By Ann Baker-Keulemans

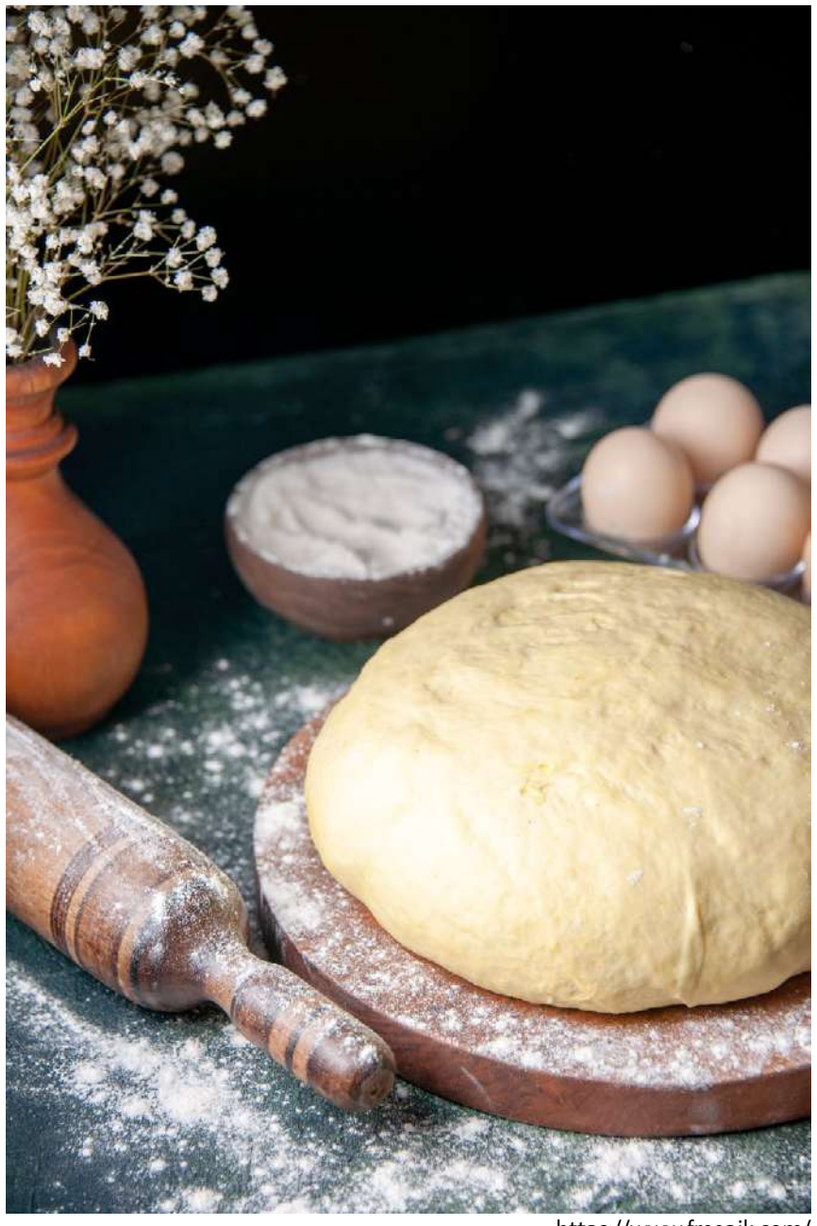
Opportunities rising in the bakery

There's something about the aroma of freshly baked bread and bread products that's instantly recognisable, appealing and comforting. It's part and parcel of the bakery experience, together with visual enticements and a delicious selection on offer. Whether it's sourdough, ciabatta, seeded wholewheat, rye bread, potato bread, multigrain, baguette, croissants, challah, flatbreads (such as chapatti, naan and tortillas), bagels or focaccia, fresh bread items often form the foundation of a successful in-store bakery.

In South Africa, white bread has gained traction due to rising ingredient and food prices. According to Global Newswire, white bread is a firm favourite among local shoppers, for good reason. Driven by affordability and convenience, the humble standard loaf dominates the bakery category – and for some stores, volume speaks louder than value. However, for many South African middle- and higher-income consumers, there's more to their local bakery than a bag of sliced white bread, and this is where the value opportunity lies.

