Evrim Dogu

Sub Rosa Bakery

Richmond, Virginia

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Location: Sub Rosa Bakery—Richmond, Virginia
Date: July 3, 2018
Interviewer: Kate Medley
Transcriptionist: Technitype Transcripts
Length: One Hour and 17 Minutes
Project: Southern Grains

Kate Medley: We'll get started.

[0:00:02.1]

Evrim Dogu: Okay.

[0:00:02.7]

Kate Medley: I'll kick things off by saying this is Kate Medley interviewing Evrim Dogu.

[0:00:08.7]

Evrim Dogu: The "G" is silent, so it'd be "dough."

[0:00:12.6]

Kate Medley: Evrim Dogu.

[0:00:12.7]

Evrim Dogu: Yeah.

[0:00:12.7]

Kate Medley: Okay, great. It's July 3rd, 2018, and we are in Evrim's bakery, Sub Rosa Bakery, in Richmond, Virginia. Evrim, I'll get you to take it from there and introduce us to you.

[0:00:31.6]

Evrim Dogu: Well, my name is Evrim Dogu, as mentioned, and along with my sister Evin Dogu, together we opened this little wood fired bakery that's a retail bakery, in 2012, and before that, I alone had sold bread at the farmers' market under the same name, Sub Rosa, for about—let's see—three years, two and a half to three years, and we started selling the bread using—my father has a wood fired pizza oven in his restaurant up in northern Virginia, so really what I was doing was baking all night in that oven and then driving the bread down here. The bread at that time was sold only by subscription, and you could only know about it by word of mouth or through this email list, which is why the name Sub Rosa seemed to fit the way we got the bread out there.

[0:00:31.6]

Kate Medley: Introduce us to the name. What does Sub Rosa mean to you?

[0:01:45.1]

Evrim Dogu: So, "sub rosa" is a Latin phrase, literally meaning "under the rose," but it denotes secrecy or confidentiality, something that is on the down low or between us. I like that sense of it and the kind of Old World sound of it, but I also liked that it meant that people who knew about the bread, it was kind of like this secret bread club, and for a while that's the way it operated. There was a long waiting list, and I hear many stories to this day of people remembering how they would come up to the bread table at the farmers' market and say, "I'd like two loaves, please." And I'd say, "No." [Laughter] Because we just didn't have—those were already spoken for. They were part of a

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subscription people paid monthly for. So that's the way it began. We don't have subscriptions anymore. But once we opened the shop, the brick and mortar storefront style, we were toying with the idea of changing the name, but it just seemed so—it seemed to still fit the idea that now maybe it's an open secret, but still something where we felt like we were sharing something unique with people. So, yeah, that's the kind of full explanation of the name.

[0:03:15.0]

Kate Medley: Before we go any further, what's your date of birth?

[0:03:19.8]

Evrim Dogu: August 10, 1983.

[0:03:23.3]

Kate Medley: Introduce us to Sub Rosa as it exists right now, where you guys are within Richmond, what you do, what sets you apart?

[0:03:34.6]

Evrim Dogu: So the Sub Rosa Bakery is located in a very old historic neighborhood of Richmond called Church Hill. It's one of the oldest neighborhoods in Virginia. It has a long history that's quite varied, but Church Hill, in the modern times, has been a place for kind of a slight retreat from the downtown city. It's close, but you know how it is when you go down a hill and up a hill again, it's a geographic break and really creates a kind of

separate zone. I lived here fifteen or sixteen years ago before there was even—there was maybe one café in the entire—there was a lot of corner stores, but there was really only one café. Now there's multiple restaurants, lunch spots, breakfast spots, dinner spots, shops, you know, of all kinds, so it's really changed a lot, and we came right on the cusp of that. 2012 was just about the burgeoning moment for Church Hill. Probably if someone had moved here about ten years or even twenty years before that, they knew that it was a place where property value was really low and they could kind of find a place for relatively an inexpensive price, but then be able to work and live here, and I don't think that that has changed too much until very recently. Anyway, so that's the location of where we are. We started, my sister, really, and I started to plan this bakery once we found this space. Because we're a wood fired bakery, meaning that everything we bake is baked in this masonry oven that we fire with wood every night, so if there's no fire at night, there's no baking in the morning, and that includes all the pastries. This is a very rare thing for a retail bakery to do, so there's very, very few in the whole of North America that I know of, very few retail bakeries that operate solely on a wood fired oven, partially because it's very difficult to plan your bake. You start with the hottest oven at the beginning of the day, you end with the coolest at the end, and you do have to have a very understanding customer base to be able to say, like, "No, we don't have that now. We'll have that later." Maybe since we started saying no [Laughter] early on, we got pretty good at it. But my sister was in charge of pastries from the beginning, and I was in charge of bread, and those were the two realms that we kind of married, my sister doing pastries, which is our bread and butter, ironically, and bread has always been our passion and my sister has called it the soul of the bakery, but the pastries are kind of what funds

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us to be able to do what we do with bread, if that makes sense. Yeah, does that say enough about the bakery and where we are now?

[0:07:08.6]

Kate Medley: That's great. For those who may never get to visit this space that we're sitting in, tell us what it looks like.

[0:07:18.0]

Evrim Dogu: It faces east, due east, so when the sun rises, it comes through a large set of windows, a very large door with glass frame, so there's a lot of light pouring in from the front. There's also kind of window right next to the oven that's very, very large, maybe about 12-foot-by-12-foot. There's some exposed brick, large open ceilings. People describe it as a kind of rustic, airy space, with simple design, simple lines, kind of what you see is what you get, which was our idea. One wall has a few—what are these called?

[0:08:04.1]

Kate Medley: Cubbies?

