



Bartering genius Malin Elmlid, LEFT, trades bread for everything from strawberry jam to bike repairs.

The Benefits of Barter

An amateur baker exchanges her homemade sourdough for all kinds of artisanal ingredients, then uses up her extras at a potluck brunch featuring her terrific, crisp-tender Belgian waffles.

BY GISELA WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHS BY AILINE LIEFELD

WHAT'S THE TRUE VALUE of a loaf of bread painstakingly made by hand, with the most earnest of intentions and the best possible ingredients? That's what passionate amateur baker Malin Elmlid meant to discover when she started the Bread Exchange a year-and-a-half ago. The concept of this eccentric bartering project took shape around the time a friend of a friend offered her two tickets to the Berlin Philharmonic in return for a loaf of her homemade sourdough. "It was perfect," says the 31-year-old, Berlin-based Swede. "His father's a violinist in the orchestra and always has extra tickets, and I always have too much bread lying around."

That first trade with an acquaintance inspired Elmlid to create a Bread Exchange Facebook page, on which to announce when she had loaves available for trade. And she composed

a manifesto on her blog, "Miss Elmlid, and what to do when it is time off," wherein she enumerated things that, for her, seemed a worthy trade for her artisanal bread. The items read almost like a poem or a heartfelt list jotted down in a journal: a bouquet of flowers or a handful of herbs, made or grown with dedication; special ingredients from a hometown or a far-off place, such as vanilla from Madagascar; or quirkier things—a guitar lesson, a cherished book, repairs to her bike.

That all happened back in February 2010. Since then, the Bread Exchange has grown bigger than Elmlid ever imagined. "I'd say I have about 1,000 traders," says Elmlid. "But I don't do this to meet new people. I do it to discover new things."

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TASTEMAKER



Bartering leads to inspirations like an espresso mocktail (recipe, p. 75).

In exchange for two loaves, an employee of Berlin's Design Hotels group set Elmlid up with two free nights; she spent one at the Louis Hotel in Munich, now one of her favorite places to stay. In another trade, the owners of a high-end deli that offers wine classes signed her up for a course on German and Austrian whites. Elmlid has traded her bread for a pair of jeans, an original drawing, free meals at restaurants and artisanal foods, from homemade jams to sea salts. "Almost everything I eat is a gift, or made from gifts," Elmlid says.

What's difficult to imagine is how someone with such a demanding career—Elmlid is the sales manager for Levi's XX in Germany, Austria and Switzerland—has this much time to bake. But in a way, her fashion career is what pushed her to bake bread. Prior to Levi's, she'd worked for the cutting-edge Scandinavian street-wear label Wood Wood, which had her traveling nonstop. That made her a little homesick—not just for Sweden itself, but also for her homeland's traditional sourdough.

"I started searching out bakeries in cities like Paris and Antwerp," Elmlid recalls. Then, at the Bo Bech bakery in Copenhagen, she had what she calls the perfect sourdough: "It was crunchy but still moist." She started baking in an attempt to replicate that loaf, and the hobby soon became an obsession. "I had something bubbling in every corner of my home," she says.

But first she had to coax her own "mother" to life. (A sourdough mother, or starter, is a stable yeast-plus-bacteria culture that lives in a mixture of flour and water; each new batch of bread has its origin there.) She began with fermented rhubarb and apples, kept adding flour and water, and five years later still uses this original mother for every loaf. "My starter has been at every Fashion Week I've worked, every summer holiday I've been on," she says. "I have to feed it every day."

In 2009, Elmlid contacted Manfred Enoksson, "the best sourdough baker in Sweden," she says. He agreed to let her spend two weeks working with him at



Elmlid's golden Liège waffles, LEFT, use pearl sugar from a trade. A friend brought a lentil-beet salad, BELOW (recipe, p. 70).



a bakery in the town of Høje. There, she learned “to understand the dough,” she says. “To intuitively know when to feed it and fold it. If I don’t do it at the right moment, the bread gets too sour, or I don’t get the bubbles inside that I’m looking for.” The tradition surrounding this task also keeps her grounded, despite a career in the capricious world of fashion. “Baking bread,” she says, “is an age-old rite.”

Trading bread for other foods is undoubtedly an ancient ritual, too, but with the Bread Exchange’s success, Elmlid has run into an unexpected problem: too much food. “I tend to get a lot of strawberry jam,” she admits. As a result, she often shares her spoils with friends and colleagues, as she did one Sunday at a potluck brunch.

