



Tyler Hopwood

Hopwood Breads - Fayetteville, AR

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Interviewer: Jordan P. Hickey

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Jordan Hickey: Today is June 21. I'm Jordan Hickey. I'm speaking with Tyler Hopwood here in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Tyler, would you mind introducing yourself for the recording?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah! My name is Tyler Hopwood, and I own and operate Hopwood Breads. We are a cottage bakery that specializes in naturally leavened loaves of bread that use freshly milled whole grains, in virtually all of our breads. So, yeah, we've been doin this—I say “we”—it is really just me—and my boyfriend helps out at every single pop-up, so I do say “we” just to give him the credit that he definitely deserves. We've been doin this for about two and a half years, part-time, and then we have been doing it since January full time. So, yeah, it has been a wild ride so far.

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Jordan Hickey: Are you from Arkansas?

Tyler Hopwood: No. I'm originally from St. Louis. I lived there for the first 24 years of my life, and then I met my boyfriend, who is from Fayetteville, and he is a nurse down here, so I moved down here, because he already had his career established and all that stuff.

Jordan Hickey: How did you get to baking? How did you come to this? Were you a baking-at-three-years-old prodigy? How did you get here?

Tyler Hopwood: I really wish that I had a really sweet and wholesome story of always baking with my grandmother, or always being covered in flour as a child. But in preparation for this interview, I did text my mom and I was like, “Hey, mom, was I super into baking as a child?”

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And she was like, “No.”

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: I was like, “Oh, okay, great. Thanks. That’s—awesome.” But, I don’t know. As far as my childhood goes, I feel like a lot of cottage bakers are always like, “I had a rich family history of food-centered family.” And my family’s food culture—and I apologize if they hear this—but it is very bland. Like low seasoning, basics like American-style tacos, Hamburger Helper, really just normal stuff. So I feel like I really didn’t get into food or start really appreciating food until I got my first job in a restaurant at the age of 17 in St. Louis at this really cool restaurant called Cyrano’s. As far as baking goes, I really started to get into it—I’d say during the pandemic, and it was towards the end of the pandemic, for sure.

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But it was really just a hobby. I was just bored. Chris, my boyfriend, was working the night shift as a nurse at that time, so a lot of my evenings were spent watching YouTube videos and just going down YouTube rabbit holes. One, I found this YouTube video by this bakery in Mesa, Arizona, called Proof Bread. They were just basically showing their day-to-day operations. It’s this guy named Jon and his wife Amanda that run this. They started out in their garage, in Mesa, as just the two of them, and then they converted it—they did renovations and turned it into this whole giant operation, and had multiple employees. Eventually they had to move out because they outgrew it, and they were having some issues with neighbors not wanting a big bakery in their neighborhood—you know, loud sounds going on at four in the morning—so they ended up opening their own retail space.

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But their YouTube videos—I really do have to like credit them 100%—are the ones that got me into wanting to bake sourdough. Because just the way that specifically Jon would convey what baking sourdough bread means to him—I just had not heard anyone talk about it like that. So I was like, “Oh, you know what? I should try this. I should look into other sourdough videos.” At least recipe videos. Because their videos are very much more big-picture concept and less step-by-step recipe. So, it was really cool to start with that, start with the big picture, and then kind of go in, as much as I felt comfortable, into [exhale]—and my boyfriend will attest to this—I’m very much like I will jump from thing to thing, like interest to interest.

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And so it’s hard to tell what’s gonna stick until like, you know, a month down the road. I feel like a lot of the interests that I get into, if I experience failure I’ll get discouraged and just move on to the next thing. But this thing, it was like the failures more excited me, because I was like, “Okay, so what can I do differently next time? Let me take some notes, and let me come back and try and tweak this one thing, and see if I can get a different result.” That’s basically how the baking started, at least the hobby side of it did.

Jordan Hickey: So you're watching these videos, and you're getting inspiration from them. At what point did it stop just being, “Oh, I’m going to make a single loaf,” to “I’m going to start giving it to other people”?

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Because I feel like that’s a pretty big jump, right?

Tyler Hopwood: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. To answer that question, I've kind of got to give a little bit of a background of my job trajectory and career path and all that. Because when I moved down to Arkansas, I was unemployed. I had just graduated cosmetology school. That was one of those career decisions that I made that was kind of on the whim. I had been a shop manager at a barbershop called Union Barbershop in St. Louis, before the pandemic and before I went into cosmetology school. I worked there like five days a week for about a year, and really enjoyed the people that I worked with, and they kind of just realized that—I had conveyed to them, “I don't really know what I'm doing. I don't know what I want to do.”

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I had been working in restaurants here and there, and bouncing between restaurants. They were like, “Well, you know, you could do *this*. Learning to do hair is super learnable. It's just one year of schooling and then you can start your career.” I think I was in a place where I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I was like, “Okay, yeah, let's try it.” Ended up going through cosmetology school. That took longer than expected due to the pandemic. So I had to put that on pause for a little bit. Then once it reopened, I went back up to St. Louis. Because I came down here when everything was shut down, just so I could stay with my boyfriend and we weren't separated in the long distance for however long. When my school opened up again, I went back and finished up, and then moved down here. I had to get my [Laughter] cosmetology license in Missouri, because that's where I went to school, and then I had to get my crossover license *here*, or it's like a reciprocity license, is what it's called.

