

THE GREAT FEMALE BAKE OFF

Louisa Walters meets ladies who are really mixing things up

From the Prime Minister to Doctor Who, women are taking the top spots in the UK. No doubt inspired by Mary Berry on the *Great British Bake Off*, women are making a strong impact in the world of baking too.

GRODZINSKI

Grodzinski and Daughters – the name says it all, really. The owner of the business is male (Jonathan Grodzinski owns the Edgware shop and two branches in Stamford Hill) and has five daughters – hence the name. But there have always been women at the helm.

The company was founded in 1888, when Judith and Harris Grodzinski, bakers by trade, left Lithuania and set up shop in the East End of London. They hired kosher ovens and lived above the shop. The business passed to their son Abie, then to Abie's widow Bertha and then to their children Harry and Ruby.

By the 1960s Grodzinski was the largest kosher bakery in Europe and supplied Marks & Spencer, Selfridges and Harrods.

By the end of the 20th century, fourth and fifth generation family members were running the business, with Tova Grodzinski, great-great-granddaughter of the founders, running the



Mioara, head baker at Grodzinski

Edgware branch. The (female) head baker, Romanian-born Mioara, has been there for more than 10 years, while manageress Gemma has been there more than 20.

"There's lots of heavy lifting involved, but we have lots of female bakers," says Gemma. "When I advertise for pastry chefs it's mainly women who apply, Men are very good at the role but it is thought of as a women's job."



Grodzinski will be baking 10,000 doughnuts over Chanukah.

BLONDIES KITCHEN

It might not be true that blondes have more fun, but Kristelle Levy (27) and Chelsie Collins (29) at Blondies Kitchen are having the time of their lives with their cookie creations. They jacked in their full-time roles (Kristelle was a head chef at a deli, Chelsie a food writer) to focus on their weekend >



Gemma and Tova Grodzinski



Kristelle Levy and Chelsie Collins of Blondies Kitchen

»hobby – catering events and baking cookies in Kristelle’s mum’s kitchen in Mill Hill. The cookies were so good that they became known as The Cookie Girls. As food trends evolved, they saw that the key to success was to do one thing and do it really well, so they decided to focus on their cookies.

In October 2016 Blondies Kitchen ran a Milk and Cookies pop up stand at Old Street Station – the first of its kind – selling their trademark American-style thin and chewy cookies and bottles of cereal milk (think of the milk that’s left in the bowl then you’ve finished your cornflakes or Coco Pops – that’s cereal milk). The girls were selling 800 cookies a day, working 7am until 7pm on the stand and then baking all night for the next day. The concept was featured in Time Out and Metro and they were approached by Taste of London, London Fashion Week and then Selfridges. “This was a dream come true,” says Chelsie. Selfridges invited them to run a four-week pop-up in the food hall. They baked 800 cookies for the first day and were sold out by 2pm; Blondies Kitchen was the most successful pop-up that Selfridges has ever run.

A year ago, with the help of a bank loan and some family investment, Blondies Kitchen took up permanent residence in Selfridges food hall, shifting between 3,000 and 5,000 cookies a week. This month will see the return of last year’s innovative mince pie cookie, but the bestsellers



are the Oreo-stuffed Nutella cookie and the white chocolate cookie with caramelised cookie butter.

DAISYRAE CAKES

Linzee Basch (36), lives in Bushey Heath with husband Richard and their two kids - Charlie (8) and Daisy (7). In February this year she turned her baking hobby into a business and launched DaisyRae Cakes. Working alone from home (with a little help from her daughter sometimes!), Linzee is totally self-taught. “I was always an experimental baker and preferred biscuits to cakes, she says. “I was regularly making kichels for my family and friends and I felt there was a gap in the market that I could fill.”

DaisyRae is the purveyor of exquisite biscuitcakes (the latest trend to hit the cake market), cakes, meringues, macarons, marshmallows, doughnuts and tempered chocolates. The letter and number biscuitcakes and pavlovas are extremely popular.

Linzee applies a unique approach to all her designs and produces pieces that not only look beautiful, but taste delicious. All commissions are tailored to the clients’ requirements, such as specific colours or flavours – eg tiramisu or Reece’s Pieces. Tiffany & Co recently commissioned her to make a series of biscuitcakes.

Although not licensed, Linzee uses vegetarian ingredients and can also make parev biscuit cakes and pavlovas.

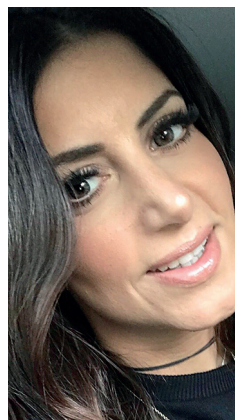
SWEET THINGS

Natalie Allen, 44, was born in Belfast, raised in Cheshire and now lives in London with her husband and their two kids, aged six and 10. She comes from a long line of female bakers – her grandma was a keen baker and her mum bakes every day.

Thirteen years ago, Natalie set up a baking business at home, supplying cake lovers and delis. When it outgrew her kitchen, she took



Linzee Basch of DaisyRae Cakes



Blondies Cookies

Natalie Allen of Sweet Things





order. Natalie serves up a scrumptious afternoon tea, and there is a gluten free version too.

KARMA BREAD

Tami Isaacs Pearce, 47, lives in Bushey with her daughters, Brady, 18, and Lily, 13. Five years ago, she took a bread-making course at a time in her life when she was coping with some personal struggles and this chance activity resulted in an award-winning, thriving business.

"The process of making and working with dough settled my restless soul in a way that nothing else could," says Tami, who won at the World Bread Awards for the second year running.

Initially baking from home, the demand for various breads, particularly her challah, became huge. Her micro-bakery soon outgrew its humble beginnings and, with the help of her father, she opened Karma Bread in Hampstead in 2013.

"Bread baking was historically a man's job but that has changed and there is an incredible community of strong female bread bakers," she says. "Social media has bought us women together from all over the world."

Opening a bakery with virtually no experience was a huge leap of faith. "All I remember about our opening day was that we opened the doors and they came." And they continue to do so – there are regular queues outside the door, especially on Fridays, which is no wonder as Tami is known as the Challah Queen. Just before opening, a baker friend took her on a tour of Tel Aviv bakeries.

"I spent a night shift on challah production in one of the most inspirational bakeries and the bakers referred to me as the Challah Queen. I guess the name stuck," she says.

She is wonderfully inventive with her baking, producing doughnuts with hitherto untried fillings, different types of babka and all manner of sourdough loaves. When Tami is recipe testing, her produce goes from cooling rack to being tasted by the customers, who give their feedback.



premises in Primrose Hill was soon supplying Selfridges and Fortnum & Mason. In 2011 she took a restaurant unit around the corner, moved the bakery into the downstairs and opened the door to Sweet Things café. The demand is such that she now manages a team of three lady bakers, although she does all the recipe development and testing herself.

The range of cakes in this little café is impressive – all manner of sweet treats including Biscoff cheesecake, salted caramel brownies and red velvet cheesecake brownies (all the brownies are gluten free), apple and cinnamon cake, orange cake, chocolate meringue cake plus lots more, including celebration cakes to



Tami Isaacs of Karma Bread