



Brian Brainerd | The Denver Post

"He's like a monk," Udi Baron says of third-generation baker Maurizio Negrini, above.

A man who lives by bread alone

"Sandwichman" Udi Baron left Israel and a career in finance. Now he's watching his dream of a bakery rise.

By Kristen Browning-Blas
 Denver Post Staff Writer

No matter how many makeovers we give the sandwich, the basic formula remains: two slices of bread plus some meat and cheese.

Sometimes, it takes a foreigner to recognize the potential of something Americans take for granted.

Israeli citizen Udi Baron saw his future in the American lunchbox. Baron had followed his sweetheart to America, planning to put his economics degree to work, but it took him another 20 years to realize his destiny lay between two pieces of bread.

In 1972, he wrote a letter in Hebrew and full of youthful enthusiasm to his mother that said, "I am so excited by the sandwiches here in America."

After working as a financial planner, Baron and his wife, Fern, opened Udi the Sandwichman in 1994 in a former Mrs. Fields cookie shop in the old Northglenn Mall.

Baron made the sandwiches and his wife delivered them, never complaining that her husband had left one lucrative field for another seemingly ludicrous one. "He had a paradigm shift in his mid-40s," she says over roast beef on ciabatta sandwiches at their new bakery-cafe on the far edge of north Denver.

When her lunch partners laugh and say, "Don't you mean midlife crisis?" she says no. "I wasn't shocked. He told me, 'If I don't follow my dream now, I never will.'"

The dream led the Barons from that first small shop to their new 14,000-square-foot shop at 70th Avenue and Broadway, where a team of like-minded food lovers bake bread and pastries, mix granola, fix sandwiches and serve lunch.

After his bread supplier "fired" Udi's as a customer for being too picky (Baron would often return unsatisfactory bread), he hired Maurizio Negrini, a third-generation baker who manned the ovens for Daily Bread and Whole Foods in Boulder. "He's like a monk," says Baron of Negrini, dressed in chef's whites and flour-covered sandals.

As he leads visitors through the airy, bright bakery, Baron's love of bread infuses the conversation, much like yeast brings flour to life. "It's like *terroir* in wine. It's the air, the people, everything that's around. If you bring a vine from Bordeaux and plant it in Colorado, you're going to get a

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Udi's Bakery

From left, Negrini, owner Udi Baron, chef John Broening and pastry chef Yasmin Lozada-Hisom at Udi's Cafe & Bakery. "There's a real bread-cuisine revolution happening, and you can see what vision Udi has," says Broening.

Udi's Favorite Sandwich | Granola-Chocolate Chip Cookies | Spicy Olive Relish

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“ If thou tastest a crust of bread, thou tastest all the stars and all the heavens. ”

- ROBERT BROWNING