



ITALIAN · LIGURIAN (GENOVA TRADITION) · SIDE · TABLE BREAD · SANDWICH BASE  
· CANAPÉ

# Focaccia (Sheet Pan, Overnight Cold Ferment)

Seventy-five percent hydration, three minutes of hands-on work, eighteen hours in the fridge, thirty minutes from fridge to table. The easiest genuinely-great bread — and the one that teaches why slow cold fermentation produces flavor that fast bread cannot match. Two versions: sourdough discard and commercial yeast.

Protein None (naturally vegan – olive oil only)

Serves 8-12 as table bread · one half-sheet pan (33 × 45 cm)

Difficulty Beginner

Active 15 min mix + 5 min dimple + 5 min plate

Total 18-24 hours (almost all hands-off cold ferment)

## THE STORY

### The Bread That Forgives Everything

Focaccia is the bread every beginner should make first, and every experienced baker should still make often. The high hydration (seventy-five percent water to flour by weight) produces a dough so wet you cannot overwork it. The high fat (fifty grams of olive oil in the dough plus another fifty on the pan) enriches flavor, extends freshness, and protects the crust from overbaking. The flat shape eliminates the shaping skill that defines most bread baking. The dimpled top holds pools of olive oil that crisp into the crust while keeping the interior moist. You cannot mess this up.

What transforms this recipe from good to great is the overnight cold ferment. Instead of the traditional 1.5–2 hour bulk ferment at room temperature (Italian grandmother method), this recipe uses an 18–24 hour cold ferment in the refrigerator. The long, slow fermentation develops flavor compounds that fast bread simply cannot produce — particularly the ethyl esters and lactic acid notes that give great focaccia its distinctive tang and depth. Lab-tested: cold-fermented focaccia has 3–4x more flavor compounds than same-day focaccia. The time is the flavor.

Two versions here. The sourdough discard version uses Pablo's active mother — a perfect way to use the discard that accumulates during regular starter feeds, and it produces a focaccia with real sourdough character. The commercial yeast version is the Italian-grandmother baseline for weeknight practicality and for teaching the technique before introducing starter complexity. Same shaping, same topping, same bake, different fermentation mechanism. The sourdough version takes 24 hours; the yeast version takes 18.

AT A GLANCE

## Specs

<p><b>YIELD</b></p> <p>1 half-sheet pan (33 × 45 cm)</p>	<p><b>HYDRATION</b></p> <p>75% (425 g water to 500 g flour)</p>	<p><b>ACTIVE TIME</b></p> <p>25 min across 24 hours</p>	<p><b>DIFFICULTY</b></p> <p>Beginner</p> <p>●○○○○</p>
<p><b>BULK FERMENT</b></p> <p>18-24 h refrigerated</p>	<p><b>SECOND PROOF</b></p> <p>1-2 h at room temp</p>	<p><b>BAKE TEMP</b></p> <p>230 °C / 450 °F</p>	<p><b>BAKE TIME</b></p> <p>20-25 min</p>
<p><b>MAKE-AHEAD</b></p> <p>Dough up to 48 h cold; baked 2 days airtight</p>	<p><b>SERVES WITH</b></p> <p>Everything — universal table bread</p>		

## What Changed & Why

Classical Italian Ligurian focaccia is same-day: mix, bulk ferment 1.5–2 hours, shape, proof, bake. This Umami adaptation uses an 18–24 hour cold ferment which transforms the recipe — more complex flavor, better crust development, improved digestibility from the extended enzymatic activity. The ● Everyday version is commercial yeast (foolproof, weeknight-friendly). The ● No Limits version uses Pablo's active sourdough discard for real sourdough character. Both versions use the same shaping, topping, and bake protocol. Pablo's active sourdough mother makes the discard version the preferred weekly cook; the yeast version is there as a technique introduction and for guests who visit without starter.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
<b>TECH</b>	1.5–2 h room temperature bulk ferment	18–24 h cold ferment in refrigerator	Slow cold fermentation develops 3–4x more flavor compounds than same-day; the time is the flavor
<b>ADD</b>	—	Sourdough discard variant ( <span style="color: red;">●</span> )	Uses Pablo's active mother, produces real sourdough focaccia character
<b>TECH</b>	5 min kneading	3 minutes of stretch-and-folds (S&F), no kneading	High hydration dough develops gluten through folds, not kneading; less hands-on work, better crumb
<b>ADD</b>	Basic salt + rosemary topping	Seasonal topping matrix: classical, Spanish, tomato-anchovy, seasonal garden	One dough, four flavor directions; keeps the recipe fresh across repeat makes
<b>ELEV</b>	Bake finish is enough	Finish with EVOO drizzle the moment it leaves the oven	Hot bread absorbs oil into the top 1–2 mm, creating a glossy, deeply flavored crust layer

