



A Gourmet Gallery

Jackie Scaglione Makes Delicious Dessert Into a Work of Art

By Alicia Vitarelli, Staten Island Anchor, NY1 News

With a perfectly angled arch, stylish straps and highest of heels, Jackie Scaglione puts the finishing touches on one of this season's must-have Manolo Blahniks.

But this stiletto won't be seen on the feet of New York's fashionistas.

Instead, the palm-sized replica of the high-end high heel will be showcased atop a cake fit for a style queen.

"I've become quite the shoemaker," says the Rosebank cake designer, who makes her magic inside Jackie's Cake Boutique on Bay Street.

This particular designer dessert also features a Louis Vuitton handbag dripping in 24-karat gold, a Jimmy Choo shoe and a Chanel insignia. And the sugared salute to our fashion icons isn't just a work of art, it's all edible.

"I don't make cakes just for show," says Scaglione. "If you think it looks good, wait until you taste it."

From flour to finished product, each confection is custom made by the 44-year-old, who owns and operates the boutique with her husband Frank. Besides running the back end of the business, he also whips up the fillings. "They're ganache-based with Belgian chocolate," says Frank, who also concocts the buttercream and rolling fondant that top the creations.

Once the icing is set in place, it's time for Scaglione to turn the treat into a showstopper. Just name the occasion, and she'll dream up a cake to celebrate.

Boasting a degree in chemistry, Scaglione's last full-time job was in nuclear medicine at St. Vincent's Hospital in West Brighton. Along the way the New Springville resident also dabbled in all kinds of artwork—from needlepoint to embroidery to watercolor. She's something of a Renaissance woman.

As for the baking, that was a craft she first learned in her grandmother Marguerite's Brooklyn kitchen.

"Either you love baking or you don't," says Scaglione, who graduated from the French Culinary Institute in 1999 and trained under famous New York City cake sensation Sylvia Weinstock. Science, sculpture and sweets—it is these three passions that yielded her recipe for success.

"Baking is a science," she says. "Just like in chemistry, your measurements have to be exact." Even the granite countertops inside Scaglione's "laboratory" were custom-measured to fit her petite 5'0" frame.

Just beside her work station is a giant red tool box fit for an Indianapolis pit crew. Its drawers are stocked with dozens of different



drills, paint and air-brushes, sculpting scalpels and other sugar-shaping instruments.

Whether it's a miniature set of stands for a replica of Yankee stadium, a Monopoly board with each property representing a "move" in life, a sugar-based Scarface or a gilded Oscar statuette, it all starts with a dollop of "pastiche"—or sugar paste.

"I can mold the paste into just about anything I want," Scaglione says, "and then set it out to dry and harden."

She once made a musically-inspired masterpiece for a Philharmonic composer that served 600 people.

"It was a full orchestra with every single instrument," Frank brags on his wife's behalf. "It was amazing."

"Every piece has to be perfect," she says. "There is a lot of stress because of the exactness I demand in each detail."

Not to mention patience.

With each cake taking hours (and sometimes days) to complete, Frank estimates they feed anywhere from 1,400 to 1,600 people a month. He says about half of the designer sweets are served to clients here in the city, with the other half shipped out of state as far as New Hampshire and Maryland.

In 2005, Scaglione won first prize at the Jacob Javits Center for a five-tiered wedding cake topped with a crop of cream-colored confectionary roses.

She says it took three weeks just to create the bouquet that topped off that blue-ribbon winner.

"I use a pasta maker to roll out each petal," Scaglione says. "And then I have to layer them one by one to make each and every rose."

And this cake crafter's style is anything but cookie-cutter. When someone

sends her a photograph of something," Frank says, "she takes that vision and actually sculpts it freehand without a mold."

Take for instance an exact sugary re-creation of a client's shocking blue '57 Chevy.

"People send me photos of their pocketbooks, their dogs or even just a vision they had of cake that they drew themselves," Scaglione says. "Once I look at it, I will only take the job if I know I can make an exact copy."

She remembers the first designer cake she made in 1999 like it was yesterday.

"It was a small-scale Viking ship for the King of Norway," Scaglione says, showing off an old snapshot of the velvety vessel.

That was back when the husband and wife team operated the business out of their home. "From there we moved to a private, professional catering kitchen," Frank says, "and finally in March we found this amazing studio."

As far as hiring apprentices or sous chefs to help out, the Scagliones say for now you'll just find the two of them in the kitchen.

"It's hard to train someone to do my job," she says. "Believe me, I have tried. But everybody wants a Jackie cake."

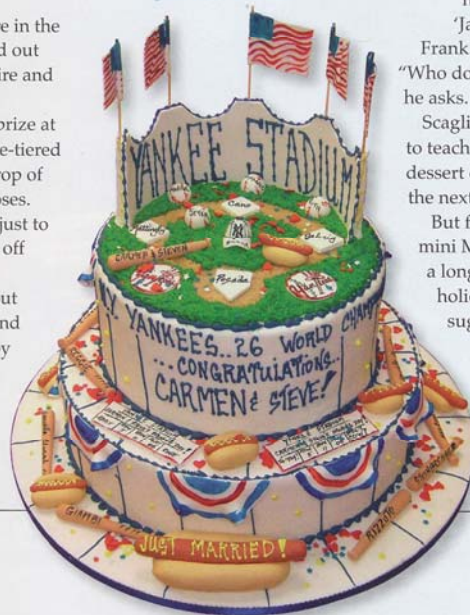
Frank says it's kind of like plastic surgery. "Who do you want doing the work on you?" he asks. "The doctor or his assistant?"

Scaglione says one day she would love to teach classes to the next batch of future dessert designers, and maybe even become the next Food Network star.

But for now it's back to making those mini Manolos, because she says there's a long line of sweet-toothed shopaholics looking for a stylish sugar kick. 🍩



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