



# BREAD OF HEAVEN

'We might be small, but we're serious and passionate about what we do' – artisan baker Tom van Rooyen tells **Anne Armstrong** about his Earth's Crust Bakery in Laurieston and why real bread has nothing to hide

Photography by Louise Llewellyn

In the heart of Laurieston village near Castle Douglas, a mini bread revolution is under way. From a converted garage behind his home, artisan baker Tom van Rooyen is spreading the word about the goodness of real bread.

Over the last year, Tom and his wife Pavlina – the creative forces behind The

Earth's Crust Bakery – have become familiar faces at a number of the region's farmers' markets with their range of hand-crafted, slowly fermented traditional, sourdough and other speciality breads.

Making bread full of flavour and texture, with no artificial additives, the couple are flying the flag for real bread

and are steadily attracting a loyal band of customers.

"There's been a food revolution in Britain in the last 10 years," says Tom.

"It's taken a bit longer for bread to catch up, but it's starting to happen now."

Tom moved to Dumfries & Galloway with his mum when he was nine. He set





Left: Tom and Pavlina grow wheat in their garden at Laurieston; right: peppers and onions ready for roasting for the speciality breads; below: final preparations before the bread goes in the oven



Tom and Pavlina with their children Natalie and Jakub; above: caramelised red onion, feta and thyme foccacias are drizzled with olive oil before being baked; below: some of The Earth's Crust's breads



off travelling and working around the world when he was 18, meeting Pavlina along the way. The couple married in Castle Douglas in 1998 and moved permanently to the area in 2000.

Always passionate about food and having worked as a cook on his travels, Tom put his skills to good use catering for events at Laurieston Hall on his return. Cooking for large numbers of people with special diets, Tom became interested in the health benefits of food and bread in particular, experimenting with different flours and discovering longer and slower baking methods, such as sourdough.

With Pavlina's experience of community bakeries when she was growing up in the Czech Republic and travelling in Europe, the couple's interest in bread-making grew and last year they set up their bakery, with Tom doing the baking and graphic designer Pavlina mainly looking after marketing, and designing and managing the business website.

Pavlina says: "I was always complaining to Tom about the bread here; good-quality bread is traditionally made in small artisan community bakeries in Europe, but it's quite a new concept here.

"People don't realise that 80 per cent of bread in Britain is made in four factories; it's

highly processed, with enhancers and preservatives. It looks good but it's not the real thing. We think it's really important to tell people they have a choice, and it's really good that people are starting to learn about bread."

**T**he couple moved into Laurieston village with their children Natalie, 10, and seven-year-old Jakub last October and began converting the garage in January, installing specialist deck ovens, and transforming the space into a bakery.

Apart from a "heart in mouth" moment when the ovens arrived and just fitted into the old garage by a couple of inches, the conversion went smoothly and Tom is now fully up and running in his new premises.

He currently bakes three days a week to make bread for farmers' markets and to supply his two retail outlets in Castle Douglas – Sunrise Wholefoods and Thistle 'B' Scrumptious. All Tom's breads have long fermentation times, so he prepares them one day and freshly bakes them the next morning.

The Earth's Crust Bakery is a member of the Real Bread Campaign, and its ethos follows the campaign's principles that real bread "has nothing to hide", with the only essential ingredients being flour, water, yeast

and salt. Other ingredients can be added as long as they are natural – such as seeds, nuts, cheese, herbs, and oils.

While an industrial loaf can take 90 minutes from mixing to baked loaf, Tom's breads can take 16-20 hours. This means they become full of flavour; develop natural keeping qualities, which take away the need for additives or preservatives; and make them more digestible.

Pavlina says: "It's a real shame that some people think they can't eat bread. When bread is highly processed and made so fast it doesn't have a chance to become digestible; I am convinced that most people eating our bread will be fine with it."

All the flour Tom uses, sourced from mills in North Wales and Gloucestershire, is certified organic, stoneground and made using grains grown in Britain. He would like to source flour closer to home, but has been unable to do so. He also sources local ingredients to add to the breads when he can.

Tom produces a range of hand-crafted breads, from yeasted tinned loaves, such as The Earth's Crust Five Seed; Wheatgerm & Honey, and Pain de Mie – his version of the classic French white loaf – to speciality breads such as foccacia, in caramelised red onion, feta and thyme; rosemary and flaked sea salt; and sun-dried tomato and basil

## 'You're only as good as your last batch of bread; that's what keeps you on your toes. You can't afford to let standards slip'

flavours. Sourdough breads are also a signature product.

"When a lot of people hear about sourdough bread, they think it is a very difficult thing to do," says Tom.

"My sourdough starter is good quality dark rye flour and water and that's it. You mix it together and leave it, topping it up for two or three days when you first make it. You use the starter to make bread and just keeping topping it up to replace what you've used."

Tom's range of sourdough breads include his Galloway Dark Sourdough, which is a dark sourdough with rye flour and caraway; Walnut Sourdough, a classic white sourdough, with walnut paste and chopped walnuts; Olive and Herb Sourdough; and the very popular Borodinsky, a classic Russian 100 per cent rye sourdough flavoured with coriander seeds.

While he enjoys experimenting with different combinations of ingredients, Tom has to work hard to perfect his breads.

The weather – including temperature and moisture in the air – can all have an impact on how the bread will turn out and Tom keeps data sheets about every loaf he makes, including dough and water temperature, to see which combinations make the best product.

He explains: "You are only as good as your last batch of bread; that's what keeps you on your toes. You can't afford to let standards slip."

With their fledgling business, Tom and Pavlina have found farmers' markets – they regularly sell at Dumfries, Colvend, Glenkens, Moffat and New Cample markets – to be a very friendly and helpful forum, and have been delighted at the support offered by regional food and drink organisation Savour the Flavours.

They took part in the Flavour Taster weekend in May, welcoming lots of people to the bakery to find out about and taste their breads, and also ran a sourdough starter workshop. Pavlina has planted oats,

barley and wheat in the garden, that will feature in their plans for taking part in Flavour Fortnight – the annual celebration of the region's food and drink which runs from August 25 to September 9 this year.

The couple are also looking for more outlets to supply, including local B&Bs, and have two orders to provide bread for weddings.

Pavlina says: "The farmers' markets and Savour the Flavours have been fantastic for us; they have really helped us put ourselves on the map.

"We've had so much support locally and good feedback; that's what makes it all worthwhile. Lots of things have been lost in Laurieston in the last 10 years, like the school and the pub, and I think people like to see something bringing life to the village.

"We're going against the odds setting up the bakery in such a time of doom and gloom, but we work really hard and it's going to work.

"We might be small, but we're serious and passionate about what we do." 

■ For more information about The Earth's Crust Bakery at The Croft, Laurieston, Castle Douglas, DG7 2PW, call: 01644 450624 or see: [www.earthscrustbakery.co.uk](http://www.earthscrustbakery.co.uk).