

# THE “ART” IN ARTISAN

## Olde Hearth Bread Company Rises to the Top

BY LISA A. BEACH

**MOST OF US DON'T HAVE** a lot in common with billionaire Oprah Winfrey, but we do share one passion: We all love bread, especially a great artisan loaf, crusty and golden on the outside, light and airy on the inside and hand-made with a dash of both art and science.

But with the word “artisan” slapped on everything from fast-food burgers to mass-produced potato chips, it's hard to get a handle on what artisan really means.

In its truest sense, artisan refers to a product such as cheese or bread that is handcrafted with limited, high-quality ingredients and made in small batches instead of mass produced.

Look no further than Olde Hearth Bread Company in Casselberry to get an up-close understanding of artisan bread-baking at its finest.

### ORLANDO'S ORIGINAL ARTISAN BAKERY

Olde Hearth co-owners Shannon Talty, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, and Janice (Brahm) Talty, a graduate of the culinary program at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, both carved out a path in baking before they ever met.

In the 1990s Shannon worked for Acme Bread Company, San Francisco Bay's top artisan bakery, learning the fundamentals

of proper mixing, shaping, proofing and baking from a company that set the benchmark for artisan baking. Meanwhile, Janice worked her way up to head baker at one of South Florida's best bakeries, where she mastered the art of using a wood-fired oven from Spain.

They teamed up (both professionally and personally, marrying in 2011) and opened the doors to Olde Hearth Bread Company in 1998 in Casselberry, staking their claim as the Orlando area's first artisan bakery. Starting with a limited product line of 20 to 30 artisan breads and pastries, the Taltys soon expanded into the wholesale business, wowing Central Florida chefs with their top-notch products and unbeatable level of service. With their business thriving, they eventually outgrew their small retail shop and moved to a spacious, 7,500-square-foot facility, also in Casselberry, enabling them to grow their product line to nearly 300 fresh-baked goodies and maintain a loyal, hardworking team of 43 employees.

With growth came the challenge of balancing efficiency and customer satisfaction with a continued commitment to quality through an artisanal approach. Olde Hearth doesn't disappoint.

### SUPERMARKET BREAD VS. ARTISANAL BREAD

To understand the artistry behind what

Olde Hearth does, you need a snapshot of how most “supermarket bread” is made.

Typically, the prepackaged bread found on supermarket shelves might contain 20 ingredients, including chemical additives to extend its shelf life. It's made in an automated, high-production, industrial kitchen, which churns out thousands of loaves a day. Chances are, a real person might never touch a loaf of mass-produced bread, as it moves from giant commercial mixer to enormous bins to conveyor belts to loaf pans to oven to slicer. The entire mechanical process, from prepping the flour to packaging the baked bread, can take five to six hours. Efficient, but definitely not artisanal.

By contrast, Olde Hearth Bread uses a few high-quality ingredients in a slow, hands-on process that takes three to four times longer.

“Artisan, to us, is the way bread is made, rather than its shape,” Shannon explains. “It's made simply, with minimal automation, and you allow it to develop slowly.”

Olde Hearth starts with just four key ingredients: flour, water, yeast and salt, plus natural add-ins for flavor, such as sourdough, eggs, sugar, spices, herbs, fruit, nuts and seeds. They search out the best ingredients they can find, using unbleached, unbromated flour, no preservatives and no artificial flavors.





"Flour has to mellow after it's ground, so we let it rest up to three weeks in our silo," Shannon explains. "Then you don't need chemicals to enhance its ability to form when you're mixing dough."

For specialty ingredients, such as fresh basil and rosemary, Olde Hearth often sources locally. This includes jams from Sunchowder's Emporia in Longwood, which Janice uses to create toaster pastries.

With the finest ingredients and minimal automation, dedicated bakers work around the clock to handcraft bread using an old-world process that stretches for 18 to 24 hours. They mix the ingredients, allowing the dough to slowly ferment, then hand-shape the bread and bake it in small batches on a stone in a rack oven or deck oven.

"With our sourdough, for example, we start with a seed stock of flour and water [referred to as the mother], which I originally brought from California, and we build it into a starter, which sits for 12 hours," Shannon says. "Then we build it into a sponge, where it sits for another 12 hours, then it's made into dough, where it sits another 8 to 10 hours for proofing. It's really a two-day process."

The end result? A tantalizing array of bread heaven such as rye boule, brioche, semolina, focaccia, potato chive sandwich bread, ciabatta, and sun-dried tomato bâtard.

When asked about the key to Olde Hearth's success, Shannon quickly points out, "The people. Our staff like what they're doing and it shows in the final product. They've got a hard work ethic."

## A RABID FOLLOWING

Now in their 19th year of serving Central Florida, Olde Hearth enjoys a rabid following of bread-lovers, from retail customers at their East End Market storefront to wholesale customers in some of Orlando's finest restaurants, including The Ravenous Pig, Luma, and Le Coq au Vin. Besides fantastic baked goods, what's the big draw of Olde Hearth?

"Relationships. They're hard to come by in this business," says Rhys Gawlak, chef/partner at Swine & Sons Provisions and an Olde Hearth customer for 10 years. "Janice and Shannon have worked with me on many of my culinary kitchen adventures. From the beginning, they've shown their commitment to me, and they stand behind their product. Plus, they're willing and able to take a chef's idea from infancy to finished product."

Kathleen Blake, chef/owner at The Rusty Spoon in Orlando, offers a similar sentiment. "What makes them different? Personal relationships," says Blake, who's been working with Olde Hearth for six years. "They're open to input and love to collaborate on your menu. And, they're always the first in line when there's a charitable function to offer support. After the Pulse tragedy, we were helping feed hundreds of people several times a week. Shannon and Janice had bread, pastry, whatever we asked for on a moment's notice."

Their high level of service, unwavering commitment to artisan quality, and focus on relationships are the key ingredients in Olde Hearth Bakery's rise to the top.