

# MEDITERRA BAKEHOUSE:

*Family, Tradition, Quality*

By Adrea Sustarsic, Mediterra Bakehouse



Paesano coming out of the oven

**N**ick Ambeliotis grew up in Ohio, where his father owned a grocery store. Eventually, Nick took over the store and started stocking the shelves with obscure, hard-to-find ingredients from around the world. This led him to a wide-ranging career scouring Europe for fine cheeses, olive oils, pasta, and charcuterie. Along the way, he also developed an appreciation for well-made artisan breads that evolved into a true passion. Twenty years ago, he left his job, sold his house, and put everything he had into building Mediterra Bakehouse, our bakery in Pittsburgh.

In 2002, Nick rented a 4,000 square foot unit in an industrial park just outside of downtown Pittsburgh. Over time, he recruited his children—Mike, Anthony, Nicole, and Nick—into the operation. Today, following 15 years of growth, our family business has expanded to nearly 40,000 square feet at our Pittsburgh headquarters, allowing us to serve local farmers markets and patrons, along with commercial clients including local restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, and resorts.

LEFT: Our Red Fife Batard is made using organic heritage red fife grain grown on our own land in Arizona. RIGHT: Founder, Nick Ambeliotis, on their 35-acre Arizona wheat farm

## *Tradition and Quality*

All along, Mediterra's founding commitment to tradition and quality have guided our success. We bake artisan breads using traditional French methods, relying solely on natural sourdough starters instead of commercial yeast to preserve their distinct tang and nutritional value. Each loaf is shaped by hand before it's loaded into one of our massive hearth ovens, built onsite by a seventh-generation French company. With more than 30,000 pounds of firebrick and a baking surface composed of volcanic rock from the Alps, these ovens help maintain consistent temperatures as the bread bakes. Given the scale of our operation, we also use state-of-the-art commercial ovens for some product lines.



THE BREAD BAKERS GUILD OF AMERICA

All our breads are made with fresh ingredients, never with additives, preservatives, conditioners, or extenders. Our breads always contain at least 15% of our own organic heritage Red Fife grain, grown on 35 acres of land in Arizona. Once harvested, the entire milling process is done in house using our Vermont-made New American Stone Mill stone-ground milling equipment. Milling our grain the old fashioned way contributes to the bread's distinct flavor, and ensures maximum nutrient retention.

Even as we grew, we refused to cut corners or take any shortcuts that could compromise our product. While the added time of the fermentation is costly and working with natural starters can be unpredictable, the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. We believe that patience, hard work, and knowledge produce the best product. To that end, we source ingredients locally as often as possible. We also substitute sugar with raw honey. Our water is filtered, and we only use sea salt. To minimize waste from packaging, we use a flour silo in our production facility. We send surplus product to many local charities and organizations to reduce food waste.

The combination of centuries-old baking traditions and techniques alongside cutting-edge baking technology and equipment means that Mediterra can provide true artisan bread to a wide range of customers, from the smallest cafes and restaurants to large corporate settings, universities, supermarkets, and others.

Our product selection reflects current dietary trends as well as our customers' diverse needs. Sandwich buns can be a classic white or a more specialized Challah or Ciabattini bun. Our deli loaf

offerings range from favorites like rye, sourdough, and pumpernickel to more health-forward selections like sprouted spelt and one of our newest additions, the keto-friendly sunny flax bread. We offer traditional French baguettes and Italian focaccia as well as breads unique to Mediterra like our Mt. Athos Fire, Parmesan Pepper, and Red Fife artisan



Prepping bread for the oven.

table loaves. We also offer seasonal breads such as Christmas Stollen or the Maple Pecan Loaf, made with local grains and maple syrup from Paul Family Farms near Pittsburgh.

