



Outerlands

Where the Bread Rises and Shines

BY MOLLY WATSON PHOTOS BY ROBIN JOLIN



Outerlands magnificent bread is featured prominently on the menu and is even available for take-home.

A trip to Outerlands can feel, to someone who lives in the sunny Mission, like a trip out of town, a trip to some confused but charming offspring of hipster Portland and a dreary Lost Coast burg. Old laundromat signs, a sophisticated hippie gift store, an old neighborhood bar and a serious-to-beat-the-band espresso bar are Outerlands' neighbors. The sound of gulls, if not the surf itself, is clear.

While it is well documented that San Franciscans will line up for brunch anywhere, Outerlands manages to lure folks

across the city, down to the edge of the moody surf, to wait in the drizzling almost-rain for a table. And not only for brunch. They wait in the bone-chilling damp for lunch and dinner, too.

Is there crack in the coffee? A chance with every order to win a golden ticket to tour a famous chocolate factory?

Not that I found. What I found was bread. Kick-ass bread. The kind of bread that I, who hates to drive, who has constructed an entire life around crossing Market Street as infrequently as possible, will drive over half an hour to eat.

It has crust, to be sure. Thick and brown and not dry



David Muller slices into a fresh loaf. Opposite: Muller with his handiwork.

but still crunchy and pretty much everything you want in a crust. Then, of course, there is the inside. Irregular holes and a slightly dense somewhat chewy texture. Unlike so many artisan breads in our fair city, this one is baked in this crazy thing called a loaf pan—imagine that—and thus takes on the squared-bottom, blooming top shape of breads of my youth, so it has a kick of nostalgia without having to suffer through the actual bland taste of those breads of my youth. Outerlands bread has flavor. It sounds crazy, but you can taste how the bread picks up flavor from the salty ocean air during its overnight rise on the tables and counters of the restaurant.

Yep, the bread is set to rise out on the tables after the last dinner patron leaves. Co-owner David Muller developed the technique, riffing on the method his surfing buddy, Chad Robertson of Tartine Bakery, outlines in his book *Tartine Bread*.

Oh, you think, mystery solved: So that's why the bread is so

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good, it's Tartine bread. Well, yes and no. The small kitchen at Outerlands means they can't control the rise with temperature control. David Muller manages the rise by drawing on his surfer's knowledge of the local weather and adjusting the amount of starter and the temperature of the water in the dough each day. "There are many nights," Muller says, "that I've slept in the restaurant to keep an eye on the loaves."

Muller and his wife, Lana Porcello, opened Outerlands on a bit of a whim. They are both artists and were working jobs here and there to pay the bills, "living that San Francisco bohemian reality" as Muller calls it. They frequently cooked for friends and thought of opening a take-away soup shop.

"We wanted something close and fun to do and to make soup and feed the neighborhood," says Muller. "This amazing corner spot opened up and we just decided we had to jump on it." After a year of building the space, during which Muller

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Muller pulling perfect loaves from the Outerlands ovens.

designed the beyond-cozy driftwood-clad interior, had wood-working friends show him how to line the walls and build the counter and, eventually, figured out how to bake bread, Outerlands opened in February 2009.

“I can’t even believe that it happened at all,” says Muller. “One thing just led to the next and it gathered this momentum that’s kind of crazy. Now we’re totally entrenched and I see that it has to be bigger than we imagined if only because we keep having ideas about what we want to do.”

For now that means a soup, a salad or two and several sandwiches—grilled or open-faced—that form the bulk and heart of the menu at Outerlands. Puffy pancakes and eggs in

jail join the party for weekend brunch; pastas, stews and braises round out dinner. They are open Tuesday through Saturday

11am–3pm and 6pm–close and Sunday 10am–2:30pm. Layer up (seriously, wear a hat and grab some mittens) or arrive early to avoid long waits (as of this writing Outerlands does not, to my great chagrin, take reservations). 



Molly Watson is a writer and recipe wizard. She writes thedinnerfiles.com and is the guide to local foods for About.

com. Her work has appeared in numerous other places, including *Sunset* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *New York Times*.