

The secret behind Weaver Street's *miche* bread

By David A. Ross



Photo by Alex Boerner

At Weaver Street, try to get the miche while it's warm

The Michelin-caliber origami at Chapel Hill's [One] Restaurant is lovely, but the local meal that haunts me is a shepherd's snack: a wedge of Weaver Street Market's *miche* slathered with a creamy mountain-born cheese.

The bread must be fresh. I recommend arriving at Weaver Street on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday or Sunday at around 5 p.m. to secure an hours-old loaf. As time passes, the bread retains its sour-earthy flavor but loses the crucial contrast between crackly crust and springy crumb.

Miche, a large, round sourdough loaf, is very French. Dark, crusty and dusty with flour, it belongs on a plank table at a village fete. But its old-world aspect has even more to do with its complex texture and flavor. The crust offsets a chewy, medium-dense crumb and subtly acerbic sourdough notes. The monks and peasants of times past were not naïfs, as this reincarnation of their bread makes clear.

The miche pairs well with an equally involved bottle of Saison Dupont, which you can buy across the street at the Carrboro Beverage Company. The classic Belgian import is complex, but not overpowering; relatively light and dry, it adds treble to the miche's profound bass.

Weaver Street's master bakers produce the miche at their vast facility in Hillsborough. The four-pound loaves—140 of them per week—go to Weaver Street's retail locations, where they're sold in quarters (\$3.29) and halves (\$4.99).

"Most miches don't have as much pre-fermented flour as ours do," says Rob Nichols, Weaver Street's bread production manager. "That's what makes our loaf distinctive and gives it more flavor. And because it's so large, it spends a long time in the oven. In consequence, it develops that beautiful coffee/chocolate-tasting crust."

Too complex to be a mere carb-delivery device, the miche is not meant to accommodate sandwich meat or, God forbid, Nutella. Like good wine or chocolate, it deserves a clean palate. Nonetheless, Nichols has evolved a summer breakfast with miche leftovers.

"We sell something called Ezra's Feta," he says. "It's a cross between feta and cream cheese. I toast a miche slice, douse it with olive oil and spread on this feta. I gather some fresh figs from our fig tree and mash them into the cheese and grind black pepper on top. Eating this with a cup of coffee makes me so happy."



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Indy Week, September 9, 2015

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