

WAS ESSEN DIE DEUTSCHEN?

THERE'S DOUGH IN BREAD

An Old Staple Enjoys New Popularity

The things Germans do with sauerkraut these days!

Traditionalists among sauerkraut lovers shake their heads in disbelief. But Herbert Neumann says it's good and it's selling. And, as he is the inventor of *Sauerkrautbrot*, he ought to know. He owns one of Hamburg's most prestigious bakeries, but it took long sessions with several of his master bakers before they were willing to knead sauerkraut, drained and chopped, of course, right into the dark rye bread dough.

The small round loaves are selling like hot cakes, and Herbert Neumann once again spends his rare free evenings dreaming up new bread creations. He is one of the innovative bakers in Germany who have helped to put bread back on the tables of his countrymen.

For a while it seemed that bread had no future in Germany. Of course, people bought bread, but they no longer considered it a delicacy; they thought of it as a necessity--the stuff to put sandwich fillings between. Also Germans had suddenly become calorie conscious after the famed *Fresswelle* of the late 1950's and early 1960's and they increasingly by-passed the traditional staple.

Then there was the problem of the growing mechanization of bakeries. People complained that bread no longer tasted the same; it lacked that certain something, that individual flavor.

Herbert Neumann concedes readily that the customers had reason to complain. Good bread, he says, needs the human touch. Its production cannot be left to machines, at least not entirely, without sacrificing most of its goodness.

Once again, Neumann speaks from experience. In his own bakery he installed super-modern ovens into which the loaves of bread entered on a conveyer belt, passed slowly through the high temperature, and emerged from the other end fully baked. Well, he's torn them out again; replaced the newfangled equipment, known as the *Brotstrasse*, with old-fashioned ovens; and returned to baking his bread the good old way. He says it's important to heat the ovens well in advance and give the loaves plenty of time to be baked thoroughly. "Bread lives," he says, and the way he says it shows you that he means it. Good bread depends only partly on the recipe. Other major factors are such intangibles as climate, temperature, humidity, and even the mood of the baker mixing the dough and kneading it.

One result of Neumann's efforts and those of many of his colleagues to give bread a new lease on life is a greater variety of breads. West Germany has more different kinds of bread--some 200--than any other country in the world.

People in northern Germany prefer the dark, wholesome breads like *Schinkenbrot*, so called because it goes well with *Kjenschen*, the smoked ham specialty of Schleswig-Holstein. There are many kinds of dark bread, from very dark, coarse-grained loaves to medium dark.

The names of breads often refer to the region where they were originally baked or to a person who relished a particular kind--like *Hermann-Loens-Brot*--or to the occasion for which a certain variety was once specially baked, like *Hochzeitsbrot*. New creations often give a clue to the special ingredients, like *Sauerkrautbrot*, *Gewuerzbrot*, and *Zwiebelbrot*.

Neumann also regularly bakes four-meter loaves of dark *Bauernbrot* with a thick, crisp crust. This bread he sells by the pound, and it's worth buying just to watch the saleswomen hack away at the huge loaf with special knives.

Bread has become such a favorite with many people that they are inviting their friends to "bread parties." These are simple to give and lots of fun. **Ingredients are:** as many kinds of bread and small rolls as you like, cheese, ham, salami, and red wine.

Small rolls have advanced from the lowly *Broetchen*--a must for breakfast for many people--to such specialties as *Bauernsemmeln*, *Milchbroetchen*, *Kuemmeltangen*, *Pfefferbroetchen*, *Laugenbretzeln* (a southern specialty), or *Mohnbroetchen*. The variety is infinite, and, again, there are regional differences. You will look in vain for *Selen* in northern Germany. These are small loaves of white bread with a very crisp crust, sesame seeds and large grains of salt. In the south, children seem to live on them. Truly spectacular is a huge wheel of small rye rolls, called *Storchennest*.

In addition, many bakers will bake huge pretzels, and breads in exotic shapes to order for parties and special occasions. In Bonn a baker created something of a stir when he produced, first as gag and later because it was selling well, bread shaped like men and women--before they discovered clothing.

Buying bread at a German bakery is a feast not only for the eyes and later for the stomach of the customer: it is also a special treat for the nose. The fragrance of freshly baked bread is deliciously tempting.