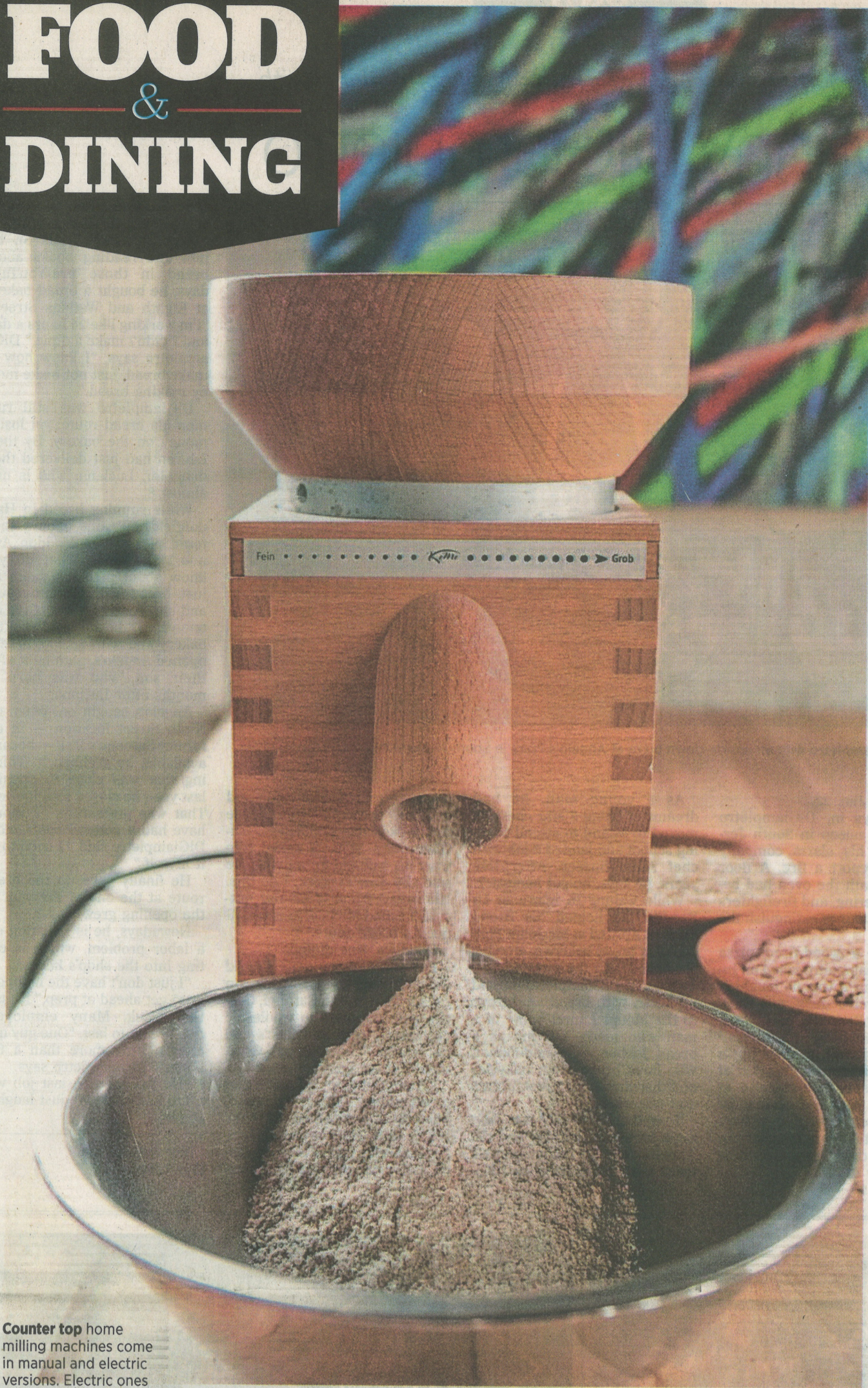


FOOD & DINING



Counter top home milling machines come in manual and electric versions. Electric ones are easiest to work.

GRACE DICKINSON / Staff

Not the same old grind

By Grace Dickinson
STAFF WRITER

Chris Wright pours a bowl of wheat kernels into a stone grain mill, an appliance about the size of a coffee maker. With the flick of a switch, the mill rumbles to life, quickly turning the pebbly, auburn grains into silky, beige-colored flour that's good for bread, pancake mix, pizza dough — almost anything that calls for flour.

"It's like when you have a garden, and you can harvest everything and put it immediately to use," Wright says. "This is as close as you can get to that fresh-picked tomato, in terms of flour, where the nutrition and flavor are at their peak."

Last year, Wright launched the Pas-

Milling your own flour at home provides better flavor and nutrition.

ta Lab, through which he sells a variety of fresh pastas made with 50 percent self-milled flour.

