Bursary to Academie Weinheim 2025 - Resume of the Students' Evaluations

1. What new skills and knowledge did this course give you

Shaping & Techniques

- Learned alternative shaping methods, e.g., leaving dough seams loose for a naturally cracked crust vs. sealing tightly.
- Mastered a variety of shaping techniques for rolls, pretzels, and sourdoughs.
- Saw firsthand the lye-dipping process for pretzels.
- Learned creative moulding for unique finishes (e.g., natural seam shaping, flour crackling, camping rolls).

Flour Knowledge & Handling

- Gained deeper understanding of rye, spelt, and wheat flours and their differences in hydration, mixing, and resting.
- Learned to use hot water for rye doughs and cold water in others to control dough temperature.
- Improved knowledge of flour types, terminology, and blends.

Bread Types & Processes

- Explored German bread culture, including traditional rye and mixed wheat breads.
- Worked with sourdough variations (e.g., 3-step sourdough, multiple preferments).
- Learned about enriched doughs, sweet German breads, and versatile sweet doughs to reduce waste.
- Better understanding of oven environments for different breads.

Practical & Technical Skills

- Developed more efficient and cleaner baking methods.
- Improved ability to taste and evaluate bread quality.
- Broadened technical knowledge of yeasted breads beyond sourdough.
- Gained confidence in mixing, shaping, and experimenting with new techniques.

Personal Growth & Networking

- Built confidence in bread-making and teamwork.
- Learned from teachers and peers, gaining insights from different backgrounds and baking journeys.
- Expanded professional network within the baking community.

2. How do you think you will use these skills in your studies and/or workplace?

👉 Overall, the main theme is using newly learned bread-making methods both academically and professionally, with a focus on innovation, adaptability, and long-term career goals.

- Stay up to date with industry knowledge for teaching and sharing with others.
- Explore more rye products and efficient techniques to boost productivity at work and in college.
- Use new skills to guide their dissertation and bakeshop choices.
- Adapt artisan methods for large-scale production, particularly in Italian bread.
- Incorporate new techniques and flavour combinations to enhance workplace products.
- Prepare for exams by mastering breads like sourdough and rye.
- Experiment with recipes (e.g., cranberry and chocolate bread) for suitability in their workplace.
- Apply these skills in future roles or their own bakery, aiming to stand out with unique loaves like sourdoughs and German breads.

3. Did the course live up to your expectations? What for you were the highlights? Were there any disappointments?

Overall impressions: The course exceeded expectations for nearly all participants.

Highlights mentioned:

- Passionate tutors (Wolfgang, Hamish, Sara).
- Meeting other bakers and building friendships/network.
- Learning new baking techniques (pretzels, enriched breads, doughnuts, laminator use, etc.).
- Exposure to German baking traditions and products.
- Bread tasting and bakery visits (when possible).
- Personal touches (celebrations, evening activities, meals, accommodation).

Disappointments / suggestions for improvement:

- Some sessions were difficult to follow (too fast, moving between recipes without enough structure).
- Desire for more hands-on practice versus observation.
- Limited worktop space at times.
- Wish for more free time to explore Weinheim and local bakeries.
- A few minor issues with food arrangements.

4. Were there any products and/or baking methods that you found particularly interesting or unusual?

- **Butter Cake**
    - Proved dough like focaccia.
    - Filled with butter + icing sugar, topped with almonds + caster sugar.
    - Fresh cream poured over after baking.
    - Incredible flavour and texture.
- **Bee Sting Cake**
    - New product, complex process.
    - Initially confusing, but ended up delicious.
    - Would like to try making it at home.
- **Pretzels**
    - Dough frozen for handling.
    - Lye dip gives signature brown shine.
    - Interesting to see process first-hand.
- **Other Baked Goods & Flavours**
    - Dänisch-brörchen (laminated bread dough) – surprisingly simple and tasty.
    - Curry Powder & Orange Juice baguette – unusual but delicious.
    - Dark wholemeal bread – multiple mixing stages, new texture, must rest before eating.
    - Granola sticks – unique, with dried fruits & oats.
    - Savoury laminated buns – new and delicious.
- **Equipment & Techniques**
    - Equipment found fascinating (dough dividers, oven loaders, lye soakers).
    - Learned how to be efficient in large-scale production with little bulk fermentation.
- **Personal Experience**
    - Nervous at first due to less experience but gained confidence.
    - Felt a real sense of achievement.
    - Particularly enjoyed enriched doughs and rye baking.

5. **What recommendations can you suggest that would improve this course for future students?**

- Tutors demonstrated sweet dough using a large batch, which was then used for all products. Participants felt it was hard to follow what was happening with each product, as teaching jumped between different elements.

- Suggest making the process clearer and more structured, e.g., progressing through one dough at a time.
- Course was highly enjoyable and described as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Recommend reducing the number of products demonstrated, to allow participants more hands-on practice in smaller groups.
- Participants appreciated the versatility of products but found it challenging to take notes due to the pace and multiple doughs being made simultaneously.
- Some found the recipe layout confusing: suggest simplifying the presentation.
- Clearer instructions during practical sessions would help reduce mistakes.
- Suggest extending the course length, as confidence and group bonding only peaked near the end.
- More dedicated time for team bonding would improve collaboration and working relationships.
- Suggest a pre-course meet-and-greet event to ease nerves, especially for those not attending the ABS conference.
- Recommendation to provide local area information (e.g., nearby shops, buses, food spots, must-visit places).
- Suggest adding an extra day to explore the local area and visit bakeries, combining cultural exploration with team bonding.

6. Were the travel, accommodation and dining arrangements satisfactory?

🚌 Travel

- Overall travel was smooth, seamless, stress-free and well-coordinated.
- Airport pick-up and drop-off were easy and well-timed.
- Public transport (e.g., buses) was cash-only, but teamwork helped manage fares.
- Group communication (e.g., group chat) helped everyone stay informed and on time.

🛏️ Accommodation

- Accommodation was consistently described as:
    - Brilliant, amazing, lovely, impeccable, clean, modern, and well-sized.
    - On-site, which added convenience.
    - Offering social spaces (indoor/outdoor areas, rooftop, rec room) while also allowing quiet personal time.
- Rooms were sometimes described as basic, but had all necessary facilities.

🍽️ Dining Arrangements

- General praise:

    - Flexible dining times appreciated.
    - Quality and quantity of food generally very good.
    - Lunches were fantastic with good variety.
    - The final night meal in town was lovely and allergy concerns were handled well.
- Common criticisms:
    - Meal format felt unusual: large lunches and small/odd dinners.
    - Some meals felt “mismatched,” “random,” or “thrown together”, though still well-cooked.
    - Students sometimes felt lethargic after large lunches or had to eat less to stay alert.
    - Vegetarian options were very limited, often only bread, salad, and cheese.
    - Evening meals were sometimes small or minimal in variety.

🎯 Overall Sentiment

- Majority felt the experience was “more than satisfactory,” “spot on,” “amazing,” or “beyond satisfactory.”
- Some noted that personal satisfaction differed slightly from others in the group (e.g., “I thought dining was amazing, but others were fussy”).

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