

Best Bet For Bastille (Or Any) Day!

Head to Choc-O-Pain in Hoboken or Jersey City for authentic French breads and pastries.

By Suzanne Zimmer Lowery | July 12, 2015



Window-shopping at Choc-O-Pain Bakery. Photo: Courtesy Choc-O-Pain

If you can't be in Paris to celebrate Bastille Day—the July 14, 1789 uprising that touched off the French Revolution—drop by one of the Choc-O-Pain bakeries and celebrate freedom the way the French do every day: by indulging in the simple luxury of world-class bread (pain), pastries and savory baked goods.

For Choc-O-Pain owner Clémence Danko, 35, bread is a ritual. "Growing up just outside of Paris," she says, "I was raised eating bread three times a day, if not four."

But when she emigrated to New Jersey in 2009, to join her Hungarian husband, Laszlo, she keenly missed the great baked goods they loved in France. Laszlo encouraged her to open a French bakery. That was kind of a surprise. She had worked in pharmaceutical management in France, and had no background in baking as a business.

But the idea appealed to her, and she took a bakery management class at Manhattan's Institute of Culinary Education (ICE) and found a job at a chain of Belgian Bakeries that "helped me learn what the customer's wanted," she says.

Next she immersed herself in a two-month, intensive bread-baking program at New York's International Culinary Center. That's when things fell into place, and Danko decided to devote herself to making bread the time-honored way—by eschewing commercial yeast and creating a natural, yeast-free, sourdough starter.

Nothing could seem simpler, yet there is magic in it. You combine flour and water, and natural bacteria begins a fermentation. A bit of the starter mixed into bread dough serves to leaven the loaf and make it rise. Done right, real French bread has a pillowy center and a rich, crackly crust.



Clémence Danko, owner/baker of Choc-O-Pain in Hoboken and Jersey City. Photo: Courtesy Choc-O-Pain

Once the starter is started, it can be kept going indefinitely by adding small amounts of fresh flour and water at regular intervals. The only time Danko's starter sat dormant was the week the shop was closed after Hurricane Sandy. But it was easily reactivated when they reopened.

The Dankos had their first child at the end of 2010, which delayed the opening of the first Choc-O-Pain shop, in Hoboken, until January 2012. Just a few months after Danko opened her second Choc-O-Pain, in Jersey City in 2013, she gave birth to their second child.

Along with the breads, Choc-O-Pain offers a number of "tartes" and "viennoiseries," which Danko calls "simple laminated" pastries like the classic buttery, flaky croissant. Varieties include almond, chocolate and fruit-filled rolls, which cry out for a cup of hot coffee, which Choc-O-Pain serves, from La Colombe roasters.

Both shops have small tables, and Danko serves lunch, with a menu of soups, quiches and sandwiches, including the classic grilled ham-and-cheese Croque Monsieur.

Choc-O-Pain Bakery
chocopainbakery.com
157 First Street
Hoboken
201-710-5175

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201-435-2462



Choc-O-Pain croissants. Photo: Courtesy Choc-O-Pain