

Austere times drive people baking mad

After seducing dessert lovers with his treats in BBC Lifestyle's *Glamour Puds*, French pâtissier Eric Lanlard returns with *Baking Mad with Eric Lanlard*. This time, he explores the growing phenomenon of baking clubs, where he is surprised by the skills of some of the amateur bakers. **Debashine Thangevelo** got the lowdown on what viewers can expect...

HIS PIERCED left ear, bejewelled with a diamond stud, is as much an Eric Lanlard signature as his designer cakes and pastries.

The French pâtissier and celebrity TV chef first romanced viewers with two series of *Glamour Puds* – that's not forgetting his handful of inspired baking books – and he is super excited about his new BBC Lifestyle venture, *Baking Mad with Eric Lanlard*.

Chatting to me from London, on an extraordinarily sunny day, Lanlard enlightens me on the format of his latest show.

"There has been a baking revolution in the UK. A lot of people are blaming – not in a bad way – the economy. People are entertaining more and spending more time in the kitchen. In the last couple of years, everyone has gone baking mad. The sales of baking products and sugar have soared. There has never been as much kitchen equipment sold.

"One of the things we came across was people who had baking clubs. I was surprised and investigated more," he says.

Operating on a similar premise to book clubs, these gatherings of passionate bakers see them share ideas and experiences.

"Anybody from any age or background can get together and make cakes. So we created a show and invited them to come to my house and show me one of their favourite cakes. And I give them a nice little judgement. It is done in a nice way – I'm not Gordon Ramsay. I'm not going to make them cry or destroy their homes. I simply give them constructive tips," offers Lanlard.

In the 10-episode series, the former apprentice of Le Grand Patisserie,

Brittany, has had the great fortune to meet some truly talented people. He says he has some great memories.

"One was with the kickboxers – the most unexpected baking club we could find. There are these three big guys who spend most of their time fighting in the ring or training and then you find them making cookies and little chocolate cakes. It was funny how seriously they take it.

"They were very competitive. But their baking didn't go that well; their presentation was terrible – they came with a plastic box with cookies. However, they scored the highest as they used great ingredients and didn't put in too much sugar. I was blown away by the quality of their cookies. The simple recipes are the best," comments Lanlard.

"We had a family that did a lovely christening cake. Their mother never bought them cakes as kids. Now they all still bake together at home and they continue that tradition. They did a great three-tier christening cake."

Besides allowing the baking club folk room to flourish with their delectable signature offerings, the celebrity chef also offered spoonfuls of advice.

"For the kickboxers, I did some morning muffins packed with good ingredients and seeds. We also had three neighbours who love baking. One had a son who couldn't have any wheat or dairy products. And he is 12 and has never had a cake in his life as a result. I created a recipe for her to bake him his first cake."

Aside from empowering viewers with baking tips, Lanlard also tries to cajole them into relinquishing their fear of baking or making cakes.

"I want people to watch the show



GIVE THEM CAKE: French pâtissier Eric Lanlard has stumbled on a new trend – baking clubs – and allows these passionate bakers to make themselves at home in his kitchen while he offers them expert advice in BBC Lifestyle's *Baking Mad with Eric Lanlard*. PICTURE: ©BBC

and learn something from it. When you watch a cooking show and it finishes, you want to make it (the dish). We always try to keep things very simple. I try not to use fancy ingredients and have viewers

running around the city trying to find them," Lanlard says.

With his café, Cake Boy, doing exceptionally well, as are his baking classes, Lanlard is basking in the sweet success of his labour of

love – baking.

● *Baking Mad with Eric Lanlard* airs on BBC Lifestyle (DStv channel 180) on Monday at 8.30pm.