

delicious. TEST REPORT

THE COOKERY SCHOOL



WHERE **Cake Boy, Battersea, London** (cake-boy.com/school)
THE COURSE **Afternoon Tea, £250 for a full-day course (includes lunch with wine and bakes to take home)**

TESTED BY **Phoebe Stone**



FEEL THE SQUEEZE
Eric shows how to pipe like a French master

WHAT IT'S LIKE Eric Lanlard's Cake Boy, a patisserie and cookery school, is a day-glo paradise at the foot of newly built blocks of flats south of the River Thames in Battersea. On arrival I was greeted by a smiling staff member who invited me and my fellow wannabe pâtissiers to tuck into a hot drink and a warm pastry. The day was young but it was already showing promise.

In the café lounge, fuchsia pink and mandarin orange leather chairs are offset by black coffee tables and a sparkling light installation. Cake Boy is a place of high-octane glamour, and the day's baking proved to be no exception. As we sipped our coffees, accomplished French baker Eric explained the day's programme and dispelled any fears ("Stop looking so nervous, you're not on Bake Off!"). Then we were led over to the kitchen equipped with a rainbow array of KitchenAid stand mixers and Joseph Joseph kit.

WHAT I LEARNED With an impressive menu of treats to prepare, including pistachio and rose financiers, cheesecake brownies and a whole celebration cake, the morning was busily spent baking the foundations of the sweet feast. Eric is a true cakemaster: he explained his foolproof methods for each recipe in detail, all with a smile on his face and cheeky glint in his eye. "I've had a lot

of bad scones in my life – some you could probably kill someone with," he grinned as he showed us how to make light ones, combining the wet with the dry ingredients using the flat of the hand in a turning motion. "Pretend you're the Queen on the balcony at the palace, waving at the crowds," he instructed.

For the cake sponges, Eric stressed the importance of making sure ingredients are at room temperature before you begin, and taking your time to cream the butter and sugar together thoroughly. The financiers (small, ingot-shaped cakes) were made with browned butter for a deep nutty taste.

I've tried making macarons twice at home with limited success and was agog at the brisk way Eric folded in his egg white mixture. But I soon learned I may have been too delicate in the past – following Eric's technique resulted in my first flawless macarons, flavoured with lemon and black pepper.

Expect to learn some etiquette tips for your afternoon tea along the way too. Scones should never be cut with a knife but twisted to separate, says Eric. And to get them to rise straight and tall, don't twist the cutter when you stamp them out (Debbie Major agrees in her ultimate cheese scone recipe – see p44).

After a relaxed lunch (we had a gorgeous

tagine made by Eric, followed by a silky chocolate dessert), it was time to get creative, filling, assembling and sprinkling decorations. The highlight for me was learning how to pipe roses for our ombre cakes. Some deftness of hand is required (and much hilarity ensued as the group compared our rosettes), but once Eric had helped me correct my technique, I found the process satisfying and therapeutic.

Before everything was neatly boxed up for us take home, it was astonishing to review the volume and standard of bakes we'd accomplished in just one day. If you do the course, I recommend you have a full house of hungry mouths waiting for you when you get home.

THE VERDICT My only criticism was that once we poured out our cake batters, they were whisked away and returned perfectly baked by Eric's team of pâtissiers, which meant we didn't see for ourselves when they were done. But I trust Eric's recipes to work at home, and it was a small price to pay for having more time to bake and decorate. As a keen baker, I took away numerous tips for finessing classic recipes and elevating them to something special, which I think makes the course worth the price tag. What's more, I laughed more than I had in a long time.

RECIPE: ERIC LANLARD. FOOD PHOTOGRAPH: TOBY SCOTT. FOOD STYLING: ELLA TARN. STYLING: TONY HUTCHINSON

THE MAKE-AT-HOME RECIPE Cream cheese brownies

MAKES 16. HANDS-ON TIME 25 MIN, OVEN TIME 30 MIN

- FOOD TEAM'S TIP** The espresso in the brownie mix doesn't give a coffee taste but it brings out the chocolate flavour.
- MAKE AHEAD** The cream cheese brownies will keep for up to 48 hours in an airtight container.