[0:08:05.3]

Evrim Dogu: Cubbies, yeah. Enclave—for some reason that word's coming to my mind—with a kind of hand-plastered wall. And when you walk into the front, if you look towards the back, you see the looming brick oven with two doors. So we definitely wanted the style of the space is long, you know, shotgun style, and we wanted to have the

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oven and the baker visible from the moment that you walked in. And one of the things we did is we took the bricks from the third chimney that used to be where the oven is, we saved the bricks and we used it as the façade, so that way the actual face of the oven is made of the same bricks that were already here, and the results was that people [Laughter] come in and they ask, "Was this oven here for a hundred years?" And that was *exactly* what we wanted, you know. We wanted it to feel like this was always a bakery, we just moved in and put in an espresso machine or something, you know. [Laughter]

[0:09:17.6]

Kate Medley: And then lead us through beyond the customer-facing space.

[0:09:24.9]

Evrim Dogu: Once you go through, the space is split between where you would be getting your coffee and pastries and where you'd be sitting down, and then you head to the back where the baker would be in front of the oven. Then there's a short, you know, hallway in which you're to the left of the oven, and then you enter the kitchen, which is probably about a 250-square-foot space with a very small walk-in, a very limiting walk-in, I might say, a little reach-in fridge, and then a couple pieces of equipment and a couple of wooden tables. Also nice windows facing west, so a lot of light back there. We're really lucky to work in a space that has a lot of natural light.

Once you go out the back door, after going down a few small steps, there's what looks like a shed, but inside the shed is what houses our 26-inch stone mill, where we mill a large amount of our own flour, and a sifter, where we sift and have then the ability

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to create flours that are both wonderful for application in pastries and many of our breads and cookies, tarts, quiche, and so forth. So we use that every day. We mill a lot. We keep some of the grain stored here in the bakery, but the large majority of it, because we get about a ton, 2,000-pound pallets at a time, we have a cold storage about nine miles outside of town. So we drive the grain back and forth from there after receiving it. [Interruption]

So where should I start there?

[0:11:20.0]

Kate Medley: You were just sort of leading us through the building.

[0:11:22.5]

Evrim Dogu: Oh, okay. So then, yeah, the building, it should also be said that not only is it east-facing, but it's on a corner of a circle where five roads meet, so when I first saw the building, I was very impressed with its kind of prominent spot on a cobblestone circle with a tree in the middle, so it's just quite a beautiful little nook. There was a restaurant across the street that's still there. So if you're out the back side of the bakery, then if you look up, there's two more apartments upstairs, and my sister and I live in separate apartments there. What is so important about that is that a wood fired bakery, whether it's retail or otherwise, really is similar to having a farm in the sense that you really have to be onsite. You don't have too much of a choice if you have to work with the fire, close the flues at night. Anyone who has a wood fired stove can relate to that. If you want to hold that heat, you can't just leave it all open. So we knew that this space was very

special for that reason, that everything could be kind of included in one ark, you know, one whole building.

[0:12:48.4]

Kate Medley: What was this building in its previous life?

[0:12:51.3]

Evrim Dogu: So it has always been a business in one unit, with the other three being apartments. Before we moved in, it was a hair salon. We've heard that it was a Goodwill, like, thrift store. We've heard that it was a church, a pharmacy, and maybe, I think, like a knickknack shop as well, apart from the clothing, at different points in its life. This building's about 120 years old, so about the turn of last century.

[0:13:26.7]

Kate Medley: Evrim, I want to step back a little bit and hear about your growing-up years.

[0:13:35.1]

Evrim Dogu: Okay.

[0:13:35.1]

Kate Medley: Tell us where you're from.

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[0:13:36.4]

Evrim Dogu: Sure. Well, my sister and I were both born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. That may be a shock because I don't have much of an accent. [Laughter] But we grew up there until I was eleven years old, so my memories of childhood, apart from the very exciting visits to New Orleans, were pretty, you know, simple. Had the suburbs at those times, at least in that place. Baton Rouge was very small at the time, so large swaths of forest and a lake down the way from us. So I have good childhood memories of a lot of Creole-style food. You know, po'boys and crawfish boils were a regular thing for me. But my mother and father are both from Turkey, they're both immigrants, and they met her in America, and Lord knows why, but they moved down to Baton Rouge. [Laughter] There's no Turks down there or anything. But my father opened a "Ma, Pa" kind of pizza joint, so I grew up in and out of this pizza joint. After school, you know, we'd hang out there. I was running around under the conveyor belt, pizza ovens, and getting to watch *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* while eating pizza. It was pretty dreamy.

[0:14:59.8]

Kate Medley: And what was the name of it?

[0:15:05.8]

Evrim Dogu: The name of his restaurant was Sicily's Pizza, and there was actually a large number of them at one time. Anybody who was there in the early [19]80s would probably know them. So from Biloxi, Mississippi, all the way through kind of Shreveport, Louisiana, there was maybe a chain of ten or twelve of those little pizza

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joints. But we had a nice, somewhat bucolic [Laughter] but suburban existence there, and then we moved up to the D.C. area, so, very different, very much a culture shock, more so than I traveled to Turkey when I was a kid, and that was almost less of a culture shock than moving to the D.C. area. So we grew up with this interesting mix of Southern living and Turkish culture, because we had *constant* Turkish visitors, but, of course, everyone I knew around me was from or living in Louisiana for quite a long time, so it was an interesting combination of cultures, resulted in me enjoying very spicy foods very often. Once we moved to the northern Virginia area, I pretty much have lived in Virginia ever since, yeah.

[0:16:29.1]

Kate Medley: Do you know how your parents landed in Baton Rouge?

[0:16:31.5]

Evrim Dogu: The only story they tell me is that my father had finished business school and it really wasn't from—he developed a passion and love for food out of the business side. He didn't start with kind of food as his main thing. So he had a friend who was Sicilian or part Sicilian, who wanted to do this pizza restaurant, and my father wanted to put his business degree to work, and thought, "Okay, this is a good way to do it." And that was the only thing that they moved on. I think that they had maybe one Turkish friend who lived in New Orleans at the time, but that was it. So, not a lot. I mean, the rest of their family were either back in Turkey or my mother had a whole bunch of family in Columbus, Ohio. Yeah, they decided to move far, far south.

[0:17:32.1]

Kate Medley: Can you introduce us to your parents by name?

