

a sweet love

Discover the hottest wedding cake trends of 2015 and get to know Nicole Slater, the woman behind Sweet Love Cake Couture who's taking the industry by storm

Story by Emily Marquart





Nicole Slater has trained with some of the cake industry's biggest names, her creations have been featured in countless magazines worldwide, she was one of only a select few to attain Masters level with Planet Cake—and it all started with a cake that went wrong.

"For my eldest daughter's first birthday, I ordered a custom-made cake with a very specific vision in mind. Let's just say, it wasn't quite what I expected!" the Coffs Harbour-based designer says.

"I decided then and there to combine my love of baking and my creative side and make their future birthday cakes myself. So I went off to the newsagent, bought a copy of the Women's Weekly Kids' Birthday Cakes cookbook, and it remained a bible for the girls' birthdays for around eight years."

Each year, the cakes became more elaborate and Nicole's passion grew. Although she wasn't yet thinking seriously about developing a business, she learned as much as she could from cake decorating and sugarcraft books.

"It wasn't until I attended formal training in Sydney that I realised how invaluable face-to-face training is. I learned more in that week than I had in the past eight years. It was during that week I decided to start a business," Nicole says.

"Coincidentally, the name Sweet Love Cake Couture came to me that week while I was in the shower (where all my great ideas happen)." From there, Nicole undertook as much training as possible while still working full-time. She used every holiday to attend training in Sydney, baked

and decorated by night, set up her business systems and established a purpose-built studio.

"I've never worked so hard in all my life," Nicole recalls. "Gradually, I dropped back my hours at the 'real' job and ramped things up with the business until the scales tipped and I had the confidence to make the jump. While the pay and conditions were difficult to let go, I knew I needed to follow my heart... and I'm pleased to say I haven't looked back."

Like all successful people, Nicole has had to overcome challenges along the way. "Like many embarking on a new business venture, I was looking through rose-coloured glasses when I began and dreamed of doing nothing but creating deliciously beautiful works of art. But the reality is there's so much more that goes on behind the scenes. I learned

very quickly that time is my most precious resource, and I'm still trying to perfect that thing called balance... what is that, anyway?!"

Nicole's hard work certainly paid off, and she has received numerous accolades from industry

experts. Sweet Love Cake Couture was recently featured on an influential US blog in their article about wedding cake trends of 2015, which was compiled by top designers in the industry.

"[The article] featured our 'Nature's Lovebirds' design, which sat proudly beside a cake by my number one idol, Maggie Austin,"

Nicole says. "To have achieved this sort of recognition on the world stage is just mind-blowing."

The featured cake was hand-painted by Nicole—a style that has become one of the hottest wedding trends of 2015. "It can be in the form of a particular design, such as the birds on our 'Nature's Lovebirds' cake, or it could be a monogram or even a love letter hand-painted in old world script on the cake," Nicole says.

The designer says wafer paper is also big this year. "There are so many possibilities with edible wafer paper," Nicole explains. "It's such a hot trend and it can be used for anything from a printed wrap for one of the tiers, to creating ruffles and textured effects, and even beautiful billowy flowers."

More and more brides and grooms are opting for a cake trio on their big day. "Why have one when you can have three? This is definitely something a little different and is fantastic when used as part of a dessert table in mismatched designs. Or if you're having an intimate gathering, three small cakes of different flavours can be presented with great effect."

Watercolour designs are also on point for couples tying the knot in 2015. "This is a variation of the hand-painted cake but is a trend all of its



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own. The effect is a soft dreamy finish, perfect for a beach wedding or bohemian style."

Nicole notes that classic floral and lace designs are still very popular choices.

"These two elements are so popular in wedding cake design that it's hard to leave them off. We're seeing the arrangement of florals in a rambling fashion more and more."

As for the colour that's hot this year? "Gold, gold and more gold!" Nicole says. "I'm personally loving this trend and can't get enough of it. It can be hints of soft gold, which is perfect with ivory, blush and lace for a vintage look; the addition of edible gold leaf for ultimate sophistication; or a subtle touch of gold on sugar flowers and painted into hand-piped lacework."

No matter the trend, the bride and groom are always at the forefront of Nicole's mind when she's designing cakes. "It's their dream I want to make come true, their personalities I want to reflect in the cake and their style that influences the design."

"Sometimes a couple may have fallen in love with a particular cake and want exactly what's in the picture. But others want a cake designed specifically to reflect their love story," Nicole says. "This is when I love nothing more than seeing a vision board or a link to their Pinterest wedding album."

When Nicole designs a cake like this, she prefers not to look at other cakes for inspiration (unless there's an element the couple specifically wants recreated). Instead, she draws on elements from the couple's personal style, the gown, the invitation and the florals to create a unique piece.

"For the ultimate personal touch, you can't go past personalised sugar figurines, which we specialise in. These are handcrafted from sugar to match all the tiny features of the couple, from their attire to the jewellery and bouquet, right down to eye colour and hairstyle. I've had couples include their pet pooch and bunnies,

and their favourite activities such as surfing and skiing. The possibilities are endless and limited only by your imagination. And the best bit: they can be kept forever."

Flavour is another opportunity for couples to personalise their cake. "Mud cakes are a most definite crowd pleaser, but the options don't stop there. If you're the healthy type, a spiced carrot cake might be more your style. If you want to wow your



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guests when the cake is cut, you can't go past the intense red of the Southern red velvet cake or even rainbow layers.

"Word has got around fast that our coconut cream cake is to-die-for. This is made using coconut milk and teams perfectly with mousseline (Italian meringue buttercream) infused with passionfruit, lemon or mango. It's the ultimate taste of summer," Nicole says.

"And if you can't decide, you can always have a different flavour for every tier!"

Since there are endless wedding cake possibilities, Nicole advises brides-to-be to not overthink things. "It can become very confusing. Go with your heart, and if you see something you've fallen in love with, stop looking. One danger is trying to combine everything you love, or every element of your theme, on your cake. This is where the experts

come in. We can guide you through the process and make suggestions to suit your style and budget."

Nicole relishes playing a small part in creating some of a couple's best memories, and many of her cakes are close to her heart.

"A standout for me is a wedding cake created in May for a very stylish bride who did everything a little differently, including the cake. It was five tiers of offset white squares, in varying heights with minimal decoration," Nicole recalls.

"From a technical point of view, it was a real challenge. A cake with no decoration leaves absolutely no room for imperfections. Then there's the internal structure required to balance the offset tiers and the sheer weight of a cake this size. So although it was a 'simple' cake to the non-caker, it was one of the most challenging I've done and one that I'm most proud of."

But there is one particular cake that Nicole most looks forward to creating each year.

"My daughters' birthday cakes take pride of place on my decorating calendar. My eldest daughter is passionate about the beach and surfing, so for her twelfth birthday in June, she requested a Kombi cake. I surprised her by adding a sugar figurine of her holding a surfboard beside the cake and this sits safely in her bedroom as a keepsake," Nicole says.

"My daughters never miss out on something special, because without them this dream would never have happened."

To find out more about Sweet Love Couture, go to www.sweet-love.com.au and like Sweet Love Cake Couture on Facebook or Instagram.

Photos by David Moore

