



## THE ART OF FRENCH PASTRY

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### What IS it about good French pastry?

Good French Pastry is the story of France. It speaks of the romance of France between every layer, every crisp bite, every soft buttery, sigh-inducing kiss of cloud and crumb. It reminds us of a trip to France, our dreams of Paris whether we've been there or not. Good French Pastry goes beyond borders and makes us remember days of simple pleasures. And makes us never want to forget.

Yes, it can do all that and more.

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#### ♥ It's hard to find

Good French pastry is hard to find. Why? Because genuine, good French pastry is very difficult to make. It takes time, talent, and a certain reverence for its tradition. The Pastry Chef must know the principles of bread making like a Baker but also has to know about the principles of puff pastry making as well – of which French pastry is a variant. Fine French pastry making is an expression of French culture and a specialized craft that takes years to learn.

It also takes a whole lot of ingenuity to work with 'living' ingredients; yeast in particular. And it's not just yeast that is literally an active ingredient. So is flour. Add them together with butter, water, sugar and salt and you can have a doughy mess or, in the right hands, the makings of an eye-closing, sigh-inducing, divine French pastry. It should be soft as a cloud inside, flaky and fabulous outside (you

can tell the real thing by the amount of crumbs left on your plate!) with only a kiss of butter— not greasy nor overwhelmingly sweet. And that's just the making of it. Then there is the

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mysterious rising and baking process; time and temperature telling no secrets. In a class all its own, French pastry is neither bread nor puff pastry: it possesses the best qualities of both and is a magical amalgam of each without being either.

#### ♥ It's simple but difficult to make

Pastry recipes themselves are simple: it's the

dealing with living matter that is difficult and subject to a whole host of influences making consistency and standardization difficult to constantly achieve. It is an act of pure chemistry as the yeast feeds on the natural sugars in the flour.

One cannot really talk about French pastry without talking specifically about puff pastry. Without getting overly technical, puff pastry 'puffs' because of the heat from the steam when the blending of water and butter and flour of many sheets of dough occurs. As the steam tries to escape, the process makes the dough rise creating light flaky layers with tiny pockets of air in between. A simple but difficult process to do as anyone knows who has tried to make puff pastry.

The difference with say a croissant is that the process is similar but yeast is added initiating a fermentation process (like bread) so that it has all the lovely flakiness of puff pastry but with a unique hint of sourdough giving the croissant its characteristic taste. This has bestowed French pastry with a certain mystique over time because there is such an art and science to its

*"What you give to the dough,  
it will give you back."*

*Pascal Bagioli,  
French Pastry Chef*

creation. Certainly pure alchemy happens as the seasoned Pastry Chef brings the naturally occurring chemical activities of the ingredients into alignment with the environmental conditions. This is where the real craftsmanship and artisanal nature of authentic French pastry making literally comes to life. And where the art, science, experience, instinct, intuition, trial, error and sometimes a little bit of luck meet.

### ♥ **It's alchemy**

Each time Pascal makes a fresh batch of pastry dough, he has to measure everything very carefully and guided by his experience and intuition, adjusts times and amounts accordingly – each and every time. How's the weather? Is it a hot day? Is it dry or humid? Should the dough be mixed for a longer time? Less time? Should it 'rest' for longer or shorter before it is layered with sheets of butter? And then layered again. And again. And then more waiting while the dough matures. Is the butter the right temperature? Rolled too cold or too hot alters the results. Is there more water or air in this block of butter than the last? Is the flour from earlier in the season? Later? Is the temperature of the water correct in order to balance with the temperature of the dough? Calgary's altitude and dryness come into play. The ambient temperature can vary radically on the same day. Every dough batch has to be adapted accordingly and tweaked constantly in order to coax the best from each one through the many technical stages of chemical interactions and development.

