

DUFF GOLDMAN and
WILLIE GOLDMAN



**FACE OF
CAKES**
THE BOOK

WILLIAM MORROW
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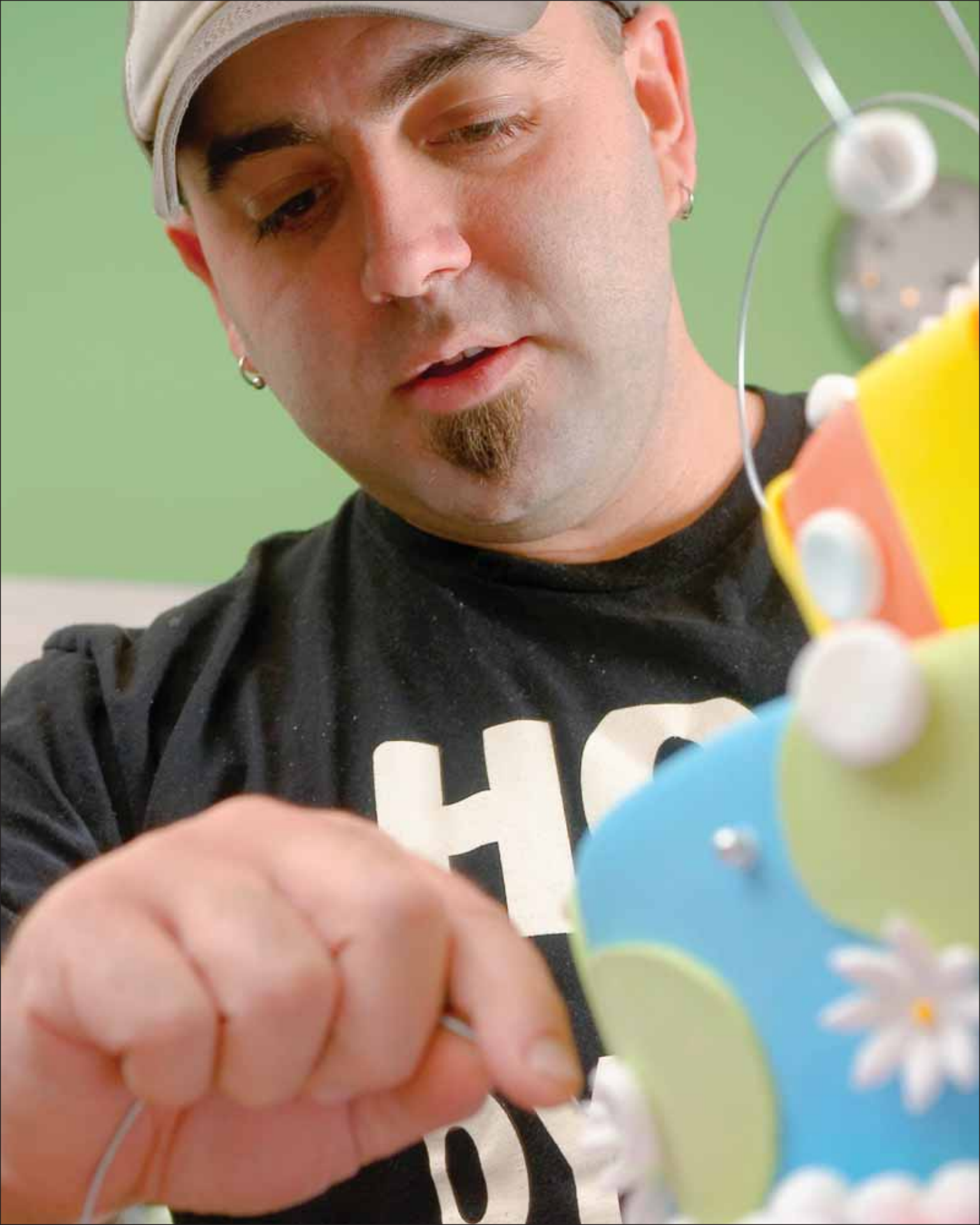
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Credits and Acknowledgments

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The Staff of **CHARM CITY CAKES**





chapter 1

ME? A CAKE DECORATOR?

One look at me and it's easy to see why no one would mistake me for a cake decorator. Mechanic, maybe. Plumber, more often than not. Graffiti artist, possibly. A bass player in a rock band—hope so. But how about someone whose job includes everything from painting several different shades of crimson on edible decorative flowers to maintaining the plumbing of a 5200-square-foot bakery? A sales rep championing a product designed to be eaten? A deliveryman who drives from one coast to the other with an edible castle the size of Buckingham Palace in the back of his van? How about a mad scientist who knows how to adjust the ingredients just so on a cake in the sweltering miasma of Baltimore heat in August, or a holiday confection in the dry and cold of a Mid-Atlantic winter? (I most definitely qualify as a weatherman, being intimately familiar with the humidity at any time of year and how it affects baked goods.)

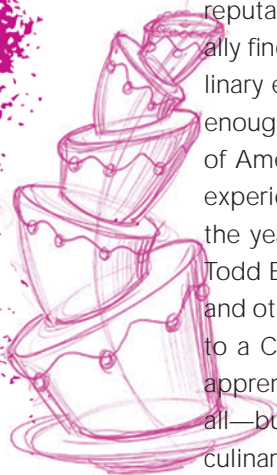
That's okay, looks can be deceiving, and I've long grown to accept that I don't fit the mold. Screw molds. To hell with boundaries. Blast the limits. Forget established convention. And laws—well, okay, not all laws (we actually have a few in the bakery that are pretty useful at times).

For the most part, the human mind has this thing—this need—to put things in drawers and jars and plastic containers and give them labels. If you've seen *Ace of Cakes*, you know I'm not about the conventional rules, but I'm also not about





Nana



breaking them just for the sake of it—and certainly not for an “image.” I may have a reputation as a rule-breaker, but you’ll actually find no bigger proponent of a proper culinary education, like the one I was fortunate enough to receive from the Culinary Institute of America, and of course all the on-the-job experience and advice I’ve picked up over the years from such mentors as Cindy Wolf, Todd English, Collette Peters, Thomas Keller, and others. This is not to say you need access to a Culinary Institute-level education, or to apprentice under world-class chefs—not at all—but it *is* important to understand certain culinary fundamentals and the rules of food before you can set about breaking them and experimenting on your own.