[0:17:35.4]

Evrim Dogu: Sure. My mother's name is Füsun. She's remarried under a different name now, Sulzbach. And my father is Erdogan, last name Dogu, like mine. But my mom, my mom is still called Füsun, but some people who couldn't pronounce it would call her Susan. And my dad, Erdogan, goes by Don sometimes, you know, D-o-n. So they both kind of have their American names and their Turkish names. I think it's less common these days. People just tough it out, you know. [Laughter]

[0:18:17.3]

Kate Medley: And give us an idea of the Turkish influence in your home growing up.

[0:18:23.7]

Evrim Dogu: So because of the constant visitors, we had my grandmother living with us for many months, aunts and cousins, and a pretty constant stream of visitors, we grew up with especially the training [Laughter], the kind of unwritten laws of Turkish hospitality, so how you offer things to people, when you offer them, when you don't offer them. [Laughter] These are kind of codes of conduct that I learned through observation alone. They're not taught overtly. They're just part and parcel of the way you do things, the way you communicate, and a big part of that is food.

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Maybe my family had a particularly special affinity and obsession sometimes with food. We just naturally talked about it at the dinner table. We'd talk about what we were going to have for breakfast the next day at dinner, you know. We talked about dinner at breakfast, and we talked about what we were eating. We kind of, interestingly, didn't judge, I would say, but we were kind of naturally critiquing what we were eating, even if it was just saying small things like, "It could use a little more salt," you know. And I didn't realize maybe until I got married and my wife said, "This is really weird. You guys talk about food all the time." I didn't realize that was something other people didn't do. But we had a really—the relationship between food and that hospitality is so intimate, that a lot of the ways you express yourself, express your emotions or express how you feel about somebody is through the food you make and what you serve when, and then how you serve it, and what you're willing to do, so to speak. So, you know, if you were visiting somebody who's recently given birth, you know, you wouldn't show up with just a gift; you would show up with gift and something to feed them with. It means a lot. So I grew up with that as a kind of constant, not even knowing that it wasn't the way everybody else—you know, as a child, you just assume everybody's growing up the way you're growing up. And once we moved to northern Virginia and I was growing up, teenager here, then, of course, I started to understand that [Laughter] it was not the same in all households, you know.

[0:20:56.8]

Kate Medley: What were y'all eating?

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[0:20:58.6]

Evrim Dogu: Oh, well, interestingly, maybe surprisingly, Turkey has very distinct cuisines, and my mother was—my father's a really good cook, but my mother was the main cook in the family, and she's from Istanbul, which is the northwest region of Turkey, and that food is actually very kind of clean and straightforward. Salt and pepper are the main flavoring agents, maybe a tiny bit of red pepper and cumin once in a while, but the food is usually flavored mostly with fresh herbs, so there's parsley, fresh mint, scallions, and those are the things that are used to impart flavor to a salad or to a vegetable dish. So we grew up with this kind of a class of vegetable dishes that are cooked slowly in olive oil, so that could be pretty much any vegetable all summer long, could be like a zucchini that's slowly cooked, but you eat with lots of yogurt. It's used in savory applications. So, like, a common meal for us would be to have minced cucumbers with garlic smashed into a paste and whipped with yogurt, and then that would be served on the side as like a little—I think in Greek it's a Tzatziki kind of style thing, and then we would have maybe Turkish-style rice would be with grated tomatoes in it, you know, so it's kind of a tomato-y rice. You could have like roast chicken or little meatballs with parsley in them. That was very common, you know, go-to meal. But then again, we also grew up once a week having pizza, you know, [Laughter] from my dad's place, because he had that. So we would kind of get the American experience by going out to Chili's or something like that, too, I remember. And like I said, we would have the Louisiana kind of food all around us, especially when we went to New Orleans. But, yeah, I mean, Turkish food, I could go on for a long time about—for dessert, oddly enough, you kind of always finish a meal with a salad, so we weren't allowed to leave the table until we

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finished our salad, whatever salad that was. It could be a cabbage and carrot salad with a splash of apple cider vinegar, or it would be like a green salad with a lemon, simple olive oil and lemon, probably the most common. And then for dessert, as kids, we'd want like ice cream or something, but Turks eat fruit. They'll eat fruit for dessert, especially in the summer months, which in Louisiana is pretty long, you know, watermelon or cherries, bunches of grapes and things like that.

[0:23:50.3]

Kate Medley: Are there carryovers of that Turkish influence here at Sub Rosa?

[0:23:55.9]

Evrim Dogu: Yes, definitely. There are ways in which the Turkish food culture kind of just bleeds over, informs the way that we choose to use certain ingredients and flavors, but it's not so much so that you could ever call ourselves a Turkish bakery or something like that, and I know some Turkish people who come here wish that was not the case, but we go for the flavors that we love, and so we just kind of subtly, I would say, incorporate some of those elements that, one, they make it more of a unique bakery that speaks to what we do, but it also is honestly showing what we're interested in, because we love French pastry, we love Viennoiserie, the whole class of laminated pastries, and so for us, the best thing to do is to take those flavors and combine them with the flavors of, say, a more Eastern Mediterranean or Aegean Turkish kind of influence, but we don't do it too heavy-handed, I would say. And all of our breads really not only speak to traditional Turkish breads, but I think they would be recognizable or I think they are recognizable to

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any Old World or any kind of European or Mediterranean culture. They would recognize this basic element of a naturally leavened bread that is also wood fired and then, of course, the fresh flour adds that other dimension, that this is the way most breads before the Industrial Revolution, this is the way most breads were made since the beginning, since literally the dawn of bread and civilization in that sense, in the grain agricultural sense.

[0:26:04.3]

Kate Medley: Stepping back again, when you were eleven, your family moved to Virginia.

[0:26:13.9]

Evrim Dogu: Yes.

[0:26:15.1]

Kate Medley: Tell us about that shift for you.

