

All from scratch

Honeyrose
organic handbaking

Lise Madsen: 'Some multiples have driven everything on price; there is no room for skill and that will come back and bite us'



Lise Madsen, of organic bakery Honeyrose, is a firm advocate of handmade – and ‘sinful’ – treats, finds Andrew Williams

Amidst the cacophony of healthy-eating messages and manufacturers scrambling to put a healthy spin on their products, it's refreshing to hear one organic baker proudly declaring her cakes as 'unhealthy'.

"Six years ago, you either had good cakes that were not organic, or you had organic cake that was a compromise in taste. It wasn't easy to find organic products that tasted really nice and were sinful, or unhealthy!" says Danish-born Lise Madsen of organic cake specialist Honeyrose Bakery.

Originally conceived for retail in 2001, the firm's handmade cakes are increasingly selling into cafés, coffee shops and business catering in and around London, in both unwrapped and individually pre-packed form. Turning over £1.4m, the next step will be taking the business up to £3m-£5m, although the imminent arrival of Madsen's second baby is an understandably more pressing priority.

"There's a limited amount of time I can put into growing the business, so we're taking on two sales managers; but we've grown slowly and steadily and it's meant we don't have any financial pressures and no loans in the business," says Madsen. In fact, she claims the firm is "cash rich" and on the lookout for new premises, having outgrown the current facility in Park Royal, London.

She firmly advocates craft skills over automation and scratch baking over premixes. "Having worked at [confectionery and delicatessen specialist] Lenôtre in Paris, within a production centre employing 500 people doing everything by hand, I know it's not because you become big that you have

to start using machines; it's just a matter of repeating a process and keeping the skills," she says.

Madsen harboured the dream of becoming a pastry chef from the age of 12 and eventually trained at Lenôtre for five years, achieving a degree in patisserie. Following a stint in Germany, she moved to London. "I had moved out of hands-on baking and into management," she recalls. Madsen then project-managed a restaurant in the City for the Roux Brothers before starting her own business.

The firm's new gluten-free products were also developed with indulgence in mind and include a Bramley apple and sultana muffin, an orange, apricot and almond muffin, an exotic fruit muffin, a brownie with walnuts, an orange almond cake and a blueberry polenta cake. "It took us a very long time to develop gluten-free products, as I didn't want to make them unless my conventional consumers would be equally happy to eat them," she says.

Honeyrose supplies some own-label and the brand will be launching into London Waitrose stores this month with a range of eight grab-and-go individually sliced cakes. But as far as buddying up with the multiples goes, that's the end of it. "I like Waitrose because of the way they treat the supplier. I have a bit of a grudge against the other supermarkets because they've driven everything on price; there is no money for the skill and, one day, that is going to come back and bite us."

In line with her ethical approach, Honeyrose contributes 5% of profits to its own charitable foundation, funding Third World projects, including setting up bakeries in Malawi. ■