So, how exactly did I get here? I think serendipity did the job in the end, but the beginning of my culinary career simply involved my working my ass off in a variety of jobs (one of my very first jobs was at the McDonald’s in Hyannis, Massachusetts) until I started doing something that just worked for me. Before the bakery, I’d never had a job for more than a year or two, but now I’m closing in on my first decade (yikes, has it been that long?!) as owner of Charm City Cakes, and it doesn’t

look like I’ll be switching careers anytime soon. Countless times I’ve been asked, “How did you know this is what you wanted to do?” I consistently give the only answer I know: “It just feels *right*...”

...And it still feels right. Even through the soul-crushing stress of a cake falling apart, or the emergencies that arise when the pipes burst, the walk-in goes kaput, the roof leaks, or the van gets a flat, it still feels right. Even through managing a team of highly creative, smart individuals who can be just as tempestuous as I am, to taking care of the dumpster bills and vehicle maintenance, it still feels right. My mom always lectured my brother and me to trust our instincts—to listen to those “voices,” no matter how out there they might seem. I never really took that to heart until later in my life, but it’s advice I rely on every day.

BEFORE THERE WAS ME

So, way before you and I were born, my great-grandmother, Esther “Mamo” Steinberg, left the Ukraine at sixteen, passed through Ellis Island, and kept on passing half way across the United States until she settled herself in Wichita, Kansas. Let me type that again in case you missed it: Wichita, Kansas. That’s right, a Russian Jew smack-dab in America’s heartland. They grow wheat there. Lots of it. Flour comes from wheat. I think you know where I’m going with this...

Mamo (my mom named her that when she was little) was an amazing woman—way ahead of her time—a freethinker, and one of the most loving women on the planet. While I have only brief memory flashes of her, there’s one thing I can recall very clearly: Mamo was a creator—everything from food to all kinds of stitchery and knitting (my brother and I still

have these amazing wool blankets she made for us before we were born). She was even a bit of an entrepreneur, buying and selling little properties all over town. She had her own millinery in downtown Wichita called the Hollywood Hat Shop (she thought the name sounded glamorous).

But it was in the kitchen where



her cooking and baking skills merged with artistry to create dishes that are, quite honestly, legendary. One of the running jokes in my mom’s family is that we may not have a lot of money, but one day we’ll publish a book filled with Mamo’s recipes and become millionaires. Family legend held that Mamo was known to keep her most special recipes in a safety deposit box along with her other cherished valuables. She also had a fairly serious on-going competition with her cousin Sissy. Their culinary rivalry was as fierce as it was epic, and as a result we ate very well in our family.

One of her particular cooking habits was to put a bit of sugar in just about everything she made; it was just one of her secret ingre-

dients. Among her vast collection of savory dishes, a select few will stay with me forever.

Let’s forget cakes for a second—I need to tell you about Mamo’s strudel. I kid you not, this woman’s strudel tasted like God had made it. The surprising thing about the strudel was the genius in the way she made the apple filling. Unlike most strudel, in which

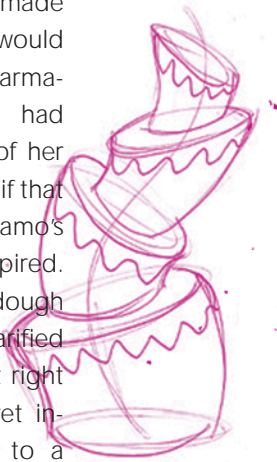
the apples are uncooked, the day before she made her strudel Mamo would make an apple marmalade to which she had added another one of her secret ingredients. As if that weren’t enough, Mamo’s phyllo dough was inspired. She would make the dough from scratch, using clarified butter, seasoning it just right (using yet another secret ingredient), and bake it to a flawless buttery brown. Even the occasional misstep resulted in something equally delicious; when she’d have a bit of dough

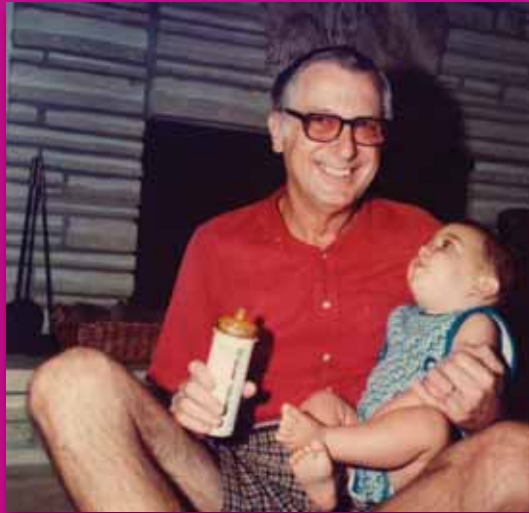
and filling left over, she would use them to make little individual strudels. She called them “bestards” in her Russian accent. My brother and I devoured them.

To a little kid of three or four, it was just this side of heaven. It was rich, it was sweet, it was messy and buttery and crunchy. All that was bliss to my little palate, which salivated at even the mention of things like mac and cheese, Dairy Queen, and gummy bears (still love the gummies, by the way).

THE NANA

Mamo’s daughter, my grandmother Elinor Helitzer, inherited her mother’s eye for style.





Baby Me Nana devoted herself to refining her study of many different art media, and while she was mostly known for her enameling and silversmithing, she also gained a reputation as a damned good lithographer and, later in life, a photographer. She even got my dentist grandfather into the act by having him make her charms out of dental gold for her bracelet. I was especially fond of the one of the little toilet with the lid on a hinge. If you happen to come across a book on fine art enameling and silversmithing in the 1950s and 60s, you might even find her work in there. She was instrumental in opening my eyes to the world of art and nature, introducing me as a kid to a lot of the art and artists whose work I respect today.

Nana was known mostly for her impressionistic images taken in the desert Southwest. She loved architecture and would examine it with her pictures. Light, shadow, and shapes endlessly fascinated her. She found them everywhere, from buildings and alleyways to mountains and boulders—there was always something that caught her eye. Other than a posed snapshot of her parents back in the 1940s, to my knowledge, she never took a photo that contained a human being.

One year when I was twelve or thirteen, Nana took me on a road trip from Kansas all the way to New Mexico (*long* before there was a Starbucks in the Santa Fe Square). We canvassed the region, driving out into the desert, taking pictures, checking stuff out, and eating some of the best cheese enchiladas I've ever had. One day we were driving by this pueblo, and as Nana had all her photo gear in the back seat and packed up tight in the trunk, she stopped the car, reached over, and grabbed my crappy little plastic 35 mm throwaway camera. She rolled down the window, leaned out, and took a picture. I got back home and my mom had the film developed. When we got the pictures back we sat down took look at them, and suddenly my mom gasped, holding up a picture and yelling, "Duffy! This is amazing! What made you take this picture?" Of course it was Nana's picture. The colors danced, the light hit that pueblo, the shadows made by the exposed logs were long and regular and at the right angle to offset the rest of boxy building, and the background was of mountains and sky. The picture was so alive that you could almost hear and smell every detail. I often wonder what that picture would have been like had she used her own fancy camera with all the settings. I can't imagine it could have been any better.

