



Debbie Lear, innovations illustrator for Finsbury, who collected the award on the night on behalf of the company

“The journey was challenging, demanding yet hugely enjoyable”

Finsbury Food Group saw off tough competition to win the Celebration Cake Business of the Year category at the Moulin Rouge-themed Baking Industry Awards 2016

AS INNOVATIONS DIRECTOR at Finsbury Foods, Jill Downs spearheaded the company’s Baking Industry Awards (BIA) entry. “We wanted our cake to reflect aspects of the Belle Époque, when the Moulin Rouge was at the height of its glory,” she says of the design.

Downs explains there were plenty of monochrome images online, but it was the paintings of artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was a patron of the Moulin Rouge, that inspired the team. “Our cake is ultimately a tribute to Toulouse-Lautrec – it is the Moulin Rouge seen through his eyes.”

The team – Andrea Pitt, innovation cake designer, David Languerand, group innovation chef, and Debbie Lear, innovations illustrator – worked hard to include Toulouse-Lautrec in many guises on the cake. “He even appears as one of the characters, holding a brush and palette, surrounded by his drawings – and alcohol, which was the cause of his early death.”

The Moulin Rouge cake itself is set against two backdrops – one depicting a night sky, to illuminate the royal icing that makes up the lights on the sails, and the second against a cloudy, Parisian sky.

“This was in keeping with our interest in showing two elements of the Moulin Rouge: the glitz and glamour of the girls and the abandonment of inhibitions, fuelled by absinthe and the optimism of the period; and, in contrast, the reality of life for many of the dancers as they sought fame and fortune far from home,” says Downs.

This theme is continued throughout the cake with details such as rats seeking crumbs from pastries; a captive, dressed



Debbie Lear collecting the award from Renshaw head of B2B Dean Andrews



monkey; and a snake that wraps around the body of famous Moulin Rouge dancer Jane Avril. The team worked on the cake for more than a month, explains Downs. “With that amount of detail we wanted to be sure to get it just right.”

Of the win itself, Downs says: “We were delighted. It was an opportunity to create an intricate cake that wasn’t restricted by manufacturing capabilities or cost. We found new ways of working through our experimentation with ingredients, pushing boundaries, which ultimately informed future designs for retail.”

And the night of the awards ceremony was unforgettable, adds Downs. “What a night! It was great seeing our displayed cake getting lots of attention.”

So does she think other businesses should enter the BIAs? “Go for it! Entering inspired us to look at cake decorating with fresh eyes. The competition was fierce and urged us to up our game. The journey was challenging, demanding and yet hugely enjoyable. It’s a massive opportunity to showcase your talent and promote your business.”

Sponsor’s comment

Renshaw has sponsored the Celebration Cake Business of the Year category for 12 years in a row.

“Each year we’re incredibly impressed with the entries we receive,” says the business. “What makes this category so fun to judge is the theme each year, and seeing how each business interprets it.”

Independent judges John Slattery of Slattery Patisserie & Chocolatier in Manchester, and Sonia Young, publisher of *British Baker* met semi-finalists at the new Renshaw Academy in Liverpool.

John Slattery says: “Finsbury’s cake showed thought, passion, attention to detail and great use of colour. Character modelling, painting and piping were executed in a neat, clean manner, creating a fantastic visual appearance.”



To attend the 2017 Baking Industry Awards visit bakeryawards.co.uk

