CIABATTA BREAD

Makes 2 loaves.
By Dennis W. Viau; modified from several recipes.

Ciabatta is a white bread that is similar to an Italian loaf or French bread, but the holes in the crumb are a little larger. Because it is made with a very wet dough, it tends to be flatter than a baguette unless baked in a baguette pan. One important characteristic of the dough is that it should be handled as little as possible to maintain the loft, or airiness, of the texture.

Ingredients:
For the Sponge:
¾ pound (340g) bread flour
½ teaspoon active dry yeast (or instant yeast)
1½ cups (355ml) water

For the Dough:
1 tablespoon salt
1¼ cups (300ml) water, plus up to ¼ cup (60ml) more if needed
½ teaspoon active dry yeast (or instant yeast)
1¼ pounds (567g) bread flour

To Finish:
An equal mixture of all purpose flour and durum wheat semolina, about 1 cup total

Directions:
Assemble the sponge ingredients in a large bowl and mix well to combine. Cover with plastic and let ferment at room temperature for at least 6 hours, preferably overnight.

Transfer the sponge to the bowl of a stand mixer. Dissolve the salt in the water. Attach the dough hook to the mixer and start the machine at low speed (#2 or #3 on a scale of 1 to 10).

Working a little at a time, add portions of the flour and the water to the bowl and incorporate before adding more. The dough should be wet and sticky, but not a liquid like a batter. If the dough is too dry, more water can be added, a tablespoon at a time, to bring it to the correct consistency. Knead 10 minutes in the machine.

Oil a clean large bowl and transfer the dough to the bowl. Cover and let rise at least 1 hour. It should double to triple in bulk. Do not punch the dough down.

Heat the oven to 450°F (230°C). Oil a large piece of parchment paper and carefully transfer the dough onto the surface by tipping the bowl and letting the dough slowly flow onto the paper. If necessary, oil a hand and help the dough out of the bowl. Without collapsing the dough, use a bench scraper or broad flat spatula to divide the dough into two equal portions. Oiling the surface of the bench scraper can reduce sticking. Using kitchen scissors, cut the parchment paper to separate the two loaves.

You can lift and pinch together the sides of each loaf to help shape it, but try to minimize the handling.

Dust an additional piece of parchment paper with the flour and semolina mixture. Carefully roll each loaf, seam side down (if there is a seam) onto the floured paper. Dust the top of the dough with the flour mixture. Transfer the loaves to a baking sheet by lifting the edges of the parchment paper and let rise about 30 minutes. Bake 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool thoroughly before cutting.

The step-by-step photos were removed. See the video for the preparation.