Nana had an eye, no doubt. She bought a Lichtenstein original long before he had become popular. She had an autographed Annie Leibowitz poster of Keith Haring, she owned Georgia O'Keeffe prints, and everywhere she lived she made into a piece of art. If she couldn't have the art, she'd buy the books on the art she loved. She was a natural master of Feng Shui, and I bet she never heard the phrase. She just had the eye of an artist.

THE ARTIST AND THE BUSINESSMAN: MOM and DAD

In the late 1940s, Nana gave birth to my mom, who is just the cutest little thing to ever come out of Wichita, Kansas. And surprise surprise—behind that sweet little face lurked artistic brilliance. Speaking of, there's two photos of the two of us at the same age where some people think we look alike, but I'll let you be the judge of that:

I look at what I do, and if I ever need to put myself in my place, I look at my mom's art, and I am humble. From the landscaping to the paint color choices, she turns her dwellings into a place of refuge from a world that loves concrete. One day she decided to paint a room in the house plaid, and it was amazing.

My mom used to own a pottery studio, but now her art is glass: she makes windows to make Tiffany proud. She creates mosaics, many without grout—as if she "paints" with little tiny pieces of glass. Sometimes she makes things one wouldn't expect *could* or *should* be made out of glass—much like we at Charm City Cakes make things that one might not expect *could* or *should* be made out of cake.



Once she made a table-size greenhouse in miniature, complete with hinged copper doors (with stained glass windows) and working skylights. She broke up parquet flooring and made a wooden-slatted floor with tiny pebbles in between the slats. The little plants inside were real and needed careful tending.

Mom now lives in Palm Springs with my stepdad, Ronnie. On a recent visit to their house, I was delighted, but not surprised, to find a gazillion butterflies decoupage Jason Rogers,

(left) Mom and I at the same age

(right) Me and Mom



for whom perfection in cooking seemed to be second nature. He was my go-to guy when I was freaking out about broken-down walk-in freezer holding my 1200 sorbet napoleons. Jason, along with Clay and Steve from Olives in D.C., was probably the best line cook I've ever seen. He was a restaurant athlete who was always laughing, no matter how far in the weeds he was.

One day I got a call from Mary Alice back in Maryland, and she asked if I would make a wedding cake for her older brother, who happened to be living in Denver at the time. Now, not only was Neil Fallon Mary Alice's brother, but he happens to be the lead singer of my favorite band of all time, Clutch. So I instantly agreed and made his wedding cake. It was a glorious six-tier cake with thousands of hand-painted marzipan flowers all over it. I brought the cake to a venue near Red Rocks and set it up. Little did I know that I was about to receive some major impetus in my career. The owner of the wedding venue freaked out when he saw the cake, saying he'd never seen one like it before. He asked me for my card, and I told him I didn't have one—I was a pastry chef at a hotel in Vail. He then says that I should quit my job and open up my own cake shop! Well, I was still getting my sea legs and had no intention of starting my own business, let alone be a cake decorator. But

even then a little light went on in my head. Hmm, I thought, maybe I could open up a cake shop and have enough time to be in band, go on tours, and make a living! Maybe. So I headed back to the hotel and checked out how much money the hotel was getting for the cakes I was making for them—and I thought, Geez! I could live off of a few cakes a year at that rate!

Once again, serendipity stepped in. My parents called from Cape Cod; they had eaten the night before at a restaurant in Boston called Olives. Knowing it had to be *the Olives* owned by the celebrated, award-winning chef Todd English, I told Mom the guy was a legend and that I'd kill to work for him. She said the private dinner was given by our cousin, and that he was friends with Todd, and he arranged to have an audition for me at the Olives in the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas.

This audition consisted pretty much of tossing me into the pastry at the Bellagio and having me bake bread and pastries for Steve Mannino, the executive chef at Olives in Washington, D.C. He must have liked what I made,



With my dad at the Culinary Institute



because I got the job—just a few miles from where I'd grown up and gone to .

I told my chef at the Cascade, and he was really happy for me and told me to go for it—and not to screw up this time (see a recurring theme in the advice?). So I packed up all my stuff again and headed back to the East Coast. Well, I made some amazing friends there, and it was at Todd's that I *really* learned how to cook. A lot. Too much, in fact. I spent about a year there and felt myself getting burned out fast. So this time I stuck to my guns and quit like a real man. I realized I wanted to own my own shop, be



in a band, and get some control over my life. So I moved back to Baltimore, got a job as a personal chef, and made enough money to start a website, get some business cards, and make cakes on the side.

enough time to be in band, go on tours, and make a living! Maybe. So I headed back to the hotel and checked out how much money the hotel was getting for the cakes I was making for them--and I thought, Geez! I could live off of a few cakes a year at that rate!

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why isn't this a cookbook? Where are the recipes?

A: This is a book about us doing things in a way that we have found works. You can just use your favorite cake recipe or even a cake mix and experiment with it. There are plenty of books out there that can tell you how to bake a cake; we're not reinventing the wheel, we're just playing with our food.

Q: How much do your cakes cost?

A: How much you got? You can't put a price on happiness.

Q: What do they taste like?

A: Dirt.

Q: No, seriously—I mean, your cakes look good, but I bet they don't taste good.

A: In all honesty, we get this one a lot, especially on the Internet--where people just love to throw up all kinds of snarky comments. First off, forget the TV show—do you really think Charm City Cakes would be in

the bakery business longer than a week if our cakes didn't actually taste good? By the time you read this, one in every twelve homes in America will have tasted a Charm City Cake--with numbers like those, it's hard to imagine they wouldn't taste good.

Okay, so we're exaggerating on the stats, but truth be told, cake itself is kind of hard to screw up--it's just flour, sugar, butter, and eggs. Of course we do make more than forty-five different flavors, which we're adding to all the time—take a look at the list on page 000. Our cakes have a layer of buttercream, on top of which is placed a decorative layer of fondant--which can be eaten or not. While it's hard to convey flavor without handing you a piece of cake, let's take our Bananas Foster cake as an example. Imagine a smoother, silkier version of Nutella, with bits of fresh sautéed bananas mixed in--that's what a Charm City Cakes cake tastes like. One bite and you'll see the face of God.

