

# The Cupcake Comeback

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The moment Sarah Jessica Parker ate her pink cupcake outside New York's Magnolia Bakery heralded a rebirth for this childhood baking classic.

The Hummingbird Bakery on London's Portobello Road produces some of the cutest cupcakes in town and counts Gwyneth Paltrow, Elle Macpherson and Ruby Wax amongst its fans. We spoke to the owner Tarek Malouf, to find out the secret of his success.

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## ADVERTISEMENT



The cupcake phenomenon has taken the food world by storm and, in the UK, cupcake shops and bars are opening far and wide.

But one that sticks out in the culinary map is the one and only Hummingbird Bakery, whose cookbook rocketed straight to the top of the best sellers list.

Hummingbird Bakery owner, Tarek Malouf, explains a little more...

**Tell us a little bit about yourself, your background and what prompted you to start the Hummingbird Bakery.**

I was raised in London and studied at The American School in London. I fondly remember making cupcakes and brownies for Bake Sales at school when I was growing up, and as an adult I missed these simple but delicious goodies. I thought London could do with a place that made good quality cakes that weren't French or from a supermarket!



I worked on the news desk at ABC News's London bureau, but decided to completely change careers, so I took a short baking course in New York before opening the first shop in London's Portobello Road.

I really thought that there was a gap in the market in London for an American-style Bakery serving good quality, handmade cakes. For me, Hummingbird Bakery has always been about providing a place to indulge one's sweet tooth – a place that evokes the home-baked tastes of childhood in a contemporary yet fun environment.

I chose Portobello Rd because it's a busy, vibrant street with a world-famous reputation. There's also an affluent residential neighbourhood in Notting Hill, with lots of families and children – our first target market. The new Soho Bakery which opened in December is in a much more trendy area surrounded by countless offices and shops.

#### **Where did you learn to bake?**

In the short course I took in New York before opening the first bakery!

#### **Are the ingredients used in baking in the US different to those in the UK?**

Mostly the same, but they generally tend to have different names. All-purpose Flour (US) = Plain Flour (UK). Caster Sugar (UK) = Granulated Sugar (US). There are some ingredients that are used in US recipes that are not easy to find here, such as Corn Syrup or 100% Unsweetened Chocolate.

#### **What defines a cupcake (versus a fairy cake or a muffin)?**

Cupcakes are the US version of fairy cakes. However, fairy cakes tend to be smaller and have less icing/frosting. Hummingbird Bakery cupcakes are much more about indulgence and really delighting the buyer, so very colourful, lots of whipped frosting and really lovely little handmade decorations. Cupcakes also have a moister, lighter sponge and fluffy icing.

#### **Where do you get the inspiration for your recipes from?**

All over the place! But we now have our own development team that comes up with new flavours.

#### **Which is your earliest memory relating to cupcakes or baking?**

As a child I remember visiting relatives in the US and baking all kinds of American treats like cupcakes and pies...

#### **Which is your best selling/most popular cup cake?**

Our Red Velvet Cupcakes are the most popular; a deep red vanilla cake that tastes slightly of chocolate and has a cream cheese frosting, making it unusual. They are really luxurious but not too sweet and made from the best ingredients.

#### **Is there a 'skinny' muffin option available?**

We don't have a skinny version yet, but this is definitely something we may consider for the future.

#### **How many cupcakes do you sell per day?**

We sell approximately 20,000 to 30,000 a week. So it works out to be approximately 1,500 a day at each shop.

#### **Go on, tell us! Which celebrity fans are amongst your clients?**

Gwyneth Paltrow, Madonna, Mariah Carey, Pixie Lott, Matthew Williamson, Lisa B, Kelly Brook, Kimberley Stewart, Minnie and Kate Driver, Rihanna, Scarlett Johansson, Stella McCartney, Cat Deeley, Dawn French, Ruby Wax, Richard Curtis, Normandie Keith, Darren Hayes & Elle Macpherson...  
(Editor: Cripes, well they can't all be wrong!)

#### **To what do you attribute the secret of your success? Any key ingredients in your recipes?**

Good quality ingredients, freshly baked everyday and high standards in customer service.

#### **Tell us about the future for the Hummingbird Bakery?**

We have a new bakery that opened in Soho, London early December 2009. I often have enquiries about franchising opportunities and I am definitely going to be considering these options in the future. The most important thing is that the Hummingbird ethos of high quality, beautiful looking and delicious tasting products is consistent, wherever they are stocked.

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