

Croissants

By Jan Rees

The finest croissants I have ever tasted were served for breakfast at a small guest house in Wimereux, on the north coast of France. We stayed there on a road trip, en route to Italy. The croissants came from a nearby patisserie; they were fresh from the oven, warm, crisp, flaky and delicious. Freshly squeezed orange juice and a cafetiere of good coffee, plus a selection of preserves made up the perfect breakfast.

Already having an interest in baking, and not being well served for patisseries in Watford. I determined to find out how to make them for myself. There followed some reading, some online research, some experimenting at home, and most useful of all, 3 different baking courses.

I discovered that one important thing is the quality of the ingredients, in particular Canadian wheat flour and Normandy butter. Canadian wheat flour has a higher protein content than British flour and so the dough achieves a better flexibility and rise. Normandy butter is particularly rich and creamy, with an excellent flavour. As butter is a major part of croissants the butter used is important.

After several mediocre results – too heavy or not crisp enough common faults in my efforts, I did eventually achieve a more pleasing breakfast pastry, although I don't think that the French have anything to worry about!

Two things to remember when attempting to make croissants is that this is something that takes time. I usually start the day before the croissants will be baked, as the process includes several rolling, folding and chilling episodes at hourly intervals, finally chilling for 8 hours or overnight. The next day the rolling and shaping can be done, with a further proving for 2 hours before applying an egg wash and baking.

The other important thing is to keep everything as cool as possible, including your hands, and for that reason, I never make croissants in hot weather. I often make them in time for Christmas, because it has become a tradition for us to have warm homemade croissants with good jam, coffee and Bucks Fizz on Christmas morning.

Achieving success with these indulgent French pastries has taken some time, and like a lot of other skills, practice and experience teaches you all sorts of things to improve the final result. Unfortunately, like all sorts of baking it takes far longer to make them than to eat them!! When lockdown came I was pleased to realise that two of my hobbies – baking and writing – could be done in the usual way and were not affected by the limitations put on some other people’s hobbies.

I will be making them again, but not until the weather is cooler. Vive la France!



Jan Rees August 2022