Q: What is the deal with fondant?

A: While fondant is edible, the point isn't to put it in your mouth. Our cakes are designed so that the fondant seals in the freshness and preserves the cake and icing underneath. Think of fondant as a thick, dense coating that's meant to be peeled like a banana; you want what's underneath. That's not to say you can't eat it--it's just that it's pure sugar.

Q: Why are your cakes mostly Styrofoam?

A: This is another misconception, thanks to the magic of TV and the Internet. Like most bakeries, we have a display rack that highlights cakes for prospective clients. We also create display cakes when a client says they'd like to be able to show a cake for a longer period of time, something that wouldn't work with edible material that would spoil. On average, Charm City Cakes creates more than



100 cakes a month—all edible—and maybe one or two display cakes for (usually) a corporate client. So, no, even though you may have seen one or two on TV, our cakes are definitely not “mostly Styrofoam.”

Q: What are marshmallow treats used for?

A: The treats are a very stable, sculptable edible material that are great for making parts of cakes that may not be as structurally sound otherwise. They're an easy way to add mass and volume without the support needed for the heavier weight of cake.

Q: How come we never see you guys wash your hands on the show?

A: The sink broke a few years ago and we just haven't had time to fix it.

Q: No, really, how come we never see you guys wash your hands on the show?

A: You're not going to let up, are you? It's a simple matter of editorial direction. The *Ace of Cakes* production team films more than 120 hours of footage for a single 22-minute episode--so the boring stuff, like *us wash-*

ing our hands, is left on the cutting-room floor. But for the record: yes, we wash our hands...

...sometimes even once a week!

Q: Can I work there?

A: No.

Q: Do you have an open internship program?

A: Not really. While we've had a few interns in the past, we currently don't have an open internship program.

Q: I think you suck and I don't like your show.

A: Take it up with the president of show business.

Q: Can I have an autograph?

A: Sure, send us an email.

Q: Is working there really your job?

A: Yes it is.

Q: Do you ship your cakes?

A: We tried. Once. Epic fail. Never again.

Q: Can I come visit the bakery?

A: While we love to have visitors, between decorating the cakes and producing the show, it's a little too crowded inside to





This is a book about us doing things in a way that we have found works. You can just use your favorite cake recipe or even a cake mix and experiment with it. There are plenty of books out there that can tell you how to bake a cake; we're not reinventing the wheel, we're just playing with our food.

If you're looking for cake technique info, check out the books *Cakewalk* by Margaret Braun, *Cakes to Dream On* by Colette Peters, and Larry Powell's *Big Book of Cake Decorating*. The web forums at sugarbuzz.us and cakecentral.com are also wonderful resources. We also suggest taking a Wilton



class at Michael's or Jo-Anne's, which can help get you started on the path to becoming a decorator.

Be creative. Be artistic. Be imaginative. And be yourself.

Q: Are there any schools you recommend?

A: While it would be really hard for us to play favorites, there are several culinary and art schools that can serve as great launching pads for careers in the culinary arts as well as art in general. Some of the schools we've attended include the University of Maryland, Culinary Institute of America, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), the Corcoran College of Art + Design, and many, many, others. The simple truth is that there's no one path—culinary schools and colleges aren't the only way into a career. With no connections in the industry, my brother thought the only way he could get a job in Hollywood was through film school. He got an internship instead, and has been a producer ever since. My advice: work in a kitchen and learn all the proper jobs, all the terminology. Try working under several chefs before attending culinary school. While schools are fantastic, there's no substitute for real-world on-the-job training.

Q: Why is there no actual food at the Food Network? I mean seriously, what's up with that?

A: Excellent question—email kilch@foodnetwork.com.

CHARM CITY CAKES ELEMENTARY

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND



Elena Fox



Katherine Hill



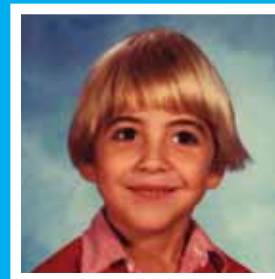
Mary Alice Fallon Yeskey



Adam Goldstein



Sophia Rodriguez



Duff Goldman



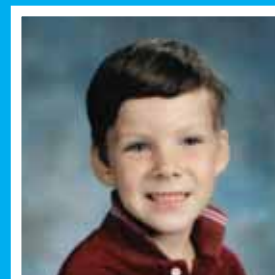
Sherrie Chambers



Jessica Curry



Adrienne Ruhf



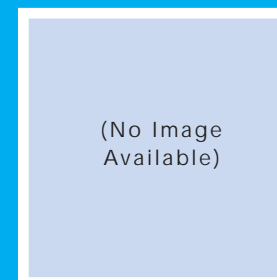
Benjamin Turner



Mary Smith



Erica Harrison



Geof Manthorne



ELENA FOX

Decorator

Hometown: Babylon, New York

Education: BFA in graphic design from SUNY New Paltz, New York

Favorite hobbies: playing music, running, collecting toys, spoiling my cat rotten

Fun fact: I can walk on my hands.

Favorite movie: Carrie, Star Wars: Episodes IV, V, VI, Raising Arizona, most comedies from the 1980s with preposterous plots

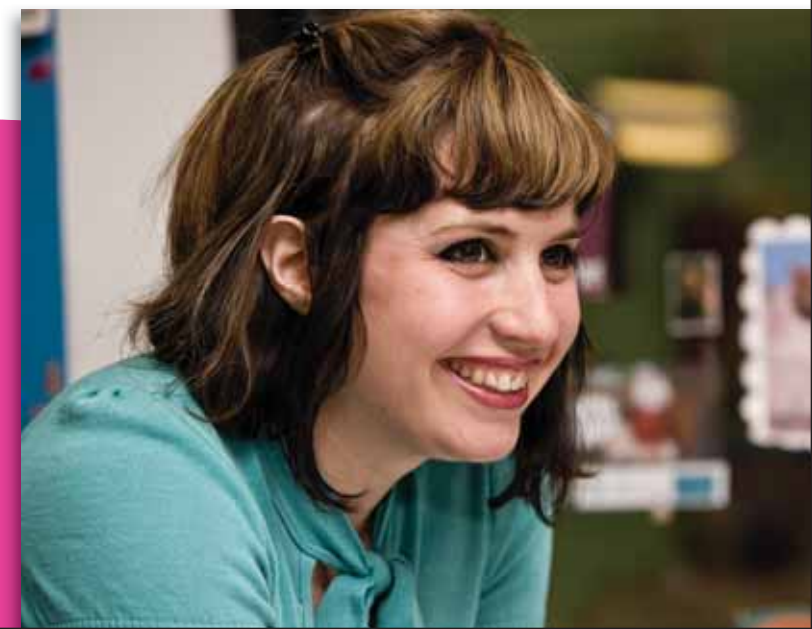
Favorite books: anything by Christopher Moore, most things by Kurt Vonnegut, Maus 1 and Maus 2 by Art Spiegelman, The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