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So then I had to take tests down here, and then finally got licensed in the state of Arkansas, and I got my first hair job, and it was—I think when you're in school for something, versus when you're actually in the career field, it can be a lot different than what you expect. I think I got into it and just realized, “Wow, this is really—I don’t want to do this.” But, you spend so much money, you spend so much time going through school, that you're like, “Well, maybe if I just tough it out and get past the beginning pains of it, it’ll be what I want.” And that just like never happened. I was really using the sourdough baking, I feel like, as a coping mechanism, of like, at least I have this baking to bring me satisfaction and fulfillment. So that’s what I was using to probably subconsciously cope with the fact that I was in a career that I hated. [Laughter]

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So, yeah, I just kept getting into it. I eventually quit my hair job because it just got to a point where it’s like, I can’t—I was sacrificing my mental health over something that I just really wasn’t enjoying. So, I quit that. I went back to work at Feed & Folly, which is a restaurant here in Fayetteville. When I was there, I was still baking as a hobbyist, but I would bring loaves to work with me, and people would try it and be like, “Oh, you should sell this.” Being me, I’m like, “Oh, no. No one’s going to buy this. Whatever.” But then going back to the Proof videos, and watching—they built a whole bakery in their *garage*—eventually I got to a point where I was like, “You know what? Maybe I can—maybe I can do this.” And so, I remember the first sale I did was through Instagram. I just posted and I was like, “Hey—”

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Because I had been posting just things as a hobbyist, like “Look at this loaf of bread I made. Wow.” Then one day I was like, “Hey, I’m going to make ten loaves of bread. DM me if you want one. First come, first serve.” And like within five minutes, I had ten DMs.

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: Foolishly, I was like, “Yeah, and I’ll deliver too.”

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: I think I had someone from Prairie Grove DM me and be like, “I’ll take one.” I was like, “Oh, yeah, sure.” Not knowing where Prairie Grove was, and it was like a 25-minute drive. And I was like, “Okay, maybe the deliveries won’t be forever.” [Laughter] But that was really the first time that I put myself out there to sell bread, and it went so well that I was like, “Okay, let’s see—let’s do this again.” I kept doing it through Instagram, and kept getting better and better. And then the first time I actually ever sold bread at a market-style event was through Big Gay Market, here in Fayetteville, which is just this organization of like queer makers and artisans and people that make stuff to sell.

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They had their Halloween Market, I think it was, like two years ago, and I had a friend who worked at my hair job with me that we kept in touch, and they were like, “You should sign up for this.” I was like, “Oh, no. I’m not like a real bakery. I can’t like do a market or whatever.” And they were like, “No, this is like the kind of market where they want people like you.” I was like, “Oh, you know, okay. I’ll go for it.” I filled out the application, I got accepted, and I did it, and it again, was one of those things where I was like, “I don’t know where this is gonna go.” But then, we set up, and the market started, and within I think it was like 20 to 30 minutes, I was sold out.

Now, albeit, I was only doing like 20 loaves of bread, but still, it was enough to be like, “Oh, crap. I need to just—I need to lean into this hardcore.”

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Jordan Hickey: Just to take a little bit of a step back, what sort of a timeline was this? Over what period of time? Roughly when did you move down here? When were you in the hair job? Was this over the course of like two months, or was this over the course of like a year and a half, or—?

Tyler Hopwood: [Laughter] I’m pretty sure what I just talked about was over the course of like a two-year span. Basically my timeline coming down to Arkansas was I met my boyfriend, through this crazy happenstance of he—he is from Fayetteville. He went to school down in Fort Smith. He went to nursing school down there. I think it was like spring break of 2018 or 2019—2018—and he planned a trip up to Chicago to visit friends, and he mistakenly booked the plane ticket for the wrong week, so he had to take a Greyhound bus from Fayetteville up to Chicago.

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So he did that. Then, he had to take it back, and so they stopped in St. Louis to pick people up, and I guess we both just had like the Tinder app downloaded [Laughter], and we matched. I saw his profile, and I was like, “Arkansas. Okay. Whatever.” Like, “I guess I’ll say hey, but I don’t think this is going to become anything.” Then we just started talking, and I was like, “Oh, this guy’s actually cool.” Then we started having phone conversations, and I think it was like a month later, I was going down to see a concert in Dallas, which is where my sister lives, and I was like, “Well, Fort Smith is on the way to Dallas. I guess I could stop by, see if things are legit, if you’re like super cool, and if we vibe.” So, we did, and so that just started our long-distance

relationship, which was for about—I said 2018; it was 2019, because then shortly after, the pandemic happened.

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I was working in the restaurant, Cyrano's, up in St. Louis, at this time, and also in cosmetology school. Then the pandemic happened, school shut down, I had to go on unemployment because I got laid off from the job. I was like, well, I'm not just gonna stay in St. Louis by myself. Chris was still working, since he's a nurse. He was working in the COVID unit. So, he was like, "Well, you can come down here and stay with me." So that was super cool. It was like, I didn't have to be alone, for the pandemic, and also it was a good test run of cohabitating with another human being which was—it's always good to have a practice run, for anything. So that was really awesome. That was about three, four months before my school opened back up. So when that happened, I was like, "Okay, I at least"—I think I had like a month and a half left of hours to get at school.

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Because that's how cosmetology works, you have to get like 1,800 hours in the state of Missouri, and I was closer to that than not. So I was like, "Okay, I'm going to go back up, finish schooling." Did that for like another month and a half. Then I was like, "Well, I'm going to"—Chris invited me to move in with him down here permanently, so I was like, "Okay, yeah, let's do it," and so I moved down here. And then ended up working at—so I worked at Feed & Folly before I started my first hair job, just as kind of an interim, "I need a job to make some money before I get licensed down here." Because you can't practice unless you're licensed in each state. So, bartended, waited tables, and then eventually got licensed down here, and that's when I

started my hair—I was an assistant. That lasted probably about four months before it got to the point where I was like, “I am just so unhappy that I need to leave.”

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So then, after that four months, I went back to the restaurant. And, yeah, I think that—I worked there up until March or April of 2022. That’s when I was doing it part time, kind of, and just doing it on Instagram, like, “Hey, I have some loaves if anyone wants to buy it.” Then I ended up leaving the restaurant job and ended up working for a local coffee roastery, Onyx. I worked on the production floor, which is actually kind of a nice job. It was cool. It was my first—I think I was also kind of burnt out on the customer service end of things. I think I have like close to ten years of restaurant work under my belt, so you get to a certain point where you get a little burnt out [Laughter] and jaded.

