

A new magazine for the Central Coast

Live Artfully

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2008 COOKBOOK ISSUE

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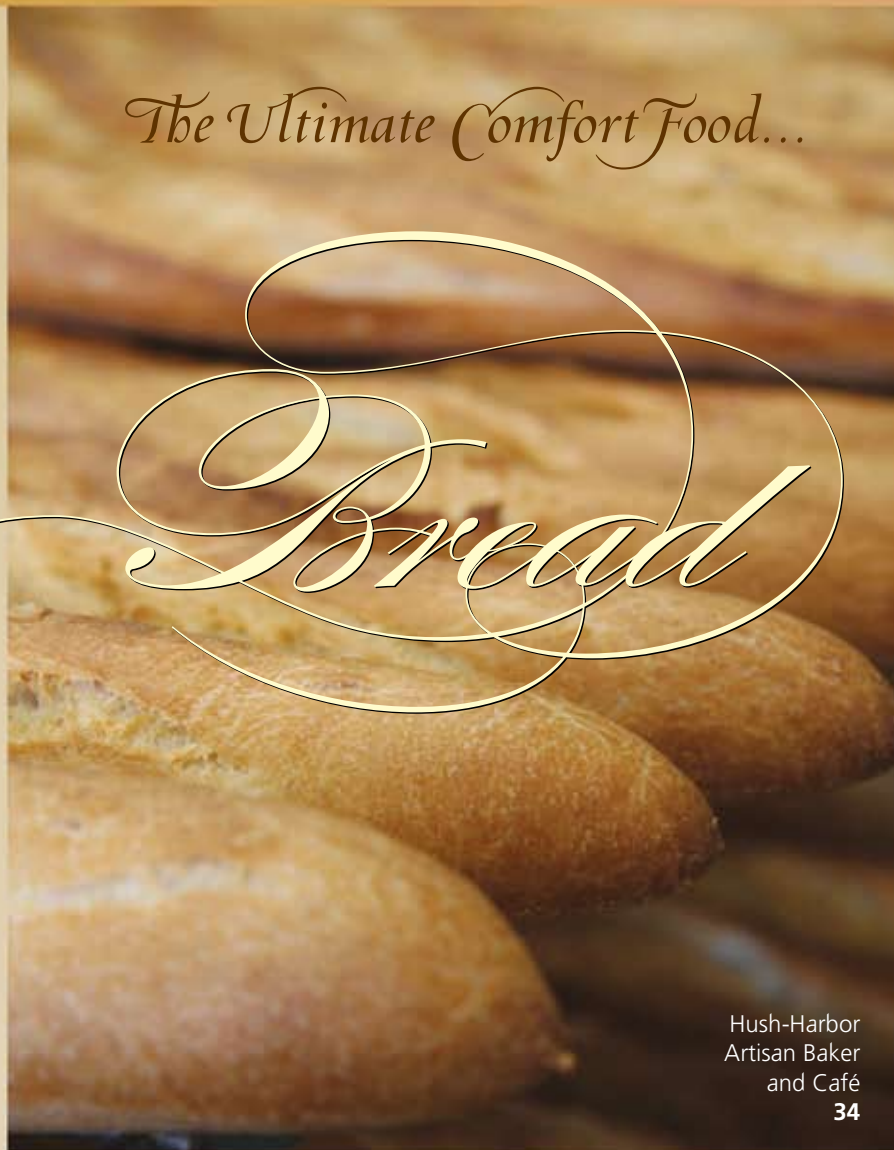
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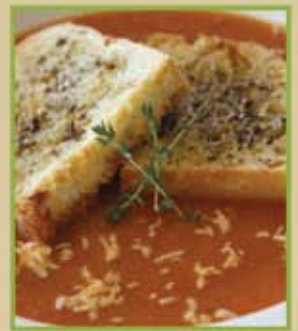


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“European customers and restaurateurs who buy from Monroe say it tastes just like breads they knew from home...”



Hush Harbor's best-selling bread is their French baguettes.



DAILY

Bread

Hush Harbor bakes their bread daily with passion and perfection.
by Kevin Colton

Fueled by a vision for excellence, perfection and a dynamic culinary experience, Donnie Monroe knows what it takes to keep local customers coming back for more. Upon entrance into Hush-Harbor Bakery and Café in Atascadero, California, the aroma of comfort and nourishment—fresh-baked bread—greet hungry visitors.

The inviting aromas are joined with the soulful strains of jazz music. The portraits of jazz greats adorn the red walls: Dizzy Gillespie, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong.

A myriad of excellent baking expressions come into view: layered quiches, assorted pastries, croissants and beautiful cakes and pies. A large window encourages guests to observe the bakers creating. Quality, creativity, complexity—complete commitment of one's craft—this is the message that's sent.