Favorite music: everything from Patsy Cline to Van Halen, but The Beatles, The Kinks, The Pixies, and Pavement are among my top faves

Favorite non-dessert dish to create or eat: anything on a barbecue in the summertime

In her own words:

I'm the youngest of four children and grew up in the seafaring town of Babylon, on the south shore of Long Island, New York. We lived in a small house positioned snugly between two boatyards on a street that ended with a canal. My mother is an elementary school art teacher and my father builds machinery that I've always liked to refer to as his robots. My parents are some of the biggest artistic influences in my life; my mom is also a painter. Realizing that I loved to draw and paint from a very young age, she was





Now of course I have to figure out how I'm going to build it. I decide what are the important aspects, the details that make that building or vehicle unique, as often it's the smallest details that draw people in. One of the many things I learned making architectural models was the importance of detail. No

matter how late or how long we'd been working, we'd always take the time to add the smallest things: miniature people and cars, awnings, streetlights, shrubbery, and flowers. These little touches really make a project come alive, whether it's an architectural model or a cake I often recall those rushed hours when we're finishing a big order, and while the cake itself is done, we're all huddled around it, decorating the base with sidewalks or waves or trees. When you hear things like, "Oh look, there's the fountain that's in the courtyard!," you know you've done your best to make a client happy.

TIP "If you have the time, think through the process of decorating the cake. Your cake will be cleaner and fresher if well planned."

—GEOF



Building models is a time-consuming job that requires accuracy and meticulousness, which naturally can lend itself to some long days. Luckily my model-building background prepared me for life in the bakery, as it's a time-consuming job that requires accuracy and meticulousness.



Once I made the transition from models to cake and learned the new materials, I was able to use those prior skills for the new job of cake decorating. Thinking back, I'm amazed at some of the weeks we survived with such a small crew—there was a time when just four of us completed over fifty cakes in one week—but back then we certainly had many fewer distractions...



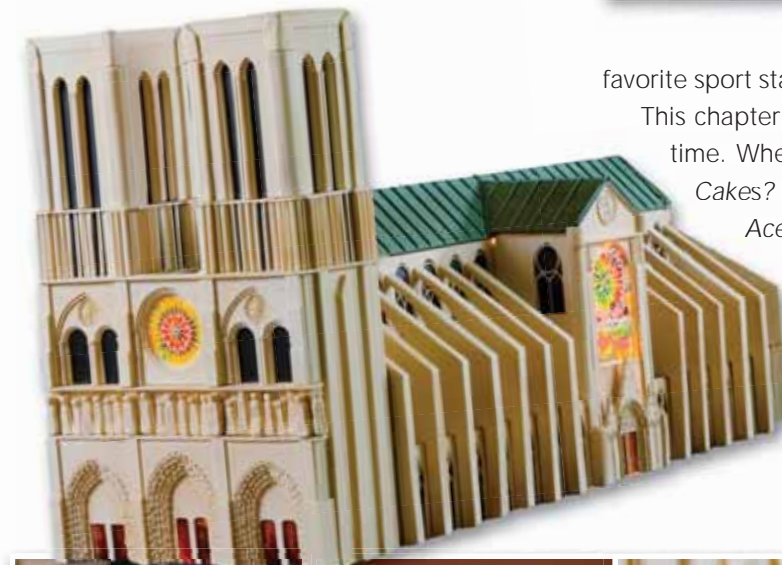
TIP "Look around you for inspiration and tools. Items in your kitchen can be used as molds to create interesting shapes."

—GEOF

The opportunities presented to us have been satisfying and unexpected, and the kinds of affairs and cakes we've worked on have been more and more gratifying. We've been invited to participate in some fantastic events that do not fall in line with a cake decorator's job description. We've voiced characters on *King of the Hill*, visited Jay Leno at *The Tonight Show*, gone place most civilians don't get to go, and met some of our

favorite sport stars, actors, and musicians.

This chapter of my life has to end sometime. When does it end—after *Ace of Cakes*? *Ace of Cakes: The Musical*? *Ace of Cakes: The Animated Series*? *Ace of Cakes on Ice*? The *Ace of Cakes Reunion Tour*? That's where it all ends.



Why Baltimore?

So why Charm City Cakes? Why not New York or Chicago or Philly or D.C.? Because Baltimore rules. Our slogan is "The Greatest City in America," and we're not kidding. Our town is the best. You know it, I know it, and the American people know it.

The thing about Baltimore is that it is unpretentious. It's not all frilly and super-cool and subject to the whims of what is "in." Baltimore likes what it likes, and really doesn't care what other people think. It's a little



eans love variety, and we can certainly provide that. From really pretty, elegant wedding cakes to crazy cakes that defy gravity, insurance regulations, and sometimes the law. Baltimore is not xenophobic. A bakery like mine wouldn't last in Washington, DC, where most people have a very clear idea of what a cake should look like. One trip to Baltimore neighborhoods such as Hamden, Mt. Vernon, Waverly, the Harbor,



rough around the edges, sure, but the heart of Baltimore is strong, alive, and very unique. I like to think of Baltimore as the SoHo of the beats, not the new, super hip SoHo, but the SoHo where anything goes and everything is judged on merit, not by what everyone else thinks. This is a city of individuals, and you can see it in Baltimore's artists, actors, musicians, local heroes, and, yes, bakeries.

I didn't grow up here, but I did go to college here and made some really good friends in that four years. Well, I left, and then I came back. Some of my friends were still here, some had moved away, and some I had yet to meet. But slowly I built my home and my bakery in Baltimore. I think the reason we've done so well here is that Baltimore loves different stuff. Baltimor-

Federal Hill, Canton, Charles Village, Remington, Rolland Park, Guilford, and/or Govanstown and you'll see Baltimore loves the wacky, and Baltimore loves its art.

In one Saturday afternoon in Baltimore, I can...

