

2010

Publication: London Word (website)

POP Tart Clare O'Connell

BY NICOLE RAPAPORT - JULY 12, 2010 - EMAIL THIS POST - PRINT THIS POST - POST A COMMENT



Clare O'Connell isn't so different to most other 22-year-old London girls I've met. She's pretty, fashionable and popular, and with a degree in Latin and a host of A-levels and GCSE's to boot, isn't exactly stupid either.

But on walking into her self-styled home bakery, I immediately see what sets her apart. Jars of colourful, sparkling sprinkles and toppings adorn the shelves and a butter-sweet smell invades my

nostrils. Willy Wonka eat your heart out – cake on a stick has hit our shores.

Success has come quickly for Clare and her creations. And although these POPs have been around less than a year, cake-making has become serious business in the O'Connell household. With the national press and glossies vying for a piece of the action, and a recent coup in the form of stocking for Harvey Nicks, she has enlisted her mum's expertise in a stalwart effort to build up the POP empire, and cope with the mounting orders.

When and why did you start to experiment in the kitchen?

'As a Swiss-Irish family we have always celebrated meal times. My mum, and recently passed grandma, really set the bar in terms of what you can accomplish in the kitchen with a little hard work and TLC. I suppose it's something I've always been around and the interest – and talent – developed from there.'

'After leaving uni in 2009, I knew I wanted to start my own business, and there was a sneaking suspicion it would be food related. The recession was well under way though, and I needed some experience under my belt, so I set to work at various catering outlets.'

Why baking, and POPs in particular?

'I love all types of cookery, but baking seems to come most naturally. The creative side of it really excites me. Not just the flavours, but the textures and designs that are involved. The POP was borne out of a lot of research and experimenting. POPs are fun, innovative and aesthetically pleasing. Everyone has a smile on their face when they see them.'

What's your inspiration?

'Everything and anything can inspire me. But usually it'll be something in the fashion world, other people's blogs, popstars and celebrities, books and London-based WAH Nails.'

Who would you most like to make POPs for then?

'Definitely someone slightly eccentric and who can think out of the box. So, Elton John or MIA or Lady Gaga.'

What makes a really good POP?

'It's all about the perfect colour combination and intricate decoration. Of course they can be ordered as bespoke options also, which is a great choice if the client has a particular interest or passion.'

POP versus cupcake. Who would win and why?

'POPs of course – portion control on a stick. What more could you want. They're less messy, not too filling, and look super-cute when you hold them!'

What does the future hold for POPs and the bakery?

'It's all about evolving and constantly experimenting with designs on the POPs, and mum and I working ever harder to build a strong business. I hope for consistency at Harvey Nichols, and of course, to make a financially viable business in the long-term.'

Where do you live in London and why?

'West Hampstead, NW2, with my parents, both sisters, and Jack Russell, Frankie. We grew up here with our parents. I want to stay with my roots as it's a family business, and while it's in the development stage, moving out to pay rent isn't really going to happen.'

What would you recommend everyone in London do at least once?

'Go swimming in Hampstead Ponds, it's invigorating.'

What is your favourite London eatery?

'In terms of serving the best cakes and coffees; Cocomaya in W2.'

Where in London would you most like your POPs to be sold?

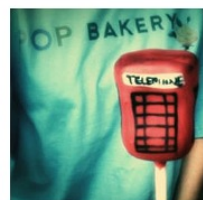
'Harvey Nichols was my top choice, and I was over the moon to get this gig. I would ultimately aspire to have my very own POP bakery located somewhere fun and young like Portobello Road.'

How would you design a typical 'London' POP?

'London has a big place in my heart so the collection wouldn't be complete without a telephone box POP.'

POPs range from £2-£3.

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