Monroe views his venture as an attempt to “push back against the mediocrity” of the modern baking profession as seen in so many supermarket-run bakeries. His passion for baking ignited 16 years ago as he traveled throughout Europe for six months. He sampled the bread of the locals and met true artisan bakers. “I was ruined,” he declared.

Born and raised in Kentucky, Monroe attended the Baking Institute of San Francisco, then moved south to Riverside to study under a reputable master baker.

“[Initially], I worked for free, so I could learn from him. Gabriel taught me patience.” This is the essential ingredient that sets his bread apart from the rest of the crowd.

Five years ago, Monroe saw the growth of the Central Coast wine industry and knew that with wine comes good food. He seized the opportunity to move his family to Atascadero.

Once Monroe relocated, he established Hush-Harbor Artisan Bakery. His first step was to acquire a great oven.

His Mordial Forni (mor-dee-al for-nee) was shipped in pieces from Verona, Italy, and unloaded in the front parking lot. Monroe paid an Italian employee of the company to help assemble it.

Mixing the mortar in the parking lot, Monroe laid and built up the brick walls himself. The result is evidenced in the final product. Behind several metal doors, each compartment contains a clay surface which produces a texture of crust on the bottom of the breads that cannot be matched using a standard rack oven.

Getting to this point meant overcoming many obstacles, including discouragement and adjustments to a new area. Monroe's answer to adversity? “Don't worry; pray! The Lord will make a way.”

To establish a base wholesale clientele, Monroe hit the streets with fresh loaves in hand and personally drummed up business from “high-end” restaurateurs. One of them is a well-known Italian restaurant in the county. Monroe walked in without an appointment, introduced himself and



Above: One major component to giving the unique flavor and texture to Monroe's breads is his imported oven from Italy, the Mordial Forni.



Monroe shows writer Kevin Colton, the inside of the Mordial Forni.

offered his bread to the staff. The matriarch of the family restaurant took one bite and immediately placed her first order. They've been a client ever since. Monroe's clientele extends from Paso Robles to Pismo Beach.

Just what is it that makes Monroe's bread so special?

Take his Rustic Italian bread, for example. It begins with a 16-year-old levain starter, which Monroe brought with him from Riverside. This, combined with a "poolish"-style fermentation process, slow rise, proofing times and the highest quality flour creates an exceedingly complex bread filled with wonderful flavors that linger on the palette.

Or take lead baker Brian Flewell's challah bread. Made before this year's Yom Kippur, it causes rejoicing on its own. He braids it with six strands of dough, tops it with egg wash and sesame seeds, and bakes it to a dark caramel brown.

Hush-Harbor's ciabatta is so sweet, the echoes of flavor call for immediate use on sandwiches. Again, only the best artisan flour will do for these kinds of bread; Monroe has his flour, Giusto's Vita-Grain, freighted in from San Francisco. "The Bay Area is probably the closest place you will find a bakery like this," he said.

Hush-Harbor's signature bread, the French baguette, is known for its consistency. Delivered throughout the Central Coast in Monroe's "Hush Mobile," they are never late. European customers and restaurateurs who buy from Monroe say it tastes just like breads they know from home.

Monroe believes restaurateurs and customers are willing to pay a premium rather than regular prices for bread because they value flavor, texture and beauty over mediocrity. His goal is to make the best product available.

Monroe draws out this same passion for baking and professionalism in his bakers and chefs. His lead employees are talented bakers and while Monroe doesn't mind sharing the limelight, he also stresses that they are given full creative autonomy. As distinctive as the bread he bakes, this business model is rarely found within the modern food service industry.

Monroe looks for opportunities to invest in up-and-coming talent. First, he identifies those with interest in the profession.



Cooling rack filled with Hush-Harbor's daily baked breads.