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I thought that they had a job opening, and I was like, “Okay”—it was a little bit of a pay cut, but I was like, “Between that and doing the bread part time”—because that’s when I had already done Big Gay Market, so after that, I was kind of like, okay, maybe I’ll start doing pop-ups and reaching out to local businesses to do pop-ups at. Between the Onyx job and that, I was like, “Okay, cool, I can make a livable income.” Then, I took a little bit of a break from doing bread, because I got an opportunity to work for this food-related startup. It was more back-of-house work, which I think was really the reason why I went for it, was because I didn’t—I had so much experience in front of house, but I was just—I always loved to cook, in my adult life, and I had this opportunity to—it was doing like frozen meal preps, and working in a commercial kitchen. And that was actually with Amanda Arafat [\[another cottage baker interviewed for this project\]](#).

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It was me and her, and these people were like, “Well, if you want to start our kitchen program.” I was like, “Uh, I mean—okay. We'll try it out. We'll see how it is.” And that job was like the perfect example of having a job that pays really well that you hate. It was nice at first, but it eventually just got to the point that I was like, “I don't know what I'm doing, and it doesn't seem like anyone knows what they're doing.” And it was such an intensive job, and a time-consuming job, that I had to put the sourdough baking on the back burner. That job started in August of 2022, and then it fell through in December. I remember we were driving down to my sister's house to celebrate family Christmas, and I got the call that, “Hey, we're going to shut down operations.”

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I was like, “Huh, okay.” But at that point, I don't know, I think I was subconsciously hoping that that would happen. Because again, it was just a very stressful job. It was so stressful that I had a shingles outbreak.

Jordan Hickey: Oh my gosh.

Tyler Hopwood: I went to urgent care, and I was like, “I don't know what's happening, but I have this painful rash.” They were like, “That's shingles. And it usually doesn't happen to people your age, unless you're under a tremendous amount of stress.” I was like, “Oh! Okay. Right on!” [Laughter] So, then it fell through. I remember being at my sister's house, celebrating Christmas, and just being like, “I'll just figure this out whenever I get back home. Whatever. I'm going to enjoy Christmas.” Then like the day we left to come back home, I was like, “You know

what? I think I'm just going to go full-time with the bakery. If this is a sign—if ever a sign, it's this.”

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I think I just—my heart had been missing baking so much, and doing the pop-ups, and seeing all my customers, and meeting new people in this context. So I was like, “You know what? We're just gonna go for it. Just gonna put my full self into it.” And ever since January this year, that's what I've been doing.

Jordan Hickey: You had mentioned sourdough. How had what you were baking changed—from those first ten loaves that you baked and offered on Instagram, how had it changed? Were you still doing the same products every time, or were you starting to dabble?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah. I think whenever I first started, I was just doing what is now called my Ozark Country Sourdough, which is just my basic, everyday kind of sourdough. I would say that's my staple loaf.

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Then it wasn't until that Big Gay Market that I started having a variety of loaves. Like I did a jalapeno cheddar loaf. I did a chocolate chip sourdough, which was really good. I kind of want to bring that back. And then I started dipping into the world of focaccia, which has just been—people have been loving it. I think the first one I did was a roasted garlic focaccia that's topped with rosemary, and it's very delicious. That was the loaf that was selling out the quickest for a while there. Then eventually, I just—I've seen some cottage bakers that just stick to four things and that's it. Which I have to say is pretty smart. You get really, really good at those four things,

and people know you for those four things, and just having those four foundational items I feel like can be such an advantage.

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Because I'm kind of on the opposite end of the spectrum now, where I feel like every single week, I'm like, "I need to do something new." But again, going back to me always switching interests, I feel like I do that now in the realm of sourdough. Where it's like, "Okay, I want to go and try this out. I want to try this out." But then, I don't know, I feel like that's the amazing thing about being a one-person show, is that I can really do whatever I want. I can test things and see if it works, and if it works for me then I'm just going to go ahead and do it. But yeah, so now it's like—I think the usual skeleton for the average menu is I want to do two types of sourdough, always my Ozark Country sourdough, and then I want to do a specialty sourdough. And then I'll do a focaccia, and that switches up every week from different flavors. And, the donuts have been—I've been going hardcore with the donuts pretty much since February.

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Jordan Hickey: You talked about watching those YouTube videos at the very beginning. But now, you're doing so many other things. You mentioned those different types of focaccias, and the sourdoughs, and donuts. Where did you learn how to do all of this?

Tyler Hopwood: Specifically, there's a couple of resources that I use to get different ideas, but the main one is a book by Emilie Raffa, it's called *Artisan Sourdough Made Simple*. I have it sitting over there next to my oven. If there is a book that people need to get who want to get into, even as a hobby, sourdough baking, that is I feel like the best one. Because there are a lot of

sourdough books out there that are really esoteric, and there's a lot of language in there that can be really confusing. But her book really just makes it as simple as possible.

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It's super accessible for people. Like if you are a parent and have a crazy schedule, these are the kind of recipes that you can manage to do, and not have to like babysit your dough over and all that stuff. There's a variety of—a lot of different recipes in there. I was doing English muffins for a while, and that's where I got my English muffin recipe is from her book. Yeah, there's just so many different recipes. I do a different formula for my focaccia now, but the focaccia recipe in Emilie Raffa's book is what I started with. So, that was one. Then I feel like *today*, my biggest resource that I use to formulate my own recipes is The Perfect Loaf, which is a website by this really awesome guy called Maurizio Leo. I feel like that name is—if you are serious about baking sourdough, either as a hobbyist or as a professional baker, you know this guy's name; you know ThePerfectLoaf.com.

