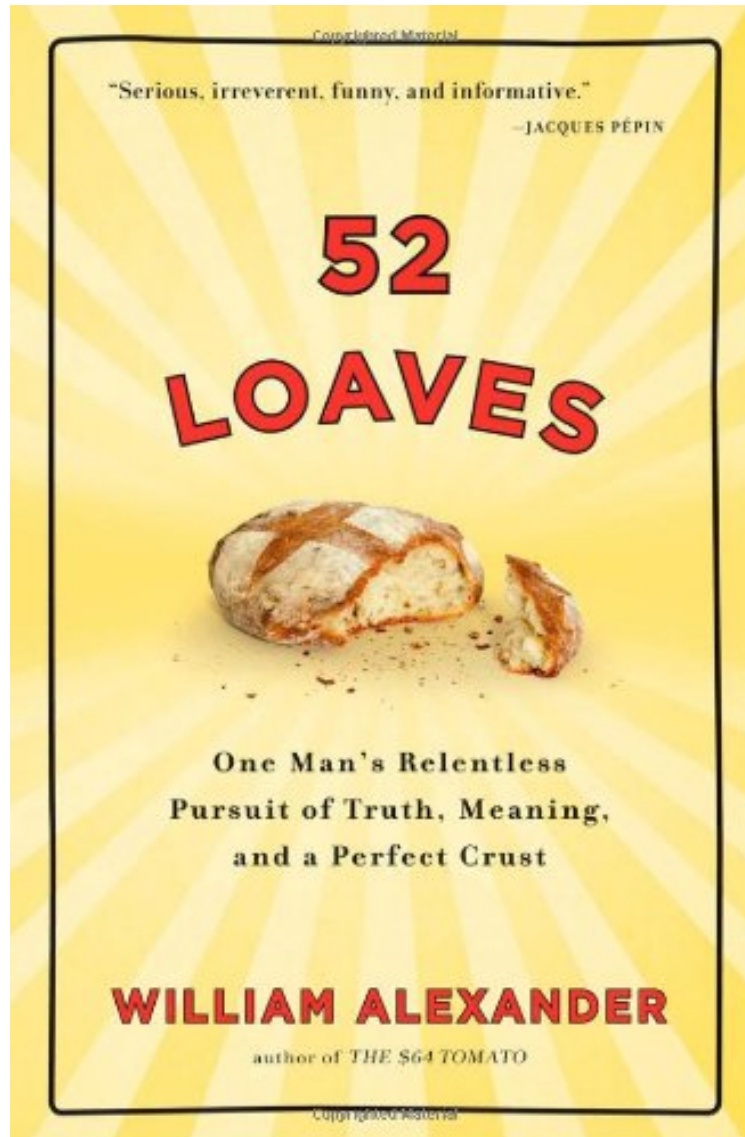


52 Loaves: One Man's Relentless Pursuit of Truth, Meaning, and a Perfect Crust

William Alexander

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William Alexander : 52 Loaves: One Man's Relentless Pursuit of Truth, Meaning, and a Perfect Crust before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised 52 Loaves: One Man's Relentless Pursuit of Truth, Meaning, and a Perfect Crust:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Eat, Bake, LoveBy C. EbelingIt did not matter what it was about: the minute I discovered William Alexander had another book out, I bought it. His first, The \$64 Tomato, was that much

fun and information that I was ready to follow him anywhere. I am happy to report that *52 Loaves* exceeded expectation. The *\$64 Tomato* chronicles Alexander's Olympian gander at vegetable and flower gardening, starting out as a no-nothing and ending up as a knows-more, with much humor and information imparted. So goes *52 Loaves*, this time with a goal to baking bread at least once a week, in an effort to achieve the perfect loaf emulating his muse, an artisan bread served in an upscale restaurant. I was ahead of the author at the outset of the book--I've baked weekly for years and achieved the large hole crumb via the Jim Lahey method (the one Mark Bittman profiled in the NY Times)--but Alexander pulled out and around me and kept on going, to making his own levain (leavening agent = yeast), visiting professionals, getting to the bottom of "enriched" flour (pellagra, anyone?), building a brick oven from the ground up, planting his own wheat crop, and then, in a flying leap, heading to the cradle of leavened bread culture (Morocco) and an ancient monastery in France to bake in what he had hoped would be Ur circumstances. To say more would be to spoil what becomes a suspenseful story on more than one level: Will he achieve the perfect loaf? Will bread make him fat? Will he remain sane? Did he plant the right kind of wheat? Can he keep doing this and keep his day job? Should his family stage an intervention? *52 Loaves* is very human, energetic, philosophical, informative and entertaining. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *52 Loaves* really took me through his pain and love of bread. By Jeannine Wilson I started on William Alexander with *\$64 Tomato*, and was instantly hooked. *52 Loaves* really took me through his pain and love of bread, and has inspired me to make some myself! Alexander is a masterful storyteller, weaving in the parts that make you miss home, make you laugh, and make you cry. A true story of one man's obsession, and how we all get in over our heads. A must read for any baker, cook, or DIY'er. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An delightful read. By J. Seidman I really loved Alexander's *The \$64 Tomato*, so I was eager to read this book. Having tried to perfect baking bread myself, I found myself able to relate to much of what he went through. (Of course, I was not nearly as fanatical about my efforts, and that's probably why my stories about bread baking seem utterly boring in comparison to his.) While I thoroughly enjoyed the book, I didn't find it nearly as laugh-out-loud funny as *The \$64 Tomato*. On a scale from "humor" to "memoir," this book definitely sits further over towards the memoir side. That's not to say that it isn't humorous, but it mostly made me smile rather than laugh. I definitely recommend it, but it's not quite the same flavor as his previous book.

William Alexander is determined to bake the perfect loaf of bread. He tasted it long ago, in a restaurant, and has been trying to reproduce it ever since. Without success. Now, on the theory that practice makes perfect, he sets out to bake peasant bread every week until he gets it right. He bakes his loaf from scratch. And because Alexander is nothing if not thorough, he really means from scratch: growing, harvesting, winnowing, threshing, and milling his own wheat. An original take on the six-thousand-year-old staple of life, *52 Loaves* explores the nature of obsession, the meditative quality of ritual, the futility of trying to re-create something perfect, our deep connection to the earth, and the mysterious instinct that makes all of us respond to the aroma of baking bread.

From *Booklist* Obsession takes many forms. Alexander, already a seasoned horticultural adept, now turns his attention to producing the ultimate loaf of bread. To achieve perfection in so simple a creation (yeast, water, flour), Alexander husbands his own field of wheat. He learns to raise this ancient grass, harvest it, prepare the grain, grind it to flour, knead it with the purest water, generate the active microorganisms to puff up the dough, and then bake that dough to produce a properly satisfying crumb within a flawless crunchy brown crust. He researches his topic thoroughly, but realizes he needs more hands-on tutelage. Moreover, the definition of a perfect loaf changes both by place and time. Alexander travels the world to learn from masters of bread baking in various styles, ending up in a Norman monastery. Impressed with the monks' daily spiritual discipline, Alexander structures this account of his quest according to the ancient canonical hours. --Mark Knoblauch "Nitpicking Obsessiveness was never so appetizing." --Entertainment Weekly, Grade A-