## What You Need

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### ● Everyday

#### The Commercial Yeast Version (● — 18-hour schedule)

- 500 g bread flour (preferred — higher protein than all-purpose, better crumb structure)
- 425 g water, lukewarm (75% hydration)
- 7 g instant dry yeast (1 standard packet)
- 10 g fine sea salt
- 50 g extra virgin olive oil (in the dough) + 50 g more (for the pan and top)
- Flaky sea salt for finishing
- Toppings (choose one or mix): fresh rosemary sprigs, cherry tomatoes (halved), pitted olives, thinly sliced onion, roasted garlic cloves

#### Infrastructure

- Half-sheet pan (33 × 45 cm / 13 × 18 inches) — standard professional size
- Large mixing bowl (3-quart minimum)
- Kitchen scale (hydration-based bread needs gram measurements, volume is too imprecise)
- Plastic wrap or beeswax cover
- Instant-read thermometer (optional but useful for water temp)

#### Substitution Notes

- *No bread flour?* All-purpose works. Crumb will be slightly less open but still excellent. Do NOT use cake or pastry flour (too low protein).
- *No half-sheet pan?* A quarter-sheet pan with half the recipe works. A 9 × 13 inch baking dish also works — use 2/3 of the recipe.
- *Active dry yeast instead of instant?* Bloom it first — dissolve in the warm water with a pinch of sugar, wait 10 minutes for foam, then proceed. Use the same amount.
- *No kitchen scale?* For the yeast version only, volume substitutes work: 4 cups flour, 1.75 cups water, 2 1/4 tsp yeast, 2 tsp salt, 1/4 cup EVOO. Sourdough version REQUIRES scale.

## ● No Limits

### The Sourdough Discard Version (● – 24-hour schedule)

- 500 g high-protein bread flour, preferably Spanish or Italian 00-type (Pablo supplier ✓ Flour & Weirdoughs mills their own – request 'bread blend' when picking up)
- 100 g active sourdough discard (Pablo's mother ✓ – 4-6 hours after last feed, at peak activity)
- 350 g filtered water, 24 °C (adjusted for the water content of the discard – total hydration still 75%)
- 2 g instant dry yeast (optional insurance – makes the sourdough version more reliable without overpowering the sourdough flavor; leave out if you want pure sourdough)
- 12 g Maldon fine sea salt (Pablo ✓)
- 75 g Arbequina EVOO (Pablo ✓ – higher-quality oil matters more when there are so few ingredients) + 75 g more for the pan and top
- Maldon flaky salt (Pablo ✓) for finishing

### Topping Matrix – Four Variants

- **Classical Ligurian:** Flaky salt + fresh rosemary sprigs + 10-15 small kalamata olives scattered. Bake then drizzle EVOO.
- **Pablo Spanish:** Flaky salt + 1 tsp pimentón dulce dusted + 8-10 thin slices of Ibérico lard (from any good jamón trim) + fresh thyme. The Spanish focaccia.
- **Tomato-Anchovy:** 15-20 halved cherry tomatoes + 6-8 anchovy fillets scattered + flaky salt + fresh oregano. Mediterranean assertive.
- **Seasonal Garden:** Whatever is peak – asparagus tips (spring), pitted cherries and rosemary (early summer – yes, sweet-savory is brilliant here), roasted pumpkin and sage (fall), caramelized onion + roasted garlic (winter).

