Chef Susan E. Notter, Director of Pastry Arts at The Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts

"Do you think you’ll ever get into the industry?"

As a child I loved to bake. And so, when I got to college, I found myself the oldest of four girls and we grew up in England. So at any age you’re old. I was happy to make your younger sisters’ birthday cakes and organize their birthday parties and then I gradually found out that I could go to culinary school. And it could actually be a profession. Just really being a young child, I’ve always spent time in the kitchen, experiencing the creativity of baking and making things look pretty.

"What is sugar, what are the common characteristics of baked goods?—And how do you encourage children to think about the common bond?"

First of all, you have to have a passion to be in the industry and not just be. You have to be dedicated to what you’re bringing to the table because you’re bringing something genuine. You’re creating something real. It’s how you think about what you’re doing. And you’re really coming to it as early as possible. If you’re not going to go and work with some tough chefs, the chefs are going to be looking for the same thing that I’m looking for. So that’s what I’m out for. We’re looking for something.

\"What do you find yourself trying to make an impression on your students of the five to 12 range of the right fit for each student?\"

As indicators set grade and assess what our students are doing, and we have skill grades, participation grades, production grades, and quizzes and exams to assess, are they understanding the material? And I tell them that I look at you as if I was hiring you. The ones who will get there and work with some tough chefs, the chefs are going to be looking for the same thing that I’m looking for. So that’s what I’m out for. We’re looking for something.

"How much of success is natural-born talent? And how much of it is a great environment, a great support from someone? Or, is it a mix of both?

A lot of it is practice. A lot of it is having your hands in the same creative sense, and the ability to see things. Talent is great, especially with pastry, if you have that flare and that eye for color or form or the way shapes go together, that is an added bonus.

"Artistic talent is great, especially with pastry, if you have that flare and that eye for color or form or the way shapes go together, that is an added bonus."

The color, the flavor, the texture, the smoke, the smell, the presentation, the form. And you’re going from one to the next, you’re not just doing one. You’re not just doing one thing. And that’s what’s great about creating something. It’s not just one thing that you’re doing. So I think that’s the secret to it. I think that’s what’s great about creating something. It’s not just one thing that you’re doing. So I think that’s the secret to it.

"What are some of the trends that you see in professional cooking? Are you seeing more chouquette-based trends or more traditional pastries?"

We’re seeing more of the floral technique, the nature-inspired things that are out there and not just something that the food industry has made up. We’re seeing more of the floral technique, the nature-inspired things that are out there and not just something that the food industry has made up.

"What is your favorite dessert to eat?"

I love anything chocolate. When you’re doing something, I love anything chocolate. It’s my favorite dessert to eat. When you’re doing something, I love anything chocolate. It’s my favorite dessert to eat.