

Idea House Preview: Three New Houses for 2006

# Southern Living®

The heart of Southern life

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special section





PHOTOGRAPHS: AMY JO YOUNG

# Sourdough Success

This gourmet bakery in Signal Mountain began with a neighbor's shared loaf of bread.

In the sprawling kitchen of The Bread Basket atop Signal Mountain, Del Williams shapes Parmesan braids while another baker grates fresh apples over a huge mound of dough. Loaves of sweet Southern sourdough, blended last night in a 60-quart mixer affectionately known as “Big Bertha,” rise in pans on the shelves of a towering cart.

## Born and Bread

Marie Hyde “accidentally” launched The Bread Basket from her home kitchen 16 years ago, not long after her family moved into a new house on Signal Mountain. Exhausted from unpacking, Marie stopped to answer the doorbell. There stood the neighbors with a welcoming gift of sourdough bread.

“We tore into it,” Marie recalls,



**top:** Owners Marie and Charlie Hyde and their son, Anson, happily greet customers.

**above:** The Bread Basket's Southern sourdough entices customers.

“and the kids went crazy over it.”

Marie felt compelled to ask for the recipe. A few days later, her new friend handed her a plastic container with scribbled instructions and a cup of grayish-white liquid. “What’s this?” Marie asked, puzzled. She’d never seen a starter, the name for the culture used to make bread from natural fermentation. The liquid yielded three loaves at a time, the neighbor explained.

The novice breadmaker quickly mastered the process, but no matter how much she gave to family and friends, extra bread abounded in the house. So Marie started experimenting with variations on the original recipe, once by adding apples she purchased from a nearby orchard.

When she shared her discovery with the orchard’s owner, he liked it



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You gotta have both to drive.”**

*Marie Hyde*

so much that he asked her to sell some loaves at his shop. Public demand for Marie's cinnamon-apple bread surged almost immediately. “I remember her pulling up in the van and women surrounding it and buying out of the back,” says Charlie, Marie's husband. “We realized we had a potential hit on our hands.”

The next year, Marie opened her first freestanding bakery with one oven and one mixer. She named the store after her penchant for showcasing products in baskets. Two of her daughters, Emily and Lesley, worked at the front counter, while son Anson kneaded dough with his mom. In 1993, the company moved to a larger place with eight ovens and six times the kitchen space. Charlie left his 25-year job as a government contract specialist with IBM to help run the business.

### **Bigger Than a Bread Basket**

The company now offers about 80 different products, from gourmet brownies to cream cheese muffins to Kahlúa fudge cake. But the signature item remains Southern sourdough. Prestigious television networks such as the Food Network and Turner South have raved about The Bread Basket's

## **Follow Your Nose**

Around Tennessee, check out The Bread Basket stores in Signal Mountain at 2116 Taft Highway, (423) 886-7771, or 7804 East Brainerd Road, (423) 510-8881. There's also one in Cleveland at 45 Mouse Creek Road, toll-free 1-866-848-6018. Or visit their Charlotte, North Carolina, location at 9315 D Monroe Road. The company sells product on the Internet and offers nationwide shipping as well as local delivery. Call (423) 886-7771 or 1-800-581-0339, or visit [www.breadbasket.com](http://www.breadbasket.com).

sweettasting sourdough. The process of maintaining and “feeding” the starter takes time, as does the cycle of mixing, shaping, and baking. What's more, the concoction is extremely sensitive to humidity and temperature. “There's never a time when it is not humming somewhere in your awareness,” says Marie. But the payoff is definitely worth it.

“It's just like a car,” Marie says of two primary ingredients in her high-maintenance specialty. “Sugar is the gas. Salt is the brake. You gotta have both to drive.”

NANCY HENDERSON WURST