

Thoughtful Food

Chef Hugo's Tasty Croissants May be Tough to Make, but Worth Every Minute

By Susie Iventosch



Susie Iventosch's daughter, Courtney, cuts croissant triangles with her mom.

Photos Susie Iventosch

On a recent trip to Paris I had a hankering to take a cooking class. I wasn't especially picky about what kinds of things we would learn to make, but just thought it would be a really fun thing to do.

When I discovered "Make Your Own Croissants" at Le Foodist cooking school on the Left Bank, I was sold. What better place in the world to learn how to make croissants than Paris? And, the added bonus was that the class was taught by a French pastry chef, in English, but with that gorgeous accent. Although I do speak French, I thought that perhaps it might be a great idea to learn how to make croissants

in my native language. They are kind of tricky and time-consuming in any language, so it really helps to understand the instructions.

With six students in the croissant class, and two cooking stations, we all took turns adding ingredients to the dough, kneading and rolling, and finally forming our croissants. The lesson gave us a really great understanding of what makes croissants so beautifully flaky and layered (81 layers!) and when we were all done and the croissants were in the oven, we sat around the table chatting, telling stories and drinking coffee.

One of the things our instructor,

Hugo Renard, insisted upon, was that we would do all of the measuring in grams using a scale. The scale offers a more accurate measurement than the cups. He said, "No measuring spoons or cups in this class!"

Because the croissants turned out so well and were so delicious, I didn't want to convert this recipe into our usual measuring cup and spoon routine, so you will need to own, buy or borrow a scale for this recipe. If you have not used a cooking scale before, then you should read about how to "tare" the scale, which in effect zeros-out the scale after taking into account the weight of the vessel used to hold the ingredients. We

used a series of small metal bowls in class, but whatever containers you use, be sure to tare the scale to get an accurate reading.

One notable ingredient we used in the class was fresh cake yeast, which gave the croissants a distinct flavor. I had trouble finding fresh yeast in the stores near me, so I went ahead and used dry yeast, and the croissants turned out beautifully, but without that more distinctly yeasty flavor. If you'd like to try the fresh yeast, I checked with Diablo Foods and they carry the Fleishmann's brand in the refrigerator section on Aisle 9. Be sure to note that if converting to dry yeast you will use approximately one-third the amount of fresh yeast called for in the recipe. So, instead of 20 grams of fresh, you will use about 7 grams of dry yeast.

I wanted to be sure to make this recipe soon after returning home, so I wouldn't forget all of

Hugo's great tips. You will probably find some new terminology you've not heard of before. At least, that was the case for me. The whole process from beginning to end will take approximately three- to-four hours, but with some spare time in between, as the dough is chilling or the croissants are proofing and baking. Be sure to have plenty of time when you dive into this project, and you'll enjoy the experience much more than if you are rushed.

Also, once the croissants are formed, they can be frozen before proofing and baking. It's best to freeze them on a tray until firm, and then transfer them to a baggie to save space. When you're ready to bake them, take them out of the freezer the night before, or at least several hours ahead of time, to let them thaw and proof before baking them.

Bon Appetit!

For more information about Le Foodist, visit www.lefoodist.com/. For more information about fresh or cake yeast and how it compares to dry yeast, visit www.thekitchn.com/does-fresh-yeast-make-a-difference-in-breads-lets-try-something-new-217460, or www.traditionaloven.com/conversions_of_measures/yeast_converter.html. For yeast conversion from fresh to dry, visit <http://makebread.com.au/fresh-yeast-conversion/>.



Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.

Chef Hugo's Croissants

**Note this recipe calls for just over one pound of butter, and even though it is measured in grams, I thought it would be more helpful for you to know approximately how much butter to have on hand.*

Step 1: Make the Polish (yeast and flour mixture)

Weigh out the following ingredients and place in a bowl: (all measurements are in grams=g)

- 20g fresh, cake yeast (use 7g if using active dry yeast)
- 112g water at about 110 degrees
- 75g all-purpose flour

Gently mix with a fork or whisk, until yeast dissolves. This is called the "polish."

Next cover the polish with:

- 375g cake flour
- 100g all-purpose flour

Be sure to completely cover the yeast mixture

(or polish) with these two types of flour, but do not stir into mixture. Cover bowl with a damp cloth (not directly on dough, but drape cloth over the top of the bowl). Rest 30 minutes covered – until cracks develop.

**Hugo says by completely covering the polish with flour, you can easily see that the yeast is working once it pushes through to form cracks in the flour.*

Step 2: Make the Dough

Weigh the following ingredients and set aside:

- 50g granulated sugar
- 12g salt
- 175g milk
- 110g butter (roughly 1 stick plus 1 Tbsp.)

