



the BREAD PEDDLER

A Slice of Life in Olympia

BY ETHAN CHUNG | PHOTOS BY JEFF HOBSON

J'ai faim. French for "I'm hungry." It might be the only bit of French you need to know when you visit The Bread Peddler, a bustling artisan bakery and café on Capitol Way in Olympia.

Even if you don't speak the romance language, that's absolutely fine. Owner André LeRest, a Frenchman from Brittany, France, will welcome you with open »

THE BREAD PEDDLER

222 N. Capitol Way, Olympia

breadpeddler.com, 360.352.1175

Hours: Monday to Friday, 7am to 6pm;

Saturday and Sunday, 7am to 5pm

Lunch, 11am to 3pm



arms, heavily accented, yet perfect, English and perhaps a cup of Batdorf and Bronson coffee and one of his delectable hand-made croissants anyway.

On an average Wednesday, The Bread Peddler is busy. The space is bright and airy, but buzzes with conversation and clink and clatter of coffee cups and plates. You can see bakers and pastry chefs busy at work and covered in flour behind the free-standing wall that separates the counter and display cases from the kitchen. Baristas and servers take orders and box pastries and sandwiches for hungry customers. The order line gets 10 people deep, but LeRest shrugs his shoulders and says he thinks it's actually pretty slow.

Olympians are big fans of this place. "They have the best coffee in town, hands down, and I also love the soups, tarts and pastries," says Reanna Kerstan, an Olympia resident. One loyal customer even said that her boyfriend, who'd recently spent six weeks in Europe and a significant amount of time in France, believes that The Bread Peddler is better than any patisserie or bakery he visited while abroad. LeRest is on a first-name

basis with many of his customers, and The Bread Peddler is a frequent stop for many French natives who live in the South Sound area.

LeRest opened The Bread Peddler five years ago after he sold his Port Hadlock wholesale bakery. His place in Olympia still does some wholesale business, with LeRest himself making deliveries to a few local coffee shops and restaurants, but now he's mostly interested in the retail and customer service aspect that comes with running a café. "We have such a diverse customer base, all walks of life come in here and I really love it," says LeRest. "The price point is reasonable and the food is really good, and it's informal. I think people like that."

The Bread Peddler offers breakfast every day. Choose from poached eggs to frittatas and oeuif en cocotte, which is eggs baked in a ramekin, with ham, mushrooms, Mornay sauce and Yukon potatoes. Customer favorites on the lunch menu include delectable sandwiches like tuna Nicoise and croque monsieur, all on house-baked bread. And of course don't miss the chance for a delicious pastry, of which the all-butter croissants are a must-try.

LeRest has no formal culinary education. Like many who toil passionately in the food industry, his culinary journey began because of his mother, who he says was an excellent cook. LeRest is a self-taught baker, and started out by baking a loaf here and there for friends, and they urged him to continue his to hone his craft. Years of trial and error have brought him to this point, where he and his staff bake some of the finest artisan European style breads in the South Sound. "What differentiates my bakery from maybe a lot of the other bakeries, I always, always, always emphasize flavor over sweetness. Coming from a European tradition we try not to use too much sugar in our pastries. I always emphasize fermentation. The taste you get is from the fermentation ... it takes years to be a good baker because of that.

"In pastries you use the term recipe. A recipe is a finite amount of stuff. In bread baking you use the term formula. It's a different set of parameters that you have to use and vary. That's an important thing to remember," he said.

According to LeRest, good bread takes time. It's important for it to have rest. Many bakeries will bake bread overnight, or



in a matter of hours, but he bakes all his bread over the course of two days.

The Bread Peddler's most popular bread offering is the levain batard, a sour white bread with a dark, crisp crust and moist, chewy crumb (batard is the French word for "bastard," and this bread gets its name because it's neither a loaf or baguette.) Also available is a 100-percent whole rye, which you'll be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the South Sound. Specialty breads are also baked throughout the week, including rosemary loafs and more.

The café and bakery has carved out a nice niche in Olympia. Its customers are proof, and LeRest is happy with what he has now. But like any good business owner, he's eager for more support. He's considering expansion or a new location in a few years, and wants to be a part of the local farmers market ("We're a little late to the party because we're the new kids on the block, but perhaps soon we can be there.").

LeRest wants more people to experience what The Bread Peddler has to offer. "Don't be intimidated. We're not a fancy French restaurant. It's relaxed, with good food," he said. Hear this: J'ai faim, indeed. ⑤