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A Passion for Baking

Written by Jo Wheatley

Published by Constable

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Jo Wheatley

A Passion for Baking

CONSTABLE

For Richard and my boys: my reasons for baking

Constable & Robinson Ltd
55–56 Russell Square
London WC1B 4HP
www.constablerobinson.com

First published in the UK by Constable,
an imprint of Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2012

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A copy of the British Library Cataloguing
in Publication Data is available from the
British Library

ISBN: 9781-7-8033-856-9 (hardback)

Design & art direction: Smith & Gilmour
Food stylist: Annie Rigg
Prop stylist: Wei Tang

Printed and bound in the EU

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INTRODUCTION

For me it all started at the tender old age of three, making pastry with my nan in her kitchen on an upturned sock bin. I wonder now, if my nan hadn't allowed me to 'help', would my love of baking have been so intense? My Auntie Helen is also a wonderful baker, and whenever we went over to her place she was always knocking up something amazing. I always wanted just to stand beside her and revel in the homely feeling she created. When my cousin was very small we were invited to his birthday party and Helen made biscuits for all the children with our names piped on them. Luke is nearly forty now and I still remember being in awe of these amazing bakes, iced in pink for the girls and blue for the boys. Even then I knew the love and attention my auntie had put into these little biscuits. On my lovely Dad's side all the aunties and grandchildren used to meet up after a trip to the market every Saturday. There were eight aunties and lots of grandchildren and we all squeezed into my Nanny Jessie's small kitchen, where somebody always had a bag with a bake in it.

Showing a child how to bake can be a lovely experience for both pupil and teacher, perhaps especially when it leads on to a picnic in the garden. My lovely mum-in-law Kath taught me that what children want most is our time. When the boys were little I'd go to collect them and they would all be sat in Kath's garden around a small child's table set for tea – a big mud pie with a candle plonked in the middle of it, three muddy boys, best china and Nanny at the centre of a teddy bears' birthday tea.

Baking is about memories, old ones and ones yet to be made: a favourite auntie's bread pudding; a nan's apple pie; eating the most amazing croissant with a loved one; madeleines that remind you of the most romantic dinner; a birthday cake shaped like a fort for a special four-year-old . . . I could go on forever! I'd love to know all your baking memories and hope that *A Passion for Baking* will bring you lots more.

I really try to think of everything when I start to develop a recipe in my mind. First and foremost the flavour. It needs to be balanced: sometimes you need just a little backnote of salt or lemon sharpness to balance that creamy sweetness, or a little coconut to melt into the background of the zesty orangeness. Then the texture – a heavy bake isn't satisfying to anyone (there is nothing worse than wasting calories on a disappointingly heavy bake!). Next is the appearance. Of course we 'eat' with our eyes first, so it must look good. Finally, there's the nose: good baking smells so homely!

I love baking and particularly all the experimenting that goes with it. I have taken to waking up at 3 a.m. with ideas, so now I have a pad by the bed to jot down my nocturnal inspiration. Baking gives me a passion and a creativity that I truly never thought existed, and I love the way it draws people together through their common interest in something so nurturing and giving.

I really am so excited to share my recipes with you. I hope you enjoy baking them as much as I have enjoyed creating them. It's so unbelievable to me that this has all happened, a dream come true. I keep expecting a tap on the shoulder to say it isn't so!

Jo x

MAKES ABOUT 6

AMERICAN PANCAKES

When I was a little girl we went on holiday to Florida and I had these incredibly fluffy pancakes. They stayed in my mind and so did the diner in which I had them, another foodie memory! Serve them with a juicy blueberry sauce - I promise you won't be disappointed.

3 large eggs, separated
1 mug of self-raising flour
1 mug of full-fat milk
a knob of unsalted butter, melted
a pinch of salt
sunflower oil for cooking the pancakes
unsalted butter for cooking the pancakes

Whisk the egg whites in a clean, dry bowl until just stiff.

In another bowl mix together the flour, milk, egg yolks, melted butter and a pinch of salt.

Using a large metal spoon, fold the egg whites into the flour mixture, one third at a time.

Heat a tablespoon of oil and a little butter in a large non-stick frying pan over a medium heat; the butter gives the cooked pancakes a lovely nutty flavour.

Ladle 2–3 spoonfuls of batter into the pan, making 2–3 little pancakes (the batter will seem really thick, but this is how it should be).

Cook the pancakes for about 40 seconds, until the underside is golden and the little bubbles stop appearing on the top of the pancakes. Flip them over and cook the other side until golden brown and the pancakes have risen to about 1cm.

Remove from the pan and keep warm while you continue to cook more pancakes until you have used up all the batter, adding more oil to the pan as needed.

See pages 248–9 for a lovely blueberry sauce to serve your pancakes with.

Bits & Bobs

Sticky sauces

I think a sticky, sweet, fruity sauce with my pancakes is the way I'd like to start my day every Saturday! I love different textures, flavours and hot and cold combinations not just at breakfast time – they're great on ice cream too. See pages 248–9 for a couple of ideas that I'd like to share with you.



