

# Efficiency with high standards

FABIEN POULAILLON CALLS HIS BUSINESS LES ATELIERS GOURMANDS – THE GOURMET STUDIOS. NO DESCRIPTION COULD BE MORE APT, AND THE IDEA BEHIND IT IS FASCINATING BECAUSE IT SHOWS THAT SPECIALIZATION IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE, BUT ALSO OPENS UP NEW, LUCRATIVE MARKETS



**++ figure 1**  
“Kougelhof” cut and filled to make sandwiches



**++ figure 2**  
A sandwich flower made with differently colored toast bread

**+** But first things first: the bakery was founded in 1973 by the current proprietor's father. Romance had brought him from the south to Alsace, where he rented a small bakery that produced among other things pretzels, which he supplied to wine bars. Poulaillon senior made the doughs softer and turned the pretzels into soft buns, which he henceforth called “moriccettes”. Today his son produces 70,000 of them every day and distributes them throughout the whole of France. They are delivered fresh in the region, but the rest of the Republic receives them frozen.

A proportion goes over the counter as sandwiches in the branches in the region, of which there are now 26. At first glance the branches look just like many others, but on close inspection one finds that here again Poulaillon lives up to his reputation as a gourmet supplier. It starts with the sandwiches, regardless of whether they are based on moriccettes,

baguettes or special sandwich rolls. They are not simply topped with cheap cheese or ham. Instead one can choose from a variety of famous types of cheese, ham and various other fillings, without this sending the prices sky-high. They are topped on the spot in the branches, and are therefore always fresh. The fact that so much quality and service has its devotees is shown by the example of the branch at the Place de L'Homme de Fer, a tramway junction in the centre of Strasbourg. The turnover of this branch, which measures barely 20 m<sup>2</sup>, is only a little below the EUR 1m mark.

As well as the sandwiches and speciality breads, manufactured both centrally and in the 13 branch bakeries, Poulaillon offers his own customers an extensive range of traiteur products. (Traiteur is a French job title that does not exist in many other countries, and can best be described as the manufacture of cold buffets.) However, visitors to the branches are not



**++ figure 3**  
Grilled sandwiches topped with different varieties of cheese, tuna and various types of ham in the branch in Strasbourg



**++ figure 4**  
Ready-made sandwiches, packed in a controlled atmosphere for vending machines in canteens and social establishments, have a shelf life of eight days

the only ones who are allowed to enjoy this assortment. Supermarkets all over France are among the clients of the baker-traiteur-pastrycook workshops. In the region they receive ready-to-serve dishes, fictional characters and filled rolls supplied fresh, while nationwide they are delivered as frozen products which, after thawing out, they in turn pass on to customers.

The products Poulailon offers are worth seeing and fill an entire catalogue. The selection ranges from elegant topped mini-pastries and filled bread figures to sandwiches with various fillings, made from toast bread or other types of bread or from salty "kougelhopf", which are then assembled to create flowers, cubes or other shapes and are just as decorative for a buffet as they are for a business snack or even a private party. In addition to savory snacks, Poulailon also supplies corresponding sweet temptations, and in the region he also delivers a hot buffet and drinks. Even glancing into the catalogue on his web site [www.poulailon.fr](http://www.poulailon.fr) makes your mouth water. One might dismiss the whole thing as a cute party service, had Poulailon not systematized the business and expanded it nationwide. Depending on the location, the branches present part of their traiteur goods for direct sale and advertise by posters and sales campaigns. The other part then goes into supermarket chains in France. This brings together the quantity needed on the one hand to enable series production, and on the other to allow the capacities of the various work-



++ figure 5  
Moricettes and sandwich rolls are baked on two Mecatherm lines

shops, each of which has become specialized in the artisan production of part of the product range, to be utilized in such a way that costs and thus prices remain moderate. The basis for the majority of the snacks are moricettes and sandwich breads, whose manufacture runs on two automated lines made by Mecatherm S.A., Barembach, France. One classical line with a vertical oven produces up to 8,000 moricettes per hour for the company's own traiteurs and branches, as well as for distribution via the food retail to end consumers or through wholesalers to third party caterers and sandwich ►

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**++ figure 6**  
A mere 20 m<sup>2</sup> in the heart of Strasbourg accounts for annual sales of almost EUR 1m



**++ figure 7**  
Sandwich inspection – anything not up to standard gets thrown out



**++ figure 8**  
“Moricettes” – the most important product in the range, a soft pretzel with a thin crust

bars. The second Mecatherm line provides semi- or fully-baked special sandwich breads, baguettes and various rustic varieties. It involves mainly doughs with a high water content, which need gentle make-up as well as a powerful burst of heat to stabilize the bases and sides quickly. That’s why the line is flexibly equipped and enables, among other things, the extremely gentle division of the dough via a Mecaflow dough sheet divider. An FTM is available as the oven, a triple-deck continuous oven with a special heating system. Every day 20,000 sandwich rolls, filled and packed in a protective atmosphere, go to vending machines in canteens and social establishments. Here again the rule is that quality spreads by word of mouth, and proverbially the eye shares the feast. Poulaillon has succeeded in establishing a high-quality product range that can be manufactured profitably at moderate prices despite the large input of manual work, because production

and distribution are systematized and new marketing routes are being utilized. No matter whether it’s a quick sandwich in the hand or the offer of fine canapés for the office, a party or even an evening meal at home, the product range offered by Poulaillon serves the needs of a society in which increasing numbers of women have jobs, the number of visits to restaurants is declining, and families have less and less time available to organize and produce delicacies for themselves or for guests, but do have the money and the awareness to want to afford quality. For the sake of convenience and speed, there are drive-in counters at three branch locations where mainly working people can collect their orders on the way home.

At any rate the system functions well at Poulaillon. One half of its turnover of around EUR 40m originates from its own branches, the remainder being generated by the other sales channels, and annual growth is currently around 15%. The 120 employees in the production units manufacture a total of 2,000 products. Therefore, according to Fabien Poulaillon, the decisive success factor is the precise specification of

what will be produced and how, and the accurate planning of what will be produced and delivered and when. To ensure that the quality is also correct, he employs his own three quality assurance staff who meticulously examine the production operations, storage and the company’s own sales outlets every day.

Only a few months ago there was a move into a new production hall offering plenty of space for expansion. +++



**++ figure 9**  
Appetizing canapés made from slices of moricette with topping

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