These are not muffins, scones, cupcakes or doughnuts. Pastries can easily be too bready, too salty, too greasy, too flat. It's a desperately delicate balance between savoury and sweet, dry and moist, heavy and light - with a whisper of sour dough essence. A classic croissant, when it's good, is an extraordinary layered combination of patience, knowledge and ordinary ingredients - mundane on their own but with the right treatment - transformed into something "that represents the soul of the Pastry Chef." *Pierre Hermé, (Master of the Macaron.)*

### ♥ **It's wholesome and natural**

Pascal uses only natural ingredients - no artificial chemicals or stabilizers to short-cut the process, ensure cookie-cutter uniformity, generate industrial quantities or artificially extend the shelf-life of the product. He has

cracked the code and figured out how to bring butter beyond how it behaves in an average croissant, creating a gorgeously light pastry with less sugar and no greasiness. The added bonus is less calories and less fat content than a typical croissant.

He possesses the love of pastry making in his head and his hands and his heart creating pastries that are a unique and special reflection

*John Gilchrist, long-time Calgary food critic, says the French seem to have a certain 'je ne sais quoi' when it comes to pastry making and called Pascal's pastries "impressive."*

of his heritage and of French cuisine. It is one thing for him to make his pastries in France, quite another to work with Canadian ingredients and conditions to make this everyday French fare here. Canadian butter has less fat content than French butter. Canadian flour is entirely different and more challenging to work with because the wheat has a higher gluten content than French flour.

Using organic flours isn't always the simple answer either as these are often too roughly milled or too low in gluten to achieve the delicacy required for French pastry. A certain amount of gluten is a highly significant element in fine pastry making because it is essentially what structurally binds the other ingredients together, literally making or breaking the pastry.

Pascal has been able to adapt Canadian ingredients and work with the western Canadian climate to develop his unique recipes

according to what is available to him in an unpredictable environment. Also, he does not needlessly embellish his pastries with icing sugar or egg wash preferring to showcase them in a more genuinely rustic way. Indeed, fine pastry of this type should be able to stand alone; all the better to appreciate its subtleties and simplicity.

#### ♥ **It's accessible through technology**

What makes Pascal's pastries even more unique is how he has made his classic French pastry accessible to pastry lovers everywhere by using technology to share his gift of nearly 20 years of pastry making expertise. Technology is used to freeze and vacuum-seal the unbaked pastries protecting their taste and texture, as well as to mix and layer the dough. However, it is the knowledge and know-how of nearly two decades of almost daily pastry making in his native Toulouse and Calgary as well as his dedication to making the best pastry possible that the pastries are then rolled and cut by hand in the time-honoured way. In this manner, technology combines with tradition to create timeless pastries with old-world taste and new-world convenience.

This allows pastry lovers everywhere to enjoy fabulous French Pastry Chef quality pastries fresh and warm right out of their own oven any time they want. And the irresistible fragrance of a French patisserie lingering throughout the house could most definitely put the 'we' back in weekend.

#### ♥ **It's for everybody**

Being able to take the French Pastry Chef out of the patisserie and into the homes of people who love French pastry is more than just convenient. It gives people the opportunity to directly appreciate the nuances of the pastries themselves. How long does the pastry take to rise so it's at its best? Between five and eight hours seems to be the sweet spot. But wait a minute - what if it's a really hot day? Will they

rise more? Yes, they will. Can you then bake them sooner? Yes, you can. One learns when they're ready. One senses the right size and shape. It's all rather seductive this lovely business of baking French Pastry – paying attention, watching for signs, waiting for the right moment. Adding some heat...

Many people like to be involved in the process of actively producing a beautiful French pastry themselves with just the right kind and right

*With Pascal's vacuum-sealed Take and Bake Pastries, technology combines with tradition to create timeless pastries with old-world taste and new-world convenience.*

amount of help at the front end. This deepens their appreciation and enjoyment of pastry's complexity. Others are happy to know that all they need is a baking sheet, an oven and some time to bring beautiful French pastries to life. Are seeds being sown for the beginnings of a pastry culture right here on the prairies?

#### ♥ **It's value**

As we all know, even artisanal 'average' is always better than industrial anything. Pascal's pastries represent the very best of artisanal excellence. And value? People routinely spend over \$100.00 for dinner for two. But at around \$2.50 (prices vary) per pastry—per beautiful, simple pastry—people can make themselves whenever they want and eat at whatever temperature they choose, that's *amour*.

