

AS THE DOUGH RISES

Behind the Scenes at Lafayette Bakery

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALLY BAHO

Jean-Bernard and Isabelle Vial owned a bakery in Lyon, France, and always dreamed of opening one in the United States. They first went to Los Angeles, but someone recommended Carmel to them, and they fell in love with both the area and the people. They set up shop in The Barnyard Shopping Village in Carmel in August 2014. In September 2018, Jean-Bernard and Isabelle went back to France, leaving daughter Marion to manage Lafayette. Following is a glimpse into the early morning hours at the bakery.

Head baker Florent Tavardon makes several hundred flaky, buttery croissants a day—not to mention chocolate croissants and raisin swirls.



While Axel Maillot is a certified pastry chef, he is also a trained baker and helps Tavadon with shaping baguette in between prepping pastries.



The guys are in constant movement, powdering pastries, slicing poached pears, shaping brioche, piping custard, painting on an egg wash, and always tidying...it's a quick and elegant dance and they make it look seamless.

While Carmel sleeps, Florent "Flo" Tavadon and Axel Maillot are in the kitchen of Lafayette Bakery in the Barnyard baking bread and making pastries. While it may not appear so from the outside, inside the bakery is bustling well before the crack of dawn. Tavadon, the head baker, arrives around 1:30-2am, depending on how much bread he needs to bake. Maillot, the pastry chef, arrives a little after to prepare the pastries for the day.

"The first thing I do when I arrive is make coffee," says Tavadon. Then he puts on music, hard rock, and begins work. "Music and espressos are the pillars of my day," he says.

Tavadon moves quickly and without pause, from the proofer to the oven to kneading at his workstation to lifting trays and sweeping the flour and crumbs out of the oven.

Tavadon turns the ovens on and sets them up—while they automatically come on in the night to heat, he still needs to set them according to what he'll be baking.

Next, he takes out and divides all of the bread dough he prepared the prior day to bring it to room temperature. Then, he takes the croissants out from the proofer where he set them the day before—proofing is the final rise a yeast dough takes before being baked.

He paints them with an egg wash and bakes them in a now hot oven. These are not just the plain croissants, there are pan au chocolat (chocolate croissants), pan aux



Maillet makes every part of every pastry—from the hazelnut cream that he fills the cream puffs with—to the crunchy chocolate crumble of the chocolate decadence and even the glaze for the fruit tarts.

raisins (raisin swirls), and other sweets made with croissant dough. While those are baking, he begins to shape his bread, stopping when the alarm chimes to take the croissants out of the oven and put more in.

Tavardon moves quickly and without pause, from the proofer to the oven to kneading at his workstation to lifting trays and sweeping the flour and crumbs out of the oven.

Meanwhile, Maillet is at his station, arranging eclairs on fluted paper cups, baking cakes, making and chilling custard, layering chocolate decadence bars, filling and glazing fruit tartelettes, and dusting his masterpieces with powdered sugar. He also begins to set the display case as he goes. He won't take his first coffee until about 6am, when



Tavardon stops to take an espresso break while his bread bakes in the oven.

he's finished the bulk of his work.

Tavardon bakes the things that need proofing, while Maillet bakes the things that don't in a convection oven, such as cookies, apple turnovers, and blueberry squares. The two don't really speak but are so familiar with the process that they sort of dance around one another, each tending to his own station, sometimes coming together to help the other out, but mainly focusing on his own realm.

At 28, Tavardon has been practicing his craft for well over a decade. He grew up in a bakery; his parents own a boulangerie in the town of Annonay in southwestern France and his father is the baker. After high school, he studied to be a baker. "You do one week of school and three weeks of



Sandwiches (top left) and pastries (top right). In France, people eat something sweet for breakfast with their coffee, but Lafayette Bakery has adjusted for the American savory craving with open-faced ham, egg, and cheese sandwiches (bottom).



By the time the sun comes up, head baker Florent Tavardon and pastry chef Axel Maillot can take a break. Here they pose outside Lafayette Bakery.

work," he explains. Then he worked in a bakery in Lyon before moving to Carmel three years ago to take over as the head baker of Lafayette.

Maillot is 26 and from Grenoble in southeastern France. He went to trade school at 15 to become a baker but after three years of study switched to pastry, "because it's more interesting," he says. After his studies, he worked in a few different bakeries, one in Lyon where he met Tavardon, and moved here in February of 2020 as the pastry chef.

While things are proofing, Tavardon does errands—invoices, inventory, reviews and prepares recipes, scales the flour, weighs ingredients, etc., and he might even take a break. Then he starts baking the bread: baguettes; seeded loafs; country bread; olive bread; and ficelles, the small breads for sandwiches.

Around 7am there's a lull, the hardest part of the day has passed, the display cases are set, and even the music has calmed. The two continue working in the back as cus-

tomers trickle in but it's slower now; the nighttime buzz is over. Maillot continues on pastries, maybe now making chocolate custard, separating dozens of eggs, whipping egg whites, making the crumble to top his pastries. And Tavardon still has to prepare the bread dough and croissants for the next day when the whole cycle will be repeated.

Lafayette Bakery & Café is located in The Barnyard Shopping Village in Carmel. For more information, go to lafayette-bakery.com or call 831/915-6286.

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