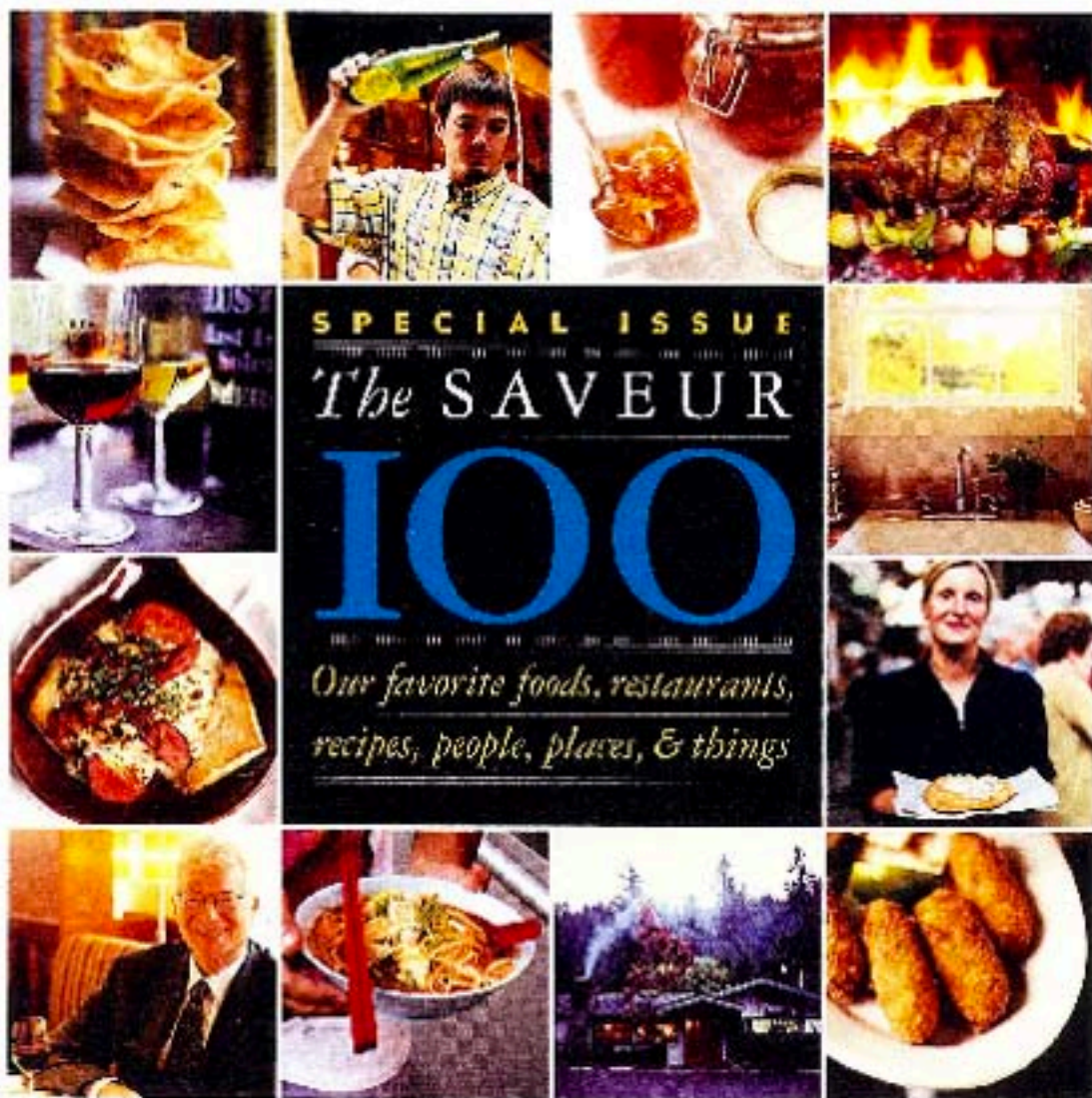


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NUMBER 81

STEADILY RISING

The aroma of baking bread awakens a Detroit neighborhood

BROKE DAWN in the Cass Corridor, a once-time-ridden stretch in inner-city Detroit, a sweet, yeasty scent hangs in the air. Warm and cooing, it's the smell of bread baking—and of the neighborhood rising to greet the day.

Awakening their community was just what Jackie Perrault-Victor and her partner, Ann Perrault-Victor, hoped to help do seven years ago, when they turned a dusty brick building lit by a dangling bulb into Avalon International Breads. Today, as the store's tall windows draw the morning sun, the bakery's custom traffic begins. "It's where you go to see everybody," says Margaret Palmer, a local real estate agent.

On a wood counter salvaged from an old YMCA, chocolate ganache-filled breads take space with organic breads named for Detroit neighborhoods: Cocktown cinnamon-rustic, Greentown olive, Palmer Park pain aux noix. An industrial mixer that insiders refer to as Big Mortua stands in a corner, seemingly supervising the bakers in the open production area as they punch balls of dough.

"The Cass Corridor has had a reputation for being rundown, bare-as-a-bun," says 24-year-old night baker Richard Watson, a five-year veteran of the enterprise. "But this is truly unique." He mentions the Christmas-themed throngs who clamor for Avalon's stollen, which is heavy with Michigan fruit and nuts. Come Valentine's Day, they'll line up for Cheese-Ferry chocolate cherry cookies,

named for a local food market that closed back in the 1970s.

For Ann and Jackie, who live in a restored Victorian around the corner, one particular goal was to be able to contribute to the neighborhood, and their \$1 million-plus operation does more than soup kitchens and provides residents with jobs and health benefits. Their main objective, of course, is to lure locals with their goods—and they serve as many as 800 customers daily and sell about 3,000 loaves of bread each Saturday. "It's really on a life of its own," says Jackie, palpably excited about the bakery's success.

Ann almost can't believe it. "I'm surprised," she says, "for how much people like us being here." (For information on Avalon International Breads, see THE PANTHER, page 83.)—LYNNE MEREDITH SCHREIBER

Avalon International Breads proprietors Jackie (left) and Ann Perrault-Victor (center) serve a neighborhood customer.