The beginnings of a beautiful brunch for a dozen family or friends can be had for the price of a dinner for two. And you know exactly what you're eating, who made it and where. Quality is assured and uncompromised as pastries are

vacuum-sealed to ensure their integrity and longevity in the freezer up to three months - even more. And like fine wine, they seem to season in a state of suspended animation as they await their awakening to a destiny of shared joy.

Although Pascal is a classically trained Pastry Chef who can make everything from all types of cakes including European mousse cakes, tarts, specialty French items such as *St. Honoré*, *Opéra*, *Croque en Bouche* and more (with a last name like 'Bagioli' he makes a mean *tiramisu* too) he prefers to specialize in the area of French pastry – much to many pastry lovers' enjoyment. He complements his pastry offerings with beautiful brioche buns and loaves made with real eggs and a lovely sandwich sized *campagne* baguette perfect for lunches, cheese, charcuterie, tasting or late night trays - all take and bake as well. He is also thinking about adding the classic French *chausson aux pommes* and *tarte au citron* as well as delightful *choquettes* to his take and bake boutique menu.

#### ♥ **It has history**

People have said that Pascal's pastries are as good as the best they've had in France. And lately, people are saying that they are even better. *Viennoiserie*, the specific type of pastries that Pascal makes, was introduced to Paris by a Viennese baker in 1839 and since then, has had a long and illustrious history in France and beyond. Pascal wishes to continue it here – bringing his passion for pastry to the prairies and fulfilling his personal mission of "Pastry to the People" - getting it out of the bakery and into the homes and hearts of pastry lovers everywhere.

More than ever, consumers want to know who makes their food and where it comes from. *Pascal's Patisserie* – Calgary's only artisanal "Unbakery" is proudly local while offering an international French staple right here in Alberta

that people can bake themselves whenever they wish. Is it any wonder they're calling it "ooh la la...to go?"

John Gilchrist long-time Calgary food critic said that it is the French who seem to make the best pastry - it is just something they do very well - something in their blood - a certain *je ne sais quoi* when it comes to pastry making. He also called Pascal's pastries "impressive" – quite a compliment knowing his penchant for French food and coming from his seasoned palate.

*"You may not want to be seduced in the morning...but we're betting you will."*

*City Palate Sept./Oct. 2011*

Pascal's pastries are a gift to anyone who appreciates that truly good food made by a real artisan is a simple pleasure and one not to be taken for granted but appreciated, respected and celebrated. And who wouldn't say *joie de vivre* to that?

#### ♥ **It's not engineered**

Like everything we eat, French pastry did not escape the mass mechanization of food production. Most commercially baked goods are made with hydrogenated fat which has a much higher melting point than butter; in particular puff pastry which is practically plastic. Ingredients are engineered and manipulated to resist gluten formation in order to control the natural fermentation process and make the fat more workable.

Ever have that 'filmy' residue in your mouth after eating a commercially produced croissant?

That would be the hydrogenated fat sticking to your tongue because its melting point is way higher than your body temperature. The starch produced by the flour sticks to that and hence you're tasting spun plastic for hours. That's why there is no crisp to industrially made croissants; it is only real butter which is real food that can do that. And real butter is always better than any other unreasonable facsimile of it.

And that's why eating real French pastry – especially warm – is such a sensual experience – real butter melts directly onto your tongue – other treats don't do that because the butter has been completely blended into them. Genuine French pastry has (remember our chemistry lesson earlier?) real butter trapped in fine layers of air and flour that melts in your mouth – literally. And this is as it should be. In fact, even in France today artisanal pastry making is becoming a dying art, with up to 40% of croissants in patisseries product that was made under industrial conditions.

#### ♥ **It's an Art**

*Pascal's Patisserie* take and bake French pastries are very unique and special. With no real pastry culture in Calgary and not a lot of information readily available about the fascinating and complex history of French pastry, a true artisanal story in the 21<sup>st</sup> century high-tech big city comes to life.

*Pascal's* is the story of one man with a passion for pastry making and one woman with a passion for telling its story - and both with a passion for enjoying its simple pleasure - coming together to make and share pastry that they often believe on good days, is pure poetry. And with all due apologies to English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, if such pleasure from pastries come, can world peace be far behind?

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*Lison McCullough – October 2011*