International trends show a growing interest in high-quality baked goods artisanal patisserie, and chocolate. A good in-store bakery can harness these trends and create a destination shopping experience that drives feet into stores while building brand awareness and loyalty.

With major retailers such as Woolworths, Pick n Pay, high-end Spars and more upmarket Checkers



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stores investing in their bakeries, competition is fierce. This is why staying on top of the latest trends and developments – while keeping a finger on the pulse of the needs and desires of local consumers – is vital for success.

Rise to the occasion

Premium bakes are taking centre stage as consumers look for the extravagant, the exotic and the indulgent. Swiss-Belgian cocoa processor and chocolate manufacturer Barry Callebaut AG says ...

> "More than ever, South African consumers are looking for indulgent experiences: multi-sensorial and surprising. Whether it's a way of escaping the ordinary or seeking comfort or just fancying a celebration moment, baked goods are definitely part of this trend as a food experience."

For celebrations, special occasions, and as a tasty gifting option, baked goods run the gamut from traditional cakes and bakes to nouveau creations such as cronuts (a cross between a croissant and a doughnut), mookies (a mashup of a muffin and a cookie), and crookies (croissant cookies). But – is it Instagrammable? Does it look hot on TikTok? For in-store bakeries looking to make an impact with Millennial and Gen Z shoppers, the aesthetics are crucial.

Whether you're using generative AI to bring fantastic creations to life or embracing the art and skill of handmade delights, it's important to note that quality is key – it can't just look good, it has to taste good too. In-store bakeries that offer customisable cakes, personalisation

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and high-end baked goods tend to become a destination point for shoppers.

Add to this the popularity of traditional bakes from other countries – think lebkuchen, pastéis de nata, panforte, tart au citron, and Sachertorte – and you have a delectable treat for the senses that attracts a broad spectrum of customers. Don't forget to branch out by embracing spicier Asian flavours (soy sauce, ginger, garlic, chilli, lemongrass, and sweet-spicy-sour combinations), ingredients from Africa or inspired by African cuisine (maize, millet, sorghum, amasi, coconut milk, watermelon, tamarind, onions, peppers, biltong, pumpkin, pecan and macadamia nuts, moringa) and South American ingredient and flavour influences (corn, beans, chillis and peppers, limes, peanuts, tomatoes, fresh herbs including cilantro or coriander, and cumin).

Ingredients matter

South Bakels is the South African branch of Bakels, an international supplier of bakery ingredients. In their 2025 Bakels Worldwide Review, they identify several important bakery trends. Ingredients are of particular interest to consumers, and Bakels notes that quality, freshness, and health and nutritional benefits are key concerns in purchase decision-making. Value for money is also top of mind and this, according to Bakels, can drive shoppers towards private label brands that offer all of the above.

Famasons Premium Ingredients, suppliers of baking and food manufacturing ingredients in South Africa, agrees ...

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> "In the food manufacturing industry, the journey of an ingredient from the farm to the factory is a critical process that determines the final product's quality and safety."

A growing awareness of climate change and how their choices can affect their environment means that consumers are interested in sustainable offerings which incorporate local and seasonal ingredients, as well as products that minimise food waste – so think smaller serving sizes, individual portions and sharing options.

Volume versus value

Shrinkflation is unavoidable given the rising costs of everything from raw materials and ingredients to water, electricity and labour. However, receiving less volume for the same price, or often at an increased price, can upset consumers and result in unavoidable backlash. Conversely, health-conscious consumers are increasingly aware of the value of 'small delights'. Bite-sized treats and little indulgences are better for the waistline, easier on the pocket and good for the soul.

Combat the negative effects of shrinkflation by growing your line of small volume but high value offerings. Petit fours and macaroons are an easy option here, but investing a little time and effort into more exotic offerings would be well worth it when attracting shoppers who want the comforts of nostalgia and the excitement of international flavours and unexpected twists on old favourites, such as milk tart Swiss roll, malva pudding cupcakes with custard cream cheese icing, milk tart-flavoured doughnuts or amasi-flavoured cheesecake with a rusk crust.

