



Vegetarian pizza at Fresco by Diego

OUR DAILY BREAD: BAKERIES IN THE D.F.

BY NICHOLAS GILMAN
Special to The News

Three new establishments have opened recently in the Roma-Condessa area, with plenty to offer the discerning bread snob

One of my few gastronomic complaints about Mexico is the lack of really good bread. I mean French baguettes – fresh, dense and crusty – the kind available on every corner of Paris (or my hometown of New York). And I'm always searching for croissants that actually taste like butter, not the typical "I-can't-believe-it's-not" kind that's so common here.

Well, weep no more. Three new establishments have opened their doors recently in the Roma-Condessa area. And all three make the kind of bread that would more than satisfy any Parisian bread snob.

HIP AND CASUALLY CHIC

Fresco by Diego is a restaurant/charcuterie/bakery with a fresh new look – part of what I call "The New Mexico City": hip, casually chic and European.

Beautifully designed using lots of wood, this friendly, open place reminds me of something you might see in northern California or southern France. It has a "natural" look that is familiar and inviting. With only five outdoor tables, a lot of what's sold here is "para llevar," or "to go." The kitchen is open so you can watch the experts at work.

Young chef and owner Diego Pérez Turner spent years plying his trade in France, England and Holland. He learned to make quesadillas from a Moroccan chef in a Mexican restaurant in Paris.



Diego Pérez Turner is the chef and owner of Fresco by Diego.



Fresco by Diego has been beautifully designed, with lots of wood.

"He was always stoned on hashish, but made superb quesadillas," he told me.

Pérez Turner studied baking in Holland, then after years abroad, returned to his homeland. With partner Rosi Lobaton, he decided to open a bakery. The partners

expanded it to include charcuterie, and finally complete meals.

Lobaton, whose husband is Lebanese, brings a Middle Eastern touch to the menu. There are several Arabic appetizers, such as hummus, tabbouleh, roast eggplant and

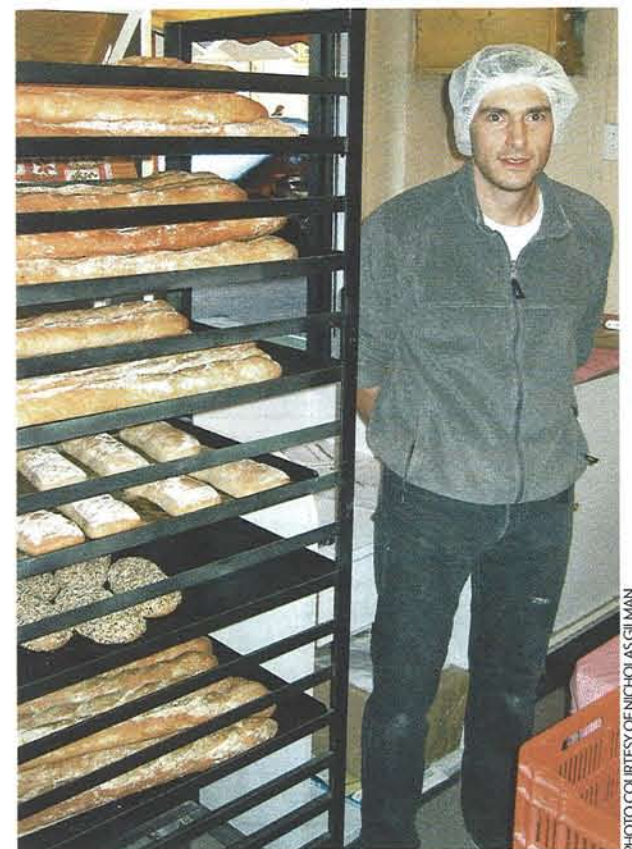
jocoque. The menu of main dishes is small, which I usually take as a good sign (I don't trust restaurants that offer to many things on their menu – how can it all be fresh?) The make excellent lasagna, prepared with a well-done Bolognese sauce and a dense, spic tomato sauce.

An outstanding duck plum sauce is fragrant with ginger and pepper. Oblong shaped pizzas are just right with a thin, crisp crust, the sauce rich with concentrate tomato flavor. Sandwiches are ample – the "salmon marinade en casa" is my favorite.

There are several salads and soups as well, and special dishes that change daily. But best of all are the breads and pastries – sweet rolls with cardamom, various fruit and cream tarts, croissants, coolies – and those baguettes. Dense and flavorful, they have a satisfying contrast between the soft, chewy inside and the crunchy outside. They will not disappoint. Everything baked right on the premises so freshness is assured.

CHAIN DOES IT RIGHT

Another newcomer in the Condessa, Le Pain Quotidien, a Belgian chain bakery which promises to open in more locations around Mexico City. I'm usually wary of chains, but I have to admit that their



Jean Michel Laurent produces few items, but he does them well.

bread here are exceptional.

The pain de campagne is weighty and redolent of sourdough, truly the best of its kind I've had outside Europe (it reminds me of the legendary Poulain of Paris). Cakes and pastries are buttery good and the coconut macaroons are to die for. The pleasant, airy interior looks out onto tree-lined Avenida Amsterdam, while classical music plays in the background – a relief from the usual drone of pop music, or worse, television!

The menu of salads, omelets or a mixed breadbasket with imported jams is perfect for breakfast or lunch. Very good coffee is served a la francesa, that is, in bowls without handles. In the evening, there are several light offerings, including "hot pot de pollo" and various bruschette, such as wild mushroom and Gruyere.

There's a small wine and beer list, too, if you want something stronger than lemonade or iced tea.

PARIS-STYLE BAGUETTES

Nearby in Colonia Roma, just across from the bountiful Medellín market, a sign recently caught my eye: "Boulangerie Français Artesanal," it read.

It turned out to be a French bakery. This small shop is run by young chef Jean Michel Laurent, who hails from Southwest France and learned breadmaking in Paris.

His Mexican wife Alma Patricia manages the store while keeping an eye on their

CRUST MUSTS
These three shops make bread like you'd find in Paris

Fresco by Diego

Montes de Oca 23 (near Tamaulipas), Colonia Condessa, Tel. 5553-1027
Open 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday

Le Pain Quotidien

Avenida Amsterdam 309 (between Celaya and Avenida México), Colonia Condessa
Open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekends

Boulangerie Français Artesanal

Coahuila 167 (between Monterrey and Medellín), Colonia Roma
Open until 6 p.m., closed Monday

newborn son. They produce only a few items, but do those very well.

Whole grain round loaves, rolls, croissants and perfect Paris-style baguettes come out of the ovens every few hours. They're often sold out by midday, so go early.

Nicholas Gilman is author of "Good Food in Mexico City: A Guide to Food Stalls, Fondas and Fine Dining," available through online booksellers. His Web site is www.mexicocityfood.net

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