

Kings of Pastry

a Film by
Chris Hegedus and D A Pennebaker

84 minutes, Digibeta, 2010
1.33 / Stereo

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PRAISE FOR KINGS OF PASTRY

“The film builds in interest and intrigue as it goes along...You’ll be surprised by how devastating the collapse of a chocolate tower can be.” –Mike Hale, [The New York Times](#)

Critic’s Pick! “Alluring, irresistible...Everything these men make...looks so mouth-watering that no one should dare watch this film on even a half-empty stomach.” – Kenneth Turan, [Los Angeles Times](#)

“As the helmers observe the mental, physical and emotional toll the competition exacts on the contestants and their families, the film becomes gripping, even for non-foodies...As their calm camera glides over the chefs' almost-too-beautiful-to-eat creations, viewers share their awe.” – Alissa Simon, [Variety](#)

“How sweet it is!...Call it the ultimate sugar high.” – VA Musetto, [The New York Post](#)

“A delectable new documentary...spellbinding demonstrations of pastry-making brilliance, high drama and even light moments of humor.” – Monica Eng, [The Chicago Tribune](#)

“More substantial than any TV food show...the antidote to Gordon Ramsay.”
– Andrea Gronvall, [Chicago Reader](#)

“This doc is a demonstration that the basics, when done by masters, can be very tasty.”
– Hank Sartin, [Time Out Chicago](#)

“Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker engross viewers in a pins-and-needles odyssey into mythical kitchens, where master pastry chefs dare to reach for immortality. The work crescendos to such epic levels that the viewer is not going to know how this thing ends until the very, very end.”
– Matthew Nestel, [Box Office Magazine](#)

“Heartfelt, feel-good doc...delivers huge servings of emotionally wrenching drama and delicious visuals...Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker are at their peak with Kings of Pastry...Kings of Pastry and its striving masters of the culinary universe provide entertainment as rich as the desserts on display.”
– Doris Toumarkine, [Film Journal International](#)

“The perfect recipe for an engaging documentary...suspenseful...Hegedus and Pennebaker tell the story sweetly and capture the delicious spirit of the chefs and judges. This is a delectable little gourmet feast of a documentary.” – Jennifer Merin, [About.com](#)

“The tasty new serving of cinema verite...a highly entertaining and engrossing never-before-seen peek into the exalted pastry portion of the Olympic-like quest for French artisan excellence.” – G.A. Benton, [alive!](#)

“Kings Of Pastry keeps its food fetish festivities cheerful...and washes everything down nicely with a chaser of upbeat vintage jazz.” – Prairie Miller, [News Blaze](#)

“Another winner from Hegedus and Pennebaker...a great documentary because it takes the viewer into a secret world than remains closed to the public---the private world of world-class food preparation.”
– Ron Wilkinson, [M & C](#)

SYNOPSIS

Imagine a scene never before witnessed: Sixteen French pastry chefs gathered in Lyon for three intense days of mixing, piping and sculpting everything from delicate chocolates to six-foot sugar sculptures in hopes of being declared by President Nicolas Sarkozy one of the best. This is the prestigious Meilleurs Ouvriers de France competition (Best Craftsmen in France). The blue, white and red striped collar worn on the jackets of the winners is more than the ultimate recognition for every pastry chef – it is a dream and an obsession. The finalists, France’s culinary elite, risk their reputations as well as sacrifice family and finances in pursuit of this lifelong distinction of excellence. Similar to the Olympics, the three-day contest takes place every four years and it requires that the chefs not only have extraordinary skill and nerves of steel, but also a lot of luck.

Filmmakers D A Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus secured exclusive access to shoot this epic, never-before-filmed test of France’s finest artisans. The film follows chef Jacquy Pfeiffer, co-founder of Chicago’s French Pastry School, as he journeys back to his childhood home of Alsace to practice for the contest. Two other finalists are profiled in the film -- chef Regis Lazard, who was competing for the second time (he dropped his sugar sculpture the first time), and chef Philippe Rigollot, from Maison Pic, France’s only three-star restaurant owned by a woman. During the grueling final competition, chefs work under constant scrutiny by master judges and the critical palates of some of the world’s most renowned chefs evaluate their elaborate pastries. Finally, these pastry marathoners racing the clock must hand carry all their creations including their fragile sugar sculptures through a series of rooms to a final buffet area without shattering them. The film captures the high-stakes drama of the competition – passion, sacrifice, disappointment, and joy – in the quest to become one of the KINGS OF PASTRY.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

People often ask why we would make a film about a French pastry competition but as soon as we met chef Jacquy Pfeiffer it became clear that the Meilleurs Ouvriers de France competition was not going to be your average Top Chef cook off. These reality TV shows seemed like mere wind sprints compared to the marathon three-day M.O.F. contest which he was preparing to enter. But winning is not all that this epic contest represents. Becoming a M.O.F. (Best Craftsman in France) is a lifelong dream for French artisans that can only come true by seeking excellence.