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Better for you: healthier bakery options

The 'better-for-you' trend is not going anywhere soon. Consumers remain focused on making healthier choices for themselves and their households and on ensuring that the nutritional needs of their families are met. Bakery items using less or no added sugar and salt, sugar alternatives, plant-based milks and lower calories will appeal to consumers looking after their health.

In general, baked goods such as breads can be considered a healthier option when they are high in fibre, protein, essential micronutrients, prebiotics and wholegrains. Allergen-free bread may also fall into this category. As these characteristics address a variety of health and dietary needs, stating them clearly on the label needs to be a given.

Bakery becomes seasonal

South Africa is a melting pot of cultures and religions, offering wide and varied potential for seasonal products based on shopper demographics and location. Make your store a catering and occasion one-stop destination by ensuring that your in-store bakery has at least a few seasonal offerings. According to Barry Callebaut, "In addition to traditional and, more importantly, seasonal celebrations, people are looking for new occasions to celebrate."

Packaging and branding

In-store and own-brand baked goods often lose out when it comes to packaging. Naturally, cost and convenience are king – but don't overlook the

https://stockcake.com/i/spooky-halloween-cupcakes

Cupcakes originated in America in the late 18th century, with the first recipe appearing in Amelia Simmons' 1796 cookbook, "American Cookery," for a "light cake to bake in small cups," leading to the name and the concept of individual servings. Early recipes, known as "number cakes," used simple cup measurements (e.g., 1 cup butter, 2 cups sugar) for easy replication, and the invention of muffin tins in the 19th century standardised their baking, making them popular for parties before Hostess mass-produced them in the 1900s, cementing their status as a beloved, convenient treat.

branding opportunity that your bakery packaging presents. Prime examples are celebratory or occasion goods, decadent treats and speciality bakes. Presentation plays a vital role in a category that invites shoppers to 'eat with their eyes'. A good example is Woolworths fun and eye-catching blue and pink packaging for their own-brand doughnuts, which certainly stands out.

In addition to leaving an impression, bakery packaging needs to be sturdy enough to transport bakery goods safely and also be easily recyclable. Consumers are increasingly unwilling to accept substandard packaging, and a growing concern for their own environmental impact means that retailers and wholesalers must continue to take the sustainability of their bakery packaging choices into account, or risk losing the support of conscientious shoppers.

Labelling is also an area where key trends are growing. For several years, clean and clear labelling has been a concern for consumers at an international level. Shoppers want to know what's in their food, what it costs, who made it and where it comes from. And they want to access this information quickly and easily. Ingredient lists must be accessible and comprehensive and allergens need to be listed clearly. While making unverified health claims is prohibited in South Africa, prominently displaying ingredients with better-for-you benefits on bakery packaging is a smart marketing move.