- 150g unsalted butter
- 200g dark chocolate, broken into pieces
- 250g caster sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 medium free-range eggs
- 100ml freshly made strong espresso
- 100g plain flour

FOR THE MARBLING

- 150g full-fat cream cheese (we used Philadelphia)
- 60g caster sugar
- 1 medium free-range egg, beaten
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

YOU'LL ALSO NEED...

- 20cm square cake tin, greased and lined with non-stick baking paper

1 Heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4. Melt the butter and the chocolate in a large heatproof bowl set over a pan of barely simmering water, stirring occasionally (don't let the bowl touch the water). Remove the bowl from the heat and cool slightly.

2 Stir the sugar, vanilla and a pinch of salt into the chocolate mix, then beat in the eggs using a wooden spoon or electric hand mixer until smooth. Stir in the coffee, sift over the flour, then beat until just combined and glossy.

3 For the marbling, beat the cream cheese in a mixing bowl until smooth, then mix in the sugar, egg and vanilla. Spoon the coffee chocolate mix into the tin, then pour over the marbling mix and use a knife to cut through both mixes for a marbled effect.

4 Bake for 30 minutes, but keep an eye on the brownies as you may need to cover the tin with foil for the last 10 minutes of cooking if they start to brown too much. Cool in the tin, then cut into 16 squares.

PER BROWNIE 261kcal, 11.6g fat (6.9g saturated), 4.4g protein, 34.3g carbs (19.9g sugars), 0.2g salt, 0.8g fibre →



THE TAKE-HOME TIPS Eric Lanlard's expert baking advice



it's important to get your bake into the oven swiftly. Don't prepare

- When you're using baking powder as a raising agent, the second it gets wet, the party starts and the rising begins, so

numerous tins of batter if you can't bake them simultaneously.

- Chocolate with a higher cocoa percentage burns more easily. Save anything over 70 per cent for eating; bake with 60 per cent bittersweet confectioner's chocolate instead.
- In Eric's words, there is "nothing worse than an over-baked brownie". Err on the side of under-baking to ensure you get that fudgy texture.

THE GADGET



KitchenAid Power Plus Blender (5KSB8270) £649; available from Lakeland, John Lewis
TESTED BY **Aggie MacKenzie**

WHY BOTHER? If you're a devotee of the KitchenAid range and after a state-of-the-art blender that'll whizz the blazes out of anything you show it – and can even make a hot soup – this could be for you. Plus, if you want to increase the amount of fruit and veg you eat via smoothies and soups, this might be an easy way to do it.

WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT THIS ONE? It's handsome, for sure, but it's not all about looks. The powerful motor pulverises to perfection. I fed it a pineapple – notoriously fibrous – and the result was utterly smooth. I found it helps if you add a few ice cubes and a splash of apple juice, say, to get things going. If you want a more textured finish – a salsa, for instance – that's possible too. With soups, you can go from raw ingredients to a piping hot bowlful, but for a bit of browning and a deeper flavour it's better to sauté first.

ANY DRAWBACKS? The motor at full pelt is very noisy, but thankfully it doesn't need to go at max for long. It's a big beast – and expensive.

THE VERDICT I'm probably too mean to shell out the cash, but I'd be extremely happy to receive one as a special-occasion present.



A KITCHEN WHIZZER Power to blend the rough with the smooth

THE TASTE TEST ENGLISH BREAKFAST TEA BAGS

HOW WE TEST Our panel are taste experts. We conduct our tests without packaging, so tasters don't know who produced each product. And to prevent one tester influencing another, the panel aren't allowed to confer, so the results are unbiased.
WHAT WE LOOKED FOR The robust flavour of English breakfast tea has been enjoyed since the 1800s. Traditionally a blend of teas from Assam, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Kenya, the brew should be full-bodied and refreshing, with a light floral note.



SUPERMARKET WINNER
Marks & Spencer English breakfast tea bags, £1.75 for 50
The most full-bodied, with a rich, malty flavour and invigorating quality.



JOINT SUPERMARKET RUNNER-UP
Asda English breakfast classic black tea bags, £1 for 50
Powerful and flavoursome tea that tasted bright and refreshing.



JOINT SUPERMARKET RUNNER-UP
Co-op Fairtrade English breakfast tea bags, £1.69 for 50
A strong, tannic brew with a vibrant colour and prominent fruitiness.



BRANDED WINNER
Pure Leaf English breakfast tea bags, £3.99 for 16, Ocado
Evidently of high quality, with vivid flavours of malt, spice and citrus.



