





sweet edible art

Patti Paige is a cookie connoisseur in New York City.

In the bustling city that never sleeps, Patti spends her days designing, baking and decorating sought-after cookies in her studio bakery, known as Baked Ideas. She founded the bakery in 1979 in Manhattan, up two flights of stairs in a SoHo loft, where hundreds of her own handmade cookie cutters adorn her kitchen walls.

Patti never went to culinary school, instead she studied painting. “Oddly, the texture of my paintings was quite like the texture of icing,” she says.

“My grandmother was a cookie baker and always made cookies for us, in various shapes, with a cookie gun. I began baking her walnut cookie recipe as a way to supplement my income (I was teaching Art to kids) and it just took off! I made shaped cakes and cookies back when it was fairly unusual, so I got a lot of attention for it.”

She sold these walnut cookies to food shops in SoHo. Back then Patti didn't have an oven in her loft, so she would bake at her neighbour's place at 2am.

Patti's cookies range from lifelike animals, fried eggs with pepper on

toast, to bacon so real-looking it's as if it's sizzling in a pan. She's created gingerbread-shaped typewriters, fireplaces in chimneys and monuments like the Lincoln Memorial, complete with mittens and earmuffs!

In 2014, Patti published her book, *You Can't Judge a Cookie by Its Cutter*. She got the idea for it when guests would eye her cookie cutters on her studio walls, trying to guess what shapes they were. “Often, they would guess wrong but I could see what they were seeing! So, I figured it would be fun to take cutters and bake the shapes and see how many different ways I could decorate each one.



Then I got the idea for the title, and it all made perfect sense."

How did you learn to bake and decorate? I learned decorating through the one or two books I could find and by experimenting. Baking is just a matter of following a recipe, as far as I can see. Some recipes are better than others, so you learn to get a sense of which recipes might be good. It took me forever to find a yellow cake recipe I liked. Decorating is

similar to making art, and it came easily to me. You get a feel for the tools and materials and how to use them, to get the results you want.

How do you create cookies? Designing the cookies begins with an idea. Often I have something brewing in my mind. I look around for inspiration in books, online, in store windows and in nature. Then I draw the shape, make it cookie cutter friendly, and make a cookie cutter.

I make all my own cutters and always have done. I make a stencil if necessary, to get the design onto the cookie surface. Then it's a lot of time mixing colours, piping and 'painting in' or 'flooding', as most people call it.

You've baked for the White House! I baked cookies for the children's Easter Egg Roll (hunt) on the White House lawn when President Clinton was in office. It was so much fun. JK Rowling and



many other big names were invited, so I got to meet a lot of people, including the president and Hillary Clinton. I also made cookies for the White House Christmas tree one year and cookies for President Obama of his two dogs trick or treating!

What's been your most exciting project to date? It's hard to say, since I have been doing this for so long! I recently shot something for American Express. I had

to travel to L.A. and ship all the cookies in various stages there from New York City. I made a life-sized chicken with waffles, taco, and pizza. All were beyond realistic. When I work small, the details are looser. These were larger so the details had to be approached differently. It was a challenge but it all went well.

Favourite thing to bake? I guess my favourite thing to bake is cookies, any kind, because cookies are my favourite

sweet to eat. Truth is, though, I don't have a big sweet tooth anymore! The shaped cookies I make, without the icing on, are not very sweet.

What do you do for fun outside of work? I go to the flea markets, auctions and yard sales to collect whatever catches my eye. I get ideas for cookie shapes, colours and patterns that way. I also garden, grow vegetables and edible flowers, and play tennis.