

Jane Mason, 40, a strategy-consultant turned baker, is the founder of Virtuous Bread, a business dedicated to making it easy for people to find and make good bread, and using bread as a catalyst for social and environmental change. She runs courses (Bread Angels) to teach people how to start up their own home-baking business. She also hosts breadmaking workshops in prisons, hospices, schools and shelters (virtuousbread.com). **Interview by Jini Reddy**

The idea behind Bread Angels is getting people to bake at home, encouraging them to buy flour the way I do – from a stone miller, close to them – providing them with a bit of an income, and encouraging them to deliver locally, on foot or bicycle, within a two-mile radius. That way, not only do they keep their carbon footprint down but they also build links in their local community.

I believe in pester power. When I go into a school I spend the whole day with the kids. When you're baking there's a lot of hanging around and I use that time to talk to them about sustainable farming, and about organic versus non-organic and what that means. I try to get them to be aware of where food comes from. I'm hoping the children will be so excited about the bread they bake that they pester their parents to make it at home.

There's a big difference between industrially milled flour and stone-ground flour. When flour is stone-ground there is minimal processing, which means as little destruction of nutrients as possible. In an industrial mill, the grain gets squashed to within an inch of its life.

Baking in shelters with women is designed to be a cost-saving, morale-boosting activity. A lot of these places exist on public money and donations, and it's cheaper for shelters to make their own bread.

My mother is German and when she moved to Canada after the war she cried because the bread was so disgusting. She baked her own, so I grew up

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pretty much exclusively on sourdough and rye bread. I got a bit obsessive about sourdough – bread that is made without the addition of yeast. I have three sourdough 'starters' on the go at any one time. One of them has been alive since 1837.

I get up every day to change the world. I did it as a partner in a consulting firm, at a macro level, but realised I'd rather be doing it at an individual level.

My not-so-secret agenda is to get people to stop eating white sliced bread. I don't want to put industrial millers or bakers out of business – I want them to make a better product, with better-quality ingredients, and one that doesn't come in a plastic bag.

Photograph by Sonal Kantaria

Next week: the green theatre director



If you learn to make or bake something, then you have something to trade. I personally swap bread for vegetables, fruit and cheese. **Get good at something**, so that you have a skill you can bargain with. Do your homework and **find a great baker not far from where you live** – buy several loaves at a time and freeze them. **Read the label of the bread you are buying.** If you can't pronounce it, don't eat it. If you buy your bread from a baker or a supermarket's in-store bakery, ask them what's in their bread. If possible, **don't buy bread that comes in a plastic bag.** We now take cloth shopping bags to supermarkets, but fill them up with items in plastic packaging. **What's better than sliced bread? Unsliced bread.** Invest in a good bread knife and slice it yourself.