



The Fabulous Baker Boys

The wind is howling and the weatherman warns that exposed skin can freeze in less than a minute. It's January in Winnipeg. But just minutes north of the blustery corner of Portage and Main, in the heart of Winnipeg's multicultural North End Selkirk Avenue, lies **Gunn's Bakery**. Step inside the doors of Gunn's and the smell of fresh baking, the friendly staff and the festive atmosphere will thaw your hands and warm your heart.

Gunn's is one of the oldest family-run bakeries in Western Canada. It was founded in 1937 by Morris Gunn, a baker's son who emigrated to Canada from Poland in the thirties.

Morris's sons Arthur and Bernie were born next door to the Selkirk Avenue bakery, and the Gunn brothers literally grew up baking.

Award Winners

Today Gunn's is a medium-sized, full range bakery specializing in ethnic baked goods. Most of the over 300 products in the Gunn's line are still made the old-fashioned way - by hand. The glass case below the front counter tempts you with row upon row of cookies, tarts, cakes, sweet breads, baguettes, pan breads, pastries, croissants, and Gunn's trademark-bagels!

Above the counter a shelf proudly displays antique pots and pans, plates and memorabilia; and tucked between the collectibles are the trophies, ribbons and certificates that Gunn's has amassed in over fifty years of award-winning baking.

A life-time commitment to his craft

Arthur Gunn loves to bake. As Gunn's chief baker, he has spent a life-time honing his craft, experimenting with recipes and creating new products.

"When we're looking to develop something new, explains Arthur, we will take a basic formula and then improvise on that, making changes to bring it up to the quality we feel we want. Of course we will have some winners and we will have some losers, but in the store you will only see the winners!"

But good taste isn't the only yardstick for success - the product has to look good, and Arthur credits his staff for Gunn's edible masterpieces. "Our cake decorator does some unbelievable cakes, beautifully designed and put together with a lot of creativity. When you look at something and say "this looks really perfect", Janice has done it."

Step into the back room at Gunn's and it is a buzz. In one corner, a man and woman prepare trays of bagels for the oven. In the centre of the room on either side of a long wooden table, two women carefully stretch a large piece of paper-thin dough across the width of the work surface. They fill the pastry with one of three luscious fillings; spinach and feta cheese, potato and mushroom or potato and cheddar cheese. Then the dough is rolled, cut into two-and-a-half inch squares and finally shaped (by hand) into knishes.

Another baker wields a large cookie cutter to carve shortbread into festive forms. The holiday season also sees the production of fruitcake, plum pudding, special breads, eggs rolls and chocolate-laden yulelogs.



Gunn's bagels are so sought after in fact, that the brothers have shipped them to bagel-craving customers in Canada's North-West Territories and as far away as Japan, and the bagels are a staple at the annual "Winnipeg Day" in Vancouver, where transplanted Winnipeggers gather to reminisce about their home town.

"When ex-Winnipeggers see our products in the supermarket," says Arthur, "it's a nice reminder of home." Croissants are another Gunn's specialty; not the mass-produced, fast-frozen kind that are available in most supermarkets, but a light, buttery pastry sold as is (for the purists) or stuffed with one of several different fillings.

Demand remains high

The sheer diversity of their product line and the

undeniable success for the business leads one to wonder if Gunn's can continue to keep up with demand. Arthur Gunn is confident that he can.

"We have to work hard-six days a week, 24-hours a day, but we will continue to supply our customers. Most people still appreciate good quality," says Arthur, "and they come from all over the city to get it."

"Winnipeg is a good place to live, he continues, "It may not have the outstanding opportunities that other centres have, but as a businessman I have the feeling that if you are successful here you will continue to be successful as long as you keep up with whatever is going on in the industry."

What started as a one-room, one man operation has grown to include 60 staff and modern equipment, but Gunn's remains essentially a family business, steeped in tradition and dedicated to its loyal clientele.

In over fifty years of satisfying the sweet tooth of north-end Winnipeg, the Gunn brothers have come to know many of their more colorful customers by name. Some of the "old timers" like to come in every day, buy a loaf of their favorite bread and spend the better part of an hour teasing the clerks and kibitzing with Arthur and Bernie.

"They will poke their heads into the office and say, "Why are you sitting there doing nothing? You should be in the back making bagels!" The brothers love the good-natured ribbing. "Some of our older customers forget that a number of years have gone by," jokes Bernie. "They remember Arthur and I as kids doing chores around the shop, and running to fetch them things from the backroom."

"Sometimes people come in to order wedding cakes for their children and they will say to me, "You know Bernie, your dad made my wedding cake." If you don't pay any attention to that statement it can slip right past you, but it really says something, that after all these years, people remember us - and come back."

Gunn's Bakery has also expanded to the Winnipeg International Airport.