

The Great British Baking Show: Collection 10, 2022

Paul Hollywood & Prue Leith Q&A

Paul Hollywood

***Bake Off* is back for a 13th series. Did Lady Luck smile on the tent?**

Yeah, I think so, but not on the weather front. It was quite poor. We've had pretty warm years in the past and this year it was too cold. I was in New York during the heatwave here – it was 36 or 37 degrees there with 85% humidity. Staggeringly hot. But I thought, 'Thank God we're not in the tent!' When it's hot, it feels like a greenhouse. It gets really hot very quickly.

What did you think of this year's bakers...

The standard was very high. They had great ideas and executed them well. They were very professional, all of them. They always fall on the same thing: timing. Bad timing is the thing that catches most bakers out when they come into the tent. You have to have a time plan, so every bake you start, you know you can finish. Time runs away from them when they're trying to be inventive to impress us. And they get approached by Prue, myself, Noel and Matt and take their eye off the ball slightly.

After so long, do you ever think: 'Should this be my last *Bake Off*'?

I enjoy it far too much and, when you look at my co-judges in their 80s, I've got a bit more to go. I'm passionate about the show and showing the best of British baking. It's played a huge part in my life. The day I stop loving it is the time I'll hang up my baking gloves.

What can you reveal about this year's opening spoof?

There was a lot of dressing up. Matt and Noel looked hilarious, Prue looked incredible and I managed to do something I've always wanted to do. It was epic. We filmed in one of the big studios at Pinewood, so it was like being a movie star.

What are the highlights for you this series?

Mexican Week and Halloween Week were fantastic. The tent was set up for Halloween beautifully. You can imagine it being quite spooky. There were cobwebs... Noel thought it was like going home. The food I had in Mexico was spectacular and it was lovely to carry it into the tent for Mexican Week. Patisserie week was pretty good, too, and the pies. There was impressive stuff. A couple of times, I remember eating bakes and thinking: 'Oh my God, they're all good.' It was a real 'What am I gonna do with the handshake here then?' moment.

How much fun is it working with Matt, Noel and Prue?

They make you laugh when you shouldn't. There's a bit of corpsing. I like giggling. I am a giggler. When Matt and Noel do something that makes me laugh, Prue's normally oblivious. That makes it funnier. Matt, Noel and myself are giggling like school kids. I love that.

Is Noel paying more attention to the baking in case he ends up having to take part in a celeb special? Hosts Sandi and Matt have both done it now...

No. [Laughs] He'd just go with the flow. He loves his baking. Noel would probably do alright because he concentrates on what he's doing. If you read the recipe well enough, the answers are always there.

He started making bread in lockdown. Has he continued?

I don't think so, but he enjoyed it. I showed him how to do a no knead bread – the most simple bread to make because you just stir the ingredients together. Nature does most of the work. I need to make one

myself. I love making that bread. I need to give him another challenge. I'm seeing him in a couple of weeks. I'll give him a recipe.

Having competed in *The Great Celebrity Bake Off for SU2C*, does Matt have a new perspective on what it's like for bakers going into the tent?

Absolutely. He's got utter respect for the bakers. He's said that a few times. It's hard. As soon as he got behind the bench and we approached him, he was nervous and he knew us as friends. I found that bizarre. *That* shows the power of the tent. The pressure bakers are under cannot be underestimated. People make silly mistakes they'd never do normally. I've seen that every year. It's because of the time, cameras, lights and you're in the tent. Everyone's fallible.

Do you judges ever have cross words?

Never. We don't really disagree. We're singing off the same hymn sheet.

It's nerve-racking to bake for you in the tent. What's the most nerve-racking thing you've done in your life or career?

Whenever I knew the Royal Family were in the hotels I was working in... that was always nerve-racking, it's just that added pressure of knowing this is going to be eaten by the Royal Family. It was a bit concerning, but great for the CV and for your own confidence. I've baked for the Queen, the Queen Mother, Prince Philip, Diana, Charles. I remember making the Prince of Wales feathers many times out of bread.

