



Above: Classic sugar craft flowers for a wedding cake.
Main image: An exquisite wedding creation.
Below: A simple wedding cake topped with a bouquet of flowers made of icing.



QUEEN Elizabeth I is said to have loved cakes decorated with flowers and figures. While icing skills have come a long way since her reign, the passion for adorning everything from lavish multi-tiered wedding cakes to cupcakes has never faded.

You just need to engage in conversation with Upper Highway-based master icing specialists Dawn Booth and Di Edgcombe to realise that the number of people wanting to learn more about this age-old craft is growing pretty quickly.

But before you get to the nitty-gritty of what they are trying to do in the way of harnessing this exciting foodie energy, you need to pause just long enough to look at a table showcasing the sort of decorating that is setting them off on an "inspirational new adventure".

As huggable as a baby's toy is a family of giraffe. Across the table is a vase of aloes and a scarlet late-summer rose with one of its petals about to fall off.

It's amazing to think that each of these intricate works of art

Having your cake and eating

If you have ever tried to ice a cake, you will know it is not as simple as it looks. **Liz Clarke** spoke to who are starting a new journey in cake decorating and sugar craft.

started off as little more than a packet of icing sugar.

Dawn Booth, 43, explains that at one time South Africa produced some of the world's top ornamental icing artists and sugar crafters.

"But then the interest waned and only a few young people wanted to learn this skill. In the last few years, however, there has been a huge resurgence of interest."

It is this new awareness of icing as an art form that has persuaded Booth and fellow championship master floral icing specialist 63-year-old Edgcombe to combine forces with a group of local experienced icing artists.

Together they have established the School of Contemporary Cake Design aimed at teaching icing and sugar-crafting skills from beginner to advanced levels.

"We believe that with

the growing demand for individualised and personalised designs for special occasions like weddings and birthdays, there's opportunities for everyone to come along and learn.

"We certainly don't want to step on the toes of other cake decorators, but rather to enhance what they are doing."

The school will shortly be launched at a business park near Waterfall starting with an initial 10-week course divided into once-a-week lessons.

Helping with the course modules will be three other experienced icing specialists, Jaeli Clark, a former jeweller who "fell in love with icing design",

Lorna Williamson, a special needs teacher, who in her spare time focuses on "the bold and beautiful" in contemporary cake design and Candice Leth, who studied fine arts and is a freelance artist of many art forms.

Adding to her art portfolio, Leth now also creates detailed adorable cartoon characters and beautiful lady figurines in icing, which she says are a hit with all ages.

"Our aim," says Edgcombe, who also teaches sugar craft at the 1000 Hills Chef School, "is to work as a team to create the sort of awareness that could bring us back on to the national and international stage."

It's a subject that is very dear

to her. She is one of the few sugar crafters competing on an international level, including showcasing her sugar craft designs at the annual Birmingham Cake International.

"At this level the competition is enormous," she says. "Being a botanist, my favourite subjects are flowers and plants, but that means knowing every internal and external aspect, right down to the seeds and the pollen."

Like Edgcombe, Booth is also an experienced sugar crafter who sees sugar art as a form of artistic expression that "pushes every boundary in both a competitive and collaborative way".

Multi-tier classic wedding cakes

are part of her repertoire but she admits they can be challenging. Apart from the many hours spent on decoration the biggest issue is to transport them to their destination in one piece.

"They are extremely heavy and even a small movement can be disastrous," says Booth. Fortunately, we have found a solution, which will be sharing with our students."

The solution is in the form of a "food friendly" plastic ring that is inserted into the cake forming a level platform.

"It's so strong you can stand on it," says Edgcombe, who came up with the prototype. I am hoping this ring will make a huge



Top: Bright faces to liven up any occasion.
Above: A friendly dragon any kid would want to know.
Below: Appealing giraffe and elephant icing creations.

PICTURES: LIZ CLARKE



it is an art form

to two entrepreneurs

difference and take away the fear factor, which any multi-tier cake designer will tell you is a real problem."

Another issue that the course will focus on is costing and budgeting. "It's all very well having fun making beautiful things with sugar craft," says Booth, "but at some stage one has to look hard at how much it is costing and what is required to turn one's skill into a workable business. Hobbies are expensive, so one has to look at money-generating possibilities."

They are particularly excited at partnering with Rolkem, a proudly South African company that produces an international range of food colourants made from natural



Dawn Booth and Di Edgcombe have established the School of Contemporary Cake Design to teach icing and sugar crafting.



sources. Booth and Edgcombe say their three-year plan is to encourage sugar craft as an art form across

South Africa and to encourage people from other countries, like Russia and Japan, to study sugar craft in South Africa.

THEIR TOP TIPS FOR EMERGING ENTREPRENEURS

- Always ensure that there is a business plan associated with your hobby, or you won't be able to sustain it.
- Working as a team with people who have the same goals in mind is the best way to start a business.
- Take the ceilings away. Look at all possibilities.
- Celebrate success when it happens.

• An introductory Cake Safari will be held at the school's headquarters, 37 Nguni Way, Waterfall, on May 6, where students will be given introductory demos on sugar craft and cake icing. Contact Dawn Booth on 031 786 3797 or 073 841 8211 or e-mail on schoolofcakeanddesign@gmail.com or go to the website www.cakesandcarrriages.co.za
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