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He is so good at like—he will tell you the exact temperature that things need to be at. That's more on the end of like if you want to go super extensive. That's where I get a lot of my ideas now. My donut formula is heavily based off of his. I'll kind of [Laughter]—even when I'm relaxing or about to go to bed at night, I'll just go to his recipe page, of all his recipes, and just kind of scroll through, and just get some ideas. Because he's just done so many amazing things. It's just such a good tool and resource for people if they want to learn how to bake sourdough bread. But that's where I get a lot of my ideas from.

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Jordan Hickey: I know on the counter right now—I saw on Instagram earlier, you've got the four donuts that you're doing for your pop-up on Friday.

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jordan Hickey: I think there's like a chocolate mousse, and—

Tyler Hopwood: Yep.

Jordan Hickey: —there's a coconut cream pie.

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jordan Hickey: Are those flavor combinations also coming from the cookbooks, or are those coming from inside?

Tyler Hopwood: I don't know, you get to a point where—or at least I feel like I've gotten to a point where—I was sticking to just ideas that I saw in books, or on the internet, but now that I have done donuts so many times, you get to a point where it's like, okay now I can start to freestyle, if you will. So *now*, I kind of—I have this method of taking an Epsom salt bath, and really like kicking back, and that's where most of my ideas come to me.

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Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: I feel like a lot of the stuff that I do *now* is—I don't know, I have this code that I try to stick to—is if it doesn't excite me, I don't want to do it. If I wouldn't eat it, I don't want to do it. Like, I don't do jellies or jams, because I don't like jellies or jams. People have asked for them; “I'm sorry, I just don't do 'em.” So I've been doing these like collections, of donuts. At my normal pop-ups, it's heavy on the bread, and I'll do like one flavor of donut. But, I

came up with this idea of like—I could maybe, like once a month, do these donut collections, of like four different kinds, and you can choose to buy them individually, or you can get a variety pack. like I did the key lime pie donut first, and then I was like, “Okay, so, now I can do a pie collection,” which is what I’m doing this upcoming Friday.

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I do always bring one back, like a callback donut. The first one I ever did—I’ll have to look. At this point, there have been so many donuts that have come out of this apartment kitchen that it’s hard for me to keep up with. But the first donut collection I ever did was the tea collection, which—that was one that whenever I was baking part time, I had always—I have to give a specific shoutout to the Instagram @Mushroom.Momma. Her name is Amanda. She is in [Livermore], California. She, I feel like, is—that’s the first account I ever saw that did sourdough donuts, and her flavor ideas are so amazing. I feel like that’s also where I’ve gotten a lot of inspiration for my donut flavors, too, is from her. But I would just follow her—and this was long before I even like flirted with the idea of doing donuts. But that, I was always just like, “Man, it would be so cool to do that, but I don’t think it’s ever gonna happen.”

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And I have this like [Laughter]—in my Notes app, I have this list of ideas I came up with, like if I ever were to do donuts, the flavors. Honestly, it’s pretty awesome, because now I can go back and do them, now that I am doing the donuts. The tea collection was in that list that I made two years ago. So it was really awesome to be able to bring that to life, years later, and how successful it went. Yeah, the donuts have been a blessing. And a little bit of a curse, in a way, but mostly a blessing. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: What do you mean, a curse?

Tyler Hopwood: Oh, so, I don't know. I get in my head a little bit about not wanting to pigeonhole myself. I have this constant internal battle of, "I need to be focusing more on the bread and less on the donuts."

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Because I'm not just a donut bakery, and I don't want to be perceived as just a [Laughter] donut bakery. But I don't think anyone really—I think people know that that's one of my specialties, but people still—I still get sold out of my normal bread, too, so I know that people come for the bread, too. But we just always have internal battles and think that we need to be doing something differently or whatever. But yeah, I don't know, I feel like the donuts, they have been more of a blessing, just because they were the item that made it from like, "Oh, yeah, people come to my pop-ups," to, "Oh, wow, there's a line of 20 people that are here before I even got here to set up, that are waiting to buy these donuts from me." Which, the first time *that* happened, I couldn't even look up at the line, because it was like—I had never seen that many people in line to buy bread from me before, and I was like, "If I look up, I'm going to like freak out, so I've just gotta keep my head down, and keep swiping people's cards and bagging up bread for people."

[Laughter]

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But yeah, the donuts definitely took this bakery to the next level.

Jordan Hickey: Could you tell me a little bit about the relationship that you have with your clientele? You've mentioned selling out, and seeing the long lines. What is that relationship like?

Also, does it extend to the online sphere? Are you getting DMs from people, like I think you had mentioned before, requesting flavors and stuff?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Jordan Hickey: What is that like?

Tyler Hopwood: It's so cool. I feel like that's the part—when I was imagining having a full-fledged cottage bakery, I don't think that that dawned on me, the community aspect of it. But it—honestly, as much as I love baking the bread and actually doing the technical work and skills of it, the community aspect is what keeps me doing it.

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Or at least keeps me—because I could be a hobbyist all day long, but I think actually putting yourself out there and putting your product out there can be a little daunting for people. But once you do it—and especially with bread, I feel like it's such a wholesome product, that the people that come to buy it are just so amazing. No one wants to be a jerk at a bread pop-up, you know?

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: And again, ten years of restaurant industry, you get a little jaded with the general public. But doing this has kind of restored my faith in humanity a little bit, because the people that come to these pop-ups are so amazing. There are people that I have relationships with now today that I didn't even know existed until they came to my pop-up. And they just saw me on Instagram and wanted to buy bread from me, and now I'm on a first-name basis with these people and know these people's kids and families.

