

More2Life

BREAKING THE STIGMA

Dementia sufferer on why a fulfilling life can still be lived: Page 36

EASTERN PROMISE

Belfast's newest Chinese gets off to great start: Page 37

OUR DAILY BREAD

Couple behind artisan Lisburn bakery let Jade Beecroft in on the secret of their award-winning sourdough. Pages 34&35

'Our bread is made with love... every loaf matters'

When it comes to success for one Lisburn business, team members Betty and Betsy are the temperamental matriarchs behind the entire operation.

These sisters aren't human, but they are very much alive — and production depends on their well-being. Staff rotas revolve around feeding times and they're never left alone over weekends or holidays.

Betty and Betsy are the sourdough starters behind the multi-award winning bread at the Daily Apron bakery, run by married couple Katrina Collins and Cathy Stevenson.

Since launching their business three years ago in Market Square, they have scooped over 17 awards and built a loyal local following, with a community-focused ethos at the heart of what they do.

Katrina says they're incredibly proud of their team of bakers, who train in-house and work all hours to ensure a steady production of loaves, pastries and traybakes — as well as tending to Betty and Betsy.

"They're named after Cathy's mum," Katrina laughs. "She's Elizabeth and her two nicknames are Betty and Betsy, and Cathy wanted to make the point that sourdough starters need to be cared for as well as you would your own mother."

"Cathy's superpower is that she only has to look at the starters, or smell them, to know if they need a wee bit more or less heat, another 30 minutes proving or more water."



Cathy and Katrina with a hunk of sourdough

"Making real bread is chemistry, it has to be so precise. You take the basic ingredients of flour, water and salt, add fermentation and that's how the magic happens. None of our products have any artificial ingredients or preservatives."

Katrina and Cathy, from Lurgan, have been together for 33 years after meeting on a night out in Belfast, and business partners for 23 of those, having run several cafes and delis — most recently in Lisburn's Smyth Patterson.

Katrina explains that they are both self-taught, learning from a number of mentors over the years, including Radha Patterson who owned Cargoes Deli on the Lisburn Road.

During the Covid lockdowns, Cathy became "obsessed" with learning how to make sourdough bread, experimenting and reading everything she could in her bid to create the perfect loaf.

By the time restrictions lifted, the idea of opening a bakery had been sown.

In 2021 the couple visited the well-known Ursa Minor, in Ballycastle, to get some tips and guidance, and by autumn 2022 they had opened the Daily Apron.

"We saw a gap in the market in Lisburn for artisan bread," explains Katrina. "From the very beginning we've had so much support and so many customers have become like friends because they come to us every week for their bread, weekend pastries and sweet treats."

EMOTIONAL

"Our front-of-house manager Julie Curry is amazing — she's been with us for 22 years since we first opened in Lisburn and I've never seen her without a smile on her face. She knows everyone who comes in so well."

Katrina notes that the hospitality industry can be

"tough", but she and Cathy are determined to buck that trend. They prioritise training their young team of bakers and making the shop feel "like a family".

"We have two sets of sisters on the team," laughs Katrina.

"Amy and Kaitlyn McMullan, and Emily and Ellie McMannon. Then there's Rhiannon Dunn, Hayley Cromie and Daniel McIlveen — all under the age of 30 and some have been with us from they were very young."

"I tell our team that our ethos is cakes, kindness and community. Baking is our superpower and our aprons are our capes. Cathy and I aim to equip our young people with emotional skills as well as the technical skills of baking."

In addition to selling from their bakery Thursday to Saturday, the Daily Apron team deliver to trade customers such as farm shops, cafes, restaurants and delicatessens across the province, meaning there is someone proving or baking seven days a week.

The night shift starts at midnight, or 10pm on Friday nights in preparation for Saturday, which is their busiest day.

"This is to ensure the freshest of products," explains Katrina. "We deliver as far as the border with Armagh and Monaghan, Warrenpoint, Ballygawley, Draperstown, Holywood, and of course Belfast."