### Service Companions (when serving as dinner-party table bread)

- Small bowl of high-quality EVOO + balsamic vinegar for dipping (traditional Italian service)
- Small dish of classical alioli (UMAMI-9 #2) – Spanish bridge
- Thinly sliced jamón Ibérico (Chèvre Miami supplier ✓) draped on warm focaccia
- Fresh burrata + EVOO + flaky salt on torn pieces

## EQUIPMENT

### Your Kit

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- Half-sheet pan (33 × 45 cm), preferably heavy aluminum (thin pans warp at 230 °C)

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- Large mixing bowl (3 L or larger)

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- Kitchen scale (essential — volume measurements fail at this hydration)

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- Plastic wrap, beeswax cover, or fitted bowl lid

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- Bench scraper (useful for handling wet dough)

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- Pastry brush (for oiling the pan)

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- Oven at 230 °C / 450 °F with rack in middle position

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- Wire cooling rack (focaccia must cool on rack to prevent soggy bottom)

## MISE EN PLACE

### Before You Start

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- Yeast version: flour, water, yeast, salt, oil all measured BEFORE starting — the process is fast

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- Sourdough version: starter fed 4–6 hours before starting mix (at peak activity — should pass the float test)

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- Sheet pan thoroughly oiled (50 g EVOO — do not skimp, this creates the bottom crust)

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- Topping ingredients prepped (rosemary picked, tomatoes halved, olives pitted, anchovies arranged)

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- For overnight method: clear fridge space for a covered half-sheet pan

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- Oven preheated 45 minutes before bake (a hot oven + hot pan = proper oven spring)

# Timeline

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● **Day 1 · 6:00 PM – Mix (● yeast)**

In large bowl, whisk 500 g flour + 7 g yeast. Add 425 g warm water. Stir to shaggy dough. Rest 10 min for autolyse. Add 10 g salt + 50 g EVOO. Stir to combine — dough will be very wet and sticky. This is correct.

● **Day 1 · 6:00 PM – Mix (● sourdough)**

In large bowl, combine 500 g flour + 100 g active discard + 350 g water + 2 g yeast (optional). Stir. Rest 30 min for autolyse. Add 12 g salt + 75 g EVOO. Mix to combine.

● **Day 1 · 6:15 PM – First S&F**

Wet your hand. Grab one side of dough, stretch up, fold over top. Rotate bowl 90°. Repeat 4 times total. Cover. Rest 30 min.

● **Day 1 · 6:45, 7:15, 7:45 PM – Three more S&Fs**

Same stretch-and-fold sequence, 30 min apart. By the fourth S&F, the dough should have noticeably more structure, be smoother, and pass a windowpane test (can be stretched thin without tearing).

● **Day 1 · 8:15 PM – Oil sheet pan + transfer**

Pour 50 g (about 3–4 tablespoons) of EVOO onto the sheet pan. Spread to coat entirely — do not skip this; the oil creates the bottom crust. Transfer the dough to the pan. Drizzle 25 g more oil on top of the dough.

● **Day 1 · 8:20 PM – Into fridge**

Cover the sheet pan with plastic wrap (tented to allow expansion). Place in refrigerator. DO NOT try to stretch the dough at this stage — cold-ferment first, stretch in the morning.

● **Day 2 · ~2:00 PM – Out of fridge**

Pull the sheet pan out. The dough should have expanded significantly and will have visible bubbles. Let it come to room temp 1 hour (2 hours for sourdough version).

● **Day 2 · ~3:00 PM – Dimple and stretch**

Oiled fingers. Push dough to fill the pan edges. If it resists, rest 15 min and try again. Dimple all over — push fingertips ALL the way down to the pan bottom. The dimples hold oil pools and create the focaccia texture. Add your chosen topping (rosemary + olives, tomato-anchovy, etc.). Finish with flaky salt.

● **Day 2 · ~3:15 PM – Final proof**

Let the dimpled, topped focaccia proof at room temperature for 30–45 minutes while oven preheats. The dough should look puffy and pillowy before baking.

● **Day 2 · ~4:00 PM – Bake**

Oven at 230 °C / 450 °F. Bake on middle rack 20–25 minutes until deep golden-brown on top and the oil is visibly bubbling around the edges.

● **Day 2 · ~4:25 PM – Finish + cool**

Remove from oven. IMMEDIATELY drizzle another 25 g EVOO over the hot focaccia — the hot bread absorbs this oil into the top layer. Transfer to wire rack to cool 10 minutes before serving. Serve warm or at room temp.

## METHOD

# The Cook

### 1 The Mix — 5 Minutes of Hands-On Work

1. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour and yeast until distributed evenly. For the sourdough version: whisk flour with the small amount of insurance yeast if using, and set aside.
2. Add the water. For the yeast version: warm water at roughly 35 °C (comfortable to the touch, not hot). For the sourdough version: cool to room-temp water at 24 °C, plus your active discard.
3. Stir with a spoon or clean hand until there are no dry spots. The dough will be shaggy, wet, and unattractive. This is correct.
4. Let the dough rest 10–30 minutes (autolyse). This hydrates the flour and starts gluten development without any work from you. 10 min for yeast, 30 min for sourdough.
5. Add the salt and olive oil. Stir or pinch them into the dough until fully incorporated. The dough will feel wetter again as the oil coats the gluten strands — correct.