- ◆ See the U.S.S *Constitution* and the place where "The Star Spangled Banner" was penned
- ◆ See sharks and the rainforest at the Baltimore Aquarium
- ◆ Buy some awesome indie rock at Soundgarden in Fell's Point
- ✓ Eat world-famous crab cakes from Faidley's in Lexington Market
- ◆ See art from all over the world and from many different eras at the Walters Gallery



- ◆ Hear the amazing classical music students practicing at the Peabody Institute
- ◆ Stop for a cocktail at Club Charles, where both Lenny Bruce and Mary Alice met their spouses
- ✓ See the beautiful brownstones of Charles Village
- ◆ Stroll through Johns Hopkins campus
- ◆ Pick up a DVD categorized by director at Video Americaine
- ◆ Stop by the Baltimore Museum of Art and see one of the finest collections on the East Coast
- ◆ Head over to the wonderfully retro Baltimore Zoo and see baby elephants and our thriving community of Panamanian golden frogs
- ◆ Hit up the Frisbee golf course in Druid Hill Park
- ◆ Pay your respects to Edgar Allen Poe at Westminster Hall
- ◆ See a game at the most beautiful stadium in the world, Camden Yards
- ◆ Check out the fierce derby ladies of the Charm City Rollergirls
- ◆ See where we kicked some British ass, again, at Fort McHenry
- ◆ Chow down on some incredible BBQ at Chaps and Andy Nelson's
- ◆ See the Patterson Park Pagoda, designed by Charles LaTrobe
- ◆ Buy some top-quality produce, seafood,

and cheese and say hi to friends at one of Baltimore's outdoor farmer's markets.

- ✓ Catch a Broadway show at the beautifully restored Hippodrome theater
- ◆ See the latest offering out of Cannes at the Charles Theater—and have tapas right next door
- ◆ Catch my band and many other awesome indie acts at the OttoBar, our rock and roll haven
- ◆ See the world's largest trashcan on Russell street.
- ◆ Lose count of Michaels Phelps' Gold Medals
- ◆ Head up to Hamden and get some awesome vintage clothes, vintage food, and the ultra super cool stuff at Atomic Books (where you can buy this book)
- ◆ See a bunch of tattooed urban hipsters doing synchronized swimming at Fluid Movement
- ✓ Marvel at the Kinetic Sculpture Race and see some really awesome contemporary art at the American Visionary Art Museum
- ◆ See the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum on North Ave
- ◆ Stop by the Babe Ruth Museum downtown
- ◆ Send my brother out for mind-blowing sandwiches at Isabella's in Little Italy.
- ◆ Experience the best Indian food on the planet at the Ambassador Dining Room
- ◆ Take a picture outside of Charm City Cakes!

I think John Waters (proud citizen of Baltimore) put it best when he was describing the difference between Baltimore and New York: "In New York, the people are weird and they know it, in Baltimore people are weird and



CREATIVITY BEGETS CREATIVITY

I bought this great old building with lots and lots of character in the old Remington section of Baltimore and let the contractors have at it. It used to be a church, so the bones were there. Knowing we wanted (and needed) a happy, cheerful environment, we painted the walls some great shades of happy, cheerful, yet soothing colors. We saved the character of the original building as much as possible, down to the rich deep-honey wood flooring. The bakery is much more of an art studio than it is a traditional bakery, and that's where and why the magic happens. We've got all kinds of music going on, and

I'm pretty confident in my ability to make cool cakes, things people haven't seen before.

—DUFF



lots of bright, natural light. Again, I believe that keeping the senses stimulated in a positive manner is the best incubator for creative activity. We play off each other, too. No room for competition at Charm City Cakes. We're very much unique individuals on a very spe-



cial team.

Never one to want to be bored with the safe, tried and true, I always look for new fresh approaches to cake decorating. I've blown 'em up, hung 'em up, lit them up, motorized 'em and electrified 'em. There's close to nothing we can't do with cake, and there's certainly nothing we won't try. I'm always learning, always teaching, always reaching, and always expanding—by observing and keeping an open mind, I'm always ready to accept a challenge and interpret anything I see into cake design. We must and do keep our work fresh, fun, and exciting.

What also keeps me creative and motivated, besides the limitless creative ideas and the challenge to make cakes with the "wow factor," is the pure and simple fun and inner satisfaction it gives me to bring joy to so many people. My customers must *never* be disappointed. It's up to me to see to that. There's nothing like watching the face of a cake recipient when they first see their cake. I can tell immediately if they love it, and I love it when they do. I couldn't do this for long if I didn't get that payoff. No amount of money can buy that kind of satisfaction. It's what makes me excited by the creative process – thinking as I go while working on a planned design; getting even more excited in the middle of a project because I just thought of something

The 49 Flavors of Charm City Cakes

almond	chocolate chip muffin	peanut butter cup
almond amaretto cream	chocolate espresso	pear compote and ginger
apples and cinnamon	chocolate mint	pear spice
banana caramel	chocolate orange	pecan pie
bananas foster	chocolate raspberry	pineapple coconut
beurre noisette	dulce de leche	pumpkin and cinnamon
black forest	egg nog	pumpkin chocolate chip
blackberry sour cream	ginger and green tea	red velvet
blueberry muffin	Italian orange and vanilla	s'mores
brownie	lemon	strawberry shortcake
butterscotch walnut	lemon curd and berries	tiramisu
cardamom and pistachio	lemon poppyseed	white
Caribbean black cake	marble	white chocolate
carrot	mudslide	raspberry
cherry and almond	orange and ginger	yellow
chocolate	peaches and cream	yellow with chocolate
chocolate cherry	peanut butter and jelly	buttercream



new for the cake that I can integrate into the original idea. I don't worry about sticking to my plan so strictly, because I know that if I get an inspired idea while working on it, I can make an immediate adjustment. I just add it, subtract it, change it. Remember, no lines stopping me.

I get stoked and will spend inordinate amounts of time and energy on the smallest detail, just to get it right. Sure they're the client's cakes, but

we like to think of them as "our" cakes. They may not have asked for lights to flash, or for things to move or to spin around, but if we think it will be a better cake design, we'll do it. While we're delighted by the fact that most of our clients give us free rein to push the envelopes, it's never a requirement. There's a difference between doing it for its own sake and doing it when it's right.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

When I first take on a particular new cake challenge, I begin by learning about my cake. It wasn't that long ago that Charm City Cakes consisted of "three friends who listen to a lot of music and eat a lot of sushi." We eat much less sushi and listen to music less frequently (since it's prohibited while filming), and are now fifteen or so staff members. And now strangers talk to me--and not because they

An Oral History of ACE OF CAKES

In an exclusive conversation, we talk to the following Food Network executives:



Brook Johnson,
President, Food
Network



Allison Page,
Vice President,
Programming



Charles Nordlander,
Vice President,
Program Development



Susie Fogelson,
Vice President,
Marketing and
Brand Strategy



Carrie Welch,
Vice President,
Public Relations



Brian Lando,
Director,
Programming



Bob Tuschman,
Senior Vice Presi-
dent, Programming
and Production



Katie Ilch,
Consumer Market-
ing Director,
Advertising and
Branding



Katie Ilch,
Consumer Market-
ing Director,
Advertising and
Branding

Here, in their own words, is the story of how *Ace of Cakes* got on to Food Network. After Food Network was turned on to Duff by fellow cake decorator Colette Peters, he first popped up as a competitor on Food Network Challenge.

