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Pasticceria Beverara: Wizard of cakes

Producing fine panettone is such a challenge foreign pastry chefs have called it the Mount Everest of baking. The iconic Italian Christmas cake has added to the glory of the festive season since it was first baked in Milan in the late 15th century.

Despite the already formidable task, a maestro of confection in Bologna is taking the artistry of panettone even further. Luca Porretto and his team at Pasticceria Beverara have created artisanal interpretations of the traditional Milanese delight so good some have related patents and one even won a certificate for innovation in the 2017 Re Panettone, or King of Panettone, competition closely followed in epicurean Italy.



At just 33 years old Luca Porretto, the creative force behind Pasticceria Beverara, has already won awards and patents. He is considered one of the top pastry chefs of his generation.

With the festive season upon us, Luca is sleeping two hours a night – down from the usual five – as the 33-year-old wunderkind keeps a keen eye on a process so complex it would do a chemistry professor proud. Ambient temperature, the hour of the day, humidity and the PH of the mother yeast herself all affect the final masterpiece.

Working with a team of 30 – including colleague pastry chefs Federico Pieri, Federico Bardasi and Matteo De Simoni – Luca not only produces the Christmas season delight, but also a full range of other pastries at his shop and kitchen in the hamlet of Sabbiano in the municipality of Castel Maggiore, 5 km from downtown Bologna.

Its full name, Pasticceria Beverara Cafè Pralineria, pays homage to his father Vincenzo, who began as a pastry apprentice at 13 years old. In 2003 the elder Porretto opened a pastry workshop on via Beverara in Bologna. Luca was 19 in 2006 when he carried on the tradition and began learning from his father, at the time the city's absolute master of brioches, cornetti and croissants delivered daily to the best of

Bologna's coffeehouses and bars.

That start, his own experimentation and diligence have already made Luca renowned in his own right. He led a move to a much larger facility four years ago.

Today the operation is the most popular baker of wedding cakes in all of Bologna, crafting some 200 of the all-important creations each year. The effort and his brilliant local TV show have earned Luca the appellation "Wizard of Cakes" from a wide range of clients including appreciative newlyweds.



The spherical Panettone Porretto is another expression of Luca's fertile creativity.

But it is the panettone that consumes Luca this time of year. His obsession is so complete he often finds himself drawing inspiration even while watching TV. Two seasons ago at Easter, he was watching a movie and was inspired by a girl eating a round chocolate. He was struck with the idea of a spherical panettone, which would come to be named Panettone Porretto.

Because each traditional Milanese panettone must be turned upside-down to cool after baking, a round panettone presents unique challenges. Undeterred, Luca invented new patented baking hardware that allows the delicious spherical wonder to retain its shape throughout the process. His shop also designed special packaging to hold the sphere without marring it. The Panettone Porretto and the entire process is patented in Italy and the EU, and has a patent pending in the US.

A mixture of 99 percent dark chocolate, candied oranges and bitter orange marmalade drops, the Panettone Porretto is covered with hazelnut glaze, hazelnut cream and pralines.

An élite product that requires a more elaborate process, the innovative panettone is pricier than others, as is any hot, luxe and desirable gift for the Holiday Season. For his achievements, Luca is considered one of the most esteemed Italian pastry chefs of his generation.

Another of his inspirations also came at Eastertime, this one from Russian Matryoshka dolls that nestle one within the other. In 2016 Luca created a panettone made from layers of pistachio glaze, creme of ginger and a core of chocolate, all waiting to be discovered in their own time. The creation won the King of Panettone innovation award in 2017 and is patented in Italy.

Pasticceria Beverara of course makes the most traditional Milanese panettone with candied fruit and raisins as well as three other other variants: a chocolate panettone, chocolate with amarena cherries, and milk chocolate with pears, candied fruit and nuts. All are produced without additives and delivered fresh.

“It is such a satisfaction to see people appreciate what we do,” says Luca. “We would like to also export to some specialty food outlets in the US.”

Yet his busy mind returns to cakes as well. “I saw a show called Cake Boss in 2012,” he recalls. It charmed me and I said to myself ‘I want to try that’.” That same year the talented cake master created an entry for a competition called the Wedding Cake Expo – and won. The five-tier cake included a pair of newlywed figures that emerged with the help of a mechanical device inside.

Luca's unique cakes are for all events. They can be filled with amazing special effects or be visually more traditional. With his

commitment and fertile imagination “I now see cakes everywhere”, he says.

Luca was also the head pastry chef on a team of 300 that set the Guinness World Record for the largest cake ever made. The 17-meter long, 14-meter wide confection was created during Milan Expo 2015 and weighed more than a ton.



The élite products are finely packaged, making impressive gifts for friends, family or colleagues.

It is all the more remarkable considering Luca has no formal schooling in the fine arts of pastry making. He is almost entirely self-taught and self-made.

“I work for challenges,” he says. “There’s always a new challenge to keep me creative. I constantly challenge myself. And I will never have arrived at the culmination because I don’t think I will ever stop working. I cannot think about my profession only as a way of making money”.

Pasticceria Beverara also produces classic Italian mignon pastries, cookies, chocolates, a vast range of bonbons, marmalades and typical Bolognese desserts such as the torta di riso, or sweet rice cake, and Pan Speciale, a traditional Christmas sweet bread. Very rich in spices, Pan Speciale is also known as Certosino because the monk-bakers from La Certosa di Bologna, the city’s Carthusian monastery, have been preparing it since the Middle Ages.

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