

## Bake to the Future

Eszter Takacs brought her fine art to her cakes. Now she talks to [Lara Medlam](#) about bringing those cakes to York

Tuesday 4 October 2016



Eszter Takacs

Shutishuti Patisserie is a one-off in York. Eszter Takacs' exquisite patisserie creations are a real cottage industry. I met up with Eszter to discuss the finer points of European patisserie, starting from scratch in new towns, the pros and cons of social media, and why tradition and innovation are such natural bedfellows.

Unsurprisingly, Eszter's beautiful cakes are informed by an artistic background. After studying painting in her native Hungary, she came to London to pursue an MA in Fine Art. And in among all this creative endeavour, the need to make a living arose. So she waitressed, and as is often the case for anyone with an interest in food, the kitchen side was far more appealing. "I started training in the pastry section. I sort of asked myself onto the job," she confesses. Life oscillated between art and patisserie, working as an artist's assistant, then making cakes in a café in Greenwich.

But the real turning point came when she moved to Falmouth: "Going down to Cornwall was a big change, and I thought 'What else can I do?'" So she turned her mind to what interested her, what she was good at, and began to make cakes independently. "I started doing markets and festivals, all just myself. And a bit of bespoke. People who wanted something for a special occasion." Similarly, she missed the tradition of cake shops in Hungary and Europe more generally, and wanted to offer something different: "I want to try and show what else is possible."

Having established a new guise as a patissier, life threw a new flavour into the mix: she moved to York only a year ago. She quickly took up a position as a pastry chef at a busy hotel but realised that she was ready to do it herself. "Because it's too important not to try" she adds, and since no independent patissiers exist in York, it's all for the best that's Eszter's so busy. She jokes that "There's always something to do" but you can see why: designing and maintaining your own website, forging links with

other businesses, doing all the photography, social media and PR. Not to mention actually making the cakes!

One challenge is ensuring everything stays as delicious as when first baked. “When you bake just for home, that’s a different realm to baking professionally, where the product has to stay the same for five days. Or if it’s a mousse cake it has to remain fresh and enticing at least for a few days.”

However, as every imaginative chef knows, not everything turns out perfectly, especially if you experiment with interesting ingredients. A recent green tea roll experiment didn’t pass the test: “Green tea oxidises in the air. So it gets less green over the day, especially if the sun shines on it. For me that’s not good enough so I’m not going to sell it.”

Her creativity is fuelled by a mix of food cultures and her love for visual art and craft. “I love the French for their technique in pastry, but my childhood food memories are all related to Hungary, so it’s poppy seeds and layer cakes, but now I live in Britain and I want to relate to the people here and so I am constantly thinking about the local palate and bridging that gap of French-Hungarian-British with a new creation that doesn’t necessarily match any nationality.”



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Take the Shutishuti lemon cake. Rather than classic lemon drizzle, Eszter uses a French recipe for a more aerated sponge, and always tries to infuse it with an additional seasonal flavour – a rather appealing passionfruit at the moment.

Eszter seems to work with a quiet fortitude; it’s not surprising that’s she been able to anchor herself in York so seamlessly after so little time. She consistently highlights the importance of locality. “Everyone uses social media, so do I. It’s nice to have a growing visual portfolio on Instagram but in the end that’s not going to make it or break it, because you really have to be in touch with what’s local. Talking to people directly can lead to great friendships and bring real opportunities. I’m so happy I met Rebecca and Russ (owners of Kiosk). I work with them very closely and it’s more of a collaboration really. We do a regular supper club, where I get to play with plated desserts.”

Insight into the reality of starting a business isn’t all Eszter knows – it’s fascinating hearing about the intricacies of patisserie. Layer upon layer, multitudinous techniques and elements, with texture just as important as flavour.

But the perfect appearance is no conceit: “The way you present what you make is just a representation of what’s going on inside it. It’s not to show off, but it signifies the amount of work, also in the flavour of things.”

And the flavours reveal a true playfulness, such as her miso cookie. “I like it when desserts don’t have an overwhelmingly sweet flavour. It has to have balance, if it’s only sweet then it’s not interesting”. Eszter’s approach is holistic, taking the technical expertise of European patisserie, the best of local produce and a

lot of effort and imagination.

All her learning and practice has been “a natural progression”, but certain technical points have to be fully understood, especially with cooked creams. “In cooking you have your mother sauces, you have the same in patisserie, where more than one dessert can originate from one base recipe.

“I didn’t always think this way, that if you alter one ingredient it will result in a new creation, but it’s logical and practical to work this way, and it was a revelation when I discovered it.” If revelations like this can deliver basil, mint and raspberry choux tarts, or little grape, fig and poppyseed cakes, bring them on.

And because you’re probably all wondering, the endearing name Shutishuti comes from süti, the Hungarian nickname for cake. Yet another innovative take on tradition.

*Eszter’s pop up can be found at The Rattle Owl, 104 Mickelgate, Fridays 10-3*

<http://www.shutishuti.co.uk>



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