

My love letter to Bake Off



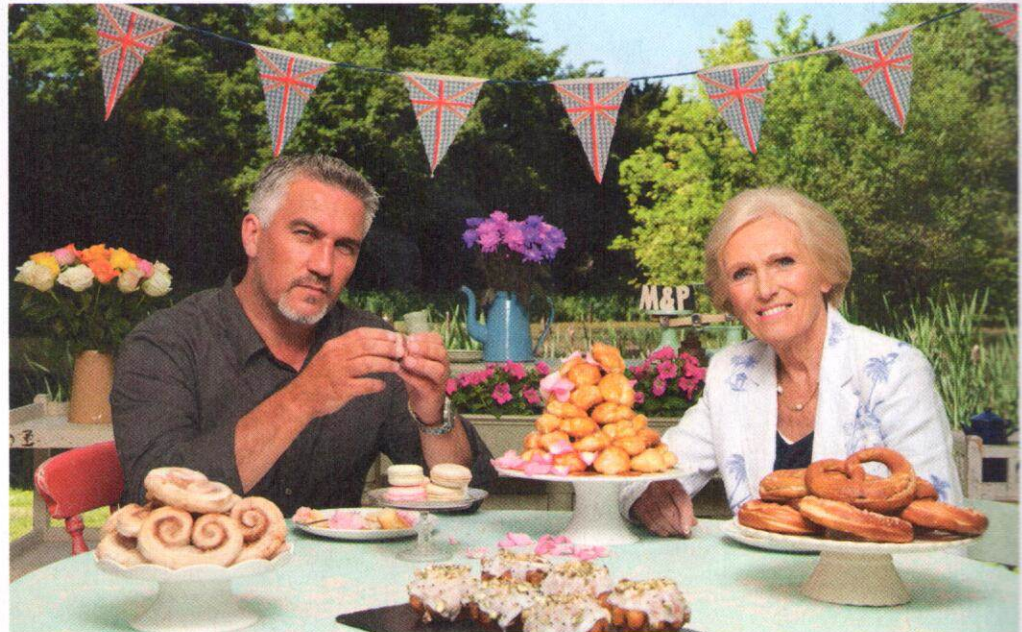
POINT OF VIEW Emma Freud

BACK IN THE 60s, my father Clement (below) presented a cookery show on TV called *Freud on Food*. The programme was just him, a Dorchester-trained cook with a mischievous spin, in a kitchen, cracking deadpan jokes while he flambéed, cooking dishes like Drunkard's Soup – made solely of caramelised onions, a bottle of champagne and a floated camembert. He was strange and funny and interesting – I, being his daughter, thought it was marvellous. But cut to 2013 and now I'm looking at *The Great British Bake Off* (Tuesdays BBC2), and by comparison my dad's programme was clearly actually rubbish.

This show is a total triumph of the imagination. Just consider...

THE INGREDIENTS

- **13 AMATEUR COOKS** All seemingly gentle, untrained but passionate souls, there not to audition for a spin-off series, but to intensify their cooking skills and finally whisk an egg white so stiff that baking powder becomes a thing of the past.
- **MEL AND SUE** Established, experienced, wise and fabulous comedians who have worked their double act in various media since the 90s. They are constantly funny, brilliantly laid-back, beautifully honest, wonderfully non-corporate and give off an air of "I KNOW – we can't quite believe we're taking baking this seriously, either".
- **MARY BERRY** An actual Goddess. My role model, and the person I want to be when I, too, am 78. A pillar of integrity, kindness, wisdom, maturity, beauty, dignity, charm and lovely buttery hair. She bakes like she invented it, which I think she probably did. When Mary tells someone that their Victoria sponge isn't quite as rigorously prepared as it might have been (ie it's revolting), she seems to empower the



amateur cook to go further, achieve more and surpass their ideals. I literally worship her.

- **PAUL HOLLYWOOD** A behemoth of a man; the silverback of the culinary universe (copyright Sue Perkins). This baker is a force of nature... strong, scary, straight-talking, terrifyingly frank and incapable of hiding his disappointment. When he doesn't like a cake, he spits it out. Were you to meet him in a dark alley, you would apologise for everything you had ever cooked, and then run for your life. I am afeared of Paul Hollywood.

- **THE TENT** So whose idea was it to set this iconic, ratings-breaking series in a great big Women's Institute marquee? And then kit it out like the prettiest corner of the John Lewis kitchen department? It's a set you want to cook in, eat in and then live in. And it's surrounded by magnificent parkland, which hints that it just might, just possibly, be the grounds of Downton Abbey. That's my theory, anyway. Please don't tell me it's a BBC car park.

- **CAKE CORNER** When Mary, Paul, Sue and Mel need a moment to gather their thoughts, they retreat into a small, exquisite vintage tent dressed with props you know are props but slightly believe were whisked that morning from Mary's summer conservatory. Here, she quickly knocks up the perfect version of the cake the contestants are struggling with, and dishes it out to her fellow commentators to set the cakey bar

and kick off an in-depth discussion about rising agents. They eat Mary's masterpiece from ancient floral crockery and all we, the viewers, can think is: I WANT TO BE YOU. FOR EVER.

- **THE SQUIRREL** So much has been said about the oversized genitals of the squirrels that inhabit the parkland surrounding the *Bake Off* Tent that there is very little else I can add. Except... you sometimes get to see a squirrel's oversized genitals. In a baking show. With Mary Berry in it. I'M SERIOUS!

And this is what the BBC does with those ingredients...

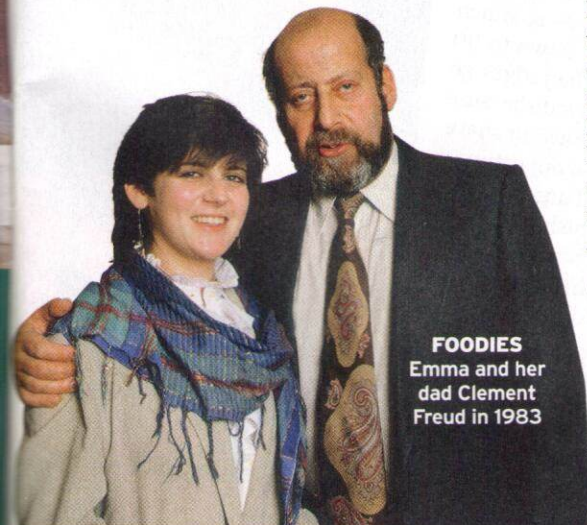
THE RECIPE

We live in an era of TV shows about murderers, rapists, murderers who pretend to be policemen, policemen who actually murder, serial killers, and serial killers who only kill serial killers. In the middle of this grim cavalcade arrives a show about cake – about endeavouring to produce the best, purest, most delicious, honest, beautiful cake manageable in a restricted time while also trying not to have a hissy fit on national TV.

When that cake is well baked, it is praised and celebrated. Alternatively, when that cake doesn't rise and ends up looking like something has died on a plate, they don't wallow in the drama in the hope of creating a YouTube moment.

The tearful contestant will be taken to one side by the glorious Sue Perkins (as she did with Ruby, episode 1, series 4), genuinely comforted and told, "It's OK – it's only a TV show." How wrong she is – it's not "only a TV show", it's a TV show that adds up to more than the sum of its glorious parts and consequently seems to put some of the sorrows of the world to right.

That's one hell of a recipe.



FOODIES
Emma and her
dad Clement
Freud in 1983

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