

**M**ost people who have lived in France would remember the daily comfort and pleasure of buying a warm baguette on the way home – which never made it home as it was eaten on the way – and warm Viennoiserie on the way to school or work in the mornings.

They would remember the baker's wife shouting to her husband to bring more baguettes through from the oven. They would remember the smile of the baker who was proud of his bread and the mouth-watering smell of the baking bread, so different from the horrible, artificial aromas pumped out by some so-called bakeries today. You can lose all track of time when you work in a real bakery.

#### INDUSTRY TAKES OVER

It was always like this in France, but in the 1970s and 1980s industrially produced bread took over in both supermarkets and local independent bakeries. Bakers were retiring with no one to succeed them. There was increased pressure on productivity. In France, as elsewhere, the weekly supermarket shop became the new trend. This hit local bakeries hard and many disappeared.

In the 1990s a new trend emerged: comfort and convenience consumption. It was a return to traditional values, not as a 'must do', but as a conscious choice. Consumers rediscovered the pleasure of buying fresh products from specialist shops close to home. They wanted to buy fresh vegetables from the local farmers' market or greengrocer, and they wanted warm, freshly baked bread, Viennoiserie and patisserie.

I believe the UK is now waking up to this same trend. Even large supermarket chains have local convenience stores. Now, when consumers can choose between buying their



## Minding my business

**David Belhassen**, MD of Paul UK, subsidiary of French family bakery and patisserie Paul, says there is renewed interest in buying fresh bread from the local baker in the UK



bread, cheese or vegetables from the supermarket or from local specialised shops, which will they choose? The issue is time. Why queue two or three times when it can be done in one hit at the supermarket?

This is where the new retail trend towards creating an enjoyable experience for the customer comes into play. Shopping at the supermarket is a chore to be endured. Shopping in a local specialist bakery or fromagerie is a genuine pleasure.

Now that consumers can use the internet to buy all the boring necessities, such as cleaning products and bottled water, they have more time to enjoy the pleasure of shopping for top-quality and artisan-produced

food in excellent small shops or markets.

Awareness is growing among consumers in the UK that taking care of yourself includes buying the best quality food you can find, and making sure that the purchase is a nice one.

At Paul UK, we see this every day at each of our community bakeries. We could have saved on production costs and time by opting for industrial bread, but we believe in this trend and we make the effort every night and day to make our bread from scratch by hand.

We also do it because we really enjoy it, and we are addicted to the memories of that wonderful freshness we all experienced during our childhoods in France.

B&T

#### All about Paul

Paul plans to open 10 shops a year over the next five years, towards a target of having 50 or 60 outlets in five years' time. The company, which is the UK division of France's biggest retail bakery chain, now has 15 shops in the London area, served by its central bakery in Covent Garden. It plans to replicate the model when it opens a central bakery in Dublin, Ireland, in 2007. It will then open central bakeries in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 2008.