

# Olaf's Artisan Bakery Café

European perfection in Mt Eden

by Belinda Jeursen



Olaf Blanke.

It's hard to know where to look first when you walk into Olaf's. There are sparkling cabinets of fruit-laden pastries, shelves of artisan bread crying out to be eaten, and table after table of customers eating seriously good-looking food.

No wonder Olaf's found itself listed among the top ten new cafés in Auckland according to *Metro* only four months after opening in 2011. It also made a *NZ Herald* "Four of the Best Auckland Bakeries" list.

Business partners Olaf Blanke (ex-Zarbo) and Robert Heeps (previous owner of The Pastryhouse) wanted to create a fine dining atmosphere in a café and they achieved it immediately, coming in the *Metro* top five for their cabinet food and menu.

They're about to start opening at night, and Olaf with expansion into other markets planned has just brought a Citroen HY van into the country to do their deliveries and markets. One of only six on the country, this distinctive piece of history will attract attention as it makes its way around Auckland delivering artisan breads and pastries to fine dining establishments like Peter Gordon's Sugar Club, Al Brown's Depot, Sean Connolly's The Grill and Botswana Butchery.

Olaf says the first two years were hard work but they are now well settled in their busy Mt Eden location.

Their BIANZ Bakery of the Year awards are proudly displayed and customers often order breads based on these. Their two bread bakers and two pastry chefs can be seen at various times in the bakery, in full view of the café. Applicants must demonstrate loyalty and ambition to take their place on the staff at Olaf's.

Olaf and his wife Oranna settled in New Zealand in 2008 after he spent time here in 2007 working at a French bakery. Robert Heeps introduced himself to Olaf while Olaf was working at Zarbo and there was a connection from the beginning through their conversations about good bread.

After leaving Zarbo's and taking some time out in Europe, Olaf approached Robert saying he was ready to be self-employed. They found their location, expensive but good, and it wasn't long before a steady stream of customers found them.

So what does the term 'artisan bread' mean to Olaf? Olaf says the word artisan is abused and applied to many bread products that do not fit any of the criteria.

He explains that while it's not possible to do all the mixing of ingredients by hand, after the initial mixing the product should not be touched by a machine but hand-scaled, moulded and shaped. Production levels must be small to maintain integrity and there can be no additives, preservatives or colouring.

Yeast is also not allowed in products which have traditionally relied on a starter. Olaf's has three starters: rye sourdough, levain and spelt sourdough. They use yeast only in products developed since yeast has been commercially available, like French baguettes, ciabatta, Turkish pide and their farmers' loaf.

While Olaf's home country of Germany has always had a strong tradition of bread-making going back to the days when it was communally baked, he is disappointed at the direction the industry is taking there, with automation and preservatives becoming commonplace.



Vinschgauer Paarden – traditional in South Tyrol

He is keen to educate his customers about the keeping qualities of traditionally-made breads and provides information on this with the bread he sells. His sourdoughs can last up to five days if kept covered by a tea-towel, cut-side down on a wooden board.

Olaf's favourite bread at the moment is the Vinschgauer Paarden, a bread typical of South Tyrol in Italy. The traditional recipe was given to him by Andreas Winkler, a baker in the region, after Olaf spent two days working in his bakery while on holiday.

The recipe requires three types of rye flour. Only one of these is available here in New Zealand so a bit of ingenuity was required to make it work. Two pieces of dough are moulded together and left to ferment. Once the surface of the dough cracks it's time to bake them and the end result is an unusual and attractive round loaf. Another famous bread from this region is Schuettelbrot, but only Peter Gordon's Sugar Club benefits from this as Olaf simply can't produce enough for retail at the moment.

When asked about his philosophy on food, Olaf says he wants to see us go back to our past and produce food in a good way.

"We need to get away from preservatives. They make us sick. Butter and cream are not bad in themselves. It's the added ingredients that are the problem. But a lot of people just don't want to know so they don't ask and don't read the packaging. Those people who have travelled are a bit more open to change."

Olaf sees New Zealand's high levels of bowel cancer as a prime indicator of the dangers of processed and convenience foods. "People like Jamie Oliver have shown us that there's no excuse for not making real food."

And if it's real food you want, you know where to get it – Olaf's.



Olaf's – going places in distinctive style

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