[0:26:18.0]

Evrim Dogu: Well, when we first moved, I was so excited. [Laughter] So I guess I was at the age where something new and adventurous like that, rather than being traumatic, was just, you know, it was like living in the Hobbits' world or something. I was just going to this new, big world, this new, big place, and like I said, it's strange, even though I had been to Turkey, which is very different from Louisiana, here was something

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exciting about moving to a completely new home, completely new place. So I quite enjoyed the move. Once I was there, though, culturally I would say the things I noticed right away is that people in northern Virginia—and this also could be—it's hard to say if it's the timing or the place, right? You're turning twelve, it's kind of an interesting time for a young boy. But I remember the first time people being aware of how I dressed and kind of watching that more. I didn't become more aware of Turkishness exactly, but I would say that I became—it was more ethnically diverse, and so I became more aware of this kind of variety of people that Turkishness was just kind of one of, which I think was really good. If anything, though, like in terms of the food we ate, didn't really change very much. My mother did a good job [Laughter] of keeping things pretty constant. But, yeah, the move, overall, went really smoothly, at least from my perspective as a kid. I didn't know what was actually happening. [Laughter] But once I went to high school, high school was very close by, I could walk there, and living in D.C., all of a sudden I had—or living outside, I'm sorry, outside of D.C., but being able to access things in the city, like the museums especially, that was very culturally enriching in a way that I, we didn't even have access to. When we were in Baton Rouge, the most exciting place was New Orleans, but it was a long drive. It was an hour drive. It was a big trip as a kid, like, "Oh, we're going there," once a year, you know.

[0:28:48.4]

Kate Medley: Where were you guys in Virginia?

[0:28:50.5]

Evrim Dogu: In Reston, Virginia, so right around the time when there was the, AOL was big on the scene and Reston was kind of its own very tiny Silicon Valley. We moved right at that time, right kind of at the beginning of that, 1994.

[0:29:10.4]

Kate Medley: Why did y'all move?

[0:29:11.5]

Evrim Dogu: You know, as a kid, you're just told. [Laughter] "What do you think about us moving? We're doing it." [Laughter] Again, later the reasons that were given was that my father wanted to do something in a larger city, and he wanted to do something that was a little bit more like not just "Ma, Pa" pizza shop, but a little more upscale but still casual, and he wanted to have it be in the city. So they looked at different cities, and D.C. was still a hop, skip, and a jump to—they pretty much ruled out the West Coast because it was too far from Turkey. You'd have to go 3,000 miles before you go another 3,000 miles. So the idea was somewhere along the East Coast. New York was too big. Philadelphia, they didn't know anybody. But they had this connection to D.C., and it was about a seven-hour drive to my mother's family, so it was a combination of being in the right place. My sister and I at that time were both in—let's see. I was going into middle school, elementary school, still, and my sister was going into high school, so they also saw that—you know, they looked at the numbers and they're like, "Wow Fairfax County, really nice public schools." And my mom was a public school teacher. She was an English teacher. So it kind of fit the bill for everybody to them, and, you know, I think it

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was really, really good, even though it's such a different suburban experience, you know. It really woke me up to the suburban sprawl as a reality. It felt very different in Louisiana, where there was just a larger amount of nature between suburbs. There was still the kind of, you know, cul-de-sacs and things [Laughter] that you see, but even at that time in 1994, northern Virginia was quite developed and was pretty vast.

[0:31:24.7]

Kate Medley: Evrim, tell us about how your father's business evolved in the D.C. area, and then bring us around to the role that played in your starting a bakery.

[0:31:40.4]

Evrim Dogu: Yeah. So my father, once we moved to northern Virginia, he was going to open a shop in Washington, D.C., but then that fell through because of a bum deal on the building. So he was really sad. It was a really central location in the city. But then this other location popped up, seemed like a great deal, but it was all the way out in the suburbs and not even near Reston. It was in a—it's in a place, still, called Centreville, and that is where he ended up pouring his kind of heart and soul and mind into this restaurant. And it is still there. It's called Rosemary's Thyme Bistro. I was there the whole summer. [Laughter] That was what I did the whole summer, was go with him to work every day to see the transformation of this building from—I think it was a chain of restaurants called Boston Chicken before [Laughter], if you remember, but it changed from that and he completely gutted it and changed the whole thing to turn it into this restaurant, so I really got to see what that was like, which now that I'm saying it, makes me realize, like, wow,

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I did this exact same thing here, went through turning a hair salon into a bakery, which is a very long, arduous process, not for the faint of heart. But also you just learn *so* many different things that you didn't think you were going to learn when you just want to bake, you know, you just want to start taking loaves in and out of the oven. So when he first opened, though, he went through a very dramatic evolution from—I think the concept of the restaurant when he first opened was called Pastas and Pizzas of the World, and it was kind of like this wild kind of—almost like you can describe it as like a Disneyworld of food. I mean, there was everything from—oh, one of my favorite pizzas is called Santa Fe Pizza, and it was, like, a black bean puree with three different cheeses, sour cream in the middle, cilantro all over the pizza when it came out, and even little nacho chips like kind of dotting the pizza. Ahead of its time. I say to this day, ahead of its time. And he had, like, a pasta that was Santa Fe Pasta. And the chef that he had found was this small just firecracker of a guy, Paulie, we called him. He was from Thailand, and so he's from Thailand, put Pad Thai on there, so there was, like, a Pad Thai Pizza, there's a Pad Thai Pasta you could get. So it was kind of this wild experience, and I actually do miss it a lot. Over time, as it kind of refined and changed, one really big moment for him was my sister decided to—my sister, of course, opening this bakery with me, is very dedicated to food and loves—she calls herself—she says, "I started as a taster and then became a maker." But when she was in Italy, she went for a year to study abroad. You know, we as a family kind of took her there to drop her off, and then we flew back. And when we were there all together, my father had a kind of revelation there in terms of—particularly in terms of fresh pasta. He just fell in love with making your own pasta. He had that realization that if it's freshly made like that, it really doesn't need much. To this day, he

tells the story about this one spaghetti we had that looked like—you know the kind of snakes you make in kindergarten, just kind of rolled by hand and lumpy in some parts and thin in others? Just crushed tomatoes with olive oil, salt, and pepper. I don't even think there was cheese. There was nothing else on there, but it was delicious, he said one of the best pastas he'd ever had. And I was there. I ate it too. It was delicious. And so that is something—that line really follows all the way through, same thing that we do now. And he came home with that, and he started to change the menu a lot. Then he started to rely more, as he took some dishes off of the menu—goodbye, Pad Thai, you know, after he left, and goodbye Santa Fe after a time—he started to focus on what he knew best, which was Turkish food. So the menu started to reflect more Turkish food and more kind of that inspiration from the Italian side, which is where it still is today. I think he always—my father, in terms of his evolution, has always battled with wanting to put more and more things on. Like who knows, if we let him have free rein, there might be a Santa Fe again, but, you know, once in a while I'll go and, sure enough, there's a burger on the menu or, you know, a rack of ribs, and he just kind of can't help himself, you know. But the essence of what it's become has been maybe 50 percent it's, like, a Turkish menu, and the rest is this kind of Pan-Mediterranean.

