

TASTING SUCCESS

Lynda Booth of the award-winning Dublin Cookery School shares her recipe for success – and suitcase secrets – writes **Maria Moynihan**



Picture: Ramona Farrelly

When it comes to packing for a summer holiday, it's not that extra pair of sandals or strappy sundress that Lynda Booth tries to squeeze into her suitcase.

"I generally have my knives, my microplane grater, madeleine moulds... and I always bring a cake tin," she lists.

"I'd much prefer to have room for my equipment than my clothes."

As the owner of the Dublin Cookery School, you'd expect the last thing Lynda would want to do is slave over a hot stove on a break. But that's not taking into account her insatiable passion that has seen her business take the Best Irish Cookery School title in both 2013 and 2015 at the Irish Restaurant Awards.

It's here we meet – a former warehouse in Blackrock, Co Dublin that barely had running water when Lynda took it over in 2007. Today, it's bright and light with hands-on cooking facilities for up to 24 people, as well as demo and dining space; but more of that later.

This story starts in Boyle, Co Roscommon, where Lynda's family ran Stewart's Mills animal feeds, but it was a visit to a pen pal in France at the age of 13 – where Lynda watched her host mother rustle up pots of ratatouille and cous cous – where she fell head over heels in love with food.

Little surprise then that after studying languages in Trinity,

Lynda left to go to Ballymaloe and started exploring the world through her taste buds; first working in Vancouver, then Oxford and finally Italy.

She has many stories from those days – she once baked a birthday cake for Robert De Niro and basically charmed celebrity chef Raymond Blanc into employing her as a pastry chef after ambushing him on the street. But perhaps most telling of her tenacious nature was when she went to Milan to try to get a job with Gualitiero Marchesi – the first chef in Italy to get three Michelin stars – despite the fact she had no contacts, not to mind a word of Italian.

As it turned out, she managed to get a meeting with the man himself, but his restaurant was closed for renovations. However, he had sent his own pastry chef to a restaurant in the Riviera and said he'd give the owner a call to see if he had any other positions.

"And within two hours of meeting him, I was on a train trundling my way through this Italian countryside," she smiles.

"You could say I was im-

pulsive – and sometimes I guess if you don't try, you're not going to succeed. And if one door closes, another one opens."

On returning to Ireland with her husband Richard, a clinic psychologist, Lynda knew she wanted to share her passion by setting up her own cookery school, but without backing from the bank, started teaching classes at home while raising their three children Cian, Marco and Clara.

However, the drive to have her own school never left and by the mid-'00s, she gave it another shot.

"I said to my family: 'I've had this ambition all my life, I've kind of shelved it for my family, but at a certain point I'm going to go crazy if I don't actually realise it,'" she recalls.



Once again, Lynda struggled to get finance ("I actually felt if I was a man I would have got meetings that I wasn't granted," she says wryly) until she found a manager in Ulster Bank who believed in her plan and also advised her wisely to lease rather than buy a property.

"I could have so easily have bought a property," she says, "and I wouldn't be sitting here today."

However, Lynda still took an "enormous financial risk" by putting her house up against the loan to transform the warehouse into a state-of-the-art facility.

"So I did live with the kind of fear that I would actually lose the business and my house and my family would come collapsing around me," she admits.

Indeed, having opened Dublin Cookery School in 2007 at the height of the boom, she was hit when the corporate market collapsed. However, another side-effect was that people who had been made redundant and wanted a change of career

began to sign up for her three-month and one-month certificate cookery courses, with restaurants like Chapter One offering work experience to her students, while field trips to producers like Knockdrinna Cheese and chefs such as Paul Flynn are also included.

The school also offers a broad range of themed courses like Thai or Middle Eastern cooking and pop-up restaurant nights for the more casual foodie.

For those who want a career in food, Linda's advice is to get experience in the best places that you can.

"Most people don't want to open Michelin star restaurants," she says, "but if you want to open a cafe, why don't you make sure that the time you spend is in somewhere extraordinary like Ottolenghi?"

As for the home cook, her tips are down to earth: always work and clean methodically, season and "taste, taste, taste" as you go along, trust your instincts and most importantly?

"Don't forget to put a little bit of love into everything," she smiles.

There is no shortage of that in Lynda's kitchen ... or suitcase. **CL**