City, New York, **Noel Comess** uses two Bongards for baking. "They're a modern incarnation of old village ovens," he says. "They have stone floors and a low dome so the top of the loaf is close to the top of the oven. It provides even and concentrated heat."

This wholesale bakery, which supplies many upscale restaurants and gourmet stores in New York City, mainly bakes free-form breads in the Bongard ovens, which come with built-

in steam systems as well as loading mechanisms.

To mix the dough, Comess uses one 60-quart Hobart and two Mahot fork mixers from France. Comess says the fork mixers aerate the dough evenly. "It's also gentle," he adds. "It doesn't tear the dough."

Another machine with a gentle touch that is used at Tom Cat is the Bertrand dough divider. "It's one of the industry standards," Comess reports. And, because the cavity where the dough is dropped is round, less pressure is required to shape it. All of the equipment is pretty basic and pretty traditional. "I recently went to an equipment show in France—the *ne plus ultra* of equipment shows—and found that there wasn't much that was new," Comess says. "Besides, I've learned that the more you do by hand, the better it is."

**Nancy Silverton** at **LaBrea Bakery** in Los Angeles agrees. All of the hearth breads the bakery makes for the adjacent restaurant, **Campanile**, are hand-shaped; the baguettes are hand-finished and raised on floured boards lined with cloth. LaBrea also sells its goods retail and wholesale.

At the moment, Silverton says she's not particularly pleased with any of her equipment, especially the ovens. So she's looking around for other options.

One that's caught her eye is a \$60,000 German thermo-roll oven by Daub. "It's a hybrid between a rack and a hearth," Silverton says, with each level of the rack sitting above a hearthlike slab. With it, there's rack oven ease-of-handling, but deck oven even-heating.

Steve Bloom of Allied Bakery Equipment Company in Santa Fe Springs, California, is the United States distributor for Daub ovens, though he hasn't sold any here yet. The Daub ovens caught his eye a couple of years ago at the last large German bakery show.

Daub uses a thermal-oil system to heat coils in each deck. Because thermal oil has a heat content that's higher than any other medium, Bloom says, "the heat from it mimics the characteristics of a brick oven." Because of this high energy content, "the temperature doesn't come down when you put in the bread, like it does in a rack oven. But," he adds, "unlike a brick oven, you can change the temperature."

Bloom admits that the cost of Daub ovens is high. "Even in Germany they're expensive," he says. "It's the technology that makes it that way, but that's also what makes the ovens superior." ■



Mechanization helps chefs move their buns at bakeries that produce large batches: Hyatt Hotels Corporation utilizes rolling rack ovens and steam-injected rotating ovens from Lucks, Cutler and Bakers Pride. Pictured: Bruno Jappert, executive chef, Hyatt Regency, Dallas-Fort Worth (left), and Janos Kiss, corporate chef and assistant vice president, Hyatt Hotels Corporation. Photo by Phil Huber/Black Star.

#### TOPPING THE CHARTS:

Some leading manufacturers reveal their best-selling pieces of baking equipment.

**Alto-Shaam:** combination convection oven/steamer

**Garland:** full-size convection oven, deep depth

**Hobart:** 60-quart, floor model, upright mixer

**Montague:** gas convection oven

**Rondo:** sheeter

**Vulcan-Hart:** two-pan deck oven with either an 8- or 12-inch throat