BRANDED RUNNER-UP
Newby English breakfast 15 silken pyramids, £5.95 for 15, Waitrose
These bags were praised for their fresh aroma and well balanced tannic flavour.



BRANDED RUNNER-UP
Ahmad Tea royal breakfast loose leaf pyramids, £3.49 for 15, Ocado
This married a light and floral flavour with a refreshing astringency.

TASTE TEST WORDS: PHOEBE STONE

THE COOKBOOK



River Cafe 30 by Ruth Rogers, Rose Gray, Sian Wyn Owen and Joseph Trivelli (€28; Ebury Press)

TESTED BY **Susan Low**

The River Cafe opened its doors in 1987 and this book commemorates three decades at the vanguard of London's restaurant scene. It's as much a tribute to the late co-founder Rose Gray (who died in 2010) as it is to the riverside restaurant that was at the forefront of London's restaurant revolution back in the early Nineties – and it's still deemed to be at the top of its game. The current cheffy obsession with seasonality and insistence on the best ingredients can in part be traced back to the kitchen of Rose Gray and her business partner Ruth Rogers, where the careers of Jamie Oliver, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Sam and Sam Clark of Moro fame were launched.

Ninety of the recipes are from the original, blue-bound *River Cafe Cook Book*, published in 1995, along with 30 new recipes. Chapters are set out as an Italian menu would be: antipasti, primi, secondi, contorni (side dishes), dolci. From the primi I tried out risotto with porcini and girolles; and from the dolci, River Cafe's (in)famous signature dish, chocolate nemesis cake.

QUALITY OF THE RECIPES When Rose and Ruth named the chocolate nemesis cake, little did they know that the insanely rich concoction would indeed be the baking downfall of many an experienced cook. Soon after the 'blue book' was published, a spate of newspaper articles decried the recipe as unworkable. Julian Barnes, writing in *The Guardian*, described his own failed attempt as "a kind of cowpat".

I still have my original blue book but, not surprisingly, had never been tempted to try the nemesis cake. Now was the time. I compared the two recipes and, although the list of ingredients was identical, there were key differences in the method. The original nemesis called for the cake to be cooked at 160°C for 30 minutes. The re-worked recipe specifies 130°C and a cooking time of 1¼ hours. The cake tin is a different size too: the original called for a 20cm tin; the new version for a 30cm tin

PHOTOGRAPHS: MATTHEW DONALDSON, SUSAN LOW

River Cafe



that's 7.5cm deep. The recipe gave pause for thought: was I being foolish to dish out substantial dosh on top quality chocolate, 10 eggs and a pound of butter? Would the cake be my nemesis? When I got stuck in, I found there was a potential stumbling block with the method. You need to whisk the eggs with a third of the sugar until the volume quadruples – it takes time, and if you're using an ordinary home kitchen-size mixing bowl, you're going to come a cropper; you need a mega-bowl. And for the record, you really do need that 30cm cake tin. The batter just wouldn't fit into anything smaller.

As it baked, my workmates took bets on whether the cake would leak, split, burn or be undercooked. But – behold... the pic above is the cake I cooked. It was rich but light with a crisp crust of the sort you find on brownies. It had the unmistakable sweet taste of success.

The risotto recipe didn't require such fortitude – but I did choke at spending a king's ransom on a kilo of wild mushrooms. I knew better than to buy chicken stock (Rose wouldn't have approved) so I made my own, following the book's recipe. The result? I'd be lying if I said I'd ever eaten a better risotto. It was rich (with 150ml extra-virgin olive oil, 200g parmesan and 100g butter for six starter-size portions,

in the know.



FOOD OF THE GODS
Wild mushroom risotto; chocolate nemesis cake



this wasn't going to be health food) and intensely umami flavoured.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND DESIGN Food porn it's not. The recipe photography is of the 'cook it, plonk it down and snap it quick' school, with no concessions to soft lighting or pretty props. The design incorporates artwork from Damien Hirst, Peter Doig and others, who were asked to draw or paint on a menu for the book. Elsewhere, black and white photos, line drawings and architectural sketches bring it to life.

WHO'S THE BOOK SUITABLE FOR? It would appeal to River Cafe fans who want a memento (although remember, if you already have the original blue book, you'd only get 30 new recipes), as well as lovers of stylish Italian cooking.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