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And, you know, we—“How has your week been?” They'll send me—or they'll reach out—I love it when people feel comfortable enough to reach out and have suggestions for me. Because believe it or not, it's kind of hard to come up with a new flavor of donut, every single week, back to back. So having people that are like, “Do you think you would ever try this?” and being able to be like, “Yeah, let's do it, let's see what happens”—again, I say “we” a lot when I refer to this bread company, because it is so community-based at this point that I—what it is now would not be possible without the people that show up week after week to those pop-ups. Yeah, it has been absolutely beautiful. Even this past weekend was the latest Big Gay Market—which is cool. It's cool to see that as like a mile marker—Big Gay Market two years ago versus Big Gay Market this year. Because it's just like—I feel like there were still the same faces, but now I know more about these spaces.

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And there's people that I've never met before in my entire life, but they're just like, “I saw you on Instagram, and now we're here, buying bread from you.” It's pretty wild, and I still—yeah, I don't think I've fully absorbed it yet. But I don't know, the power of social media is *wild*.

Jordan Hickey: That's something I wanted to ask about as well, because you had mentioned working in restaurants for ten years. I've got to imagine—and part of the reason why I asked about the relationship with the clientele—I was wondering if the relationship between your earlier work at restaurants, ten years ago, if that has changed because of social media.

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Because when you're on social media, and there's the Instagram story—they call it a story, but it *is* a story. It's like, “This is what's going on in my life right now.” I kind of wonder, yeah, the

extent to which social media has allowed you to do this. Could you do this without social media? Even like the DMs, like that first ten loaves. I don't know, like could you have done it?

Tyler Hopwood: Absolutely not. And it's like, okay, this is a very double-edged sword for sure. Because I just—I don't know. I could not do this without Instagram, and I am pretty much like 99% operating through Instagram for my advertising and all that. Yeah. I feel like before I did this bread stuff, I just had a normal Instagram account, that I was just posting random stuff that I would do in my life, and all that.

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And I never thought that it could be like this tool to use for this bread company. I don't even think that I even called it a bread company when I started [Laughter] using Instagram for it. I didn't even have a name for my cottage bakery at that point. I don't know, it's crazy to think about the reach that it can get. It's just every single week, I get more followers, and then they come to my pop-ups. It's pretty mind-blowing that this little computer in my pocket is—I just post a thing, and then I get to meet new people because of it? But at the same time, I don't know, I feel like that's—I love that I can gain more business and gain more relationships through it.

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However, it is one of those things that I feel pressure to keep up with, and feel pressure that—I just don't really like what social media does to people's brains, sometimes. Even to my brain. I'll post something, and it won't get as many likes as last week, and I'll be like, "Oh, am I the worst baker in the world?" [Laughter] "Is no one going to come to my bread pop-ups this week?"

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: And then the same amount of people come, and I'm like, "Oh. No. This is just the effect that social media is having on my brain." So I've had to rewire my brain with how I view it, and put more faith into my customer base, and not just—what I post doesn't determine how many—or if those people are going to come.

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My regular customers are my regular customers. As long as they know where it's gonna happen, they're gonna come. So I don't know, I go back and forth with it. It's amazing, and it's how I run my business, and how I've gotten my business to be so successful, but it's also—social media can get pretty scary. Yeah.

Jordan Hickey: One thing that I wanted to ask about is—you've talked about selling out, and you're growing. Right now, we're sitting in—you had mentioned your apartment kitchen. I'm kind of wondering, how do you grow when the space that you have is limited? If you're cottage baking, you're baking out of your house. How has this space physically changed over the course of the past couple years, and how do you work within the confines of the limitations of the physical space?

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Tyler Hopwood: When I was first doing it, I was baking out of Dutch ovens, out of my just apartment oven. Then, switched to this really cool cast iron oven called a Fourneau, that little thing right down there. It has always been a slow-moving process. It has always been like, okay—even baking those first ten loaves took me five to six hours to do. It has just been like—again—well, what I love so much about cottage baking is that you really have to get creative in your methods, and in how you utilize your space.

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I feel like most of the transformations in this apartment have happened from learning the hard way.

Jordan Hickey: Like what?

Tyler Hopwood: Like, “Oh, I need more surfaces.” I have this black utility shelf, and that was a really sweet gift. I came home after a shift at Feed & Folly bartending, and my boyfriend had just bought it for me and set it up, because he saw that I was running out of space. And he was also probably sick of like having loaves of bread like where they didn’t belong, you know?

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: [Laughter] So, it was really—that was really sweet of him. I feel like that was the first piece of equipment that started to make this kitchen feel less like a kitchen and more like a work space, which I feel like is super motivating for me. It can feel a little discouraging when you're trying to run a business in a space that feels like a business should not be running out of it.

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But, so yeah, that was the first one. After that, it was really just like, okay, doing the best with what I have. Getting smaller pieces of equipment. Like the Mockmill that I have that allows me to mill my own whole grains into flour; that was super cool. A lot of these pieces of equipment don’t take up a lot of space, too. This was a very gradual transformation to where this kitchen is now, but it was piece by piece. “What do I need now?” Okay. “What isn’t working? What would work better? And what’s doable in this apartment kitchen?” Because if I had a whole house,

there's a whole list of equipment that I could get that would be doable in an actual house, not just an apartment kitchen.

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I have to get even a little more creative as a cottage baker working out of an apartment. Yeah, it was very slow moving. I'm glad that I did the hard stuff first, because now, I feel like I'm getting more professional pieces of equipment, it's like smooth sailing. Because I was grinding for hours, trying to get 12 loaves done, and it took me like six to eight hours. It was pretty hardcore.

[Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: Working as a cottage baker, is there a lot of trial and error?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah! Oh, like 100%. [Laughter] I don't know, I'm really bad about not thinking—well, okay, I am *now*, but at first, I was really bad about trying to prepare for things, or really bad at forecasting what might go wrong.

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Even like the surfaces, being like, “Oh, I guess I didn't really take into account that if I make more bread, I'm going to need more surfaces to put them on.”