As Jacquy would say, “The M.O.F is *not* about doing the ‘best that *you can do*’ but the ‘best that *can be done*.” This degree of perfection in the pastry profession, like most Olympic contests, is achieved through passion, sacrifice, and extraordinary skill -- and as we found out, for Jacquy and the other fifteen finalists, a lot of luck.

Our filmmaking has allowed us to witness many different worlds through the eyes of interesting and talented people many of whom have become friends. Chef Jacquy Pfeiffer is among them. What we found in the arcane creation of French pastry was a process based on ancient kitchen physics. Once you have learned the laws that apply perfection lies in the job of properly carrying them out. Most Americans hardly recognize the names of classic French pastries -- macarons, dacquoise, brioche -- some of the exquisite treats that Jacquy perfects daily. But what we did not expect was that Jacquy was more than a baker. He was an artist creating towering sugar sculptures, Brancusi style blown sugar figures, and large intricate Faberge eggs. Everyday we watched Jacquy push himself toward excellence and show students at his Chicago based French Pastry School what the M.O.F is all about.

Fifteen extraordinary finalists competed with Jacquy in Lyon each pursuing their dream to wear the tri-color collar of a M.O.F and to enter this brotherhood of pastry elite. Many other renowned chefs lent their expertise as judges, tasters and helpers. Watching the camaraderie between the chefs was inspirational and at times of crisis especially moving to witness. We are extremely grateful to the M.O.F. organization for letting us be the first to film this fascinating world.

D A Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus

FILMMAKER BIOS

CHRIS HEGEDUS – Director, Camera, Editor

Chris Hegedus has been making films as a director, cinematographer, and editor for over 30 years, recording some of the best-known personalities of our times. She received the 2001 DGA Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement for *Startup.com*. With her husband and partner D A Pennebaker, she directed *The War Room*, a behind-the-scenes look at Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign that received an Academy Award® nomination and won the National Board of Review's D.W. Griffith Award for Best Documentary. Hegedus has received the Golden Eagle CINE award and lifetime achievement awards from several organizations, including the International Documentary Association. In 2006, she theatrically released, *Al Franken: God Spoke*.

Hegedus first collaborated with Pennebaker as editor of *Town Bloody Hall*, about the infamous 1971 debate on feminism moderated by Norman Mailer. Subsequent collaborations include the 1977 television series *The Energy War; DeLorean*, following auto entrepreneur John DeLorean; *Rockaby*, written by Samuel Beckett for their project starring Billie Whitelaw; and the acclaimed 1998 feature *Moon Over Broadway*, which chronicled Carol Burnett's tumultuous return to Broadway theater.

Hegedus and Pennebaker have devoted much of their creative energies to short and feature-length films about music. Before MTV, they filmed Randy Newman's song "Baltimore," helping establish the music video format. Their music documentary features include *Depeche Mode 101; Down From the Mountain*, a companion concert film to the Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*; and the soul musical tribute *Only The Strong Survive*. Other music-related films include *Branford Marsalis: The Music Tells You; Open Hand*, chronicling Suzanne Vega's concert tour; the 1994 series *Woodstock Diary*; and *Searching for Jimi Hendrix*. Their HBO special, *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, won a 2004 Primetime Emmy™ Award for Best Music, Comedy or Variety Show. Other recent credits include *Assume the Position* with Robert Wuhl for HBO; and a segment for the highly regarded HBO special *Addiction*.

Recently, Hegedus and Pennebaker have made a number of political films for Sundance Channel. 2008's *The Return of the War Room*, which met up with the original cast of *The War Room* to discuss the changes in America's political landscape over the interceding 15 years. *Vote for Change* chronicled the concert tour of Bruce Springsteen and others organized by MoveOn.org. Also for Sundance, Hegedus directed *The First Amendment Project: Fox vs. Franken*.

D A PENNEBAKER - Director/Editor/Camera & Sound

Donn Alan Pennebaker is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of cinéma vérité filmmaking. In the early sixties, Pennebaker and his colleague Richard Leacock developed one of the first fully portable 16mm synchronized camera and sound recording systems, which revolutionized filmmaking and introduced the immediate style of shooting so popular today. Pennebaker's many professional honors include the IFP's Gotham Award.

