

MY LIFE ON A PLATE

French patissier Eric Lanlard, host of DStv's new series *Baking Mad*, gives us insight into his passion for family, food and baking... By Ingrid Casson

My mother went completely overboard with cooking at the weekend... I have fond memories of coming back from school on Saturdays, being welcomed by the aroma of roast chicken and fresh apple tart. Saturday was a rustic affair but on Sunday the boat would be pushed out with sophisticated dishes and there was always a perfect and beautiful table setting.

My grandmother was also a great cook... My sister and I spent every Wednesday with our grandmother. We went to the market to get all of our ingredients and we all cooked together, having a great laugh as we went along. This is where I understood the importance of fresh quality produce. My grandmother had the most amazing vegetable gardens. Like my mum, she too liked to put on a show when entertaining by having a beautiful tablecloth, with glassware and porcelain on display.

I grew up being encouraged to eat everything... We even bred our own rabbits, knowing they would end up being cooked in red wine with juicy prunes. From a young age I understood where food came from and it never bothered me. Most of my friends were farmers and I hung around with them, sometimes helping out, so I knew exactly how things grew, and where milk and meat come from. I was very lucky to have that upbringing and to have a very healthy relationship with food from early on.

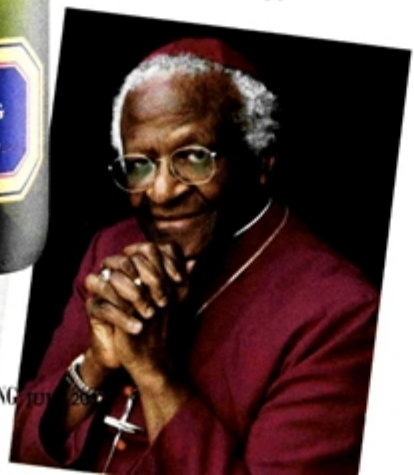
The most evocative smell is anything baked with apple... It reminds me of my childhood. Coming from Brittany we had lots of apples and so many of our recipes

used them – both sweet and savoury. I still love baking with apples today. **The only thing I ask to be removed from a dish is raw or semi-cooked white onion...** I just don't like them and think it spoils the taste of a great dish! Otherwise I've tried many types of food during my travels and always make a point of trying any local specialities. **I get a lot of inspiration during my travels...** I eat out a lot and I like taking an old classic and bringing it up to date by putting my own twist on it. I keep myself updated with what's going on through courses and meetings. I love my job as there is always something new to learn. **Sugar is overrated...** I bake with sugar, of course, and I always use an unrefined variety for its great flavour and also being a healthier option. But I think many desserts and cakes are spoiled by too much sugar in the recipe. I'm a great believer in using the main ingredients to bring the sweetness or flavours to the recipe. We get great feedback from our clients again and again – they always say they love our cakes because they are not too sweet.

With my last R200 I'd buy a bottle of Simonsig Cuvée Royale sparkling wine... and a bundle of steamed white asparagus!

The first person on my dinner party list would be Catherine Deneuve... She is a true French icon and has class and elegance. Also Desmond Tutu for his wisdom and his wit; Sir Elton John because there would be a piano in the room and I can imagine him playing and singing a tune or two (and also for the drama that usually surrounds him!). And the Queen, as I've heard that behind her professional smile she has a great sense of humour.

Catch Eric on *Baking Mad*, a 10-part series where bake clubs across the UK are invited into Eric's home to learn the tricks of quick, easy and delicious baking. From Monday 18 June at 8:30pm BBC Lifestyle (channel 180 on DStv).



Photograph of Desmond Tutu by GREATSTOCK/CORBIS