



All rise for the New York bagel sage . . . from New Jersey

Will Pavia, New York

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Beth George, a former lawyer, found a hole in the market for coaching people to bake authentic New York bagels
MICHAEL GEORGE/NEW YORK TIMES/EYEVINE

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In her family home in Bangalore a corporate lawyer named Spurthy Akshar turned her mind to the problem of the New York bagel.

She plans to open a New York-style bagel shop and has been conducting preparatory experiments in her parents' kitchen. She was still struggling with the texture. It was time to consult the grandmaster of New York bagel baking, the guru of the wholewheat everything, the sage of the salted and the sourdough.

A woman with curly dark hair, sitting on a cream sofa, appeared before Ms Akshar on a video call. The class began. "We have this issue with stickiness," the bagel guru said. "We need to address that."

Beth George is an international consultant on New York-style bagels. She has helped about 50 aspiring entrepreneurs to open shops all over the world, on every continent but Antarctica and South America, and has been called in as a coach in twenty other bagel operations. She has done all this from New Jersey, of all places, working out of a commercial kitchen in Fairlawn and sometimes holding consulting sessions from her home.

Ms George, 57, grew up in Massachusetts, where her Lebanese-American parents ran a swimming pool fed by a natural spring. She became a lawyer but began working on spelt-based breads in 2007

after discovering that her son had a sensitivity to gluten. She began a spelt baking business and joined up with Frank Mauro, a veteran bagel equipment salesman who found that Ms George was good at teaching customers how to use his machinery.

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“He knows everything about the equipment but he speaks in a language that most people don’t understand,” she said. She was good on her feet too. “I used to do live appellate work,” she said. “I clerked for two appellate judges. I learnt the way to get your point across . . . and to never expect that anyone’s going to know what you’re talking about.”

She launched BYOB Bagels, with the help of Mr Mauro, and began consulting more widely on the business of making New York bagels, developing formulas and mixes that allowed bakers in far-flung climes to adapt their flour. “Dough can be very temperamental,” she said. “It’s art, it’s science, it’s passion.”

Ms Akshar, 25, first tasted a New York bagel on a visit to the city last November. “I thought, ‘Okay, we don’t have this back home,’” she said. After some preliminary experiments in India she began searching for a bagel consultant and immediately found Ms George. She plans to offer New York-style bagels in her shop but will use spicier fillings to cater for local tastes. She showed Ms George some of her latest efforts, then the class began.

“Dough needs to rest,” Ms George told her. They had to consider the ambient temperature too. “It’s almost like a baby. We have to take its temperature and we have to give it naps.”

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