

Emma Freud cooks for **Paul A Young**

Our columnist meets the chocolate-making genius who added sea salt to caramel and Marmite to truffles! Treat your family this Easter to his sea-salted chocolate & pecan tart on page 141

photographs DAVID COTSWORTH



Paul A Young is a groundbreaking alchemist. He's the man who helped to make sea salt caramel one of the biggest (and lasting) food trends, and is ranked amongst the world's greatest chocolatiers. His produce is daring and experimental, natural and handmade, yet he never trained, and is exceptionally fond of Cadbury's Dairy Milk. I braved his recipe for a sensational chocolate tart and he came to my house to eat it – but first, we had a bit of a gossip.

Emma I've never liked posh chocolate shops – everything about them feels like it's saying, 'This isn't really for you, you're not refined enough to eat this.' Especially the French shops – I feel like a muggle in them.

Paul I'm so glad you said that. I used to hate going into those high-end places. The chocolate is great, but everyone's in suits, it's so formal and you can't have a chat because it's all behind glass. I wanted ours to be different, and super approachable.

E To be honest, you don't even look like a chocolatier.

P I know – people always expect me to be older and with a big tummy. And I'm northern.

E When did you know you wanted to cook?

P I wasn't academic. My career was either going to be art, cooking or music – those were the only things I was good at.

E So you're living the dream, combining art and cooking – your chocolates are like tiny works of digestible art...

P ...and I listen to music while I'm making them. I have this constant urge to create. I need to put ingredients together, feed people and get them to taste new things.

E So how did this happen for you?

P I'd been studying catering but I hated it – it wasn't creative and was too commercial for me – so I dropped out of college. My first job in London was in 1996, training as a pastry chef with Marco Pierre White. Lots of chefs don't want to do it because it's very particular, very technical, very 'chemistry', but it's a great skill to have under your belt. After that I decided I wanted to work in chocolate, but I hated all the pompous formality that comes with it. I wanted to blend high-end with totally approachable chocolates.



E Where did you go to learn the trade?

P I decided not to train with anyone. Why would I want to learn how to make the same Belgian chocolates people have had for decades and you can buy in all the other shops. So I decided to develop my own.

E How are yours different?

P We basically challenged the way it was being done – we wanted no preservatives, no additives, no concentrates, no machines, no unnecessary wording, all fresh ingredients, all in small batches, amazing flavours, and we wanted to change them all the time. People in the industry said to me 'you'll never make this work.' As a northerner, if someone says that, of course I'm going to make it work. It made me angry, but I knew it meant there was a gap in the market there.

E You had no training in it, but you knew you could do something special. You have a fierce confidence. I'm crediting your mum there.

P You're right! Mum always said to me and my brothers, 'I want you to do more than I did. Go out and say yes to everything. You can always say no later if it doesn't work out.'

E Once you'd opened your first shop, how did you get people to come?

P An editor from a national newspaper came into the shop and said, 'Lovely chocolates, but sadly no Marmite flavour,' and I thought, 'oh, challenge!' She said if you can make it work, I'll do a feature on you. I launched the Marmite truffle three months later and she did the feature. That was 13 years ago and we can't take it off the collection now.

E How did you invent your legendary sea salt caramel?

P I was trying to make a chocolate with a liquid caramel filling and I was just playing around with it. I wanted the shell really thin rather than clunky, I didn't want any decoration, just as neutral and natural as possible, and then I thought I'd put a bit of salt in the centre. I entered it into the first Academy of Chocolate Awards, and won the gold.

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E You must have sold tens of thousands of them – people get addicted to them. Are they done by machine now?

P No! We're still the only entirely handmade chocolate factory in the UK. We don't have machines to roll or temper, we don't use pre-made shells, or pre-made fillings. We're just people using our hands. And the hardest part now is Easter. All the chocolatier's techniques for Easter eggs have been adopted by the supermarkets, but they can make them far cheaper. Our team has grown from two to 40, but the supermarkets can really do it in bulk. So their eggs can be £8 but our eggs are going to be £28.

E But your flavours are astonishing. How did they get so interesting?

P If you look at the Sunday roast, you've got vegetables, apple sauce, mustard, every combination of sweet and savoury – but in chocolate, it's only ever nuts, fruit, praline and caramel. I think that's dull. Why can't we have chocolate that has interesting combinations?

E Is that how you ended up with a blue cheese truffle?

P That came from me tasting stilton and then licking a finger which had chocolate on, so I worked on a stilton truffle. I made hundreds of them but because I'd added sugar to the cheese, it had fermented and the next morning they all literally exploded and popped out of their shells. To stop it exploding, I put port in with the stilton which preserved it, and that's how it was born.

E Have you ever put meat in a chocolate?

