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Lafayette Boulange to Open Soon

By Sophie Braccini



Many years ago in a village located in the South-West of France, a young boy named Pascal Rigo used to get up at 3:00 o'clock in the morning to go make bread with the village's baker. Growing up, he worked with some well-known bakers in Bordeaux and Paris. This passion for bread didn't prevent him from working hard in school, and after earning his MBA, he decided to cross the ocean and try his luck in the United States. Some 20 years ago, combining his business training and his passion for bread, he and his wife Virginie created Bay Bread, first a wholesale bread-making company that led to bakeries in San Francisco and beyond. Now partnering with another Frenchman, Thomas Lefort, they are scheduled to open their 13th 'La Boulange' in the Lafayette Mercantile on Mount Diablo Boulevard on August 9th.

Bay Bread continues to be a family-owned company and still has a family feel, in spite of the fact that it employs 500 people. Wholesale is still a significant part of the gross income. In Lafayette, Trader Joe's carries the "Pain Pascal," and Diablo Foods the "La Boulange Brioche."

Photo courtesy La Boulange

became a permanent feature of the market. Urban legend has it that many couples were formed by people waiting to get their walnut bread or their chocolate croissant and that Bay Bread was at the root of many peninsula marriages. What made its success then, is what continues to make it today.

"We are baking some of the most authentic French breads and pastries of the Bay Area," says Lefort, "we work according to the specifications given by Pascal, who supervises the daily production, and we continue to use the same Utah Mill that has been providing us for years with organic flour. Some of the flour mixes have been made for our needs, as close to what Pascal would use in France; we try hard to be an authentic and rustic French bakery, not extremely sophisticated, more from the countryside, and we use no additives, everything is made from scratch every day."

The concept for the La Boulange that's opening across from Yankee Pier is a 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., seven days a week store where pastries, breads, brunch and lunch items are sold, along with coffees and teas. Everything comes daily from one of the company's two production units. Each Boulange is managed locally and partners with the neighborhood, just like a village bakery would be part of the close network of merchants and customers. "Nathan Figone will be in charge of the Lafayette Boulange; he was managing our Novato store but lives in the East Bay, it's a better choice to have someone local and experienced," says Lefort, adding, "We are about integrating into the community. The Lafayette Boulange will have its own vibe and will bring a little piece of France to the neighborhood."

One of the new manager's tasks will be to train his staff. "We're very adamant that our staff has to deliver a real hospitality service, and we train them with that purpose," says Lefort, "friendliness is the key to a successful place like this one. We focus on the whole guest experience, including a warm and welcoming decor."

The fact that Lafayette Boulange is the 13th of the group is a good omen to Lefort. "Our store is located by a beautiful old French fountain that was imported by the architect of the Mercantile - we couldn't have chosen a more appropriate spot."

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