



<http://gremolata.com/dufflet.htm>

**Dufflet Rosenberg: Queen of Cake,  
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**Gremolata's Interview with Dufflet Rosenberg**  
*by Malcolm Jolley*



When I arrive at **Dufflet** World Headquarters, at the end of Dovercourt, south of the suddenly hip West Queen West gallery strip, I am buzzed in and put into a room to wait for my interview with the Queen of Cake. It's non-descript little meeting room with table and some chairs, and I see some packaging samples for Dufflet's new line of small treats (*Small Indulgences*) and other marketing *bric a brac*. It's only after I have set my briefcase down and flipped through my question notes that I look up and see a wall of cookbooks. There are few things that engender Gremolata respect than a well collected library of gastronomic library. All the greats are there: David, Olney, Wolfert, Fisher. I secretly hope **Dufflet Rosenberg** is a little late for our meeting, so I can flip through some of the rarer treasures.



When Dufflet comes in, a moment later, I tell her how impressed I am and she says, "That's nothing: these are just the castoffs," and she leads to her office, where the real treasure lies: shelves and shelves of baking and patisserie books, and culinary magazines spanning more than the nearly thirty years since she sold her first cake in 1975. OK, I think, this lady's serious about baking and getting it right.

Dufflet is a diminutive woman with (in her words) "messy" red hair. She possesses an air of youth that does not suggest someone entering their fourth decade of running a business. She is open and friendly, but it is very clear from her confidence that she is the boss, and she knows everything that's going on in the building and beyond.

Soon it's time for my *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* tour of the actual bakery. Dufflet leads me into the giant room, but not before I am given a requisite green smock and a perfect Gilles Duceppe-style shower cap. We are greeted by a summer exchange student from Guelph and the serious tasting team

– always checking new recipes, developing new (or old) cakes, cookies and tarts. The smell of butter and sugar and fresh baking, which has been in the background since I walked in the building, really hits me. *It smells really good in here.*



The scale of the operation is impressive, and no one in the room is idle and great trolleys of tarts, cakes and things are being wheeled around in a constant swirl of activity. I am struck by the enormous blades for a giant mixer and imagine a twenty foot Nigella Lawson licking it. There are great truck trailers which serve as fridges and freezers (Dufflet tells me as an aside not to fear frozen baked goods; some things actually improve below zero), and huge ovens built to handle the volume. Different teams handle different stages, and I notice a group of bakers who, Dufflet explains, work exclusively on their booming wedding cake business.

Yet, for all this industrial wonder, I am struck by two homey scenes. First, all these cakes - before they are boxed and shipped to Dufflet's stores, or your local grocery - are laid out on a counter and frosted by hand with a spatula. It's just like you would do at home if you were frosting a birthday cake (or maybe twenty of them). The scale is massive, but the technique has not been corrupted. Second, on our tour we pass a giant metal mixing bowl filled with what must be the shredded rind of a whole grove of lemons. Holy cow, I think, the lemon flavour in these pies

actually comes from *lemons*! I expected at the least, extract of this or that, or even some kind of industrial



flavourings. But there aren't. All the raw ingredients are natural (Dufflet reminds me that her outfit supplies **Whole Foods** and her products are 100% free of preservatives, hydrogenated fats or any other unpleasant additive). Once the tour is over, and I have returned my smock and cap, we return to the book lined meeting room and begin "the interview", as follows.

**Gremolata:** What happened? How did you go from small to big? From artisan baker to *Queen of Cake*?

**Dufflet:** I made a point of hiring people with experience who knew what they were doing. We made some mistakes along the way, but we learned and went on and before I knew it I wasn't just baking, I was manufacturing!

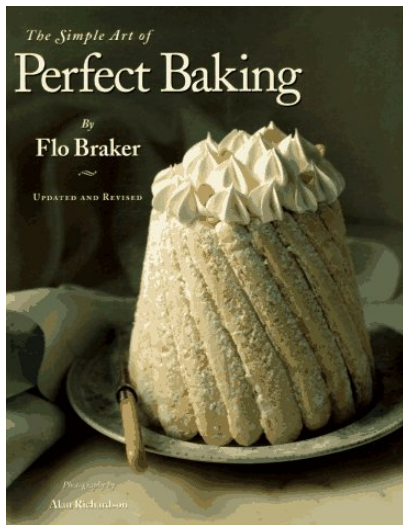
**G:** Has baking always been your passion?