In addition to the popular plain sourdough, Cathy and her team bake a variety of special flavours, including charcoal and sesame, sunblush tomato and olive, and dark choco-





Cathy and Katrina in their bakery; and (right) Cathy with some of the team. Below right: Some of their breads, pastries and sweet treats © Belfast News and Features



‘Real bread takes time — fermentation is a process that you can’t speed up’

late and cinnamon. There is also a chipmunk seeded country loaf, all manner of bagels, and Guinness and treacle wheaten bread.

“There are many definitions of real bread,” explains Katrina. “For us it’s about the ingredients, the lack of anything artificial, and the slow-food process, made by hand rather than machines. Real bread takes time — fermentation is a live process and you can’t speed up nature.”

SABBATICAL

Meanwhile the counter is always stacked with a mouth-watering array of traybakes and pastries, which Katrina points out are made with North Cork butter — never margarine.

One of Cathy’s dreams had been to train in viennoiserie, which is a style of baking to create things like croissants and pain au chocolat, and in 2023 she got the chance.

A friend from Vancouver put her in touch with French baker Mikel working in a bakery called Artisan Eats on Bowen Island, off the coast of British Columbia, and she flew out to Canada for a six-week sabbatical with him.

“This guy was basically baking for the whole island,” explains Katrina. “As soon as Cathy arrived she rolled up her sleeves and got stuck in, so they got on like a house on fire.”

“She came back with authentic French recipes and a method of making croissants, cruffins and pastries that’s so secret that she won’t even tell me what it is — but it works! Our fresh pastries don’t taste like anywhere else’s.”

Since opening, the Daily Apron has won 17 awards, including Irish Quality Food and Drink Awards (IQFDA-Gold for charcoal sourdough, Gold for everything bagel), World Bread Awards (Gold for sourdough) and the prestigious McKenna Guide (Best in Ireland 2025 and 2026).

But Katrina says that for her and Cathy, the biggest reward is the community they are building, both within the bakery and with their customers.

“Nothing ever goes to waste,” says Katrina. “We donate any leftover stock to our local Lisburn food bank. Our bread is made with love and every single loaf matters.”

Gardening

Alan Mercer of Hillmount Garden Centre shares his gardening tips exclusively with Sunday Life readers



RHS: What will be pick of bunch?

With the world’s most famous, and according to the organisers, greatest flower show, taking place this week, I took a sneak peek at The RHS Chelsea Flower Show plant of the year shortlist. The criteria for winning is based on novelty and innovation, garden performance and likely appeal to gardeners.

Most, if not all, of the plants shortlisted have the wow factor that the judges are looking for.

I’ve chosen a few of the finalists to consider carefully and there are some trends showing through in the varieties being bred this year.

From compact plants which are great for smaller spaces, long flowering plants, unusual foliage colours and those with our environment and climate in mind. A real standout is the Carnival Lights Candy Apple with its unusually deep red flowers. This plant usually has pink tones so the red is a real breakthrough colour.

The perennial snapdragon, ‘Shiryu Kiss’, is an antirrhinum with purple blooms promising resistance to rust and mildew and there are two Clematis in the running, both with distinctive flower blooms.

I think one of the most eye-catching entries is the ‘Red Ninja’ Hosta with its deep red foliage. Hostas are popular in any garden but prefer shade. They like to be kept well-watered, especially when their leaves are expanding in spring and summer. Young hostas are attractive to slugs and snails so I would suggest protecting them with copper tape around pots or with wildlife friendly repellents.

I’m looking forward to seeing the highlights from this year’s Chelsea Flower Show and I’ll be watching with interest to see which one is chosen as this year’s plant of the year!

● If you have a question for Alan, email him at alan@hillmount.co.uk or message him on facebook at www.facebook.com/hillmountgardencentre. For inspiration for your garden, log on to www.hillmount.co.uk and follow them on instagram — www.instagram.com/hillmountbelfast