[0:37:25.0]

Kate Medley: Interesting.

[0:37:26.1]

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Evrim Dogu: Yeah. Were you asking how that now influenced what we do, or just how did I see that change over time for his restaurant?

[0:37:36.1]

Kate Medley: I was asking how your dad's experience owning a restaurant—

[0:37:42.7]

Evrim Dogu: Oh, owning. Yeah.

[0:37:43.5]

Kate Medley: —may have enabled or helped you get started with your restaurant.

[0:37:48.0]

Evrim Dogu: Oh, well, so that is a different story, then, because, really, for one thing, he was the initial investor, so he helped me figure out, "Okay, this is a space that looks really good. We should buy it." That was the first thing he said. So he was the one who really pursued, which was key, is key to our whole operation, is being able to use the whole building, be able to build a mill house and not have to worry about whether we're going to get kicked out next month, and being able to, again, live onsite, very important for the wood fired baking, at least for—like, we're still in the first five years, six years, so it's important to establish yourself before you can leave for a week or even be in a house down the street, maybe somebody else can take over. But my sister and I split those duties. My father, from the beginning, it was kind of the reverse of when I was going

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every day watching him build out his restaurant, he would come here all the time, and so he was a wealth of information just about the process, particularly of opening a place, you know, saying, "Don't worry about this. That's just the way it is," or, "You know, you should push this a little bit more. Make sure you have this." And, of course, a bakery is very different from a restaurant, but there's a lot of similarities. So that really helped us. His owning a restaurant informed, I think, the way that we opened, but I think once we opened, we noticed that one gigantic difference, the biggest difference, I would say, is that my father has always been more behind the scenes, administration, owner who helps run everything, and for my sister and I, we do that, both of us split that fifty-fifty, but we're also 150 percent both in the actual production. So we actually make everything here and we actually lead production. Really, until this year, we're the only people leading the production. Now we have people we can work with and trust, to the point that we can take a step back and they're able to do it even better. [Laughter] But that takes time, and for the beginning, that was the biggest difference we noticed in the things that we would bring up and he would say to do. We had to tell him, "Oh, well, Dad, we can't really do that because we're actually in the back fifty-five hours already. You can only add so many hours on top of that before you burn out." So we had to find that balance very quickly very early on.

[0:40:53.5]

Kate Medley: Evrim, your first career was not as a baker.

[0:40:58.0]

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Evrim Dogu: Or maybe it was. [Laughter]

[0:40:59.3]

Kate Medley: Tell us about your journey.

[0:41:03.0]

Evrim Dogu: So, yes, my first career. I don't think I built a career for myself until I became a baker, but it wasn't the trajectory I was on for sure. I went to college. First, I went to art school to study film and photography. I was very interested in being behind the scenes in filmmaking. But within my first year, I think that I desired technical knowledge more than anything else, and there was such a heavy fine art emphasis on conceptualization and kind of the—I don't even know how else to say it—bullshit [Laughter] of making art, that I could only take one year of it.

[0:42:03.6]

Kate Medley: Where was that?

[0:42:04.1]

Evrim Dogu: That was at VCU, so that was my first year in Richmond, Virginia. I loved the city, though. I did love the city. I was still close to my parents, but far enough away. I loved that it was down-to-earth, slightly gritty, but relaxed vibe, very different from D.C. the East Coast, in general, has a culture of competition, and you have to be working and you have to be doing things, you know, very success-driven and goal-driven, and I liked

that Richmond was pretty much as far from that as you could get on the East Coast. I mean, it's still here, because we live in that culture, but people just had a vibe that was like, "You know, a beer on the porch is an okay way to just have your day go." And I appreciated that, even if that wasn't me. [Laughter] Even though I was still going to work seventy hours, I really liked being around that, you know, beauty of the river and the forest being so close. Richmond just seemed really well situated. So after that first year, I traveled to see my family in Turkey, traveled a lot in Eastern Europe, and I came back not knowing what I was going to do, so I literally just put my finger on the classes that I wanted to take most, and I ended up they were all, like, religious studies classes. I was just interested in different cultures, different philosophies, and I wanted to be able to study that. I was, I should say, lucky and advantaged enough to have my father say, "You know, I want you to go to school, but if you go to school, I'll pay for it," because he knew that I wasn't going to go if I didn't have the money. I had some inkling, even at that time, that I just did not want debt that early in my life, and I still think that that's true to this day. I mean, that's a separate conversation. But for bakers that come through here, most of them went to college, most of them have debt. One went to school for food. So, you know, I think it's a very common thing, and it was beneficial for me to have that time. But I left school on a trajectory more towards education and thinking about alternative forms of education, ways of influencing the way we view our connection to society so that it was much more direct, and I guess over time I realized that food was just going to be the way that I understand that best and that I kind of fall into best. I worked with trying to take that in other directions, combining food and education, but I think that I moved into baking because I found something that I loved to do so much that

I realized people would pay money for. So I recently read about this overlapping—it's like this Japanese concept of combining what you love to do with what you can get paid to do, with what the world needs, and for me, baking became that kind of focus. But the educational component has never really left. Both my sister was a teacher before. I was never a teacher, but was interested in pursuing it, and went so far as to almost go to grad school. I accepted, then didn't go. But I think that that is also part of where we'd like to maybe not take Sub Rosa as it is now, but something that we'd like to incorporate in the coming years, is a way of opening up Sub Rosa to be an educational experience for people, you know, for children especially, young adults.