P I did a beef reduction in ganache once and it was really nice, and I've done a black pudding truffle – that was lovely.

E Please say you've never done a fish chocolate?

P I've tried using fermented anchovies and dried anchovies, but the only thing that works well are Thai dried shrimps. They're not very shrimp-y, they're more salty and crunchy.

We move to the kitchen where I have made Paul's chocolate tart. It took me three attempts – not because

it's particularly complicated, but because I am particularly inept at baking. I showed him the first attempt which I had unfortunately dropped on the floor when it came out of the oven. He gave it a two out of 10.

E Where do you stand on Cadbury's Dairy Milk?

P I'm the least snobby chocolatier out there. I still eat Cadbury's mini eggs at Easter because my grandmother made me believe that fluffy chicks laid them. She was a big influence on me – we would get two bars at her house every Sunday afternoon. TWO BARS! Mint Aero, Drifter's... they were my life.

We cut the tart:

P Wow. Look how super-thin your pastry is. I'm impressed. You get a full-on 10.

My teenage son eats a slice and declares it the best thing I have ever made.

E This is chocolate heaven. I've never cooked something like this.

P You can always do it now. And using that chocolate filling as a base, you can add spices, or a layer of raspberries on top, or add some cream with a bit of booze in.

E Do you ever have days now when you only eat chocolate?

P Yes, yesterday was one of those days. Nothing savoury until I got home in the evening. We've got a new collection on and we had to taste every part of it.

E You do seem happy.

P That's because when you eat chocolate, your brain releases dopamine. And I love what I make before I even eat it. I'm very happy – especially with the tart you didn't drop on the floor.

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Good Food contributing editor Emma Freud is a journalist and broadcaster, director of Red Nose Day and a co-presenter of Radio Four's *Loose Ends*.

next month


Emma cooks for legendary chef Michel Roux Jr

Try it yourself

Sea-salted chocolate & pecan tart

Definitely one for a special dinner party. With its sophisticated, sweet chocolate pastry crust, unctuous ganache filling, and caramelised salted pecans, this tart will stop all conversation for all the right reasons.

SERVES 10-12 **PREP** 35 mins

COOK 50 mins plus at least 5 hrs 15 mins chilling **EASY** 

For the pastry

175g soft butter
75g golden caster sugar
2 eggs, yolks only
250g plain flour, plus more for dusting

20g cocoa powder, sieved

For the filling

200g Madagascan 64% dark chocolate, broken into pieces
200ml whipping or double cream (whipping cream gives a slightly lighter texture)

200g light muscovado sugar
5g sea salt

For the topping

100g caster sugar
a pinch of sea salt
100g pecan halves

1 To make the pastry, cream the butter and sugar with a wooden spoon or in an electric mixer until light and creamy. Add the egg yolks and 35ml water and mix well until all the liquid has been incorporated. Gradually mix in the flour and cocoa powder until a paste is formed. It will be quite a soft dough.

2 Wrap the pastry in foil, flatten it with your hand and chill for 1 hr. *The pastry can be made two days ahead, though in this case, you may want to remove it from the fridge for a few minutes before rolling to soften it.*

3 Sprinkle your work surface with a light dusting of flour and roll out the pastry until it's about 5mm thick. Line a 23cm tart tin with the pastry using the rolling pin to help you lift it over, pushing the pastry well into the edges and folding the excess over the top. Trim off the excess. Chill for 15 mins to relax the pastry and to help prevent it from shrinking during cooking.

4 Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. Line the tart with a sheet of baking parchment (scrunch it up first to soften it), then tip in baking beans, rice or lentils and bake blind for 15 mins. Lift out the beans and bake for a further 10-12 mins until the base is dry. Allow to cool.

5 To make the filling, put all the ingredients in a glass or metal mixing bowl, place it over a pan of very hot water and allow them to melt together until glossy and thick. Pour into the cooled pastry case and chill for 4 hrs or overnight.

6 For the topping, heat the sugar in a saucepan on a medium heat, tilt the pan rather than stirring, until you have an even golden liquid caramel. Add the salt and mix

well with a wooden spoon or heatproof spatula. Pour in the pecans and, mixing thoroughly, quickly pour the mixture on to a piece of baking parchment and spread out with the back of the spoon. Allow to cool thoroughly, then break or chop up into shards or chunky pieces to sprinkle over the ganache.

7 Cut the tart with a hot, wet knife for perfect, restaurant-quality slices.

PER SERVING (12) 543 kcal • fat 32g • saturates 16g • carbs 56g • sugars 38g • fibre 3g • protein 5g • salt 0.7g



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Recipe adapted from *Adventures with Chocolate* by Paul A. Young (£14.99, Kyle Books). Photographs © Anders Schønnemann