



Sun rises like a spotlight on this natural performer

There's a rumour that Olaf Blanke, Eden Village's artisan baker, is a little, well, grumpy. It's even been suggested that his staff have special permission to remind him to be cheery! Leaving no stone unturned in its quest for the truth, *The Garden* joined Olaf for a day on the job, and discovered a handful of reasons why this rumour may have begun.

Reason 1. Olaf shares a name with the villainous Count in the book series, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. However, he looks nothing like Count Olaf, so this one can be discounted.



Reason 2. Olaf's day starts at 4am, long before the sparrows have even thought about farting. It ends around 8.30pm, when most other people are settling in for an evening of TV. It's not easy doing all your living at the wrong end of the day. On the morning these photos were taken, Olaf was positively giddy compared to your writer. Despite the darkness outside, and the isolation that seems to press in when there is no activity on the street, Olaf tackles his tasks with energy and silent efficiency. It begins with the combination of dry and liquid ingredients, setting up doughs for fermentation, and ensuring they are timed so they are not all ready once, Turkish pide first, then ciabatta, then baguette, and so on. Each day follows the same pattern, making doughs,

fermentation, scaling, shaping, proofing, baking. But every day is different too, and no two breads are the same, to a degree. Temperature and humidity fluctuations outside can have a dramatic impact on the preparation of the doughs. And this is where Olaf's skills come into play, even when there's no-one around to watch.

Reason 3. Olaf is most certainly an artist, and artists can be temperamental. But Olaf's not just an artist, he's a performer. You can tell by the way he pauses mid-task so you can take a good picture. He understands timing, drama, framing, depth. He sees his world from both ends of the lens. But far from acting like a temperamental artist, Olaf performs with great humour. And he has built a business



around giving customers the opportunity to watch him work. His 'act' has been honed over 20 years in hospitality, from early days as a pastry chef then baker, and also through a stint as a human resources trainer prior to emigrating to NZ from Germany in 2007. It was in New Zealand that his passion for baking was fuelled again, this time around with a new appreciation of the importance of pulling back the curtain on his craft. In Olaf's early years of hospitality he chose kitchen over front of house because he didn't like dealing with customers. These days it's all about customer engagement for Olaf.

Reason 4. There's a sincerity to Olaf about bread that is a little disarming. He is passionate about what he does and how he does it. He's

a zealot when it comes to healthy bread, bread made right, bread that has great crust, texture and taste. There's something of the Jamie Oliver in Olaf, passionate not only about the product, but also about educating people on the dietary benefits of spending a little more to get a better product. It's not uncommon to hear him call his

I do with it, you actually see the passion.

'It's about seeing something as growing.'

So, the verdict. Olaf's no grump. He is sincere because he loves what he does, intense because he is passionate about what he makes, determined because he believes he can educate people for their own good.

And anyway, someone who has been married to the beautiful Oranna for 20 years can't be all that grumpy. Oranna's is the welcoming face that greets customers at the door.

Like any good performer, Olaf's work is done in full view, for the mutual enjoyment of himself and anyone who cares to observe him, once the sun has come up over Maungawhau. /DW

“Some people might think I'm crazy but I'm just passionate about what I do.”

doughs his 'babies', and indeed he doesn't so much bake bread, as nurture it into existence.

'Some people might think I'm crazy but I'm just passionate about what I do,' he says, reflecting later in the day. 'If you watch me, what I do with my hands and how I place the dough in the basket, or whatever



Olaf handles his doughs with such care, it's no surprise when he refers to them as his 'babies'.



Scoring with a blade prior to baking.



Olaf handles the dough with care, even as he divides it up for shaping.



While Olaf bakes the bread, fresh pastries are prepared.



Olaf keeps a watchful eye on his breads, like a father at a nursery window.