

A gristmill grows in Gowanus

January 17, 2025 Michaela Keil



A handful of wheat berries, ready for milling. Photo: Patrick Shaw-Kitch

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Back in 1810, the Gravesend Village in what is now Bath Beach contained 20 houses, a church, a schoolhouse, and two mills, none of which exists

anymore. Grain milling in Brooklyn feels about as antiquated as the borough's original name — “Breuckelen.” And yet, baker Patrick Shaw-Kitch is building a brand new gristmill in Gowanus.

The Brooklyn Granary & Mill (BGM), set at 300 Huntington Street, will feature stone mills. Shaw-Kitch isn't using contemporary mills or even the fast, modern steel roller mills introduced in the late 1800s. No, instead he is using modernized stone mills — two pieces of stone stacked atop each other and rotated slowly to grind flour, the best of 15th-century technology — to produce flour. The mill will include a bakery showcasing the best of the BGM flour.

Brooklynites love it. BGM raised over \$50,000 on [Kickstarter](#).

But why is Patrick Shaw-Kitch preparing to open a brand-new stone mill in Gowanus? In short, nutrition, sustainability and above all, flavor.



A field of wheat. Photo: Patrick Shaw-Kitch

Before starting BGM, Shaw-Kitch was the head baker at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, a two-Michelin-starred farm-to-table restaurant in Tarrytown. “There was a flour mill there, so all of the flour that we used in the bakery we milled ourselves and bought directly from the farmers,” Shaw-Kitch told the Brooklyn Eagle. Stone milling retains all parts of a wheat berry — the germ, the bran and the endosperm — whereas store-bought flour usually contains only endosperm. Blue Hill’s fresh-milled flour resulted in loaves of bread that diners raved about.

Shaw-Kitch aims to bring this flour to the average customer. “It is not like a thing just for rich people or elite people,” he said, “This flour can be used in so many different products.”

The best thing since sliced bread, wasn’t

Wonder Bread was one of the first companies to sell sliced bread nationally. Fluffy, white slices were a staple in American homes beginning in the 1930s, despite a notorious lack of nutrition in these loaves.

White bread and white flour are the result of industrialized milling methods. The steel roller mill, introduced in the late 1800s, crushes wheat berries and sifts them into separate sizes. White flour is the finest of the particles and is made up *only* of the endosperm. What is lost in this process is everything that makes wheat nutritious — lipids, vitamins, healthy carbohydrates and certain proteins found in the germ and the bran. However, the consistent product from white flour made it popular in industrial kitchens, and its cheapness made it popular among grocery shoppers, despite the nutritional deficiencies.

In the 1940s, the FDA recommended “enrichment” for white flour. Americans had been experiencing higher levels of deficiency diseases. These “enriched” flours and loaves of bread had added vitamins that were removed during the industrial milling process.



The cross-section of a loaf of bread made with fresh stone-milled flour. Photo: Patrick Shaw-Kitch

To make white flour even more consistent, producers began to bleach it. The bleached flour meant that all products would be uniform in color, which further appealed to commercial bakers.

A systematic review of stone-ground flour studies by the Ecological Agriculture Projects at McGill University found that “Today’s milling, refining, bleaching, enriching and addition of various chemicals to flour and baked breads cause many scientists and medical workers to question their nutritional quality as well as their safety.”

One case study mentioned in the review found that, in Britain in the late 1800s, the birth rate dropped by more than 50% in the years following the introduction of the steel roller mill. Vitamin E deficiency was the purported cause. Wheat germ is where the majority of wheat’s vitamin E is found, but the germ is discarded as part of the steel rolling process. A reintroduction of wheat germ to the general population correlated with a rise in the birthrate in just two years.

The McGill study concluded, “Only whole grain stone-ground flour is sure to contain the grain components in their original proportions and to include the germ.” A Tufts University Food Lab article advocated for the “freshest flour possible to maximize nutritional benefits and flavor” — which local stone-milling provides.



A loaf of bread made with fresh stone-milled flour. Photo: Patrick Shaw-Kitch

Sustainable practices

The potential connection with farmers largely inspired Brooklyn Granary & Mill. “I thought there was an amazing opportunity to kind of connect the farmers and the people of New York via this flour mill,” Shaw-Kitch explained. BGM lists five partner farms on its website, along with the specific wheat cultivars they supply.

One farmer, Stuart Farr of Hudson Valley Hops and Grains, grows wheat using regenerative practices. According to Shaw-Kitch, Farr grows three different types of wheat and various crops in a rotation to increase soil fertility. Some crops, like rye, are important natural pest suppressors, improve drainage, and can increase the levels of certain soil nutrients. Rye, specifically, is a favorite of Shaw-Kitch, who says it’s underutilized in kitchens.

For Shaw-Kitch, visiting these farms and learning more about the crops opens your mind as a baker, “I can’t just focus on these traditional wheat crops, I also need to incorporate the rye, the buckwheat, the oats, the beans, the sunflowers, into our baking, because we want the mill and the bakery to better represent the farm itself.”

BGM primarily wants to sell freshly ground flours to restaurants and bakeries in the New York area. By buying 2,000 to 5,000 pounds of grain at a time, BGM can keep shipping costs low — down to three to five cents per pound — and pass those savings on to the bakeries. “Our flour will be more expensive than commodity white flour, for sure, but we have set our prices at a place that we think, and from some people we’ve talked to, is a price point that is going to be able to work for restaurants and bakeries in New York City.”

One of the 15 reasons that GrowNYC, a sustainability nonprofit, encourages people to eat local grain is to support the local grain economy. Shaw-Kitch explains it simply: Buying local and selling local grains “Helps grow the farmers, and helps grow our business, and helps grow the businesses of the people that buy our products.”

Taste the difference

Stone-ground flour and flours made of different types of wheat and grain offer an entirely new flavor profile. “You’re now working with these very specific varieties and cultivars that have their own personality, their own unique baking characteristics, and you can then take those characteristics and really create a bread or a pastry or a pasta that really is an example of what you think is delicious.”

The freshness of Shaw-Kitch’s flour is part of why it is so flavorful. “Most of the flavor and mouth feel and richness from whole wheat flour comes from the germ because that’s where all of the natural oils are,” he explained. Fats and oils are a large contributor to flavor, but can also spoil quickly. Store-bought whole wheat flours are often already rancid by the time they make it to your home or they are sold without the germ in it to prevent any potential spoiling. “That leads to a really bad-tasting whole wheat flour,” Shaw-Kitch explained.



The Brooklyn Granary & Mill logo. Photo courtesy of BGM

“To make really good whole wheat bread, you have to add a lot of water to it. Mass-produced bread is made by machines, and machines can’t work with bread that is really wet.” The bread that Shaw-Kitch will make for the mill’s accompanying bakery he describes as “really custardy and soft and moist.”

To teach others how to make their own delicious, nutritious bread, BGM will offer extensive information on its website and in the store about different grains and how to use them. Shaw-Kitch will work directly with bakeries and chefs to help them find the right flours and grains for their products.

Eventually, BGM hopes to offer classes to continue to educate people about different grains.

Shaw-Kitch emphasized that he just wants to “start a conversation and a dialogue between people who care about agriculture and good food and baking.”

Be on the lookout for the opening of Brooklyn Granary & Mill. Information will be available on the mill’s [Instagram](#).

See the recipe for German rye bread here:

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