The smell of bread infused her apartment. She’d made eight loaves, spiking several with charcoal, which colors the crust and dough a deep gray without changing the flavor. One friend brought prototypes for a line of jellies she was launching called Pump Up the Jam; another had given her a potted goji-berry tree. “I love when a trade becomes its own little ecosystem,” Elmlid said, plucking the bright red berries for her version of Bircher muesli, a cold cereal of grains and seeds usually made with milk or cream. “I use yogurt and coconut water, so it’s less heavy,” she explained.

After a round of eye-opening coffee mocktails, Elmlid produced a tower of Liège-style waffles—famous for their caramelized exterior and their pop of sweetness from Belgian pearl sugar, which she’d received as a trade. Then she made a caviar cake, laying stripes of fish eggs—another trade—over a custard topped with crème fraîche.

Later, as her guests crowded onto the terrace to enjoy the unexpectedly warm day, Elmlid cleared the table. “Maybe one day I’ll open a bakery,” she said. “But a normal one? That wouldn’t hold my interest. I’ll still have to allow for trading.”

Liège Waffles

ACTIVE: 35 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR 35 MIN

MAKES ABOUT 16 WAFFLES

Malin Elmlid bartered her bread for Belgian pearl sugar, the key ingredient in these Liège-style waffles: The smooth balls of sugar add pops of sweetness and caramelize to make the exterior crisp. Elmlid sometimes flavors her waffles with saffron, but the vanilla-scented ones here are more traditional.

- 1½ tablespoons light brown sugar
- 1¾ teaspoons active dry yeast
- ⅓ cup lukewarm water
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, melted (about 1 cup), plus more for brushing
- 1 cup Belgian pearl sugar (see Note)

TASTEMAKER

1. In a small bowl, whisk the brown sugar and yeast into the lukewarm water and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. In the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the paddle, mix the flour with the salt. Make a well in the center of the bowl and pour in the yeast mixture. Mix at medium speed until shaggy, about 1 minute. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing for 20 seconds between each. Whisk the vanilla with the 1 cup of melted butter. With the mixer at medium-low, gradually mix in the butter until smooth; the batter will be thick and very sticky. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the batter rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 hour and 45 minutes.

2. Stir the pearl sugar into the risen batter. Cover again and let rest for 15 minutes.

3. Preheat the oven to 250°. Preheat a Belgian waffle iron and brush it with melted butter. Gently stir the batter to deflate. Using about 2 tablespoons of batter for each, cook the waffles according to the manufacturer's directions until they are golden and crisp; brush the waffle iron with melted butter as needed. Transfer the waffles to plates or keep them warm in the oven, then serve.

NOTE Belgian pearl sugar is available at specialty shops and at amazon.com.

MAKE AHEAD The batter can be prepared through Step 1 and refrigerated overnight.

Apple Muesli with Goji Berries

TOTAL: 15 MIN PLUS OVERNIGHT

CHILLING • MAKES 4 CUPS

"You can make this with any grain or fruit that goes with yogurt," says Elmlid. For her version of this cold cereal, she uses plain rolled grains, like oats or spelt, moistened with apples, coconut water and yogurt. When a friend brought her a goji-berry tree to barter for bread, she added a few berries right from the branch.

2 large apples, such as Granny Smith

1 cup rolled oats, kamut or spelt

3 tablespoons flax seeds

1¼ cups coconut water

1¼ cups plain 2 percent Greek yogurt

½ cup dried goji berries

2 tablespoons fresh mint leaves, coarsely chopped

3 tablespoons honey

Pinch of salt

Fresh berries, granola and chopped nuts, for garnish (optional)



Muesli becomes creamy when soaked in yogurt and coconut water overnight.

1. Using a box grater set over a large bowl, coarsely grate the apples, stopping when you reach the core. Add the rolled oats, flax seeds, coconut water, yogurt, goji berries and mint to the bowl and stir until thoroughly combined. Cover the muesli and refrigerate overnight.

2. Mix the honey and salt into the muesli and spoon into bowls. Garnish with berries, granola and nuts and serve.

MAKE AHEAD The apple muesli can be prepared through Step 1 and refrigerated for up to 2 days.

Beet and Red Cabbage Salad with Lentils and Blue Cheese

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🕒 TOTAL: 45 MIN • 8 TO 10 SERVINGS

Elmlid's friend Emma Jessen Krut contributed this salad to the potluck; it's hearty enough to stand alone as a main course. Because there are so many ingredients, including bacon, lentils and cabbage, she dresses it very simply with lemon juice and olive oil.

