

# SBLS

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CHASING THE SUN



# FRESH BATCH

*AT OAT BAKERY, GET YOUR (HEALTHY) BREAD  
AND BUTTER—AND THEN SOME*

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Few—if any—other bakeries have a running club, a Goop collaboration, and true Danish touch to their name. If you haven't already (which is highly unlikely), meet Oat Bakery: the brazenly inventive health-bread hotspot gracing downtown Santa Barbara, Old Town Goleta, and as of late April, the Montecito Country Mart.

On top of nutrient-dense superfoods, whole grains, and fresh farmer's market pickings, Oat Bakery's key ingredient is, evidently, unconventionality. To transform typically benign, carb-heavy bread into a balanced source of fiber is a feat in itself, but to hand-craft it with stunning Scandinavian artistry, fuse unlikely flavors, and attract a cult following beyond Santa Barbara borders, puts the bakery in a league of its own.

Until 2017, bakery ownership was never in the cards for co-founder Louise Ulrich-Fontana. The Copenhagen native was raised making functional, fitness-conducive bread, guided by the evolving recipes of her mother Elise, a professional athlete. Every Scandinavian-style loaf was an experiment in optimizing oats, sprinkling whole grain flours with organic greens and nourishing seeds. When love—namely, her husband and co-founder Lou Fontana—brought Louise to Santa Barbara for good, she took her talents in tow, only intending to bake in the background of her fine art career.

As it turns out, she had much to gain from going with the grain. "I would give my [baked goods] to friends and family, then our friends, who own Juice Ranch, asked if they could start selling them there. It would sell out in an hour or two, so I would eventually be baking 11 hours a day, until our home oven died," she smiles, reminiscing on the coinciding local pop-ups her husband helped her with on weekends. "We had good momentum and support, so when the initial Haley Street lease fell into our laps, we went for it."

It's hard to believe such intentional storefronts unrolled somewhat serendipitously. But Oat Bakery's natural ease feels reflective of something grown organically; with love and *hygge*, the cozy cheer underlying Danish culture's characteristic happiness. This Scandinavian congeniality evokes the warmth of a hug, with no agenda other than enjoying one another's company. Louise likewise had no long-term entrepreneurial aspirations; Oat Bakery's success sprang from the simplicity of breaking bread together.

It's remarkable just how imaginative (and Instagrammable) their bread blends can be. Though dynamic experimentation makes for seasonally inspired offerings (think: chamomile-poached rhubarb and strawberry pastries in spring, and creamed corn and tomato tarts in summer), a number of coveted staples hold down the fort. Lively fruit, cheese, and herbs ornament ever-rotating farmer's market buns, baked Tuesdays and Saturdays. The olive sourdough focaccia's decadence is augmented by delicate sea salt, and *hygge* buns place a date, walnut, and coconut-oil-based spin on sweet cinnamon rolls. Charcoal sesame sourdough loaves elicit *yin-yang* in both tangy-meets-earthly flavors and visual appeal (satisfyingly revealed by a cross-section cut).

Montecito serves up a handful of pastries and weekend-only caviar creations, who meet their match in truffle cashew cream cheese and cilantro walnut pesto spreads. Oat Bakery downtown offers gluten-free versions of Elise-inspired classics, including date/almond, sage/garlic, and flax seed oat buns. Its Goleta location hosts the most expansive kitchen, and, by extension, is its largest creative outlet: vegetable-powered frittatas, jam-layered toasts, and daily sandwich and salad varieties bring a pop of live produce to the table.

Each bakery's artistic assortments, perched about their cream-and-cerulean walls, also pay a playful homage to Louise's two homes. "A lot of what you see in the Montecito window is from Copenhagen, and is either friends' or friends of friends', and is vintage, or is new, but it's all Danish," Louise says, gesturing to the dainty miscellany of vases, baskets, and bowls at the entrance of the newest location. Much of the abstract pottery dotting each location's displays are actually of her own creation, but she likely won't divulge this.

Down to olive oil selections, Louise consciously uplifts like-minded creatives throughout California and Copenhagen—to which Oat Bakery's ceaseless product partnerships and collaborative pop-ups stand testament. "When I first opened the bakery, the first thing I thought of was, 'How can I include my Danish friends doing cool things in our success?' So now we sell my friends' coffee in Goleta; I spent a lot of time finding this jam from London that I grew up eating because I think it's the best in the world; we've worked with Ghia doing a bake sale in L.A.; we've worked with Moon Juice," she reflects.







It'd be remiss not to revisit their crowning collaboration with wellness wisewoman herself, Gwyneth Paltrow. The Goop x Oat Bakery Wellness Bread packs an astounding 25 grams of grain- and gluten-free protein, thanks to chia seeds, almond flour and buckwheat. The mix stocks Goop's Rosewood Miramar boutique shelves and is soon to debut online nationwide, while its baked counterpart at Oat Bakery Montecito is a twice-a-day sellout star.

They're also the official bread vendor of Flamingo Estate, baking small-batch rolls for weekly Regenerative Farm Boxes delivered throughout Los Angeles. "We're such a small company, so to be able to work with these leading forces in the industry is amazing. I'm so grateful for and proud of that: they're also just good people," Louise remarks. "At the core of it all is finding good people who inspire you."

She'll be the last to give herself credit for it, but Louise's spirit of community cultivation serves as just this sort of leading light to locals. Goleta's ongoing Breakfast Club series invites all to sip barista brews while shopping floral and pottery selections, all curated from the Central Coast and Copenhagen. The Montecito location's forthcoming Bun Club Run Club will make monthly strides to foster community in shared experiences and healthy recovery bites. For all of its elaborate culinary creations and coalescing events, Oat Bakery's formula is simple: good ingredients and creative license in, happy bakers and inspired customers out. And, Louise knows, it wouldn't be possible without the hands that knead it.

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"I'm proud to be an immigrant, and to be 31 years old and have this amazing, growing business. I'm in awe of what we created and where we are and who we work with, and seeing everyone not only work hard every day, but truly loving what they do," she smiles. "The most gratifying thing about this is the people you meet, and realizing that you couldn't do it without them."\*