



it virtually impossible for a woman to get a bank loan without a male cosigner, but kitchen staffs regarded females as pariahs, feeling they could neither carry their weight nor stand the heat, literally and figuratively. Now no territory in the professional food world is off-limits to women.

Today, more than ever, your passion for cooking could turn into a profitable career. Some of our winners first traveled other career tracks, then took fortuitous detours into the work they love. Already solid successes, all consider themselves midway in their goals. Their stories provide insights into how they got started, what they sacrificed along the way, and how they got past the pitfalls to become tops in their field.

COLETTE PETERS | 44, *Colette Cakes, (Special Occasion Cakes), New York City*

Working in a sweet jumble of a storefront kitchen in Greenwich Village, Colette Peters creates fanciful cakes for special occasions and also for photography in food magazines and her detailed how-to books, which include *Colette's Cakes* and *Colette's Wedding Cakes*. Whether modeling traditional wedding cakes with cascades of sugar flowers or her more imaginative trademarks such as a heavy-knit sweater, a hat, an automobile, a Gothic Cathedral, a cactus plant, or a stack of stylish, gold-tied gift boxes, she combines two of her most enduring loves.

Growing up in Chicago, Peters always wanted to go to art school in New York. But she also loved to bake and often did so after school. When she finally attended Pratt Institute, she used pastry bags to pipe paints onto her canvases. While working for a crafts company, she baked cakes for co-workers' birthdays and

so received her early commissions. Later, as a designer of stationery and china at Tiffany's, she decorated cakes for displays and two of that elegant shop's beautiful books on home entertaining. Orders began to flow in.

Between traveling to teach her craft and filling orders, Peters works the year-round with a slight slowdown only in January and February. Weekends are hectic. "You learn how to get along without sleep for days at a time," she says, vowing that she would not trade that for the more regular but repetitious work of a retail bakery.

As concerned with flavor as with appearance, Peters combines delicate white, chocolate, carrot, or spice cake layers with harmonious butter cream or chocolate ganache fillings. Her prices begin at \$8 a portion and increase with the complexity of decorations.

Employing help only for deliveries and the closely supervised preparation of basics, she often goes along with the cake to assemble it. Recently, Peters traveled to England to bake one large wedding cake and 1,300 individual replicas (for ease of serving) for the marriage of the exiled Prince Pavlos of Greece to Marie Chantal Miller. But she feels just as challenged and inspired by a mother's request for her child's first birthday cake.

As for her social life, Peters, who is single, says, "No problem. I don't have one."

SUSAN SPICER | 43, *chef-partner, Bayona, New Orleans*

This spirited, energetic chef has made a dent in the often traditional food tastes of New Orleanians, first coming to prominence at the Bistro of the Maison de Ville hotel, then as chef-partner in the six-year-old Bayona, where she keeps to a hectic lunch