[0:46:24.6]

Kate Medley: How did you and your sister decide to work together, and what's that like?

[0:46:31.2]

Evrim Dogu: Yeah. So my sister at the time when I started that first subscription business called Sub Rosa, she was moving back from having spent five years in Istanbul freelancing as a food writer, but then also working, teaching English while also writing travel guides, while also—she did a bunch of different things. She had to really hustle, but she enjoyed the big city life of Istanbul, very cosmopolitan place. But she missed home, she wanted to be closer to family, and my father needed help at the restaurant. He opened a second restaurant, same name, at that time in D.C., in DuPont Circle, and he needed help with that place. So she came and helped and worked as a manager there. So I can only tell you what she told me after she first tried—she heard that I was making

bread and that I was, like, hustling, myself, and selling it at the farmers' markets, and she said that it was when she tasted the bread that she first realized, "Oh, okay, he's not just messing around." [Laughter] Like, "This is good. We could do something with this." And at that time, I was doing it with a friend and we were looking at Charlottesville and Richmond, but once that friend moved on and didn't really want to do it here in Richmond, I was like, "Well, now I have the freedom to look at other options and what am I going to do." So I went to Evin and said, "I really want to do a wood fired bakery. I'm not attached to it being retail or wholesale, but if it is retail, I need it to have pastries. It can't just be bread." I knew from my father's training as a businessperson, you have to look at what is actually going to sell, how many people are going to buy it, is it going to be able to float the whole project, and I knew that we don't have a bread culture in America. We have kind of pockets of bread culture, but we don't have a bread culture here, and there's not a consistent purchasing of bread in every household, so it's harder to fund a solo bread operation. So I talked to her about it, and she said, "Yeah, I would be really interested in that. I'd be really interested in pursuing that." So, over the years I kept looking for a space, we kept talking about it, and she started to pursue *stages* and apprenticeships at other bakeries, and she, very luckily, both met and worked at some pretty great bakeries, Bien Cuit in Brooklyn, New York, and Farm & Sparrow, most notably, in Asheville, North Carolina. She worked at a bakery outside of D.C. for a few months. But she learned so much in that way, she never went to school for any of it, and myself, I was also self-taught. But the whole time during that period, she was off somewhere else learning while I started the build-out and found the space, and then the reality of what the menu and things would start to look like started to take shape. I

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remember saying, when we first opened, I didn't care if there was just one croissant, one chocolate croissant, one savory tart, and one sweet tart. I was like, "The menu can have four things on it, but we're just gonna knock it out of the park, just do the best croissants we've ever had in our lives, and we should make them here." And so, luckily, she wanted to do more than that, and, of course, my sense of what a weird, funny bakery that would've been. I've been to a wonderful bakery that's like that in San Francisco, and I think in a place where you have tons of people, it can work, but the variety that we have here really works to our advantage. So she started developing other—we started talking about, "Okay, well, why don't we do—we love these flavors. Why don't we do this." And so once we—I'd watched other people have menus that could grow really quickly, so when we started, we knew that it was easier to giveth than to taketh away, so we were very careful with what we added. Then after we opened, we both lived here, you know, we were just in full throttle. Both of us were working—in those early days, it was just—I can't even—there are no hours. It was just constant. I remember maybe the opening night, my mother was visiting and she took a picture of me asleep on the floor in the back, you know, just classic kind of brutal [Laughter] burn-out kind of stuff. But we—the reason I'm even telling you about that is because when you work that hard with somebody else, people ask this question a lot, like, "How is it working with your sister? Oh, my god, sibling." I mean, we did pull each other's hair until we were both on the ground as kids, so people wonder, like, how does that change when you own a business together? But to me, at least, one, we get along really well anyway now as adults, but the second thing is if you're both working that hard, it's really difficult to be upset or angry with somebody, even if they make a mistake. If I make a mistake or she makes a mistake,

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we both have the compassion to know what we're both just putting our all into it. So if one of us was kind of halfway there and the other one was really working hard and picking up the slack, I think that that would feel different and we probably would have more problems, but we have the same goal, we have the same vision for the bakery, and I would say that Evin is very gracious about letting me do what I want to do when I want to do it, and I don't know if I'm gracious, but I listen [Laughter] and try to support the things that she really wants to do, you know, and I think we are a kind of check and balance for each other so it doesn't become kind of too "It has to be this way," and it also doesn't become too much like we can be everything to everyone, you know. So there's a good balance there.

[0:53:35.5]

Kate Medley: Is there anything about the original scope of this business that you guys have shifted in your six years of experience, that you've reconsidered, or that you've altered course on?

[0:53:50.4]

Evrim Dogu: [Laughter] Yeah, there's a few things. So, one of them is when we first opened, we were a very different kind of bakery in the sense that we just had pastries for you to—you could come and eat them here with your espresso drink or your drink, and you could get a bread to go, but we didn't really have any other menu. We didn't have any sandwiches, we didn't have any soups or salads. Really the hallmarks of an American bakery, we had none of them. Now, a French bakery or a bakery even in Turkey, that

wouldn't be a surprise. You go there and you really get—you're going for the baked goods that they make and you take them away. And that happens at some bakeries here, but usually they're very sweet, they're donut shops or they're cupcake shops, and sometimes even those have kind of a full lunch menu.

