

Rising star

Paul Hollywood talks humble beginnings, overseas adventures and the 'Bake Off' phenomenon taking the UK by storm

When did you first get into baking?

My Dad was a professional baker, so I grew up around baking. I used to go and visit my Dad in the shop, and when I was very young I used to make pies with my Mum. My Dad introduced me to dough when I was around nine or ten. That's the main thing they got me into really. I did really enjoy it. The biggest headache was getting out of bed in the morning at 1am, or on a Friday we'd start at around 11pm at night. You got used to it, but it was never a pleasure getting up in the morning. Originally I didn't really want to be a baker. I wanted to be a fireman when I was a kid, but then I went to art school and, I mean, at 16 who knows what they want to do? I think in the 80s you needed to get a trade, and the trade was offered so I took it.

'I wanted to be a fireman when I was a kid'

The Great British Bake Off has sparked a renewed interest in baking? What, in your opinion, is behind the appeal?

It's the simplicity. It's easy to approach because most people have the ingredients at home, and there's so many gadgetries out at the moment which encourage you to bake and make life easier for yourself. There is also nothing better than the smell of baked goods at home. What's the old tale... if you want to sell a house fill it with the smell of baked bread? Above all though I think it's nostalgia. People remember certain breads, pies or puddings when they were kids or growing up.

What are the best and worst dishes you have judged to date?

The worst ones are where people mess up the recipes. When they put too much salt in for instance. It's the rudimentary thing of following the recipe and knowing the difference between sugar and salt. Those things wind me up, if anybody does that I mark their card.

Some of the best are from those who work outside of the box or do something slightly different, or do something normal but to the best of their ability. For example, when Ryan from last year's show did a Key Lime Pie. It's one of my favourite flavours... lime in a cake, or lime in anything. I just love. Some people, when they do something like a lemon drizzle

cake, just don't put enough flavour in. If something is blackberry or strawberry, then make it taste of what it is. It's pointless calling something a flavour, and then you don't get it coming through, or it is overwhelmed by another one like clove or cardamon. You have to be careful with spices, as it is all to do with the balance of flavours.

How does baking in the UK compare to your experiences in America and Cyprus?

I worked in Cyprus for five years in a couple of five star hotels teaching the Cypriots European-style baking. I really enjoyed it. I was originally going to do a year and ended up doing five. The Greeks tend to use more natural sweeteners such as honey or mastiha or mahlepi, which is a really beautiful spice that they use to flavour their food. Rose water is used a lot. There is always that middle-eastern influence coming over in the Greek food. The food is so simple. I love things like Souvlaki which is Pitta bread filled with pork, cucumber and tomato and lemon juice. And it is good for you because it is all grilled. Lots of fresh fruit and veg, and that's what it is all about! In America they tend to use a lot of sugar, and everything is very sweet, and that was the big difference I noticed between their food and ours.

'There is nothing better than the smell of baked goods at home'

What is your signature dish?

I do birthday cakes, and if I do one I tend to keep to my signature which is a very rich chocolate cake, which is delicious. I use pure, ground almonds rather than flour, or half and half, because it keeps the cake quite moist. I often put roast beets through it as well and it is gorgeous with the chocolate ganache over the top.

Do you do most of the cooking?

I don't really bake at home. I do occasionally with my boy, which we both enjoy.

What do you like to do when you're not working?

I enjoy going out on my bike, just getting out on the road, stopping off and having a cup of tea in a café and meeting all the like-minded people.



What other projects are you working on?

We are auditioning now for the current Bake Off. It is going to be very exciting this year as we are developing all the technical challenges. The tour also starts off soon on April 28th or May 26th, travelling from the North down to the South. I've never cooked at the London Apollo before so I am a little bit nervous about that, but it's going to be great fun. I'll be talking and telling stories and passing on the knowledge I've learnt over the years.

What in your opinion makes a house a home?

The kitchen is the heart of a home. I think the kitchen needs to be used, as opposed to going out all the time or getting take aways. Having a table and chairs for people to sit down is the key thing.

For dates and ticket details for Paul Hollywood's Get Your Bake On! Live tour go to www.paulhollywood.com or www.theticketfactory.com