

The Worshipful Company of Bakers at Richemont 2024

The Richemont Centre of Excellence is the world's leading international educational institute for the complete bakery and confectionery trade. Sixteen students were selected for a bursary to this august institution, and they were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. This is captured in the comment from one participant: 'I can honestly say this has been one of the best weeks of my life and I don't think I stopped smiling throughout it. These courses are invaluable for us in this industry and I'm so grateful for the opportunity.'

All participants reported that they had gained a host of new skills and knowledge from their visit. Not only did they learn how to make new products, but also the science underpinning the methods.

Examples of their learning with respect to breadmaking included:

- different mixing methods and flour ratios to achieve specific outcomes
- the wide use a range of different flours and flavourings in dough
- uses of a firm sourdough compared with a liquid one
- braiding bread with 2 strands
- the use of a Farinograph and an Extensograph
- the effects of adding gluten and ascorbic acid to dough

New learning concerning confectionery included:

- how to temper chocolate
- new techniques for creating unique chocolate decorations
- how to glaze entremets
- how to apply a mirror glaze
- dusting choux pastry with icing sugar to get a smooth top after baking
- new methods of making mousses and glazes, as well as using a frozen metal bar to create a chocolate nest for decoration

Additionally they learned useful management skills, such as ways of reducing the amount of wastage. Some learned so many new things that they couldn't list them all but said that they had made copious notes and illustrated them with photos. One student reported: 'I feel like my brain is going to burst with all the new things I have learned and all the inspiration and ideas it has given me. Not only did we learn an incredible amount through the teaching, recipes, workbooks and practical work, but also directly from the tutors, giving us hints and tips along the way that will be valuable in our day-to-day baking. There were so many things this week that I did for the first time, which I now know I have the confidence and a solid recipe to replicate at home.'

The students were all excited and inspired to try out their new knowledge in their own workplaces. Not only do they intend to pass on their new learning to colleagues in their own workplaces, but some said they would pass it on through the ABST (Alliance for Bakery Students and Trainees). Some identified ways in which they had already implemented new ideas, by extending the range of products they make and sell, and to inform new product

development. The course gave the students a heightened sense of awareness of the need to make high quality products.

Visiting Switzerland extended the students' awareness of many cultural differences. They identified greater consumption of a wider range of sweet and savoury breads in Europe compared with UK. These include breads made for different occasions, such as Swiss National Day. A wider range of spices, flavourings, raising agents and different kinds of flour are used in bread-making in Europe and these are influenced by neighbouring countries. They also identified the greater precision with which products are made.

The most interesting aspects of the course for students included:

- the use of ammonium bicarbonate and star anise
- fig bread
- storing the mother sourdough in a cool room and submerged in water to create an anaerobic environment
- using an extra layer of dough to cover heavily fruited bread to prevent burning
- the use of alcohol in cakes
- ways of improving efficiency, for example, by freezing ingredients, such as custard filling for a macchiato tart,
- students mentioned some specific products, such as, a spelt hazelnut wave, Chilli ring with sweetcorn, Bruli dough, buttercream with kirsch, chocolate avocado cake, a spring bun in the shape of a flower, saffron macaron, and cremaux .

The students reported that the course well exceeded their expectations. They cited the knowledge, skill and approachability of the tutors, the amount they learned, the quantity of new dishes they prepared, the favourable position of the school, the friendliness and talent of everyone – tutors and students, the quality of the food, the 'incredible experience' of dining at the Bakers' Guild House in Lucerne, the lake, watching the sun go down over Mount Pilatus. Several said that the visit had been an unforgettable experience.

Although most students could think of no ways to improve the course, others had some suggestions for enhancing the experience even further. There were practical suggestions such as reminding students about bringing a Swiss adaptor for their electrical devices, and ordering a bigger size for their whites. Some students would have preferred the heavier meal of the day to be in the evening as the lunches made them feel lethargic in the afternoon. Others would have liked more time to explore the area.

Everyone was complementary about the travelling and accommodation arrangements with several mentioned the convenience of their free bus pass. They particularly highlighted the smooth travel arrangements, the quality of their rooms and the overall organisation.

This course was an outstanding success. Every student identified huge gains in their specialist knowledge and skills, and had very clear plans for using this new learning in the future – to develop new products, teach their colleagues, and enhance the range of products they offer. They very much appreciated the camaraderie of their colleagues and learned a lot from sharing their experiences. Everyone was extremely grateful to Sara and the Worshipful Company of Bakers.