



INTERVIEW

# PAINS & TRADITION

*Far from being revolutionaries, it's all about flour power!*

*It's in Bascharage in the south of Luxembourg, a town renowned for its beer, that Jean Kircher and his team bake bread – a traditional bread using ancestral methods. And what was initially supposed to be a presentation about the company took a different turn – Jean Kircher wanted to deliver a strong message about his battle against junk food and the desire to sell a good product at a competitive price.*



Interview

## JEAN KIRCHER FOUNDER OF "PAINS & TRADITION"

*"It takes us four to five hours to bake our bread!"*

**Mr Kircher, you seem upset. What's on your mind?**

It's simple, we bake bread; lots of people make bread, such as bakers and the bread-baking industry. Not counting those who sell it but don't bake it. A huge industry revolves around bread and the message always focuses on quality, tradition, freshness and taste. Everyone plays on these values which are anchored in the collective unconscious; bread is considered as sacred in Judeo-Christian culture, as it is in other cultures. It is hard to make your voice heard amidst all this chatter. And the task has become even harder now that bread has garnered the reputation as a 'bad food'.

**What do you mean by that statement?**

The majority of what we consume today is mass-produced in industrial facilities – safety and hygiene standards are guaranteed but the whole process has been polluted by chemicals. It is clear that the driving force behind this practice is the notion of 'output' – maximum output must be ensured. For example, at present, a cow produces 40 to 45 litres of milk a day. A traditional breed of cow however produced 15 to 20 litres a day. Intensive farming methods deplete the soil and, furthermore, animals fall sick more often and must be treated with antibiotics.



**And where does bread come into the equation?**

The issue is straightforward. Due to industrial production methods we can now bake a baguette in 45 minutes. It's the combination of industrialisation and the demand for output. This is made possible by cutting out a fundamental stage – fermentation. It takes us four to five hours to bake bread if we respect the natural process. We allow our bread to ferment at room temperature with only 0.2% to 0.3% of yeast, as compared to 2% to 3% used in the industrial process. We have opted for tradition.





#### What about the modern baker?

The modern baker undertakes a false long-fermentation process. The dough is subject to cold-resting and placed in the fridge for six to eight hours. When taken out of the fridge, it is exposed to a temperature of 30 to 40 °C – which is anything but natural! At Pains et Tradition, we follow traditional baking techniques – we are not revolutionaries. We have decided to embrace the traditional method and it offers unbeatable quality.

#### What are the ingredients of a good dough?

Good hydration and a balanced amount of flour. Flour acts like a sugar which, when you hydrate it, transforms into alcohol, CO<sub>2</sub> and flavour. If the mixture is not balanced, the dough will be too dry and therefore not bake properly – the outcome will be an unpalatable product. Just as if you were eating flour... Finally, you need a proper fermentation.

#### Knocking back the dough – a baking trademark?

Long fermentation and knocking back the dough are two techniques which trigger enzyme activity. Enzymes and bacteria need oxygen. The dough is a 'closed environment' and the enzymes stop working after an hour due to the lack of oxygen. This is where our bakers come into play by knocking back the dough. The CO<sub>2</sub> is thereby liberated and oxygen is introduced into the dough. When it's taken out of the oven, you're left with a great loaf of bread – as expected. Knocking back the dough is, above all, a technique to reintroduce oxygen into the dough. Once again, tradition – not revolution.



#### What about the glycemic index?

This index is used to classify food containing carbohydrates. I would like to remind you that modern, poorly fermented breads have levels that are too high, between 70 and 90 GI, and therefore contain fast-releasing sugar (bad sugar). Our breads are between 39 and 44 GI. At this level, our bread is not bad for health as it contains slow-releasing sugars, which are better absorbed by the body.

#### That sounds like a political statement...

You're right! Imagine this: to get the same amount of vitamins out of an apple from the 1950s, you would have to eat about forty of them in 2016! From a hygienic point of view our food nowadays is perfect – but so much so that over the long term it will make you sick. In my eyes, food is our basic medicine. I am convinced that 90% of illnesses come from what we eat. And I'm not alone in thinking this, far from it. When I'm in the supermarket and I look into people's trolleys, I am always shocked by the sheer amount of junk food: ready meals, frozen pizzas, tinned sauces. It is sad to see that people no longer take the time to prepare a proper meal. After all, it's not difficult to make a Bolognese sauce! Isn't it ironic that everyone is now watching cooking shows on television, but the pleasure of cooking is on the verge of extinction.

#### It's a broad subject...

... but few politicians dare tackle the issue head-on. Eating a proper and balanced diet is beneficial for health and, consequently, the national health insurance. Nevertheless, I am aware that due to financial constraints many consumers really don't have any other choice. However, 20% of the population are aware of the need for a healthy diet. What must we think of a 'naturally carbonated water from the spring' where the gas is extracted and then the water is recarbonated? It is no longer the same product. I shall say it again: I believe that food is our basic medicine and it is time to sell good products at competitive prices. Ultimately, we are both fighting the same battle: at RAK Porcelain, you are fighting in your sector and we at "Pains & Tradition" are fighting in ours.

[www.pains-tradition.com](http://www.pains-tradition.com)



## PAINS & TRADITION

*Jean Kircher comes from a family of millers whose origins he can trace back to the year 1760. In 1990, he himself decided to turn his back on his professional guild and instead try his luck as a baker. Today, his company „Pains & Tradition“ produces some ten tons of bread per day on two different sites and employs 120 people. A mill in Alsace, France, belongs to the firm.*

*Today, the products of „Pains & Tradition“ are exported throughout the world, to the Emirates, Russia, Japan, Scandinavia... About a hundred Michelin-Star awarded restaurants are listed among its customers, the motto of the house being: „Taste is everything!“. Dough is kneaded slowly several times, the guaranteed for the perfect development of its aromas. The long fermentation is neither interrupted nor artificially extended and lasts for at least four hours. Before the dough is put into the oven, where it will be baked at 250° Celsius, a last fermenting process will take place. The baking is interrupted after two thirds of the required time, then the bread is deep-frozen at -35° C and prepared for transport. The customer only has to bring the baking process to an end. Furthermore, the company to a large extent forms its own collaborators in-house. As a result of this, a strong sense of community and a personal identification with the products rank very high, which in turn lead to a higher quality down the production line.*

