

Leaping ahead

MARIO MONTELLA FROM SALERNO BELONGS TO THE INCREASING GROUP OF ITALIAN BAKERS READY TO RISK TURNING TO SEMI-INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION



++ figure 1



++ Mario Montella

++ figure 1
The oven loader moves Soffiati dough pieces from the peel boards

++ figure 2
These rolls are called “Soffiati” which means “bloating”. When cutting these rolls, the name becomes logical

++ figure 3
“Bloating rolls” and how they look from the outside

++ figure 4
The rolls are still picked up from the unloader manually; automatic processing and transport to the packaging section are already being planned

++ figure 5
Hand-plaited loaves are baked on racks trolleys

Compared to the near by metropolitan Neapel, Salerno with its 130,000 inhabitants is a rather quiet seaport. The city boasts a university and an archbishop as well as the administration of the Salerno Province which is not only famous for the picturesque Amalfi coast but also for the delicious buffalo mozzarella which is produced here in small dairies.

As everywhere in Italy, the assortment of rolls and bread is huge with a focus on regional specialties. People in Salerno love Mantovani with its thick, sturdy crust which stays crunchy until the evening, as well as a moist baguette-type roll called Barchetta made from pure durum, or Soffiati, a roll which pays tribute to its name because soffiatati translates as “bloating”. This roll consists mainly of crust. Among the bread types, Panella is a round wheat bread with a proofing time of one hour which is baked for 40 minutes, starting at 240 °C without steam, which is later

dropped to 215 °C; or Gran Leggera, a ciabatta-type bread with 20% biga (pre-ferment), a dough hydration of 90% and two hour batch proof as well as 40 minutes final proof.

Mario Montella bakes all these and other products each day. In total 30 different products from 20 different dough recipes. He, along with his 10 employees in the production zone process 5 tons of flour every night with more than one ton being for Gran Leggera which is fluffy with large pores so that the light can shine through.

Mario Montella has been a baker since he started working at the age of 14. Today, he is 35 and the boss of 25 employees including the sales staff in his own stores. He has just completed the construction of a new production facility.

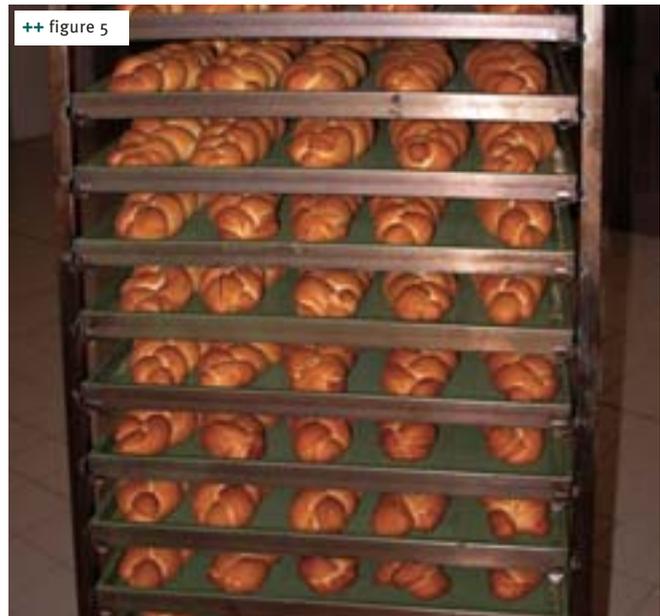
The equipment is not yet complete. Next to the mixers, a roll make-up station for moulded rolls and a processing line for dough strands on which rolls, baguettes and some of



++ figure 2



++ figure 3



the other types of bread are made. The largest new investment is in proofing and oven technology. Montella: “This is the heart of the bakery, this is decisive.” At his premises he has two accessible proofer rooms, one for bread and one for rolls; a series of rack ovens consisting of six steam tube rack ovens and a three deck steam tube tunnel oven with a stone plate baking area of 57 m² including loader and unloader. All are supplied by Mondial Forni.

The products for the tunnel oven are transported on peel boards to the oven where workers prepare them for the oven loader. Dough pieces for rolls such as for Soffiati or bread such as Panella are placed directly onto the oven belts. The very soft dough pieces for Gran Leggera are first picked up by the loader and then turned while gaining a bit of length due to gravitational force, and then loaded from the second loader level. Baguettes are also turned by the double loader prior to moving into the oven.

The three-deck oven has two heating zones; all three decks share a burner each for the front and the back part. The heat is conducted via water-filled tubes above and beneath the product belts ensuring gentle, but intense baking heat. This arrangement also simulates the same baking atmosphere as in traditional brick ovens which are very important because most of the products are baked without steam.

Mario Montella started his own business at the age of 24 in a village in the mountains above Salerno. He recalls that his bakery at that time had a floor space of 160 m², including the

shop. “Immediately I started to supply supermarkets. Initially I processed 250 kg flour each day, later on, prior to our moving to the new location, we used 3.5 tons daily. Today we process 5 tons.”

The problems with restricted space have been solved. The hall bought by Montella offers now 3,500 m² on three levels after re-construction. Production and distribution is on the ground level, the first floor houses the offices and storage rooms while on the second floor a production for puff pastry products and babas – specially shaped pound cakes – will be set up. Montella has switched from distribution via its own trucks to haulage contractors. In general, the distribution takes place once a day, twice if required. The small pastry shop generates 10–20% of total sales. Everything else is generated with bread and rolls. 90% of the total sales is with supermarkets. Montella’s customers include international retail chains as well as small independent markets.

Today, Montella’s bakery is the largest one in the Salerno Province, but he is set on further growth. His goal is further automation of the production and the utilization of its capacity in a three-shift operation. He knows that this can only be achieved with frozen products, so therefore freezing units are already on his investment schedule. Until then he will supply the northern parts of Italy with his specialties such as Barchetta or Gran Leggera. He is positive that the quality of his products will be appreciated. However, he prefers to shun nearby Neapel. +++



++ figure 6
Gran Leggera – dough pieces with a hydration of 90% are picked up after proofing by the oven loader, turned and deposited onto the oven belt

++ figure 7
Gran Leggera (back) and a roll made completely from durum flour, thus keeping its juiciness for a prolonged time