



# PRESS RELEASE

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## TIME OUT (Avril 1994)

### Show us your buns

*Don't leave the over-indulgence to the under-fives this Easter-satisfy your own passion for cake at one of London's booming band of pâtisseries. If you are what you eat, then Caroline Stacey is a large, fruity tart.*

Pit French pâtisserie against English cakes and there's no contest. We gave the world Eccles cakes, rock cakes and Bath buns: they gave us fruit tarts, croissants, chocolate truffle cake and tarte au citron. Ours may be more wholesome, but theirs are art, decorated with squiggles and ribbons and given further mystique by exotic names.

Pâtisserie has always had its strongholds in London, particularly in the traditionally French bastion of South Kensington, and rich areas like Chelsea and Mayfair, but recently the competition has hotted up and has become even more luxurious and elaborate - feast your mince pies on the windows of Cannelle or Bagatelle or Cullen's for proof. Increasingly, too, cake shops are adding chairs and making the transition to café, so you don't have to trip out of the shop with a be-ribboned box.

Sure, you have to pay more for it: but you get to press your nose against the window first, experience the exquisite anticipation of sizing up the brightly coloured array of cakes to decide which one as your name on it. It's a highly personal thing, pâtisserie, a relationship tinged with longing and guilt, between you and what you are about to eat. According to social anthropologists, different foods, the occasions on which they are eaten and what they are eaten with, have different meanings. When food is an art form, as pâtisserie

undoubtedly is, it becomes arguable whether it is really food at all. Hence the guilt - we're not eating it because we're hungry and we're certainly not falling on it because it's good for us. We're also destroying something really beautiful as we chop it up and cram it in our mouth. This allows us to indulge in a certain amount of fetishistic cake eating, playing out a ritual of delayed gratification with techniques like peeling the marzipan off the Battenberg and saving it until last. No one can tell you not to play with your food when it's not real food but indulgence.

Social anthropologist Simon Charlsey of the University of Glasgow writes, in "Wedding Cakes and Cultural History" (Routledge), The cake developed... not as an integral part of any meal but as a festive or celebratory elaboration of bread". I rang Charlsey to see if he could throw any light on the significance of pâtisserie in contemporary urban consumer society (Soho and South Kensington to be more precise). He said he was very sorry but he'd put cake behind him and was now more concerned with the class system in India. It seems social anthropologists are more fickle than consumers who, now they've acquired a taste for French cake shops, are becoming ever more discriminating about which is the best. Compared with some of the dazzling new continental cake shops, the longer-established ones now seem rather dowdy. We select our own favourites.

### PÂTISSERIES

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Bagatelle, 44 Harrington Rd, SW7 (071 581 1551) South Kensington tube. Open daily 8am-8pm, Sun until 6pm,

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if you want to pretend you are in one of the smarter quarters of Paris stroll in here. The shop is spacious and almost terrify-ingly chic. The pâtisserie is so elaborate and perfect that the individual slices look like brooches, while the larger cakes could be Ascot hats. Disproves the notion that anything can look too good to eat. Large tarts start at £6.50 for a simple fruit one up to £20.80 for a Fontainebleu (chocolate mousse, meringue and almonds). Individual chocolate cakes are £2.20; raspberry and strawberry tarts are £2.20; lemon tarts £1.45 and croissants 55p. This is purely a shop; there's no seating.

**BUTTER FINGERS - THE GOOD CROISSANT GUIDE**  
As with all pâtisserie, or, in the case of croissants, Viennoiserie (breakfast pasties), the finest ingredients are crucial. The flour should be French, as should the butter as this has a lower water content than our own. Croissant means "crescent" and that's how they should look. Why then, do some bakers make them look like torpedoes?

We rounded up croissants from some of London's leading pâtisseries to compare them.

Results showed that it's the flashy Jeanny-come-lately pâtisseries that come out best. Copper-bottomed Frenchness does not a good croissant guarantee, as the two least successful in the tasting were both from well-established French bakeries. Even the most dedicated croissant-crumblers found fatigue soon set in. However, top marks went to the incredibly buttery ones from Cannelle; the deliciously doughy, fresh and slightly chewy ones from Maison Bertaux; and the rather sweet, dainty and light ones from Bagatelle. Least liked were those from Pechon and Bonne Bouche.

Maison Blanc's boomerang-shaped versions were not popular and croissants from Cullen's were notable mostly for their obscenely large size and overbaked quality. The rest were much of a muchness.