Pennebaker's first film was the 1953 short *Daybreak Express*. In 1959, he joined Drew Associates, which produced for Time-Life the celebrated "Living Camera" series in the early 1960s. The subjects ranged from Jane Fonda's Broadway debut, *Jane*, to Kennedy's 1960 Wisconsin Democratic primary, *Primary*, to the desegregation of the University of Alabama, *Crisis*.

In 1967, Pennebaker released the seminal classic *Don't Look Back*, which followed Bob Dylan's last acoustic concert tour in England. He continued to capture the musical moment in subsequent films, including the influential *Monterey Pop*, *Keep On Rockin'* and *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. 1970 brought *Company – The Original Cast Album*, about the recording of the Stephen Sondheim musical's cast album.

In 1976, Pennebaker began his collaboration with his partner and future wife, Chris Hegedus, co-directing such acclaimed films as 1998's *Moon Over Broadway* and 1993's *The War Room*, which received an Academy Award® nomination and won the National Board of Review's D.W. Griffith Award for Best Documentary. The team's early films include the three-part special *The Energy War; Town Bloody Hall*, and *DeLorean*. Their many films about the performing arts and popular music include *Rockaby; Elliott Carter at Buffalo; Depeche Mode 101; Searching For Jimi Hendrix; Down From The Mountain; Only The Strong Survive*; and the HBO special *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, winner of the 2004 Emmy Award™ for Best Music, Comedy or Variety Show. Other recent credits include *Vote for Change*, for Sundance Channel; *Assume the Position* with Robert Wuhl for HBO; and *The Return of the War Room* for Sundance Channel. and a segment for the highly regarded HBO special *Addiction*.

Pennebaker was executive producer for *Startup.com* and *Al Franken: God Spoke*, both directed by Hegedus.

THE DOCUMENTARY BLOG

<http://www.thedocumentaryblog.com/index.php/2010/05/20/the-documentary-blogs-hot-docs-2010-recap/>

KINGS OF PASTRY

Directed by Christ Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker
France, Netherlands, USA, UK



Hot Docs Synopsis:

Eclairs, croquenbouches, and chocolate mousse might taste like heavenly French desserts, but for 16 top pastry chefs they are instruments of near torture. France's highest chef honour, the Meilleur Ouvrier, is awarded once every four years and is every pâtissier's dream. Hopefuls face three days of back-breaking competition, creating round after round of fanciful, often gravity-defying confections while a team of meticulous judges times, inspects, and samples every morsel. In signature vérité style, renowned documentarians D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus (*The War Room*) transcend the pretense of so many reality cooking series to focus on the skill of masters at their best. Irresistibly engaging, *Kings of Pastry* captures not only the competitors' stunning artistry, but their equally impressive dedication to a time-honoured craft. Bon appétit! – Myrocia Watamaniuk

If you're a fan of *Ace of Cakes* or any similar TLC shows, you might have an inkling of the kinds of beautiful art that can be created with sugar and icing in the hands of a master. *Kings of Pastry* goes after the best of the best, the Meilleur Ouvrier de France, a 3-day competition held every four years where pastry chefs compete to earn the ultimate title of recognition in their profession. Acclaimed documentarians Chris Hegedus (*The War Room*) and D.A. Pennebaker (*Dont Look Back*) follow a number of hopefuls as they prepare in the months leading up to the competition. It may not sound like particularly thrilling subject matter, but as we slowly come to understand the painstaking amount of sacrifice and hard work that goes into their craft, the stakes become quite high. It all culminates with the competition itself, which is incredibly tense and emotional. Four years of work are riding on delicate sculptures that can shatter at a moment's notice. The cinematography is a little bland, but the artistic creations and the human drama contained in this film are anything but. — Sean

CREDITS

Directed by
Chris Hegedus
D A Pennebaker

Executive Producers
Frazer Pennebaker for Pennebaker Hegedus Films
Nick Fraser for BBC
Barbara Truyen for VPRO

Produced by
Frazer Pennebaker
Flora Lazar

Associate Producers
Rebecca Lando
Patricia Soussloff

Camera and Sound by
Chris Hegedus
D A Pennebaker
Nick Doob

Edited by
Chris Hegedus
D A Pennebaker

Featuring
Sebastien Canonne, M.O.F.
Jacquy Pfeiffer
Rachel Beaudry
Philippe Rigollot
Stephane Glacier, M.O.F.
Regis Lazard
Frederique Lazard
Philippe Urraca, M.O.F

Musicians
Alex Toledano, Music Supervisor
Sebastien Giniaux
Guillaume Singer
Jeremie Arranger
Corentin Giniaux

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