So one of the things that we toyed with was, okay, should we have lunch so that people come in during this slower time of the day, because otherwise it's usually just a morning rush. So we did that for three months. [Laughter] We had it for three months, and it just didn't work. We hadn't planned it well enough. We don't have the facilities and the staff enough to be able to do it the way we wanted to do it. We wanted to do really excellent paninis and, you know, really good soup, and at least have a good salad, good basic kind of three things. And we weren't able to do that well enough for our standards and do everything we do on top of that. So it's been something that my sister has actually brought up many times since, and I still don't believe, especially since now it's been four or five years of doing what we do, I think it would take a lot of energy to really kind of rebrand and remarket us as a lunch option, and to be able to offer all that in a really high-quality setting I feel like would require a separate space, basically a separate building, which we don't have. So that's been the one thing. And the question, I think, I speak with other bakers around the country about this, too, is—and this is one of those questions that I think my father's expertise in the business realm of restaurants doesn't quite help with, but it's what's the best way to grow. You know, in what ways can we grow that makes sense for us? I do think that we need to always be growing, but I don't accept the dominant paradigm of growth that we have in our culture right now, where it's literally only profit or financial profit growth. That is helpful at times, but I think that can

shrink, and other ways of growing your bakery should take precedent. So for us, that might be, for example, we sold our old mill. We got a new mill. We're able to mill more. More of our flour is coming from our own grain that we are contracting with farmers directly. The products reflect that and the flavors reflect that, so it's a quality growth that I think needs to be on the table just as importantly as the resources to do those things. So we've also grown in terms of numbers, but we always pay attention to the ways in which we can kind of make the space nicer or make the experience nicer. Now we have some wines if people want to take a bottle to go with their bread, or small things like that, I think, make a big difference, and those are the ways I see us growing, very kind of internally. People ask, "Oh, would you open another Sub Rosa" here or there, and I really do see it—my father would hate to hear this, but I do think that we're just not a very franchiseable business. It's so personal and driven and also difficult to do, wood fired retail, it doesn't really make sense to—it's not repeatable in that way. Another version of something, sure, maybe, but that's part of why it's so unique, you know.

[0:58:53.6]

Kate Medley: You mentioned the grain and your sourcing. Talk to us about Sub Rosa's approach to grain.

[0:59:00.6]

Evrim Dogu: Sure. So, early on from the get-go, from before we opened, we planned on having our own mill and being able to make our own flour, mainly because of my experience at the bakery Farm & Sparrow in Asheville, North Carolina. I tasted—I was

there with another baker and a mason who built our oven, Antoine Guerlain, and he and I have this shared memory. I'm so happy that I have somebody else to, you know, ratify or—what's the word—tell me that that memory was real, you know. Dave was baking a big batch of breads for the market, it smelled coming out of the oven, and for me—I actually used to complain about this later—the whole thing was like watching magic. I mean, the whole thing was full of a kind of majesty and sanctity, the early morning hours turning into the day, and the working the bread into the oven and taking it out was just mind-blowing to me. People do sit and watch us sometimes, but I'm more amazed at how many people don't just sit and stare, and are not blown away [Laughter] by the simple fact that bread is made that way. Anyway, so that was part of the whole experience I'm trying to set up. He takes out the bread and goes, "Oh, you guys should try this." [Laughter] And he tosses a loaf over. We crack it open. It's relatively fresh, but it's, you know, not steaming, steaming hot, but still warm. And we ate it and we looked at each other like, "What in God's name is going on here?" Like, "What is this?" We're smelling it, and that was when I realized—I asked him what bread this was and he's like, "Oh, that's our—," whatever they called it, their basic, their country bread. He's like, "Oh, it's all from the mill. It's 100 percent—," I think it was Turkey Red Wheat at that time. That was a couple years before we opened, and that was when I knew. I said, "Damn. We're going to have to do this." There's no going back once you taste something like that. You just can't get it out of your mind. So from the very beginning, I knew Sub Rosa would be a place that we milled our own grains and we, you know, wanted to provide that experience, even if it was a tenth of that experience, to people who ate bread or, you know, first-timers too. Once you start—that was its own rabbit hole, though, for sure.

Once you start reading about milling and creating your own flour, you butt right up against the availability of the grain that needs to be for human consumption, and then you start to become aware of grain as a food source that has gone through the same kind of painful recent history as most other foods. And that the painful part is the loss of diversity and the monocropping or monoculturing of grains to the point where breeding programs, they might call it diverse, but they're really breeding each year just for that place just for that year, and they breed and breed and breed, then grow it out in *huge* amounts, right? Which, of course, presupposes large amounts of waste, huge amount of exporting. Fifty percent of our wheat is exported out of the country. At least ten years ago, it was 50 percent. Might be more or less now. So the approach was to really try to localize the bread that we were making out of the shop. "Local" was, like, a very hip catchword at that time. Now it's kind of—you know, you can get "local" at Walmart. Or, like, what does local mean anymore? Maybe "regional" is the new word that matters. But really, localized or regionalized grain production, I think, is one of those important aspects of the experiment in a beneficial agriculture that needs to be tried and tested and worked on immediately, because the other one definitely doesn't work. And we don't know if—people often say that, well, you know, what happens if we can't feed everybody, this or that? It's like, well, maybe the diets will change a little bit, but we definitely need to try something else, because the monoculturing of grain, and putting aside even the creative aspects as a baker and how boring it is to only have to bake with one flour, two types of flour, putting even that aside for one second, the toll on the soil, the use and the drainage of the topsoil and food security, the ability for disease to wipe out very large amount of crops because there's no genetic diversity, these are all very real and alive issues, and

they kind of inform, from the background, why we're so interested in setting up something different. So in whatever role myself, my sister, Sub Rosa can play in aiding that or helping create that, that's the nice thing about having a retail shop with all these nice little sweets and this and that. You can reach back behind you and reach from the resources, the richness of what is being grown around you and feed that to people directly through something that they might have already been getting for years, and that's the part where I say education probably will come back more and more. When you do something like that, you have to be clever [Laughter] in how you're going to be a business and just sell bread and sell pastries and make something delicious for people to enjoy, but at the same time, constantly educate yourself and, through that, educate other people about why you're doing it this way, why does it cost this much, what are the grains that you're using, why are you using those grains as opposed to the others. These are conversations that we are, I think, just now trying to have more explicitly, because we don't even have literature up. As you see in this shop, there's no sign that says we use 100 percent organic freshly milled anything, to our discredit, you know. We should say that more. But that explicit conversation needs to happen because then the fact that we are milling a large amount of our grain takes on new significance. It's not just a cool tool [Laughter] that we happen to have that makes us kind of hip, and that's fine. I mean, it's good. I'm glad for anybody who uses a mill. If it makes them look sexier, I'm all for it, you know. [Laughter] But they should also know that they now have a tool that can *really* revolutionize the way people eat. That's the whole kit and caboodle for us, you know. That's what matters most. Otherwise, I feel like it's a very unsuccessful experiment. It's a

successful business, but it might be an unsuccessful experiment, if you know what I mean.

