

Rugbrød

by Jeni Hansen Gard

With a strong cultural connection to Denmark, as the granddaughter of Danish immigrants, I've always been interested in the traditions of my ancestors. In my own work, I look at the rituals of meal sharing and its historical and contemporary relationship to ceramic tableware. I traveled to Denmark in May for an artist residency at Guldergaard International Ceramic Research Center in hopes of discovering my food heritage. What I found was a culture of people who were in love with their bread. The most common, and by far the most important, recipe I was taught was for the traditional Danish rye bread, known as rugbrød. Rugbrød is a dense, dark rye-based bread. The bread takes two days to make, with preparations beginning the evening before you plan to bake it and up to a week if you're also making the sourdough starter.

I noticed that some of the people I visited in Denmark would leave their bread wrapped in plastic on a cutting board to keep

the moisture in while others put their bread out of sight in a wooden or metal breadbox or the cupboard in the kitchen. After returning to the US, I wanted to design a ceramic breadbox for my own table that would function to protect the bread and to serve as a centerpiece. I designed a breadbox with two parts—a base to elevate and display the bread, and a lid that fits snugly into the base to protect and preserve the freshness of the bread.

Prep Work

I bake my bread in a traditional Danish rye bread pan made by the Danish design company, Eva Solo (www.evasolo.com). The pan measures 11.8×4×4 inches. The rugbrød pan is unique because it's a perfect rectangle, with all 90° angles, unlike most bread pans sold in the US.

When I start making any food-specific vessel the first thing I do is measure the size of the food, which in this case is deter-



1 Roll a long coil and gently push it around the edge of the base on the interior.



2 Use your thumb and forefinger to further press the clay into the base. Rotate the piece as you work.



3 Once the first coil is fully connected, move back to the interior and smooth out the attachment.



4 Pinch the coil up and check for even thickness. After the piece stiffens up, use a sharp knife to cut and level the top.



5 Score, slip, and attach the two slabs that will be used for the top of the base. Use a rib to smooth and compress them.



6 Lay a plastic bag over the top of the base platform and begin working on the breadbox lid.



7 Allow the bottom coil of the lid to set up and then add several more layers of coils.



8 Continue working on the base. After the desired height is reached, add coils on the inside to support the base's top.

mined by the size of the bread pan. I then make my calculations from the food and account for shrinkage usually adding an extra 5–10% for wiggle room in case the loaf size varies. I use a mid-range porcelain clay body that shrinks 13½% from the wet state to the fired cone 6 form. I use these calculations to make paper or craft-foam templates.

I have two templates I work with. One template is slightly larger than the bread and is the size of the slab that the bread will sit on, which is also the same size as the lid's interior dimensions. The other is larger than the first template by at least 1 inch in each direction and is used to determine the size of the base.

I prefer to work on cement board because I can roll slabs without picking up the texture of canvas. The cement absorbs any excess moisture and easily releases the slab.

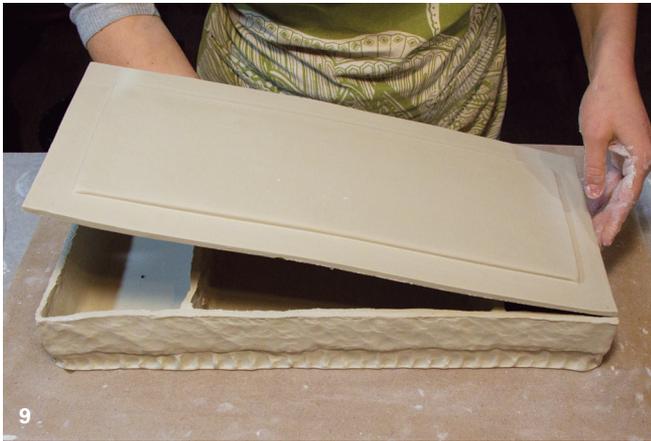
Begin by rolling out 4 slabs at $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick—large enough to fit the templates. Cover one slab in plastic (for the lid) and let the remaining slabs rest until they're soft leather hard.

Base

Start at the bottom and work your way up. Cut a 18½×8¼-inch slab for the base. Place the slab on a board and set it on a banding wheel. Roll or extrude a long coil. Score the top and side

edges of the slab and the bottom of the coil. **Tip:** To better control the coil when attaching it, I start with the coil in my hand and wrap the rest of it over my shoulder, feeding more through my hands as I work. I usually go over and work on each coil multiple times. Start by gently pushing the coil in place around the width of the base on the interior (1). Use your thumb to press the clay down into the center of the piece and use your opposite hand to turn the banding wheel. After one complete rotation, move to the exterior of the piece and do the same (2). After the second rotation, move back to the interior and smooth out the attachment where the coil meets the slab (3). Repeat these steps as more coils are added. On the next rotation pull up the coil and check for even thickness. Allow the piece to stiffen up, then use a sharp knife to trim the top, leveling it off so the next coil is attaching to a flat surface (4). Score the top of the attached coil and add another coil and repeat the process until you reach the desired height. **Tip:** If you're going to leave your piece overnight before adding another coil, don't trim the coil until you're ready to attach the next one.