**D:** Yes. I'm not a chef. I cook a little at home, but I'm not like you, I don't have my dinners planned!

**G:** Baking terrifies me! We've done experiments in our kitchen, but they never work out well.

**D:** I think the key to baking is first to take a few classes at one of the schools, and then get the right books with well tested and reliable recipes. Then when you follow them, you'll realise "wow, this works" and it won't seem so scary. That's how I learned.

**G:** Any particular titles?



**D:** I like **Flo Braker's** book, [The Simple Art of Perfect Baking](#), [Nick Maglieri](#) books are very good – he taught at **Peter Kump's** school in New York, which is now called the Institute of Culinary Education – [The Cake Bible](#), [Maida Heatter](#)...all of these books and authors *work*. Once you get the basic technique and get how to do it, you build up confidence quickly.

**G:** So it's not insurmountable.

**D:** No, but everyone says that. It's always one or the other: "I'm not a baker" or "I'm not a chef". I think the ingredients in cooking turned me off a bit. I never liked handling raw meat. Yuk. I always preferred the ingredients in baking: butter, sugar, chocolate. But now, of course, I can get tired of being around them all the time. By the end of the day I really just want a green salad with nothing on it!

**G:** Good topic: what do you eat? Where do you shop?

**D:** I like to shop locally. I try and keep away from the big stores and keep my neighbourhood people happy. I like the Organic Boutique around the corner, and I want him to stay there, so I try and do as much shopping as I can there. I love to bike down to the St. Lawrence Market. And I think the new cheese place on College is great, that was in Gremolata.

**G:** [La Fromagerie!](#)

**D:** They're great, because they'll always give you a taste of any of their cheeses. You can't do that in the big shops.

**G:** Your products are "all natural", right?

**D:** Right, but not organic. We do a total audit on any new supplier, making sure there are no preservatives. The hardest thing to avoid are sulphites, because most dried fruits have them. Then we also look out for hydrogenated fats. These are in things that are supposed to sit on the shelf for a long time. We get around this mostly by making our own recipes from scratch.





**G:** It sounds like it might be hard.

**D:** Yeah. Take the chocolate we use for decorations. We have to bring it in from outside Canada to get it without hydrogenated fats. A lot of baking is done with margarine, especially in the big shops, but not here.

**G:** So, you're all butter.

**D:** Yes. I prefer the taste and mouth-feel of butter.

**G:** What about the product? Are you baking different things from when you started?

**D:** Sure, but we still make the same chocolate cake: that recipe has not changed at all. And the cheese cake is pretty much the same, though we make different flavours. Lately we've been doing a lot miniature items. And French pastries are still very popular: *clafoutis* style tarts...but you know we always do French pastries with a bit of a twist. A little different from what you might get in France or Montréal.

**G:** How do you develop new products?

**D:** We meet as a group and try to plan the year out. Right now we're getting ready for fall. But everyone has their own agenda: sales wants to expand the product line to have more items to offer, but production wants to streamline... We're always trying and tasting new things, but we also have enough experience to know what people want or don't, what flavours sell and what don't. Passion fruit is perhaps too exotic. Sometimes, we make a bring out a new item that just doesn't sell. We make this little coconut lime loaf that we all love. But it's not selling.

**G:** What is selling?

**D:** Right now, carrot cake is one of our top sellers.

**G:** Really?

**D:** Yes, it's really come back! And little cupcakes are big. Especially chocolate. Chocolate is big right now, though I prefer vanilla, since it's a purer flavour.

**G:** Do you still teach?

**D:** A little bit, I have two classes coming up. One at Loblaw's, and one at [Great Cooks](#). I do it to keep fresh, certainly not for the money. But just to get out there and talk to people. Immediate feedback!

**G:** Have you noticed any changes in the students? Are they more hard core?

**D:** Sure, I'd say so, especially people who bake. They can get right into it. Although there are always people who realise, after they have come to class, that it's probably not worth it to bake at home! If you look at what goes into something major – obviously not a brownie or something like that – there's often five or six separate recipes that have to be put together to make one product: the filling, the cake, the glaze and so on. Before you know it, it's a two day operation to make just one cake. So, if you look at your time you may be better off to spend \$40 on a great cake. And you'd probably spend close to \$40 on ingredients anyway.

**G:** So there really are savings in economies of scale.

**D:** Yes. But, look: many people find baking really relaxing. I do. So I don't want to discourage anyone!

*Look for Dufflet's new line of **Small Indulgences** at their stores at 787 Queen Street West or 2638 Yonge Street and at selected retailers across Ontario. Visit [www.dufflet.com](http://www.dufflet.com) to find out more.*