Ciabatta

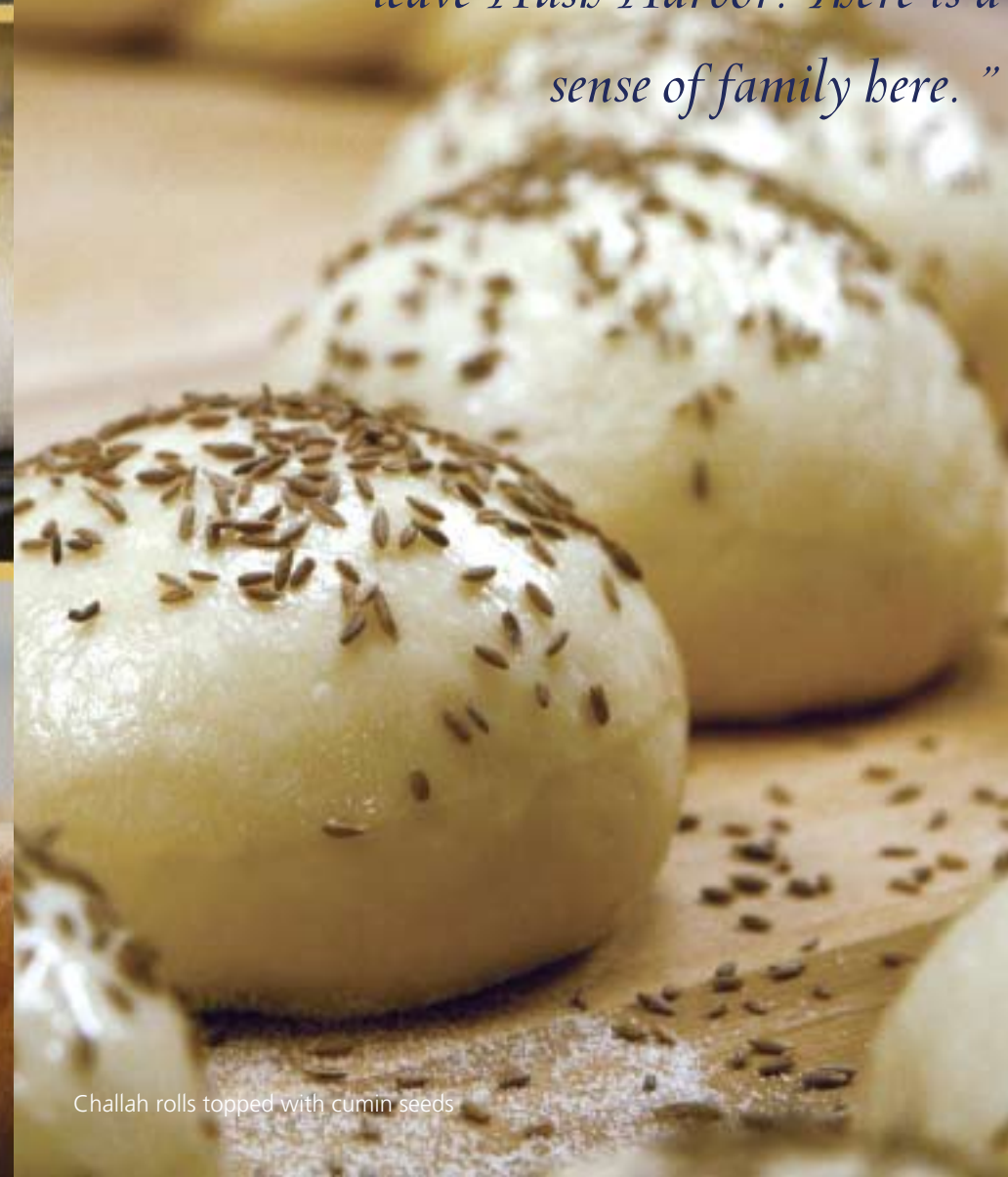


Challah

From left to right: Garret Humphrey, pastry chef, Brian Flewell, lead baker and Donnie Monroe, head baker and owner.



"After a long day's work, the crew does not seem to be in a hurry to leave Hush-Harbor. There is a sense of family here."



Challah rolls topped with cumin seeds



**Deep Dish Challah
French Toast
the Cottage**
Paso Robles, CA

- Butter for greasing pan
- 1 24 oz. challah loaf, cut into 1-inch cubes (or use Kings Hawaiian bread)
- 1 8 oz. package cream cheese, cut into 18 cubes
- ¼ cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- ½ cup raisins
- 8 large eggs
- 2 cups milk
- ½ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- Pinch of nutmeg
- Pinch of cloves
- 4 Tbsp. melted butter

Generously butter a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Place the bread cubes in a single layer, filling in all the gaps. Evenly scatter the cream cheese cubes, nuts and raisins on top. Cover with the remaining bread cubes and pack down.

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, milk, brown sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. Pour the egg mixture over the bread cubes. Using your palms, gently press down to allow top layer to absorb the liquid. Cover dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Let dish sit at room temperature for 20 minutes before baking.

Bake uncovered for 30 minutes. Remove from oven, drizzle with melted butter, return to oven and bake until the cubes are nicely toasted and all the liquid is absorbed, about 5-10 minutes.

Remove from oven and cool on rack and run a knife around rim of the pan to release the french toast. Cut into squares and arrange on individual plates and sprinkle with powdered sugar. Serve with real maple syrup.



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Sometimes, this means taking risks. One of his first employees was a young man who had spent so much time in jail that at the age of 21, he still did not have a driver's license. Monroe's wife, Penny, taught him how to drive. After working under Monroe's guidance for almost three years, he had become a fully trained, world-class baker.