While waiting for the coil to stiffen up, cut out another 18½×8¼-inch slab and a 16×5¾-inch slab from your remaining resting slabs. Center the smaller slab on the larger slab and attach



9 Score, slip, and attach the base's top. Add small coils around the seam to blend and secure the pieces together.



10 Continue working on the lid, adding and pinching more coils until the desired height is reached. Level off the top.



11 Drape a slab over the lid walls, slump it slightly with a rib, and leave it until it's leather hard. Flip the slab over, trim, then attach.



12 Dry the breadbox base and lid together then fire them separately to cone 6.

the two together to create a gentle raised platform where the loaf of bread will fit and the lid will nestle against while resting on the base. Smooth the edge of the slab platform to prevent separation and cracking (5). Lay a plastic bag on top of the connected slabs before starting to build the breadbox lid to make sure that the lid has a perfect fit to the base and to prevent the wet clay coils from sticking to the base while working (see figure 6).

Lid

The first coil is shaped snugly around the side of the slab platform, so that it's resting on the bottom wider slab where there's a 1-inch margin (6). The lid takes several layers of coils to make (7). After each layer I switch back and forth between working on the base and the lid to allow time for the layers to stiffen up. After adding two coils, remove the lid from the platform slabs and the plastic. Place the 16×5¾-inch template inside the lid to make sure that the size of the lid does not shift or change shape as you are working on it. Add one more coil and let the lid set up, moving back to working on the base.

Flip the base over and compress the bottom edges where the bottom coil meets the slab. Flip it back over again and add structural supports on the interior to support the top of the base. Pinch two coils up (evenly spaced) so that they span the width of the base

and trim these flush with the top of the coil wall (8). Before closing the base, put holes in each section to allow air flow.

Score the areas that will touch when attached and place the slab on top of the base (9). Add a small coil to even out the area where the coil wall meets the slab. Now the base is complete.

To finish the lid, add two more layers of coils to make it approximately 5¾–6 inches tall (10). Drape the slab cut for the top of the lid on the top of the box, allowing it to drop in slightly. Smooth the slab with a red rubber rib (11). Leave this together, fully covered overnight or until leather hard. The following day, flip the slab over, trim it to the appropriate size, and attach to the top. When it has reached a soft leather hard, flip it over onto foam and add a coil to reinforce the connection between the coil wall and slab lid. Put the lid on the breadbox and dry them together (12). For food-safe reasons, I glazed the small slab where the bread rests. I left the exterior of the breadbox unglazed. Separate the base from the lid and fire them to cone 6.

Check out Bodil's rugbrød (Danish rye bread) recipe on page 44.

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Bodil's Rugbrød Danish Rye Bread

Day 1:

- 1 cup of sourdough starter
- 2 cups of lukewarm water
- ½ cup cracked spelt berries
- ½ cup cracked rye kernels
- 1 cup rye flour
- 1 cup spelt flour (or wheat flour)
- ½–1 cup flaxseed
- 2 tbsp salt
- ½ cup pumpkin seeds, optional

Mix all the ingredients (A) into a thick mush (B). Leave at room temperature overnight (or for at least 12 hours) covered by a cloth (C).

Day 2:

- 1 cup rye flour
- 1 cup spelt flour (or wheat flour)
- 1 tablespoon malt syrup, dark syrup, or dark molasses
- 1 malt beer or 1 cup water

Take ½–1 cup of the dough and store it in the refrigerator for sourdough starter to use next time you wish to bake bread (use within 1 week).

Add the day 2 ingredients to the mixture from day 1 (D).

Oil the bread pan and fill it ¾ full with the dough (E).

Leave the bread covered for 3–4 hours at room temperature or until it has risen to the edge of the pan.

Bake at 350°F for approximately 2 hours. Put a few cups of water in another pan in the oven while baking. This will keep the crust from drying out too much during the long bake time.

When the bread is removed from the oven (F) let it cool covered with a cloth. Place in a plastic bag or an airtight container overnight to let the bread settle. Then place it in the breadbox. Wait until the next day to slice the bread.

Enjoy the bread toasted with butter or use it to make open-face sandwiches (smørrebrød).



A



B



C



D



E



F