MAKES 10

PIGGIES IN BLANKETS DANISH

These are wonderful and I think that for people who love Danish but haven't got a particularly sweet tooth this is the very thing. Gorgeous light flaky pastry with that fresh, cutting tomato flavour topped with a wonderful sausage wrapped in bacon.

½ quantity of Danish pastry dough, see page 20
plain flour for rolling out
10 rashers of streaky bacon
10 chipolatas
1 tbsp sunflower or light olive oil
6 tbsp tomato chutney or home-made tomato sauce
1 egg, beaten with 1 tbsp water

You will also need
2 baking trays

Lightly dust the work surface with plain flour and roll out the dough into a rectangle.

Cut the dough into neat 12–15cm squares. Fold two opposite corners of each square to meet in the middle.

Arrange the pastries on two baking trays, cover loosely with cling film and leave to prove for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6.

Meanwhile, wrap a rasher of bacon around each chipolata, heat a tablespoon of oil in a frying pan and flash fry a few sausages at a time until just starting to brown. Remove from the pan and drain on kitchen paper to remove excess oil.

Spoon the chutney or tomato sauce into a small saucepan and reduce over a low heat until you have a thick paste, stirring with a wooden spoon to prevent the sauce catching on the bottom of the pan.

Brush the pastries with a little egg wash, then top with a spoonful of chutney and a bacon-wrapped sausage, seam side down.

Cook on the middle shelf of the preheated oven for about 25 minutes until golden brown. Serve warm.

SERVES 1

OVEN-BAKED BREAKFAST

This is a lovely easy weekend brunch for when I'm not ready for a big breakfast but then too hungry to wait until lunchtime.

For every person I'd suggest:
1 good-quality sausage
a handful of button mushrooms
a knob of butter
1 tomato
olive oil
a pinch of fresh thyme leaves
2 rashers of good-quality bacon
1 egg
salt and freshly ground black pepper

You will need 1 baking tray for every 2 people eating

Preheat the oven to 220°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7.

Pop the baking tray into the oven to heat up for a couple of minutes.

Prick the sausages with a fork and put onto the hot baking tray. Turn the oven down to 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6 and cook for 4 minutes.

Slice the mushrooms and arrange in a pile in one corner of the baking tray, top with a knob of butter and season with a pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper. Return to the oven and continue to bake for another 6 minutes.

Cut the tomato in half, brush with olive oil, scatter with thyme, season and place onto the baking tray along with the bacon rashers.

Cook for a further 8–10 minutes until the bacon is nice and crisp.

Transfer everything onto a heated plate, cover with foil and keep warm. Break one egg per person directly onto the hot baking tray, return to the oven and cook for about 2 minutes until set and cooked to your liking.

Serve with a big pot of tea and some toasted sliced bloomer.

Bits & Bobs

Eggy Bread

Sometimes you may feel a little peckish but there isn't much in the cupboard apart from perhaps an egg and a slice of white bread that's past its best. Don't despair: if a look in the spice rack then reveals some cinnamon, you've got more than enough for an excellent gap-filler.
See pages 248–9.

Chapter three

FAMILY BAKING

How nice to have family favourites: it's like creating your own history, something you can pass down from generation to generation, each one with a memory, maybe of a happy Sunday tea when your youngest took his first step, or a sunny afternoon with a group of women whom twenty-five years later you are still honoured to call your friends, or the lovely moist fruity loaf that reminds you of a much loved auntie.



SERVES 8

RASPBERRY TORTE

I've been baking this torte for the last twenty-five years: it never disappoints and it's so simple, requiring all the same weights of ingredients, a quick whisk and a pop into the oven. I'm forever grateful to my lovely friend Linda for this recipe.

150g self-raising flour
150g unsalted butter, softened
150g caster sugar
150g ground almonds
2 large eggs, beaten
150g fresh raspberries, plus extra to serve
icing sugar to dust

You will also need a 23cm cake tin, buttered and the base lined with a disc of buttered baking parchment

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4.

Tip the flour, soft butter, sugar, ground almonds and eggs into a bowl and beat together until pale, light and fluffy.

Spoon the cake mixture into the prepared tin and spread level with a palette knife. Push the raspberries, pointy sides up, into the batter.

Bake on the middle shelf of the preheated oven for about 1 hour, checking the cake after 45 minutes and covering it loosely with foil once it has browned to prevent the top colouring too much.

Cool in the tin for 5 minutes and then transfer the torte to a cooling rack until cold. Scatter with extra raspberries and dust with icing sugar to serve.

SERVES 8

VICTORIA SANDWICH

I love Victoria sandwich cake: it reminds me of all things British – Sunday tea, the Women's Institute, family parties – and you're never more than one step away from making one, as all of the ingredients are normally in the store cupboard. I serve mine just with jam, but you could add buttercream if you like.