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: So a lot of things, I realize in the moment needs to change. But then it's just usually an easy fix. But a lot of it is trial and error. I feel like my biggest bottleneck, as they say, is refrigeration space, because I can't bring commercial refrigeration into this apartment, so I'm stuck to literally just my normal refrigerator that came with this apartment. So it has been a lot of [Laughter]—to get over that bottleneck, what I do with our groceries, or just the normal

stuff in our refrigerator, to make room for the bread, I bought a big Igloo cooler. So every weekend that I bake, I bring this Igloo cooler that's in our backyard inside, fill it with ice, put all of our groceries in there, and that totally empties up my refrigerator, and then I can fill it with loaves of bread to proof overnight.

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Which is totally unconventional, and probably just like, you know, insane. But, again, working out of an apartment kitchen definitely has its space challenges. But it's all about finding ways to work around it. How can I make this work in the space that I am in? Because I can't get a house. I'd love to, but it's just not in the stars right now. And I knew this is what I wanted to do. And thank god my boyfriend has been so supportive in me transforming our [Laughter] kitchen into a bakery. But it has been so cool, I guess figuring out how to work around it, and make it work in this apartment kitchen.

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Because I feel like there were a lot of moments that I would run into, and I would feel like, "Is this even possible? Do I need to rent space? Do I need to flirt with the idea of opening up a brick and mortar?" Which—did not want to do that. That also was financially out of my means. So, there have definitely been times where I was like, "I don't know if this is even gonna be sustainable with the space that we have." But luckily, I don't know, you just—again, it's trial and error. Eventually you start to find cheat codes, almost, or hacks. Like the Igloo cooler; that's my big hack, that it dawned on me, and I—my boyfriend was definitely like, "This seems like a lot, just to make this happen." And I was like, "You know what? It's gonna be worth it."

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And you know what? It *is* worth it. Because I can fit 24 loaves of sourdough bread, and about like five or six dozen doughs worth of donuts in that refrigerator at one time. It's all about—I *love* the game Tetris, so I feel like that definitely helps out.

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: And, even that—even learning that like the lower you get in the refrigerator, the warmer it gets, because the cooling mechanism is up top, so if things get covered up, they will overproof if you have them on the bottom shelf. So to get around *that*, I bought a bunch of ice packs that you put into coolers. And so I shove all—a bunch of ice packs into the bottom of my refrigerator to equalize the temperature. It's all about adapting and [Laughter] figuring out what works. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: How much of this was something that you kind of figured out on your own? Or how much of it was people that you saw online? You had mentioned the folks in Mesa, Arizona, at the very beginning of your baking career. But how much has the broader baking community, especially on social media, helped you navigate these sometimes choppy waters?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah! Oh, man! This is another example of why I love the social media aspect of this job. From coming from the restaurant industry, and also having a little stint in the hair industry, I just have to say that the online Instagram sourdough cottage baking community is like the most wholesome and amazing and supportive and like the opposite of gatekeeping community that's out there.

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Because I have so many Instagram bread friends that I've never met in real life, that are just like amazing humans and will send me little messages of support. Like, I just got this new crazy

bread oven in this apartment, and I got invited to join this specific oven's users' group on Facebook. It's just a bunch of people, and I'm able to reach out with any troubleshooting questions. Even on Instagram, just like all these other bakers literally around the *world*, being able to communicate with them, and share ideas. Something will go wrong with my mix, and I'll be able to reach out to somebody that I know does doing similar, and be like, "Hey, have you ever encountered this?"

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I don't think I've ever encountered anybody that is not willing to share information with me. Because it's not a very competitive industry. I mean as far—I'm sure it can be in certain aspects, but I don't know, I've just seen nothing but support and a willingness to share information and experience. The restaurant industry is cutthroat. The hair industry is even more cutthroat. Trying to ask another stylist for their like coloring formulation—yeah, right! You're not gonna get *that*. But again, even apart from the community aspect at the pop-ups, the online baking community is just so welcoming.

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I feel like that's another reason why I've stuck with it, is that I don't feel *alone* in it. Even though I am the only one at this kitchen at four a.m. baking loaves of bread, I know that there are hundreds of others doing the exact same thing as me, and we have this really cool medium in which to communicate back and forth with. It's pretty wild. When I was a hobbyist, I would listen—when I was doing road trips back and forth from St. Louis and Fayetteville, when Chris and I were long distance—I would listen to *The Sourdough Podcast*. Mike, the guy that does that podcast, would just interview different cottage bakers, and bakers—not just cottage bakers, but

even brick and mortar bakers. I feel like that's when I realized, I was like, "Oh, this is like the cutest, most wholesome industry in the entire world." Just hearing those podcast episodes was super reassuring that, I don't know, that it was like the right industry to get into.

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People just want to talk about bread. People who bake bread love talking about bread. That's the thing. I love it. I love talking [Laughter] about bread, and I'm glad that all the other bakers love talking about bread, because we just are just back and forth all the time. It's amazing.

Jordan Hickey: You had mentioned a brick and mortar, or at least the prospect of a brick and mortar. Is that something—? What is the ultimate goal? Is it a brick and mortar? Is it just having a house where you can have a dedicated space for it? Also—and this sort of dovetails a little bit with what you were just talking about, the cottage baking community—if you were to get a brick and mortar, or a larger space, would you still feel as tied in to this community if you were to expand and do something else?

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Tyler Hopwood: I actually answered this question about the brick and mortar not too long ago. I got to be a part of—it's an organization in town called Create, and basically they have these little incubator programs where—I did the specialty bakers incubator program. They choose—I think it was like eight people around northwest Arkansas, and you apply for it, and I got in. You basically go through this six-week program, where it's just like little one-hour Zoom classes with these people, about how to run a small business and all that. Then they had this capstone event at the end of it, where each individual business would—we had to record our own sales pitch for these judges that were going to be at this event.

