

Croissant

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If someone pops one in the microwave and ends up with buttery shoe leather, Oble doesn't want them to think it is because the product is inferior.

If someone is buying two dozen and they aren't planning on having a party or at least putting them in the freezer, Oble doesn't want the customer eating stale croissants. She would rather see them buy fewer and deliver from crates to their home two days later.

Her personal brand of crazy has helped to solidify her croissants as a staple at the local farmers market scene. She sells every week at the Countrywide Conservancy's Thursday market in Akron's Highland Square and at a Saturday morning market in Howe Meadow in Cuyahoga Falls.

The biggest complaint some folks have about Oble's croissants is that they sell out too quickly. She says that, once you can begin to cry when the chocolate croissants were sold out before the girl was even in the kitchen for her weekly treat.

When a July market in Highland Square was closed due to storms, Oble went next door, to the Highland Square library branch, set up at a computer and put the word out on her Facebook page that she was willing to deliver anywhere. Her entire inventory was sold within an hour and she spent the next few days driving around town to deliver them — something Oble doesn't mind doing.

She works 80 hours a week, creating as many as 40 varieties of croissants, including some, like whole wheat, that would make a true French croissant. Every once in a while she will take a tongue-lashing from a Francophile who is troubled by the way she makes the croissants.

"One woman came up to me one day, looked at the whole wheat and said, 'The French would be offended by that,'" Oble recalled.

"I'm sure at the airport in Paris, when they're in the air," she said, tracing a circle in the air with her finger and placing a pink mark across where her face would be.

But Oble plagues more customers than she offends. "Most of her problems with her croissants are as good as what they have eaten in France. Oble can't say for sure, since she's never been there."

When Peter Reinhardt was in the Akron area recently, he did some of Oble's work and offered a professional critique. Reinhardt, an internationally recognized baking expert, is an associate professor at Wake University in Charlotte, N.C., one of the country's leading culinary schools.

Reinhardt said she was surprised that anyone would



Sally Oble, owner of Summit Croissants, cuts a croissant.

attempt to bake croissants out of her home. "Croissants are not easy to make consistently well," he explained, noting that the dough is subject to weather conditions and all sorts of temperature variations. "I think it's remarkable she's baking out of her home," he said.

Reinhardt sliced open one of Oble's plain croissants to reveal the flaky interior. "These your money shot," he said, showing off the layers. Working in a home envi-

"In my kitchen," she smiles. Yes, she really just decided one day to try to bake croissants.

Oble, 46, has always loved to bake and has always had "a fascination with those wavy layers." She remembers when using her Easy Bake Oven that a simple two-layer cake was never enough. She was always making more layers so her cakes would go higher and higher, and her mother never discouraged her from getting in the kitchen to experiment.



Sally Oble tucks in the ends on a croissant.

fill outside the markets.

The dough must be made in stages, with chilling between each step. Oble tracks the progress of each batch on paper lists kept on the front of her refrigerator that occupy the upstairs kitchen where she bakes.

She uses organic flour, milk from Snowcrest Creamery in Pomeroy, and butter from Minerva Dairy in Minerva.

"I try to make use of local ingredients as much as possible," Oble said, explaining why she drives to Minerva from Akron each week to purchase the 36 pounds of butter she will need.

Each batch of dough is made from a pound of sweet butter, which results in about 16 croissants, depending on the size of the piece. Deflating Oble will beat the butter with her rolling pin between parchment paper until it is flattened into a perfect square, about the size of a floor tile. The butter is placed on the chilled dough, which Oble folds around it, forming a perfect envelope. She then rolls the package into thin sheets of dough, which will be chilled, folded and rolled another

two times to create the light layers in her finished product.

Marshall Seed Market in Bath Township. For several years in the 1990s, Oble operated the bakery at the Hart & Marber Bed and Breakfast that her family owned in Sharon Center Township. After the inn and bakery closed, Oble went to work for a bank and took a break from food for a while.

Later, she began selling baked goods at a friend's farm stand, and then moved into farmers markets, which were just getting started in the Akron area. "I didn't grow anything, but I knew I could bake," she said.

Oble used to make a variety of baked goods, but found that moving from cookies to cinnamon rolls to muffins to whatever the next baked good was, she had been doing little more than washing dishes all day. She decided to focus on croissants, because it was one thing nobody else was selling at the farmers markets.

Her work week begins on Tuesdays, when she starts the multi-day process of making 20 to 30 batches of croissants. She said she doesn't know how many orders she has to



Sally Oble brushes on an egg wash on a batch of croissants before baking them in her kitchen.

Oble is up all night Friday rolling, filling and baking croissants so they are fresh for 9 a.m. Sunday.

It is a difficult way to make a living, but Oble loves being at the farmers markets and interacting with the customers and other vendors there.

"When I get to the market and see all the people and the other vendors, I know this is why I stayed up all night," she said.

Her dream is to one day have a croissant truck, so that she can sell sandwiches and other savory items that her home baking licenses don't allow, and she could bake on site so that customers can have her croissants at their freshest. For now, she's hoping to increase her winter business when the markets are not operating or are on limited schedules.

Special orders are never a problem. Oble is happy to

deliver and can't understand why customers feel that they are inconveniencing her when they want croissants on non-market days.

"I want you to have it right out of the oven," she said.

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ronment, rather than the commercial kitchen, every batch will be different and inconsistencies are inevitable, he said, pointing out that the blistering on the top of each pastry was slightly different.

Overall, Reinhardt was impressed with the quality of the pastry. "She's doing a very good job," he said.

It is high praise coming from someone of Reinhardt's stature, and even higher praise considering that Oble is completely self-taught.

Ask her where she studied baking, and Oble likes to reply, "M.E.," causing many to assume she is giving the acronym for a cooking school.

Her first baking job was making cinnamon rolls for the Mantast Seed Market in Bath Township. For several years in the 1990s, Oble operated the bakery at the Hart & Marber Bed and Breakfast that her family owned in Sharon Center Township. After the inn and bakery closed, Oble went to work for a bank and took a break from food for a while.

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