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Ready for TAKE-OFF

Shannon Denny chats to Eric Lanlard, Wandsworth's favourite patisserie chef, about chocolate, cakes, space and the sweet things in between



A moelleux au chocolat, Eric Lanlard style

Cake Boy – Eric Lanlard's bakery emporium – has been at home in Battersea Reach for six years now. But like the complex itself (which will see seven more towers added in coming months) Eric shows no signs of slowing down. It's onwards and upwards all the way in these parts. When I visit one sunny, bustling day, his patrons are happily scoffing sugary confections. But there's hardly time for the pâtissier himself to slow down for such pursuits as snacking on sweets.

First, there's a new book out in May, *Chocolat*. The follow-up to Eric's bestselling titles (*Cox Cookies & Cake*, *Master Cakes*, *Home Bake* and *Tart It Up!*), this showcases more than 100 of his favourite recipes using the baking ingredient he loves most – chocolate. There are classics such as Devilish Chocolate Brownies as well as stunners such as the Chocolate Martini.

The emphasis here is on making masterpieces achievable for amateurs.

The problem is, there are a lot of books on chocolate and they're quite scary, almost designed for professionals – pages and pages of technique on tempering chocolate and you need a marble table,' says Eric. 'I wanted to do a book that was accessible and put all that fear away.'

When I ask Eric to reveal the recipe from the book that he thinks is most likely to bring the house down, there's no hesitation. 'Salted Butter Caramel Cake – it's like a cheesecake base but with salted butter caramel.' All the sumptuous photography was shot in his Wandsworth home, and this was the creation that stole the production team's hearts.

So that covers Eric's work in south London – but what about further afield? Thanks to the worldwide success of television's *Baking Mad with Eric Lanlard*, this year's travel itinerary is positively packed. There are plans for a new TV project, but until the deal is inked Eric is keeping these close to his chest.

As a featured guest of P&O, he'll tour both the Mediterranean and the Caribbean.

'They're wine and food cruises, so all the chefs take turns – Marco Pierre White, myself, Atul Kochhar and Olly Smith, the wine expert. We're all doing activities, masterclasses, Q&As, book signings and excursions to local markets to buy exotic foods. It's all very exciting,' says Eric.

He has no qualms about working at onboard a ship either; this is one pâtissier whose equipment includes one sturdy pair of sea legs. 'I did my national service in the Navy as a pastry chef. Only the French Navy would have a captain who had to have his personal pastry chef!' he laughs.

Back on dry land, he's got a week of activities in Cape Town, where the TV programme is hugely popular. Baking shows from Manchester to Bologna are on the agenda too. Then over on the other side of the ocean, he'll spend time

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in Disneyworld for a food festival drawing chefs from around the globe. 'I'm looking forward to getting a picture of me cooking with Mickey,' he jokes.

If Eric's 2013 travel plans have left you green with envy, then you may want to avert your eyes when it comes to what he has in store for 2014, when he'll board Virgin Galactic and become one of the planet's first-ever space tourists. 'I think it's any boy's dream to be able to go to space. Hopefully, if I come back, I will be an astronaut. That could be on my business card – 'Master Pâtissier/ Astronaut',' he grins.

See what I mean about onwards and upwards? ●

✦ *Chocolat* by Eric Lanlard is published by Mitchell Beazley, £18.99