But you don't need to be in the commercial food business to mill your own grain.

"Milling is literally as simple as grinding some seeds with a bunch of stones," Lost Bread Co. founder Alex Bois says. "And the mill is doing it for

you."

Vetri head baker and miller Claire Kopp McWilliams agrees, saying that using a mill isn't any more challenging than using a toaster. "You set a setting and press a button."

Still, compared with buying flour, why go to the trouble? For most millers, the answer is simple: flavor and nutrition.

"There's no comparison. Eat a pinch of any commercial white flour, and it won't taste like anything," Bois says. But try fresh-milled grains, he says, and you'll discover a spectrum of flavors. Milled rye has spicy and earthy characteristics, and barley's taste is reminiscent of the smell of hay. Wheat, depending

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Hard red wheat

Creamy,
whole-wheat flour

Chris Wright demonstrates the healthy fats in home-milled flour that enable it to clump together when pressed.

Milling

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on the variety, can be nutty or grassy.

Even home-milled white flour is more flavorful, Wright says, because it contains the grain's germ — the nutrient-rich part of the wheat kernel that commercial producers remove to make flour shelf-stable. Commercial whole-wheat flour also lacks the germ, which contains a small amount of healthful fat that can turn flour rancid.

Equipment

To make flour at home, you need a counter top mill. Hand-crank versions are available, but electric mills work easiest. Two of the most popular brands are Mockmill and KoMo; prices start about \$500, but you can find cheaper options online. Nutrimill also offers compact mills, and its Harvest Grain Mill is available at Mom's Organic Market in Cherry Hill for \$350. If you have a stand mixer, you can invest in a milling attachment for about \$200 or less.

To make all-purpose flour, you'll need two additional pieces of equipment: a sieve for sifting out the bran, and a bottom pan for catching the fine flour. Wright recommends a setup from online distributor Hogentogler, featuring a 12-inch full-height brass-bottom pan (\$34) and a 12-inch full-height brass test sieve, No. 60 Mesh (\$77).

"If you have a small apartment with limited storage space, this might not be for you," Wright says.

Ingredients

Home-milled flour starts with whole grains, such as wheat berries, rye, barley, spelt, oats, and corn. All options have different protein contents, so base your choice on what you plan to make. (The website Foodal has a handy guide to grains you can grind at home.)

Hard red wheat is best for bread, according to McWilliams. "It may be named something like redeemer or red fife or warthog or turkey red." "Soft" wheat berries are lower in protein and typically gluten as well, making them better for biscuits, pancakes, crackers, cookies, and pies — foods that don't need a firm structure. If pasta is your goal, reach for durum or emmer, two types of hard wheat. Corn and oat groats work well for porridges.

The fun of home-milled flour is in experimenting. Rye, buckwheat, and spelt flour can be incorporated into breads and pastries. Baked goods made with whole-grain flour can be dense, so you can mix them with all-purpose flour (store-bought or home-ground) to lighten them up.

You can sometimes find whole grains in the bulk section of Whole Foods and Mom's Organic Market



To make all-purpose flour, you must sift the fibrous bran (top) from the germ and endosperm (bottom).

GRACE DICKINSON / Staff



Home-milled flour enhances the flavor and nutrition of goods that call for grains, such as flatbreads.

— look for brands like Arrowhead Mills and Bob's Red Mill. Local mills offer even broader selections. Bucks County's Castle Valley Mill and Small Valley Milling, near Harrisburg, have online stores.

Though milling is simple, there are a few tricks to keep in mind. First, avoid overheating the mill, as heat can mute flavor and burn off nutrients. "Touch the flour every so often — it's normal to be warm, but if it starts feeling hot, open up the mill and let everything cool off," says McWilliams.

If you aren't going to use the flour immediately, put it in the freezer; it will keep for several months. For recipes and expert answers, check out the Fresh Loaf, an online resource and community forum.

Fresh-milled food in Philly

If home milling isn't for you, you can still enjoy the richer flavor and enhanced nutrition of fresh-milled grain. At Vetri, 80 percent of

the items on the menu — like a spelt puff pastry served with warm taleggio and jam — contain fresh-milled flour. Every day, Metropolitan Bakery mills its own grain for croissants, various breads, and a pizza crust that's arguably the city's most flavorful.

Lost Bread Co. mills at least 25 percent of the flour it uses for creative breads like its beet rye, seedy grain, and cranberry pepita. House-milled flour also goes into nearly every product from Philly Bread, available on area grocery store shelves. Newly opened Musi serves house-milled polenta. And for noodles, the Pasta Lab sells at an array of farmers' markets, currently including Chestnut Hill, Media, and Bryn Mawr.

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