Jordan Hickey: Wow.

Tyler Hopwood: You could win \$5,000 if the judges thought that yours was the best.

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We did this super awesome farm-to-table dinner. They were also doing a farmers cohort at the same time as the specialty bakers cohort, so we got paired up with a farmer, and got to come up with a dish to serve at this coursed-out five-course dinner for these people. And they sold tickets to it. It was *really cool*. They did it up at Mount Sequoyah. I got paired up with this lady named Kayla who runs Mount Olive Farms here in northwest Arkansas, and she did edible flowers, edible violas. I did my sourdough donuts and filled them with a lemon lavender pastry cream, and then we topped it with one of those edible flavors. It was *so* elegant, and amazing, and it was such a great time, and I'm so glad I got paired up with Kayla. She was absolutely amazing to work with. Another thing at the event is like you serve your dish, and then you have to go up in front of these judges, and one of them asks you a question, and you don't know what it is until you get up there.

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My question was, "When are you going to open up a brick and mortar?" And my answer to that was, "If I can help it, I will always be baking out of my home." Cottage food laws are different state by state, here in the U.S. For instance, in California, you have to get licensed, you have to have the Health Department come out and inspect your space, make sure your water is good to go. It's basically like opening up a restaurant essentially, having to get health-inspected. But here in Arkansas, they're basically like, "Just label your products, and you're good." I mean, it can't

be like—I can't serve like meats, or like time/temperature-sensitive foods and stuff, but other than that, they're pretty much just like, "Just don't kill anybody, please, and you're good to go,"

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And they're also—like I just got this new oven, here, and—well, okay, so at the end of that Create event, I ended up winning the \$5,000.

Jordan Hickey: What!?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah, so—

Jordan Hickey: Wow, that's wonderful! I didn't know that! Congratulations!

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Thank you so much, yeah.

Jordan Hickey: That's not surprising, but congratulations.

Tyler Hopwood: [Laughter] Thank you so much. Yeah. Me and my sister worked really hard on the pitch video that we gave to the judges, and I guess they really loved it. But they chose my business. And, they also chose Kayla for the farm cohort. Each cohort got a winner, and so me and Kayla, who I got paired up with, ended up winning, and it was super awesome. Because of that, I was able to get this deck oven, which—it's the Tom Chandley Pico Plus, and it basically allows me now—instead of baking two loaves per hour, I can bake like six loaves in 45 minutes.

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Jordan Hickey: Oh my gosh.

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah, it's pretty wild. I've only had it for like a week or two, but it has already changed my life! [Laughter] It definitely—when I was talking about this kitchen starting to feel more like a workspace—*that*, adding that, I feel like I am in a commercial kitchen now. It's pretty amazing. And the fact that I can operate it inside of this apartment kitchen is just amazing. But, I can't remember what the original question I was answering was. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: Brick and mortar.

Tyler Hopwood: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. But so, they're making these pieces of equipment that are designed for people to bake out of their houses. So, not only do we live in a state that has like *the* best cottage food laws in the nation; we're also living in a day and age where they're making it possible to run a cottage food business out of your apartment kitchen, successfully. And there's so much risk involved in opening up a brick and mortar—financially, even safety wise, and all that.

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And having the freedom of being in my home kitchen, and being able to do what I want, as far as menu goes, and making last-minute calls and all that—I don't know, just something about being in the comfort of your own home and also being able to work and be creative in your own home—it's just—it's so nice to be able to do that. I think even three years ago—if I could go back and tell myself, “You're going to have a full-fledged bakery built in your apartment kitchen in three years,” I'd be like, “What are you talking about? You're crazy.”

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: But yeah, I have no intention of doing brick and mortar. I applaud those who have gone from cottage to brick and mortar, and I think that it's right for some people, and I think for other people it's not right.

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For me, who knows? Like I said, I never thought that I would be in my apartment baking six loaves of sourdough bread at a time, so maybe one day I will open up a brick and mortar. But as of right now, I don't know, I just have put so much time and effort to build up this bakery inside of my home. Another amazing thing about the oven that I chose is that I can stack three on top of each other, so as this business grows, I can also grow my infrastructure while still staying in my house. Again, there are so many reasons to stay cottage, it's like why would I open brick and mortar? Also, another thing that I love about cottage is that I have to go somewhere else to sell it. People aren't coming to my house. Which is *amazing*.

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

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Tyler Hopwood: While, yes, this is my production facility, having a place that separates the customer service from the actual production is nice. Because I can switch from production mode to, okay, customer service mode. Gonna go in front of a bunch of people and sell my bread. So, it is nice having that boundary.

Jordan Hickey: Is it at all tough—we haven't really touched on this very much, but you had mentioned going from production mode to customer mode. At the end of the day, if you're a cottage baker, you are—you're everything, right?

Tyler Hopwood: Right.

Jordan Hickey: I wonder how it has been to be that. Has how you imagined it at the very beginning changed? At the very beginning, were you thinking, “Oh, yeah, I could easily do all these different things—

Tyler Hopwood: [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: —and marketing is *easy*—

Tyler Hopwood: [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: —and sales are *easy*”?

Tyler Hopwood: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah!

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Jordan Hickey: Has that changed, and how do you view that now?

Tyler Hopwood: Yeah! I think that when you start, you're just thinking about the bread, and you're just hoping that those loaves of bread come out nice. Sourdough is so finicky, and it is so—when you start, it is so trial and error, and there is a lot of error that you have to work through. I feel like I am now finally at the point where it's like, I can formulate my own dough recipes. I can diagnose an issue that happened if something goes wrong. Before, it was like I was just kind of winging it. Don't get me wrong; there's still a lot of like just winging it goes on in this [Laughter] kitchen. But, yeah, I just feel like I've gotten to a point where I can—I feel a lot more like a baker, now, than before. The imposter syndrome has kind of subsided, which is nice. But, yeah, I don't know—the marketing, and—or like I submit my sales tax monthly; that's something I never thought I'd have to do.