Page: I met Duff in Sea Island, Georgia, when we were filming *Food Network Challenge* in 2005. The episode was the “Spooky Cake and Candy Cook-off,” and Duff definitely stood out among the competitors. He didn’t look or sound like any cake baker I’d ever met. My first thought was that this guy looked tough, but then he opened his mouth and that characteristic, disarming laugh came out, and I knew he was a softie on the inside. He was filled with this spirit of fun, and it was infectious!

Johnson: I had seen Duff on *Food Network Challenge*, and thought he was an unusual looking and unusually engaging personality. He was so far outside of what you would normally expect a baker to look like that I was very struck by him on that series.

Tuschman: Duff was instantly memorable – his rocker look, his offbeat style, his slacker humor

—not to mention his amazing vision and technique in cakes.

Ilch: We’d set out to do an ad campaign for Food Network Challenge and needed someone to make us some outrageous cakes. Programming recommended a distinctive character in the show, Duff Goldman. Duff actually ended up making two cakes, one of styrofoam and one real. He did more than make the cakes—he helped us make the ad come to life.

Krueger: I was in Phoenix, where we were shooting several episodes of Food Network Challenge. Duff and Geof were competing in the mystery cake challenge and were working on a hilarious cake that eventually fell apart. Instead of leaving an empty table, Duff made a big showing of carrying a small fondant fish to the table as their finished product, and the whole spectacle made me laugh so hard I had tears in my eyes.

Fogelson: Duff was made for reality TV. He and the crew are wildly entertaining characters and some of the best reality TV out there. Geof and Mary Alice are just gold. When Food Network was first presented with the idea that a docu-soap centered around cake decorating would be a good match for the network, the reactions ranged from enthusiasm to hesitation.

Nordlander: Well, I had come to Food Network from A&E, where we were having a lot of success with character-driven reality shows like *Growing Up Gotti* and *Dog, the Bounty Hunter*. I loved the idea of bringing that kind of series to Food Network, especially since one of the main reasons I was hired was to develop new programming that was different from traditional shows on the channel. And a reality series starring Duff was definitely not going to be traditional!



Johnson: I liked the idea. We had wanted to do a culinary docu-soap but had never found the right environment. Duff’s rock and roll bakery seemed like it might just be the environment we had been looking for. One of the architectural advantages is that there was some inherent drama about how and when and if the super elaborate cakes would be successfully completed. Another plus was that cakes are probably the most visually exciting element in the world of food, so this was a great subject for television.

Welch: I thought, great! Then, wow, this is going to be really different for Food Network. We had just started to get into the reality realm with *The Next Food Network Star* around that time, so it was really exciting to know we would go even further.

Page: My first thought was: that’s a show I would love for Food Network to do, and that I would personally love to watch.

Tuschman: I thought if anyone could pull off a reality series set in a bake shop, it was

ROMMEL and JESSICA LORIA



I first met Rommel in the autumn of 2006 during his design appointment, when he explained that he wanted a cake to propose to his girlfriend, Jessica. Wedding cakes: we do plenty of those. But a proposal cake? That was a new one. But I liked the idea--and besides, who am I to stand in the way of true love? Rommel described how he wanted the cake to be a "happily ever after" scene: a cute little house with a picket fence, the two of them sitting out front, all smiles, with their dog. He wanted to incorporate the engagement ring into the cake, so we came up with the idea for him to hang it from a lamppost on the sidewalk outside the house.

As this was Charm City Cakes' first engagement cake (since then a few more have followed), naturally the entire staff was

very excited about the prospect of being a part of Rommel's proposal. To make it even more interesting, I decided to surprise Rommel and wire the lamppost so it would actually light up.

The day Rommel came to the bakery to pick up the cake, he was visibly nervous, but was definitely pretty stoked that we had illuminated the light. After he took the cake home, we all waited anxiously to hear word of how the night went. The next morning, Mary Alice received an email with the subject line, "SHE SAID YES!" Rommel included a great photo of a very teary-eyed Jessica holding up her ringed hand in front of the cake.

When time came for the couple to design their wedding cake, of course the bakery was thrilled to have them back (I had promised Rommel a discount if she accepted). As the couple wanted to include their alma mater, Georgetown University, with their cake design, they chose a four-tier asymmetrical cake with a second cake that looked like the Bulldog mascot biting into the first cake. Both cakes came out fantastically, and everyone was thrilled to see pictures from the wedding afterward. Now we're anxiously awaiting a call to help out with a baby shower...

EPISODE GUIDE

Food Network presents in association with Authentic Entertainment, Inc.

ACE OF CAKES

Created by: Willie Goldman, Dana Leiken Richards, Lauren Lexton, and Tom Rogan
Executive Producers: Lauren Lexton, Tom Rogan, Kelly McPherson, Jeanne Begley
Co-Executive Producers: Willie Goldman and Dana Leiken Richards
Co-Executive Producer (Episodes 312, 313, 401-411): Jack Tarantino

Cycle 1: Season 1 (6 episodes)
Cycle 2: Season 2 (13 episodes)
Cycle 3: Season 3 (13 episodes) and Season 4 (13 episodes)
Cycle 4: Season 5 (13 episodes) and Season 6 (13 episodes)
Cycle 5: Season 6 (13 episodes) and Season 7 (13 episodes)

A note on our writers: Nothing on *Ace of Cakes* is scripted. Working with the show's editors, the writers watch all the footage from the field, and generate a technical script in reverse that's used to create narrative "storylines."

