

INTELLIGENT CURIOSITY

Top pastry chef **Leonardo Di Carlo** describes himself as “a composer, not a performer”. He tells Andrea Tolu how his relationship with Hiber allows him to focus on quality and reliability



Defining Leonardo Di Carlo as a “pastry chef” only tells a small fraction of the story. In fact, he’s much more than that: consultant, author, teacher, mentor, entrepreneur, world champion, and most importantly a researcher of the art and science of pastry-making.

Di Carlo learned the ropes of the trade at young age in his parents’ pastry shop. He then continued his education in several European schools with different teachers. It was soon clear however, that the classic training path wouldn’t really suit him: “I started to feel constrained by routine”, he says. “When you do the same thing over and over, you’re never going to grow. That applies to pastry-making as well as to life.”

FROM PERFORMER TO COMPOSER

The turning point for him came when he realised that “in a simple crème patissière there was a lot to discover.” That’s when he knew what type of pastry chef he wanted to be: not a performer but a composer.

Rather than building a wide repertoire of hundreds of cakes and pastries, Di Carlo dove deep into the study of ingredients and preparation methods, always led by what he calls “intelligent curiosity.” Stupid curiosity, he says, asks ‘how do you do it?’ Intelligent curiosity wants to know *why* you do it that way.

Answering that ‘why’ requires solid technical knowledge. For Di Carlo, haute patisserie is an art based on science, bearing a striking resemblance to music: “Just like there are seven notes, pastry-making has four main ingredients: eggs, sugar, flours and fats,” says Di Carlo. Once you really understand how they work, the creative potential is limitless.

Armed with this awareness, Di Carlo went on to live the whole spectrum of experiences a career in pastry-making can offer: he became world pastry champion, taught in different schools, wrote a best-selling book *Tradizione in evoluzione* (*Tradition in Evolution*) that is already considered a classic, traveled the world for almost twenty-five years as a consultant for over 2,000 restaurants, hotels, and pastry shops of all sizes.

A recurrent theme during my interview with Di Carlo is the importance of simplifying preparations and reducing the



number of steps. He rejects the idea that a recipe is set in stone because ‘it’s always been like that.’

A RECIPE IS A PRISON

Di Carlo’s latest accomplishment is Pastry Concept®, the training school he opened in 2016 with his wife Michela in Conegliano, near Treviso.

According to the school’s website, Michela takes care of administrative tasks, sales and marketing. In fact, for Di Carlo her role is far more important: “Most of what I’ve accomplished is thanks to her,” he says. “They say that behind every great man there’s a great woman, but in my case she should stay in the foreground.”

Each course at Pastry Concept® has

no more than six students, most of them between 20 and 35 years old, from Italy and overseas. The number of cakes included in the program is limited by design: “If I show fifteen different cakes, there would be no time for explanations,” says Di Carlo. “If I limit the choice, I can really take the time to explain what ingredients I’m using and how to modify the preparation.”

All of that is congruent with Di Carlo’s tradition in evolution philosophy: getting to know the science behind preparations, in order to create cakes that showcase the personality of the pastry chef. All the while, simplifying the process without compromising on quality or losing sight of the bottom line. In three words: art, science, entrepreneurship.



“I always remind my students that a recipe is not a solution, but a problem,” says Di Carlo. “A recipe can become a prison: if you find something that works and never change it, you stop growing.”

Small groups also give Di Carlo the opportunity to build a more personal relationship with his students. For him, it’s not just about being a teacher, but also a mentor who ensures they understand the most important qualities of a pastry chef: the right type of curiosity, humility and

Leonardo Di Carlo’s Pastry Concept® training school opened in 2016 in Conegliano, near Treviso, Italy

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transparency, in the sense of honesty of intents. And then, the most important one: tenacity.

“When you don’t achieve a goal it’s not because you didn’t make it, but because you stopped before getting there,” says Di Carlo.”

The latest milestone was the launch of Pastry Skill®. It’s an app with an extensive archive of ingredients and recipes, and a function that combines ingredients in infinite ways, with a clear indication of cost, nutritional values, allergens, etc.

START WITH THE COLD

Opening his own school also gave Di Carlo the opportunity to build his ideal pastry kitchen with the best equipment available. In his search, he did what he always recommends others do: he started with the cold. “Cold is what allows you to produce more and save time,” says Di Carlo. “It’s like having a car with a bigger tank.” Hiber was a natural choice, and for more than one reason.

First of all, Di Carlo was already familiar with the quality and reliability of Hiber’s blast chilling and refrigeration equipment. What got the project started however, was his long-time friendship with Stefano Lovisotto and Andrea Bottin.

Lovisotto is Hiber’s brand manager. His position was previously covered by Bottin, who recently appointed Lovisotto before being promoted to executive director of the Ali Group Refrigeration Division for the North East of Italy. The division is composed of three brands: Hiber, Friulinox and Polaris. Lovisotto and Di Carlo first met in 2004, when the chef was training for the World Championship he would eventually win. The friendship with Bottin goes even farther back in time.



“We are specialists in cold, but with passion,” says Lovisotto. “For us it’s not just about selling equipment, we also want to spread a culture around the use of cold in foodservice.”

For Pastry Concept®, Hiber supplied The One, their most innovative product so far, with several functions in one square meter: blast chiller and shock freezer, slow cooker, thawer, warm holder, fruit dehydrator, refrigerator, freezer and much more. These can be fully programmed and automated.

For any chef, that means saving time and effort and peace of mind. Other than The One, Hiber supplied positive and negative refrigerators, refrigerated counters and took care of the design as well.

Perhaps more importantly however, the collaboration between Hiber and Di Carlo was so productive because they both strongly believe in the importance of listening to your customers to create solutions that allow them to do more with less, while keeping quality intact. “Building equipment is easy, providing real solutions is more difficult,” says Lovisotto. “Leonardo helped us a lot with that. He knows exactly what he wants and was a source of inspiration for us.” ■

At Pastry Concept® Leonardo Di Carlo uses only Hiber refrigeration products



ABOUT HIBER

Hiber was founded in 1998 as a company specialized in blast chilling. Its turnover reached €3m in 2011 and €11m in 2017.

Today, Hiber is known in the foodservice market worldwide for its 100% Made in Italy products. The company exports to about 100 different countries.



Above: Stefano Lovisotto, brand manager, Hiber (left) and Andrea Bottin, executive director, Ali Group Refrigeration Division for the North East of Italy