

# Meeting a **KNEAD**

Stretching to put a home-baked offering on the menu could knock you back a bit, however, there are pre-made products out there that could prove just as good. Whatever you decide is best for your business, making the right decision could see your profits rise

**ANDREW DON** REPORTS





**T**he smell of freshly baked bread, like the smell of freshly brewed coffee, is to die for.

It is hardly surprising estate agents recommend vendors bake bread before home viewings: it is a scent that works on the reward centres of the brain and is somewhat different from that which comes from some traditional spit and sawdust hostellers.

Baking bread is a skill that can take years to perfect, but pub chefs that bake daily are onto a winner if they have talent.

Chris Barber, founder and chief executive of hospitality consultancy Catering Business Food Solutions (CBFS), says there are probably no more than a dozen people in the UK right now who bake really well.

"We are not awash with quality artisanal bakers. There are a few up-and-coming pubs beginning to do it and, as pubs tend to morph, it certainly is an opportunity," he believes.

#### Offering a USP

Baking in-house is not essential, although it offers a unique selling point (USP). Many pubs do not have the time or the staff to bake – if not the skills – and there are other solutions that deliver quality.

Some pubs buy fresh, baked bread daily from a local baker, or they source par-baked bread products from food-service suppliers and wholesalers.

Brakes and Bidfood, for example, deliver "a really consistent product that is the same every time and is affordable", says Barber. But seeing a Brakes lorry pulling out, "doesn't exactly inspire you to go to dinner".

Cameron Reid, the chef-proprietor of the New Inn, a traditional village pub in Tholthorpe, North Yorkshire, installed a wood-fired oven last year and operates a small shop by the bar selling daily essentials and fresh bakery products from the oven.

"I installed the oven right in the middle of the restaurant, so it's a bit of a



## Breads are incredibly versatile – suitable for all sorts of dishes

showcase... bread is the biggest draw for customers," he says.

Reid bakes about 12 loaves daily "traditional, a little bit French-style" and with no added chemicals. "Proper artisan bread," he says. He has also made wholemeal bread, focaccia with fresh rosemary and sea salt, and he makes croissants every Friday and Saturday.

Reid has always baked bread wherever he has worked and he completed a five-year apprenticeship with a baker. "That skill has stayed with me. I've always wanted to keep it going and it is a USP."

Every diner gets complimentary bread, olives, butter and oils to begin their experience. "We start to make the bread between 8am and 9am. I've got a sourdough that ferments in the fridge every day and that gets added to the dough for extra flavour."

Reid advises those who do not have the skill to make "very good" bread products to buy them in. "If you have a good local bakery then it's totally fine to buy it in. There's nothing wrong with that. Some that you buy from the catering wholesalers are perfectly acceptable."

#### Repeat business

The Gate, in Bricket Wood, Hertfordshire, and nearby Rose & Crown, in Sandridge, also make their own bread, which executive chef Darren Chason serves with soup and starters.

"I get more repeat business because of that... it's a regular bloomer. Some-

times I do an onion bread or a cheese bread or I might put caraway or poppy seeds on top. It's dictated by what I've got on the menu."

He has nothing against chefs who buy their bread in. "Some of the big names like Gordon Ramsay, Heston Blumenthal and Jamie Oliver will buy their bread in from The Bread Factory, so it's not an uncommon scenario," claims Chason.

Gordon Lauder, managing director of frozen food distributor Central Foods, recommends using speciality breads to help create easy-to-prepare tasty dishes that can be served throughout the day.

"Breads are incredibly versatile – suitable for all sorts of dishes and menu ideas – and are the perfect product to have to hand to help serve something special, at all times of the day.

"The 'breads of the world' category is the fastest growing category in the bread sector, with premium and artisanal products replacing traditional white bread, and there's probably never been as great a choice of breads available for pub operators as there is now," Lauder says, pointing to flatbreads, sub rolls and naans. Lauder adds that the beauty of using frozen breads is that operators have a constant supply, "which is perfect for when demand outstrips supply and also helps to reduce unnecessary food waste".

Butt Foods, based in Nottingham, has its own craft-baked flatbread brand, Baked Earth, and it has added a "chef's corner" section to its website that lists simple recipes from around the world to inspire chefs and operators with different ways to serve flatbreads.

Butt Foods managing director David Williams says one of the beauties of a flatbread or a folded flatbread is that it is something chefs are likely to have in the kitchen anyway, and it does not take much to adapt it to all manner of cuisine.

"Whether it's Caribbean, Indian, Italian... the world really is an operator's oyster when it comes to ways of serving a flatbread," he says. ■

## IT'S A WRAP

Filled wraps are a staple on many pub lunch menus, and tortillas play an important role as a component of many cooked dishes from fajitas to burritos.

Funnybones Foodservice hospitality development chef Tom Styman-Heighton says: "Great-quality wraps can be bought, warmed and served to such a high standard that there is no need to make the products in house."



Pubs are under pressure to add healthy and gluten-free wraps to their menus. "In order to meet this demand, we went back to the home of tortillas to source authentic wraps made to traditional recipes from corn rather than wheat," says Styman-Heighton.

"Non-wheat wraps are common fare in South America, and the health benefits of corn-based wraps are beginning to be recognised in this country."