Cake
200g self-raising flour
1 tsp baking powder
200g caster sugar
200g margarine, at room temperature
4 large eggs, beaten
1 large egg yolk
1 tsp vanilla extract or vanilla bean paste

Filling
4 tbsp strawberry jam
2 tbsp caster sugar

You will need two 20cm sandwich tins

Bits & Bobs

Buttercream

With all baking I think it's about the individual's own taste, but I have developed my own buttercream over the years which I like best. You can add anything from butterscotch to orange juice to suit whatever kind of cake you are icing. See pages 248–9 for my recipe and flavour suggestions.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4. Butter and line the base of each cake tin with a disc of buttered baking parchment.

Tip all of the cake ingredients into the bowl of a free-standing mixer and beat for 2 minutes until smooth. If you don't have a free-standing mixer, you can use an electric hand-held mixer.

Divide the batter evenly between the prepared cake tins and spread level using a palette knife. Bake on the middle shelf of the preheated oven for about 25–30 minutes or until golden, well risen and a skewer inserted into the middle of the cakes comes out clean.

Remove from the oven and carefully turn the cakes out of the tins, peel off the parchment and leave to cool on wire cooling racks.

Place one of the cold cakes on a serving plate, right side up, and spread with jam (and buttercream if using). Top with the second cake and sprinkle with caster sugar to serve.



SERVES 8

CHOCOLATE MUD CAKE

This is such a well-behaved sponge: I make it really often, it's so simple and normally I have all the ingredients in the cupboard and fridge (if you don't have sour cream, use double cream with 2 teaspoons of lemon juice). I never really liked chocolate cake before this one and, to be honest, I'm still not a lover of the artificial-tasting, shop-bought ones, but this moist chocolate cake is so good – I haven't found anyone who doesn't like it.

175g unsalted butter, softened
300g caster sugar
3 large eggs, beaten
75g self-raising flour
200g plain flour
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
75g cocoa
200ml sour cream, at room temperature
50g full-fat cream cheese, at room temperature

You will need a 20cm round spring form or cake tin, buttered and the base lined with a disc of buttered baking parchment

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4.

Beat the butter and caster sugar together until pale, light and fluffy: this is easiest using either a free-standing or an electric hand-held mixer.

Gradually add the beaten eggs a little at a time, beating well between each addition.

Sift both of the flours, bicarbonate of soda and the cocoa into a bowl. Add half of the sifted dry ingredients to the egg and sugar mixture and fold in using a large metal spoon.

In another bowl, mix the sour cream and cream cheese together until smooth. Add half to the cake batter and fold in.

Repeat this process with the remaining flour and sour cream and mix until smooth.

Spoon the cake batter into the prepared tin and spread level with a palette knife. Bake on the middle shelf of the preheated oven for about 1 hour or until a wooden skewer inserted into the middle of the cake comes out clean.

Leave the cake to cool in the tin for 10 minutes before turning out onto a wire rack.

Cover the cake with a buttercream flavoured with syrup, liqueur or a chocolate ganache (see pages 248–9).

Bits & Bobs

Flavoured syrups

Flavoured syrups are fantastic for adding extra taste and moisture into a bake by brushing the top of the cake when it comes out of the oven. You can make a basic chocolate syrup for topping a mud cake, or be adventurous and go for a rosemary and thyme glaze! See pages 248–9 for recipes.





MAKES 8–10

CUSTARD CREAMS

The boys loved custard creams and what they used to call 'borgones'. That suited me because I never liked the shop-bought variety of either.

100g unsalted butter, softened
50g caster sugar
100g plain flour, plus extra for rolling out
25g custard powder
25g cornflour

Custard-cream filling
150g icing sugar
45g unsalted butter, softened
20g custard powder
3 tsp full-fat milk

You will also need a baking tray lined with baking parchment, a 6cm square or round cookie cutter and a piping bag fitted with a 1cm round nozzle

To make the biscuits, beat the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy: this can be done either with an electric hand whisk or in a bowl with a wooden spoon. Sift the flour, custard powder and cornflour into the bowl and mix until thoroughly combined and smooth.

Wrap the dough in cling film and chill in the fridge for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 170°C/325°F/Gas Mark 3.

Dust the work surface with flour and roll the dough out to a thickness of 3–4mm. Using the cutter, stamp out biscuits and place them on the lined baking tray. Gather any dough off cuts into a ball, then re-roll and stamp out more biscuits.

Pop the baking tray into the fridge to chill for 10 minutes.

Bake on the middle shelf of the preheated oven for 10-12 minutes until the biscuits are pale golden and firm. Leave to cool on the baking tray for a couple of minutes then transfer the biscuits to a wire rack until cold.

To make the filling, mix all the ingredients together until smooth using a hand-held whisk or in the bowl of a free-standing mixer. Spoon into a piping bag fitted with a 1cm round nozzle and pipe the filling onto one half of the biscuits, then sandwich together with the remaining biscuits.

