

WHO DOESN'T REMEMBER THEIR GRANDMOTHER'S SPECIAL CAKE, AUNT MIRIAM'S STRUDEL, A NEIGHBOR'S BROWNIES OR COOKIES, THE FUNNEL CAKE AT THE COUNTY FAIR, THE ÉCLAIRS AT THE CORNER BAKER, THE APPLE PIE AT THE DINER, OR A FAVORITE DESSERT IN THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA? THOSE MEMORIES STAY WITH US FOR LIFE, DELIGHTING AND HAUNTING US AT THE SAME TIME.

INTRODUCTION

Pastries punctuate the stories of our lives. They become reference points for special moments. We cherish those memories, and those treats become the gold standard by which all other pastries are compared. We chase those memories, returning to bakeries, fairs, and markets hoping to recapture those precious moments; we contact friends, neighbors, and cousins in an effort to dig up the recipes so we can relive those moments. Library and Internet searches provide clues that tease and taunt, yielding products that come close but never match the memory. The memories loom on the horizon; their elusive nature is strong enough to keep us searching for a lifetime.

My family had dessert every night after dinner. Except for some of my mother's baked goods, our nightly desserts were from the bakery. To this day, no evening meal feels complete without some sort of sweet treat at the end, whether it is the corner of a chocolate bar, half a cookie, or a fully plated creation.

HERO WORSHIP

Each of the pastry chefs profiled here was generous in sharing his or her time, knowledge, philosophy, and experience. They have sacrificed traditional work schedules and/or time with their families to provide pleasure and memories to people whom they will never meet. They go to work long before sunrise working on their feet all day.

They are historians, teachers, and mentors linking the past to the future. They nurture young, aspiring pastry chefs; they are involved in their communities and professional organizations.

Pastry chefs dedicate their lives to mastering a trade, a craft, and an art form, and along the way they give us extraordinary gifts. This story unfolds daily in large and small shops around the world. Quite often, the only praise or accolades many pastry chefs receive is second hand—many pastry chefs work hidden from view.



Croissants by William Leaman

Pastry chefs dedicate their lives to mastering a trade, a craft, and an art form, and along the way they give us extraordinary gifts.

BRINGING IT HOME

In a way, home baking enthusiasts are no different. They rise early, work in hot, cramped kitchens, scrub pots, wash countertops, purchase expensive ingredients, buy the latest cookbooks, and fret over the details with the same fervent obsession as the professionals. And they do it to bring pleasure, comfort, and joy to their family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. It may not be possible for you to have a fully stocked professional kitchen, but it is possible to learn the properties and characteristics of ingredients and to understand the principles and techniques of production.

All chefs agree that the best place to start is with the fundamentals. Every pastry chef emphasizes the importance of knowing and understanding the core techniques that are used daily in professional kitchens. Pastry chefs do not memorize recipes; they understand how the formulas work. This enables them to elevate their pastries to a higher level and gives them the tools to be creative. In this book, we aspire to help you understand pastry making on a deeper level, to move beyond being just a recipe duplicator. Armed with the knowledge and guidance from professional pastry chefs, anyone with the desire and determination can create world-class pastries.

As in a professional kitchen, it is advised to read through the recipe before beginning. Organization of ingredients and equipment will facilitate production. Document your results using notes and photographs. Over time, your observations will be more acute, and corrective measures will flow from your knowledge. The pleasure you receive from baking and making pastry will increase with your understanding of the art and practice, practice, practice. It won't be long before you are sharing your knowledge and experience with your friends and family ... and having a lot of fun in the meantime.



Passion-fruit mousse dome by William Leaman



Lady Fingers by William Leaman