[1:07:20.5]

Kate Medley: For instance, what is the type of grain that Sub Rosa is using, and where is it coming from? And are you able to get what you want?

[1:07:33.0]

Evrim Dogu: So that is a constantly changing and evolving answer, but as of 2018, we have some really exciting new sources of grain in Virginia. I recently became Programs Director of Common Grain Alliance, which is a very recently incorporated—seeking nonprofit status currently—organization that is really made, created to revitalize and recreate a regional grain economy based from Central Virginia outwards, as much as we can in this region. And through that group, I've discovered other farmers who have hard wheats, which are usually used for bread, especially hard winter and hard spring red wheats, and then there are some white wheats and soft wheats that we can use for pastry. We get a lot of grain from Pennsylvania, some from Eastern Shore of Virginia, which is actually an old growing ground for grain. We get all of our corn—well, we got some from North Carolina. A friend of ours grew some there. We get most of our corn from Virginia and it's always heirloom varieties there. All the grain is grown by the organic standard or beyond, but we're open with consumers if we get grain that we think is really good quality and might still be under the conventional label. And then sometimes we play that balancing game where we will get grain that we think is of superb quality, but we'll

get it from further out west, so we'll get larger amounts of it and store it, and then we'll use that and blend that in our breads, and that is usually either varieties of wheat that are heirloom and difficult to find and are special both in flavor, texture, or the way they bake, or varieties that we can't find here. So it's either the quality—it's never quantity, but it's either quality or type that makes it worth kind of seeking further than our region, but we always, you know, start closest to home and kind of move outwards with our purchasing. We also get rye. Rye grows really well anywhere, including the South, particularly Abruzzi variety.

[Interruption]

[1:10:34.1]

Evrim Dogu: We have a lot of opportunities to buy rye from around this region, so we use that too.

[1:10:43.8]

Kate Medley: I have two more questions. What do you do when you're not baking? What are your hobbies?

[1:10:51.4]

Evrim Dogu: [Laughter] My hobbies.

[Interruption]

[1:10:57.9]

Evrim Dogu: Okay. So ask the question again.

[1:10:59.5]

Kate Medley: What do you do when you're not baking?

[1:11:01.6]

Evrim Dogu: When I'm not baking? Well, during the weeks there is a lot of energy [Laughter] that goes towards just running the business and being in the bakery, so is it, I think, at this time a little bit unbalanced because it has taken over my life. But I'm involved in Native American ceremonies. That's a pretty big part of my life, and those times when I'm away from the bakery, a lot of energy and time and my efforts are in connecting to that. So then other than that, I pretty much just try to cook. [Laughter] I cook again. I used to cook so much before I started this bakery and have not been able to. As you heard earlier from the way I grew up, cooking is just so much a part of the way I express myself, that it does feel like an artist who has put their, you know, brush on the shelf or something for a while. I'm kind of always itching to get back to it, but you have to have that time and the energy to be able to do that. Other hobbies, I try traveling with my wife, of course just discovering new places. Being able to just relax becomes very important. My sister is a rock climber, so she really has, like, kind of a solid hobby that allows her to do that. Yeah, so does that all make sense?

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[1:13:02.3]

Kate Medley: And then, Evrim, there's a Latin palindrome etched above your front door, or the front door of the bakery. Will you tell us about that?

[1:13:12.1]

Evrim Dogu: Yeah. The palindrome, I think I found it one night when I was looking for a little—I think I was looking for like a little catchphrase to put around the—at that time it was, like, a stamp or some kind of seal I was looking for, you know. And I found this long Latin palindrome. You want me to try to say it? I guess it's fair game, because Latin's not really spoken, right? In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni. And it's a riddle, an old riddle, means "We gather around at night and are consumed by fire." So the—you want listeners to guess at this moment, pause, guess what that means? But in a lot of actually Turkish, old, kind of Sufi poetry and really in the metaphorical mind, there's the idea of a moth being drawn to a flame, the love of what you do consuming you so completely that you become it, and so that [Laughter], for better and for worse, is how we opened—the mind with which we opened this bakery. I didn't mention, oddly enough, this entire interview that three months after we first opened, a cigarette from the back porch that just stayed lit caused a fire that closed us down for nine months, so that phrase [Laughter] became a kind of warning, almost, too. And also for everyone who has ever done something so completely that they love, you do have to be careful, because you might, you know, burn up. You might lose your wings. So we took that to heart, and when we reopened, we really have had mostly a much more balanced approach, much

more careful with our energy. But the passion is still there, of course, so that doesn't change.

[1:15:47.3]

Kate Medley: Evrim, that's all of my questions. Is there anything that you would like to add?

[1:15:53.2]

Evrim Dogu: Nothing that comes to mind, you know. I think we're still in the early stages of figuring out what the most stable form of this bakery can be and will be, you know, how big the kitchen is and the size and everything. So I'm just very interested to listen to this ten years, twenty years from now, and hear what I was talking about not only in my own life, but where we're at now and how that might change, depending on, you know, really what we all want to do with it, because the more we work or the more I work with everybody here, the more I realize it really kind of has to become a shared dream or a shared vision of what this is going to be. I gave up a long time ago trying to make it just my "This is what I want to do," so I'm interested to see what other people think is worthwhile, because, otherwise, you know, anybody can get an hourly job for food, working anywhere, but if somebody really thinks this is a worthwhile pursuit, we're doing something that would be really good for future generations, then it takes on a very different quality, different dimension. So that's it, just a reflection. [Laughter]

[1:17:34.9]

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Kate Medley: Great. Thank you so much for your time.

[1:17:37.5]

Evrim Dogu: Thank you, Kate.

[End of interview]

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