

THOM LEONARD's COUNTRY FRENCH BREAD

(from Maggie Glezer's Artisan Baking)

Make the levain on the evening before baking by mixing:

25 g fermented firm sourdough starter

140 g lukewarm water

140 g bread flour



Allow it to sit at room temperature for 12 hours, or until it has expanded and just started to sink in the center.

On baking day:

Prepare the whole wheat component, by measuring 350g whole wheat flour and sifting it with a fine strainer. This will remove the large flakes of bran (you can use it to make muffins). Measure 250g of the sifted product, and start making the dough.

250 g sifted whole wheat flour

750 g bread flour

30 g rye flour

660 g water

23 g salt

all of the levain made the previous evening

Add the three types of flour to the bowl of a large KitchenAid type mixer. Mix the water with the levain to dissolve it, and add it to the flours. Using the dough hook, mix it for 10-15 minutes, until the dough is very smooth and almost cleans the bowl. Add the salt and continue mixing for 5 more minutes.

Place the dough in a very large bowl and let it rise for 3 hours, folding three times (at 30, 60, and 90 minutes). After the final folding, just leave it undisturbed for the final 90 minutes. Remove the dough from the container, form it into a ball and let it rest for 10 minutes to relax the gluten (that makes it easier to shape).

Shape it into a large round loaf, and place it in a suitable container for proofing, lining it with a heavily floured linen, with the smooth side down. Proof at room temperature for 4 hours, or until an indentation made in the dough will not bounce back right away.

Carefully transfer the bread to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, slash the surface and bake with an initial burst of steam, in a 450F oven. Bake it for 70 to 80 minutes, rotating the dough after 30 minutes, and reducing the temperature to 400F if it starts to get too dark. Allow it to cool on a rack for several hours before slicing it.