Monroe's current lead baker, Brian Flewell, came to work at Hush-Harbor in February 2007. Raised in Bremerton, Wash., he grew up helping his parents in the kitchen.

"By age 3, I mastered baking chocolate chip cookies," Flewell said with a chuckle.

He graduated as a sous chef from Olympic College's culinary arts program. He sent Monroe a resume, joined the team, and quickly found his place in the business. As a third generation chef, Flewell knows his desire to bake for a living is lifelong and added that he intends to "roll bread in the grave."

"You can't lose with that!" Donnie added with perceptible admiration for his lead baker. "This is a true win-win situation."

Pastry chef Garret Humphrey considers working at the Hush-Harbor a privilege and appreciates the support he has to be creative. He said he's allowed to make whatever he wants—a variety of baked goods that offer customers a feast for senses. One day's work included devil's food cake, cheesecake, pies, turnovers and his signature creation: apple dumplings.

The café is open for breakfast on Saturdays and lunch Monday through Saturday. Monroe's head chef, Cesar Amezcua, serves up a variety of soups, salads and sandwiches made on the delicious bread from the bakery. Everything is made from scratch, including the salad dressings, which also find their way onto the sandwiches.

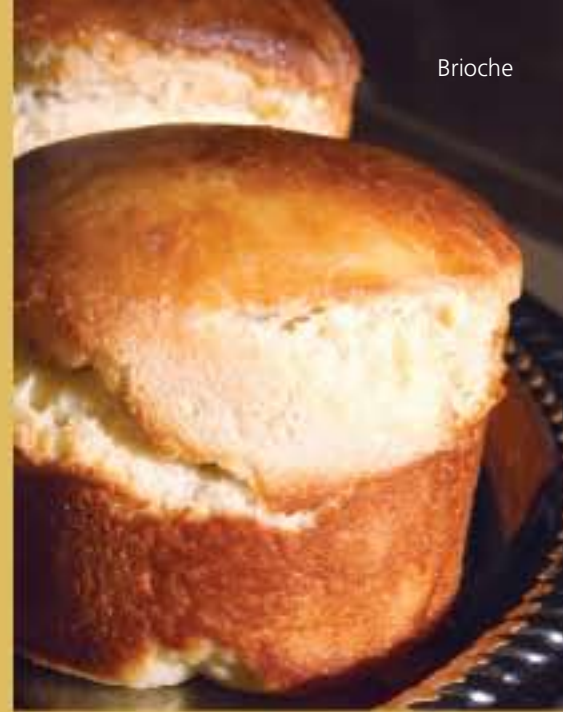
Whole wheat rounds are featured on one of the daily specials, the Italian Grinder sandwich. Because Monroe's wife, Penny, hails from New Orleans, Old Europe meets the French Quarter in the creation of Hush-Harbor's authentic Po'boy sandwiches. "This is the real thing," Monroe asserted.

After a long day's work, the crew does not seem to be in a hurry to leave the Hush-Harbor. There is a sense of family here. Return customers are on a first-name basis and treated as an extension of the family. Like the hush-harbors of days of old, this bakery has become a gathering place for the community at large to meet, refuel—and even find friendship.

Below from left to right: Morgan Gottfried, Caleb Gottfried holding daughter Chloe and Corinna Sandorval



The name **Hush-Harbor** comes from the Civil War era, when slaves would hold secret meetings along the shared borders of the plantations they belonged to. These meetings were mostly for the purpose of having church, but also became information-sharing centers as tradesmen and drivers brought news from surrounding counties and states. They helped shape African American culture.



Brioche



Green Apple and Gorgonzola Salad



Flewell eggwashes his seasonal challah.



Right: One of the daily specials, Chicken Eggplant Sandwich served with a side of fresh fruit



Elegant chocolate cake



Cesar's chili



Humphrey adds finishing touches to his banana cream pies.



Italian Grinder

Chef Cesar's Black Bean Chili

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 4 yellow onions, diced
- 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 jalapeños, chopped and seeds removed
- 24 oz. can black beans
- 32 oz. chicken stock
- ½ cup paprika
- ¼ cup chili powder
- 2 Tbsp. oregano
- ½ cup cumin
- 3 Tbsp. cayenne
- Salt and pepper to taste

In a large stock pot, brown the ground beef. Drain the fat off. Add onions, garlic and jalapeños. Sauté until onions are transparent. Add black beans and stir to combine. Add stock and spices. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to simmer for about 20 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with shredded cheddar cheese and chopped fresh cilantro.



Above from left to right: Jesse Smaw, Cesar Amezcua and Arturo Leonardo. Amezcua prepares his popular chili.



Hush-Harbor Artisan Bakery and Café is located at 5735 El Camino Real Ste. L, Atascadero, California. (805) 460-0541