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Breaking Breads: A New World Of Israeli Baking--Flatbreads, Stuffed Breads, Challahs, Cookies, And The Legendary Chocolate Babka



Synopsis

Named one of the Best Cookbooks of the Year by Food & Wine, The Boston Globe, The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The San Francisco Chronicle, USA Today, The Washington Post, and more – Israeli baking encompasses the influences of so many regions – Morocco, Yemen, Germany, and Georgia, to name a few – and master baker Uri Scheft seamlessly marries all of these in his incredible baked goods at his Breads Bakery in New York City and Lehamim Bakery in Tel Aviv. Nutella-filled babkas, potato and shakshuka focaccia, and chocolate rugelach are pulled out of the ovens several times an hour for waiting crowds. In *Breaking Breads*, Scheft takes the combined influences of his Scandinavian heritage, his European pastry training, and his Israeli and New York City homes to provide sweet and savory baking recipes that cover European, Israeli, and Middle Eastern favorites. Scheft sheds new light on classics like challah, babka, and ciabatta – and provides his creative twists on them as well, showing how bakers can do the same at home – and introduces his take on Middle Eastern daily breads like kubaneh and jachnun. The instructions are detailed and the photos explanatory so that anyone can make Scheft's Poppy Seed Hamantaschen, Cheese Bourekas, and Jerusalem Bagels, among other recipes. With several key dough recipes and hundreds of Israeli-, Middle Eastern-, Eastern European-, Scandinavian-, and Mediterranean-influenced recipes, this is truly a global baking bible.

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Customer Reviews

I wanted to love this book, I did. I even gave it as gifts. It's gorgeous, it's backed by impressive credentials: a famous baker, a beloved cuisine, media hype, and my own bias toward Israeli food, but for the home baker I find it seriously lacking. I've made three recipes so far and all of them were riddled with errors: inaccurate proof times, lack of cohesive shaping instructions, recipes that needed altering in one way or another: too much salt, not enough water, incoherent shaping instructions. This isn't a big deal for the experienced baker, but these kinds of errors are disaster for a less experienced cook. Without prior bread baking knowledge these recipes would not have turned out. We're there any recipe testers?? I'll go recipe by recipe. Light brioche was anything but. Proof time was written as 40 min - 1 hour. Note, the recipe includes FROZEN butter. It took over three hours for the dough to warm enough to rise and that was putting it near the fire in the living room. The end result was a slightly dense, overly chewy brioche, a far cry from what I love about brioche: light, airy, pillowy. Focaccia: the instructions manage to be overly verbose and vague at the same time; the amount of shaping and the cryptic instructions on rolling into cylinders multiple times then dimpling kills the beautiful supple pillowness of focaccia. Again, proof times were seriously underestimated. The flavor was seriously lacking, so next time I'll try his rather confusing instructions on prefermenting part of the dough (there's some mathematical computations to sort this out) but I can't imagine a two hour pre ferment to help much. I'd call that an autolyse rather than pre ferment. The cook times are grossly understated for all three of these breads leading me to wonder if these recipes were tested by home cooks. Lastly, the za'atar pitas. This was the most accurate of the three recipes that I tried. The only problem was the baking instructions to cook two trays at once, rotating part way through. The bottom tray poofed beautifully but did not brown, the top tray browned but didn't rise as they should have had I baked the trays one at a time on the baking stone in the bottom of the oven. Like the other three breads they required 25-30% longer bake times than suggested. These are all minor adjustments that any experienced baker can compensate for but the most glaring problems with the book are layout issues. There are photos throughout without instructions on how to achieve such breads, just eye candy. I feel this failing is widespread in cookbooks today, gorgeous impressive books that wow with photography but fall short in instruction. But the largest problem is how the recipes are written, there is no timeline, no

bakers schedule. So you have to read through two, three, four pages adding up proofing times to see how long any particular bread will take. Can it be made in a day, an afternoon, a weekend? You don't know this unless you read through each recipe and with the proof times being wildly inaccurate it's hard to make an educated guess. After making just three breads my book is riddled with notes and adjustments, which is not a good start. I'd suggest this for the experienced baker and I will continue to cook from it, but not with confidence. It's more inspiration, than education.

Most commenters thus far seem a little bit in awe of the beauty of this book, and it is indeed beautiful, but personally, I'm getting tired of the memoir/cookbook/gorgeous photo thing. I look for a book with clear instructions, impeccable proofreading, and interesting recipes. This book mostly supplies those things. But be warned, most of these recipes not only call for but apparently require the use of a stand mixer -- if you don't have one that can handle stiff doughs, don't buy the book. I also found his instructions to be on the skimpy side. Note there is no instruction for the bread on the cover; he only includes a single, simple style of braiding in the book. It's easy to figure out, but I suspect the ring requires more dough, longer braids, and at least possibly a longer baking time. I'd like to be told that rather than have to wonder and experiment myself -- especially for the bread that graces the cover. I am also a little bewildered by some of the proofing times. He says his dough should increase in size by 70 percent after a forty minute proof in a "warm kitchen." Honestly, I think the kitchen would have to be in the upper 90s to achieve that kind of proof, if even then. He does not give temperatures in any event, instead instructing the reader to use "cool" water for example. This is not a huge problem for experienced bakers, but I think he could have given some time/temperature starting points. There also are not a large number of bread recipes, only a few; the remainder is sweets and savory pastries. That's fine, but it is advertised as a bread book and I was hoping for a bit more variety than it offers in that regard. In sum, if all you are looking for is challah, you can find that in many places, including the Internet. If you are looking for a variety of Israeli/Middle Eastern/Jewish flatbreads, don't expect a lot of that here. If you want precise instructions, those aren't here either. If you don't have a stand mixer and aren't about to get one, this book will be of no use to you. But as an introduction to challah and a manual of other sweet and savory baked items, it's pretty good.

In general I would say it's a good book. It's written in a plain and clear language and it has the thing that I find most important in baking books - the ingredients are measured in scale. I do have two complaints though. First- the book could use a lot more pictures. Second- each recipe is for two or

more batches. This I find annoying, because although it's always possible to double the amount of you want to make more than one loaf, it's not anyways that easy dividing the ingredients.

I've made a few breads from this book, most notably the babkhas, using both the advance and basic doughs. They are wonderful with one problem that I encountered today: the rum raisin and cheese babkha. The mix is SO runny that it is impossible to shape the babkha as described in the instructions. I strongly suspect that the ingredients list should specify "one egg yolk" and not a whole egg. It really was a disaster. If anyone else has had this problem or a success with the Rum Raisin and Cheese Babkha, please comment. I'd love to get it right. Another possibility is to use farmer's cheese instead of ricotta, or even cream cheese. If anyone reading this has made this recipe, please comment.

when I was in New York last week...I visited Uri's bakeries both on 16th Street off Broadway and on the West Side on Broadway. Have already made three of the recipes...and this is definitely a cook book worth READING cover to cover... My carry on when I left New York was all from Breeding Breads...and BOY OH BOY were they enjoyed!!!! While I was on 16th Street I had one of the amazing little pizzas too...and am now TOTALLY an addict to the cheese cookies...YUM !!!!!

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