What's your favourite thing to bake at the moment?

I've had to rejuvenate my starter. I've been away working so much. I've been feeding my 'mother', getting it ready for me finishing work and getting back to making proper sourdough. I made a foccacia, sausage rolls and some Danish last week. I make bread every week for sandwiches and have two chunky eggs with my own bread toasted in the morning. I do pizzas nearly every other day. I'm doing them tonight. I've got friends coming round.

Pizzas feature in Bread Week. What's your favourite topping?

I'm doing garlic pizzas with mozzarella and mushroom – one of my favourite things to make. Everybody raves about it. Put a bit of parmesan on your base, then mozzarella and mushrooms on top. When you bring it out, brush it in garlic butter. Absolutely delicious.

Pineapple on pizza: yes or no?

I don't mind pineapple on pizza. I'm quite partial. It's not a thing I'd normally go for, but it's not something I'd turn my nose up at. Pineapple can go quite savoury.

When you go into a patisserie, what can you never say no to?

I love a custard tart. Made well, the English version is delicious with a touch of nutmeg on top. I love a pastéis de nata as well – fantastic with the puff pastry base. It's difficult to beat a good custard tart.

If Prue was a bake what would she be?

A cochon éclair – very elegant on the outside, beautiful to look at and soft.

If you could do another reality show, what would you do?

Probably *The Great Pottery Throw Down*. I did a little bit in art school. I'd see if I could get Keith [Brymer Jones, the judge] crying.

Do you keep your hand in with a bit of sculpting and things?

I was thinking about it recently, actually. I was looking at some of Noel's artwork and thought: 'I'd love to get back into painting again...' I'd like to do more with moulding clay, too. I used to make horses; I'd build armatures, put all the clay on and fire it. I used to love all that. I'd quite like [to do that] in my old age.

What's the most surreal thing that's happened to you because of *Bake Off*?

Recently, how much I was recognised in New York. Going on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*, then doing *Good Morning America* and then meeting Whoopi Goldberg on *The View*... and they know who you are! It's the craziest thing.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've had?

Oh, in the loo. Even when I'm washing my hands, people come up to shake my hand. That's odd. People think they know you from being a personal friend, too. They've said: 'Hi. How you doing? How's things with you?' as if they know me. Then, they say: 'I'm so sorry. I've just realised who you are...' I don't mind. If I'm approachable, it's a good thing.

Prue Leith***Bake Off* is back for a 13th series. Did Lady Luck smile on the tent?**

Oh, I think it was a good series. Yes, it really was. I thought it would be a hard act to follow because the previous one with Giuseppe and Jürgen was just so magical, but these guys turned out to be great. They were generally a younger bunch, they bonded really well, enjoyed themselves and were very creative.

What was the highlight for you?

What I liked most was the way cakes are decorated. It's been happening gradually, but there's been a leap forward, I suppose, over lockdown. When I first came on the series, seven years ago, there were a lot of rosettes round the edge of a cake with perhaps a strawberry between each rosette. Now, they do wonderfully modern designs: lots of mirror glazes, lots of informal and organic piping, lots of decoration with fresh flowers and naked sides. It's all very modern and beautiful. That impressed me.

What about the flavours?

The flavours this year were really interesting – that was partly because of people's backgrounds, the bakers imported their flavours and their traditions – and, in fact, a new way of making pastry. The baker said it was how they always do it at home. I took the recipe because I thought it was so good. It wasn't just the way the pastry was made, the whole dish was amazing.

What about unusual ingredients?

We had unusual combinations – we had pineapple and popcorn popping up in a cake. Oh, and some quite rich chilli and chocolate-type flavours. It was really good. Mexican Week upped the chilli content. Paul likes a bit more chilli than I do, having spent so much time in Mexico. He can stand a bit more heat than I can.

Did you get a few glasses of Tequila?

[LAUGHS] I got one, yes. We had Custard Week, too. All sorts of custards, they were making – custard had to be the hero. There were things like floating islands and cakes where Crème Pâtissière was very dominant. Who doesn't like custard?

