

Mon. 23 Mar '09

Queen of the Boule

Zoe Nathan's breads at Huckleberry Cafe



From open to close, people have been crowding into Santa Monica's new Huckleberry Cafe for co-owner Zoe Nathan's fruit-filled crostadas, addictive eclairs and widely touted bacon maple biscuits. The savory breakfast and lunch dishes are also a hit, but we're convinced that the boules, baguettes and fresh-baked loaves are what really set this bakery apart.

Nathan got her start at **Tartine** in San Francisco before moving through some of L.A.'s top kitchens, ultimately landing at **Rustic Canyon**--only a few doors away--where she's still the pastry chef. Since the restaurant doesn't have real bread-baking capabilities, we never got to see what the chef can do with dough. Until now: She might just be the new Nancy Silverton.

With its perfect crumb and crust, Nathan's hearty rustic country boule is used for most of the cafe's sandwiches, but there's also a wonderfully chewy ciabatta, a very snackable multigrain baguette and a soft multigrain loaf that belies that bread's usual density. All are available to go, but you have to be quick: Many sell out by the time the cafe closes. Even the most die-hard carbophobes can't resist.

Huckleberry Cafe and Bakery, 1014 Wilshire Blvd.; 310-451-2311 or huckleberrycafe.com