

Birthing Babies and Bread

A Honolulu physician takes baking to new levels with his artisan-style loaves.

AS AN OBSTETRICIAN/GYNECOLOGIST AT KAISER Permanente, Chris Miura M.D. spends much of his time bringing new life into the world. He spends the rest of his time creating something that's essential to the enjoyment of life: bread.

Miura is a baker, and a passionate one at that, firing up his self-built brick oven to bake crusty, artisanal loaves unlike any found in Honolulu bakeries. He is no weekend hobbyist; Miura has hung out at bakeries, attended classes and experimented for about a decade, all in pursuit of the perfect loaf of bread.

It all started when his wife was pregnant. "She was losing weight and couldn't keep any food down. We tried all sorts of food, then someone suggested fresh-baked bread." Miura still hasn't figured out why, but the loaves he began to produce worked to nourish his wife. When she became pregnant again, he got serious about baking.

"I took a course at Kapi'olani Community College and read every book on artisan breads," recalls Miura. "I met a bakery consultant and produced bread for a year so he could

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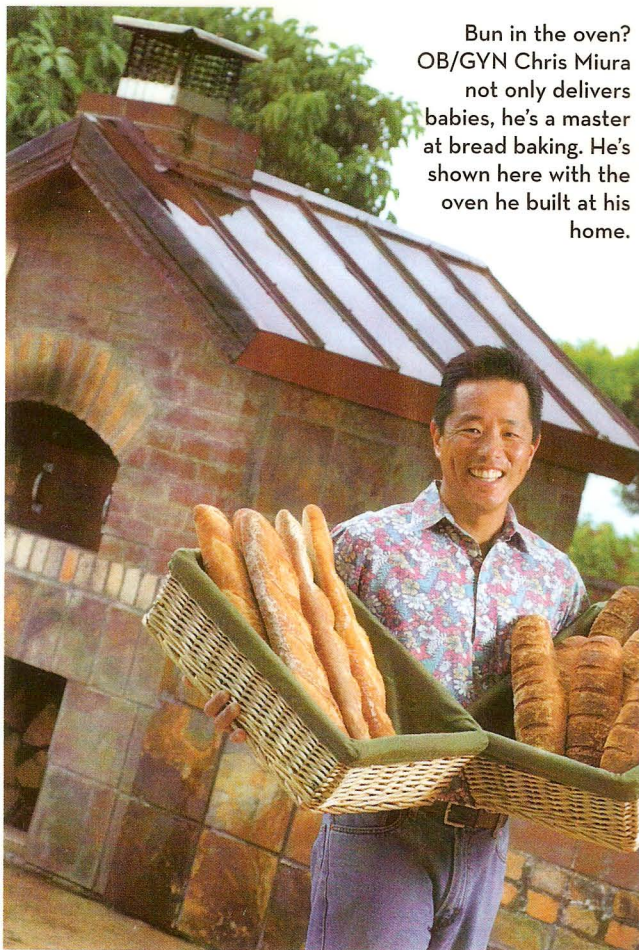
critique it. I started hanging out with industry folks. The first three years I hated it. Then it became a passion; I went crazy."

Ten years ago, he picked some grapes off a vine in California, mixed them with flour and

water in a plastic bag and brought the mixture home. This natural starter is the basis for his *boules* (round loaves), sourdough baguettes, rye and pumpernickel loaves. It's also the basis for his repertoire of specialty breads, which include kalamata olive, chocolate sour-cherry, walnut gorgonzola sourdough, roasted garlic, pecan pesto focaccia with port-infused organic raisins, Yukon gold potato/Maui-onion focaccia with white truffle oil.

Miura built his brick oven over a period of six months, allowing concrete slabs to cure and learning how to build arches with bricks and mortar. "The dome is flat, not high-peaked," he points out. "This oven gives me evenly browned, crusty loaves." From the outside, the oven is about five feet high, and sits upon a brick shelf about three feet off the ground. Inside, the oven is about three feet by three feet, by two feet high.

To bake bread, Miura fires up the oven for six to eight hours the day before he will actually bake. He burns six to eight hefty logs of eucalyptus, kiawe or guava wood; his fire reaches a temperature of 1,000 degrees, penetrating the brick-lined walls and base of the oven. "The bricks turn white and the wood burns off to ash," says Miura. "It takes about three



Bun in the oven? OB/GYN Chris Miura not only delivers babies, he's a master at bread baking. He's shown here with the oven he built at his home.

to four hours for the oven to cool down to baking temperature of 425 to 500 degrees. It stays hot for eight to 10 hours; I can do about five loads of 12 to 15 loaves each."

Miura shares his loaves with family friends and neighbors. He also shares his loaves monthly at Vino in Restaurant Row, where master sommelier Chuck Furuya challenges Miura to come up with breads that pair with specific wines.

As a natural progression in this quest for delicious bread, Miura has learned to use production equipment and has formulas established for his repertoire of breads. He knows when his dough has risen too much or too little, knows the hollow sound of a well-baked loaf. He can explain the science behind a perfect loaf, just as he can advise an expectant mother about the birth of her child. Next, he'd like to birth a bakery so he can further share his love of artisanal breads with others.

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