

Sweet Success in Stockbridge

Lesley Stewart is the goddess of the Edinburgh cake scene. Her cinnamon buns are legendary and to sample one, you must be up early, so you can hotfoot it to Raeburn Place.

I went to meet the former ICU nurse to find out more about her craft and influences.

How do you make your cakes look so natural, so organic?



Lesley Stewart

I don't plan every element of the decoration in advance. It's a feel. How I move the icing and how it sits is just a matter of instinct. Our icing is never thick and heavy, like cement. I can't bear that! I want people to see that the frosting has a flow to it; it should be soft and silky. No two of our cakes ever look the same. Customers can give us directions, but I always say, don't expect your cake to look like the photograph, because it won't!

Would you describe yourself as 'Scottish'?

Oh goodness yes! I am proudly Scottish. I was brought up in Kilmarnock on the West Coast. As a young child, I'd bake with our elderly neighbours, but it was my grandma who taught me. I still use her Be-Ro book, which was published in 1923. She was an amazing cook, probably better than me in her general touch. Together, we made traditional food: crumbles, Victoria

sponges, scones and rock cakes. But I enjoyed making Scotch pancakes most. My grandma could remember things. I don't have a great memory; I refer to my recipe books a lot!

What led you to leave nursing?

I really loved my job. But latterly, I had a run of sad cases and I found it difficult. Death is a massive part of the job. You do learn to cope, but it's still hard. I got very attached to my patients and their families and I wasn't scared to show emotion. One day a colleague said, "You don't have to do this forever, Lesley." Someone did ask if I'd go back during the pandemic; I said I would, if need be.



How are you managing to adapt and grow your business?

We were one of the first to open a takeaway service during the pandemic. Our products went on display in the window; people could see what we did. But there was also a huge surge in demand for birthday cakes when other places were closed. I've been extremely lucky.

Financially, I am driven, but the most important thing for me is the quality. I have no plans to open another shop. A big part of the shop is me; you can spread yourself too thin.

I'd love to have a mobile van though, so we can take The Pastry Section to festivals and other parts of the city. That would be as far as I would go.

Where do you look for inspiration?

Sometimes I take myself off to the local Waitrose, or M&S. I'll look at the in-season fruit, or even a new biscuit range. Waitrose has flavour combinations I wouldn't find elsewhere; and the Costcutter (on Raeburn Place) has lovely ripe mangos,

chestnuts and coconuts. I can just stand and look! We pick all the berries for jam ourselves at Cairnie Fruit Farm near Cupar and Craigie's Farm in South Queensferry.

I listen to BBC Radio Scotland's Kitchen Café and I'm watching 'Nadiya Bakes' for her flavour combinations. I also follow many professionals on Instagram. For example, The Newport Bakery, Sunrise Bakehouse (Burntisland) and Sweet Jane Bakehouse (Glasgow).

I love Olive and Delicious (magazines). You can't beat Delia, but I also love Nigella and Ottolenghi. Cookbooks such as 'The Boy who Baked' are all in the shop for customers to read.

Where do you go to eat well?

Kylesku (Hotel) on the West Coast of Scotland, for the seafood! We go in November when no one wants to be there because of the weather!



Kylesku Hotel, Sutherland

The Pastry Section 86 Raeburn Place Edinburgh EH4 1HH Tel [07484 923544](tel:07484923544)

[The Pastry Section on Instagram](#)