

She was born to decorate



How sweet it is: Paris Cutler at her Planet Cake headquarters

By ROSIE SQUIRES

MOTIVATED by the not-so-sweet experience of buying her own wedding cake, Paris Cutler decided to leave behind the corporate world and begin a career as a cake decorator.

"I was in the process of organising my wedding cake, and it was such a nightmare — I was appalled by the poor customer service and I realised there was loads of room for improvement in this industry," she says.

"The cakes were poor, the decorating was poor and I thought I could do it better: I wanted to do it with love."

Ms Cutler, a self-described "corporate drifter", admits that, before making the leap to cake decorating, she had never found a job she was enamoured with.

In 2003, she quit her job as a recruitment agent and took over a small studio, called Planet Cake, at Balmain.

"There were only two employees in the studio, and I was learning from them," Ms Cutler says.

"I bit off more than I could chew and I was completely dependent on my employees — some would call it

confidence, others would call it naive.

"I just had this gut instinct that it could be done better than the experience I had with my wedding."

In the six years since, Planet Cake has created edible masterpieces for the likes of Nicole Kidman, Céline Dion and Stephanie Rice.

"We offer couture cakes for high-end weddings and birthdays," Ms Cutler says.

"I think we have the best cakes in the country, both technically and based on design."

In what she describes as "a selfish move", Ms Cutler also offers training courses in cake decorating at the Planet Cake studio.

"Before we started, the only places to learn cake decorating were at TAFE and from old-fashioned cake guilds," she says.

"I wanted to change that. I wanted to start a modern cake-decorating school and attract students who want to produce amazing cakes — and they do."

"I'm effectively training my competition, but I embrace that," Ms Cutler adds with a laugh.

Planet Cake runs 12 cake decorat-

ing courses, from beginners or cupcakes right through to a two-tier wedding cake.

As Planet Cake's director, Ms Cutler creates all the courses taught at the studio.

"I write all the books and set the direction of the company," she says.

Ms Cutler also liaises with Planet Cake's clients, manages the staff and handles any complaints.

"I think the most challenging part of my job is managing staff — we're all so creative, and everybody has a different opinion," she says.

"The best part about my job is that I truly have fun. I'm not just pretending — I really love it."

Ms Cutler says that to have a successful career as a cake decorator, people need to have great people and sales skills and must always take the initiative.

"You have to have a vision and you have to be a good cake decorator," she says.

"But I don't think you should ever be frightened of getting into a crowded industry."

"If you have a vision to do something different, do it."



Mr fix-it: Andrew Leimgruber on the job

Picture: Frank Violi

Engineering a quick-smart fix

Name: Andrew Leimgruber

Age: 37

Job title and company:
Owner of Smart Engineering & Technologies

What exactly do you do?

As a maintenance engineer, I install, fix and maintain machines. This involves machining, welding, fabrication, cutting, technical drawings and documentation. My role is to minimise machinery downtime, fix breakdowns and advise on preventative maintenance.

What made you interested?

Since I was really young, I've been obsessed with figuring out how things work.

I used to pull all my toys apart. Thankfully, I got better at putting them back together.

Qualifications required?

A trade certificate in fitting and machining is where to start. You also need a good sense of logic.

I did a four-year apprenticeship and some extra studies along the way.

Your job entails?

Part of my job is problem-solving and trouble-shooting for packaging machines. I also design machines and parts for particular applications.

My job is to get machinery working at the highest possible performance level.

Any myths to debunk?

Not everything can be fixed with coat hangers, cable ties and duct tape.

The strangest thing you've ever had to install?

Relocating a chicken-slaughter line from Sydney to Newcastle was an adventure.



The last chook came off the line at 3.30pm on a Wednesday and the line was back in operation by Monday morning.

The most rewarding part of your career?

I really enjoy the thrill of working on a machine and tweaking it until it's just right and runs as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

There's a real buzz when you solve a problem that may have been causing havoc or low productivity levels.

The most challenging part?

Delivering and installing a quality product within tight deadlines and short lead times can be a real challenge.

What is your proudest career achievement so far?

I recently co-ordinated a large team of tradespeople who un-installed a large manufacturing line and re-installed it 200km away.

We had a very short lead time and had to work within a strict timeline.

But we got the job done within the time constraints, which was great.

ELIAS JAHSHAN