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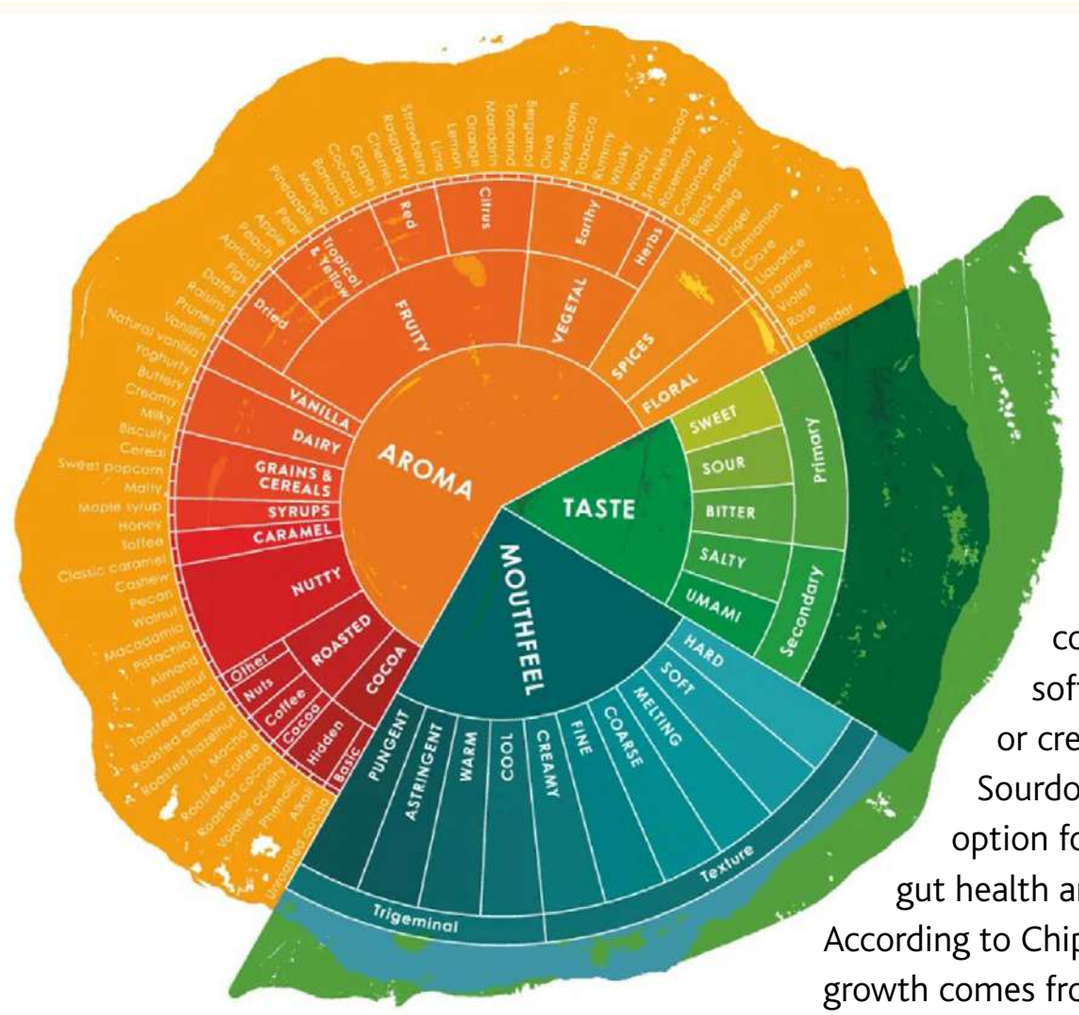
Innovation driving growth

There are many new products driving growth in the bakery. One example is Bakels, which has introduced a range aimed at encouraging development within the bakery category. Fermdor Active Durum is a bread improver for premium artisan products – a major selling point is its ability to provide reliable results even when bakery skills might not equal the skill level required for the product. The Bakels Multiseed Prebiotic, meanwhile, can be used to elevate the nutritional content and potential health benefits of standard bakes.

In the flavours and textures sector, Bakels has embraced the growing international taste for speculoos – a spiced shortcrust biscuit with a distinct flavour and crisp snap – and now offers a Speculoos Spread, Crumble, and Cake Mix. The Bakels Velvettina range includes flavoured nut butters and spreads in a variety of trending flavours, including Speculoos Biscuit, Pistachio and White Chocolate Hazelnut. Lotus Biscoff has also taken off in South Africa with spreads and biscuits leading to cakes, gourmet cookies and artisanal ice cream flavours.

The latest bakery trends

According to Chipkins Puratos, a supplier of premium baking and patisserie ingredients, the 'Hottest Bakery Trends for 2026' include protein, texture mashups and sourdough (the real deal, not the 'sourfaux' fakes that can break customer confidence in one bite). Based on their Taste Tomorrow research, Chipkins Puratos says, "No less than 67% of consumers select foods based on the health benefits they offer. And the health ingredient currently in the highest demand is protein. Consumers aren't just searching for protein in sports bars and shakes anymore. They're now actively seeking high-protein versions of everyday baked goods, such as bread, cookies, cakes and even indulgent desserts. This shift reflects a broader expectation: bakery products should support active, health-conscious lifestyles, not just satisfy cravings."



For some chocolates – for example for single origin chocolates – fruity, vegetal, spicy and floral notes become more prominent and important. For Ruby chocolate, sourness and red berry notes stand out. Discover the richness of a chocolate tasting experience with the five senses: sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. For more detail, see: https://www.barry-callebaut.com/en/trends-insights/lets-talk-taste

Texture is a big factor for consumers, with crisp, crunchy and crusty textures topping the list for many shoppers. At Chipkins Puratos, the surveys are in and unexpected mouthfeel, contrasting textures and novel experiences are a must for most respondents. "Baked goods that combine contrasting sensations are capturing consumer attention worldwide, such as the combination of crispy and chewy, soft with a crunch, or flaky with rich or creamy fillings."