#### WHY THIS WORKS

Autolyse is a French term for the rest period after flour and water are combined but before salt and any other ingredients are added. During autolyse, the flour proteins begin hydrating and forming gluten bonds passively, without any kneading work. This dramatically reduces the amount of hands-on work required later — with autolyse, the dough builds gluten structure on its own during subsequent rests. Salt is added after autolyse because salt tightens gluten, inhibiting the initial relaxation that allows hydration. The 75 percent hydration is the key variable here — it produces an open, airy crumb and eliminates kneading because water does the work of gluten development. Lower hydration doughs need more kneading; higher hydration doughs need more folding. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4 (Hydration Science); Food Science Core chapter 3 (Gluten Development).

## 2 Stretch-and-Folds — Replace Kneading

1. Wet your hand (reduces sticking). Grab the dough at one side of the bowl. Stretch it up and over, folding the dough onto itself. Rotate the bowl 90 degrees. Repeat until you have done this four times total — one full rotation.
2. Cover the bowl. Rest 30 minutes.
3. Repeat the four-fold sequence. Three more sets total, 30 minutes apart, for 4 sets over 2 hours.
4. After the final fold: the dough should feel smoother, more elastic, and noticeably structured compared to the shaggy mess at the start. It should pass a windowpane test — pinch a small piece of dough and stretch it gently; it should stretch thin enough to see light through without tearing.
5. If the dough still tears on the windowpane test after 4 S&Fs, do one or two more sets. Every flour is slightly different.

### WHY THIS WORKS

Stretch-and-folds replace kneading for high-hydration doughs. Kneading works by mechanically aligning gluten strands, but at 75 percent hydration the dough is too wet to knead effectively (it just slides off your hands). Instead, folds work by stretching the gluten strands in controlled directions and then letting the dough relax. Each rest between folds allows the gluten to re-set in the new configuration before the next stretch. The result is organized, structured gluten with excellent gas-holding capacity — producing the open, bubbly crumb that defines focaccia. The rest intervals are essential; folding too frequently (e.g., every 10 minutes) breaks the developing structure. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4; chapter 5 (Hand Techniques).

## 3

## The Cold Ferment — Where Flavor Develops

1. Oil the sheet pan generously with 50 g of olive oil. Spread to coat entirely, including corners. Do NOT skip or reduce this step — the oil is what creates the iconic focaccia bottom crust.
2. Transfer the dough from the bowl to the pan. Use a wet or oiled hand to pour it gently. Do not try to spread or shape at this stage.
3. Drizzle 25 g more oil over the top of the dough.
4. Cover the pan with plastic wrap, loose enough to allow the dough to expand but snug enough to prevent drying.
5. Refrigerate for 18–24 hours. Yes, really — the long ferment is the recipe. 18 hours minimum for yeast version, 24 hours for sourdough version.
6. Do not disturb the dough during the cold ferment. No pokes, no checks. The cold slows yeast activity to a controlled crawl, allowing enzymatic and fermentation flavor compounds to develop.



### WHY THIS WORKS

Cold fermentation at 4 °C slows yeast activity dramatically — fermentation that takes 2 hours at room temperature takes 18–24 hours in the refrigerator. The long, slow ferment has two critical effects on flavor. First, enzymes in the flour break down starches into simple sugars, and proteins into amino acids, over hours of activity. These broken-down molecules are flavor precursors that develop into complex aromatic compounds during baking (especially during Maillard reactions). Second, the yeast has time to produce ester compounds (ethyl esters, especially ethyl acetate) that give bread its fruity, complex aromas. Lab studies comparing cold-fermented and same-day doughs consistently show 3–4x more volatile aroma compounds in the cold-fermented dough. This is why pizzerias and serious bakeries all cold-ferment their doughs for 24–72 hours. The time is the flavor. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4; chapter 6 (Fermentation Chemistry).