How much fun is it working with Matt, Noel and Paul?

We have a lot of laughs. It's slightly different working with those three than working with Sandi. Sandi and I were kind of a pair. We were much more like each other than we are like them. I mean, those boys will talk football and motor cars all day every day. Sandi and I would talk books or theatre.

Have you learned anything about football working with the boys?

No and I don't wish to... Once, in lockdown, we sat down to watch the England vs Germany match and I was watching the wrong team for half the match. I kept saying: 'But he's going the wrong way!' They laughed their heads off when they realised I'd watched half the match not knowing which side I was on. Paul is still trying to persuade me to get into one of his fast cars, which I avoid like the plague. I went in one once and was so frightened that my legs were shaking when I got out.

If Paul was a Bake what would he be?

He would be a doughnut, hard on the outside but absolutely squishy in the middle.

Having competed in *Celebrity Bake Off*, does Matt have a new perspective on what it's like for the bakers going into the tent?

Yes. What struck Matt was how tiring it was, how stressful and how much he wanted to win because he didn't think he *would* want to win. The competitive streak came out.

Do you judges ever have cross words?

We don't. Sometimes Paul teases me and I don't get the joke because I'm not always good at getting jokes, but no, we don't have cross words. Let's say I'll think the cake is perfectly baked and Paul thinks it's slightly dry. We've never disagreed on Star Baker or who has to go home.

What's your favourite thing to bake at the moment?

Oh, my most frequently baked cake is lemon polenta cake. I sometimes do it with orange instead. I made a brilliant one this summer with the same basic recipe of ground almonds and polenta – there's no gluten – and lots of eggs. I used pomegranate juice and pomegranate and rhubarb topping. It was really delicious.

Pizzas feature in Bread Week. What's your favourite topping?

I like very little tomato purée, mozzarella and pepperoni or prosciutto or both. I like it a little bit spicy. And I like a handful of rocket leaves chucked on top when it comes out of the oven.

Pineapple on pizza: yes or no?

Well, no for me. I know people love it and I do like pineapple in all sorts of things, so I don't know why I'm prejudiced about it on pizza, but I don't like it.

When you go into a patisserie, what can you never say no to?

An almond croissant with frangipane in the middle.

It's nerve-racking to bake for you in the tent. What's the most nerve-racking thing you've done in your life or career?

Catering for 4,000 people in a tent in Yorkshire. It was the Yorkshire Business Conference and all these people had to be fed in 20 minutes, so it was an absolute feat. I had rolls of wallpaper, with a very pretty pattern, which we just unrolled down the middle of each table as a runner. We put a beaker of knives and forks, a tray full of glasses, a pile of napkins and hurled a pan of rose petals all over the place. That was laying a table. We had everybody queue up like McDonald's and we handed out these plates. Every plate had a slice of ham, a piece of chicken, a piece of rare beef, tomato and olive salad, coleslaw, green

salad and new potatoes. All cold. And a piece of bread. By way of pudding, we had girls going around with trays full of ice cream cones while we cleared the tables. So they got a plate of food and an ice cream in 20 minutes and they were back to work. That was very nerve-racking.

What's the most surreal thing that's happened to you because of *Bake Off*?

Meeting Richard Dreyfus was a bit surreal. I'm a fan of his films and I was so surprised he came. He's such a venerable actor, so well-decorated and he's no spring chicken. I mean, he's not as old as me, but you know, you'd think he'd have...

... better things to do?

[LAUGHS] Yes, exactly. He was lovely. Oh, no, I think the *most* surreal thing on *Bake Off* ever was Russell Brand's showstopping sculpture of the vagina of his wife. I thought: 'What's that?' I didn't understand. Then, he explained it was his wife's vagina. I thought: 'Oh God, what's *Bake Off* coming to? We'll be crucified. This is dreadful.' But he started to explain how he felt a woman's vagina was the portal to the world. It was the beginning of life. And he felt his wife was almost sacred because she was producing their daughter. It was beautifully made and utterly delicious. A very Russell Brand thing to do and a bit off the wall... and he won.