

Croissant

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If someone pops one in the microwave and ends up with buttery shoe leather, Ohle 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 eating them in the short term, Ohle doesn't want the customer eating stale croissants. She would rather see them buy fewer and deliver fresh ones to the customer later.

Her personal brand of crazy has helped to solidify her croissants as stars of the local farmers market scene. She sells out of the Akron Farmers Market Conservancy's Thursday market in Akron's Highland Square and its Saturday morning market in Howie Meadow in Cuyahoga Falls.

The biggest complaint people have about Ohle's croissants is that they sell out too quickly. She once had a young customer begin to cry when the croissants they had ordered sold out before the girl got there for her weekly treat.

When a July market in Highland Square was closed due to storms, Ohle were next door, to the Highland Square library branch, sat down at a computer and put up a post on her Facebook page that she was willing to deliver anywhere. Her entire inventory was sold within 24 hours. She spent the next few hours driving around town to deliver them — something Ohle doesn't mind doing.

She works 80 hours a week, making as many as 40 varieties of croissants, including some, like whole wheat, that would make a true Frenchman cringe. Every once in a while, she will receive a call from a Francophile who is troubled by the way she bends the rules.

"One woman came up to me one day, looked at me and went, 'You're not French. The French would be offended by that,'" Ohle recalled.

"I'm sure at the airport in Paris, they have my picture," Ohle said with a smile. "I look at her with my finger and placing a smash mark across where her face would be."

But Ohle pleases more customers than she offends.

Most of her customers tell her the croissants are as good as what they have eaten in France. Ohle can't say for sure, she has never been there.

When Peter Reinhardt, a man in the Akron area recently, he tried some of Ohle's work and offered a professional critique Reinhardt, an internationally recognized pastry chef, is an associate professor at Jepson & Wales University in Charlotte, N.C., one of the country's leading culinary schools.

Reinhardt said he was surprised that anyone would



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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 both temperature and humidity, and sorts of temperature variables. "I think it's remarkable she's baking out of her house," he said.

Reinhardt sliced open one of Ohle's plain croissants to reveal the flaky interior. "There's 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.

Ohle, 48, has always loved to bake. She has always had a fascination with things with layers. She remembers when using her Easy Bake Oven that a simple two-layer cake was never enough. She always wanted more layers so her cakes would go higher and higher, and her mother never discouraged her from getting in the kitchen to experiment.

fill outside the markets.

The dough must be made in stages, with chilling between each step. Ohle tracks the progress of each batch on a clipboard kept on top of two refrigerators that occupy the upstairs kitchen where she bakes.

She uses organic flour, milk from Sunbeam Creamery in Poland, and butter from Minerva Dairy in Minerva.

"I try to make use of local ingredients as much as possible," Ohle says, explaining why she drives to Minerva each week to purchase the 36 pounds of butter she will use.

Each batch of dough is made with a ratio of one part of sweet butter, which results in about 18 croissants, depending on their size. Dearly Ohle will beat the butter with a wooden spoon on a piece of parchment paper until it is flattened into a perfect square, about the size of a floor tile. The butter is placed in an envelope and folded around it, forming a perfect envelope. She then rolls the package into a tight roll, though the butter will be chilled.

folded and rolled another two times to create the light layers in her finished product. Her recipe and procedure have been passed down to her and she has had to take into account plenty of variables, starting with the lack of air conditioning in her home. Ohle's oven is just as tall as a double decker bus, with identical ovens upstairs and down. She lives downstairs with her longtime partner Tim Zuver, and has converted the upstairs kitchen into a walk-in walk-in pantry.

Ohle also makes nearly all of her own fillings from scratch, including the lemon curd and almond paste. She has more than 40 varieties of croissants, from the traditional plain and chocolate (filled with Malley's chocolate), to her own creations of sweet potato or goat cheese and bacon. She bakes 10 or more varieties at a time, but will bake any flavor, even just a few, to fill a customer request or special order.

Her work begins on Tuesdays, when she starts the multi-day process of making 20 or 30 batches of croissant dough, or more depending on how many orders she has to



Sunlight illuminates the flaky layers and the golden brown color of a croissant baked by Sally Ohle, owner of Summit Croissants.

Details

Summit Croissants: Visit www.summitcroissants.com, call 330-734-7975, or find Sally Ohle at the Countywide Conservancy farmers markets on Thursdays at Highland Square in Akron or on Saturdays at Howie Meadow in Cuyahoga Falls.

moment, rather than a commercial kitchen, every batch will be different and inconsistent, 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 pastries. "She's making a very good job," he said.

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

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

Her first baking job was making cinnamon rolls for the Mustard Seed Market in Ruth Township. For nearly 10 years in the 1990s, Ohle operated a bakery at the Hart & Mather Bed and Breakfast that her family owned in Sharon Center, Mahoning. After the inn and bakery closed, Ohle 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 at local farmers markets, which were just getting started in the Akron area.

"I didn't grow anything, but I knew I could bake," she said.

Asked 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 to take time just washing dishes all day. She decided to focus on croissants because it was one thing nobody else was giving her a break from food for a while.

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Special orders are never a problem. Ohle 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.

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

It is a difficult way to make a living, but Ohle 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 urbanites there, I know this is why I stayed up all night," she said.

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

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