## 4 Shape, Dimple, Proof, Bake

1. Pull the sheet pan from the fridge. The dough should have expanded noticeably, with visible bubbles on top and sides.
2. Let the dough come to room temperature: 1 hour for yeast version, 2 hours for sourdough version.
3. Oil your fingers. Gently push the dough to fill the corners and edges of the pan. If it resists, rest 15 minutes and try again — do not force it.
4. Once the dough fills the pan: dimple all over the surface with your fingertips, pushing ALL the way down until you feel the pan bottom. Space dimples roughly 2.5 cm / 1 inch apart. Don't be shy — the dimples hold the oil pools that create the signature focaccia texture.
5. Add your chosen topping (one of the four from the topping matrix). Finish with a generous pinch of flaky sea salt across the entire surface.
6. Proof at room temperature 30–45 minutes until the dough looks puffy and pillowy. It should not rise significantly more (that happened during cold ferment), just relax and fill out.
7. Preheat the oven to 230 °C / 450 °F for at least 45 minutes before bake — a properly hot oven is essential for oven spring and crust color.
8. Bake on the middle rack for 20–25 minutes until the top is deep golden-brown and the oil is visibly bubbling around the edges of the pan.
9. Remove from oven. IMMEDIATELY drizzle 25 g more EVOO across the hot surface. The hot bread absorbs this oil into the top 1–2 mm, creating a glossy, deeply flavored crust layer. Transfer to wire rack to cool 10 minutes.

### WHY THIS WORKS

The dimples are structural. Pushing your fingertips to the pan bottom creates depressions that trap olive oil pools during the bake. These pools conduct heat more effectively than the surrounding dough, creating localized deep-fried pockets that form the iconic focaccia texture — chewy, oil-rich, crisp-edged. The result is a bread that's simultaneously deep-fried in spots and baked everywhere else. The final oil drizzle on the hot bread is not just for flavor — hot bread absorbs oil through capillary action into the top 1–2 mm of the crust, creating a glossy, oil-saturated top layer that's unique to focaccia. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4; chapter 5 (Shaping Techniques).

QUICK REFERENCE

# Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
Mix + autolyse + salt/oil incorporate	15 min + 10-30 min rest	Shaggy wet dough, no dry spots
Four stretch-and-folds, 30 min apart	2 h total, 3 min active	Smooth structured dough, passes windowpane
Transfer to oiled pan + cold ferment	18-24 h in fridge	Expanded, bubbly, do not disturb
Room temp warm-up	1-2 h	Dough loosens, feels pliable
Dimple and stretch to fill pan	5 min	Fingertips reach pan bottom, no resistance
Add topping + flaky salt	2 min	Visible dimples holding oil pools
Final proof	30-45 min	Puffy, pillowy
Preheat oven 230 °C / 450 °F	45 min (start during proof)	Hot pan + hot oven = oven spring
Bake	20-25 min	Deep golden top, oil bubbling at edges
Finish EVOO drizzle + cool on rack	10 min	Glossy top, crust set, can slice

## Emergency Protocols

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### DOUGH IS TOO WET / STICKY TO HANDLE

This is correct at 75 percent hydration. Do NOT add more flour — that changes the recipe. Use wet or oiled hands for all handling. The stickiness improves dramatically after the S&F series. If truly unmanageable, your flour may be low-protein (all-purpose vs bread flour); bake as-is, use higher-protein flour next time.

### DOUGH DID NOT RISE DURING COLD FERMENT

Three possibilities. (1) Yeast was dead — use fresh yeast next time. (2) Refrigerator too cold (below 2 °C slows yeast too much) — move pan to a warmer part of fridge. (3) Not enough time — 18 h is minimum; if pulled at 12 h, return to fridge. Rescue: pull pan out, let rise at room temp 2–3 hours until visibly expanded, then proceed.

### DOUGH RESISTS SPREADING TO FILL PAN

Normal — cold dough is tight. Oil your fingers. Gently push to fill corners. If it springs back immediately, rest 15 minutes and try again. Repeat as many times as needed. Do not force it — torn gluten produces dense bread.

### FOCACCIA IS DENSE OR UNDERBAKED IN MIDDLE

Either oven was not hot enough, or proof was too short. Check oven with thermometer (many ovens run 15–20 °C lower than setting). Bake an extra 5 minutes if color is okay but interior seems dense. Next time: proof until truly puffy, check oven calibration.

### TOP IS BROWNING TOO FAST, INTERIOR STILL RAW

Tent loosely with foil at 15-minute mark. Continue baking until internal temp hits 95 °C / 203 °F (use instant-read thermometer). Next time: lower rack one position, check oven temp with thermometer.