Sourdough remains a popular bread option for those looking for improved gut health and its growth remains steady. According to Chipkins Puratos, "A large driver of this growth comes from new applications of sourdough. It isn't just artisanal loaves of sourdough bread that consumers are after. They're also craving sourdough pastries, cookies and other baked goods."

For South African bakeries in particular, Chipkins Puratos has singled out speciality breads as a potential growth point, such as their Smokey Cheese & Onion Complete Mix.

They note premium pricing, unique flavours, and a wider audience of health-conscious consumers and 'foodies' as selling points.

They also note upselling opportunities with spreads, cheeses and gourmet fillings.. For in-store bakeries this can mean becoming a destination store for speciality breads, which include sourdough, seeded bread and brioche.

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Braai-focused bakery offerings

South Africa is the braai nation, so braai-focused bakery offerings can expand on existing parbaked and heat-and-eat options for braai broodjies and garlic bread. Roosterkoek, braai loaves, pot breads, flat breads, beer breads, corn breads – the options are endless and the fillings can be too. It is a wise bakery manager who remembers that there are a number of traditional breads, both local and international, that can be introduced to the South African braai, and that consumers are increasingly open to experiencing new flavours.

https://www.sbakels.co.za/

Automation and optimisation: bakery equipment evolves

As bakery equipment continues to improve and evolve, automation, multifunctionality, efficiency and specialisation all have an impact on bakery production and efficiencies. . Multifunctional units that utilise less space and perform a range of functions mean a bakery's available space or labour constraints no longer impede its potential success. Automation reduces the need for many manual labour positions, while efficiency and reliability is improved. However, proper training in the use of this equipment remains essential. Specialised equipment and premium ingredients also make speciality and artisanal products easier to produce, which can elevate a simple in-store bakery into a more innovative endeavour altogether.

Investing in bakery equipment that suits our needs requires a capital outlay, but the potential return on investment, be it space saving, production optimisation, increased efficiency or an elevated customer offering, offsets these costs.

Potential for growth

Despite challenges such as rising costs, supply insecurity and fierce competition, both locally and from international players, the South African bakery category is ready for growth. The rise in bakery technology is addressing traditional challenges in terms of skilled labour, space and efficiency, as is the availability of top-quality premixes and parbaked products.

The biggest areas for potential growth are healthier 'better-for-you' products and functional foods, alternative ingredients that address food intolerances, as well as niche diets and preferences, convenience, variety paired with availability (and accessibility thanks to e-commerce), speciality and artisanal bakes, sustainability, personalisation and, last but not least, the adoption of technologies such as artificial intelligence that optimise production, enable demand forecasting, and improve quality control and reliability. **SR**

Ann Baker-Keulemans writes on topics related to business, lifestyle, technology, and health, with extensive knowledge on the SA retail and wholesale landscape. Contact annbk@wilkinsross.co.za | www.wilkinsrossglobal.com

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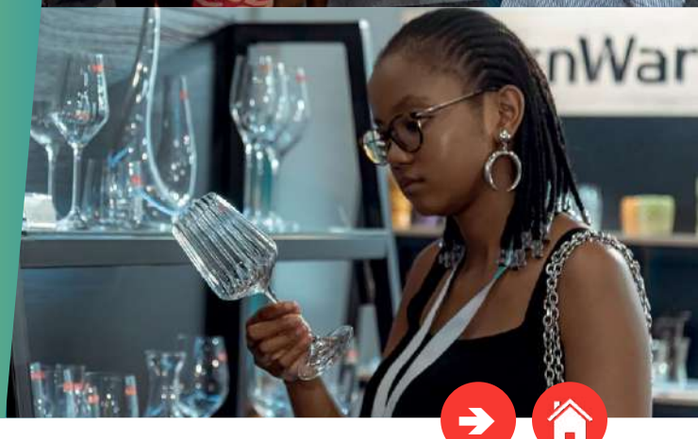

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