Add sugar, salt, milk, and butter to polish. Pour this all into the bowl of your KitchenAid. Using the dough hook attachment, mix for 1 minute, or until mixture becomes a soft dough. You will hear the dough beginning to sort of thump against the edges of the bowl. Place dough into a greased, large bowl and cover bowl with a damp cloth. (Again, not directly on dough, but drape cloth over top of bowl.)

Rest at room temperature for 1 hour. Then press dough down, cover and refrigerate for approximately 1 hour.

Step 3: Roll out the Butter

Meanwhile prepare the butter. Cut a large piece of plastic wrap or parchment paper, approximately 15 x 25 inches. Place 350g unsalted butter (this will be slightly more than 3 sticks of butter) in the center of one half of the paper. Fold paper over butter so that the butter is in the center and paper is both under and over butter.

Using a rolling pin, gently beat butter to flatten and then roll out to approximately ¼-inch thickness and in a perfect square that is approximately 10 inches* square. Be careful not to tear the paper. Use the edges of the paper or a knife to get to a straight. Once flattened and shaped, keep butter covered in wrap and refrigerated until ready to use.

**The measurement may differ depending upon thickness, but this is roughly the size you want!*

Step 4: Roll Out Dough and Make the First Turn

Dust a large cutting board or a flat surface with flour. (Always keep extra flour on hand from here on out for dusting both the surface of the dough as well as the rolling surface.) Place dough on surface and roll out into a rectangle slightly more than double the length and three inches wider than your large square of butter. So, this should be about 13 x 23 inches or so.

Remove butter from refrigerator and let sit for about 3-5 minutes to soften ever so slightly.



Now, take your big square of butter and place it on one end of the dough, leaving a ½ -inch border on the sides. (Be sure to peel off paper or plastic wrap around the butter as you place it on the dough!) Fold the other half of the dough over the butter, and then just like wrapping a package, fold the sides over the top, pressing them gently with your fingers in order to seal the butter inside of the dough package.

You now have a big square of dough with the butter tucked inside. Beginning from the middle of the square, work your way up towards the top and from the middle work your way down towards the bottom of the dough to form a large rectangle approximately 12 x 20 inches. Keep checking under the dough and on top of the dough for any butter escaping the package. If it is, dust with flour and be gentle with the dough. If butter escaping becomes a problem, put the dough in the refrigerator until the butter firms up a little bit and then resume.

Once you have the dough rolled out to the desired size, fold the dough in thirds, like a business letter, beginning at the narrow end. So, now you have a rectangle approximately 12 x 6 ½ inches. So, if you count dough, butter, dough, for each of the 3 folds, we now have 9 layers of dough. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Step 5: Make the Second Turn

Remove dough from refrigerator and plastic wrap and place on floured rolling surface with the narrow end towards you. Again, rolling from the center up and from the center down, roll dough out into a 12 x 20 inch rectangle, again being very careful not to allow butter to squeeze through. Again, fold in thirds, wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes to an hour. Now, you have 27 layers of butter and dough.

Step 6: Make the Third Turn

Repeat the process from Step 5, and remember to begin rolling with the narrow end towards you and roll from the center up and down. Fold in thirds, wrap and refrigerate. Now you have 81 layers of butter and dough. Refrigerate again for about 30 minutes.

Step 7: Shape the Croissants

Roll out dough into a large thin (¼-inch thick) rectangle, or cut in half or thirds and roll into several rectangles. Then cut dough into triangles approximately 4 x 7 inches and beginning at the flat end, roll into crescent shapes and curve the ends down a little bit, like a frown. Be sure to end with the tip of the triangle tucked underneath the croissant. **One of Hugo's tricks here was to make two little cuts about ¼ inch long on the 4-inch end, which helps allow the crescent shape to be curved once you roll it.*

Place croissants onto a baking sheet covered with parchment paper, or sprayed with PAM.

**If you plan to freeze some of the uncooked croissants to bake later, freeze them on a tray before the egg wash. Once frozen, store in baggies. When you want to bake them, remove from freezer to thaw, brush with egg wash, proof for about 30 minutes and then bake!*

Step 8: Make the Egg Wash

Whisk one egg plus one egg yolk with a pinch of salt.

Apply the egg wash to the rolled croissants with a pastry brush.

Allow to proof at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Apply a second coat of egg wash to areas of the proofed croissant that seem to be missing the egg wash. You will clearly be able to see where you missed the egg wash the first time.

Step 9: Bake the Croissants

Preheat oven to 360 degrees. Bake croissants for approximately 12-14 minutes.