### FOCACCIA STUCK TO PAN ON BOTTOM

Oil quantity was insufficient. Next time: use full 50 g EVOO on pan, spread evenly. Rescue: run a thin metal spatula between bread and pan to release. Once cooled, the bottom often releases easily even when initial sticking occurs.

#### SOURDOUGH DISCARD VERSION IS TOO SOUR

Discard was too old or mother was weak. Use discard that's 4–6 hours after feed (peak activity, balanced sour). Alternative: reduce discard to 75 g and add 2 g yeast for insurance. The sour note should be present but not dominant — think backdrop, not lead flavor.

#### OVER-PROOFED (DOUGH COLLAPSES WHEN DIMPLED)

Too long at room temp before shaping. Bake anyway — slightly denser crumb but still good. Next time: set a timer for the warm-up phase; 1 hour for yeast, 2 hours for sourdough is the maximum before dough over-proofs.

### DEEP DIVES

## Technique Notes

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### Universal: Why 75 Percent Hydration Matters

BREAD SCIENCE · HYDRATION · UNIVERSAL

Bread recipes use baker's percentages — ingredient weights expressed as a percentage of the flour weight. Seventy-five percent hydration means 375 grams of water per 500 grams of flour (and this recipe is exactly that). This hydration level is the sweet spot for focaccia specifically. Below 70 percent the crumb is too tight and requires kneading. Above 80 percent the dough becomes unmanageable even for experienced bakers. Seventy-five percent produces an open, bubbly crumb that is characteristic of focaccia, while still being handleable via stretch-and-folds. Every bread style has a hydration sweet spot — brioche is 65 percent, pizza is 65 percent, focaccia is 75 percent, ciabatta is 80 percent. Memorize this for each bread you make regularly. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4.

## ● Universal: The Cold Ferment Transforms Flavor

FERMENTATION CHEMISTRY • COLD FERMENT • UNIVERSAL

The single change that elevates this focaccia from good to great is the 18–24 hour cold ferment in the refrigerator. Cold slows yeast activity to a controlled crawl, allowing two critical processes to complete. First, enzymes in the flour break down starches into simple sugars and proteins into amino acids — flavor precursors that become complex aromatic compounds during baking. Second, yeast produces ethyl ester compounds that give bread its fruity, complex aromas. Lab studies consistently show 3–4 times more volatile aroma compounds in cold-fermented doughs compared to same-day doughs. This is why every serious pizzeria and bakery cold-ferments for 24–72 hours. Time is the flavor. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4 and 6.

## ● Universal: Stretch-and-Folds Replace Kneading

BREAD TECHNIQUE • GLUTEN DEVELOPMENT • UNIVERSAL

At 75 percent hydration, traditional kneading doesn't work — the dough is too wet to move against your hands. Instead, stretch-and-folds develop gluten through controlled stretching with rest intervals. Each fold aligns gluten strands in a new direction; the rest between folds lets the gluten re-set before the next stretch. Four sets of folds 30 minutes apart over two hours produces well-developed gluten with minimal hands-on work. The windowpane test confirms readiness: a small piece of dough should stretch thin enough to see light through without tearing. This technique works for any high-hydration dough (focaccia, ciabatta, sourdough) and is the foundation skill for advanced bread work. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 4; chapter 5.

## ● Universal: Dimple to the Pan Bottom (Oil Pool Mechanism)

BREAD TECHNIQUE • FOCACCIA FINISHING • UNIVERSAL

The dimples on focaccia are structural, not decorative. Your fingertips must push all the way through the dough to touch the pan bottom. Each dimple creates a pocket that traps olive oil during the bake — and this is the secret to focaccia texture. The oil pools in the dimples become localized deep-frying zones, producing the chewy, oil-rich, crisp-edged texture that defines proper focaccia. Shallow dimples produce a regular flat bread with some oil on top. Deep dimples produce focaccia. Space them 2.5 cm apart, push firmly, don't be shy. This is Italian grandmother knowledge codified by science. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 5.

## ● No Limits: The Sourdough Discard Application

SOURDOUGH TECHNIQUE · STARTER MAINTENANCE · PABLO PATTERN

Pablo maintains an active sourdough mother for the Master Sourdough Loaf (UMAMI-10 #1). Regular starter feeds produce discard — the portion of starter that must be removed before each feed to prevent runaway fermentation. This discard is often thrown away, which is a waste. Focaccia is the ideal discard application: the sourdough character adds complexity without requiring the starter to be at peak activity (unlike loaf bread, where timing is critical). Use discard that is 4–6 hours past its last feed — still active enough to contribute fermentation, but past the peak when it would compete with the commercial yeast insurance. This creates a weekly pattern: bake sourdough loaf, feed mother, bake focaccia with the discard. Zero waste, two breads, one active starter cycle. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 6 (Sourdough Maintenance).

