

THE 55TH ANNUAL
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emmy
awards

AND THE EMMY GOES TO...

An Interview with
Pastry Chef/Executive
Producer Jimmy MacMillan



Emmy Award winners Julee and Jimmy MacMillan of JMPurePastry.



Clockwise from left: CRPC2 chefs with production crew just before filming; 2012 CRPC judges table Curtis Duffy, Dana Cree, Della Gossett; CRPC 2012 filming the chef finalists; Chef Thomas Raquel; CRPC2 Chef Finalists at the reception at Acadia restaurant.



Chef Jimmy MacMillan has been an active contributor to the pastry industry for over a decade, as evidenced by his prolific print and web offerings. His work has always been all-encompassing, combining modern and classic dessert elements, strong technique and clean presentations to create artistic statements.

So it may be of little surprise that Chef MacMillan's most recent endeavor, The Chicago Restaurant Pastry Competition, is creating an innovative venue for modern restaurant pastry in the form of pastry competition videos. This original concept was developed by JMPurePastry, which is the pastry consulting duo of Chef Jimmy MacMillan and his wife Chef Julie MacMillan.

We interviewed the chef recently in his adopted hometown of Chicago to get some insight into the Emmy Awards, the upcoming Season 3, and how JMPurePastry is turning the pastry competition on its ear.

Dessert Professional: First of all, congratulations on winning Emmy number two for the CPRC video series. That's huge. Can you tell us how that came about?

Jimmy MacMillan: Thanks. It's always great to receive recognition. Ultimately, we would do what we do because we're passionate about the projects and that's what motivates us. What it says to me is that the videos we created have achieved a certain quality standard.

DP: Yes, but you have to admit, winning an Emmy two years in a row is somewhat amazing. You're competing against major networks and some big budget productions. Did you feel pressure to repeat the success of the first season?

JM: The only pressure we felt was the pressure we put on ourselves to be better. By the time we won the first Emmy, we had already recorded season two and thought that what we had recorded was special. It was definitely an evolution from the first year's competition. We also had great chef finalists, an increased budget and overall enthusiasm from the previous year. All the pieces of the puzzle were there.

DP: Do you think the role you've taken on as producer and event coordinator might overshadow your work as a pastry chef?

JM: No, I don't believe so. My pastry work stands on its own. I've never stopped creating new desserts. I will say that I'm less concerned with blasting out a volume of photos, recipes and ideas. Today's social media climate can certainly encourage that. What's most important to me is creating a consistent representation of ideas, images and designs.

DP: How did the idea develop to make pastry videos? Couldn't you just as easily have had a live competition?

JM: It may have been easier to organize a live competition. We wanted to document the chefs on film to contrast the conflict-driven style of network TV cooking competitions. And the videos have been great. It'd been an amazing amount of work, but the format is much more enduring. We have these amazing pastry talents talking about their work in their own words, and we're delivering that story over four months. We think the videos will be relevant for years to come.

DP: The CRPC looks like a TV show, not just some low production YouTube videos. Why isn't it on television?

JM: I wish I knew the answer to that. We have been actively shopping the videos to cable television, but with limited interest. Television is clinging to their definition of reality programming. Although some network reps we spoke with understand that eventually TV will need to move on, the lack of 'drama' in our show appeared to be the problem. But that's the point of our project, so right now it's on the internet.

DP: Do you think the video format is the future?

JM: Sure. It's on trend with what on-demand video steaming or pre-recorded streaming video services are providing. We're creating original programming for a very specific audience, pastry professionals. Those professionals can watch around their busy schedules without traveling to another city.

DP: You've mentioned the role of the CRPC as building a 'world-wide pastry community'.

JM: Yes, that's true. It may seem a bit heady, but it's true. This project has changed the way that we do business. It has put us in close touch with pastry chefs from all over the globe and the companies that provide ingredients and equipment for them. It's a wonderful network to plug into, and exciting to watch people make connections thru the CRPC and develop work relationships.

DP: Do you think that the Emmy wins, the competition videos, and the network you've created make JMPurePastry a standard bearer for the pastry industry?

JM: I think there are many standard bearers for our industry. Our goal is to bring excellence to everything that we do, whether it's making a plated dessert or creating a pastry video series. We

approach everything from the perspective of the chef; restless creativity and a desire for perfection.

DP: What things are different now that you're headed into season 3?

JM: We definitely want to push ourselves every year. We have some special guests this year in the way of Top Ten Pastry Chefs Will Goldfarb and Antonio Bachour who are judges this year. We created a third challenge; we asked the chefs to make an Artisan Gelato Milkshake. Also, we're working with a new production company that will to allow us to edit the videos more efficiently.

DP: Do you expect others to follow your lead into making videos for the pastry industry?

JM: Of course. There's interest from many food companies to produce videos to represent them. We've worked on several videos recently. We highly recommend video use for web sites, training videos and for use at trade shows. It's a powerful branding tool and a great way to deliver a message about your product.

DP: Can you give us a sneak peak into season three videos? What can we expect?

JM: Well there are some really amazing young chefs in Season 3. Sean Pera uses power tools and brings a tremendous amount of technique to his work. Michaela Hapak, our first 'international' competitor, uses some unique indigenous ingredients in her signature dessert. Jim Hutchison is a solid, consistent competitor with a great balance of flavor and technique. And Meg Galus returns from Season One to seek redemption for her third place finish. The competition is much closer this year, so there was an increased level of intensity.

DP: When will the (new) videos be released?

JM: The sneak-peek trailer comes out in mid-December. Then the four episodes will be released starting January 2014 and then every month with the finale in April 2014.

DP: When do you start thinking about season 4?

JM: We're already working on it! Often we'll get the idea for the next season sometime during the shoot.

DP: Can you tell us about the selection process- how does a chef become a finalist for the competition?

JM: After the last episode airs in April, we send out a call for entries. The entry consists of a recipe and photograph of an original dessert. All the entries are judged by our committee of chefs and designers. There are no names or identifying information on what the committee sees; the submissions are truly "blind". This enables young, talented competitors like Michaela (Hapak) to become a finalists.

DP: Any final words?

JM: In general we want to encourage all pastry professionals to get involved in something that grows the industry. We're all fortunate to be able to work in a creative field that focuses the talent and energies of some very gifted individuals. Contribute to the industry in ways that help others. Support young talent to travel and compete. Share the work of others. In short, be the best pastry professionals that we can be by supporting each other everyday.

Chef MacMillan and JMPurePastry contribute to every issue of Dessert Professional in their column Material Handling. For more information visit their website: www.JMPurePastry.com.