

All the young food dudes...

I started my first catering business at 22 years old and began work on my first and only restaurant at 24. I had great experiences from my culinary business and though I was naive in many aspects of the food and drink industry I look back with fondness, particularly for some of the magical nights where diners had a beautiful meal in a fantastic atmosphere.

One evening the whole restaurant stood up to sing "Happy Birthday" to an octogenarian. That was the sort of dining room I wanted it to be: vibrant, excited and inebriated! And then there were the dull, quiet Tuesday night's... As 'they' say, it's all a learning experience.

Yet I'm delighted to see that some young things are making moves in the food industry. 14 year old Grace Warnock has been named the Champion Baker in the Contini Bake Off 2019 following their nationwide search. Nationwide, being Scotland. Political!



Grace Warnock with Carina Contini

Grace won for many baking triumphs, but including the rather Christmassy Trifle Cupcake, combining vanilla cake, custard filling, jelly cake (made for her own jam, if you please!) and whipped cream icing. Grace's fabulous concoctions will be gracing the afternoon tea plates of the Scottish Cafe on the Mound this month. Merry Christmas Trifle to you, Grace!

If you start at the bottom you can get to the top. Congratulations to Jake Hassall, 25 year old chef at the Waldorf Astoria, who won the Flavour and Flair international contest in London. He started his career as a potwasher and is now an up and coming talent. Already up and come, I imagine. Remember: liberate now and again from hotel style cooking, Jake. BBQ the Christmas dinner. Set yourself free.



Jake Hassall

For aspiring cooks, young or old, my Christmas gift recommendation is *Cooked To Perfection* by Anne Willan. My parents bought this perfect starter cookbook for me from the late 'Two Fat Ladies' Clarissa Dickson-Wright. Sadly her Grassmarket bookshop is long gone but she suggested for me a tome that teaches technique that sets you free in the kitchen.

For example, if you can make a white sauce you can also cook a beautiful soufflé! Willan's sophisticated 'Home Economics' should be on the school, curriculum. There's no greater gift to yourself, family or company than to be able to cook a filling or fabulous meal, and she teaches you with aplomb!