



BREAD PROJECT |  
WORLDWIDE

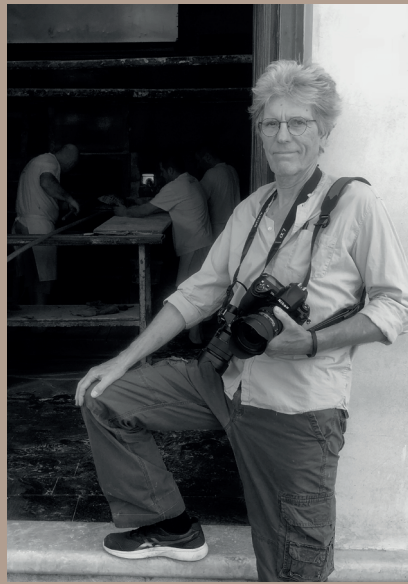
*'Bread:  
A staple food that  
connects us.'*

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Photos and words  
Mirjam Letsch  
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Portrait Mirjam © S. Zweegman

GATHERER





Name: Hans de Clercq  
Profession: Freelance Photographer |  
Writer | Studio Letsch & de Clercq  
Gathering: Bread Worldwide

*Photo 1-2.* Hatidža from a village in Bosnia-Herzegovina bakes Domaći hljeb, literally 'homemade bread.'

*Photo 3-4.* Vincent from Burgundy, France, bakes spelt and whole wheat bread for villagers and a co-operative market.

*Photo 5-6.* The round Moroccan bread served at most meals is called khobz, sometimes referred to as kesra or agroum.

*'Isn't it fantastic how bread, one of the oldest recipes, usually containing just flour, water, yeast, and some salt, shows such a wide variety all over the world? In recent years, we have visited some of the most exquisite bakeries and ovens.'*

We have smelled their bread, felt its crust, and tasted it. You could call us bread gatherers — hunting for the most beautiful bread stories worldwide. We are collecting them to eventually bundle into a book, but also to honour the wonderful artisan baker's trade.'

Nearly two years ago, Dutch writers and photographers Mirjam Letsch and her husband Hans de Clercq embarked on a journey across the world in search of artisan bakers to photograph. Mirjam, accomplished photographer with several cookbooks to her name (two of which received national and international awards), had been approached by Johan Pater, third generation in a family of bakers. Inspired by his family, he hired her to photograph artisan bakeries all over the world. Johan's grandfather, founder of the bakery, delivered bread door to door in a handcart. His father then expanded the company, and under his direction, it grew into a string of sophisticated, large-scale, highly automated venues, providing daily bread for various supermarket chains. But deep inside, he yearned for the old days, with wood-fired ovens and dough kneaded by hand. He considered this the true art of baking. Thus, the Bread Project took off, and the search for artisan bakers began.

'To be honest, like most people, we had never given bread much thought, other than we insist on whole wheat, which we buy at a local bakery. Behind the counter, one can see the bakery's innards — a semi-industrial space with huge gas-fired ovens with hinged doors. Little did we know that the assignment to photograph artisan bakers would take us into a world that was alien to us.'







Name: Miriam Letsch  
Profession: Freelance Photographer |  
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Gathering: Bread Worldwide

*Photo 1.* Lebanese Ka'ak Bread, is a very popular flatbread sold in the streets of Beirut, Lebanon. The bread, with a hole in the centre, resembles a purse — hence its nickname: purse bread.

*Photo 2.* Lebanese flatbread, traditionally prepared with white flour and yeast. This bread is a staple of the Lebanese diet.

*Photo 3.* Swedish cinnamon bread rolls baked by Mikael in Lulea.

*Photo 4.* Natalia from Moldova bakes twelve different breads, some with fanciful names: Borodinskii, Zemgaliskii, Crapacioasa.

*Photo 5.* In Bosnia-Herzegovina, somun ćurukot, a round flatbread sprinkled with black cumin seeds is traditionally eaten during Ramadan when the fast ends after sunset.

*Photo 6.* Pane di Matera is a country-style sourdough bread, named after an ancient Italian city and the province of its origin.

Now, after some twenty countries and a multitude of local bakeries, we can confidently say that bread is a wonderful product, that bakeries are extremely photogenic locations, and proud bakers are the best people to meet!

'Haris Hodžić from Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example. Every day, a long line of customers wait in front of his Poričanin bakery in Sarajevo, where the doors are wide open to let in the fresh air. Now, during Ramadan, a group of bakers is even busier baking somun ćurukot, the round flatbread traditionally eaten when the fast ends after sunset. Somun is available all year round, but during Ramadan, it is sprinkled with black cumin seeds, which Muhammad is believed to have said bring good luck and prosperity and can cure everything except death.'

'Or how about the inspiring story of Beáta Kovács from Hungary? She knows all about how love can turn things upside down. She originally graduated as a music teacher and worked in Budapest as a producer of classical music events. When she fell in love with a winemaker, she moved to Kisapáti, a village of three hundred souls north of Lake Balaton. This love did not last, but she continued to live in the village. She became a baker, simply because baking appealed to her, and she wanted to create something with her hands. She borrowed money to buy a former pub that had stood empty for ten years, gathered everything she needed, including the oven, and taught herself to bake. She now is the proud owner of the smallest bakery in Hungary. The entire country is currently estimated to have no more than twenty artisan bakers. The old village bakeries all disappeared under communism after the introduction of centralised commercial bread factories. Of the twenty artisan bakeries, hers is the smallest. These are the inspiring stories we gather.'







These are the cosy bakeries we love to photograph. Places where passion can be felt in every nook and cranny.' 'And we have to tell you about Sigurður Rafn Hilmarsson — Sigggi for short — from Iceland, who stuck his spade in the sand, where he buried a pan filled with bread dough twenty-four hours earlier. We had heard of bread from the ground, but this was the first time we saw it in real life. The earth bubbled with Iceland's ubiquitous geothermal heat. At around 100°C, the ground is a great temperature for steaming bread. Although Sigggi had marked the spot with a stone, it shifted, so he had to search carefully with the shovel. A sudden triumphant gesture — he found it!

'We have rarely met anyone as passionate about baking as Natalia Matiescu from Moldova. Her grandmother was her inspiration, famous for her homemade sourdough bread. It had a longer shelf life and an unparalleled taste, as she made the sourdough from grape must. Natalia's mother also baked, but used commercial baker's yeast. Natalia saw how her grandmother's tradition was in danger of being lost, and she immersed herself in the old ways. She learned how women used to bake bread that could be kept for up to two weeks — those who lived a gruelling life in the countryside had little time for baking. Now, after years of hard work and trial and error, Natalia has her own bakery, which she financed with crowdfunding. And her new bread is ready. She keeps the recipe secret, but she does reveal the baking time: fourteen hours. The bread, called Temelia, or 'foundation' in Romanian, can last a month. The longer it rests, the more intense the taste.'

'From Uganda to Iran, from Romania to Friesland, where we live. We will continue gathering stories, but you'll have to wait to read more. In the meantime, our social media connects bakers all over the world. Bread might be a relatively simple product with only a few ingredients, but it is one of the staples that links us all.'

*Photo. Laufabrauð ('leaf bread' or 'snowflake cake'), a unique Icelandic Christmas tradition. While other countries decorate bread, these round, leaf-thin, deep-fried cakes with patterns created by making cuts through the dough are unique to Iceland.*