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I have an actual business license. I have a home office license. I have all these *things*. I pay like a 2% hotel/motel/restaurant tax to the City of Fayetteville every single month. Yeah, definitely I feel like that aspect of it I was not prepared for, and was not—didn't realize that you do have to keep track of all these things. Or, like holding onto receipts, now; I understand why my parents would always get receipts at the store when they ask you if you want a receipt. I used to think that it was just like a waste of paper. But now I'm like, I have like [Laughter]—I have a dresser upstairs, where one of the drawers is literally just full of receipts, so I can—

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: —use it for my taxes at the end of the year. Like that kind of stuff, it's definitely the more administrative part of the job I did not think of, whenever I first started. Because, again, you're just thinking about the product at that point.

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Jordan Hickey: Where did you learn all this about, like, taxes and stuff? Because I feel like no one gives you a book, right?

Tyler Hopwood: No. Oh, no, yeah. One of the things in January when I decided to go full time was, I was looking at different venture options, ways to get funding for this. One of them was through a local—or it's called Kiva, like getting a Kiva loan. It's a crowd-funded loan. So I was looking into that, and I was in communication with someone that worked there. They basically gave me a list of things that I would have to get to qualify, and one of them was a home office license, get your sales tax license, start submitting your sales tax, start charging sales tax.

Like basically get official on paper so we can give you this loan. I ended up not going that route, just because of the \$5,000 I won through Cureate, which was amazing.

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The fact that I was able to get that and not have overhead for this oven is just an absolute dream come true. But, yeah, so that was when things got a lot more real, when it was submitting monthly sales tax, going and getting my actual business license from the City of Fayetteville, and all that. And, yeah, it is still very much so about the bread, but there are a lot of different things I have to think about now, [Laughter] as a business owner. Or actually, I'm not just baking out of my apartment; I am running a business out of my apartment. And it feels like it now. [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: The last question I have for you is, having said all that, what do you want this to look like, let's say like next year, or five years? Do you want to have employees?

1:04:04

Do you want to have an accountant? [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: Yes! [Laughter]

Jordan Hickey: [Laughter]

Tyler Hopwood: That would be nice. I have a really nice—I think she's a CPA. I just know that she helps me figure out what to do with my taxes and what to keep track of. So I do have help with that. But as far as what the plan is for growth, well, I just got this oven, so that's the first—trying to calibrate my business to work with this oven. It's like, "Okay, I know I can bake more, but should I?" I am really in this phase of trying to be mindful about how I scale up, and not doing more than I can actually do. Again, refrigeration space is a big issue, so that is kind of

plateaued right now, sort of plateaued with how much I can fit into the refrigerator, so that does limit certain things.

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Eventually, we do want to move into a full house, and that will really open up the opportunities to get commercial refrigeration. Again, I can stack two more ovens on top of the oven I already have. So, it really—I don't even really know how far I want to take this, but I do know I want to keep taking it further. I have a list of like 20 things that I want to put out there and debut. I'm about to go on vacation this next week, which is going to be awesome, and much needed. But then I want to come back—I have plans to do sourdough pretzels in October. I have this really fun idea of doing like an Oktoberfest tour, the month of October, so I want to go to a different brewery every single weekend and do pretzels there, and serve it with a beer cheese, and make that beer cheese with beer from each different brewery than I'm at.

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And I really want to collab with my sister, who is my sounding board for my ideas, but also my graphic designer. She designed my logo. She's super talented and amazing. But I really want to do kind of like a band tour poster, to have, like, Oktoberfest, Hopwood Breads, Bread Tour—or like Brewery Tour. I think that would be super sick. And also like sourdough muffins, sourdough bagels, baguettes. I think that I'm gonna kind of do a soft launch for sourdough baguettes Friday evening. I have some dough that I'm going to shape here this evening and test those out. I feel like those are the holy grails of sourdough baking. They're so hard to get right, but once you do, you get addicted to it, and you cannot stop.

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There's so many awesome prospective ideas out there, and I really do intend on making a lot of them come to life. But I feel like for now, doing the weekend pop-ups have been amazing. Oh, I also want to do a bread subscription. I think it would be really cool to do monthly subscriptions, where it's like, "Hey, you pay this flat fee for the month, and you get bread every single week. And you go and pick it up at this location." I think that would be super cool. But yeah, I don't know. The idea of having an employee freaks me out, big time. I have a lot of control issues. Which is another good thing about me being the only person doing this, is that I can't blame any issues on anyone else, and it just comes down to me. And I kind of like that. But also, the idea of imparting knowledge or being able to train someone or teach someone how to bake sourdough bread sounds really cool, and just having one person that I invest in and can—it would be really cool to see someone get the same joy that I get out of it.

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But that's it for now. We'll see, down the road, where it goes, but I think that I'm kind of just going to sit in this spot that I'm at right now, and let it unfold organically.

Jordan Hickey: I think that's about all I have. Is there anything that I haven't asked about, whether it's about your business, cottage baking as a whole, anything that you want to get out there?

Tyler Hopwood: I guess I just want—if people ever have the inkling to get into something, or specifically baking sourdough, definitely do it. There are so many resources out there.

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Don't ever think just because there's a cottage baker down the street in your town that you can't do it, too. Again, this is the least competitive industry I've ever worked in, and the most

supportive industry I've ever worked in, and it has just been so rewarding. Yeah, I definitely encourage people to try it. If they even have a small inkling to do it, definitely go for it. It's super wholesome, and it definitely just teaches you a lot about yourself.

Jordan Hickey: I like that. I think that is about it. I'm going to leave 30 seconds at the end of this for editing. So, I'll just let it go here for 30 seconds, and then we're good.

Tyler Hopwood: Cool.

1:10:00

[pause]

[End]