½ cup French green lentils

Salt

4 ounces thickly sliced bacon, cut crosswise ¼ inch thick

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Freshly ground black pepper

1½ pounds vacuum-packed beets, cut into wedges

¼ cup coarsely chopped parsley

½ pound red cabbage, cut into ½-by-2-inch pieces

¼ pound green-leaf lettuce, torn into large pieces

¼ pound blue cheese, such as Roquefort, crumbled (about 1 cup)

1. In a small pot, cover the lentils with 2 inches of water and bring to a boil. Add ¼ teaspoon of salt and simmer the lentils over moderate heat until they are tender, 25 to 30 minutes. Drain the lentils, rinse with cold water and then drain again. >

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Jam is one of the most popular trades for Elmlid's sourdough.

What's a Loaf Worth?

2 JARS OF JAM Malin Elmlid trades a loaf of her sourdough bread for two jars of homemade jam (or, as in the photo above, two bottles of Pump Up the Jam). While she is rarely given store-bought versions, a Swedish friend brought her a jar of nicely wrapped jam from Ikea as a joke (right).

5 KILOGRAMS OF BELGIAN PEARL SUGAR During a pop-up bakery she did in Paris, Elmlid traded a loaf of bread for a bag of sugar balls. They are an essential ingredient in crispy Liège waffles (recipe, p. 68). \$18 for 2 lbs of Lars' Own Belgian Pearl Sugar; amazon.com.

1 SMALL GOJI-BERRY PLANT Since Elmlid received the goji plant, it's grown to two feet tall. She uses the antioxidant-rich berries in her muesli (recipe, p. 70). \$13 for 1 plant from gurneys.com; \$12 for 1 lb of dried berries from nutsonline.com.



TASTEMAKER

2. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, cook the bacon over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until crispy. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate.

3. In a small bowl, whisk the oil with the lemon juice; season with salt and pepper. In a large bowl, toss the beets, parsley and lentils with one-third of the dressing. Add the cabbage, lettuce and the remaining dressing and toss gently. Season the salad with salt and pepper, top with the bacon and blue cheese and serve.

Swedish Caviar Cake

ACTIVE: 25 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR 25 MIN

8 SERVINGS

This caviar "cake" is actually a simple chilled custard that's topped with crème fraîche, onion and two types of caviar. Elmlid's family in Sweden serves this at every holiday smorgasbord, including Christmas and the summer solstice celebration known as Midsommar.

1¾ cups whole milk

¾ teaspoon salt

Butter, for greasing

5 large eggs

1 cup crème fraîche

½ cup finely chopped red onion

3 tablespoons red caviar, such as trout roe (about 2 ounces)

3 tablespoons black caviar, such as paddlefish roe (about 2 ounces)

1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh dill

Freshly ground pepper

1. In a small saucepan, bring the milk to a boil over moderately high heat. Immediately remove from the heat, stir in the salt and let cool to warm.

2. Preheat the oven to 325° and butter an 11-by-7-inch glass or ceramic baking dish. In a medium saucepan, bring 1 quart of water to a simmer.

3. In a large bowl, whisk the cooled milk with the eggs until smooth. Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish and cover tightly with aluminum foil. Set the dish in a roasting pan and pour enough of the simmering water into the roasting pan to reach about halfway up the side of the

baking dish. Transfer the roasting pan to the middle of the oven. Bake the custard for about 30 minutes, until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean. Transfer the baking dish to a rack and remove the foil. Let the custard cool completely, then refrigerate for about 1 hour, until chilled.

4. Spread the crème fraîche in an even layer over the cooled custard. Spoon the onion, the red caviar and the black caviar over the crème fraîche in alternating diagonal rows. Sprinkle the caviar cake with the dill, season with pepper and serve.

MAKE AHEAD The caviar cake can be made through Step 3, covered and refrigerated overnight.

Coffee-Ginger Shakerato

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🕒 TOTAL: 5 MIN • MAKES 1 DRINK

Elmlid's friend John Benjamin Savary sweetens this clever coffee mocktail with ginger syrup and orange marmalade. Marmalade made with Seville oranges is best because it has a pleasing bitter edge.

Ice

¼ cup freshly brewed espresso

1 tablespoon Ginger Syrup (recipe follows)

1 teaspoon Seville orange marmalade

1 orange twist, for garnish

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add the espresso, Ginger Syrup and marmalade and shake well. Strain into a coupe and garnish with the twist.

Ginger Syrup

🕒 ACTIVE: 5 MIN; TOTAL: 30 MIN

MAKES ¾ CUP

1 ounce fresh ginger, peeled and thinly sliced

½ cup water

½ cup sugar

In a small saucepan, combine all of the ingredients and simmer until the sugar has dissolved. Cover and steep for 20 minutes. Strain the syrup into a jar and let cool. Use right away or refrigerate for up to 1 month. ●

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