
WORTH THE TRIP

BY BENJAMIN SCHMERLER

SLEEPER PRETZEL ROLL

Get thee to a bunnery.



“Fourteen? That’s all? You’re kidding, right?” That was my reaction upon hearing the number of cheese pretzel rolls made daily by bakers Ba Hassami and Afton Wilkey at Almondine, a bakery and patisserie in Dumbo. The rolls, which cost \$3.25 and come topped with Gruyère and poppy and sesame seeds, sell out in a few hours. But 14 is the production level owner Hervé Poussot says the market will currently bear without the risk of leftovers. “I’d like to have them make more,” he says, “but there isn’t a strong enough demand at this time.” Sorry, I just can’t sit back and let something this good be gobbled by a baker’s dozen (plus one)—it deserves a wider audience, it deserves—yes, I’ll say it—noshing notoriety.

I consulted food-writer friends who might have tried it: nothing doing. I Googled “Almondine Bakery’s cheese pretzel roll”: zippo. Then I tried the Brooklyn Chowhound board: a couple of posts from kindred spirits, “M,” and “Alan Henderson,” who called them “outrageous” and “when warm from the oven almost as good as those in S. Germany,” respectively. Now we’re talking. Still, not exactly a public outpouring. Compounding the injustice, I thought, was the fact that right around the corner hordes of tourists were lining up nightly at Grimaldi’s for pizza, oblivious to their proximity to pretzel-roll greatness.

Then I started to second-guess myself: Perhaps, it’s just in too competitive a food category to get noticed? No, that can’t be right, for who can name even *one* famous New York City pretzel? There’s City Bakery’s pretzel croissant, which, mind you, has its very own Web site (www.pretzelcroissant.com). Then, I thought: Maybe the baker doesn’t have a fancy pedigree? That was quickly ruled out when I learned that Almondine’s founding baker (and sometime consultant), the man who originally made the pretzel at the store (after getting the recipe from a colleague who obtained it while at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone; still with me?) is none other than George Gural. Gural is a French Culinary Institute instructor who worked at Bouley Bakery, Amy’s Bread, and, get this, once headed-up Thomas Keller’s Bouchon Bakery in Napa. (And, interestingly, the guy’s got a philosophy degree from NYU, too.)

People, wake up. There’s an amazing cheese pretzel roll in Dumbo that warrants your attention. Perhaps its strongest endorsement comes from Gural himself: “When I worked there I would eat one every day with a cup of soup.”

Needless to say, next time, I’m trying the soup. □

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