### *Adjusting to a COVID world*

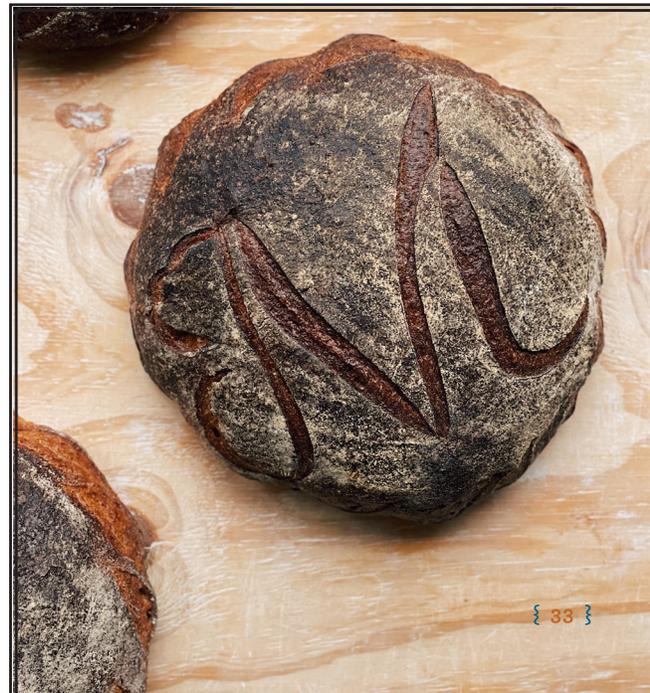
Since we opened our doors in 2002, we've made it a point to diversify our client base. To do this, we've always been careful to select a mix of both food service and retail customers. Today, our clients include local mom-and-pop stores, cafés, and restaurants, as well as national grocery chains and everything in between.

This strategy has served us well, especially during the COVID 19 crisis. Since March 2021, we've watched as nearly all of our restaurant customers either

shifted to take out only or closed their doors altogether. However, our close relationship with national grocery chain Whole Foods has played a crucial role in our ability to withstand the short- and long-term effects of the virus. COVID may have had a negative effect on the restaurant industry, but it only increased the speed at which bread

flew off grocery store shelves. Since we were already heavily oriented towards wholesale fulfillment, our team of bakers was prepared for the challenge and we could gear up to meet the demand. The hard work and agility of our employees, together with our working relationship with Whole Foods, have helped keep us afloat amidst the uncertainty, and for that we are endlessly grateful. After all, what is baking without community? 🌟

Our flagship bread, the Mt. Athos is made using a germ-restored wheat sourdough



# ROMAN PIZZA BIANCA

Contributed by Mediterra Bakehouse

This Roman version of a flat bread resembles a focaccia that is fluffy inside and crisp outside.



## ROMAN PIZZA BIANCA

Ingredients	%	Kilograms
Total dough weight		1.966
Total flour	100.00	1.000
Bread flour* *11%–12% protein	90.00	0.900
Hard red wheat, freshly-milled	10.00	0.100
Water 1	70.40	0.704
Water 2	17.60	0.176
Salt	2.50	0.025
Fresh yeast	0.10	0.001
Extra virgin olive oil	6.00	0.060
<b>Totals</b>	<b>196.60</b>	<b>1.966</b>

### Roman Pizza Bianca

<b>Mixing</b>	<b>Type of Mixer</b>	Spiral
	<b>Mix style</b>	Improved
	<b>Hold back</b>	Water 2, oil
	<b>1st speed</b>	0:06
	<b>2nd speed</b>	0:06
	<b>Add</b>	Slowly add water 2
	<b>2nd speed</b>	About 0:05, until incorporated
	<b>Add</b>	Olive oil
<b>Fermentation</b>	<b>2nd speed</b>	Until incorporated
	<b>Dough temperature</b>	76°F
	<b>Time/temperature</b>	3:00 at 72°F - 75°F
<b>Shaping</b>	<b>Time</b>	0:45, 1:30
	<b>Time/temperature</b>	12:00 at 41°F
	<b>Time/temperature</b>	1:00 at 72°F
<b>Bake</b>	<b>Divide</b>	2.5 lb
	<b>Pre Shape</b>	Round
	<b>Proofing Device</b>	Well-oiled half-sheet pan
	<b>Rest</b>	2:00–3:00
	<b>Shape</b>	Stretch and dimple to edges of pan
	<b>Oven Type</b>	Deck
<b>Time/temperature</b>	590°F, until golden brown	