## ● No Limits: The Finish Oil Drizzle

BREAD FINISHING · CAPILLARY ACTION · UNIVERSAL

The moment focaccia leaves the oven, before it cools, drizzle another 25 g of olive oil across the hot top surface. This is not optional decoration — it is a capillary action technique that transforms the crust. Hot bread has open pores in the top 1–2 mm of the crust; as it cools, these pores close. Oil applied during this brief hot window is absorbed into the crust by capillary action, creating a glossy, oil-saturated top layer that adds flavor, moisture, and visual appeal. Oil applied after cooling just sits on top and runs off. The same principle applies to any oil-finished bread (ciabatta, fougasse). Use your best oil for this finish — the flavor is fully preserved. Reference: Bread and Baking chapter 5; chapter 7 (Finishing).

### PAIRING

## What to Drink

### 🍷 Wine — Everyday

Young Sangiovese (Tuscany) or Garnacha (Spain)

*Both are medium-bodied, food-friendly reds that pair with focaccia's olive oil richness. Sangiovese for the Italian tradition, Garnacha for the Spanish adaptation. Both handle the variety of toppings without competing.*

### **Wine — No Limits**

Ligurian Vermentino (white) for classical; Priorat Garnacha for Pablo-Spanish

*The ultra-local regional pairing. Vermentino from Liguria is the birthplace wine of focaccia — bright minerality cuts the olive oil. For the Pablo Spanish topping, Priorat Garnacha matches the pimentón and Ibérico character.*

### **Wine — Rosé Alternative**

Dry Provençal or Spanish rosado

*For summer outdoor service with focaccia: chilled dry rosé is the universal Mediterranean pairing. Handles all four topping variants, refreshes between bites of oil-rich bread.*

### **Non-Wine Alternative**

Sparkling water with lemon, or a crisp Italian Pilsner (Menabrea)

*For casual afternoon service or when guests don't drink wine — the bread is already flavor-rich, a clean palate-resetter works better than an assertive non-wine option. Menabrea from Liguria is the regional beer match.*

## CONTEXT

# Menu Ideas

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### **Table Bread (dinner-party essential)**

Focaccia is the universal table bread for Mediterranean dinners. Warm slab on a wooden board in the center of the table, torn by hand, accompanied by small bowls of EVOO and balsamic for dipping. Works with any main — Spanish, Italian, French, Japanese-Mediterranean fusion. If the menu has Spanish leanings, use the pimentón + Ibérico lard topping (Pablo variant). For classic Italian, use the rosemary + olive topping. The bread participates in the meal rather than just filling a gap.

### Canapé Base (cocktail hour)

Cut focaccia into 5 cm / 2 inch squares. Top each with: whipped burrata + cherry tomato + basil; jamón Ibérico + honey drizzle; anchovy + caper + lemon zest; or smoked salmon + crème fraîche + dill. Modern tapa service — one bread, five variations, full cocktail hour. Works especially well when you've cold-fermented the focaccia the day before the dinner party.

### Sandwich Base (next-day rescue)

Leftover focaccia is the best sandwich bread that exists. Slice horizontally to create two slabs. Fill with: mozzarella + tomato + pesto; jamón Ibérico + Manchego + fig jam; grilled vegetables + hummus + arugula. The oil-rich crumb absorbs fillings without getting soggy. Grill briefly on both sides for a warm sandwich, or serve cold for picnic-style.

### Pablo-Specific Weekly Rotation

Pairs with Pablo's Master Sourdough Loaf cycle (UMAMI-10 #1). Discard focaccia on Thursday (using Tuesday's starter discard), loaf on Saturday (main weekly bake). Two breads per week from one active starter cycle. Pair with classical alioli (UMAMI-9 #2) on the table for universal Spanish service. When guests are coming, the cold-ferment timing matches perfectly: mix Friday evening, bake Saturday afternoon for Saturday dinner.

## YOUR NOTES

# Cook Log

### Session Notes

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ · Serves: \_\_\_\_ · Rating: \_\_ / 5

*Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.*