



*Special section*  
**Inside Seattle**

Best thing since sliced  
bread? William Leaman's  
Bakery Nouveau

# Bakery Nouveau

Baguette bigwig William Leaman lets us in on  
the secrets of his success

BY JESS THOMSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS M. BARWICK

## Inside Seattle | In the kitchen



Ham and cheese on a Bakery Nouveau baguette.



The flour flies: William Leaman at work.



Still-warm chocolate croissants



Earl Grey-infused chocolate bites

**IT'S BARELY 6 A.M.** on a Thursday when I arrive at Bakery Nouveau, where owner William Leaman greets me with a smile as warm as his chocolate croissants, fresh out of the oven. The 1,500-square-foot West Seattle kitchen has already been humming quietly for hours, turning out tray after tray of breads and breakfast pastries for Leaman's local following, who will soon come clamoring.

Today, I'm here not to eat but to learn. Since leading Team USA to win the *Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie* (the World Cup of Baking) in 2005, Leaman has emerged as nothing short of a baking phenomenon. So it surprises me that when I walk in, Bakery Nouveau's staff is scoring baguettes, decorating cakes, and assembling his signature twice-baked almond croissants—cut in half lengthwise, toasted,

layered with a rum-spiked almond paste, crusted with sliced almonds, and baked again—while William the Conqueror is making ... sandwiches.

But when we start in on the ham and cheese, stuffed between his—yes, I'll say it—*perfect* baguettes, it becomes obvious that Leaman is a natural teacher. Every time he opens his mouth, words of wisdom seem to tumble out. "When you cut open a baguette, you should see a good mix of big and small holes, distributed evenly along its length," he tells me. He's trained his staff with such fine attention to detail that he feels no need to watch over them.

Leaman begins cutting the long loaves lengthwise in smooth, rhythmic motions. I follow behind, smearing his housemade French mayonnaise on each half, but he's so fast with the knife that I can't keep up.

Wrapped with a slip of parchment paper, secured with a raffia knot, and hustled out to the retail area all day long in small batches, the sandwiches are a good example of Leaman's *modus operandi*: He named his business Bakery Nouveau because everything's always fresh, always new. He sells 150 baguettes a day but bakes them only a dozen at a time.

The bakery's name also hints at Leaman's creative side. Take his olive fougasse, a *boulangerie* staple. His version is done with baguette dough that's been laminated with butter, for an end product with layer upon flaky layer of flavor. His strawberry-rhubarb tart looks typical enough, but it's made with a brioche base and rimmed with coffee cake-style streusel.

Next, we turn to croissants: One batch of dough in a 6-foot-high vertical mixer will

## SEATTLE'S BAKERY BOOM

*With pastry shops popping up all over town, the only problem you'll have is deciding which to try first. Here are our favorites.*

### FOR PIES

**Shoofly Pie Company** If it fits in a crust, Shoofly makes it—berry pie, cream pie, and traditional shoofly pie (made with molasses and brown sugar), as well as savory quiche and baby potpie. \$; closed Mon–Tue; 4444 California Ave. S.W.; 206/938-0680.

### FOR CUPCAKES

**Trophy Cupcakes and Party** With exciting flavors like green tea, peanut butter & jelly, and chai cardamom, Trophy is the newly crowned queen of Seattle's cupcake scene. 1815 N. 45th St., Ste. 209; 206/632-7020.

### FOR BRIOCHE

**Sugar Bakery + Cafe** Sugar's brioche cinnamon rolls are the perfect pick-me-up after a doctor's visit on Pill Hill. \$; closed Sun; 1014 Madison St.; 206/749-4105.

### FOR GLUTEN-FREE GOODS

**Flying Apron Bakery** Whether eating gluten-free is a goal or a necessity, you'll want to try Flying Apron's innovative ways with alternative flours and sweeteners. \$; 3510 Fremont Ave. N.; 206/442-1115.

### FOR CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

**Sugar Shack Baking Co.** The classic chocolate chip is a best-seller, but don't miss the spiced Mexican chocolate chip cookie, made with cinnamon, oatmeal, and toasted coconut. \$; closed Sun through Apr 30; open daily starting May 1; 8056 Lake City Way N.E.; 206/523-6197.

make 400—what he sells on an average weekday morning. When I peer into the bowl, I wonder if I could take a nap in it; the motor is big enough to require a clutch.

I comment on the sheer volume (it's only 8 a.m., and the bakery has already churned through 60 pounds of butter). Leaman gives me a lopsided grin in response. Compared with his experiences at Seattle's Essential Baking Company and running the pastry kitchens in the Paris hotel in Las Vegas, a bakery this size is child's play. "We may be small, but we are mighty," he jokes. "Bakery Nouveau is successful because we're creating a culture for our neighborhood—but also because we're preserving the craft and tradition of baking."

**INFO** Bakery Nouveau (\$; 4737 California Ave. S.W.; 206/923-0534)