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Dufflet Rosenberg

Toronto's Queen of Cake

By Lise Murphy

Not only is Dufflet Rosenberg Toronto's "Queen of Cake", she is also its Baroness of Bars, Troubadour of Tarts, Monarch of Miniatures and Swami of Small Indulgences. As founder and owner of Dufflet Pastries and the recently launched Dufflet Small Indulgences, she manages an empire that delivers premium treats to the GTA and beyond. According to Joanne Kates in the Globe & Mail, "Dufflet has many imitators, but she is still the best baker in Toronto. Her touch is light and subtle and rather European."

Like most entrepreneurs, Dufflet started out small. In 1975, she dropped out of university after only one year to start baking and selling cakes out of her mother's kitchen "I had nothing to lose," she says with a smile, "I was 20 years old and could try out a new career, almost like starting a hobby." Her first client was the now defunct Cow Café, a vegetarian restaurant on Dupont Street, and her product line consisted of four items: chocolate fudge cake, New York style cheesecake, apple butter cake and apricot squares. Word of mouth about her scrumptious creations soon spread and restaurants and cafés rushed to place orders. "The tremendous growth of my business," she says, "was due to market demand." In no time, she had installed a second oven in her basement and was winning rave reviews as "the best Baker in Toronto."

By 1980, she had outgrown her mother's house and opened a small manufacturing facility on Queen Street West. She followed with a retail outlet and café in 1982 and in 1985 moved the entire production operation to a 5000 square foot bakery on Dovercourt Road. Today, Dufflet Pastries has more than doubled in size to 13,000 square feet, employs over 100 people, and supplies over 500 restaurants and cafés as well as fine food shops, hotels and caterers with more than 100 delicious products - enduring favourites include raspberry truffle cake and white chocolate mousse cake. In 2002, she opened an innovative retail café uptown on Yonge Street: "Pastry, Flowers + Café, is a total sensory experience where flavour, texture, fragrance and beauty co-mingle," says Dufflet. (Editorial note: If you haven't been yet - GO!) In 2004, the untiring Dufflet launched her two Small Indulgences lines: Specialty Gourmet items and frozen Grab and Go Desserts. She notes, "We (had) have a strong brand presence in Toronto, the specialty cake market in the GTA was more competitive than ever, so we decided to expand our business by extending our brand."

Dufflet is largely self taught: "I always liked to bake. My mother was a "from scratch" baker, and the first cake that I ever made was a chocolate cake from Joy of Cooking." Her only formal training was an intensive two week course at the Le Notre School in Paris and some evening baking classes at George Brown. Her biggest influence? "Maida Heatter - I'm a big fan of her homey, straightforward style of desserts."

Dufflet looks far and wide for inspiration: "I go to the New York Fancy Food Show, I read magazines and cookbooks. However, ideas have to be practical and executable. We may start out making a cake like you would at home, but we have to be sure we can scale the recipe up to manufacture it within the limitations of our plant and equipment."

Dufflet's key to success? "The ability to work hard, to be a jack of all trades, to have good negotiating and decision making skills." She defines her biggest challenge as the ability to find the right people and motivate them. Her advice to WCN members who are thinking of starting their own business? "Don't do it", she laughs, "Seriously though, you have to be prepared emotionally and psychologically. Think carefully about what your goals are, equip yourself with the right education, and be prepared for many sleepless nights. The world is a different place today - it's much more demanding than when I started my business in 1975. To succeed you have to be willing to put it on the line - you must be unique, yes, but also competitive." With her tousled hair and warm smile, Dufflet excuses herself - she has a lemon tart to make for an upcoming appearance on the Food Network show Party Dish.

Interested in finding out more about Dufflet's ever expanding business? Check out her website at www.dufflet.com