SEASON ONE

Triple Crown Cake

Production #: DB101
Original air date: August 17, 2006
Writer: Miriam Leffert
Director: Jeffrey R. Daniels
Editors: Grayce Lackland, Matthew Monte

Chef Duff Goldman, proprietor, owner, and operator of Charm City Cakes, explains that the largest order of the week is a fifty-pound masterpiece for Baltimore's Preakness horse race. Later in the day, Duff's old friend stops by the bakery to select her wedding cake: a clean and classy beach motif, complete with edible sand and seashells. Duff gets to work building the scale model base of the cake with real wood and rope using an assortment of power tools. With less than twenty-four hours to complete the cake for the horse race, Duff pulls an all-nighter with sous chef Geof, loads the cake into his delivery van, and races across town to the Pimlico race track, just in time

to cross the race track and a sea of partying college kids to complete the delivery.

Featured cakes: Preakness, Jeep, Dental School Graduation, Fish-in-a-Basket, Sweet Sixteen, Cell Phone, and Black Belt

Special appearance: Lt. Gov. Michael Steele

Decorative techniques: Base construction, modeling chocolate, dowel insertion, gum paste seashells and black-eyed Susans, graham cracker crumbs for sand, piping, airbrushing

Featured organizations: Pimlico Race Track

Fun facts: While this was the first episode to air, portions of episode 105 were first shot in Los Angeles and edited into that episode.

"Technically I am the executive sous chef of Charm City Cakes. This is a title that Duff gave me; I don't really know what it means."

—GEOF

"Well, we kind of specialize in not small and not simple."

—MARY ALICE

"Real men prefer caulk."

—DUFF

Hell Week

Production #: DB102
Original air date: August 31, 2006
Writer: Dustin Rubin
Director: Jeffrey R. Daniels
Editors: Jeanette Christensen, Grayce Lackland, Matthew Monte

With just five days to complete twenty-seven cakes, there's a whirlwind of activity at Charm City Cakes. Geof and Richard construct a cake in the form of a tequila bottle out of Krispy cereal treats give the cake added stability. The most challenging cake is modeled after a client's German Shepherd and will require a complex multi-tiered base/skeleton out of wood and

metal. Once Sherri has carved stacked and iced sheet cakes, Duff and Geof get to work quickly applying fondant the odd-shaped dog cake. With all cakes now completed, the bakery has less than twenty-four hours to deliver them. Duff and Geof explain the complexities of delivering different types of cakes. All deliveries are completed, and another successful week at Charm City Cakes concludes.

Featured cakes: Tequila, German Shepherd, and Naval Academy graduation; Haggarty, Tisch, Wingate, Zak, Powell, Callar, Churlin, Hunt, and California Scenes weddings.

Decorative techniques: Rice Krispy treats usage, fondant application, fondant crack repair.

Caketastrophe: Duff must repair a fondant crack in the bottom tier of an already painted cake.

Fun facts: Sound mixer Josh Spector appears in a half-second cameo in this episode.

"Sherri is like the Swiss army knife – she can do anything."

—DUFF

"Ever notice there's always peas in throw up? Even if you haven't had peas, there's peas."

—DUFF

"High five? I don't play that jive."

—GEOF

"We call a turn like this a cake killer."

—DUFF

Wedding Cakes and Headaches

Production #: DB103
Original air date: August 19, 2006
Writer: Miriam Leffert
Director: Jeffrey R. Daniels
Editor: Grayce Lackland

To celebrate her mother's eightieth birthday, a client asks Charm City Cakes to

design a cake in the form of her mother's favorite hat. Duff and the staff go the extra mile, creating an edible hatbox out of gumpaste and edible tissue paper. For his dad's birthday, Duff replicates a World War II-era "Flying Wing" plane, which he will trick out with a series of fireworks. While Duff and decorator Richard perform a fireworks test for his dad's cake, Geof places fondant stripes around the hat box and the entire Charm City Cakes team gets to work completing all their cakes for the looming weekend deadline.

Featured cakes: Beardsley Wedding, Hat Box, World War II Flying Wing, Grape, and Lavender Anniversary

Special appearances: Rahn, Steven, Peggy (Dorothy's daughter), Dorothy, Morrie, Luke

Decorative techniques: Royal icing application, gum paste construction, piping and painting design outlines, fondant application, fireworks.

Fun facts: Even though this is the third episode completed, Food Network aired it two days after the series premiere, and a week prior to episode 102, Hell Week. Duff's band, ...soihadto..., played "Searching for the Cure" in this episode. This is the first episode to feature appearances by Duff's family.

"It's not Charm City Cookies. It's not Charm City Meatloaf."

—DUFF

"She's taking our baking for granite."

—MARY ALICE

"You got to be real fast with it because it will dry out, it will crack, but yet you have to be really, really gentle with it at the same time. Fondant's like a woman, but I won't get into that now."

—GEOF

"Why is it that everything is done, and we're not done? Can somebody tell me why everything is done and we're not done yet?"

—DUFF

"Just checking on my investment in culinary school."

—MORRIE GOLDMAN

Life's a Zoo

Production #: DB104
Original air date: September 7, 2006
Writer: Dustin Rubin
Director: Jeffrey R. Daniels
Editor: Grayce Lackland, Jacob Lane

The Baltimore Zoo asks Duff to create a pair of flamingos for a black-tie event. While Duff uses an arc welder to join the metal support rods to the base of the Flamingo cake, Sherri must help area baker and Food Network personality Warren Brown create a replica of the U.S. Capitol dome for a cupcake-tower wedding cake. Duff and Richard use sanders and blocks of Styrofoam to shape the flamingo heads. Duff and Geof cover the flamingo framework with fondant. Sherri works on the dome and cuts out fondant flamingo feathers. Duff airbrushes the flamingos pink. Once the flamingos are completed, Duff and Sherri must hold the oversize cake diagonally in the cargo space of the delivery van so it doesn't collapse while Mary Alice drives them to the Zoo.

Featured cakes: Flamingo display, Fist of Rock groom's, Capital Dome wedding topper.

Special appearances: Warren Brown, Lainie Contreras, Matthew Mulkey and Ruth Martin (groom and bride), Barbara Queen (bride).

Decorative techniques: Chocolate sculpting, fondant application, layered airbrushing technique, gum paste figures.

Featured organizations: Zoomerang, Baltimore Zoo

Fun facts: Duff first appeared with Warren on the premiere episode of his Food Network series Sugar Rush. Warren owns and operates one of his Cake Love specialty shops in nearby Canton. The stained-glass mosaic featuring the Charm City Cakes

logo was made by Duff's mother, Jackie, an accomplished stained-glass artist.

"I hope someone there can give me the fist of rock. That sounds kind of dirty, though, doesn't it?"

—GEOF

Life's a Zoo

Production #: DB104
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Editor: Grayce Lackland, Jacob Lane

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