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Spring
INTO BAKING



**Spotlight On
Jessica Pedemont**

**International
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Food DECONSTRUCTION

BY JAMES DILLON

Breaking the barrier between sweet and savoury is Chocolate Artisan's Jessica Pedemont. *Australian Baking Business* talked to the business owner, teacher, chef, pastry chef, chocolatier and industry ambassador about striking out on her own.



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any bakers perceive a divide between the worlds of restaurants and bakeries, where the fiery temperament of the kitchen opposes

the measured nature of long fermentation. Jessica Pedemont has enjoyed the best of both worlds, having started work in a kitchen at the age of 15 before making her way through the likes of Rockpool, bel mondo and Victoire prior to working at Planet Cake. Now striking out independently with her own business, Chocolate Artisan, as well as working as a highly sought-after teacher, the 30-year-old has found the freedom she needs to explore new ways of making food.

"I'm a qualified chef first, then pastry chef, then chocolate maker in that order. I always enjoyed my savoury and did very well out of it," Ms Pedemont told *Australian Baking Business*.

"As much as I love to do everything, it's very difficult."

Ms Pedemont believes in making product that is creative edible art. With customers now demanding to be excited by their food, and with the belief that people eat with their eyes, Ms Pedemont uses colour and passion to sensually bring her products to life.

"Passion is very important. When you're in a really good place like that you can be your best and hopefully share that with others," she says.

Making food as an act of giving to others is particularly important to Ms Pedemont. She gifts many of her cakes to various charities and interest groups, as well supporting the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation.

"When you make food, you make it from yourself, from your family and that's just the way food is for me. That's the way I've been brought up with food," she says.

Ms Pedemont's fierce determination first started at TAFE NSW, where she was named Student of the Year in 2000. In 2001 she won the prestigious Oliver C. Shaul Scholarship, allowing her to travel to Chicago where she worked in the five-star kitchen of Charlie Trotter's and studied at the world-renowned French Pastry School. In 2003 she assisted Australia in the Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie held in France every two years. It was there that she came back with a passion for chocolate, going on to become a qualified chocolatier.

Chocolate is now the centre of her attention and finding the right type to use is an important decision. She believes that many in the industry buy chocolate for the wrong reasons.

"People will make the common mistake of buying for price or buying for quality, or buying for what they know," she explains. "Some people will just be in the right place at the right time and buy off the right people without even knowing it. Some people are very price driven. People are obviously brand driven, so they will buy the brand even though it's not necessarily made by [the company] they think it is."

Swiss chocolate maker Felchlin began following Ms Pedemont's movements within the industry before approaching her in late 2009 to become one of their ambassadors. Even though she is now aligned with the company, she is still adamant that she uses a range of

chocolates for her business and enjoys playing with chocolate from different origins.

"It's very interesting. People debate who they use, what they use and that sort of thing. I definitely use Felchlin's chocolate heavily and I used their chocolate prior to [being an ambassador] as well," she says.

Australians still have a long way to go with their chocolate consumption, eating 5kg on average per person each year compared to 11kg by the Swiss, the highest consumers of chocolate in the world. The Swiss are highly regarded with their chocolate work, producing chocolate that is usually fluid and creamy but still very balanced.

Ms Pedemont finds Belgium chocolate on the sweeter side, while German products predominantly have bitter cocoa and French chocolate is very fruity with extreme notes in their characteristic profile flavours.

"They all have their own signature trends when it comes to chocolate and chocolate characteristics. Overall they are all good brands," she says.

The chef, pastry chef and chocolatier is revelling in the upswell of interest in high-quality food gripping the nation. She can see plenty of potential for new and innovative products, but says the way in which they are presented and introduced to the market is important.

"What I find with chocolate and whatever fad, whether its macarons or cupcakes, I think they are here to stay. I just think the actual knowledge of it has just spread and people can make their own decisions about it," she says.

"Macarons as so trendy, I get all kinds of people ask to teach them how to make them. I taught macarons for a while now and every recipe, from Swiss to Italian to Spanish, has its own little version. You can airbrush them and apply different lustre dust."

For Ms Pedemont, the allure of food is that it is a never-ending craft she can constantly play with.

"You can re-create it, you can deconstruct it and you can put it back together again," she says.

With so many varied interests, Ms Pedemont attempts to find the right balance of art, charity, teaching and cultural discovery. And just like her food, balancing the different elements keeps life exciting.

"It's like your life is a plate or a palate. Do you want to have too many carbs or too much protein? Are you teaching too much or are you making couture cakes too much?" she asks. ■



Jessica Pedemont

