



Yulia and Jean Yves Bougouin at their new Warren Street location in Hudson. Photo by Brian PJ Cronin.

# the Upper Crust

Patisserie Lenox brings a slice of Paris to Hudson

by Brian PJ Cronin

There are many reasons why one might want to devote their lives to being a baker: The satisfaction of creating something intricate with your hands, the joy of feeding hungry people, the smell out of the oven. But Jean Yves Bougouin's reasons were much more pedestrian.

"I needed food and a place to sleep!" he says with a hearty laugh. When Jean was 15, Paris was still the kind of place where a kid could come to the big city; sign on as an apprentice at a restaurant, bakery, butcher's shop or fishmonger's, and be given free room and board in exchange for years of unglamorous grunt work and the eventual chance to learn the trade from the masters themselves. He chose baking because the schedule was a good fit for his lifestyle.

"I was finished by 12 o'clock in the afternoon," he said. "I could go out, pick up

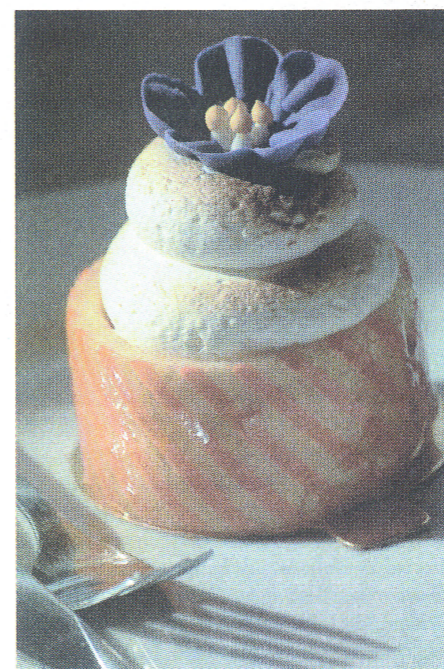
some nice girl, go out until I had to go back to work at two in the morning. It wasn't like a calling." He thinks a moment, and then adds: "But I got into it."

Jean may downplay the seriousness of how he came to baking – actually, spend a few minutes talking to him and it soon becomes clear that he enjoys downplaying the seriousness of everything – but the career choice proved to be a good one. No matter where you are in the world, there is always a demand for classically trained French pastry chefs. His baking took him across Europe, then across the Atlantic to Canada ("Too cold!"), then down to New York City and then, many years later, to the town of Lenox, Massachusetts, where Jean and his wife Yulia were having dinner one night in 2011. They had begun weekendening in the Berkshires and didn't know much about the area. But they saw an empty storefront, which led to an idea, which led to several more ideas.

Now, Hudson Valley residents who want to get their fix of Jean's brioches and macaroons will be able to do so without crossing state lines.

"I thought we'd just do wedding cakes, and display one in the window," said Jean. "It wasn't going to be a retail shop. And then I thought, 'Well, as long as we have the space, we might as well do a few pastries.'"

The idea of having "a few pastries" snowballed into the idea of a full blown Russian tea room – a nod to Yulia's heritage. "But then we found out that in the Berkshires, nobody drinks tea," said Yulia. "It's all about coffee. We had NO knowledge of how to make espresso or cappuccinos."



Examples of Patisserie Lenox's fine french pastries. Photos submitted.

"We had to drink a lot of coffee for research," recalls Jean.

"The very first thing I had to do on the very first day for our very first customers was pull two cappuccinos, while wearing our eight month old baby," Yulia said. "I was so so nervous! But they turned out pretty good. And now people tell us we make the best cappuccinos in the Berkshires."

From those first two cappuccinos, Patisserie Lenox was an instant hit. But the success was a bit overwhelming. Since the space was too small for ovens, Jean was doing most of the baking off-site, leaving Yulia and the baby to handle the crowds.

For the Bougouins, Hudson was a natural fit for the new location. It has a dense population base, residents and tourists who would appreciate a traditional French bakery, and a lack of direct competition.

"We were not ready to be so busy, so fast," said Yulia. "We hired our first employee four days after we opened. She walked in and said 'Are you hiring?' And I said 'We are now! Come on in!'"

"None of this was planned!" says Jean, incredulously. "We didn't even know Lenox very well. We just went out to eat there one night and saw that empty storefront. We didn't even know about Tanglewood, and how busy it gets in the summertime."

Sure enough, summer came to the Berkshires and with it came the maddening crowds of culture seekers. And they were hungry. Once again, Patisserie Lenox changed its business model as the couple began offering soups and sandwiches to the ravenous mobs. The lack of a kitchen proved to be somewhat problematic until Jean, who is as handy with a bandsaw as he is with a stand mixer, built one himself.

When the couple opened a second Patisserie Lenox two years later in Great Barrington, they took advantage of what

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they had learned the first time around. The new location featured an on site bakery, kitchen, and a fully trained staff in place from day one. And like their flagship store in Lenox, it was embraced by the community immediately.

"We've been in business for four and a half years and we've never had to advertise," said Yulia. "The best way to advertise is to just keep your quality up and people will keep coming back."

Now, Hudson Valley residents who want to get their fix of Jean's brioches and macaroons will be able to do so without crossing state lines. As of press time, the couple was putting the finishing touches on a third branch of Patisserie Lenox at 504 Warren Street in Hudson and were aiming for a late June opening.

For the Bougouins, Hudson was a natural fit for the new location. It has a dense population base, residents and tourists who would appreciate a traditional French bakery, and a lack of direct competition. "You've got some great bakeries here but they're mostly making bread, no one's really doing traditional French pastries," said Jean. And it's Jean's strict adherence to traditional French baking techniques that has proven to be the secret to Patisserie Lenox's continued success.

"There's been a lot of new trends in baking and cooking these past few years," said Yulia. "He doesn't follow them. He still uses the same recipes he learned when he was 15. It's very basic. No shortening, no preservatives, nothing from concentrate. Just European butter with 83% butterfat, milk, eggs, flour, fresh fruit, dark chocolate, nuts. Pretty much everything is made from that."

"I've been doing this for 45 years," said Jean with a characteristic grin. "So I'm not going to change what I'm doing now."

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